News Analysis (30 Apr, 2021)

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The Global Forest Goals Report 2021: UN Report

Why in News

According to the **U**nited Nations' Global Forest Goals Report 2021, Covid-19 pandemic has **aggravated the challenges faced by countries in managing their forests.**

> The Report has been prepared by the **Department of Economic and Social Affairs** of the United Nations. It provides an initial overview of progress of Goals and targets contained within the **United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2030.**

Key Points

- **Findings of the Report:**
  - **Covid-19 leading to Systemic Vulnerabilities and Inequalities:**
    - More than just a health crisis, **Covid-19 is driving losses of lives and livelihoods**, extreme poverty, inequality, and food insecurity, and it has put the 'Future We Want' further out of reach.
  - **Impact of Covid-19 on Global Output:**
    - It is estimated that world gross product **fell by an estimated 4.3% in 2020.** It is the **sharpest contraction** of global output **since the Great Depression.**
  - **Covid-19 is Threatening the Lifeline that Forests Provide:**
    - An **estimated 1.6 billion people, or 25% of the global population, rely on forests** for their subsistence **needs, livelihoods, employment, and income.**
    - Of the extreme poor in rural areas, 40% live in forest and savannah areas, and approximately 20% of the global population, especially women, children, landless farmers, and other vulnerable segments of society look to forests to meet their food and income needs.
  - **Impact of Covid-19 on Forest Dependent Population:**
    - On the **economic front**, forest-dependent populations have **faced job loss, reduced income**, **diminished access to markets and information**, and for many women and youth, **a contraction in seasonal employment.**
    - **Socially**, many of these populations are already **marginalized and vulnerable groups**, such as indigenous peoples, least able to access critical socio-economic safety nets.
    - Many forest dependent populations, especially those in remote or hard to reach places, have faced **difficulties accessing healthcare** or find that government assistance programmes and basic services are disrupted.
  - **Increased Pressure on Forest:**
    - Pandemic driven health and socio-economic outcomes have increased pressure on forests.
    - To ease their growing vulnerability, many indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as returning migrants and urban workers, **have retreated deeper into the woods to seek food, fuel, shelter, and protection from the risks of Covid-**19.

- **Biodiversity Crisis:**
  - Among its many findings, the **'Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services'** of the <u>Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)</u> highlighted that **one million species were at risk of extinction** and that 100 million hectares of tropical forest were lost from 1980 to 2000.
  - At the same time, **climate change is jeopardizing the resilience of forest ecosystems** and their ability to support ecosystem services worldwide.
  - Though forests offer nature-based solutions to overcome these concurrent global challenges, they have also never been more at risk.
- **Suggestions:**
  - The resilient recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic along with responses to the climate and biodiversity crises **must be rooted in the world's forests.**
        Forests and forest-dependent people are both a casualty and an important part of the solution.
  - **Sustainably resourced and managed forests** can bolster employment, disaster risk reduction, food security and social safety nets, for starters.
  - Forest **can also protect biodiversity and advance both climate mitigation and adaptation.**
  - With regard to global health, safeguarding and restoring forests are among the environmental actions that **can reduce the risk of future zoonotic disease outbreaks.**
  - The report called for a future course of action that included **greater sustainability and a greener and more inclusive economy** to tackle the threats of Covid-19, climate change and the biodiversity crisis faced by forests.

Status of World Forest

- **Total Forest Area:** According to the <u>**Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 (FRA 2020)**</u> report, the **world's total forest area is 4.06 billion hectares (bha)**, which is 31% of the total land area. This area is equivalent to 0.52 hectares per person.
- **Top Countries in Forest Cover**—the Russian Federation, Brazil, Canada, the United States of America and China constituted more than 54% of the world's forests.

Forest in India

- According to the **<u>India State of Forest Report, 2019,</u>** the **Total Forest and Tree cover is 24.56%** of the geographical area of the country.
- **Forest Cover (Area-wise):** Madhya Pradesh> Arunachal Pradesh> Chhattisgarh> Odisha> Maharashtra.

- **National Forest Policy of India, 1988** envisages a goal of achieving 33% of the geographical area of the country under forest and tree cover.

United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030

- The United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 was created with a mission to promote sustainable forest management and enhance the contribution of forests and trees to the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**
- The agreement on the first-ever UN Strategic Plan for Forests was **forged at a special session of the UN Forum on Forests held in January 2017** and provides an ambitious vision for global forests in 2030.
- **Goals and Targets:** It features **a set of six Global Forest Goals and 26 associated targets** to be reached by 2030, which are **voluntary and universal.**
  - It includes a target to increase forest area by **3% worldwide by 2030**, signifying an increase of 120 million hectares, an area over twice the size of France.
- It builds on the vision of the 2030 Agenda and recognizes that real change requires decisive, collective action, within and beyond the UN System.

Source: DTE
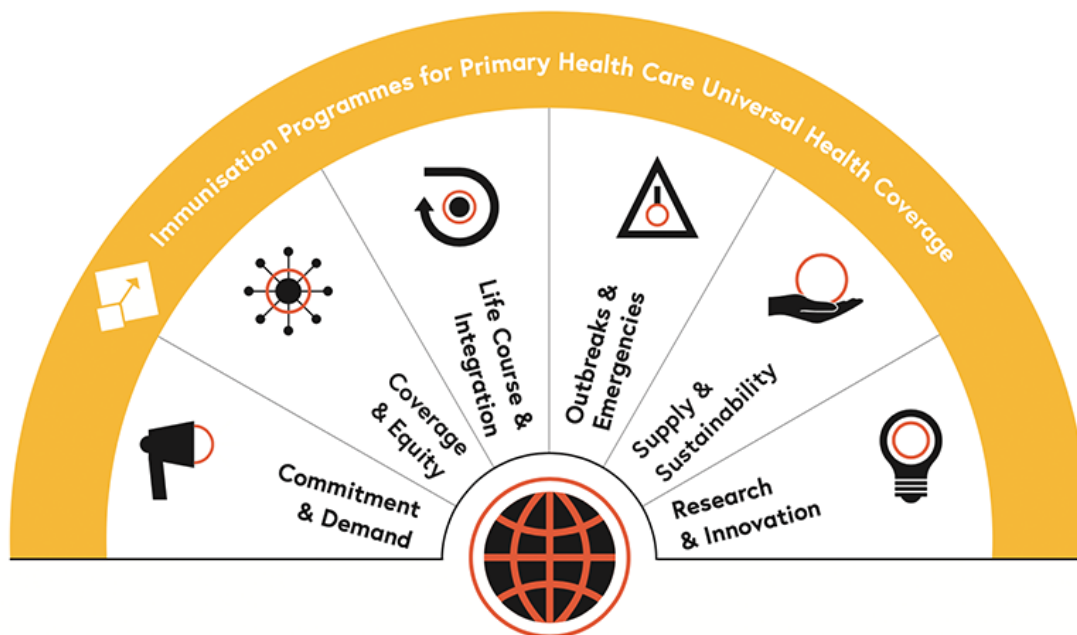
Immunisation Agenda 2030

Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations** and other agencies have launched the **Immunisation Agenda 2030 (IA2030)** during the **World Immunisation Week.**

- It will contribute to achieving the **UN-mandated Sustainable Development Goals specifically SDG 3 i.e. Good Health and Well being.**
- Covid-19 pandemic has **affected routine immunization globally.**

Key Points

About the Immunisation Agenda 2030 (IA2030):
- It sets an ambitious, overarching global vision and **strategy for vaccines and immunization for the decade 2021–2030.**
- The IA2030 is **based on learnings from Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP).** It **aims to address the unmet targets of the GVAP** that were initially to be fulfilled as part of the global immunisation strategy of the **'Decade of vaccines' (2011–2020).**
  - **GVAP** was developed to help realize the vision of the **Decade of Vaccines**, that all individuals and communities enjoy lives free from vaccine preventable diseases.
- It is **based on a conceptual framework of seven strategic priorities**, to ensure that immunization fully contributes to stronger **primary health care** and attainment of **universal health coverage.**
- It is underpinned by **four core principles:** it puts people in the centre, is led by countries, implemented through broad partnerships, and driven by data.

- **Targets of IA2030:**
  - As part of this new immunisation programme, global agencies like the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, **UNICEF** and others have set a target of **avoiding 50 million vaccine-preventable infections in this decade.**
  - It also intends **to reduce the number of zero-dose children by 50%. Zero-dose children** are those who have received no vaccines through immunisation programmes.
  - To achieve **90% coverage for essential vaccines** given in childhood and adolescence.
  - To complete **500 national or subnational introductions of new or under-utilized vaccines** - such as those for **Covid-19**, **rotavirus**, or human papillomavirus (HPV).
  - The UN agencies aim to ensure through IA2030 that the **benefits of immunisation are shared equitably among and within countries.**
- **Priority Section of the Population:**
  - The new programme will focus on a **'bottoms-up' approach**, in contrast to the GVAP that followed a 'top-down' one.
  - It will give priority to populations that are **not currently being reached, particularly the most marginalised communities, those living in fragile and conflict-affected settings and mobile populations**, such as those moving across borders.
- **India's Initiatives on Immunization:**
  - Recently, the **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0 scheme** has been rolled out to cover children and pregnant women who missed routine immunisation during the Covid-19 pandemic.
    The Immunization Programme in India was introduced in 1978 as 'Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI) by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. In 1985, the Programme was modified as **'Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)'.**
  - India is also the **major supplier to COVAX**, a global initiative aimed at equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines led by UNICEF, Gavi (The Vaccine Alliance) , the World Health Organization, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and others.
  - India also began its 'Vaccine Maitri' to supply Covid vaccine to different nations.

World Immunisation Week

- World Immunization Week is celebrated **every year in the last week of April.**

- It **aims to promote the use of vaccines** to protect people of all ages against disease.
  - **Immunisation** describes the process whereby people are protected against illness caused by infection with microorganisms (formally called pathogens). The term **vaccine refers to the material used for immunisation.**
  - Immunization is a success story for global health and development, saving millions of lives every year.
- The theme for 2021 is **"Vaccines bring us closer".**

Source: DTE

Differential Pricing for Covid-19 Vaccines

Why in News

Recently, the Supreme Court has asked the government to clarify in its affidavit the basis and rationale for pricing of **Covid-19** Vaccines.

> The court noted that "different manufacturers are quoting different prices". There are powers under the **Drugs Control Act and Patents Act,** and this is the time to invoke such powers.

Key Points

- **Pricing Regulation for Drugs in India:**
  - The pricing of essential drugs is regulated centrally through **The Essential Commodities Act**, 1955.
  - Under **Section 3 of the Act,** the government has enacted the **Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO).**
    - The **DPCO** lists **over 800 drugs** as **"essential"** in its schedule, and has capped their prices.
    - The capping of prices is done based on a formula that is worked out in each case by the **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA),** which was set up **in 1997.**
  - However, regulation through DPCO is **not applicable for patented drugs or fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs.**
    > This is why the price of the antiviral drug **remdesivir,** which is currently in great demand for the treatment of serious cases of Covid-19, is **not regulated by the government.**
  - An **amendment is required to bring Covid-19 vaccines or drugs** used in the treatment of Covid-19 such as remdesivir under the DPCO policy.

- **Other Legal Avenues Available to Address Differential Pricing for Vaccines:**
  - **The Patents Act, 1970:**
    - This law, which was mentioned by the Supreme Court, **has two key provisions** that could be potentially invoked to regulate the pricing of the vaccine.
    - **Section 100** of the Act gives the central government the power to authorise anyone (a pharma company) to use the invention for the "purposes of the government".

      This provision enables the government to license the patents of the vaccine to specific companies to speed up manufacturing and ensure equitable pricing.
    - **Under Section 92** of the Act, which deals with **compulsory licensing**, the government can, without the permission of the patent holder, license the patent under specific circumstances prescribed in the Act.
  - **The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:**
    - This has been the main legal weapon for the government in dealing with the pandemic.
    - **Section 2 of** this law gives the government "power to take special measures and prescribe regulations as to dangerous epidemic disease".
    - The broad, undefined powers under the Act, can be used to take measures to regulate pricing.

Way Forward

Apart from these legislative options, experts suggest that the **central government procuring directly from the manufacturers** could be the most beneficial route to ensure equitable pricing. As the sole purchaser, it will have greater bargaining power.

Source: IE

China's Permanent Space Station

Why in News

Recently, China **launched an unmanned module of its permanent space station that it plans to complete by the end of 2022.**

- The module, named **"Tianhe"**, or **"Harmony of the Heavens"**, was launched on the **Long March 5B**, China's largest carrier rocket.
- **India** has also set its **eye on building its own space station in low earth orbit** to conduct microgravity experiments in space in 5 to 7 years.

Key Points

- **Background:**
  - The **only space station** currently in orbit is the **International Space Station (ISS)**, from which **China is excluded.**
    - A **space station is a spacecraft** capable of supporting crew members, designed to remain in space for an extended period of time and for other spacecraft to dock.
    - The **ISS is backed by** the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan and Canada.
  - **China has been a late starter** when it comes to space exploration. It was only in 2003 that it sent its first astronaut into orbit, making it the third country to do so, after the Soviet Union and the US.
  - So far, China has sent two previous space stations into orbit. The **Tiangong-1** and **Tiangong-2** were **trial stations** though, simple modules that allowed only relatively short stays by astronauts.
- **China's Space Station:**
  - The **new, 66-tonne, multi-module Tiangong station** is set to be **operational for at least 10 years.**
  - **Tianhe is one of three main components of** what would be **China's first self-developed space station**, rivalling the only other station in service – the ISS.
    - It **forms the main living quarters for three crew members** in the Chinese space station.
  - The Tianhe launch is the **first of 11 missions** needed to complete the space station, which will **orbit Earth at an altitude of 340 to 450 km.**
  - In the later missions, China will launch the **two other core modules, four manned spacecraft** and **four cargo spacecraft.**
- **Significance for China:**
  - **For Ramping up Space Programme:**
    - China **aims to become a major space power by 2030.** It has ramped up its space programme with visits to the moon, the launch of an uncrewed probe to Mars and the construction of its own space station.
 - **ISS is about to expire by 2024:**
    - In contrast, the fate of the ageing ISS – in orbit for more than two decades – remains uncertain. The **project is set to expire in 2024**, barring funding from its partners. Russia has said recently that it would quit the project **from 2025.**
  - **Russia's Deepening Ties with China:**
    - Russia is deepening ties with China in space as **tensions with the US rise.** It has **slammed the US-led Artemis moon exploration programme** and instead chosen to join China in setting up **a lunar research outpost** in the coming years.

- **Other Missions of China:**
  - **Chang'e-5 (Moon)**
  - **Tianwen-1 (Mars)**
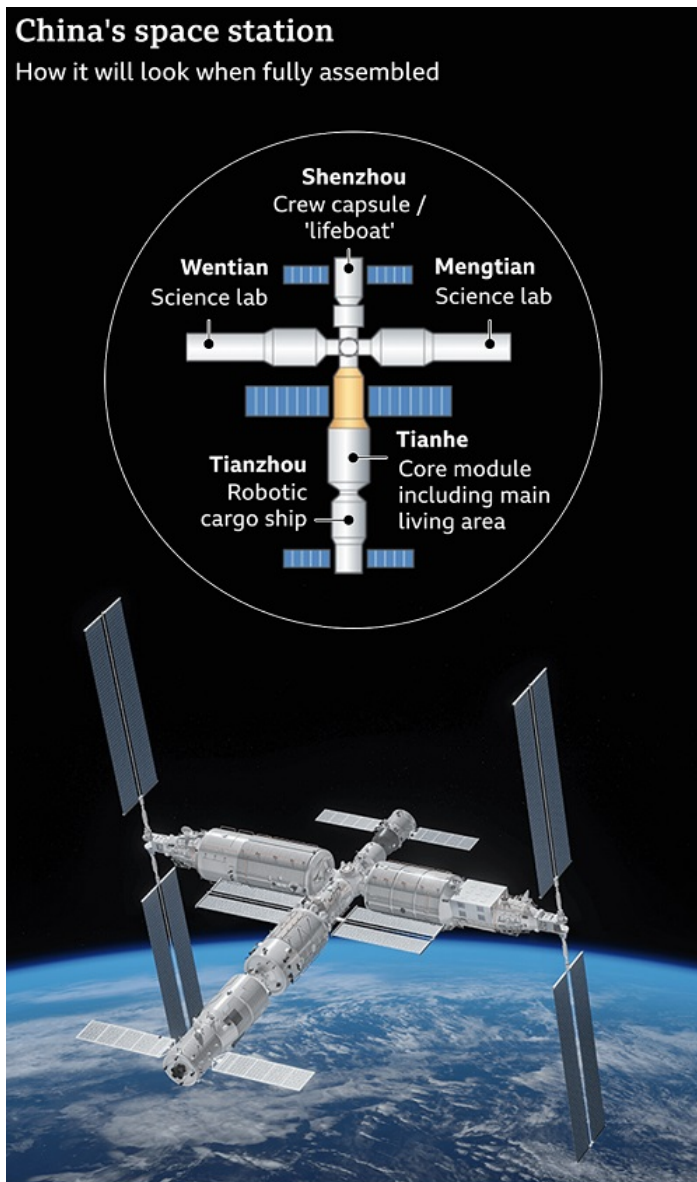
Source: TH

Corporate Social Responsibility Expenditure

Why in News

Experts are calling on the government **to ease CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) regulations** to allow corporate **expenditure on vaccinations for employees** and **treatment of employees** suffering from Covid to be **covered** under spending for **CSR.**

Under **current CSR norms,** companies are **not permitted** to count **expenditure** incurred **exclusively** for the **welfare of employees** as part of their **mandatory CSR expenditure.**

Key Points

- **Corporate Social Responsibility:**
  - **Meaning:**
    - The term "Corporate Social Responsibility" in general can be referred to as **a corporate initiative to assess and take responsibility for the company's effects on the environment** and impact on social welfare.
  - **Governance:**
    - In India, the concept of CSR is **governed by clause 135 of the Companies Act, 2013.**
      - India is the **first country in the world to mandate CSR spending** along with a framework to identify potential CSR activities.
    - The **CSR provisions** within the Act is **applicable to companies with an annual turnover of 1,000 crore and more, or a net worth of Rs. 500 crore and more, or a net profit of Rs. 5 crore and more.**
    - The Act **requires companies to set up a CSR committee** which shall recommend a Corporate Social Responsibility Policy to the Board of Directors and also monitor the same from time to time.
    - The Act **encourages companies to spend 2% of their average net profit in the previous three years on CSR activities.**
  - **CSR Activities:**
    - The **indicative activities,** which can be undertaken by a company under CSR, have been **specified under Schedule VII of the Act.** The activities include:
      - Eradicating extreme hunger and poverty,
      - Promotion of education, gender equality and empowering women,
      - Combating **Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome** and other diseases,
      - Ensuring environmental sustainability;
      - Contribution to the **Prime Minister's National Relief Fund** or any other fund set up by the Central Government for socio-economic development and relief and funds for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes, minorities and women etc.
  - **Injeti Srinivas Committee:**
    - A **High Level Committee on CSR** was formed in 2018 under the Chairmanship of Injeti Srinivas.
    - The **main recommendations** included making CSR expenditure tax deductible, allowing the carry-forward of unspent balance for a period of 3-5 years, and aligning Schedule VII of the Companies Act with the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**.

- **Recent Development:**
  - In 2020, the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs allowed companies to spend CSR funds on Covid-19 relief,** including preventive healthcare and sanitation and on research and development of Covid drugs, vaccines and medical devices.
  - The **ambit was expanded further this year** to include awareness or public outreach programmes on Covid-19 vaccination and setting up of makeshift hospitals and temporary Covid care facilities.
- **Benefits of Further Easing CSR Norms:**
  - **Role in Vaccination Drive:** Approximately, Rs. 10,000 crore is available with listed companies annually for spending on CSR activities. If the eligible unlisted companies are taken into account, the available sum may be larger. This can be handy in supplementing the expenditure of the Centre and States on vaccination.
  - **Rural Population can be reachable:** Many of these companies have a presence in rural areas.This will ensure that the drive goes beyond the large cities and reach the rural population too.
  - **Benefit of Allowing Corporate Expenditure on Vaccinations for Employees under CSR:** This will boost vaccinations for unorganised labour in the manufacturing sector and will benefit the overburdened healthcare system.

Source:IE

MACS 1407: Variety of Soybean

Why in News

Recently, **Indian Scientists** have developed **a high-yielding and pest-resistant variety of soybean**, called **MACS 1407.**

Scientists from **MACS- Agharkar Research Institute, Pune**, in collaboration with **Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi** have developed it.

Key Points

- **MACS 1407:**
  - Using the conventional cross breeding technique, scientists developed **MACS 1407** which gives **39 quintals per hectare** making it **a high yielding variety.**
  - It **requires an average 43 days for 50% flowering** and takes 104 days to mature from the date of sowing.
  - It has white coloured flowers, yellow seeds and black hilum. Its seeds have **19.81% oil content, 41% protein content and show good germinability.**
  - Its thick stem, higher pod insertion (7 cm) from ground, and resistance to pod shattering make it suitable even for **mechanical harvesting.**
  - It is **suitable for rain-fed conditions of north- east India.**
    - It is suitable for cultivation in the states of Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and North-Eastern states.
  - Variety is also **resistant to major insect-pests** like girdle beetle, leaf miner, leaf roller, stem fly, aphids, white fly and defoliators.
  - Its seeds will be made available to farmers for sowing during the **2022 Kharif season.**
    - It is highly adaptive to sowing from **20 June to 5 July** without any yield loss. This makes it **resistant to the vagaries of Monsoon** as compared to other varieties.
- **Significance:**
  - In **2019, India produced around 90 million tons of soybean**, widely cultivated as oil seeds as well as a cheap source of protein for animal feed and many packaged meals and is striving to be among the world's major producers of soybean.
  - High-yielding, disease resistant varieties of the legume can help achieve this target.

Kharif Season

- Crops are **sown** from **June to July** and **Harvesting** is done in between **September-October.**
- Crops are: Rice, maize, jowar, bajra, tur, moong, urad, cotton, jute, groundnut, soyabean etc.
- States are: Assam, West Bengal, coastal regions of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra.

Rabi Season

- Crops are **sown** from **October to December** and **Harvesting** is done in between **April-June.**
- **Crops are:** Wheat, barley, peas, gram, mustard etc.
- **States are:** Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Zaid Season

- In between the rabi and the kharif seasons, there is **a short season during the summer months** known as the Zaid season.
- Crops are: watermelon, muskmelon, cucumber, vegetables and fodder crops.

Source: PIB

Tejas Adds Python-5 Air to Air Missile Capability

Why in News

Recently, India's Indigenous **Light Combat Aircraft Tejas** has added capability of firing **Israeli-origin Python-5 air-to-air missile (AAM)** after concluding successful tests.

- The same set of tests were also aimed to validate the enhanced capability of the already integrated Israeli-origin **Derby beyond visual range AAM** on Tejas.
- The tests were conducted by **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).**

Key Points

- **Python-5 Missile:**
  - It has been **developed by the Israeli defence company Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.** It is the **newest member of the Python family.**
  - This **fifth generation air-to-air missile** provides the pilot engaging an enemy aircraft with a revolutionary full sphere launch capability.
  - It can be **launched from very short to beyond-visual ranges** with greater kill probability, excellent resistance to countermeasures, irrespective of evasive target manoeuvers or deployment of countermeasures.
  - It is a **dual use missile suitable for air-to-air and surface-to-air missions.**
  - It is powered by a solid propellant **rocket engine.** The propulsion system provides a **speed of Mach 4** and an operational **range of more than 20 km.**
  - It is also equipped with **lock-on-before launch (LOBL)** and **lock-on-after launch (LOAL) capabilities.**

- **Light Combat Aircraft Tejas:**
    - **Tejas** is a **single engined, light weight, highly agile, multi-role supersonic fighter.**
    - The **indigenously-developed aircraft** has been **manufactured at the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)** and **designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA)** for the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy.
    - It is **designed to carry** a range of air-to-air, air-to-surface, precision-guided, weapons.

Beyond Visual Range AAM

- A beyond-visual-range missile (BVR) is an air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) that is **capable of engaging at ranges of 37 km or beyond.** This range has been achieved using dual pulse rocket motors or booster rocket motors and ramjet sustainer motors.
- In addition to the range capability, the missile is also capable of tracking its target at this range or of acquiring the target in flight.
- Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM) technology enables the fighter-pilots to shoot precisely at the enemy targets which are beyond their visual range.
    Astra missile works on BVRAAM.

Source: PIB