



## News Analysis (05 Aug, 2021)

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### Continuation of Scheme for Fast Track Courts

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#### Why in News

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Recently, the Union Government **approved the continuation of more than 1000 Fast Track Special Court (FTSCs) as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for two years** (April 2021-March 2023).

- It includes 389 exclusive **POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Courts**.
- The Central share will be provided from the **Nirbhaya Fund**.

#### Key Points

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- **Background:**
  - Fast track courts (FTCs) were first recommended by the **Eleventh Finance Commission in 2000** "to substantially bring down, if not eliminate, pendency in the district and subordinate courts over the next five years".
  - Following the Finance Commission's report, Rs 502.90 crore was granted by the Centre to create 1,734 additional courts in different states for a period of five years.
  - In 2011, the **central government stopped funding fast-track courts**.
    - The decision was challenged in the Supreme Court (SC) in 2012, but the apex court said it was up to the states to continue or shut down these courts depending on their financial situation.
  - Three states--Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala--continued running these courts while **Delhi, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka** had said they would continue till 2013.
  - Following the December 2012 Gangrape and murder, the Union Government set up a '**Nirbhaya Fund**', amended **the Juvenile Justice Act** and set up **fast-track Mahila Courts**.
    - Some other states such as Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar etc. also set up FTCs for rape cases thereafter.

- **Scheme for Fast Track Special Courts:**

- More recently, **in 2019, the government approved a scheme for setting up 1,023 fast-track special courts (FTSCs)** across the country for expeditious disposal of pending rape cases under the Indian penal Code (IPC) and crimes under the POCSO Act.

In July 2019, the SC also directed setting up of a centrally funded special court in each district where more than 100 FIRs are registered under the POCSO Act in order to deal exclusively with these cases.

- FTSCs are **dedicated courts expected to ensure swift dispensation of justice.** They have a better clearance rate as compared to the regular courts and hold speedy trials.
- It also strengthens the deterrence framework for sexual offenders.

- **Performance of Fast Track Courts So Far:**

- The Performance has been below par.
- According to **NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau)**, at the end of 2019, rape cases had a pendency rate--pending cases at the end of the year as a percentage of total cases for trial--of 89.5% and the conviction rate of 27.8%.
- For POCSO cases, 88.8% cases were pending at the end of the year, and of those disposed of, 34.9% ended in a conviction.

- **Issues with FTCs:**

- **Lack of Infrastructure:**

- Fast-track courts operate no differently than regular courts. It is just like any other court hall in the district judiciary.
- There are no changes in the legal process to enable the cases to move forward faster. There is no element of process engineering except where it is just fixed as an ad hoc thing (for instance, for high-profile cases), because there is simply no supporting infrastructure to ensure that the timeline is met.

- **No clear Mandate:**

- There are no clear mandates on what kind of cases fast-track courts are supposed to hear.
- The fast-track courts set up under the Nirbhaya Fund, for instance, were not clear whether all cases of gender-based violence such as 'eve-teasing' (street harassment) or domestic violence came under their purview.

- **Delay in Judgement:**

- Delay due to absence of witnesses was seen as one of the main reasons for adjournments, showed a study.
- Another cause for delays is adjournments sought by lawyers.  
Litigation culture in India encourages seeking adjournments; in fact, clients come to lawyers to delay the cases.
- Delays can also be caused because many times the decision of a fast-track court is challenged in the high court or the Supreme Court.

- **Overburdened Judges:**

- Less number of Judicial Officials.  
As of February, 2020, around 21% of the sanctioned strength (24,018) of judicial officers in subordinate courts was vacant in different states; of the 5,146 vacancies, a large number of seats were vacant in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.
- They are more or less judges from sessions courts who are given the extra responsibility of fast-track courts.

## Way Forward

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- **The Push FTCs need:**

For fast-track courts to be more effective, trials must be completed in a time-bound manner. For this, a two-pronged approach that improves the human capacity of these courts with dedicated judges and competent staff while restructuring processes is needed.

- **Capacity building:**

- They must have dedicated judges so that cases can be heard on a regular basis.
- Competent staff such as stenographers and clerks can help with evidence processing and serving notices to witnesses and investigating officers, which saves a lot of time.

- **Process engineering:**
  - Certain time-consuming processes must be reengineered so as to make the system more efficient.
  - There should be a realistic assessment of the time taken for each hearing and then have a proper time table which offers ample time to every case.
- **Clear Mandate:**
  - There should be a clear mandate for fast-track courts as is the practice in countries such as Spain and Liberia.
  - The hearings take place in a stipulated time frame and any case pertaining to gender-based violence is automatically transferred to these courts.

**Source: IE**

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## **Inequitable Food System**

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### **Why in News**

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According to a **United Nations**' report on the **Food System**, today's **food systems are heavily afflicted by power imbalances and inequality**, and do not work for most women.

- Women are affected disproportionately by the factors such as **Climate Change**, **Covid-19**, Discrimination, Less land rights, **migration** etc.
- The Report has **come ahead of the Food Systems Summit in September 2021**.

### **Key Points**

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- **Food Systems:**

**Food systems** are a complex web of activities involving production, processing, handling, preparation, storage, distribution, marketing, access, purchase, consumption, food loss and waste, as well as the outputs of these activities, including social, economic and environmental outcomes.

- **Findings from the Report:**

- **Climate Change:**

- Women farmers are disproportionately more affected by climate change and land degradation.
- While women are more likely than men to notice the climate change impacts on agricultural productivity, livestock problems and water availability, they are less likely than men to receive key information on climate and agricultural information that would allow them to plan for climate concerns.

- **Malnutrition:**

- They face high levels of obesity and are more susceptible to chronic disease.
- Indigenous women play a crucial role in eradicating hunger and malnutrition. But limitations in the recognition and exercise of rights have hampered access to equitable systems of food.

- **Migration:**

- Migration among youths over the course of urban transition have had impacts on the gendered nature of economic roles.
- Such migration has entailed **a growing gap between the location of food production and food consumption.**
- This may have been followed by a change in lifestyle, including dietary habits.

- **Covid-19:**

A 2020 UN report had hinted how epidemics can significantly reduce women's economic and livelihood activities, increasing poverty rates and exacerbating food insecurity.

- **Food Insecurity:**

- **Rural women were among the worst affected** among the food insecure population of 821 million (as of 2017).
- As many as 31 African countries depended on external food aid till 2019.

- **Discrimination:**

- Rural women accounting for nearly half the agricultural workforce in developing countries, face discrimination. They have very little land rights, face difficulties obtaining ownership, do not have access to credit and are engaged in unpaid work.
- This lack of agency reflects in their dietary patterns: They eat least, last and least well. Women farmers who control resources generally have better-quality diets.

- **Suggestions:**
  - **Independent Women Groups are Needed:**
    - **Dimitra Clubs in the rural regions of sub-Saharan Africa** have been drivers of women's leadership for over a decade. These groups comprise women and men who shed light on the gender inequalities in households and communities.
    - The UN has called for more such independent, social systems at the national as well as the regional level to strengthen institutional architecture and make decision-making processes related to food systems more inclusive.
  - **Ensure Access to Fundamental Services:**
    - It urged the systems **to adopt policies that eliminate barriers in access to fundamental services**, ensuring, for example, the right to food, shelter and health.
    - The report **cited the example of German dual training system**, an institutional infrastructure that creates a path to jobs and better livelihoods. It integrates school-based learning with work-based practice by providing theoretical training for aspiring farmers as well as short-term courses on specific skills.
  - **Making Governments and Businesses Accountable:**

The UN stressed that **inequitable systems** and structures that enable and exacerbate inequalities for food systems workers and consumers **be dismantled** and **governments, businesses, and organizations be held accountable for ensuring equitable livelihoods.**

## India's Initiatives for Equitable Food System

- **Class:** Small and marginal farmers FPO (Farmer producer Organisation), Cooperatives, cluster mode of working in most development programs .
- **Disadvantaged sections** (Agricultural labour and tribal population): Dedicated budget allocation for better inclusion in programs.
- **Gender budgeting**, incentives for ensuring greater participation, **mahila sashaktikaran pariyojana** (women empowerment scheme of M/oRD), National Gender Resource Center for agriculture.
- **Food and nutrition security:** **PDS**, **One Nation One Card**, **National Nutrition Mission**, focus on nutri cereals.

## UN Food Systems Summit

- **About:**
  - It will be convened as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** by 2030.
  - The Summit will launch bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems.
  - The Food Systems Summit is organised around **five action tracks**.

- **Action Tracks:**
  - Safe and nutritious food.
  - Sustainable consumption patterns.
  - Nature-positive production.
  - Advance equitable livelihoods.
  - Resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.
- **India at UN Food Systems Summit:**
  - **India has volunteered, but not limited to, to the Action Track 4: Advance Equitable Livelihoods** for the UN Food System Summit 2021.
  - **Agriculture being a State subject**, implementation of specific initiatives by state governments will be crucial.

**Source: DTE**

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## **Road to Zero Hunger Goal: SDG 2**

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### **Why in News**

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According to a recent report by the **United Nations**, the goal of achieving **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2** i.e. **'Zero Hunger'** has been hit in the wake of the novel **coronavirus disease (Covid-19)** pandemic.

The **zero hunger goal works in tandem** with many others: Poverty elimination (SDG1), good health and well-being (SDG3), and the need for clean drinking water (SDG6).

### **Key Points**

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- **Relation with other SDGs:**

- **SDG 2 and SDG 1:**

- Food security **does not only rely on food availability**, but also on food access.
- If **food security and poverty** can be seen as **part of the same battle**, reduction of poverty should not only be sought through lower food prices but also through higher income.

- **SDG 2 and SDG 3:**

- **Nutrition is key to good health**, so the relation between **SDG 2 and SDG 3** is also synergetic.
- **Environmental health** through a more sustainable agriculture also establishes a link between SDG2 and SDG 3.
  - **Agricultural activities** substantially contribute to **global pollution**: Biomass burning causes air pollution and land clearing contributes to fuel combustion emissions.
  - **Agriculture ammonia emissions** also impact human health. They are behind **several hundred thousand premature deaths** per year globally.

- **Other SDGs:** Similarly, education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), decent work and economic growth (SDG8), reduction of inequality (SDG10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG11), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16), and partnership for the goals (SDG17) also **influence consumption patterns and healthy diet choice**.

- **Gender inequality** makes **several women food insecure**: Female workers are a substantial share of the agricultural workforce, but face difficulties in accessing land, livestock, education, extension and financial services.
- Decent work and economic growth (SDG8) and reduction of inequality (SDG10) **can also support better nutrition** by going beyond SDG1 and bringing economic resources.

- **Challenges:**

- One of the most widely studied **adverse environmental impacts** of the food system is its contribution to **climate change**.

The **food system** contributes **34% of the anthropogenic greenhouse gas** emissions.

- **Overconsumption of water resources** is another critical challenge faced by agriculture.

**Irrigation represents about 70% of global water withdrawals**, and this demand is expected to continue to increase in the coming decades.

- **Excess use of nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P)** is harmful for terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

Excess of N causes acidification of soils and freshwater; Nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) causes climate-warming emissions and stratospheric **ozone** depletion.



- **Suggestions:**
  - Facilitating new investment, research and innovation for sustainable agriculture.
  - Reducing food waste and losses.
  - Changing our consumption patterns to leverage considerable benefits on SDG outcomes by relieving pressure on natural resources and fostering the health benefits.

## India's Initiatives for Making Food Systems Sustainable

- Achievements of India's **Green Revolution** and learnings there from.
- **Cropping patterns are being changed** as per agro ecological zones defined for the country.
- **Alternate farming** including organic and natural farming
- **Enhancing water use efficiency** in agriculture.
- Integrated farming systems.
- **National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture**

**Source: DTE**

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## Stubble Burning

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### Why in News

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Recently, some experts advised that the government should speed up implementation of **alternatives to stubble burning**.

The centre, facing criticism from **farmers protesting against the farm laws**, had committed to **removing a clause in the Air Commission Bill, 2021** that would penalise farmers for burning stubble, an important contributor to noxious air quality.

### Key Points

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- **About:**
  - Stubble (parali) burning is the **act of setting fire to crop residue** to remove them from the field to sow the next crop.
  - In order to plant the next winter crop (Rabi crop), farmers in **Haryana and Punjab** have to move in a very short interval and if they are late, due to short winters these days, they might face considerable losses. Therefore, **burning is the cheapest and fastest way to get rid of the stubble.**
    - If parali is left in the field, **pests like termites may attack the upcoming crop.**
    - The precarious **economic condition of farmers doesn't allow them to use expensive mechanised methods** to remove stubble.
  - **It begins around October and peaks in November**, coinciding with the withdrawal of **southwest monsoon**.
- **Major Causes:**
  - **Technology:**
    - The problem arises due to the **use of mechanised harvesting** which leaves several inches of stubble in the fields.
    - Earlier, this excess crop was used by farmers for cooking, as hay to keep their animals warm or even as extra insulation for homes.
    - But, now the stubble use for such purposes has become outdated.
  - **Adverse Impact of Laws:**
    - Implementation of the **Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act (2009)** made the time period of stubble burning coincident with the onset of winter in Northern India.
    - **Late transplanting of paddy** during Kharif season to prevent water loss as directed by PPSW Act (2009) had left farmers with little time between harvesting and preparing the field for the next crop and hence farmers are resorting to the burning of stubble.
  - **High Silica Content:**
    - Rice straw is **considered useless as fodder** in the case of non-basmati rice, because of its high silica content.

- **Effects of Stubble Burning:**
  - **Pollution:**
    - Open stubble burning emits large amounts of toxic pollutants in the atmosphere which contain harmful gases like **methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Volatile organic compound (VOC) and carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.**
    - After the release in the atmosphere, these pollutants disperse in the surroundings, may undergo a physical and chemical transformation and eventually **adversely affect human health by causing a thick blanket of smog.**
  - **Soil Fertility:**
    - Burning husk on the ground **destroys the nutrients in the soil**, making it less fertile.
  - **Heat Penetration:**
    - Heat generated by stubble burning penetrates into the soil, leading to the **loss of moisture and useful microbes.**
- **Alternatives to Stubble Burning:**
  - **In-Situ Treatment of Stubble-** For example crop residue management by zero-tiller machine and Use of bio-decomposers.
  - **Ex-Situ (off site) Treatment-** For example use of rice straw as cattle fodder.
  - **Use of Technology-** For example Turbo Happy Seeder (THS) machine, which can uproot the stubble and also sow seeds in the area cleared. The stubble can then be used as mulch for the field.
  - **Changing Cropping Pattern-** It is the deeper and more fundamental solution.

## Way Forward

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- Imposing a **fine is not going to work in our socio-economic conditions** for curbing stubble burning. We need to **focus on alternative solutions.**
- Although the government is distributing but **everyone is not getting the machines for in-situ management.** The government should ensure their availability to everyone.
- Similarly, in ex-situ management, some companies have started collecting stubble for their use, **but more effort on this front is needed.**
- **Small and marginal farmers, especially, need support for adoption of in-situ strategies,** to mulch the straw into the soil and not burn it. **Penalty without access to solutions does not work.**

Source: TH

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## PSUs Exempted from Minimum Public Shareholding

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## Why in News

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The Ministry of Finance **has amended the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957** to exempt listed public sector companies from the minimum public shareholding norm.

## Key Points

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- **The Amendment:**
  - **About:**

The **government can now exempt any listed public sector enterprise from the Minimum Public Shareholding (MPS) norm**, which mandates at least 25% public float for all listed entities.
  - **Rationale to the New Amendment:**
    - The framework for the MPS has been revised to **make it easier for large companies to launch IPOs** (Initial Public Offers).
    - The move comes as the **government prepares for the IPO of Life Insurance Corp (LIC) of India**, likely to be the biggest listing ever.
  - **Concerns:**
    - **Can Affect Liquidity in PSU Stocks:**

Investors, especially foreign ones, are wary of investing in such stocks due to absence of liquidity – because of high promoter holding.
    - **Can Impact Foreign Investment:**
      - Maintenance of minimum public float by listed companies helps attract higher foreign capital and increases India's weight in international indices like MSCI (Morgan Stanley Capital International) and FTSE (Financial Times Stock Exchange).
      - Government firms not adhering to these norms could be a drag on inflow of foreign capital.
    - **Can Impact Strategic Disinvestment Program:**
      - This can be detrimental at a time the government is planning **Strategic Sales** in various PSUs including BPCL, Shipping Corporation, and Air India.
      - Low free float is one of the reasons why PSU stocks command low valuation in the market.
    - **Non-Uniform Governance Standards:**

Various government expert committees have in their reports argued all listed entities, government or private, should be treated at par on governance standards.

- **Minimum Public Shareholding (MPS):**

- **About:**

- The MPS (also called free float) rule **requires all listed companies in India to ensure that at least 25% of their equity shares are held by non-promoters, i.e. public.**
    - Public shareholders **could be individual or financial institutions** and they normally **buy shares through public offer or secondary markets.**
    - In order **to bring more transparency** in the working of listed companies, the concept of minimum public shareholding was introduced.  
In **2010, SEBI amended the Securities Contracts Regulation Rules** to insist on this 25% public float for private sector companies.
    - The **average promoter holding in India is among the highest globally.**  
In the 2019-20 Budget, the government had proposed to increase the minimum public float from 25% to 35%.

- **Compliance Status:**

- While the timeline for achieving 25% MPS for listed companies was 2013, the timeline for public sector companies i.e. PSUs and public sector banks (PSBs), were extended multiple times closer to the deadline due to lack of efforts from such companies towards compliance.  
The previous such extension granted them time till 2nd August, 2021 for compliance.
    - With the latest amendment, the Central government has empowered itself to exempt selected public sector companies from the 25% MPS norm.

- **Significance:**

- Adequate free float in a listed company is **essential for providing sufficient liquidity in trading stocks** thereby facilitating efficient price discovery and maintaining market integrity.
    - Public float ensures that there is **lesser price manipulation in the stock.**
    - Forcing promoters to relax their grip on listed companies **can improve corporate governance** by giving public shareholders and institutions greater say in corporate actions.  
There are very few investment opportunities in the stock market and so forcing promoters to sell shares would **improve the supply of shares.**

## **SEBI**

- SEBI is a **statutory body** established in April, 1992 in accordance with the provisions of the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.
- The basic functions of the Securities and Exchange Board of India is to protect the interests of investors in securities and to promote and regulate the securities market.

## **Listed Companies**

"Listed" is a term that describes a company that is included and on a given stock exchange (such as **NSE**, BSE) so that its stock can be traded.

## Central Public Sector Enterprises

- Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) are those companies in which the **direct holding of the Central Government or other CPSEs is 51% or more**
- As on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, there were 348 CPSEs (excluding insurance companies). Of these, 86 enterprises were yet to commence commercial operations and 13 CPSEs are under closure/liquidation. Remaining 249 were operating enterprises (including 180 scheduled CPSEs).

## Promoter

- The meaning of 'promoter' and 'promoter group' is **defined in Companies Act, 2013 and SEBI (ICDR) Regulations, 2018.**
- Generally, a promoter conceives an idea for setting-up a particular business at a given place and performs various formalities required for starting a company.

## Primary Market and Secondary Market

- The primary market is where securities are created, while the secondary market is where those securities are traded by investors.
- In the primary market, companies sell new stocks and bonds to the public for the first time, such as with an initial public offering (IPO).
- The secondary market is basically the stock market and refers to the New York Stock Exchange, the Nasdaq, and other exchanges worldwide.

## Stock Liquidity

Liquidity generally refers to **how easily or quickly a security can be bought or sold in a secondary market.** Liquid investments can be sold readily and without paying a hefty fee to get money when it is needed.

**Source: IE**

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## New Framework for Payment Systems Operators

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has issued a framework for **payment and settlement related activities by payment system operators.**

This framework is issued under provisions of **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.**

The **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007** provides for the **regulation and supervision of payment systems in India and designates the RBI** as the authority for that purpose and all related matters.

## Payment System

- A **payment system is a system** used to **settle financial transactions** through the transfer of monetary value and consist of the various mechanisms that facilitate the transfer of funds from one party (the payer) to another (the payee).
- A payment system includes the **participants (institutions) and the users** (customers/clients), the rules and regulations that guide its operation and the standards and technologies on which the system operates
- The **Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems (BPSS)**, a sub-committee of the **Central Board of the RBI** is the **highest policy making body** on payment systems in India.

## Payment System Operators (PSOs)

- PSOs by virtue of services they **provide and the construct of models** on which they **operate, largely outsource their payment and settlement-related activities** to various other entities.
- It is an **institution** which has been **granted an authorisation for the operation of a payment system.**

## Key Points

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- **New Framework:**
  - **Licensed non-bank Payment System Operators (PSOs)**, cannot outsource core management functions.  
**Core management functions** include **risk management and internal audit, compliance and decision-making functions** such as determining compliance with KYC norms.
  - It will be **applicable to all service providers**, whether **located in India or abroad.**
- **Objective:**

To **put in place minimum standards** to manage risks in outsourcing of payment and settlement-related activities including tasks such as onboarding customers and IT-based services.
- **Need:**

**There is a potential area of operational risk associated** with outsourcing by payment system operators and participants of authorised payments systems.  
**India's tech ecosystem** has seen **several high-profile cyber attacks** such as those at **Juspay, Upstox and Mobikwik** over the last year targeting customers' payments data.
- **Related Previous Initiative:**

Earlier, the **RBI** has put in place **restrictions with respect to investments in payments system operators (PSOs)** by new entities from jurisdictions that have **weak measures to deal with money laundering and terrorist financing activities.**

## Way Forward

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- **Since, India is the second-fastest digital** adapter among 17 of the most-digital economies globally, and rapid digitisation does **require forward-looking measures to boost cybersecurity**.
- It is **important for the corporates or the respective government departments to find the gaps in their organisations** and address those gaps and create a layered security system, wherein security threat intelligence sharing is happening between different layers.

**Source: IE**

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## INS Vikrant Begins Sea Trials

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) 1** named **INS Vikrant**, started sea trials (one of the last phases of trials).

- It is **likely to be commissioned in 2022**. At present, **India has only one aircraft carrier**, the Russian-origin **INS Vikramaditya**.
- Earlier, the **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** approved issuance of **Request for Proposal (RFP)** for six advanced submarines for the Indian Navy under **Project-75I**.

### Key Points

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- **About:**
  - The vessel, to be named **Vikrant after the decommissioned maiden carrier of the Navy**.  
India **acquired the Vikrant from the United Kingdom in 1961**, and the carrier played a stellar role in the **1971 war** with Pakistan that led to the birth of Bangladesh.
  - Over **76% of the material and equipment on board IAC-1 is indigenous**.
  - It will have an **air component of 30 aircraft**, comprising **MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31** airborne early warning helicopters and the soon-to-be-inducted **MH-60R** multi-role helicopter, besides the **indigenous Advanced Light Helicopters**.
  - It is expected to have a **top speed of 30 knots (approximately 55 kmph)** and is propelled by four gas turbines. Its **endurance is 7,500 nautical miles at 18 knots (32 kmph) speed**.
  - The shipborne weapons include **Barak LR SAM and AK-630**, while it has **MFSTAR and RAN-40L 3D radars as sensors**. The vessel has a **Shakti EW (Electronic Warfare) Suite**.
  - It has a **pair of runways** and a 'short take off but arrested recovery' system to control aircraft operations.



- **Significance:**
  - **Adds Combat and Sea Control Capability**, especially in the Indian Ocean Region.
  - **Increased Ability of Air Power:** It would **offer an incomparable military instrument** with its ability to project air power over long distances, including air interdiction, anti-surface warfare, offensive and defensive counter-air, airborne anti-submarine warfare and airborne early warning.
  - **Self-Reliance:** Only five or six nations currently have the capability of manufacturing an aircraft carrier — **India joins this elite club now.**
- **Future Endeavours:**
  - Since 2015, the **Navy has been seeking approval to build a third aircraft carrier** for the country, which, **if approved, will become India's second Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-2).**
  - This proposed carrier, to be named **INS Vishal**, is intended to be a giant 65,000-tonne vessel, **much bigger than IAC-1 and the INS Vikramaditya.**

Source: TH

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## Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle

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### Why in News

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In recent years, **a lot of efforts** have been put by the conservationists to save the **world's most endangered turtle**, Swinhoe's softshell turtle from the brink of extinction.

- The animal is also known as the **Hoan Kiem turtle or Yangtze giant softshell turtle.**
- In **Vietnam**, these animals have **great cultural significance** as people in Hanoi revere this creature as a **living god.**



### Key Points

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- **Scientific Name:** *Rafetus swinhoei*  
These turtles are **gray with light gray or yellow spots**.
- **Significance:**  
Some researchers have highlighted their **importance to the seafloor biosystem**, where they contribute by enriching soil nutrients and facilitating seed dispersion.
- **Habitat:**
  - The natural habitat for these turtles are **wetlands and large lakes**.
  - Native to **China and Vietnam**.
- **Threats:**  
They have been driven to the brink by hunting for its meat and eggs, as well as by destruction of its habitat.

**Source: DTE**

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## **World's Highest Motorable Road at Umling La**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, the **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** has constructed and completed black topping the **world's highest motorable road at Umling La pass** in Eastern **Ladakh**, located at an altitude of 19,300 ft.

### **Key Points**

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- **About the Road:**
  - By constructing this road, BRO has **created a record in high-altitude road construction**.  
It bettered the **previous record of a road in Bolivia** connecting to its **volcano Uturuncu** at 18,953 ft.
  - The strategic road built under '**Project Himank**' passes through the Umling La Top and **connects Chisumle and Demchok villages**.
  - It will enhance the **socio-economic condition and promote tourism in Ladakh**.
  - The road is close to the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** and will allow quick movement of troops and equipment.
- **Comparing the Road:**
  - The road has been constructed at an **altitude higher than the Mt Everest Base Camps** as the South Base Camp in Nepal is at an altitude of 17,598 ft, while North Base Camp in Tibet is at 16,900 ft.
  - The road has been constructed much **above the altitude of Siachen Glacier** which is at 17,700 ft.
  - The **Khardung La Pass in Leh** is at an altitude of 17,582 ft.

- **Project Himank:**

- **Project Himank**, is a project of the BRO being implemented in the Ladakh region of Jammu & Kashmir.
- This project started in 1985.
- Under this project, BRO is responsible for the construction and maintenance of roads and related infrastructure including the world's highest motorable roads.

Pass	Link/Features
Banihal Pass	Kashmir Valley with the outer Himalaya and the plains to the south.
Bara-Lacha-La Pass	Lahaul district in Himachal Pradesh with Leh district in Ladakh.
Fotu La Pass	Leh with Kargil of Ladakh
Rohtang Pass	Kullu Valley with the Lahaul and Spiti Valleys of Himachal Pradesh.
Shipki La Pass	Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh with Autonomous Region of Tibet, China.
Jelep La Pass	Sikkim with Autonomous Region of Tibet, China.
Nathu La Pass	Sikkim with Autonomous Region of Tibet, China.
Lipu Lekh Pass	Chaudans valley of India with Autonomous Region of Tibet, China. It is located close to the tri junction of Uttarakhand (India), China and Nepal.
Khardung La	Ladakh with Siachen glacier.
Bom di La	It is in Arunachal Pradesh

**Source: PIB**