NEWS TODAY

PARLIAMENTARY PANEL CALLS FOR REVIEW OF AIRFARE POLICY AMIDST SOARING PRICES

- At present, airfares **are not controlled by the Government.**
  - Airlines follow a **dynamic airfare mechanism,** in this the prices are **kept dynamic and they change** based on the **current market demands** using the **algorithm approach.**
  - Earlier, **Airfares** in India were **regulated** through **Air Corporations Act 1953, but it was repealed in 1994.**
- **Challenges in the rationalization of airfares**
  - Sector is a **capital-intensive business** and the airlines operate in an **extremely competitive environment.**
  - Sector has to face **unforeseen challenges** to remain in business such as: **Volatility** in the **input cost of operation,** fluctuation in **Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices**/exchange rates, changes in the geo-political **situation** etc.
- **Recommendations**
  - **Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA)** shall collaborate with **airlines** and the **Ministry of Tourism** to establish a **mechanism to monitor flight booking portals** and prevent them from publishing **inaccurate information.**
  - **Explore the possibility of introducing a 'price lock' feature.**
  - Setting up a **grievance redressal mechanism** to deal with airfare-related complaints.
  - Establish a **monitoring body** akin to the Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), endowed with quasi-judicial powers, to enforce reasonable airfare collection.

PIPED WATER NOW IN 2/3 RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN INDIA: GOVERNMENT DATA

- Of the 192.4 mn rural household in India, **66.80% or 128.5 mn rural households now have a functional water tap connection.**
  - This achievement was highlighted on the dashboard of India's flagship drinking water programme, Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).
- **About JJM**
  - JJM is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** (launched in 2019) by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti.**
  - JJM aims to provide **Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household** i.e., Har Ghar Nal Se Jal (HGNSJ) by 2024.
    - Under JJM, the focus has shifted to the **assured supply of potable water** to every home rather than the **mere creation of water supply infrastructure.**
  - JJM has been planned and implemented by following a **decentralized, demand-driven, community-managed** approach.
  - **Fund-sharing pattern**
    - 100% for UTs without a legislature;
    - 90:10 for northeastern states and UTs with a legislature; and
    - 50:50 for all other states.
- **Significance of JJM**
  - **Improvement in ease of living**
  - **Empowering women** (Freeing women from the task of fetching water)
  - **Access to safe and clean drinking water** helps to improve health
  - **Addressing climate change** through sustainable infrastructure
  - **Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6** (access to water and sanitation for all)

Jal Jeevan Mission
Vision - Aligned with SDGs

- **Adequate Quantity** 55 Litres per capital day
- **Sustainability** Source, system and financial
- **Reliability** Regular and Safe
- SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
- **Affordability** Reasonable user charges
- **Equity & Inclusivity** No one should be left behind
- **Quality** BIS:10500

JJM is perhaps the world's largest programme to achieve SDG-6 targets ahead of time with 'speed and scale'

INDIA HAS STARTED MANUFACTURING 38 ACTIVE PHARMACEUTICAL INGREDIENTS (APIS) IN PAST 1.5 YEARS

- Under the **production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme** for the sector, Government aims to reduce the import dependency of 54 APIs from abroad and the domestic formulation industry gets APIs domestically.
- APIs are the **active components** in a pharmaceutical drug that produces the **required effect on the body** to treat a condition.
- **Challenges in Manufacturing API**
  - India is still largely **dependent on China for Key Starting Materials (KSMs),** the basic building blocks for making APIs.
  - **Manufacturing APIs is a complex process** involving a number of reaction and purification steps.
    - Employing **fermentation processes** for making APIs continues to face challenges in terms of both technologies and costs.
  - **Low-profit margins** making less attractive for locals manufacturers.
- **Initiatives**
  - **PLI Scheme** for promotion of domestic manufacturing of critical KSMs/ Drug Intermediates (DIs) and APIs in India.
  - The Scheme for **Promotion of Bulk Drug Park.**
  - **Scheme for Strengthening of Pharmaceuticals Industry (SPI)** aims to provide infrastructure support for pharma MSMEs in clusters and to address the issues of technology upgradation of individual pharma MSMEs.
  - **The government has allowed 100% FDI in the pharma sector** for greenfield projects under automatic route.

UGC RELEASES DRAFT REGULATIONS FOR RECOGNITION AND GRANT OF EQUIVALENCE TO QUALIFICATIONS FROM FOREIGN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, 2023

- As per UGC **"Foreign Higher Education Institution" (FHEI)** means a **higher education institution** that is established/incorporated or recognized in a **foreign country** and **offers academic**/research programs at the **undergraduate and/or higher levels.**
- **Key provisions of regulation**
  - **Recognition:** A degree from a **FHEI** will be **recognized** and granted equivalence **only if a student physically attends** an institute recognized by the home country.
  - **Applicability:** for **schools** under a foreign board or any degree from an offshore campus.
    - The regulation shall not apply to q**ualifications obtained through online** and **distance education modes.**
  - **Entry-level requirements** for **admission to the program** must **also be like that** of a corresponding program in India.
  - **Equivalence:** UGC will **assume the responsibility of granting equivalence** to foreign degrees.
- **Initiative for FHEI in India**
  - Announced in **Union Budget 2022-23, World Class Foreign Universities,** free from domestic regulations, **will be allowed in GIFT City** to offer various courses.
  - **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020** provides for collaborations and **setting up of foreign universities' campuses in India.**
  - UGC in 2023 **released guidelines** for **setting up foreign universities.**

BENEFITS OF FHEI
- Boost **element of competition** in the **higher education sector.**
- **Enable Indian students** to **obtain foreign qualifications** at affordable cost.
- **Reduction in foreign exchange** outflow
- **Control in brain drain.**

VARIOUS HILL STATES NOTICED MAJOR LANDSLIDES FOLLOWING HEAVY RAINFALL

- **Landslide refers** to processes that **result in the downward and outward movement of slope-forming materials,** including **rock, soil, artificial fill,** or a combination of these.
  - The primary **driving factor of landslides** is **gravity acting** on a **portion of a slope** that is **out of equilibrium.**
- **Reasons for Frequent Landslides in Himalayan area:**
  - **Intense water saturation from snowmelt or heavy rains** weakens rock and soil slope properties.
  - **Slope cutting and blasting activity** for construction and widening of hill roads.
  - **Other reasons like** Poor urban planning, lack of comprehensive land use policy, lax enforcement of construction laws and excessive tourism in these regions. (as per 2019 strategy document by NDMA)
- For the landslide, **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** released the **following recommendations related to human-induced landslides:**
  - No construction in the areas having **slopes above 30 degrees or areas falling on the spring lines and first-order streams.**
  - Perform **load-bearing tests,** use of **hazard zonation,** and **slope and land-use maps in urban planning.**
  - Fast-growing **trees and useful grasses to be grown.**
  - Provisions can be **made in the MNREGA scheme for structural mitigation of landslides** in hill areas.

GENETICALLY ALTERED PIG'S KIDNEY TRANSPLANTED INTO A HUMAN WORKS

- **Xenotransplantation** is any **procedure that involves the transplantation,** implantation, or infusion into a human recipient with **live non-human animal cells,** tissues, or organs.
  - ➢ Pig kidneys are used because they are very similar to human kidneys in their makeup and are about the same size.
- **Process:** Genetic engineering is used to tweak the genome of the pig, this involves **'deactivating'** four pig genes, and adding six **human genes to reduce** any **immunity complications.**
- **Xenotransplantation has seen significant** advances in **recent years with the advent** of **CRISPR-Cas9 genome** editing.
  - ➢ It made it **easier to create pig organs** that **are less likely to be attacked by human immune** systems.
- **Benefits**
  - ➢ reduce the **shortage of transplantable** organs.
  - ➢ **alternative supply of organs** to those with **life-threatening diseases.**
  - ➢ **open new areas of research.**
- **Concerns: very high rejection rate,** Infection risk, Fulfilling all the organ functional roles, animal welfare, etc.

Genetically engineering pigs as organ donors

① Adding and removing genes with gene-editing technology creates genetically-altered pig cells

② These are used to make pig embryos

③ The genetically-engineered pigs are raised in a controlled, bio-sealed environment

④ The organ is removed (4) from adult pig and transplanted into patient

⑤ Patient must still take immunosuppressant drugs, to prevent their body rejecting the new organ

ALSO IN NEWS

Drones to monitor MGNREGA scheme worksites	• Union Ministry of Rural Development is pressing drones into service to monitor both the progress and quality of assets produced under **Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.** • As per Standard operating procedure, drones will be used for four types of monitoring: **Surveying the ongoing works, inspecting the completed works, impact assessment, and special inspection in case of complaints.** • **Benefits:** Curb corruption by real-time monitoring and by garnering evidence. • Earlier **National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) App** was introduced for mandatory attendance capture at all worksites using the NMMS app.
UDGAM (Unclaimed Deposits – Gateway to Access Information) Portal	• **RBI** has launched a centralized web portal – UDGAM (Unclaimed Deposits – Gateway to Access Information). • **Objective:** It will enable bank customers to find their unclaimed deposits across multiple banks in one place. ➢ **Unclaimed deposits:** Balances in savings/current accounts that are not operated for 10 years, **or term deposits not claimed within 10 years** from the date of maturity. • It will promote **financial inclusivity,** using digital advances to deliver banking services to its customers efficiently.

Mobile User Protection reforms	• **Ministry of Communications** introduced two **Mobile User Protection** reforms which will supplement the **Sanchar Saathi portal.**
	• **Reforms**
	  ➢ **Mandatory registration of franchisees,** Agents, and Distributors (PoS) by Licensees, thus eliminating the rogue PoS who by fraudulent practices issue SIMs to anti-social/anti-national elements
	  ➢ **KYC Reforms-** demographic details will mandatorily be captured by scanning QR code of printed Aadhaar.
	• **Sanchar Saathi's portal** empowers mobile subscribers to: Find out mobile connections registered in their name, and report stolen/ lost mobile handsets & block them etc.

FloodWatch Mobile Application	• **Central Water Commission (CWC)** has launched the mobile application, **FloodWatch.** • FloodWatch provides **real-time flood situations in the country and flood forecasts to the public.** ➢ It will provide **State-wise/Basin-wise** Flood Forecast. • FloodWatch app **utilises advanced technologies such as satellite data analysis, mathematical modelling, and real-time monitoring** to deliver accurate and timely flood forecasts.

Food Sovereignty	• Food sovereignty is the **right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods,** and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. ➢ It puts the aspirations and needs of those **who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies** rather than the demands of markets and corporations. • The idea of Food Sovereignty developed as a response to the crises facing the world's farmers and food systems.

Monsoon break	• The **intervals of dry monsoon conditions** during which the large-scale rainfall over the monsoon trough zone is interrupted for several days in July and August are known as the breaks.
	  ➢ Monsoon Trough is an **elongated low-pressure area which extends from heat low over Pakistan to Head Bay of Bengal.**
	  ➢ Southward migration results in active/vigorous monsoon over a major part of India.
	  ➢ In contrast, the northward migration of this trough leads to **break monsoon condition. However,** this movement enhances rainfall along the Himalayan foothills.

Gaganachukki waterfalls	• **Gaganachukki waterfalls are** formed by the **River Kaveri** in the Mandya district of Karnataka. • It is **shaped like a huge horsetail** and has of height of 90 mts.
Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (or ALS)	• ALS is a **neurodegenerative disease** in which special nerve cells called motor neurons in the brain and spine are affected. ➢ **Motor neurons** control an individual's **voluntary functions** like walking, chewing, talking, moving their arms. • ALS is a **progressive disease** as nerve cells progressively die, the muscles dependent on them are unable to function or move, due to which they begin to atrophy or waste away. • Currently, there is **no effective cure** for ALS. • It is a **'rare disease'** in India, as per the definitions stated in the National Policy for Rare Diseases.
Vindhyagiri	• The sixth **Stealth Frigate of Project 17A 'Vindhyagiri'** has been launched. • It is named after a **mountain range** in **Karnataka.** • Project 17A Frigates are the follow-on class of the **Project 17 (Shivalik Class)** Frigates, with improved **stealth features, advanced weapons & sensors** and **platform management systems.**

Places in News	**Lithuania (Capital: Vilnius)**
	• Lithuania will temporarily close two checkpoints with Belarus amid tensions on border.
	• **Political Boundaries**
	  ➢ Located in north-eastern Europe, the southernmost and largest of the three Baltic states **(other two Estonia, Latvia)**
	  ➢ Lithuania is bounded by Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, **Poland and the detached Russian** oblast of Kaliningrad to the southwest, and the Baltic Sea to the west.
	• **Geographical Boundaries:**
	  ➢ **Important Rivers:** Nemunas river
	  ➢ **Largest lake:** Lake Drūkšiai
	  ➢ **Highest Point:** Mount Juozapinė
	  ➢ **Language:** Lithuanian is the oldest surviving Indo-European language in the world.