



News Analysis (18 Dec, 2020)

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National Security Directive

Why in News

Recently, the **Cabinet Committee on Security** has approved the setting up of a **new National Security Directive** on the **telecommunication** sector.

Also, the Union Cabinet has **approved the auction of 2,251.25 megahertz of spectrum** with a **reserve price of Rs. 3.92 lakh crore**.

Key Points

- **Background:**

- The Centre asked all **telecom operators to undertake an ‘information security audit’** of their networks.
- The **objective** was to **specifically check for any ‘backdoor’ or ‘trapdoor’ vulnerabilities** in the telecom networks, which can be **exploited to extract information and pass on illegally** to agencies around the world.

A backdoor or a trap door is a **bug installed in the telecom hardware that allows companies to listen in or collect data** being shared on the network.

- Chinese vendors Huawei and ZTE have been **under global scrutiny for allegedly installing backdoor vulnerabilities** and **spying** for the Chinese government and have been **banned by several countries**.

Almost **30% of Bharti Airtel’s network comprises Chinese telecom equipment** and it is **40% for Vodafone Idea’s network**. **State-run telcos** Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) too **have equipment from Chinese vendors**, including **Huawei** and **ZTE**, in their 3G and older networks.

- **All vendors** including Huawei and ZTE were **allowed to participate in 5G trials** but their **participation became difficult owing to developments like the Galwan Valley Standoff** in Ladakh.
 - The **government barred BSNL and MTNL from using Chinese equipment** for the roll-out of its 4G network.
 - The **Department of Telecommunications** hinted that it would **announce guidelines asking even private telcos to refrain from using Chinese equipment**, however, no such guidelines have been issued till now.

- **National Security Directive:**

- It aims to **classify telecom products and their sources** under the ‘**trusted**’ and ‘**non-trusted**’ categories.

- It will make its decision based on **approval of the National Security Committee on Telecom.**

It will be **headed by the deputy National Security Advisor (NSA)** and have members from other departments and ministries, and independent experts as well as two members from the industry.

- The **National Cyber Security Coordinator** is the **designated authority** and will **devise the methodology** to designate trusted products.

- From among the sources declared as trusted sources by the designated authority, those which **meet the criteria of the Department of Telecom’s preferential market access policy** will be certified as **India trusted sources.**

The policy provides **opportunities to local manufacturers of equipment and handsets in the “sensitive” telecom sector to counter dumping of products** by other countries.

- **Telecom Service Providers (TSPs)** are **required to connect new devices which are designated trusted** products.

- However, the directive **will not ask TSPs to mandatorily replace the old and existing equipment** and does not impact the ongoing annual maintenance contracts or upgrades to old equipment either.

- **Significance:**

- Apart from the directive, the government will release at regular intervals new guidelines for **effective monitoring and effective control of the network security** of the TSPs.

- The move could potentially make it **more difficult for Chinese telecom equipment vendors** to supply equipment to Indian telecom players.

- **Mobile applications that either have Chinese origins or have central servers in China** may also find **re-entry in the market extremely difficult.**

Since **June 2020**, the **Centre has banned over 200 Chinese apps**, citing national security concerns.

Telecom Spectrum Auction

- Spectrum in the **frequency bands of 700MHz, 800MHz, 900MHz, 1,800MHz, 2,100MHz, 2,300MHz and 2,500MHz** would be offered for **20 years.**

- The auction would help **boost spectrum availability with telecom operators enabling improvements in 4G services.**

- By winning the right to use spectrum through the auction, incumbent telecom service providers will be **able to augment their network capacity**, whereas **new players will be able to start services.**

Spectrum holding per operator in a service area in India is well below the international average so any further auctioning of spectrum is needed.

- **Spectrum Auction:**

- It is a **transparent process of spectrum assignment to successful bidders.** Sufficient spectrum availability increases the quality of telecom services for the consumers.
- It is relevant that the telecom sector today is a key infrastructure provider with **strong linkages with economic growth, direct and indirect employment generation** and expansion of **Digital India.**

Source: IE

Recommendations on Reservation

Why in News

Recently, an **eight-member committee**, appointed by the government for **suggesting measures for effective implementation of reservation in students admissions and faculty recruitment** in the **Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)**, has come out with its recommendations.

Key Points

- **About the Committee:**

- It was **chaired by IIT Delhi's Director** and had representatives of secretaries of the departments of **Social Justice and Empowerment, Tribal Affairs, Department of Personnel and Training, Persons with Disabilities**, among others.
- Its report was **submitted to the Ministry of Education in June 2020** and has been made available under the **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.**

- **Recommendations:**

- Being established and recognised as institutions of national importance, **IITs should be added to the list of “Institutions of Excellence”** mentioned in the **Schedule to the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers’ Cadre) Act, 2019** (CEI Act).
 - **Section 4 of the Act exempts** “institutions of excellence, research institutions, institutions of national and strategic importance” mentioned in the Schedule and “minority institutions” from providing reservation.
 - Currently, many research institutes like the **Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, National Brain Research Centre, Space Physics Laboratory**, etc. are included under Section 4 of the act, but not the IITs.
- If granting full exemption from reservations was not possible, the committee recommended that the implementation of reservation policies for all categories **including Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) be restricted just to Assistant Professor Grade I and Grade II and not for levels above.**
- **Vacancies not filled in a particular year** due to non-availability, be **de-reserved in the subsequent year.**
- **Conduct of special recruitment drives** to attract candidates from reserved categories.
- To **address diversity issues**, the report argued that a “**system emphasising targeted goals over a period of time**” and **not “specific quotas”** be followed so that IITs can “compete with other top institutions in the world in terms of excellence, output, research and teaching.”
- The panel proposes a **two-year Research Assistantship for students from reserved categories aspiring to join PhD programmes.**

It highlighted that the **enrollment of reserved category students in the PhD programme is low and needs to be addressed**, which is severely limiting the number of reserved category candidates available to be hired as faculty in the IIT system.

Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers’ Cadre) Act, 2019

- It provides for the **reservation of posts in appointments by direct recruitment** of persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs), the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) and the Economically Weaker Sections (EWSs), to **teachers’ cadre in certain Central Educational Institutions** established, maintained or aided by the Central Government, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- The **Act not to apply in certain cases:**
 - The institutions of excellence, research institutions, institutions of national and strategic importance specified in the Schedule to this Act.
 - A Minority Educational Institution.
- However, the **Central Government may**, by notification in the Official Gazette, **amend the Schedule from time to time.**

Parliament Sessions

Why in News

The government has recently decided to **cancel the Winter session of Parliament**, citing fears over a surge in cases due to **covid-19 pandemic**.

Key Points

- **Sessions of Parliament:**

- The summoning of Parliament is specified in **Article 85 of the Constitution**.
- The power to **convene a session of Parliament** rests with the Government. The decision is taken by the **Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs** which is **formalised by the President**, in whose name MPs are summoned to meet for a session.
- India does not have a **fixed parliamentary calendar**. **By convention (i.e. not provided by the Constitution)**, Parliament meets for **three sessions** in a year.
 - The longest, Budget Session (1st session), starts towards the **end of January, and concludes by the end of April or first week of May**. The session has a **recess** so that Parliamentary Committees can discuss the **budgetary proposals**.
 - The second session is the **three-week Monsoon Session**, which usually begins in **July and finishes in August**.
 - Winter Session (3rd session), is held from **November to December**.

- **Summoning of Parliament:**

Summoning is the process of **calling all members of the Parliament** to meet. The **President** summons each House of the Parliament from time to time. The gap between two sessions of the Parliament cannot **exceed 6 months**, which means the Parliament meets at least **two times in one year**.

- **Adjournment:**

Adjournment **terminates the sitting of the House** which meets again at the time appointed for the next sitting. The postponement may be for a specified time such as hours, days or weeks. If the meeting is terminated without **any definite time/date fixed for the next meeting**, it is called **Adjournment sine die**.

- **Prorogation:**

Prorogation is the end of a session. A prorogation puts an **end to a session**. The time between the **Prorogation and reassembly is called Recess**. Prorogation is the end of session and **not the dissolution of the house** (in case of Lok Sabha, as Rajya Sabha does not dissolve).

- **Quorum:**

Quorum refers to the **minimum number of the members** required to be present for conducting a meeting of the house. The Constitution has fixed **one-tenth strength as quorum for both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha**. Thus, to conduct a sitting of **Lok Sabha**, there should be at least **55 members present** while to conduct a sitting of **Rajya Sabha**, there should be at least **25 members present**.

Source:IE

Mid-term Review of National Hydrology Project

Why in News

Recently, the **Union Minister of Jal Shakti** has reviewed the progress made under the **National Hydrology Project (NHP)** in its mid-term.

Key Points

- **National Hydrology Project:**

- It was started in **2016** as a **Central Sector Scheme** with **100% grant to implementing agencies on pan India basis**.
- It is an **initiative of the Ministry of Jal Shakti** and is **supported by the World Bank**.
- It has a **budget outlay of Rs. 3680 crore** to be spent over a **period of 8 years**.
- **Aim:**
 - To improve the extent, reliability and accessibility of water resources information.
 - To strengthen the capacity of targeted water resource management institutions in India.
 - To facilitate acquisition of reliable information efficiently which would pave the way for an effective water resource development and management.
- **Project Beneficiaries:**
 - Central and state implementing agencies responsible for surface and/or groundwater planning and management, including river basin organizations.
 - Users of the **Water Resources Information System (WRIS)** across various sectors and around the World.

- **Project Components:**
 - **Water Resource Monitoring System:** WRMS focuses on improving the extent, timeliness and reliability of water resources data.
 - Establishment of Hydromet Observation Networks.
 - Establishment of **Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition (SCADA)** Systems for Water Infrastructure.
 - Establishment of Hydro-Informatics Centers.
 - **Water Resources Information System:** WRIS supports strengthening of national and sub-national water information centers with web-enabled WRIS through standardization of databases and products from various data sources/departments.
 - Strengthening of WRIS.
 - Establishing state WRIS.
 - **Water Resources Operation and Planning System:** WROPS supports the development of interactive analytical tools and decision support platforms that would integrate database, models and scenario manager for hydrological flood forecasting, integrated reservoir operations and water resources accounting for improved operation, planning and management of both surface and groundwater.
 - Development of Analytical Tools and Decision Support Systems.
 - Purpose Driven Studies.
 - Piloting Innovative Knowledge Products.
 - **Water Resources Institutions Capacity Enhancement:** WRICE aims to build capacity for knowledge-based water resources management.
 - Water Resource Knowledge Centres.
 - Professional Development.
 - Project Management.
 - Operational Support.

- **Mid-term Review:**

- The NHP has been termed as a **project of National importance** since it establishes a **nationwide ‘Nodal’ ‘one point’ platform for all states to collaborate and share data** pertaining to water resources.
- Significant progress has been made in the fields of WRMS, WRIS, WROPS and WRICE.
- Under the NHP, a nationwide repository of water resources data, **National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC)** has been established.
- NHP is focusing on establishment of **Real Time Data Acquisition System (RTDAS)** on pan India basis, which **would complement the manual data acquisition stations** and would lay a strong foundation for informed decision making for better water resources management.
- Through the NHP, the management of water resources shall **witness a sea change since it will adopt an integrated approach and make use of cutting edge technology.**
- **Concerns:**
 - Collecting data from scattered agencies posed a major bottleneck in effective water resource management and also a stumbling block in important policy level decision making.
 - The lackadaisical approach and lack of interest shown by previous Governments has resulted in unavailability of reliable historic data.
- **Suggestions:**
 - Authorities should be directed to share the valuable works carried out under NHP in public domain and encourage academia, universities/research institutes globally to contribute towards this initiative.
 - Simultaneously, there is a need to further improve the water resources dissemination platform India-WRIS to take care of the requirements and aspirations of various stakeholders like **Central Water Commission (CWC)**, **Central Ground Water Board (CGWB)**, **National Water Development Agency (NWDA)**, **National Institute of Hydrology (NIH)**, etc.

Way Forward

A lot of data-driven developments are expected to follow naturally over the course of time in the government as well as the private sectors and academic and research institutions, that hold the potential of transforming the water sector of the country from an age-old experience-based system depending largely on personal judgement to an optimised, transparent system where it is possible to holistically assess the impact of decisions across the sectors in advance, before they are actually made.

Source: PIB

North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project

Why in News

The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs** has approved the Revised Cost Estimate (RCE) of **Rs. 6,700 crore** for the **North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project (NERPSIP)**.

This is a major step towards **economic development of the North Eastern Region** through strengthening of Intra - State Transmission and Distribution systems.

Key Points

- **North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project:**

- **Background:**

The Scheme was initially approved in **December 2014** as a **Central Sector Scheme** of the Ministry of Power.

- **Funded By:**

The **assistance of the World Bank** fund and by the Government of India through the Budget support of the Ministry of Power on **50:50** basis except for the **capacity building component for Rs. 89 crore, which will be entirely funded by the Government of India.**

- **Implemented By:**

- The scheme is being implemented through **Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID)** in association with six beneficiary North Eastern States namely, **Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura** and is targeted to be commissioned by December 2021.
- **POWERGRID** is a '**Maharatna**' Company operating under Ministry of Power, it is engaged in power transmission business with the responsibility for **planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS).**

- **Maintenance:**

After commissioning, the project will be owned and maintained by the respective **North Eastern State Utilities.**

- **Objective:**

Government's **commitment for the total economic development** of the North Eastern Region and to **strengthen the Intra-State Transmission & Distribution Infrastructure** in the North East Region.

- **Significance:**

- Implementation of this scheme will **create a reliable power grid and improve NER States' connectivity to the upcoming load centers**, and thus **extend the benefits** of the grid connected power to all categories of consumers of beneficiaries in the North Eastern Region.
- The scheme shall also **increase the per capita power consumption** of these States, and shall **contribute to the total economic development** of the North-Eastern Region.
- Hiring local manpower is **generating a lot of employment for skilled and unskilled manpower** of North-Eastern Region.

- **Other Initiatives for North Eastern States:**

- **North-East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS):**

In order to promote employment in the North East States, the Government is incentivizing primarily the MSME Sector through this scheme.

- **International Tourism Mart (ITM):**

- It is organized annually with the **objective of showcasing the largely untapped tourism potential of the North East region** in the domestic and international markets.
- 10% of the plan allocation of the Ministry of Tourism is marked for the NorthEast region.
- There are also plans to hold an NER Tourism Mart where tour operators from all over the country can meet and the regional tourism can be showcased.

- **National Bamboo Mission:**

The Mission envisages promoting holistic growth of the bamboo sector by adopting the area-based, regionally differentiated strategy. It aims to increase the area under bamboo cultivation and marketing.

Source:PIB

Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy

Why in News

Various online surveys have been conducted recently to check vaccine acceptance among the general population.

Key Points

- **Vaccine Hesitancy**
 - **Meaning:** It refers to **delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines** despite availability of vaccine services. It is complex and **context specific** varying across time, place and vaccine. It is influenced by factors such as **complacency, convenience and confidence**.
 - **Reasons for Vaccine Hesitancy:** The main issue with **vaccine hesitancy** is **mis-information**.
 - **Religious propaganda** that the vaccine may contain microbes, chemicals and animal-derived products which is forbidden by religious laws.
 - **Social media** is used in stirring fear in people by falsely blaming vaccines for unrelated diseases. This is the bedrock of the vaccine hesitancy all across the globe.
 - For example, some sections in India have refrained from the polio vaccine. This is due to the misconception that the polio vaccine causes illness, infertility and is ineffective.
 - **Vaccine-derived diseases:** Oral Polio Vaccines (OPV) contains weakened but **live poliovirus**. This virus from the vaccine is excreted by **immunized children** which can move from one person to another.
 - This allows the virus **to stick around and mutate** to a more virulent form, raising the threat of **vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV)**.
 - **Inconvenience** in accessing vaccines is also the leading cause of vaccine hesitancy.
- **The Case of Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy:**
 - In an **online study** conducted by infectious diseases consultants at Apollo Hospital, Chennai, among 1424 health professionals, only 45% said they will take the **Covid vaccine** as soon as it becomes available.
 - 55% will either defer the vaccination** or are yet to decide what to do.
 - Another recent online survey by the agency Local Circles, where **59% of the public** surveyed said they prefer to defer vaccination.
- **Associated Issue:**
 - Can have a **negative consequence** on effort to control the pandemic.
 - May lead to massive spread of the disease.
- **Solution:**
 - Make Public Aware:**
 - Give confidence to the public by discussing the **robustness** of various processes involved in drug/vaccine development - **clinical trial designs, monitoring, analysis and the regulatory reviews** that happen before it is approved.
 - Use **Social Media Platforms** to counter any mis-information regarding vaccines and spread awareness.

Source:TH

Young Champions of the Earth: UN

Why in News

A 29-year-old Indian entrepreneur is among the **seven winners** of the prestigious “**Young Champions of the Earth**” 2020 prize given by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** to global change-makers using innovative ideas and ambitious action to help solve some of the world’s most pressing environmental challenges.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - Introduced in **2017**, **Young Champions of the Earth** aims to celebrate and support individuals aged between **18 and 30** who have outstanding **potential to create a positive environmental impact**.
 - In 2020, seven Young Champions of the Earth will be selected from **each global region**: Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, West Asia and two from Asia and the Pacific.
 - Each winner will receive:
 - USD 10,000 in seed funding,
 - Attendance at a high-level **UN** meeting,
 - An introduction to dignitaries at the **Champions of the Earth award** ceremony,
 - Publicity and recognition through interviews and online and global media.
- **7 Winners of 2020:**
 - **Fatemah Alzelzela, Kuwait: (Eco Star - Trees for waste)**. A non-profit recycling initiative that exchanges trees and plants for waste from homes, schools and businesses.
 - **Lefteris Arapakis, Greece: (Mediterranean CleanUp)**. Trains, empowers and incentivises the local fishing community to collect plastic from the sea, allowing both fish stocks and the ecosystem to recover.
 - **Max Hidalgo Quinto, Peru: (YAWA)**. Sustainable technology for access to water building portable wind turbines that harvest up to 300 litres of water per day from atmospheric humidity and mist.
 - **Niria Alicia Garcia, United States of America: (Run4Salmon)**. An indigenous-lead conservation uses virtual reality to bring to life the historical journey of the Sacramento chinook salmon along California’s largest watershed, raising awareness of this invaluable ecosystem, the species and people it supports.
 - **Nzambi Matee, Kenya: (Building a Greener Kenya)**. Produces sustainable low-cost construction materials made of recycled plastic waste and sand.
 - **Xiaoyuan Ren, China: (MyH₂O)**. A data platform for clean water that tests and records the quality of groundwater across a thousand villages in rural China into an app so residents know where to find clean water.
 - **Vidyut Mohan, India: (Takachar)**. Harvesting value from agricultural waste.

Takachar: Harvesting Value from Agricultural Waste

- **About:**
 - Takachar is a **social enterprise** founded by **Vidyut Mohan** in 2018.
 - It enables farmers to prevent open burning of their waste farm residues and earn extra income by converting them into **value-added chemicals**.
 - It is a meaningful and immediate solution to the **triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution**.
- **Procedure:**

Takachar buys rice husks, straw and coconut shells from farmers and turns them into charcoal, saving the debris from the fires, which are also a driver of climate change.
- **Benefits:**
 - Open burning of agricultural residues is a big source of air pollution in many parts of the world and this innovative technology can help farmers turn what is currently thought of as waste into a valuable resource while helping clean up our environment.
 - Enables **rural farmers to earn 40%** more by converting their crop residues into fuels, fertilisers and value-added chemicals like activated carbon (AC) on-site.
- **Potential:**

By 2030, Takachar will impact 300 million farmers affected by this problem, create USD 4 billion/year equivalent in additional rural income and jobs, and mitigate one gigaton/year of CO₂ equivalent.

United Nation Environment Program

- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was **established in 1972** to guide and coordinate **environmental activities** within the United Nations (UN) system.
- UNEP promotes international cooperation on environmental issues, provides guidance to UN organizations.
- Through its scientific advisory groups, UNEP encourages the international scientific community to participate in formulating policy for many of the UN's environmental projects.
- UNEP is **headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya**.
- The organization also encourages **participation by the private sector** to promote the sustainable use of the world's natural resources.
- **Major Reports:** Emission Gap Report, **Global Environment Outlook**, Frontiers, Invest into Healthy Planet.
- **Major Campaigns:** Beat Pollution, UN75, World Environment Day, Wild for Life.

Source: IE

UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Why in News

Hawker Culture in Singapore has been inscribed on the **UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity** at the **15th session of the Intergovernmental Committee (IGC)** that was held online.

Key Points

- **Hawker Culture in Singapore:**
 - It is a living heritage shared by those who prepare hawker food and those who dine and mingle over hawker food in community dining spaces called hawker centres.
 - It reflects Singapore’s multicultural identity as a people and nation, and resonates strongly with Singaporeans across all races and social strata.
- **UNESCO’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage:**
 - This coveted list is made up of those **intangible heritage elements that help demonstrate diversity of cultural heritage** and **raise awareness** about its importance.
 - The list was established in **2008** when the **Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage** came into effect.
- **Intangible Cultural Heritage of India, recognized by UNESCO:**

13 ICH traditions recognised by UNESCO

1.	Tradition of Vedic chanting, 2008	8.	Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir, India, 2012
2.	Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana, 2008	9.	Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur, 2013
3.	Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre, 2008	10.	Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab, India ,2014
4.	Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India, 2009	11.	Yoga, 2016
5.	Mudiyettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala, 2010	12.	Nowruz, 2016
6.	Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan, 2010	13.	Kumbh Mela, 2017
7.	Chhau dance, 2010		

The **Ministry of Culture** has also launched the **draft National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India.**

- The National ICH List is an attempt to recognize the diversity of Indian culture embedded in its intangible heritage.
- This initiative is also a part of the **Vision 2024 of the Ministry of Culture.**

UNESCO

- UNESCO is the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.** It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture.

- UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals** defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.
- It has 193 Members and 11 Associate Members. **India joined UNESCO in 1946.**
In 2019, **the USA and Israel formally quit UNESCO.**
- It is **headquartered in Paris, France.**
- **UNESCO-IOC (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission)** is leading a global effort to establish ocean-based tsunami warning systems as part of an overall multi-hazard disaster reduction strategy.
Recently, UNESCO-IOC approved the **recognition of two communities of Odisha** viz., Venkatraipur and Noliasahi as Tsunami Ready Communities.
- **Other Initiatives of UNESCO:**
 - **Man and Biosphere Programme:**
 - Biosphere Reserves focus on the harmonised management of **biological and cultural diversity.**
 - Out of 18 notified biosphere reserves, India has 12 biosphere reserves under the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR), the latest one included is **Panna Biosphere Reserve.**
 - **World Heritage Programme:**
 - World Heritage Sites promote the **conservation of natural and cultural sites** of outstanding universal value.
 - India has **38 world heritage sites, including 30 cultural properties, 7 natural properties and 1 mixed site.** The latest one included is **Jaipur city, Rajasthan.**
 - **UNESCO Global Geopark Network:**
 - UNESCO Global Geoparks give **international recognition** for sites that promote the importance and significance of protecting the **Earth's geodiversity** through actively engaging with the **local communities.**
 - **India does not have any UNESCO Global geopark.**
 - **UNESCO's Network of Creative Cities:**
 - The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was **created in 2004** to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.
 - The Network covers seven creative fields: **Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.**
 - There are **five Indian cities** in UCCN as follows:
 - Hyderabad – Gastronomy (2019).
 - Mumbai – Film (2019).
 - Chennai - Creative city of Music (2017).
 - Jaipur - Crafts and Folk Arts (2015).
 - Varanasi - Creative city of Music (2015).

Source:IE

Loan Pact with NDB

Why in News

Government has recently announced a **1 billion USD loan pact** with **New Development Bank** (NDB) to boost rural employment and infrastructure.

Key Points

- The government and the **New Development Bank** (NDB) signed a loan agreement worth **1 billion USD** to help India's **economic recovery from Covid-19** by supporting:
 - **Spending** on rural infrastructure related to natural resource management (NRM) and
 - **Rural employment generation** under **MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme)**.
- The loan has a tenor of **30 years, including a 5-year grace period**.
- The funding comes under **NDB's Policy on fast-track emergency response to Covid-19**.
- The loan would specially help **migrant workers** who have returned from urban areas and have lost their livelihoods due to the pandemic.
- Economic activity slowed down post lockdowns to contain the **spread of virus**, resulting in loss of employment and income of workers especially those employed in the informal sector, including rural areas.
- The **World Bank** has also approved four projects worth over 800 million USD for strengthening **India's social protection architecture**, promoting nutrition-supportive agriculture for tribal households in **Chhattisgarh**, enhancing quality education in **Nagaland** and improving safety and performance of existing **dams** across states.

New Development Bank

- It is a multilateral development bank **jointly founded by the BRICS countries** (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) at the 6th **BRICS** Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil in 2014.
- It was formed to support infrastructure and sustainable development efforts in BRICS and other underserved, emerging economies for faster development through innovation and cutting-edge technology.
- Its ownership structure is unique, as the **BRICS countries have an equal share and no country has any veto power**.
- It is headquartered at **Shanghai, China**.
- In 2018, the NDB received **observer status** in the **United Nations** General Assembly, establishing a firm basis for active and fruitful cooperation with the United Nations.
- All members of the United Nations could be members of the Bank, however **the share of the BRICS nations can never be less than 55% of voting power**.

Source:IE

India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol

Why in News

Recently, the **35th edition of India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (IND-INDO CORPAT)** between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy has been conducted.



Key Points

- **Background:**

As part of Government of India's vision of **SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region)**, the Indian Navy has been proactively engaging with countries in the Indian Ocean Region for **coordinated patrols, cooperation in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance, passage exercises** and **bilateral/multilateral exercises**.

The main **objective** is towards enhancing regional maritime security.

- **IND-INDO CORPAT:**
 - To reinforce maritime links, the two navies have been carrying out CORPAT along their International Maritime Boundary Line **since 2002**.
 - **Aim:**
 - Ensuring **safety and security of shipping and international trade** in the region.
 - CORPATs build up **understanding and interoperability between navies** and facilitate institution of measures to prevent and **suppress Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing, drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, armed robbery and piracy**.
 - **Participants in 35th Edition:**
 - **Indian Naval Ship (INS) Kulish** - an indigenously built missile corvette and **P8I Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA)** undertook coordinated patrol along with Indonesian ships.
 - **Significance:** The 35th IND-INDO CORPAT will contribute towards the Indian Navy's efforts to consolidate interoperability and **forge strong bonds of friendship across the Indo-Pacific**.
- **Other Military Exercises with Indonesia:**
 - **Samudra Shakti:** A bilateral **maritime** exercise.
 - **Garuda Shakti:** A joint **military** exercise.

Source:PIB
