

## Indian Antarctic Bill, 2020

### ❖ Context

- Nearly 40 years after India first signed the Antarctic Treaty, the **government has brought in a draft Indian Antarctic Bill, 2020.**
- Recently, Earth Sciences Minister tabled the draft Bill in Lok Sabha.

### ❖ Key Highlights

- The draft bill is the **first domestic legislation** with regard to Antarctica in India.
- **Twenty-seven countries** already have domestic legislations on Antarctica.
- India's expeditions have been circumscribed by international law.
- The Bill now **puts into place a comprehensive list of regulations related to Antarctica**, for such scientific expeditions, as well as for individuals, companies and tourists.

### ❖ Antarctica Treaty

- **Signed in 1959 by 12 countries** and came into force in 1961.
- The Treaty **covers the area south of 60°S latitude.**
- Currently, **54 nations are signatories** to the Antarctic Treaty.
- **Only 29 nations have a right to vote** at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings – this includes India.
- **India signed the Antarctic Treaty in 1983.**
- **Objective of the Treaty:**
  - To **demilitarize Antarctica** and establish it as a zone used for **peaceful research activities.**
  - To set aside any disputes regarding territorial sovereignty, thereby ensuring **international cooperation.**

### ❖ Objectives of the Bill:

- To **have India's own national measures for protecting the Antarctic environment** and its dependent and associated ecosystem.
- To **regulate visits and activities to Antarctica**, as well as **potential disputes** that may arise among those present on the continent.

### ❖ Main Provisions of the Bill

- It **extend the jurisdiction of Indian courts** to Antarctica, and the investigation and trial for crimes committed on the Arctic continent,
- The Bill is a comprehensive document of **regulations**, particularly keeping in mind **environmental protection** and the fragile nature of the region.
- The Bill introduces an **elaborate permit system for any expedition or individual** who wishes to visit the continent.
  - These permits will be issued by a Committee that will be set up by the government.
- While **India does not carry out commercial fishing in the area**, since every country has an allotted quota, the Bill now provides for this activity.
- Bill **enables Indian tour operators** to operate in Antarctica with strict regulation.
- Bill enlists elaborate **standards for environmental protection** as well as waste management.
- **Prohibition:**
  - **Drilling, dredging, excavation or collection of mineral resources** or even doing anything to identify where such mineral deposits occur.
  - **Damaging of native plants, flying or landing helicopters** or operating vessels that could disturb birds and seals,
  - **Removing soil** or any biological material native to Antarctica.
  - Engaging in any activity that **could adversely change the habitat of birds and animals**, kill, injure or capture any bird or animal.
  - The **introduction of animals, birds, plants** or microscopic organisms that are not native to Antarctica.

## PM-Kisan

### ❖ Context

- The government is **using data analytics and artificial intelligence** to identify ineligible farmers who pay income tax but also get ₹6,000 in annual financial assistance under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi.
- The **Government will ask them to return the sum** received since December 2018, when the welfare scheme began.

### ❖ Key Highlights

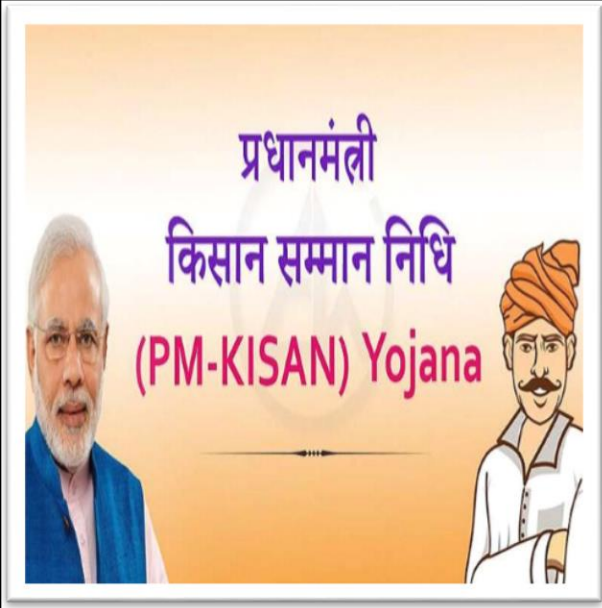
- Both **physical verifications and technology-driven exercises** at various levels have been undertaken to eliminate ineligible beneficiaries from the list.
- Among 6.45 million beneficiaries in 2021-22 **less than 5% of them were ineligible.**

### ❖ About PM-KISAN

- It was **launched in February 2019.**
- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** with 100% funding from the Government of India.
- Implemented by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.**

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### ❖ Features

- Under the scheme, the **Center transfers an amount of Rs 6,000 per year, in three equal installments**, directly into the bank accounts of all landholding farmers irrespective of the size of their land holdings.
- **Identification of Beneficiaries:**
  - The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the **State / UT Governments**.
- **Objectives:**
  - To **supplement the financial needs** of the Small and Marginal Farmers in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of each crop cycle.
  - To **protect them from falling in the clutches of money lenders** for meeting such expenses and ensure their continuance in the farming activities.

## Economic Crisis in Srilanka & Emergency

### ❖ Context

- In the wake of protests demanding resignation of the Srilankan President, a state of Emergency has been declared in Sri Lanka.

### ❖ Key Highlights

#### ❖ What does an economic crisis mean for the common man?

- Prices of essentials like cooking gas, oils, rice, pulses, vegetables, fish, meat spike - For eg. 1 kg Milk powder now cost LR 2000 (1 Indian Rupee = 3-4 Srilanka Rupee).
- Consumers could not find the most basic things such as petrol, LPG cylinders, kerosene, or milk in the market. They spent hours waiting in long queues outside fuel stations or shops.
- Supermarket shelves were either empty or had products with high price tags that most could not afford.
- The fuel shortage has led to long blackouts — up to 13 hours — across the island.
- Such situation has angered people sparking protests all over the island.

#### ❖ What caused the economic crisis in Srilanka?

- The Easter Sunday bombings of 2019 that deterred tourists, = **Fall in foreign exchange earnings and export.**
- The pandemic since early 2020 stalled recovery & worker remittances = **Negative economic growth = Fall in production and income.**
- The government cut tax revenue substantially = **Fall in government capacity to spend and invest.**

- Another government decision with respect to 'organic only' agricultural policy that will likely slash this year's harvest by half = **Increasing dependence of the nation on import of food = Increase in CAD = Increase in need of foreign exchange which were already under stress** on account of decline in workers remittances and tourism.

#### • **Result: 1 US \$ = 300-400 LR.**

- Without enough dollars to pay for the country's high import bill, consignments leave the Colombo port.
- The island faces a severe shortage of essentials - from fuel, cooking gas, and staple foodgrains to medicines.

#### ❖ Path out of crisis

- **Short term** - With foreign assistance, deal with the BoP crisis and stabilise prevailing high prices.
- **Long term** - Structural reforms to boost productivity & economic growth & income.

#### ❖ Foreign assistance

- India has extended \$2.4 billion of assistance including currency swap, credit lines for import, loan deferment etc.
- China is considering a fresh request from Colombo for \$2.5 billion assistance, in addition to the \$2.8 billion it has extended since the pandemic broke out.
- The government has decided to negotiate an International Monetary Fund programme, while seeking support from other multilateral and bilateral sources.

## News in Between the Lines

### Netherland: Gateway to India's Energy Export to EU

#### ❖ Context

- Netherland is working on MoU with India on renewable energy which is likely to be taken for discussion between the countries during Indian President visit to Netherland next week.

#### ❖ Key Factors

- With Russia-Ukraine crisis leading to rise in oil and gas prices, **Netherland is looking at reducing its energy dependence.**

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- One of the goal for India is to become net exporter of green hydrogen.
- Netherland does not have enough space to produce all the green hydrogen by self.
- Rotterdam port is the biggest port of the Europe.
- Netherland is the fifth biggest foreign investor in India.

❖ **Other Focus Areas**

- Working on preparation of a model for **Global Water Pact** based on water security initiatives from across the world, including the Indian government's Jal Jeevan Mission.
- According to the Netherlands' special envoy for international water affairs, India's efforts under the jal shakti ministry can be replicated in other parts of the world.
- In **2021**, during a virtual summit between the prime ministers of the two countries, a **strategic partnership on water was launched**.
- The **Netherland** will be co-hosting with **Tajikistan** a 3-day **UN Water conference** on **22 March 2023** for taking action on sustainable water management.

## Bharat New Car Assessment Programme



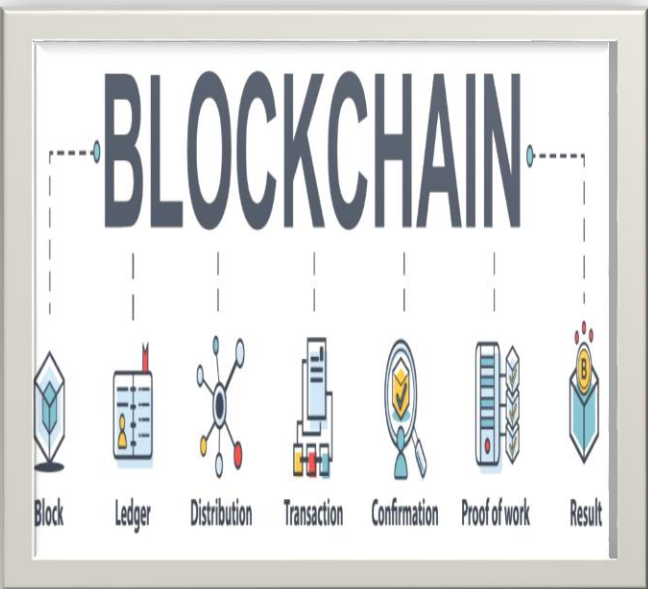
❖ **Context**

- The **Ministry of Road & Transport** is working on a proposal to prepare a plan to test and validate star ratings of cars under the Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (BNCAP).

❖ **Key Highlights**

- This is aimed at encouraging **automakers** to **voluntarily participate** in the **safety testing assessment programme**.
- It will incorporate higher safety levels in new car models with regard to the identified parameters which include structural safety, safety of adult and child occupants, and provision of active and passive safety assist technologies.
- The proposed assessment will allocate **ratings from 1 to 5 stars**.
- The ministry, through a notification, has laid out additional safety features for motor vehicles used for carrying passengers, comprising not more than 8 seats, manufactured on and after 1 July 2019.

## Blockchain and Caste Certificate



❖ **Context**

- Maharashtra government is in process to implement a system to authenticate government-issued caste certificates through a blockchain system.

❖ **Key Highlights**

- The system, **first of its kind** in the country, is to be put in place in the Maoist affected **Gadchiroli district** whose **70% population is tribal**.
- It will help protect the rights of tribals.
- Currently, the state issues digitally signed certificates, through 'Mahaonline' portal, which people keep in physical form and are difficult to verify.
- The proposed system will **encode and store** the important details of caste certificates on blockchain and **generate a unique QR code**, consisting of blockchain proofs, **embedded on each caste certificate**.

❖ **Benefits of Blockchain**

- Any **third party** such as employers, educational institutions, judicial bodies **can verify** the certificate.
- Use of blockchain will also **ensure privacy** of all data without exposing it to the internet.
- The verification that will **take only 10 seconds** will merely involve scanning QR code.
- Immunity of citizens from any kind of **deplatform** - once the information is on blockchain no one will be able to erase the data.

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## UVIT J2022



### ❖ Context

- Researchers from India have discovered a **faint star-forming galaxy around 136 light years away**, using the Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (UVIT) on-board India's only space observatory AstroSat.

### ❖ Key Highlights

- The galaxy was **undetected so far since it lies in front of a much brighter galaxy**.
- It has a **"ghost-like" appearance** in the optical images because of its low disk density. The inner part of the galaxy shows **stars are still being formed** in the newly-discovered galaxy.
- The team was **studying a known interacting galaxy NGC6902A** and noticed the color image of the south-west outer region of the galaxy NGC 6902A in the shows diffuse blue emission.
- The **color was captured by Dark Energy Camera Legacy Survey (DECaLS)**, a deep optical survey conducted on international telescopes.
- **Faint Galaxies:**
  - Faint Galaxies are called **low surface brightness galaxies or ultra-diffuse galaxies** and have a **surface brightness** that is at least **ten times fainter** than the surrounding night sky.
  - Such faint galaxies may account for up to **15 % of the mass of the universe**.
  - They are **difficult to detect** because of their inherent low luminosities.

## NFC Technology



### ❖ Context

- **Google Pay** has recently launched a new feature in India, **'Tap to pay for UPI', in collaboration with Pine Labs**.
- The feature makes use of Near Field Communication (NFC) technology.

### ❖ Key Highlights

- The functionality will allow **users with NFC-enabled Android smartphones** and UPI accounts linked to Google Pay to **carry out transactions just by tapping their phones** on any POS terminal across the country. Till now, **Tap to Pay was only available for cards**.

### ❖ About NFC Technology

- NFC is a **short-range wireless** connectivity technology.
- It allows NFC-enabled devices to communicate with each other and **transfer information quickly and easily with a single touch** — whether to pay bills, exchange business cards, download coupons, or share a document. **NFC transmits data through electromagnetic radio fields**, to enable communication between two devices. Both devices **must contain NFC chips**, as transactions take place within a very short distance.
- NFC-enabled devices must be either **physically touching** or within a **few centimeters from each other for data transfer to occur**.

### ❖ Applications of NFC Technology

- It is **used in contactless banking cards** to perform money transactions or to **generate contact-less tickets for public transport**.
- Contactless cards and readers use NFC in several applications from **securing networks and buildings to monitoring inventory and sales, preventing auto theft, keeping tabs on library books, and running unmanned toll booths**.
- It is present in **speakers, household appliances**, and other electronic devices that we monitor and control through our smartphones.
- With just a touch, NFC can also **set up WiFi and Bluetooth devices** in our homes, and NFC is also **used in wireless charging**.
- It also has an application in **healthcare, to monitor patient stats through NFC-enabled wristbands**.

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