



News Analysis (05 Feb, 2021)

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Taxing Interest Incomes on EPF

Why in News

The **Union Budget 2021-22** proposed to tax the interest income on **Provident Fund (PF)** contributions by employees exceeding Rs. 2.5 lakh a year.

- The Ministry of Finance **expressed concerns over investments as much as Rs. 1 crore each month into PF** and suggested it was **unfair** that they **get tax concessions as well as an assured return**.
- The **Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme** is managed under the aegis of the **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)**.
EPFO is a **government organization** that manages provident fund and pension accounts for the workforce engaged in the organized sector in India.

Key Points

- **About the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme:**
 - The Employee Provident Fund is **open for employees of both the Public and Private Sectors**. Additionally, any organisation that employs **at least 20 individuals is mandatorily** liable to extend benefits of EPF to its employees.
 - **Both employer and employee contribute 12% of an employee's monthly salary** (basic wages plus dearness allowance) to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) scheme.
Of the employer's share of 12%, **8.33% is diverted towards the Employees Pension Scheme (EPS)**.
 - EPF scheme is **mandatory for employees who draw a basic wage of Rs. 15,000 per month**.
 - The **EPF interest rate is declared every year by the EPFO**.
 - EPFO implements **the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952**.
 - The EPF Act, 1952 provides for the institution of provident funds for employees in factories and other establishments.
 - This savings scheme offers **tax exemption under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act**.

- **Proposed Tax on Income:**

- The **annual contribution to EPF and Gratuity** - and also **voluntary contributions to EPF** - will be added. **If the aggregate contribution exceeds Rs 2.5 lakh, the interest income on that will be taxed at the marginal tax rate** in which the income of the individual falls.
- Importantly, **only the contribution linked to the employees' component will be calculated for taxation purposes**. The employer's contribution towards the EPF will not be considered for the calculation.
- The **interest income on the additional contribution of a year will get taxed every year**.

This means that if an individual's annual contribution to PF in FY22 is Rs. 10 lakh, the interest income on Rs 7.5 lakh will get taxed not only for FY22 but also for all subsequent years.

- The **average normal EPF contributor would not be affected** by this new proposal.

- **Reasons for Taxing Interest Income on PF Contributions:**

- **Preventing Misuse of the Scheme:**

- The government has found instances **where some employees are contributing huge amounts to these funds** and are **getting the benefit of tax exemption at all stages** - contribution, interest accumulation and withdrawal.
- Since any tax exemption is provided through taxpayers' money, it was unfair to allow **High Networth Individuals (HNIs)** depositing large sums in EPF to earn an assured interest (under EPFO) and tax-free income together.

HNIs: Those people with investable assets above a certain figure.

- Earlier, the **government had capped the contributions by employers into employee welfare schemes** like the EPF or the **National Pension Scheme** or a superannuation plan, at Rs. 7.5 lakh a year.

However, government as well as private sector employees are allowed to make voluntary contributions over and above the statutory deductions into the **general provident fund (available only for government employees) or EPF (available for government as well as private sector employees)**.

- **Promoting Equity among PF Contributors:**

Of an estimated 4.5 crore EPF accounts, about 0.27% members had an average corpus of Rs. 5.92 crore and were earning over Rs. 50 lakh a year as "tax-free assured interest".

This is a misuse of the welfare scheme aiming to promote savings and provide social security to lower and middle income groups of employees.

Source: TH

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana


Why in News

Recently, the government's maternity benefit scheme, or **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**, has crossed 1.75 crore eligible women till the financial year 2020.

A total sum of Rs. 5,931.95 crore was paid to 1.75 crore eligible beneficiaries between financial year 2018 and 2020.

Key Points

MATTER OF HEALTH	THE INITIATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Under-nutrition continues to adversely affect women in India ➤ Every third woman is under-nourished, while every second woman is anaemic ➤ Under-nourished women often give birth to babies with a low birth weight ➤ When poor nutrition starts in-utero, it extends throughout the life cycle ➤ Owing to economic and social distress, many women continue to work to earn a living for their family up to the last days of their pregnancy ➤ They resume work soon after childbirth, which prevents their bodies from fully recovering ➤ It also impedes their ability to exclusively breastfeed during the first six months 	<p>The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana provides maternity benefits of ₹5,000 for pregnant women and lactating mothers after their first delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The benefit is provided in three instalments ■ It is a conditional cash transfer scheme and provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare ■ The scheme ensures safe delivery and good nutrition for women ■ The benefits are not available for employees of the Central or State governments and any public-sector undertaking



• About:

- PMMVY is a **maternity benefit programme** being implemented in all districts of the country with effect from 1st January, 2017.
- It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** being executed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- **Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme:**

Cash benefits are provided to pregnant women in their bank account directly to meet enhanced nutritional needs and partially compensate for wage loss.
- **Target Beneficiaries:**
 - All **Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM)**, excluding those who are in regular employment with the Central Government or the State Governments or PSUs or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.
 - All eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers who have their **pregnancy on or after 1st January 2017 for the first child in the family.**
- **Benefits under the Scheme:**
 - Beneficiaries receive a **cash benefit of Rs. 5,000 in three installments** on fulfilling the following conditions:
 - Early registration of pregnancy
 - Ante-natal check-up
 - Registration of the birth of the child and completion of first cycle of vaccination for the first living child of the family.
 - The eligible beneficiaries also receive cash incentive under **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)**. Thus, on an average, a woman gets Rs. 6,000.

- **Distinctive Feature:**

- Implementation of the scheme is closely monitored by the central and state governments through the **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana - Common Application Software (PMMVY-CAS)**.
- PMMVY-CAS is a web based software application that **enables tracking the status of each beneficiary under the scheme**, resulting in expedited, accountable and better grievance redressal.

Janani Suraksha Yojana

- **About:**

- It is a **100% centrally sponsored scheme** which is being implemented with the objective of **reducing maternal and infant mortality** by promoting institutional delivery among pregnant women.
 - As per the data of **National Family Health Survey-5**:

Infant and child mortality rates across most Indian states have declined. Bihar registered the highest prevalence of neonatal mortality rate (NMR-34), infant mortality rate (IMR-47), and under-five mortality rate (U5MR-56) across 22 surveyed states and Union territories while Kerala reported the lowest death rates.
 - The **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)** in India has declined to **113 (per 1,00,000 live births)** in 2016-18 from 122 in 2015-17 and 130 in 2014-2016, according to the **special bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2016-18**, released by the Office of the Registrar General's Sample Registration System (SRS).
 - 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**.
- Basically, it is a safe motherhood intervention under the **National Health Mission (NHM)**.

- **Benefit:**

- Under the JSY, **eligible pregnant women are entitled for cash assistance irrespective of the age of mother and number of children**, for giving birth in a government or accredited private health facility.
- The scheme also provides performance based incentives to women health volunteers known as **Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)** for promoting institutional delivery among pregnant women.

Other Schemes Focussing on Nutritional and Health Aspects of Women:

- **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojna (IGMSY):**
 - The scheme aims to contribute to a better enabling environment by providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers.
 - It is being implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- **Kudumbashree in Kerala:**

It was launched in Kerala in 1998 to wipe out absolute poverty through community action. It is the largest women empowering project in the country. It has three components i.e., microcredit, entrepreneurship and empowerment.
- **Poshan Abhiyaan:**

Launched in March 2018, the goal of **Poshan Abhiyaan** is to achieve improvement in the nutritional status of Children (0-6 years) and Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers in a time-bound manner.
- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme:**
 - The scheme provides specific interventions targeted towards the vulnerable groups including children below 6 years and **women**.
 - It is being implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Source: TH

Increased Farm Exports

Why in News

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, **farm exports have registered 9.8% growth** for the period of April-December 2020.

Previously, the government of India launched the **Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Product (RoDTEP)** scheme replacing **Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)** to further improve exports.

Key Points

- **Data for April-December 2020:**
 - **Overall merchandise exports:** Registered 15.5% fall.
 - **Farm exports:** Registered 9.8% growth.

Overall merchandise exports include all the goods manufactured in India while Farm exports include only the agricultural products.

- **Reasons For Growth in Farm Exports:**
 - **Rising International Prices:**
 - **Normalisation of Demands:**
 - Due to steady normalisation of demand with most countries unlocking their economies after May 2020 and, at the same time, **restoration of supply chains** post-**Covid** not keeping pace has made exports of many farm products from India competitive.
 - That includes **non-basmati rice, sugar, oilseed meals, cotton and even wheat and other cereals (mainly maize)**.
 - Earlier, the **United Nations (UN) Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)**, released its latest **Food Price Index (FPI)** for January 2021, which showed that the **FPI has increased from a 48-month-low to a 78-month-high**.
 - **Chinese Stockpiling:**
 - Global prices have also been increased by Chinese stockpiling.
 - It had stepped up imports of everything – from maize, wheat, soyabean and barely to sugar and milk powder – **to build strategic food reserves amid geopolitical tensions**.
 - **Dry Weather of Different Countries:**
 - The current export revival is equally a result of **dry weather conditions** in major producing countries such as **Argentina, Brazil, Ukraine, Thailand and Vietnam**.
 - **Russia** (world's largest wheat exporter) and **Argentina** (No. 1 in soybean meal and No. 3 in maize) have even **announced temporary suspension or taxes on grain shipments in response to high domestic food inflation**.
 - **India's Surplus Monsoon:**

India, on the other hand, hasn't faced serious weather issues; both 2019 and 2020 **recorded surplus monsoon rainfall** along with **timely onset of winter**.
 - **Agriculture Exempted from Lockdown:**

Farmers harvested a bumper rabi crop during April-June, enabled by the government exempting agriculture-related activities from **lockdown** restrictions.
- **Significance of Rising Exports:**
 - If it sustains, it can help **increase crop prices** when the next rabi harvest is due from March 2021. This may be **politically useful** in a context of **farm unrest**.
 - It will help in achieving the USD **5-trillion economy** goal by India.
 - It will help achieve an ambitious target of **doubling farmers' income** by 2022.

Export promotion : Steps taken so far

Export promotion measures taken in last few years

- **Interest Equalization Scheme (IES)** on pre and post shipment rupee export credit introduced from 1.4.2015 providing interest equalisation at 3% to exporters on 416 lines and for all MSME exporters.
- *The IES rate increased to 5% for MSME exporters with effect from 2.11.2018 and merchant exporters were covered under the scheme with effect from 2.1.2019.*
- India's rank in **World Bank 'Ease of doing business'** ranking improved from 142 in 2014 to 77 in 2018, with the *sub-rank in 'Trading across borders' moving up from 122 to 80.*
- **"Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES)"** launched with effect from 1st April 2017 to address the export infrastructure gaps in the country.
- Comprehensive **"Agriculture Export Policy"** launched on 6th December, 2018 with an aim to double farmers' income by 2022
- **"Transport and Marketing Assistance" (TMA) scheme** launched in 05th March 2019 for mitigating disadvantage of higher cost of transportation for export of specified agriculture products.
- **Scheme for Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL)** covering export of garments and made-ups notified on 7.3.2019 providing refund of duties/taxes at higher rates.

Source: IE

Concerns Over DNA Bill, 2019

Why in News

Recently, the **Parliamentary Standing Committee** on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change has recommended that the **government should address the concerns raised** over the **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019**, including over creation of a **national databank** of crime scene DNA profiles and fears of communities being targeted.

While the Bill speaks of regional databanks apart from a central one, the **Parliamentary Standing Committee strongly recommends only one National Data Bank**, to minimise chances of misuse of data.

Key Points

- **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019 (Key Provisions):**
 - The Bill allows the use of the technology to establish the identity of persons in matters of crime, parentage dispute, **emigration or immigration** and **transplantation of human organs**.
 - It provides for **establishment of national and regional DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) data banks** and each databank will maintain **crime scene index, suspects' or undertrials' index and offenders' index** separately.
 - The Bill talks of a **DNA Regulatory Board** that would advise the Centre and state governments on issues such as setting up of DNA laboratories and databanks; and laying down of guidelines, standards and procedures for the same.
- **Concerns Raised by the Committee:**
 - **Over DNA Databanks:** The risk with a national databank of crime scene DNA profiles is that it **will likely include virtually everyone since DNA is left at the 'crime scene' before and after the crime by several persons** who may have nothing to do with the crime being investigated.
 - **Over DNA Profiling:** The **DNA profiling** to be done under this Bill **can be misused to target different segments of the society** based on factors like religion, caste or political views.

DNA profiling is the process where a specific DNA pattern, called a profile, is obtained from a person or sample of bodily tissue.
 - **Storage of DNA Profiles of Unconvicted Persons:**
 - The Bill proposes to store DNA profiles of suspects, undertrials, victims and their relatives for future investigations.
 - The Bill also provides that DNA profiles for civil matters will also be stored in the data banks, but without a clear and separate index.
 - The committee has questioned the necessity for storage of such DNA profiles, pointing out that this violates the **fundamental right to privacy** and does not serve any public purpose.
 - **Perfunctory Consent:**
 - The Bill refers to consent in several provisions, but in each of those, **a magistrate can easily override consent**, thereby in effect, making consent perfunctory.
 - There is also no guidance in the Bill on the grounds and reasons of when the magistrate can override consent.
 - **Absence of Robust Data Protections:**

It has **questioned the security of a huge number of DNA profiles** that will be placed with the National DNA Data bank.

- **Need of the Bill:**
 - **Greater Demand for Testing:**
 - DNA testing is currently being done on an extremely limited scale in India, with approximately 30-40 DNA experts in 15-18 laboratories undertaking less than 3,000 cases per year, which represent 2-3% of the total need.
 - The standards of the DNA testing laboratories are not monitored or regulated, in absence of any proper regulation.
 - **Enables Identification of Missing Persons:**
 - As per the National Crime Records Bureau, annually 1,00,000 children go missing.
 - The Bill will also help in identifying unidentified deceased, including disaster victims and apprehend repeat offenders for heinous crimes such as rape and murder.
- **Global Scenario Regarding DNA Profiling:**
 - According to the **USA Interpol's Global DNA Profiling Survey Results 2016**, as many as 69 countries have a national DNA database, including the USA, Canada and China.
 - **The countries hold genetic information of at least 35,413,155 individuals.**
 - Different countries have different regulations for collection, removal and retention of DNA samples.
 - **Declaration on Human Genetic Data**, which was adopted unanimously at UNESCO's 32nd General Conference in 2003, aims to ensure the respect of human dignity and protection of human rights and fundamental freedom in collection, processing, use and storage of human genetic data and biological samples.
- **DNA Profiling and Genome India Project (GIP):**
 - Recently, the Ministry of Science and Technology also approved an ambitious gene-mapping project called the Genome India Project (GIP) which aims to sample and sequence 10,000 genomes in the first phase from across India, to arrive at a representative Indian genome.
 - **Gene Mapping** is different from DNA profiling as DNA profiling **uses small stretches of DNA** to identify an individual while gene mapping involves sequencing the whole genome.
 - Gene Mapping is done for scientific and medical uses while DNA profiling is done primarily for forensic and criminal investigation.

Way Forward

- The Committee recommends an **enabling ecosystem must be created** soon to ensure that DNA profiling is done in a manner that is fully consistent with the letter and spirit of various Supreme Court judgments and with the Constitution.
- Prior adoption of a privacy or data protection bill would allow individuals some recourse if their rights were not protected. This is particularly important, especially following the Supreme Court's Right to Privacy judgment.

Source: IE

Centenary of the Chauri Chaura Incident

Why in News

On the occasion of the centenary of the **Chauri Chaura** incident, a **postage stamp** was released by the Prime Minister.

- Chauri Chaura is a **town in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh**.
- On **4th February, 1922**, this town witnessed a violent incident - a large crowd of peasants set on fire a police station that killed 22 policemen. Due to this incident **Mahatma Gandhi** called off the **Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22)**.

Key Points

- **Background (Launch of the Non-Cooperation Movement):**
 - On 1st August, 1920, Gandhi had launched the Non-Cooperation Movement against the government.
It involved using **swadeshi** and **boycott of foreign goods**, especially machine made cloth, and legal, educational and administrative institutions, "**refusing to assist a ruler who misrules**".
 - In the winter of **1921-22**, **volunteers of the Congress and the Khilafat Movement** were organised into a **national volunteer corps**.
 - **Khilafat Movement** was a **pan-Islamic force in India that arose in 1919** in an effort **to salvage the Ottoman caliph as a symbol of unity among the Muslim community in India** during the British raj.
 - The **Congress supported the movement** and Mahatma Gandhi sought to conjoin it to the Non-Cooperation Movement.
- **Details of the Chauri Chaura Incident:**

On 4th February, volunteers congregated in the town, and after the meeting, proceeded in a procession to the local police station, and to picket the nearby Mundera bazaar.

 - The police fired into the crowd killing some people and injuring many volunteers.
 - In retaliation, the crowd proceeded to set the police station on fire.
 - Some of the policemen who tried to escape were caught and battered to death. A lot of police property, including weapons, was destroyed.
- **Reaction of the British:**

The British Raj **prosecuted the accused aggressively**. A sessions court quickly sentenced 172 of the 225 accused to death. However, ultimately, only 19 of those convicted were hanged.
- **Reaction of Mahatma Gandhi:**
 - He condemned the crime of the policemen's killing. The volunteer groups in nearby villages were disbanded, and a **Chauri Chaura Support Fund** was set up to demonstrate "genuine sympathy" and seek atonement.
 - Gandhi **decided to stop the Non-Cooperation Movement**, which he saw as having been tainted by unforgivable violence. He bent the Congress Working Committee to his will, and **on 12th February, 1922, the satyagraha (movement) was formally suspended**.

- **Reaction of Other National Leaders:**
 - **Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders** leading the Non-Cooperation movement **were shocked that Gandhiji had stopped the struggle** when the civil resistance had consolidated their position in the freedom movement.
 - Other leaders like Motilal Nehru and CR Das recorded their dismay at Gandhi's decision and decided to establish the **Swaraj Party**.
- **Justification for the Suspension of the Movement:**
 - **Gandhi** on his part, justified himself on grounds of his unshakeable **faith in non-violence**.
 - Historians such as Bipan Chandra have argued that **Gandhian strategy of non-violence was based on the premise that the use of repressive force against non-violent protesters would expose the real character of the colonial state** and ultimately put moral pressure on them, but incidents such as Chauri Chaura defeated that strategy.
 - Besides, Bipin chandra opines that **withdrawal or shift to a phase of non-confrontation** is an inherent part of a strategy of political action that is based on the masses.
- **Immediate Result:**
 - The disillusionment resulting from the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement nudged **many of the younger Indian nationalists towards the conclusion that India would not be able to throw off colonial rule through non-violence**.
 - It was from the ranks of these impatient patriots that some of India's most of the revolutionaries came into picture like Jogesh Chatterjee, Ramprasad Bismil, Sachin Sanyal, Ashfaqulla Khan, Jatin Das, **Bhagat Singh**, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Masterda Surya Sen, and many others.
 - Besides, sudden termination of the Non-Cooperation Movement **disillusioned the Khilafat movement leaders** that created a rift between Congress and the muslim leaders.

Source: IE

Pandit Bhimsen Joshi Jayanti

Recently, the **Prime Minister paid homage to Pandit Bhimsen Joshi**, the classical music vocalist, on his centenary **birth anniversary**.

Key Points

- **About:**

- **Pandit Bhimsen Joshi** was born on February 4, 1922.
- **Important Recognition:** He received the **Bharat Ratna in 2008**.
- **Work:** He is remembered for his famous ragas including **Shuddha Kalyan, Miyan Ki Todi, Puriya Dhanashri and Multani etc.**
 - He belonged to the **Kirana Gharana**.
 - **Kirana Gharana** got its name from a small town called Kerana in Uttar Pradesh. It was founded by Ustad Abdul Karim Khan. Famous artists such as Abdul Wahid Khan, Suresh Babu Mane, Hira Bai Badodekar and Roshanara Begum belong to this Gharana.
 - He belonged to the school of **Hindustani classical music**.

- **Hindustani Music:**

- Origin:**

- Hindustani Music is one of the **two distinct schools of Indian Classical Music** practiced mainly in North India. The other school of Indian Classical Music is **Carnatic music** which is practiced mainly in Southern India.
 - The historical roots of both the music types belong to the **Bharata's Natyasastra**.
 - **Hindustani Music is vocal-centric**. The major vocal forms associated with Hindustani classical music are the **khayal, Ghazal, dhrupad, dhammar, Tarana and thumri**.

Most of the Hindustani musicians trace their descent to Tansen.

- **Gharanas:**

- A Gharana is a **system of social organisation linking musicians** or dancers by lineage or apprenticeship, and by adherence to a particular musical style.
 - Function in **guru-shishya parampara**, i.e. disciples learning under a particular guru, transmitting his musical knowledge and style.

Gharana	Place	Founder
Gwalior	Gwalior	Nanthan Khan
Agra	Agra	Hajisujan Khan
Rangeela	Agra	Faiyyaz Khan
Jaipur Atrauli	Jaipur	Alladiya Khan
Kirana	Awadh	Abdul Wahid Khan
Banaras	Varanasi	Ram Sahai

Source: PIB

Smart Walls For Borders

Why in News

Recently, an alternative **Smart Wall** has been proposed to replace the physical and armed patrolling with advanced surveillance technology at the **USA-Mexico border**.

Earlier in 2019, the **USA declared a national emergency** to fund construction of a border wall along the USA-Mexico Border citing "invasion" of drugs and criminals from Mexico.

Key Points



- **About Smart Wall:**

- There is no one single definition for this recently-conceived solution, however It is a **collection of discrete technologies** that work together to prevent illegal entry, smuggling, and all the various threats posed by a porous border.
- It uses **drones**, **scanners**, and **sensors** to create a **technological barrier** too high to climb over, too wide to go around, and too deep to burrow under.

Using **Internet-of-Things (IoT)** technologies like in-ground sensors, security cameras and software solutions, a smart wall could **empower border officials with enhanced situational awareness** to prevent illicit activity.

- **Benefits of Smart Wall:**

- **Reduces Cost:**

- A smart wall can accomplish the same goals as a physical wall with a much smaller price.

- **Decreases Deployment Time:**

- Physical boundaries take years to build but smart border technology is ready to go.

- **Low Maintenance Costs:**

- Unlike a physical barrier, a smart wall would **allow border security officials to continuously adjust tactics to changing conditions.**
 - Ground sensors and IoT devices are **quick and easy to deploy and inexpensive to move and update.**
 - They require only a **fraction of the costs to maintain**, and can be implemented gradually and as needed.

- **Decreases Environmental Concerns:**

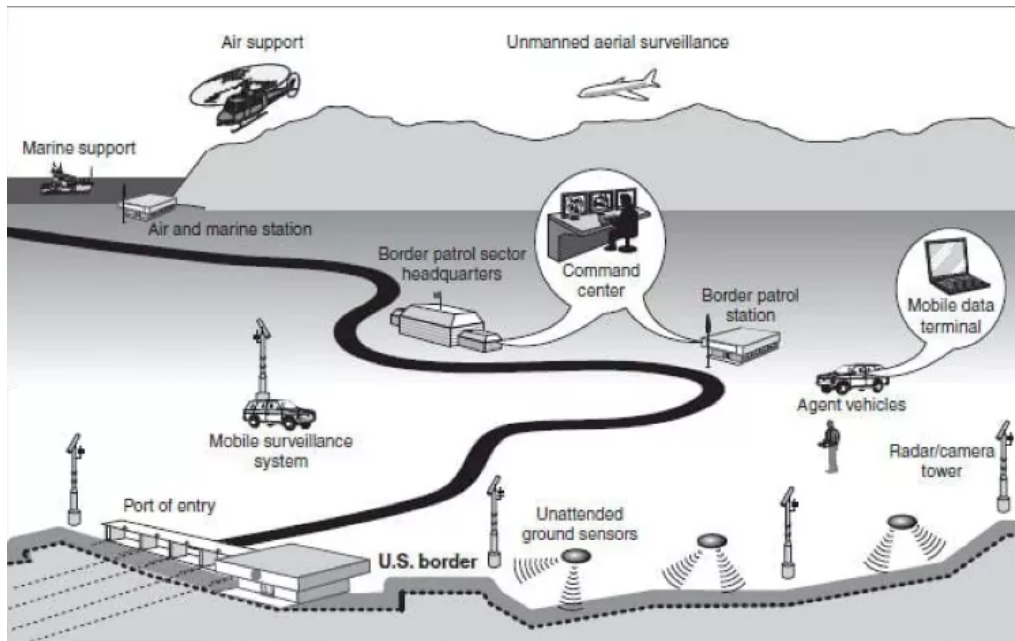
- A smart wall raises **minimal environmental concerns**, allowing wildlife and rainwater to pass freely through the area.
 - Most smart devices can tell the difference between people and animals, **alerting officers when a human attempts to cross the border illegally** while leaving wildlife alone.

- **Overcomes the Limitations of Terrain:**

- Rough terrain is difficult to patrol, which could leave portions of the wall vulnerable to breaches.
 - Digital technology, however, allows for **enhanced surveillance across vast terrain.**
 - **Devices** like cameras and in-ground sensors **allow patrolmen to survey hundreds of miles at once**, and take informed action should the need arise.
 - **Real-time alerts** make it easy to respond to activity from immigrants approaching the border or to a lost hiker looking for supplies.

- **Reduces Land Requirement:**

- To construct a border wall, the government would need to seize property from local landowners.
 - However, Small and relatively non-invasive, smart wall technologies would require far fewer land seizures.



- **Need of Smart Wall in India:**

- A critical factor that must be considered to enable the usage of such a system along Indian borders is that the **terrain in the region is rugged, and, furthermore, not even clearly defined.**
- Such a system, even if not feasible for India's long boundaries, may still be **deployed to enhance critical security establishments** of the country and complement the already existing physical fencing and walls.
- It is **imperative for Indian armed forces to be well equipped and simultaneously have the latest technological** advantage over its enemies.
- Experts should explore this idea to **effectively counter the problem of border infiltration.**

- **Smart Fencing in India:**

Two pilot projects covering about 71 Kms on Indo-Pakistan Border (10 Kms) and Indo-Bangladesh Border (61 Kms) of **Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)** have been completed.

- CIBMS involves deployment of a range of state-of-the-art surveillance technologies — **thermal imagers, infra-red and laser-based intruder alarms, aerostats for aerial surveillance, unattended ground sensors** that can help detect intrusion bids, **radars, sonar systems** to secure riverine borders, **fibre-optic sensors** and a command and control system that shall receive data from all surveillance devices in real time.
- **BOLD-QIT** (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) under CIBMS on Indo- Bangladesh border in Dhubri district of Assam is also being used.

Source: TH

CCTNS Hackathon & Cyber Challenge

Why in News

Recently, the inaugural function of the **2nd CCTNS Hackathon and Cyber Challenge 2020-21** of the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** was held in New Delhi.

Key Points

- **Background:**
 - This hackathon is **in continuation to the Hackathon & Cyber Challenge** which concluded in March 2020.
 - It aimed to **deepen understanding and enhance skills** of the law enforcement personnel across all ranks and file, empowering them to adopt **smart strategies for effectively addressing the evolving threats**.
- **About the 2nd CCTNS Hackathon and Cyber Challenge:**
 - **Police officials** especially those from the cutting edge level, **academia, industry, students and others** are being invited **to help improve existing IT applications** as well as help identify new IT applications **to improve the CCTNS ecosystem**.
 - The Mobile App: “Locate Nearest Police Station” was also launched at the function.
 - This App will help various users including women commuters, interstate travelers, domestic and foreign tourists etc. especially during any emergency and has the facility to dial 112. This is **another step towards improving accessibility of the police to the citizens**.
 - This will **add to other Central Citizen Services being provided by the NCRB** such as “**Missing Person Search**”, “**Generate Vehicle NOC**”, “**Proclaimed Offenders Information**” and various other services being provided by the State Citizen Police Portals.

Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems

- **Background:**

Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) is a plan scheme conceived in the light of experience of a non-plan scheme namely - **Common Integrated Police Application (CIPA)**.
- **Launch:**
 - CCTNS is a **Mission Mode Project** under the **National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)** of the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
 - Approx. 14,000 Police Stations throughout the country have been proposed to be automated besides 6000 higher offices in the police hierarchy.
 - It was approved in **2009**.
- **Objectives:**
 - Make the Police functioning **citizen friendly** and **more transparent** by automating the functioning of Police Stations.
 - Improve delivery of **citizen-centric services** through effective usage of **ICT**.
 - Provide the Investigating Officers of the Civil Police with **tools, technology and information** to facilitate investigation of crime and detection of criminals.
- **Recent Initiatives:**

A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was signed between **National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID)** and **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** for the access of the **CCTNS database**.

National Crime Records Bureau

- NCRB, **headquartered in New Delhi, was set-up in 1986** under the **Ministry of Home Affairs** to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.
- It was set up based on the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Task Force (1985).
- NCRB brings out the annual comprehensive statistics of crime across the country (**'Crime in India' report**).
Being **published since 1953**, the report serves as a crucial tool in understanding the law and order situation across the country.

Source: PIB

Aero India 2021

Why in News

Recently, the **13th edition** of the **Aero India show** began at Bengaluru's **Yelahanka Air Force Station** (Karnataka).

Key Points

- **About Aero India:**
 - Aero India is a **biennial international military and civil airshow**.
 - It is a premier event that draws **international and Indian military and civil aircraft makers**, their support industries, military brass and government dignitaries, and business visitors.
 - **Bengaluru based Yelahanka air base**, about 30 km from the city centre, **has been hosting the air show in February** since it was started in Bengaluru in 1996.

- **Aero India 2021:**

- This is the **first-of-its-kind 'hybrid' air show**, which means people can also attend it digitally.
- The **focus region** for Aero India 2021 is the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.
- It has been organised by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
- Aero India 2021 has seen the participation of top aviation firms, while India is showcasing its indigenous defence capability.
 - Apart from global aviation giants such as Boeing (USA), Lockheed Martin (USA), Dassault (France) and Airbus (Europe), the show will also see the participation of top defence firms involved in the aviation sector including Thales (France), BAE Systems (UK) and missile manufacturer MBDA (Europe).
- During the Aero show, the government has also formally sealed the Rs. 48,000 crore deal to procure **83 Tejas light combat aircraft** from state-run aerospace company **Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL)**.

Tejas, manufactured by the HAL, is a **single engine** and highly agile multi-role **supersonic fighter aircraft** capable of operating in high-threat air environments.

- **Importance:**

- India offers a unique opportunity in **defence and aerospace manufacturing**.
 - Under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**, domestic manufacturing of bigger and complex defence platforms has become the focus of the country's defence policy.
- Aero India 2021 will **boost investment, expand manufacturing ecosystem, support enterprises, appreciate and enhance the technology levels and propel the economic growth** for the country.

Source: IE

Consumer Welfare Fund

Why in News

During the ongoing session the Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has informed the parliament about **Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF)**.

Key Points

- **About:**

- It was set up under the **Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act, 2017**. The consumer welfare fund rules of 1992 have been subsumed under the CGST rules, 2017.
- The Fund has been set up by the **Department of Revenue (Ministry of Finance)** and is being operated by the **Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution)**.

- **Objective:** To promote and protect the welfare of the consumers. **Few Examples:**
 - Creation of **Consumer Law Chairs/ Centres of Excellence in Institutions/Universities** of repute to foster research and training on consumer related issues.
 - Projects for **spreading consumer literacy and awareness.**
- **Other Related Initiatives:**
 - Celebration of **World Consumer Rights Day/National Consumer Day.**
 - The **Consumer Protection Act, 2019** has been implemented.

The new Act covers e-commerce transactions, it allows electronic filing of complaints, hearing and/or examining parties through video-conferencing for procedural ease and reduces inconvenience.
 - Government has set up a National Consumer Helpline (NCH) to handle the consumer grievances.
 - Consumer awareness programmes are being organized through the network of **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** across the country for promoting the concept of standardization, certification and quality consciousness among consumers as well as manufactures.

Source: PIB
