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SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

- IAS SELF STUDY GUIDE -

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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GS PAPER - I

Paper 1 Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

1. Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS)

Context:

- Prime Minister of India recently honoured the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS) as part of celebrations to mark Buddha Purnima. The PM also highlighted ₹360 crore allocation made for the development of the Buddhist circuit.

About CIHTS:

- CIHTS is a centrally funded institute that was started in 1967 following a discussion between Dalai Lama and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the early 1960s.
- It was started with a view to educating the young Tibetan Diaspora and those from the Himalayan border regions of India, who have religion, culture and language in common with Tibet.
- Originally the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS), began to function as a constituent wing of the Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, and eventually emerged as an autonomous body in 1977 under the Ministry of Culture.
- It is located at Sarnath, Varanasi.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** CIHTS and Buddhist circuit.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Tholu Bommalata

Context:

- Tholu Bommalata, the traditional puppetry art form of Andhra Pradesh, has lost its sheen. Now, there are only a few artisans to carry forward the art.

Background:

- Years ago, the art was active in the four districts of Rayalaseema, especially in the border villages of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. However currently, there are only 6-8 troops left in all those areas that are still taking up the leather puppetry as the prime livelihood.

About Tholu Bommalata:

- Tholu Bommalata is the shadow puppet theatre tradition of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Tholu Bommalata literally means "the dance of leather puppets".
- The puppeteers make up some of the various entertainers who perform all night and usually reenact various stories from Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- Its performers the part of a group of wandering entertainers and peddlers who pass through villages during the course of a year and offer to sing ballads, tell fortunes, sell amulets, perform acrobatics, charm snakes, weave fishnets, tattoo local people and mend pots.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Tholu Bommalata.
- For Mains:** Revival of traditional arts- efforts by government.



Sources: the hindu.

3. Nathu La

Context:

- Nathu La pass has been reopened for the annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.

Background:

- China had shut down the Nathu La pass in Sikkim and denied entry to the Kailash Mansarovar (located in Tibet) pilgrims last year due to the standoff in Doklam between troops of India and China at the border on account of security reasons.



Kailash Mansarovar Yatra:

- Kailash Mansarovar Yatra (KMY) is known for its religious importance, cultural significance and arduous nature.
- The annual pilgrimage holds religious importance for Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.
- The Yatra is organized by the government of India in close cooperation with the Government of the People's Republic of China. State Governments of Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Delhi, and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam Limited (KMVN) are other major Indian partners of the Ministry in organizing the Yatra.

Facts for Prelims:

- Mansarovar Lake** is located at an altitude of 14,950 ft (4,558 m) is said to be the highest freshwater lake in the world. It is located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, 940 kilometres from Lhasa. To the west of it is Lake Rakshastal and to the north is Mount Kailash.
- Nathu La** is a mountain pass in the Himalayas. It connects the Indian state of Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region. It is also one of the four officially agreed BPM (Border Personnel Meeting) points between the Indian Army and People's Liberation Army of China for regular consultations and interactions between the two armies, which helps in defusing stand-offs.
- There are five BPM points** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at Bum La and Kibithu in Arunachal Pradesh, Daulat Beg Oldi and Chushul in Ladakh, and Nathu La in Sikkim.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 1 Topic: Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

1. Supreme Court asks high courts to fast-track trial under POCSO Act

Context:

- The Supreme Court has issued a slew of directions to all high courts of the country regarding trial in sexual assault cases involving children.

Guidelines:

- All high courts must ensure that the cases of sexual assault of children are fast-tracked and decided by special courts.
- High courts should instruct the trial courts not to grant unnecessary adjournments during trial of cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.
- High courts may constitute a committee of three judges to regulate and monitor the trials of sexual assault cases of children.
- The State police chiefs should constitute special task forces to investigate cases.

Background:

- Nearly 32% of cases filed under the POCSO Act, which deals with sexual abuse of minors, were pending police investigation at the end of 2016 while 89% were pending trials.

POCSO Act:

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012 was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.
- **Role of police:** The Act casts the police in the role of child protectors during the investigative process. Thus, the police personnel receiving a report of sexual abuse of a child are given the responsibility of making urgent arrangements for the care and protection of the child, such as obtaining emergency medical treatment for the child and placing the child in a shelter home, and bringing the matter in front of the CWC, should the need arise.
- **Safeguards:** The Act further makes provisions for avoiding the re-victimisation of the child at the hands of the judicial system. It provides for special courts that conduct the trial in-camera and without revealing the identity of the child, in a manner that is as child-friendly as possible. Hence, the child may have a parent or other trusted person present at the time of testifying and can call for assistance from an interpreter, special educator, or other professional while giving evidence. Above all, the Act stipulates that a case of child sexual abuse must be disposed of within one year from the date the offence is reported.
- **Mandatory reporting:** The Act also provides for mandatory reporting of sexual offences. This casts a legal duty upon a person who has knowledge that a child has been sexually abused to report the offence; if he fails to do so, he may be punished with six months' imprisonment and/ or a fine.
- **Definitions:** The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age. It defines different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography. It deems a sexual assault to be "aggravated" under certain circumstances, such as when the abused child is mentally ill or when the abuse is committed by a person in a position of trust or authority like a family member, police officer, teacher, or doctor.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** POCSO Act provisions.
- **For Mains:** Sexual abuse of children- prevention and need for stringent provisions.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme

Context:

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development recently held a National Conference of 244 Districts under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) in New Delhi.
- The Nodal Officers of 244 Districts, State Nodal Officers and Senior officers were part of the conference.

Concerns:

- The low and falling child sex ratio in the country is a matter of policy concern, not only because it violates the human rights of unborn and infant girls but also because it deprives the country of the potential economic and social contribution of these 'missing women'.
- In addition, there may be longer-run adverse impacts from a marriage market squeeze caused by an excess supply of male relative to female youth. Already, states like Haryana and Punjab, where the sex ratio has been extremely distorted for several decades, have been experiencing bride trafficking.

Way ahead:

- Declining sex ratio is a silent emergency. But the crisis is real, and its persistence has profound and

**About BBBP:**

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme was launched in January, 2015. The scheme is aimed at promoting gender equality and the significance of educating girls.
- The Scheme is targeted at improving the Child Sex Ratio through multi sectoral interventions including prevention of gender biased sex selection and promoting girls' education and her holistic empowerment.
- It is a **tri-ministerial effort** of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.

frightening implications for society and the future of humankind. Clearly, there is a need to go beyond slogans and institute tangible schemes.

- Enforcement of the law that prohibits determination of the sex of the foetus must go hand in hand with massive social investments to protect both immediate and long-term prospects of girls — in the form of cash incentives through registration of births, a continuum of health care, early educational opportunities and social protection. Half-measures cannot produce a dramatic reversal of the shameful national record.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** BBBP.
- **For Mains:** Declining CSR- concerns, challenges and solutions.

Sources: pib.

3. One Stop Centres (OSCs)

Context:

- 100 additional One Stop Centres have been approved by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

About One Stop Centres (OSCs):

- Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for setting up One Stop Centres (OSC), to be **funded from the Nirbhaya Fund**. The scheme is being implemented through States/UTs from 1st April 2015.
- These Centres will be established across the country to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in a phased manner.
- The purpose of these OSCs is to facilitate integrated services for women affected with violence such as police assistance, medical aid, psycho-social counselling, legal aid/counselling, temporary stay for 5 days etc. such that aggrieved women can avail services under one roof and The OSCs are established in existing buildings and in new constructed buildings in a standard format.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Scheme for setting up of OSCs.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for OSCs.

Sources: pib.

4. Domestic Violence Act applies after divorce too

Context:

- The Supreme Court has upheld a ruling that the Domestic Violence Act, intended to safeguard women against marital abuse, will apply even after divorce. The court observed that the act extends to all man-woman relationships, and also protects divorced women from their former husbands.
- The apex court has upheld Rajasthan High Court's interpretation that 'domestic relationship' is not confined to the "relationship as husband and wife or a relationship in the nature of marriage, but it includes other relationship as well such as sisters, mother, etc."

What is Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005?

- It is an act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of Women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- Domestic Violence Act 2005 is the first significant attempt in India to recognise domestic abuse as a punishable offence, to extend its provisions to those in live-in relationships, and to provide for emergency relief for the victims, in addition to legal recourse. It extends to the whole of India except the State Jammu & Kashmir.

- It aims to protect women from physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic abuse at home.

Way ahead:

- Domestic violence can continue even after divorce and the reach of the Act should not be shackled by confining only for the protection of women living in marriage.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Particulars of Domestic violence act.
- **For Mains:** DV Act- significance, concerns, misuse and reforms.

Sources: the hindu.

5. Bharosa

Context:

- Aimed at empowering vulnerable and marginalised women by imparting skills training, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will soon set up a skill development centre at 'Bharosa,' an integrated support centre for distressed women and children in Hyderabad.

Bharosa:

- 'Bharosa,' an initiative of Hyderabad City Police, is a state-of-the-art centre to support women and children who are victims of violence. Since its inception in 2016, a total of 3,560 victims have approached 'Bharosa' centre with a range of problems.
- 'Bharosa' provides under one roof, 24X7 services related to police, medical, legal, prosecution, psycho-therapeutic counselling and relief and rehabilitation services in completely private counselling rooms to maintain confidentiality and privacy.
- The centre is equipped with well-trained staff and modern gadgets, including facilities like video conferencing, so that the victims need not go to the court.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Bharosa, UNDP and SDGs.
- **For Mains:** Use of IT for the protection of women and significance of SDGs.

Sources: the hindu.

About UNDP:

- Headquartered in New York City, UNDP advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.
- The status of UNDP is that of an executive board within the United Nations General Assembly.
- The UNDP Administrator is the third highest-ranking official of the United Nations after the United Nations Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General.
- The UNDP Human Development Report Office also publishes an annual Human Development Report.

Important functions:

- It provides expert advice, training and grants support to developing countries, with increasing emphasis on assistance to the least developed countries. It promotes technical and investment cooperation among nations.
- To accomplish the SDGs and encourage global development, UNDP focuses on poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS, democratic governance, energy and environment, social development, and crisis prevention and recovery.

6. 'Samarth'

Context:

- A meeting of stakeholders on Samarth – Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector under the Skill India Mission was recently held in New Delhi to familiarize the stakeholders about the scheme and its guidelines.
- The meeting was chaired by Union Minister of Textiles, Smt Smriti Zubin Irani.

NSQF:

- National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) organizes qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude. These levels are defined in terms of learning outcomes which the learner must possess regardless of whether they were acquired through **formal**, **non-formal** or **informal** learning.

- There are 10 levels in the framework, with the entry level being 1, and the highest level being 10. This will enable a person to acquire desired competency levels, transit to the job market and, at an opportune time, return for acquiring additional skills to further upgrade competencies.
- The framework would be anchored and operationalized by the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Finance, mandated to coordinate and harmonize skill development efforts of the Government of India and the private sector.

Significance of NSQF:

- The NSQF would also help shift emphasis to outcome based learning – both in the general and vocational space.
- NSQF will also facilitate Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that is largely lacking in the present education and training scenario. Additionally, it would help alignment of Indian qualifications to international qualifications.
- The credit accumulation and transfer system that will be integrated in the NSQF will allow people to move between education, vocational training and work at different stages in their lives according to their needs and convenience.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Samarth and NSQF.
- **For Mains:** Capacity building in textile sector.

Sources: pib.

Paper 1 Topic: *Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.*

1. Madhya Pradesh Gets India's First Smart Cities Control Centre

Context:

- In a major step towards realising the centre's smart city mission (SCM), the Madhya Pradesh government on Tuesday launched the country's first Integrated Control and Command Centre (ICCC) for all seven smart cities of the state in Bhopal.

About the ICCC:

- ICCC is a cloud-based Universal Internet of Things (UIoT) platform developed by Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE). It can run multiple city command centre operations through its multi-efficiency capabilities.
- ICCC would integrate a multitude of citizens' services applications and sensors running across selected cities of Madhya Pradesh. It would enable the authorities to monitor the status of various smart civic amenities in real-time through the sensors connected to it.
- The GPS sensors installed in public transport buses, dial 100 vehicles, 108 ambulance services, smart poles, smart lights, traffic management cameras, public bike sharing, solid waste management, meteorological department updates, smart maps etc. would be linked to this centre, enabling the authorities to monitor the status of the civic amenities in real-time.

Facts for Prelims:

- Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Satna, and Sagar are the seven smart cities under Smart City Mission in Madhya Pradesh.

About Smart City mission- Key facts:

Under the scheme that was launched in 2014, around 100 cities in the country will be developed.

About Samarth scheme:

- The broad objective of the scheme is to skill the **youth** for gainful and sustainable employment in the textile sector covering the entire value chain of textiles, excluding spinning and weaving.
- The scheme is intended to provide demand driven, placement oriented National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) compliant skilling programmes to incentivize and supplement the efforts of the industry in creating jobs in the textiles sectors.
- The scheme targets to train 10 lakh persons (9 lakh in organised and 1 lakh in traditional sector) over a period of 3 years (2017-20), with an outlay of Rs. 1300 crore.

- **Selection of cities:** The selection is based on the scores cities get for carrying out urban reforms in areas including sanitation and governance. Cities that score the highest will be picked for the project, to be implemented over a 10-year period.
- **Development:** These cities will be developed to have basic infrastructure through assured water and power supply, sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban mobility and public transport, IT connectivity, e-governance and citizen participation. Bottom-up approach has been the key planning principle under Smart City Mission.
- **Funding:** Under the scheme, each city will get Rs 500 crore from the Centre for implementing various projects. An equal amount, on matching basis, will have to be contributed by the state or urban local bodies. The mission will provide central funding of Rs 48,000 crore to the selected cities.
- **Implementation:** The implementation of the Mission at the City level will be done by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) created for the purpose. The SPV will plan, appraise, approve, release funds, implement, manage, operate, monitor and evaluate the Smart City development projects. Each smart city will have a SPV which will be headed by a full time CEO and have nominees of Central Government, State Government and ULB on its Board.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Features of Smart cities mission.
- **For Mains:** Significance of ICCC and smart cities mission.

Sources: the hindu.

GS PAPER - II

***Paper 2 Topic:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.*

Finance Commission

Context:

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission has constituted an Advisory Council to advise and assist the Commission.

The role and functions of the Advisory Council will be:

- To advise the Commission on any issue or subject related to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission, which may be of relevance.
- To assist in the preparation of any paper or research study which would enhance the Commission's understanding on the issues containing in its ToR.
- To help in broadening the Commission's ambit and understanding to seek best national and international practices on matters pertaining to fiscal devolution and improving the quality and reach and enforcement of its recommendations.

About the Finance Commission:

What is a Finance Commission?

- It is a body set up under **Article 280** of the Constitution. Its primary job is to recommend measures and methods on how revenues need to be distributed **between the Centre and states**.

Composition of Finance Commission:

- The Constitution provides that Finance Commission shall consist of a **Chairman and four other members** to be appointed by **President**.
- The Chairman or members are **eligible for reappointment**.
- The Constitution authorizes **Parliament** to make provisions related to qualifications, conditions of service of members or powers of Finance Commission.
- So Parliament enacted **Finance Commission Act in 1951** to determine provisions related to qualifications or disqualifications, conditions of service or miscellaneous powers to perform functions provided under constitution.

Qualifications:

- The Chairman shall have vast experience in Public affairs and other four members shall be selected among persons who a) have qualifications as par with a judge of HC, b) has special knowledge of Finance and Accounts of govt, c) have vast experience in financial matters and d) have special knowledge of economics.

Sources: pib.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.*

1. Indian Petroleum & Explosives Safety Service (IPESS)

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Cadre review and formation of Group 'A' service of the technical cadre of Petroleum & Safety Organization (PESO) in the name of Indian Petroleum & Explosives Safety Service (IPESS).

Significance of the move:

- To remove acute stagnation in all grades and uplift the morale of the workforce and enhance its performance, it has been decided to form Group 'A' Service of the technical cadre of PESO in the name of IPESS and restructure the newly-formed service.

- The measure will enhance the capacity and efficiency of the organization and it will also enhance career progression of its Group 'A' officers.

About PESO:

- PESO is a subordinate office under Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (**DIPP**).
- The organization is serving the nation since **1898** as a nodal agency for regulating safety of substances such as explosives, compressed gases and petroleum.
- The organization deals with wide range of subjects related to explosives, petroleum, compressed gases, pressure vessels, gas cylinders, cross-country pipelines, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), Auto Liquefied Petroleum Gas (Auto LPG) etc.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** IPESS, PESO.

Sources: pib.

2. Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission

Context:

- In a step that would spare animals from suffering due to drug experiments, the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission has approved modern, animal-free tests for drug manufacturers.

Key facts:

- In its latest guidelines on tests for drugs manufactured and marketed in India, the IPC has replaced the pyrogen test carried out on rabbits and the abnormal toxicity test carried out on guinea pigs and mice with tests that can be done in test tubes.
- With the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission's new mandate, the pyrogen test will be replaced by a bacterial endotoxin test or a monocyte activation test which can be carried out in test tubes.

INTRODUCTION

As per the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940, the **Indian Pharmacopoeia** is the legally recognized book of **Standards** for the quality of drug substances and preparations included therein for **INDIA**.

Background:

- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India has been pushing for doing away with the cruel methods of testing on animals for the past several years.

Key facts for Prelims:

- **The pyrogen test** is carried out to check impurity or substance that can cause adverse side-effects. For the test, the drug is injected into a rabbit and the animal is closely observed for feverish symptoms.
- **The abnormal toxicity test** is carried out to check potential hazardous biological contamination in vaccine formulations. This batch test is done before the product is approved for marketing. In this, mice or guinea pigs are injected with the vaccine.

About IPC:

- Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) is an Autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- IPC is created to set standards of drugs in the country. It's basic function is to update regularly the standards of drugs commonly required for treatment of diseases prevailing in this region.
- It publishes official documents for improving Quality of Medicines by way of adding new and updating existing monographs in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP). It further promotes rational use of generic medicines by publishing National Formulary of India.

What's important ?

- **For Prelims:** Pyrogen test, abnormal toxicity test and IPC.
- **For Mains:** Drug testing on animals- concerns and alternatives to it.

Sources: the hindu.

3. TRIFED

Context:

- Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) of Ministry of Tribal Affairs has operationalised Retail Inventory Software (RIS) in all its Tribes India Outlets, Regional Offices and Head Office for inventory control.

Key facts:

- The electronic mode of system has been made available at all Regional Offices and Outlets, streamlining the entire retail operations from purchases upto sales by automating the transaction process and tracking important purchase, stocks and sales data.
- Implementation of RIS software will bring greater transparency and control over various transactions under Retail sale.

About TRIFED:

- TRIFED is an apex organisation at National Level and functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

What it does ?

- TRIFED is serving the interests of Tribals, who are engaged in collection of NTFP and making of Tribal Art & Handicraft Products for their livelihood so as to ensure better remunerative price for their products as well as for the socio-economic betterment through Self Help Groups, Empanelled NGOs, State level Tribal Development Corporations, Forest Development Corporations for undertaking marketing development of the tribal products.
- It also organizes exhibitions like National Tribal Craft Expo called “Aadi Mahotsav” etc. in which it promotes and markets tribal products.

What's important ?

- **For Prelims:** TRIFED.
- **For Mains:** Tribal development- challenges, need and solutions.

Sources: pib.

4. Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)

Context:

- The Government of India has carried out an Amendment to the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 substituting “Directorate General of Trade Remedies” in place of “Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties” in Department of Commerce.

Key facts:

- The DGTR will function as an attached office of Department of Commerce. The recommendation of DGTR for imposition of Anti-dumping, countervailing & Safeguard duties would be considered by the Department of Revenue.
- The DGTR will be a professionally integrated organisation with multi-spectrum skill sets emanating from officers drawn from different services and specialisations.

Need for a unified umbrella authority:

- Presently, the trade defence mechanism in India lacks optimality and takes more than a year to complete proceedings in cases pertaining to unfair trade practices. Currently, the Directorate General of Anti-dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) deals with anti-dumping and CVD cases, Directorate General of Safeguards (DGS) deals with safeguard measures and DGFT deals with quantitative restriction (QR) safeguards.
- The DGTR will bring DGAD, DGS and Safeguards (QR) functions of DGFT into its fold by merging them into one single national entity. This provides comprehensive and swift trade defence mechanism in India.

- The creation of DGTR will also provide a level playing field to the domestic industry. In the last three years, India initiated more than 130 anti-dumping/countervailing duty/safeguard cases to deal with the rising incidences of unfair trade practices and to provide a level playing field to the domestic industry.

Functions of DGTR:

- DGTR will deal with Anti-dumping, CVD and Safeguard measures.
- It will also provide trade defence support to our domestic industry and exporters in dealing with increasing instances of trade remedy investigations instituted against them by other countries.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** About DGTR.
- **For Mains:** Need for comprehensive and swift trade defence mechanism in India.

Sources: pib.

Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

Citizenship Bill

Context:

- People in Assam have been protesting against the granting of Indian citizenship to Hindu foreigners as the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 began its hearing in Assam. Protesters say the move would threaten the existence of the indigenous people of Assam. They also see it as a violation of the provisions of the Assam Accord of 1985.

WHAT IS THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL 2016 ?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 seeks to allow illegal migrants from certain minority communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship. In other words, it amends the Citizenship Act of 1955.
- The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.

WHAT DOES IT WANT ?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill seeks to allow illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan to not be imprisoned or deported.
- It also appeals for the minimum years of residency in India to apply for citizenship to be lessened from at least 11 to six years for such migrants.
- The Bill, however, does not extend to illegal Muslim migrants. It also does not talk about other minority communities in the three neighbouring countries, such as Jews, Bahais etc.

WHY ARE PEOPLE IN ASSAM NOT HAPPY ABOUT IT ?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill has not been sitting well with the Assamese as it contradicts the Assam Accord of 1985, which clearly states that illegal migrants heading in from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, would be deported.

Assam Accord:

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.
- As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.

- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

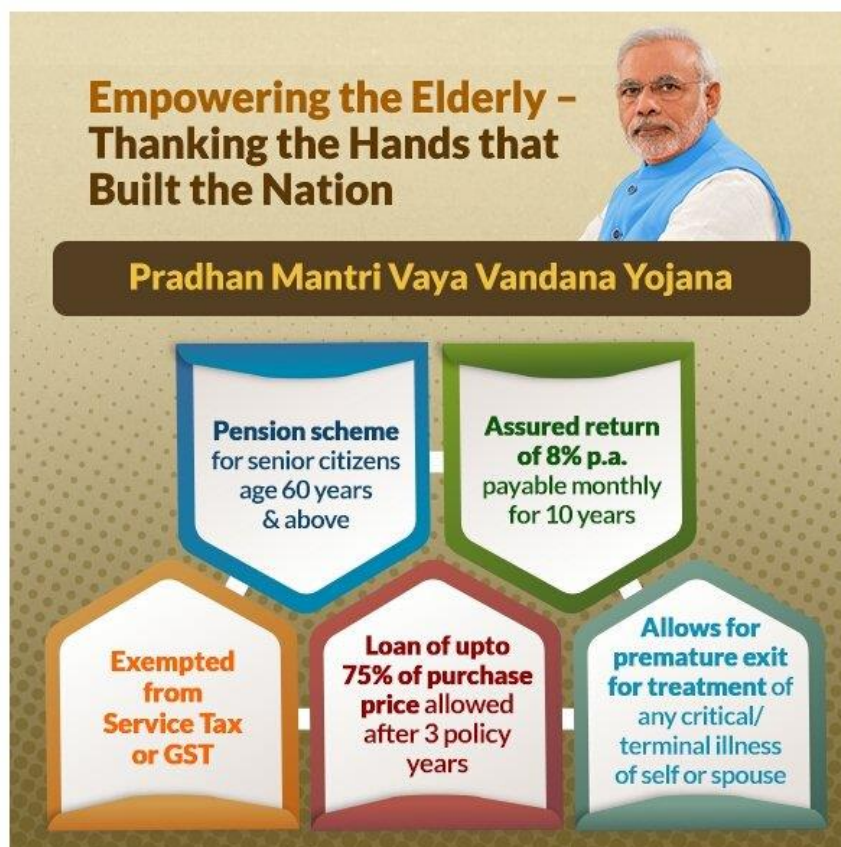
1. Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for extending the investment limit from Rs 7.5 lakhs to Rs 15 lakhs as well as extension of time limits for subscription from 4th May 2018 to 31st March, 2020 under the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY) as part of Government's commitment for financial inclusion and social security.

About PMVVY:

- PMVVY is a Pension Scheme exclusively for the senior citizens **aged 60 years and above**.
- The Scheme can be purchased offline as well as online through Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India which has been given the sole privilege to operate this Scheme.



Key features of the scheme:

- Scheme provides an assured **return of 8% p.a. payable monthly** (equivalent to 8.30% p.a. effective) for 10 years.
- Pension is payable at the end of each period, during the policy term of 10 years, as per the frequency of monthly/ quarterly/ half-yearly/ yearly as chosen by the pensioner at the time of purchase.
- The scheme is **exempted from Service Tax/ GST**.
- On survival of the pensioner to the end of the policy term of 10 years, Purchase price along with final pension installment shall be payable.
- Loan upto 75% of Purchase Price shall be allowed after 3 policy years (to meet the liquidity needs). Loan interest shall be recovered from the pension installments and loan to be recovered from claim proceeds.
- The scheme also allows for premature exit for the treatment of any critical/ terminal illness of self or spouse. On such premature exit, 98% of the Purchase Price shall be refunded.
- On death of the pensioner during the policy term of 10 years, the Purchase Price shall be paid to the beneficiary.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** PMVVY- key features.
- For Mains:** Significance of PMVVY.

Sources: pib.

2. Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)

Context:

- In a major boost to the expansion of healthcare infrastructure in the country, the Union Cabinet Chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the continuation of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) beyond 12th Five Year Plan to 2019-20.

About PMSSY:

- The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) was announced in 2003 with objectives of correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/reliable tertiary healthcare services and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country.
- It is a central sector scheme.
- The scheme has two components: Setting up of new AIIMS and upgradation of government medical colleges.

Significance of the scheme:

- Setting up of new AIIMS would not only transform health education and training but also address the shortfall of health care professionals in the region. Construction of new AIIMS is fully funded by the Central Government. The Operations & Maintenance expenses on new AIIMS are also fully borne by the Central Government.

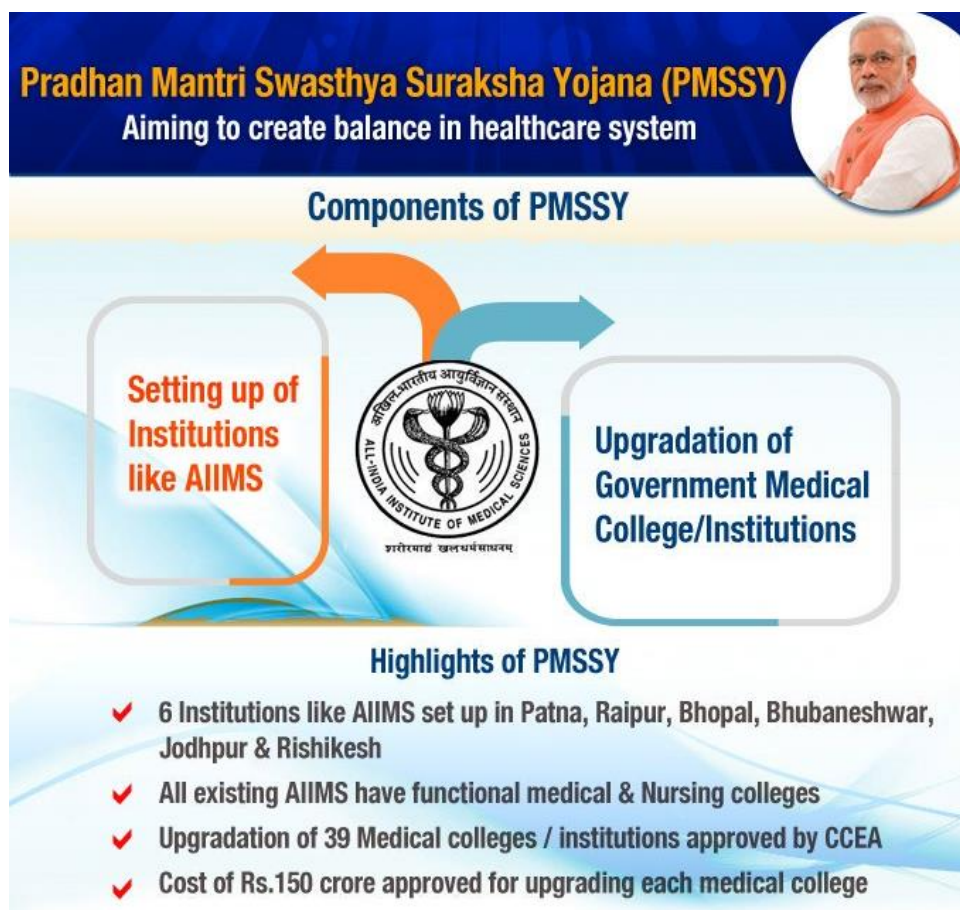
Employment Generation:

- Setting up new AIIMS in various states will lead to employment generation for nearly 3000 people in various faculty & non-faculty posts in each of the AIIMS. Further, indirect employment generation will take place due to facilities & services like shopping centre, canteens, etc. coming in the vicinity of new AIIMS.
- The upgradation programme is carried out in selected Government Medical Colleges (GMCs) by agencies appointed by the Government of India under the direct supervision of the Central Government. Post-Graduate seats and additional faculty posts as per norms will be created and filled up in these GMCs by the respective State/UT Governments.
- The construction activity involved for creation of the physical infrastructure for the various new AIIMS and Government Medical Colleges' upgradation projects being undertaken under the scheme is also expected to generate substantial employment in the construction phase as well.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** PMSSY.
- For Mains:** Significance of the scheme and the need for universal access to healthcare facilities in the country.

Sources: pib.



3. Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)

Context:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal for renaming and restructuring of Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) as Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK). CCEA has also approved its continuation during the remaining period of the 14th Finance Commission.

Background:

- Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) was launched in the year 2008-09 in 90 identified Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs) having at least 25% minority population and below national average with respect to one or both of the backwardness parameters with the objective of developing assets for socio-economic and basic amenities.
- MsDP has been identified as one of the Core of the Core Schemes under National Development Agenda in the Report of the Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Rationalization of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, which was constituted by NITI Aayog.
- MsDP has been designed primarily to address the developmental gaps/deficits in identified backward minority concentration areas by topping up of existing Centrally Sponsored Schemes of various Central ministries/departments without any change in the norms, guidelines and the funding pattern.

About PMJVK:

- The Programme aims to address development deficits in the identified minority concentration areas. The identification of minority concentration areas has been done on the basis of presence of substantial population of notified Minority Communities based on Census, 2011.
- The restructured programme would provide better socio economic infrastructure facilities to the minority communities particularly in the field of education, health & skill development as compared to the present situation, which would further lead to lessening of the gap between the national average and the minority communities with regard to backwardness parameters.

States/Districts covered:

- The PMJVK will be implemented in Minority Concentration District Hqrs, Minority Concentration Block (MCBs), Minority Concentration Towns (MCTs) falling in 308 districts of 32 States/UTs.
- Moreover, the scheme will also be implemented in Backward Clusters of Minority Concentration Villages (CoMCV). These CoMCV will be identified on the proposal of the States/UTs as per criteria of PMJVK.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** PMJVK and its significance.

Sources: pib.

4. Van Dhan Vikas Kendras

Context:

- Ministry of Tribal Affairs is planning to expand Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in Tribal Districts across the country.

Implementation:

- The scheme will be implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level.
- At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at grassroot level.
- Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.

About Van Dhan Vikas Kendras initiative:

- The initiative aims to promote MFPs-centric livelihood development of tribal gatherers and artisans. It mainstreams the tribal community by promoting primary level value addition to MFP at grassroots level.
- Through this initiative, the share of tribals in the value chain of Non-Timber Forest Produce is expected to rise from the present 20% to around 60%.

- As per the plan, TRIFED will facilitate establishment of MFP-led multi-purpose Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, a cluster of 10 SHGs comprising of 30 tribal MFP gatherers each, in the tribal areas.

Significance of MFP:

- Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income.
- It provides them critical subsistence during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter gatherers, and the landless. Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP on which they spend major portion of their time.
- This activity has strong linkage to women's financial empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and used/sold by women. MFP sector has the potential to create about 10 million workdays annually in the country.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Van Dhan Vikas Kendras.
- For Mains:** MFP and its significance.

Sources: pib.

5. Senior Citizen draft Bill

Context:

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has drafted the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Draft Bill, 2018, that will amend the 2007 version of the legislation to expand its scope and provide for more stringent penalties.

Key provisions in the Bill:

- The Bill enhances the jail term for those found abandoning or abusing their parents, 60 years or older, to six months from the existing three months.
- The Bill expands the definition of children, which currently refers to only biological children and grandchildren, to include daughter-in-law and son-in-law and also adopted/step-children.
- It extends the definition of maintenance beyond provision of food, clothing, housing, health care to include "safety and security" of the parent.
- As per the Bill, senior citizens can also approach a Maintenance Tribunal in case their children neglect or refuse to maintain them. In such cases, the draft Bill states that the Tribunal can order the children or, in case the person is childless, the relative to pay a monthly maintenance to the senior citizen. The amount would be decided by taking into account the standard of living of the senior citizen and the financial situation of both the parties.
- The Bill proposes to make monthly maintenance amount variable as people who earn more, can afford to shell out a higher amount for the upkeep of their parents.
- The Bill also introduces a punitive measure of up to one month imprisonment in case the monthly allowance remains unpaid.
- Currently, various government and private schemes for insurance/health, housing and travel, have varied cut-off age for offering benefits meant for senior citizens. The Bill mandates the uniform age across schemes should be 60 years.
- The Bill will require the government to establish and run at least one Senior Citizen Care Home in every district in the country.
- As per the Bill, if parents transfer property to their children on the condition that they take care of them, and this clause is breached, the transfer of property will be deemed to be "made by fraud or coercion or under undue influence" and a tribunal can order it to be transferred back to the parent.

Elderly as a resource:

- The elderly should be seen as a blessing, not a burden. The elderly are becoming the fastest growing, but underutilized resource available to humanity. Rather than putting them aside, physically (and mentally), to be

cared for separately, they should be integrated into the lives of communities where they can make a substantial contribution to improving social conditions.

- The benefits of turning the 'problem' of the elderly into a 'solution' for other social problems is being demonstrated in several countries.

Way ahead:

- The elderly are the fastest growing, underutilized resource that humanity has to address many other problems. Re-integration of the elderly into communities may save humanity from mindlessly changing into a technology-driven 'Industry 4.0' which futurists are projecting: an economy of robots producing things for each other. Investing a little to engage the elderly in communities can improve the health and well-being of the elderly. It can also improve the health and well-being of communities.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Key provisions of the Bill.
- **For Mains:** Welfare schemes for the protection of the elderly in the country.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Overcrowding in prisons

Context:

- The Supreme Court has expressed concern about overcrowding in prisons across the country, in some cases beyond 150 per cent of the capacity, and asked all the high courts to consider the issue as it involves "violation of human rights". The court has requested the chief justices of the high courts to take up the matter as a suo-motu writ petition.
- The Centre apprised the court that steps were being taken to encourage setting up of 'open prisons' and a model uniform rules for the administration of open correctional institutions have already been framed.

What are open prisons?

- Semi-open prisons or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the jail premises and earn a livelihood and return in the evening. The concept was brought in to assimilate the convicts with society and reduce the psychological pressure and lack of confidence they faced lack of confidence in returning to lives outside prison.

Background:

- Overcrowding is one of the biggest problems faced by prison inmates. It results in poor hygiene and lack of sleep among other problems. More than 65% of the undertrials spend three months to five years in jail before getting bail. A fourth of all the under trials have been under detention for more than a year.

Management of prisons:

- The management of prisons falls exclusively under the domain of the state government, as per the seventh schedule of the constitution. In every state, the prison administrative machinery works under the chief of prisons who is a senior ranking IPS officer.

Need for reforms:

- NHRC figures show that prisoners cut off from family and friends had a 50% more chance of committing suicide than those outside. The average suicide rate among the general public for this period is 11 (per 100,000) whereas the average suicide rate in prison is 16.9 (per 100,000). In other words, the average suicide rate in prisons is over 50% more than in normal conditions.
- Indian prisons face three long-standing structural constraints: overcrowding, thanks to a high percentage of undertrials in the prison population, understaffing and underfunding. The inevitable outcome is sub-human living conditions, poor hygiene, and violent clashes between the inmates and jail authorities.
- Besides, while 33% of the total requirement of prison officials still lies vacant, almost 36% of vacancy for supervising officers is still unfulfilled. In the absence of adequate prison staff, overcrowding of prisons leads to rampant violence and other criminal activities inside the jails.

Way ahead:

- Indian jails have often been dubbed as a university for grooming criminals due to pathetic and inhumane conditions. In the absence of a robust Whistleblower Protection Act and structural changes to address the issues of overcrowding and understaffing, India's prisons will continue to be heaven for politically connected criminals and hell for socio-economically disadvantaged undertrials, some regular media uproars notwithstanding.
- Fundamental rights of prisoners cannot be placed in the back-burner and the Centre and the states need to be more pro-active in sensitising staff about the need to treat prisoners as humanely as possible.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NALSA and open jails.
- **For Mains:** Prison reforms- need and challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

7. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act

Context:

- The government is planning to bring an ordinance to overturn the Supreme Court verdict putting safeguards on arrests under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and subsequently introduce a bill to insulate it from further judicial scrutiny.
- The government is likely to introduce the bill in monsoon session of Parliament to incorporate the legislation in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, laws under which cannot be challenged in courts.

Impact:

- The ordinance is an interim arrangement to overturn the Supreme Court's ruling on the issue. The proposed ordinance would make it clear that notwithstanding any judgement or any other law in force, the provisions of the act shall remain valid. Once promulgated, this would mean the ordinance would overturn the SC order.
- Also, ***once included in the Ninth Schedule, the legislation gets protection under Article 31-B (validation of certain Acts and Regulations) and is not subject to judicial scrutiny.***

What's the issue?

- In its March 20 order, the apex court had laid down new guidelines for police officers on how to ensure that innocent people, especially public officials, are protected from false complaints under the act. The "dilution" triggered massive protests by various Dalit and political outfits.

About SC/ST Act:

- The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, or simply the Atrocities Act. The SC/ST Act was enacted on September 9, 1989. The rules for the Act were notified on March 31, 1995.
- The SC/ST Act lists 22 offences relating to various patterns or behaviours inflicting criminal offences and breaking the self-respect and esteem of the scheduled castes and tribes community. This includes denial of economic, democratic and social rights, discrimination, exploitation and abuse of the legal process.
- According to the SC/ST Act, the protection is provided from social disabilities such as denial of access to certain places and to use customary passage, personal atrocities like forceful drinking or eating of inedible food sexual exploitation, injury etc, atrocities affecting properties, malicious prosecution, political disabilities and economic exploitation.
- For speedy trial, Section 14 of the SC/ST Act provides for a Court of Session to be a Special Court to try offences under this Act in each district.
- The prime objective of the SC/ST Act is to deliver justice to marginalised through proactive efforts, giving them a life of dignity, self-esteem and a life without fear, violence or suppression from the dominant castes.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** SC/ST Act and 9th schedule of the constitution.

- **For Mains:** Need for review of the act and issues related to judicial overreach.

Sources: the hindu.

8. Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana

Context:

- The Centre has signed MoU with four States – Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Union Territory of Chandigarh for implementing Ayushman Bharat.

Highlights of the scheme:

- **It will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes** -Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).
- **Coverage:** The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.



- **Target:** The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database. Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- **Role of state governments:** State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.
- **Council:** For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.

Who is eligible?

- It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.
- The different categories in rural area include families having only one room with kucha walls and kucharooof; families having no adult member between age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.
- Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.

Implementation Strategy:

- At the national level to manage, an Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Agency (AB-NHPMA) would be put in place. States/ UTs would be advised to implement the scheme by a dedicated entity called State Health Agency (SHA). They can either use an existing Trust/ Society/ Not for Profit Company/ State Nodal Agency (SNA) or set up a new entity to implement the scheme. States/ UTs can decide to implement the scheme through an insurance company or directly through the Trust/ Society or use an integrated model.

Benefits of the scheme:

- This will lead to increased access to quality health and medication. In addition, the unmet needs of the population which remained hidden due to lack of financial resources will be catered to. This will lead to timely treatments, improvements in health outcomes, patient satisfaction, improvement in productivity and efficiency, job creation thus leading to improvement in quality of life.

Way ahead:

- The scheme, if implemented properly could be a game changer by enhancing access to health care including early detection and treatment services by a large section of society who otherwise could not afford them. The identification of beneficiaries can be done by linking with Aadhar and similarly following up for services received and health outcomes achieved, thereby helping to monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme.
- Ultimately, the scheme could help country move towards universal health coverage and equitable access to healthcare which is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Ayushman Bharat- Particulars of the scheme.
- For Mains:** Need for universal health coverage.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

1. Gujarat to offer PNG subsidy

Context:

- Gujarat is planning to launch the new PNG/LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) Sahay Yojana—an extension to the Ujjwala Yojana.

Key facts:

- The scheme for select urban areas will supplement Ujjwala for BPL-AAY households not covered under Ujjwala to help supply households with clean fuel.
- As per the scheme, the government will pay Rs 1,600 as one-time subsidy per connection and Rs1,725 as loan to customers opting for a new PNG connection. As a result, a beneficiary will have to pay only Rs118 to get a new connection and a refundable security deposit of Rs50 per month for a period of 100 months.
- The pipeline infrastructure and maintenance charges will be borne by city gas distribution companies.

About the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide **LPG** (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to **poor households**.

Implementation:

- Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
- Eligible households will be identified in consultation with state governments and Union territories.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

- About 75 crore Indians, especially women and girls, are exposed to severe **household air pollution (HAP)** from the use of solid fuels such as biomass, dung cakes and coal for cooking. A report from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare places HAP as the second leading risk factor contributing to India's disease burden.
- According to the World Health Organization, solid fuel use is responsible for about 13% of all mortality and morbidity in India (measured as Disability-Adjusted Life Years), and causes about 40% of all pulmonary disorders, nearly 30% of cataract incidences, and over 20% each of ischemic heart disease, lung cancer and lower respiratory infection.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** PMUY and Sahay Yojana.
- For Mains:** Need for LPG adoption.

Sources: the hindu.

2. National Telecom Policy**Context:**

- The draft National Digital Communications Policy 2018 has been released by the Department of Telecom (DoT).

The draft policy has outlined three major missions which it aims to achieve by 2022:

- Connect India under which it aims to create robust digital communications.
- Propel India under which the government aims to harness the power of emerging digital technologies, including 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), Internet Of Things (IoT), etc.
- Secure India which aims to safeguard the digital sovereignty of India with a focus on ensuring individual autonomy and choice, data ownership, privacy and security.

**Key features:**

- Major goals:** The policy has outlined goals such as providing broadband for all, creating 4 million additional jobs in the digital communications sector, apart from enhancing the contribution of the digital communications sector to 8% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) from less than 6% in 2017.
- Data protection:** In the wake of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytics data scandal, the government aims to now establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals and facilitates India's participation in the global digital economy.
- National Broadband mission:** The policy has announced goals such as deployment of 5 million public Wi-Fi Hotspots by 2020 and 10 million by 2022 through a National Broadband Mission.
- Fibre First Initiative:** The policy aims to implement a 'Fibre First Initiative' to take fibre to the home by according telecom optic fibre cables the status of public utility.
- Infrastructure convergence:** The government also aims to enable infrastructure convergence of IT, telecom and broadcasting sectors by amending the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and other relevant acts for the purpose of convergence in coordination with respective ministries.
- Boost to investments:** In order to attract investments of \$100 billion in the digital communications sector and increase India's contribution to global value chains, the government will review levies and fees including license fee, universal service obligation fund (USOF) levy and concept of pass through revenues in line with principles of input line credit apart from rationalising spectrum usage charges (SUCs) to reflect the costs of regulation and administration of spectrum.
- Light touch licensing regime:** The DoT will also establish light touch licensing regime for the proliferation of public data offices (PDOs) and Public Data Office Aggregators for providing internet access through Wi-Fi hotspots.

- **Renewable energy technologies:** The Policy talks of incentivising the use of renewable energy technologies in the communications sector, including utilisation of small cell fuel batteries, lithium-ion batteries or other similar technologies.

Sources: pib.

3. DNA profiling Bill

Context:

- The Supreme Court has considered the submission of the Centre that it would move a Bill in the upcoming Parliament session for DNA profiling to enable authorities to maintain records of unidentified and unclaimed dead bodies or missing persons.

Background:

- The government was responding to a PIL petition on the use of DNA profiling for identifying unclaimed bodies, especially to match them with old cases of missing persons.

Human DNA Profiling Bill:

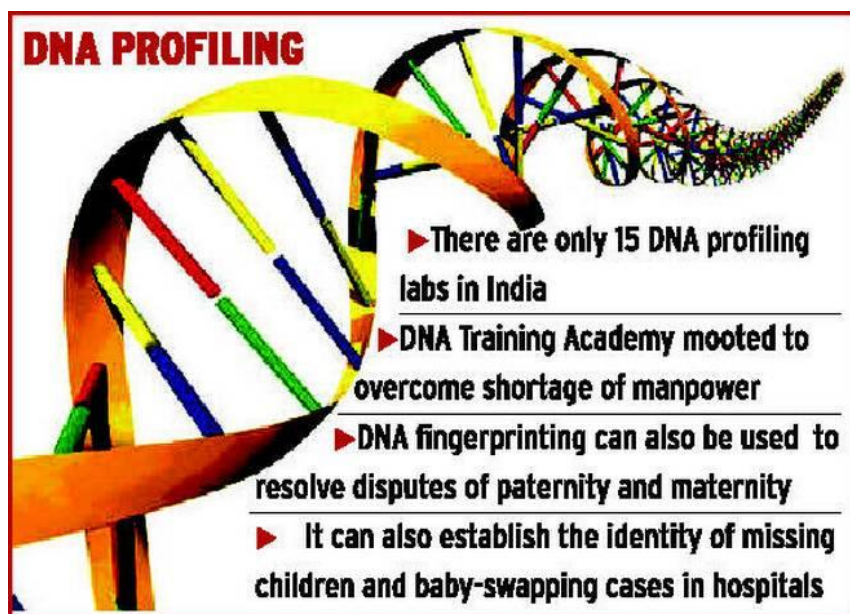
- The Centre's Human DNA Profiling Bill, 2015, was prepared by the Department of Biotechnology and the Hyderabad-based Centre for DNA-Fingerprinting and Diagnostics.
- Several organisations and individuals, however, raised concerns that the bill gave sweeping powers to government to mine the database and use it for purposes beyond just solving crime.

Law commission report:

- Last year, the Law Commission of India, in its 271st report, prepared the draft Bill named The DNA Based Technology (Use and Regulation) Bill, 2017 after examining various judicial pronouncements and constitutional provisions.
- It however had also flagged that privacy concerns and the ethics involved in this scientific collection of data were very high. The Commission said the procedure for DNA profiling, if given statutory recognition, should be done legitimately as per constitutional provisions.

Highlights of the DNA Based Technology (Use and Regulation) Bill, 2017:

- **DNA profiling Board:** Constitution of a DNA Profiling Board, a statutory body to undertake functions such as laying down procedures and standards to establish DNA laboratories and grant accreditation to such laboratories; and advising the concerned ministries/departments of the Central and state governments on issues relating to DNA laboratories.
- **Functions of the Board:** The Board shall also be responsible for supervising, monitoring, inspecting and assessing the laboratories. The Board will frame guidelines for training of the police and other investigating agencies dealing with DNA-related matters. Advising on all ethical and human rights issues relating to DNA



Highlights of the Human DNA Profiling Bill:

- The bill proposes to allow collection of samples from private parts of human body for DNA profiling and data preservation with the approval of a regulatory body.
- It suggests that a National DNA Profiling Board and a National DNA Bank be set up in Hyderabad, with every state having a regional DNA data bank. The DNA Data Bank would maintain records of samples found at crime scenes, or from suspects, offenders, missing persons, volunteers, etc.
- The bill also makes it clear that no DNA Laboratory shall undertake DNA profiling without the prior approval of the DNA Board.
- If a foreign country requests DNA profiling, the DNA Bank will coordinate through CBI or a concerned department.
- The bill mandates that the DNA profiles or samples be kept confidential, and they should be used only for establishing identity of a person and nothing else.
- Government investigation agencies and judiciary, among others, can seek information from Data Banks. For unauthorized use of data, a stringent punishment is provided.

testing in consonance with international guidelines will be another function of the Board. It will recommend research and development activities in DNA testing and related issues, etc.

- **Security:** DNA profiling would be undertaken exclusively for identification of a person and would not be used to extract any other information.
- **National DNA Data Bank:** There shall be a National DNA Data Bank, and Regional DNA Data Banks for the states, to be established by the Central government. The data banks will be responsible for storing DNA profiles received from the accredited laboratories and maintaining certain indices for various categories of data, like crime scene index, suspects' index, offenders' index, missing persons' index and unknown deceased persons' index.
- With a view to assist the kith and kin of missing persons, provisions have been made for proper identification of missing persons on the basis of their bodily samples/substances.

DNA technology- significance and concerns:

- DNA analysis is an extremely useful and accurate technology in ascertaining the identity of a person from his/her DNA sample, or establishing biological relationships between individuals. A hair sample, or even bloodstains from clothes, from a scene of crime, for example, can be matched with that of a suspect, and it can, in most cases, be conclusively established whether the DNA in the sample belongs to the suspected individual. As a result, DNA technology is being increasingly relied upon in investigations of crime, identification of unidentified bodies, or in determining parentage.
- But information from DNA samples can reveal not just how a person looks, or what their eye colour or skin colour is, but also more intrusive information like their allergies, or susceptibility to diseases. As a result, there is a greater risk of information from DNA analysis getting misused.

EVIDENCE VS. RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Scientists vouch for DNA Bill, but privacy activists fear it will lead to gross violation of human rights

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1985: Indian courts accept DNA as evidence in criminal investigation 2003: Work begins to draft Bill to regulate use of DNA samples in probes 2005: Code of Criminal Procedure amended, includes use of DNA profiling | Government says Bill will be useful in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Crime scene investigation ➤ Maintaining database of convicts and | suspects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Verification of missing persons ➤ Investigation of unidentified bodies ➤ Research work |
| Activists claim that the Bill could lead to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Racial and communal profiling ➤ Violation of privacy ➤ Longer trial period ➤ Errant testing and conviction | | |

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Not much.
- **For Mains:** DNA profiling- need, concerns and need for a law in this regard, law commission recommendations.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)

Context:

- The parliamentary panel on Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds has recommended that amounts donated by lawmakers for rehabilitation work after natural disasters be disbursed within two weeks.

What's the issue?

- Funds are to be released by the nodal district of the lawmaker concerned to the district authority of the affected district. However, funds allocated for the purpose by the parliamentarians often reach the affected people too late to help. Currently, the actual transfer takes anything from six months to over a year due to red tape.

About MPLAD scheme:

- **What is it?** It was launched in December, 1993, to provide a mechanism for the Members of Parliament to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on locally felt needs.

- **Works under the scheme:** Works, developmental in nature, based on locally felt needs and always available for the use of the public at large, are eligible under the scheme. Preference under the scheme is given to works relating to national priorities, such as provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc. MPs were allowed to spend the money outside their constituency — and outside their State in case of Rajya Sabha— after the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha.
- **Funds:** Funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable. The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.
- **Execution of works:** The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme. They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government. The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.
- **Recommendation of works:** The Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies. The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected. Nominated members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select works for implementation anywhere in the country.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** MPLAD scheme and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

5. Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)

Context:

- The Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) had recently announced the completion of the first round of bidding under its new Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), a part of its revamped Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) unveiled in March 2016.

What is OALP?

- The policy was brought out in June 2017 and marked a departure from the previous regime in terms of the geographical area that could be explored, the number of licences required, the manner in which proceeds are to be shared with the government, and the procedure to sell what is extracted. OALP is a part of HELP, which itself was a replacement to the New Exploration and Licensing Policy.

Key features of the new policy:

- The 'open acreage' in OALP refers to the fact that potential investors are now able to choose exactly which areas they want to explore and develop. Under OALP, investors choose the exact areas they are interested in, convey their interest to the government, which then places just those blocks up for bidding, typically twice a year.
- Under the new policy, developers don't need to apply for separate licences for each of the hydrocarbons they want to extract from the block. They can obtain a single unified license that will allow them to extract and market oil, gas, coal bed methane, shale oil and shale gas.
- The new policy also does away with the earlier provision for a profit-sharing model with the government. Profit sharing as a policy led to a number of delays and complications over what exactly constituted the cost, and therefore profit, of the firm doing the exploring. The new policy hinges on revenue-sharing, doing away with this ambiguity.

What was the need for the new Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)?

- India is the 3rd largest consumer of crude oil and petroleum products with oil and gas contributing 34.4% to primary energy consumption. In 2015-2016, India's crude oil import dependence rose to 81% from 78.5%. In last five years, India has seen overall decline in exploration and production of conventional resources. New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) created in 1997 ended the state dominance and created a competitive environment leading to liberalization of oil and gas exploration and production industry. However, it failed to keep the momentum of production growth and attracting the foreign investment.

- Bureaucratic hurdles like multiple approvals and sanctions, cost overruns, and disputes led to some oil majors leaving their awarded blocks and exit from the space.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** OALP and HELP.
- **For Mains:** Need for HELP and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

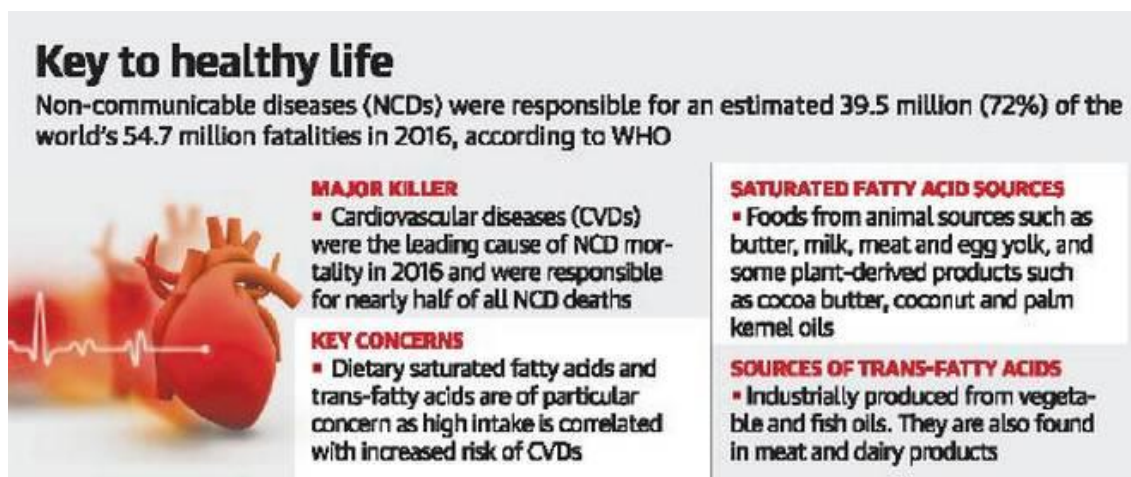
1. Limit trans fats

Context:

- WHO has released draft recommendations on limiting the intake of trans fats. These draft recommendations, the first since 2002, are aimed at controlling non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are responsible for an estimated 39.5 million death (72%) of the 54.7 million deaths worldwide in 2016.

Key recommendations:

- Saturated fatty acids should not comprise more than 10% of your daily calorie intake.
- Trans fatty acids should not comprise more than 1% of your daily calorie intake.
- Use heart-healthy polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) as replacement.
- The recommendations are applicable to both adults and children.



Saturated fatty acids:

- Saturated fatty acids are found in foods from animal sources such as butter, milk, meat, salmon, and egg yolks, and some plant-derived products such as chocolate and cocoa butter, coconut, palm and palm kernel oils.

Trans fats:

- Trans fatty acids (TFAs) or Trans fats are the most harmful type of fats which can have much more adverse effects on our body than any other dietary constituent. These fats are largely produced artificially but a small amount also occurs naturally. Thus in our diet, these may be present as Artificial TFAs and/ or Natural TFAs.
- Artificial TFAs are formed when hydrogen is made to react with the oil to produce fats resembling pure ghee/butter.

Harmful effects:

- TFAs pose a higher risk of heart disease than saturated fats. While saturated fats raise total cholesterol levels, TFAs not only raise total cholesterol levels but also reduce the good cholesterol (HDL), which helps to protect us against heart disease. Trans fats consumption increases the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.
- It is also associated with a higher risk of developing obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, metabolic syndrome, insulin resistance, infertility, certain types of cancers and can also lead to compromised fetal development causing harm to the yet to be born baby.

- In our diet the major sources of artificial TFAs are the partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVO)/vanaspati/margarine while the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products, though in small amounts.

Why they are increasingly being used?

- TFA containing oils can be preserved longer, they give the food the desired shape and texture and can easily substitute 'Pure ghee'. F
- These are comparatively far lower in cost and thus add to profit/saving.

Way ahead:

- The recommendations in these guidelines can be used by policymakers and programme managers to assess current intake levels of these fatty acids in their populations relative to a benchmark, with a view to develop measures to decrease the intake of saturated fatty acids and trans-fatty acids, where necessary, through a range of policy actions and public health interventions.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Transfats- what are they, uses, concerns and the need for reduction in their usage.

Sources: the hindu.

2. POSHAN Abhiyaan

Context:

- The Government of India signed a loan deal worth \$ 200 million with the World Bank for the National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan).

Significance of the project:

- With a focus on improving the coverage and quality of ICDS nutrition services to pregnant and lactating women and children under 3 years of age, the project will include investments in improving the skills and capacities of ICDS staff and community nutrition workers, instituting mechanisms of community mobilization and behavior change communication.
- It also aims at strengthening systems of citizen engagement and grievance redress and establishing mobile technology based tools for improved monitoring and management of services for better outreach to beneficiaries during the critical 1,000 day window for nutrition impact.
- The project will additionally ensure convergence of all nutrition related schemes and provide performance based incentives to states and community nutrition and health workers, facilitating a focus on results.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** POSHAN Abhiyaan and targets under the scheme.
- **For Mains:** Schemes for the welfare of weaker sections of the society.

Sources: pib.

About POSHAN Abhiyaan:

- POSHAN Abhiyaan was launched on International Women's day (March 8) in 2018 to boost nutrition among children and women.
- The target of the mission is to bring down stunting among children in the age group 0-6 years from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.

Other Targets:

- Prevent and **reduce stunting** in children (0-6 years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Prevent and **reduce under-nutrition** (underweight prevalence) in children (0-6 years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of **anemia** among **young Children** (6-59 months): By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of **anemia** among **Women and Adolescent Girls** in the age group of 15-49 years: By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce Low Birth Weight (LBW): By 6% @ 2% p.a.

Paper 2 Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance-applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

1. Umang App

Context:

- EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation) has announced the introduction of a new service for pensioners through the Umang App.
- Under the new facility, a pensioner can view his pension passbook on the app.



About Umang app:

- Umang is an initiative to promote Digital India program. The term — **Umang** stands for **Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance** and is envisaged to make e-governance. The application is developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**) and National e-Governance Division (**NeGD**) in order to drive **Mobile Governance** in India.
- The key goal of launching this application is to allow the citizens of India do everything online, at just a click — be it making a passport, Aadhaar or Pan, book a gas cylinder, know about your Provident fund account or resolving an Aadhaar related. Umang app basically provides a unified approach where you can install one application to avail multiple government services — almost over 100 of them.

What's important?

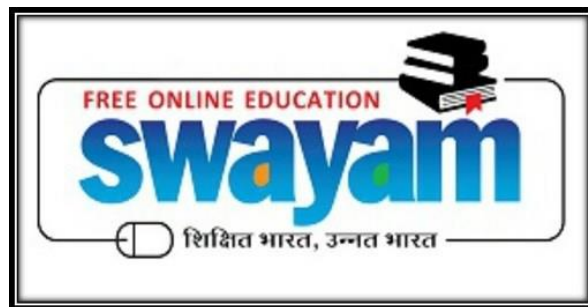
- **For Prelims:** UMANG app, EPFO.

Sources: the hindu.

2. SWAYAM

Context:

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched a major and unique initiative of online professional development of 1.5 million higher education faculty using the MOOCs platform SWAYAM.
- In the first phase, 75 discipline-specific National Resource Centres have been identified which are tasked to prepare online training material with focus on latest developments in the discipline, new & emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.



SWAYAM:

- It is an online interactive learning platform that provides, not only video lectures, reading material but also assignments/quizzes that could end up in securing credits after completing the assessment system.
- More than 400 Courses are available on SWAYAM covering all the engineering and non-engineering subjects at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
- The UGC has already issued Regulation that allows transfer of credits earned through the courses done through SWAYAM into the academic record of the students.
- It is now possible for the students and others to take courses of the prestigious IITs or IIMs without formally studying there.
- The platform has been constructed by Microsoft with totally indigenous efforts.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** SWAYAM.
- **For Mains:** Reforms in higher education.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1. Hague Convention

Context:

- A committee set up by the Centre to prepare a report on the issue of inter-country parental child abduction has questioned one of the basic principles of the Hague Convention by arguing that the return of the child to his or her habitual residence may not necessarily be in the best interest of the child. The Committee recently submitted its report to the Women and Child Development Ministry.

**Background:**

- The **Justice Rajesh Bindal Committee** was set up last year to suggest a model legislation to safeguard the interest of the child as well those of the parents when an NRI (Non Resident Indian) marriage goes sour and one of the parents flees from one country to another with the child.
- In 2016, the government had decided not to be a signatory to the on the ground that it can be detrimental to the interest of the women fleeing an abusive marriage.

The issue of habitual residence:

- Under the treaty, there is the criterion of “habitual residence” of the child, which is used to determine whether the child was wrongfully removed by a parent as well as to seek the return of the child.
- The Committee feels that the concept of habitual residence is not synchronous with the best interest of the child. It is because returning a child to the place of habitual residence may result in sending the child to an inharmonious set-up as well as overlook the fact that a mother is the primary caregiver of the child.

Proposed draft law:

- The panel has prepared a draft law to safeguard the interest of the children, as well as those of the parents, particularly mothers. The proposed legislation lays down nine exceptions under which a child will not be returned to the country of habitual residence.
- The important conditions under which a child's return can be refused are — best interest of the child, domestic violence or mental or physical cruelty or harassment against the parent who fled with the child, the parent claiming the

About Hague Abduction Convention:

- The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction or Hague Abduction Convention is a multilateral treaty developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) that provides an expeditious method to return a child internationally abducted by a parent from one member country to another. The Convention entered into force between the signatories on 1 December 1983.
- The Convention was drafted to ensure the prompt return of children who have been abducted from their country of habitual residence or wrongfully retained in a contracting state not their country of habitual residence.
- The primary intention of the Convention is to preserve whatever *status quo* child custody arrangement existed immediately before an alleged wrongful removal or retention thereby deterring a parent from crossing international boundaries in search of a more sympathetic court.
- **The Convention applies only to children under the age of 16.**

return of the child was not exercising the custody rights at the time of removal, and if there is a grave risk that the child would be exposed to physical or psychological harm.

Significance of the Indian family system:

- The report highlights the importance of the “Indian family system” in ensuring the best interest of the child, seemingly to question the logic behind returning the child to a place of habitual residence outside India.
- With the older generation of womenfolk being home-makers, the households have great caregivers in terms of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc., on either sides. A child, even if he may have stayed in some other country, would never be completely uprooted from the country of his parents’ origin, who have families back home in India.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims:** Hague convention.
- **For Mains:** Issues related to international child abduction.

Sources: the hindu.

2. A Global Environment Compact

Context:

- The UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution to set up a working group for negotiations aimed at creating a Global Pact for the Environment, a legally binding international instrument.

About the resolution:

- The resolution requests UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to submit to the General Assembly a report that identifies and assesses possible gaps in international environmental law and environment-related instruments with a view to strengthening their implementation.
- It decides to establish an ad hoc open-ended working group to consider the report, and if deemed necessary, to consider the scope, parameters and feasibility of a Global Pact for the Environment.
- The resolution requests the current president of the General Assembly to appoint two co-chairs of the working group — one from a developing country and one from a developed country — to oversee its consultations.

Key facts for Prelims:

- The resolution was sponsored by France and won the support of 143 countries.
- Iran, the Philippines, Russia, Syria, Turkey and the United States voted against it.
- Six other countries abstained while several states did not vote.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests.*

Iran nuclear deal

Context:

- US President Donald Trump has announced he is pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal. He described the agreement as “decaying and rotting”.

Background:

- The agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has been on the rocks since Trump’s election, and the resulting climate of uncertainty spooked many large firms from doing business in Iran, thus diminishing the economic incentives that drew Iran to the agreement in the first place.

What is the iran nuclear deal?

- Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.

- Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.
- The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.

Why did Iran agree to the deal?

- It had been hit with devastating economic sanctions by the United Nations, United States and the European Union that are estimated to have cost it tens of billions of pounds a year in lost oil export revenues. Billions in overseas assets had also been frozen.

Why is US pulling out of the deal?

- Trump and opponents to the deal say it is flawed because it gives Iran access to billions of dollars but does not address Iran's support for groups the U.S. considers terrorists, like Hamas and Hezbollah. They note it also doesn't curb Iran's development of ballistic missiles and that the deal phases out by 2030. They say Iran has lied about its nuclear program in the past.

What about the other countries involved?

- The agreement was signed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and China, plus Germany — and Iran. The deal was also enshrined in a UN Security Council resolution, incorporating it into international law.
- Some of the US' closest allies, the UK, France and Germany, issued a statement expressing "regret and concern" about the decision, emphasizing Iran's compliance with the deal and their "continuing commitment" to the deal. The leaders of those countries failed in their attempts to convince Trump to preserve the deal.
- Russia meanwhile said the deal was "new confirmation of Washington's incompetence," and underscored that the US, not Iran, is now technically in violation of the deal.

What happens next?

- Experts believe that, should Iran choose to resume the enrichment of uranium, it could build a bomb within about a year. The sanctions, meanwhile, could take months to go into effect as the US government develops guidance for companies and banks.

What's important ?

- **For Prelims:** Highlights of the deal.
- **For Mains:** Significance of the deal, impact of the latest developments on developing countries.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

1. WHO Framework Convention on tobacco control

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given approval to accede to the Protocol under World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on tobacco control to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products.
- It will be applicable to both smoking and chewing or smokeless tobacco (SLT) forms as negotiated and adopted under Article 15 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).



About WHO FCTC:

- The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO.
- The objective of FCTC is to provide a framework for supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco control at the national, regional and global levels.

- Article 15 of WHO FCTC envisages elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting.
- **India is a party to WHO FCTC.**

The FCTC provides an internationally co-ordinated response to combating the tobacco epidemic, and sets out specific steps for governments addressing tobacco use, including to:

- Adopt tax and price measures to reduce tobacco consumption.
- Ban tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.
- Create smoke-free work and public spaces.
- Put prominent health warnings on tobacco packages.
- Combat illicit trade in tobacco products.

Significance of the protocol:

- Elimination of illicit trade in tobacco products through strengthened regulation will help in strengthening comprehensive tobacco control, leading to reduction in tobacco use which in turn, will result in reduction in disease burden and mortality associated with tobacco use.
- Accession to such treaty will provide actionable alternatives against such prevailing practices that are affecting public health at large. India, being at the forefront of tobacco control, would be able to influence the international organizations including World Custom Organization in controlling such illicit trade.
- The protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products is a path breaking initiative in strengthening global action against tobacco and is also a new legal instrument in public health. It is a comprehensive tool to counter and eventually eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products and to strengthen legal dimensions for international health cooperation.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** WHO FCTC.
- **For Mains:** Tobacco and its effects on health, need for elimination of illicit trade in tobacco products.

Sources: pib.

2. Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Context:

- 51st Annual Meeting of Asian Development Bank (ADB) is being held in Manila, Philippines. The Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors is an opportunity to provide guidance on ADB administrative, financial, and operational directions.

About ADB:

- It is a regional development bank established on 22 August 1966 and is headquartered in Philippines. It aims to facilitate economic development of countries in Asia. It also aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.

Membership:

- The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, formerly known as the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) and non-regional developed countries.
- Currently, it has 67 members – of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

Voting:

- ADB was modelled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with member's capital subscriptions.

Funding:

- ADB raises funds through bond issues on the world's capital markets.
- ADB also rely on its members' contributions, retained earnings from its lending operations, and the repayment of loans.
- Japan holds the largest proportions of shares at 15.67%. The United States holds 15.56%, China holds 6.47%, India holds 6.36%, and Australia holds 5.81%.

Board of Governors:

- It is the highest policy-making body of the bank.
- It is composed of one representative from each member state.
- The Board of Governors also elect the bank's President who is the chairperson of the Board of Directors and manages ADB.
- The Alternate Board of Governors are nominated by Board of Governors of ADB's 67 to represent them at the Annual Meeting that meets formally once year to be held in a member country.

Loans:

- It offers both Hard Loans and Soft loans. The ADB offers "hard" loans from ordinary capital resources (OCR) on commercial terms, and the Asian Development Fund (ADF) affiliated with the ADB extends "soft" loans from special fund resources with concessional conditions.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** ADB and key facts.
- **For Mains:** Significance of ADB and the need for regional financial institutions.

Sources: the hindu.

3. World Gold Council (WGC)

Context:

- As per WGC's 'Gold Demand Trends' report, the global gold demand fell by 7% to 973 tonne during the January-March period this year as compared to the same period last year mainly due to a decline in investment demand.

**Highlights of the report:**

- ETF inflows were down year-on-year.
- Investment in gold bars and coins was down.
- Jewelry demand was flat.
- Central banks bought more gold.
- Gold supply up 3 percent year-on-year.

About World Gold Council:

- The World Gold Council is the market development organisation for the gold industry. It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.
- The World Gold Council is an association whose members comprise the world's leading gold mining companies. It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.
- Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** WGC.

Sources: the hindu.

4. 15th Asia Media Summit

Context:

- The 15th Asia Media Summit (AMS) 2018 is being held in India. India is hosting the event for the first time.

Theme: 'Telling Our Stories – Asia and More'.

Host:

- It is being hosted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, jointly with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi and Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL).



#AsiaMediaSummit

About the AMS Summit:

- It is an annual summit of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) Kuala Lumpur.
- Scope:** The Summit would encourage regional and bilateral dialogue and cooperation to respond to challenges to the broadcasting sector in the region. It would provide a unique opportunity for broadcasters in the Asian region to share their thoughts on software and hardware aspects of Broadcasting. There are also opportunities for networking, facilities for business to business meetings and prospective translation of these meetings into trade and economic relations after the summit.
- Participants:** Participants would represent organizations like Ministries responsible for Information and Broadcasting in the Asian region, International Organizations UNESCO, FAO, UN; Regulators; Radio and Television broadcasting companies both national/ public and private broadcasters; Television channels and networks, Institutes/Academies of Communication, Media Research; Community Radio groups; Press and Media, and broadcast equipment manufacturers.

About AIBD:

- The Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) was established in 1977 under the auspices of UNESCO. It is hosted by the Government of Malaysia and the secretariat is located in Kuala Lumpur.

Founders:

- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) are founding organisations of the Institute and they are non-voting members of the General Conference.
- The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) is a founding organisation of the Institute and is a non-voting member of the General Conference.

Membership:

- Full membership of the AIBD is confined to sovereign states and they are invited to designate the broadcasting authority of the country to be the beneficiary.
- The AIBD currently has 26 Full Members (countries), represented by 34 organisations, and 67 Affiliate Members (organisations) with a total membership of 101 representing 48 countries and regions and over 50 partners in Asia, Pacific, Europe, Africa, Arab States and North America.

Role and mandate:

- It is a unique regional inter-governmental organisation servicing countries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) in the field of electronic media development.
- It is mandated to achieve a vibrant and cohesive electronic media environment in the Asia-Pacific region through policy and resource development.

What's important ?

- For Prelims and Mains:** AMS summit and AIBD.

Sources: pib.

5. United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners

Context:

- The third edition of the United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners (UNPCAP) is being held in New Delhi.

About UNPCAP:

- The course is aimed to build and enhance the capacity of the African Troop Contributing Countries to the UN and to further train the trainers from these countries.
- The course is conducted by the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in India (CUNPK) in partnership with the US, the Indian Army said in a statement.
- The first and second editions of the course were held in New Delhi in 2016 and 2017, respectively.
- The training incorporates topics on operational and logistical matters, humanitarian issues, thematic topics, Blackboard and table Top exercises and mission briefs. The course is also targeted to assist the student officers to further train officers in their respective countries on the nuances of peacekeeping.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** UNPCAP.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Pacific Islands Forum

Context:

- The Pacific Islands Forum has been granted approval to establish a Permanent Observer Office at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).
- The Permanent Observer status would entrench the presence of the Blue Pacific region in, and strengthen its links to the United Nations organisations, including its specialised agencies, programmes, fund initiatives and joint programs.



About Pacific Islands Forum:

- Pacific Islands Forum, formerly (1971–2000) South Pacific Forum, organization established in 1971 to provide a setting for heads of government to discuss common issues and problems facing the independent and self-governing states of the South Pacific.
- It comprises 18 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
- In 2000 Forum leaders adopted the **Biketawa Declaration**, which was a response to regional political instability and which put forward a set of principles and actions for members to take to promote open, democratic, and clean government, as well as equal rights for citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed, or political belief.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Pacific Islands Forum and its significance.

Sources: et.

7. NAFTA

Context:

- Negotiators have failed to reach NAFTA deal. Negotiators have ended talks without a deal to modernize NAFTA, agreeing instead to resume negotiations soon, ahead of a deadline next week issued by U.S House of Representatives. The failure to secure a quick deal underscores uncertainty over the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Background:

- President Donald Trump has pledged to begin renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in upcoming talks with the leaders of Mexico and Canada. Trump has called NAFTA the “worst trade deal in history,” and blames it for the loss of manufacturing jobs in America’s Rust Belt. He has pledged to negotiate “tough and fair” trade agreements with the goal of creating more U.S. jobs as a top goal.

Why is NAFTA controversial?

- NAFTA was controversial when first proposed, mostly because it was the first [free trade agreement] involving two wealthy, developed countries and a developing country. Some people felt that allowing free trade with a developing country provides an incentive for U.S.-based business to move their operations to that country.
- Since its implementation NAFTA has remained a prime target of trade protectionists (those who advocate taking measures such as taxing imports to “protect” domestic industries from foreign competition).

What’s important?

- For Prelims:** NAFTA.
- For Mains:** Issues related to NAFTA and Why is US against the deal.

Sources: the hindu.

What is NAFTA?

- NAFTA is the initialism for the North American Free Trade Agreement, an agreement signed by Canada, Mexico, and the United States that reduced or eliminated trade barriers in North America. (Since the U.S. and Canada already had a free trade agreement (signed in 1988), NAFTA merely brought Mexico into the trade bloc.)
- Negotiations for the trade agreement began in 1990 under the administration of George H.W. Bush and were finalized under Bill Clinton’s presidency in 1993. The agreement went into effect on January 1, 1994.

What was the purpose of NAFTA?

- In 1993 the European Union (EU) created a “single market”—one territory without any internal borders or other regulatory obstacles to the free movement of goods and services. This allowed every country and business in the EU to have access to more than 500 million consumers.
- NAFTA, which was approved that same year, was designed to have a similar effect, providing a way to allow the exchange of goods and services to flow more freely across national borders without the artificial restrictions.
- NAFTA provided for progressive elimination of all tariffs on any goods qualifying as North American. The deal also sought to protect intellectual property, establish dispute-resolution mechanisms, and, through corollary agreements, implement labor and environmental safeguards.

8. Islamic Cooperation countries (OIC)

Context:

- Russia has come in support of Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries (OIC) in their effort to enter the Russian market.

Background:

- Russia’s trade turnover with OIC countries stands at about \$75 billion, with exports accounting for about \$58 billion. Imports from OIC countries total about \$17 billion.

About the OIC:

- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states. It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- The organisation states that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony”.
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** OIC.

Sources: et.

GS PAPER - III

Paper 3 Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)

Context:

- **Reserve Bank** has initiated prompt corrective action against public sector lender Dena in view of high non-performing loans, restricting the bank from giving fresh credit and new hiring.

What is PCA?

- PCA norms allow the regulator to place certain restrictions such as halting branch expansion and stopping dividend payment.
- It can even cap a bank's lending limit to one entity or sector.
- Other corrective action that can be imposed on banks include special audit, restructuring operations and activation of recovery plan. Banks' promoters can be asked to bring in new management, too.
- The RBI can also supersede the bank's board, under PCA.

When is PCA invoked?

- The PCA is invoked when certain risk thresholds are breached.
- There are three risk thresholds which are based on certain levels of asset quality, profitability, capital and the like.
- The third such threshold, which is maximum tolerance limit, sets net NPA at over 12% and negative return on assets for four consecutive years.

What are the types of sanctions?

- There are two type of restrictions, mandatory and discretionary.
- Restrictions on dividend, branch expansion, directors compensation, are mandatory while discretionary restrictions could include curbs on lending and deposit.
- In the cases of two banks where PCA was invoked after the revised guidelines were issued — IDBI Bank and UCO Bank — only mandatory restrictions were imposed. Both the banks breached risk threshold 2.

What will a bank do if PCA is triggered?

- Banks are not allowed to re new or access costly deposits or take steps to increase their fee-based income.
- Banks will also have to launch a special drive to reduce the stock of NPAs and contain generation of fresh NPAs. They will also not be allowed to enter into new lines of business.
- RBI will also impose restrictions on the bank on borrowings from interbank market.

Impact:

- Small and medium enterprises will have to bear the brunt due to this move by RBI.
- Since the PCA framework restricts the amount of loans banks can extend, this will definitely put pressure on credit being made available to companies especially the MSMEs.
- Large companies have access to the corporate bond market so they may not be impacted immediately. It has been predicted that if more state-owned banks are brought under PCA, it will impact the credit availability for the MSME segment.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** PCA.
- **For Mains:** PCA- need, significance, sanctions and challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

1. Advance Pricing Agreement

Context:

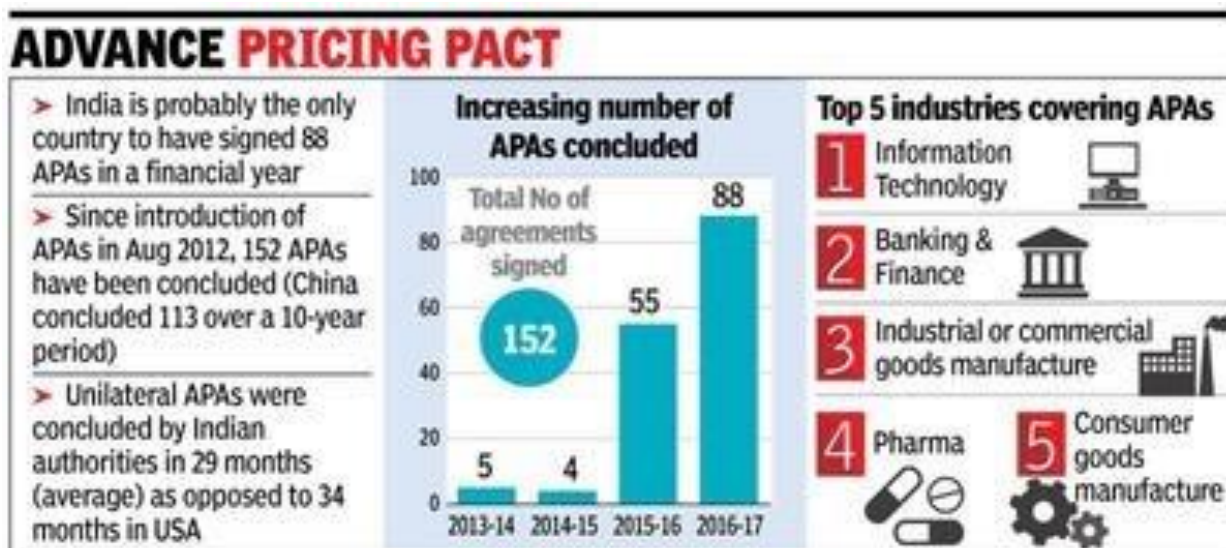
- The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) recently achieved another milestone of having signed its 200th Unilateral Advance Pricing Agreement (UAPA).
- The total number of APAs entered into by CBDT has gone up to 220, which, inter alia include 20 Bilateral APAs.

About the APA scheme:

- The APA scheme was introduced in the Income-tax Act in 2012 and the “rollback” provisions were introduced in 2014. The scheme endeavors to provide certainty to taxpayers in the domain of transfer pricing by specifying the methods of pricing and determining the prices of international transactions in advance.
- Since its inception, the APA scheme has evinced a lot of interest from taxpayers and that has resulted in more than 700 applications (both unilateral and bilateral) being filed so far in about five years.
- The progress of the APA Scheme strengthens the government’s resolve of fostering a non-adversarial tax regime. The Indian APA program has been appreciated nationally and internationally for being able to address complex transfer pricing issues in a fair and transparent manner.

About CBDT:

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes is a statutory authority functioning under the Central Board of Revenue Act, 1963. It is a part of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India.
- It provides essential inputs for policy and planning of direct taxes in India and is also responsible for administration of the direct tax laws through Income Tax Department.
- It is also India’s official Financial Action Task Force unit.
- The CBDT Chairman and Members of CBDT are selected from Indian Revenue Service (IRS) whose members constitute the top management of Income Tax Department.



What's important?

- For Prelims:** APA, CBDT.
- For Mains:** Significance of APAs.

Sources: pib.

2. FDI confidence index

Context: FDI confidence index for the year 2018 has been released.

About the FDI confidence index:

- The Foreign Direct Investment Confidence (FDI) Index prepared by A.T. Kearney is an annual survey which tracks the impact of likely political, economic, and regulatory changes on the foreign direct investment intentions and preferences of CEOs, CFOs, and other top executives of Global 1000 companies.
- The report includes detailed commentary on the markets and the impact a variety of global trade issues have on their FDI attractiveness, as well as a ranking of the top 25 countries.

Performance of India:

- India is ranked 11th. India was down three notches in the overall ranking from last year.
- India remains the second highest ranked emerging market on the Index. A variety of recent reforms have made its regulatory environment more business friendly, and economic growth is forecast to rebound this year.
- Overall, India remains among the top investment destinations due to its market size and rapid economic growth.

Performance of other countries:

- US topped the list, followed by Canada, while Germany dropped to the third place.
- The United States tops the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index for the sixth year in a row.
- The top five countries on the Index have not changed in the past three years, but their relative positions have shifted.
- While the top 10 likely destinations for FDI were the same in 2016 and 2017, there is a change in the composition of the list this year: Switzerland and Italy enter the top 10 for the first time in more than a decade, edging out India and Singapore.
- European markets account for more than half of the total positions on this year's Index as well as half of the top 10.

Way ahead:

- The investment climate in India has become much friendlier today than previous decades. Infrastructure is being developed and FDI policy is being liberalized to improve the situation.
- However, a lot is to be done if we want to emerge as one of the major export oriented manufacturing hub.
- Investors are showing their growing confidence in the immediate and medium term prospects of Indian Economy.
- FDI off course might be one of the important sources of financing the economic development. India needs a massive investment to achieve the goals of vision 20-20.
- Policy makers need to ensure transparency and consistency in policy making along with comprehensive long term development strategy.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Rankings of FDI confidence index.
- **For Mains:** FDI- significance, issues, challenges and government efforts in this regard.

Sources: the hindu.

3. National security clearance policy

Context:

- The Home Ministry has given security clearance to more than 5,000 investment proposals, including for Foreign Direct Investment, in the last four years.
- Among the foreign countries, U.S., China (including Hong Kong), Mauritius, U.K. has received the green signal for the maximum number of projects at 10 each, followed by Germany 6, Bangladesh 3 and two each for Italy, Israel, Netherlands and Switzerland.

Background:

- Security clearance is granted by the **Ministry of Home Affairs** after assessing reports received from the Central Intelligence and investigating agencies from the national security point of view.
- The Ministry had formulated a new national security clearance policy in 2015 after the government decided to speed up projects, which were stuck for lack of approval by Intelligence Bureau (IB) or other agencies including the State police.
- The time taken for security clearance for a project was eight-nine months on an average. This has been brought down to 40 days since last year.

Policy for national security clearance:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has formulated a policy for national security clearance for certain sensitive sectors of the economy by codifying all existing practices. In addition, the policy has also liberalized certain investment restrictions existing earlier.
- The new policy is aimed at bringing about a healthy balance between meeting the imperatives of national security and facilitating ease of doing business and promoting investment in the country.
- Under the new policy, fifteen parametres have been laid down where inputs from security agencies will be sought.
- The parametres on which inputs would be sought by the security agencies would be: money laundering charges against the promoters, terrorist angle, financial fraud and scam, passport fraud, links with external intelligence agencies and conviction for any serious crime like murder.

Background:

- At present, only 11 sectors, including defence and retail trading, require government approval for foreign direct investment. Over 90% of FDI proposals have come through the automatic route.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Policy on security clearance and FDI reforms.

Sources: pib.

4. GST Network (GSTN)

Context:

- The GST Council has approved making GST Network (GSTN) a government entity by taking over stakes held by private entities. As per the proposal, the central government will own 50% and the remaining would be collectively held by state governments.

What is GSTN?

- The GSTN is a private limited company floated to aid the rollout of the new indirect tax regime.
- The company will provide information technology support to all stakeholders for smooth implementation of the new taxation regime across the country and will be the repository of all information related to taxation and entities registered under GST.
- The majority (51%) shareholding in the firm is with private entities including HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and LIC among others. The central government, jointly with state governments and Union Territories, own 49% in the company.



What's important?

- For Prelims:** GSTN.
- For Mains:** All about GST.

Sources: pib.

5. Merchandise Export from India Scheme

Context:

- The Director General of Foreign Trade has said that the rates enhanced under the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS), a scheme to promote exports, would continue beyond June 30.

About MEIS:

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) is one of the two schemes introduced in Foreign Trade Policy of India 2015-20, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.
- Objective of Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) as per Indian Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 (FTP 2015-20) is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products, which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India's export competitiveness.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** MEIS and its key features.
- For Mains:** Significance of MEIS.



Sources: the hindu.

Topic: *inclusive growth and issues arising out of it.*

CriSidEx

Context:

- Business sentiment among micro and small enterprises (MSE) improved in the January-March quarter as the sentiment index rose by 14 points in the quarter, according to the CriSidEx survey. The CriSidEx sentiment index rose to 121 in the survey quarter (SQ) of January-March from 107 in the previous quarter.

About CriSidEx:

- What is it?** CriSidEx is a composite index based on a diffusion index of 8 parameters and measures MSE business sentiment on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 200 (extremely positive). CriSidEx will have 2 indices, one for the 'survey quarter' and another for the 'next quarter' once a trend emerges after few rounds of the survey, providing independent time series data.
- Benefits:** The crucial benefit of CriSidEx is that its readings will flag potential headwinds and changes in production cycles and thus help improve market efficiencies. And by capturing the sentiment of exporters and importers, it will also offer actionable indicators on foreign trade.

Significance of MSME:

- MSME sector is backbone of the economy. It is one of the largest employer in the country and with the vast population where employment either in government or in the large industry itself has limited potential.
- This is one sector where people not only exhibit their entrepreneurial skills, become part of large value chains but also become job creators in the process. And that is the reason why a bulk of the jobs in manufacturing, trading have been created in this particular sector.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** CriSidEx index.
- For Mains:** MSME sector- significance and the need for reforms.

Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: *Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.*

1. 'Gobar Dhan' scheme

Context:

- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched the 'Gobar Dhan' scheme for Nation. The government is also planning to create an online platform for trading cow dung and agricultural waste under the scheme.

What is the GOBAR-Dhan Yojana?

- The Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBAR-DHAN) scheme was first announced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley during his budget speech on February 1. The scheme would focus on managing and converting cattle dung and solid waste in farms to compost, biogas and bio-CNG. It will help in keeping the village clean while increasing the income of farmers and cattle herders.

Benefits of the scheme:

- This is hugely helpful for the country as India is home to the highest cattle population in the world, close to 300 million in number, with a daily output of 3 million tonnes of dung.
- The Scheme will encourage the farmers to consider dung and other waste not just as a waste but as a source of income.
- It will provide many benefits to the rural people. It will be easier to keep the village clean and sanitized, livestock health will improve and farm yields will increase.
- Biogas generation will increase self-reliance in energy utilized for cooking and lighting.

- Farmers and cattle herders will be helped in augmenting their income. There will be novel opportunities for newer jobs linked to waste collection, transportation, biogas sales etc.
- The scheme also provides a stable fuel supply in the market for oil companies and accessible credit in the market through government schemes and banks for entrepreneurs.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** GOBAR Dhan Yojana.
- **For Mains:** Alternative sources of income for farmers, clean fuel generation.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Green Revolution – Krishonnati Yojana

Context:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for the Umbrella Scheme, “Green Revolution – Krishonnati Yojana” in agriculture sector beyond 12th Five Year Plan for the period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The Umbrella scheme comprises of 11 Schemes/Missions. These schemes look to develop the agriculture and allied sector in a holistic and scientific manner to increase the income of farmers by enhancing production, productivity and better returns on produce.

Key objectives of the scheme:

- Betterment of agricultural base.
- Doubling of farmers' earnings.
- Development of appropriate agriculture infrastructure.
- Adequate market for sale of produce.

The Schemes that are part of the Umbrella Schemes are:

- Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).
- National Food Security Mission (NFSM).
- National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).
- Submission on Agriculture Extension (SMAE).
- Sub-Mission on Seeds and Planting Material (SMSP).
- Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation (SMAM).
- Sub Mission on Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine (SMPPQ).
- Integrated Scheme on Agriculture Census, Economics and Statistics (ISACES).
- Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Cooperation (ISAC).
- Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Marketing (ISAM).
- National e-Governance Plan (NeGP-A).

Sources: pib.

3. Frozen Semen Station

Context:

- Frozen Semen Station is being set up in Maranga, Purnea in Bihar under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission with 100% contribution from the Central Government.

Key facts:

- The frozen semen station in Purnea will be the first state-of-the-art semen production center of the country.

- The center will develop highly modern bull shade, semen processing lab, feed and godown, agricultural equipment, and other facilities.

About Rashtriya Gokul Mission:

- To conserve and develop indigenous bovine breeds, government has launched 'Rashtriya Gokul Mission' under the National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development (NPBBD).
- ***The Mission is being implemented with the objectives to:*** a) development and conservation of indigenous breeds b) undertake breed improvement programme for indigenous cattle breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock; c) enhance milk production and productivity; d) upgrade nondescript cattle using elite indigenous breeds like Gir, Sahiwal, Rath, Deoni, Tharparkar, Red Sindhi and e) distribute disease free high genetic merit bulls for natural service.

Implementation:

- Rashtriya Gokul Mission will be implemented through the "State Implementing Agency (SIA viz Livestock Development Boards). State Gauseva Ayogs will be given the mandate to sponsor proposals to the SIA's (LDB's) and monitor implementation of the sponsored proposal. All Agencies having a role in indigenous cattle development will be the "Participating Agencies" like CFSPTI, CCBFs, ICAR, Universities, Colleges, NGO's, Cooperative Societies and Gaushalas with best germplasm.

Gokul Gram:

Funds under the scheme will be allocated for the establishment of Integrated Indigenous Cattle Centres viz "Gokul Gram".

- Gokul Grams will be established in: i) the native breeding tracts and ii) near metropolitan cities for housing the urban cattle.
- Gokul Gram will act as Centres for development of Indigenous Breeds and a dependable source for supply of high genetic breeding stock to the farmers in the breeding tract.
- The Gokul Gram will be self sustaining and will generate economic resources from sale of A2 milk, organic manure, vermi-composting, urine distillates, and production of electricity from bio gas for in house consumption and sale of animal products.
- The Gokul Gram will also function as state of the art in situ training centre for Farmers, Breeders and MAITRI's.
- The Gokul Gram will maintain milch and unproductive animals in the ratio of 60:40 and will have the capacity to maintain about 1000 animals. Nutritional requirements of the animals will be provided in the Gokul Gram through in house fodder production.
- Gokul Gram will also be set up near to metropolitan cities for managing urban cattle. Metropolitan Gokul Gram will focus on genetic upgradation of urban cattle.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Frozen semen station, Rashtriya Gokul Mission and Gokul gram.

Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana

Context:

- The government has clarified that all the remaining households in the country including located in the habitations/hamlets/Dhanis/Majras/Tolas associated with the Census villages and households attached to urban settlements would be covered under 'Saubhagya'.

About the Saubhagya scheme:

- Under the 'Saubhagya' scheme, launched in September, 2017, all willing households in rural areas and poor families in urban areas are given free electricity connections. There are around 4 Crore un-electrified households in the country and they are targeted for providing electricity connections by December 2018.

Implementation:

- Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) is the Nodal Agency for the operationalization of the scheme throughout the country.

Salient Features of Saubhagya are:

- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme in line with DDUGJY.
- The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 installments through electricity bill.
- The electricity connections to un-electrified households include provision of service line cable, energy meter including pre-paid/smart meter, single point wiring, LED lamps and associated accessories in line with technical specifications and construction standard.

The expected outcome of the Scheme is as follows:

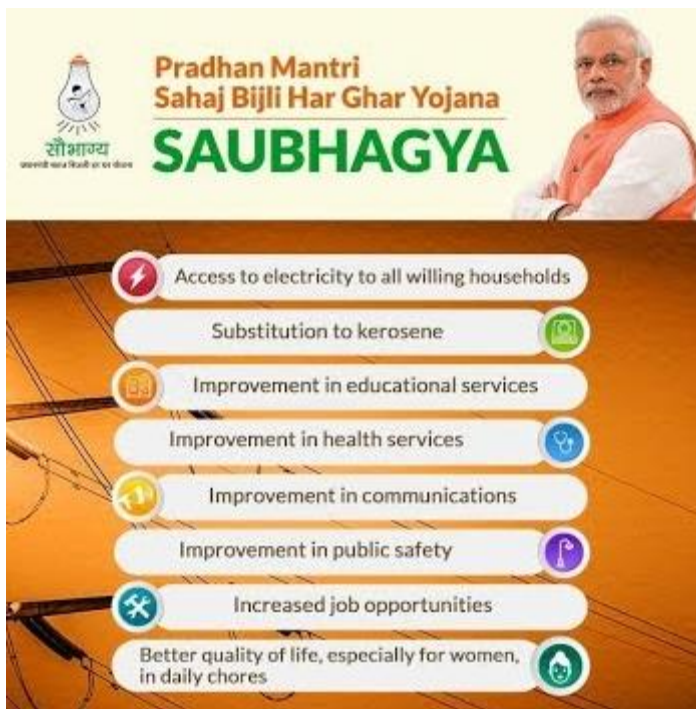
- Environmental upgradation by substitution of Kerosene for lighting purposes.
- Improvement education services.
- Better health services.
- Enhanced connectivity through radio, television, mobiles, etc.
- Increased economic activities and jobs.
- Improved quality of life especially for women.

Way ahead:

- The scheme will help India, the world's third-largest energy consumer after the US and China, to help meet its global climate change commitments as electricity will substitute kerosene for lighting purposes.
- Lighting in turn will also help in improving education, health, connectivity with the multiplier effect of increased economic activities and job creation.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Salient features of the scheme.
- For Mains:** Significance of Saubhagya scheme and the need for last mile connectivity.



2. NABH (Nextgen Airports For Bharat) Nirman initiative

Context:

- The government is augmenting the airport capacity of various airports as part of NABH (NextGen Airports for Bharat) Nirman initiative.

About NABH Nirman initiative:

- The government in February announced a new initiative — NABH Nirman— under which it proposes to expand airport capacity in the country by more than five times to handle a billion trips a year.
- The three key aspects of NABH Nirman are (1) fair and equitable land acquisition, (2) long-term master plan for airport and regional development and (3) balanced economics for all stakeholders.

Significance of the initiative:

- In the last three years, domestic air passenger traffic grew at 18% a year and the airline companies placed orders for more than 900 aircraft. NABH Nirman could take the number of airports in India to 700 from about 125 airports today.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** NABH Nirman initiative.
- For Mains:** The need and significance of regional air connectivity.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Green licence plates for e-vehicles

Context:

- The government has approved distinctive green licence plates for electric vehicles to encourage people to use electric vehicles. Such vehicles will be fitted with green licence plates bearing numbers in white fonts for private cars and yellow font for taxis.



Significance of the move:

- The measure is aimed at promoting e-vehicle's use and the government is considering exemption from permits for such vehicles. The purpose behind distinctive number plates is their easy identification for preferential treatment in parking, free entry in congested zones besides other proposed benefits like concessional toll.

Types of number plates:

- India, currently, has four kinds of number plates – white licence plates with numbers on black font for private cars, yellow plates with fonts in black for commercial vehicles, black plates with yellow font letters for self-driven rental vehicles and blue plates with white font letters for Embassies and High Commissions.
- Army vehicles, on the other hand, follow a different registration system given by the defence ministry, while vehicles of the President and governors have red licence plates with the national emblem.

FAME scheme:

- The Government started Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles (FAME) scheme which provides incentives for purchasing electric vehicle.
- It is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan. The scheme envisages Rs 795 crore support in the first two fiscals starting with the current year.
- It is being administered by the Heavy Industries Ministry.

Challenges ahead:

- Mainstreaming electric vehicles will require an overhaul of the country's energy and transport infrastructure. For example, EV charging stations will have to be set up on a war footing, and electricity generation will have to

improve significantly even as its piggybacks on the push for solar energy. EV technology (especially the battery) will have to become much cheaper before it can perform well in a price-sensitive market like India.

Way ahead:

- With the onus of being the second-largest populated country in the world, India has a lot of reasons to rejoice over the bright outlook of the adoption of electric vehicles in India. NITI Aayog said in a recent report that can cut its energy demand by 64% and carbon emissions by 37% by making its passenger mobility shared, electric, and connected. The concept not only helps India to fulfil its renewable energy goals but also assists it in other facets like the 'Make in India' vision.
- The Indian automobile industry is the sixth-largest in the world and accounts for a whopping 22% of the country's total manufacturing output. The large-scale adoption of electric vehicles can play an important role in increasing the share of manufacturing in India's GDP from the current 15% to 25% by 2022.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) Programme

Context:

- Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has shipped the first oil cargo for India's strategic petroleum reserve at Mangalore.

Background:

- Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd (ISPRL) had then signed an agreement with ADNOC which allows the firm to store 5.86 million barrels of crude in the strategic facility at Mangalore at its own cost.
- India can use the entire available crude oil stored by ADNOC in the Mangalore facility during an emergency situation. The Agreement with ISPRL also allows ADNOC to sell part of the crude oil to Indian refineries on commercial basis while adhering to mutually agreed minimum crude storage which is for the exclusive use of the Indian government.

About SPR programme:

- To ensure energy security, the Government of India had decided to set up 5 million metric tons (MMT) of strategic crude oil storages at three locations namely, Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur (near Udupi). These strategic storages would be in addition to the existing storages of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies and would serve as a cushion during any external supply disruptions.
- In the 2017-18 budget, it was announced that two more such caverns will be set up Chandikhole in Jajpur district of Odisha and Bikaner in Rajasthan as part of the second phase.
- The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

Need for strategic oil reserves:

- In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days. While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.
- It is unlikely that India's energy needs will dramatically move away from fossil fuels in the near future. Over 80% of these fuels come from imports, a majority of which is sourced from West Asia. This is a major strategic risk and poses a massive financial drain for an embattled economy and its growing current account deficit.
- To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. Today, with India consuming upwards of four million barrels of crude every day (January 2015 figures), the case for creating such reserves grows stronger.

Facts for Prelims:

- In January 2016, India signed a deal with the United Arab Emirates that allows the Gulf OPEC country to fill half of the underground crude oil storage facility of ISPRL at Mangalore. Therefore, the UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company will store about 6 million barrels of oil at Mangalore.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** India's strategic oil reserves- locations, ISPR.
- **For Mains:** Energy security, need for SPR.

Sources: pib.

5. National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy

Context:

- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has issued National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy.
- **The objective of the policy** is to provide a framework for promotion of large grid connected wind-solar PV hybrid system for efficient utilization of transmission infrastructure and land. It also aims at reducing the variability in renewable power generation and achieving better grid stability.

Highlights of the policy:

- On technology front the Policy provides for integration of both the energy sources i.e. wind and solar at AC as well as DC level. The Policy also provides for flexibility in share of wind and solar components in hybrid project, subject to the condition that, rated power capacity of one resource be at least 25 per cent of the rated power capacity of other resource for it to be recognised hybrid project.
- The Policy seeks to promote new hybrid projects as well as hybridisation of existing wind/solar projects. The existing wind/solar projects can be hybridised with higher transmission capacity than the sanctioned one, subject to availability of margin in the existing transmission capacity.
- The Policy provides for procurement of power from a hybrid project on tariff based transparent bidding process for which Government entities may invite bids. Policy also permits use of battery storage in the hybrid project for optimising the output and further reduce the variability. It mandates the regulatory authorities to formulate necessary standards and regulations for wind-solar hybrid systems.

Way ahead:

- With significant capacity additions in renewables in recent years and with Hybrid Policy aiming at better utilisation of resources, it is envisaged that the Hybrid Policy will open-up a new area for availability of renewable power at competitive prices along with reduced variability.

Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life
Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1. Atal Tinkering Marathon

What is it?

- It is a six month long nationwide challenge across six different thematic areas, namely, clean energy, water resources, waste management, healthcare, smart mobility and agri-tech. It is being organized by Atal Tinkering Labs of the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) of NITI Aayog.

Why in news?

- Top 30 innovations have been selected from among 100 innovations shortlisted. These top 30 innovations have been identified from 20 different States and Union territories from across India.

What are ATIs?

- With a vision to 'Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators', Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATIs) in schools across India.



- **Objective:** The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing etc.
- **Financial Support:** AIM will provide grant-in-aid that includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and operational expenses of Rs. 10 lakh for a maximum period of 5 years to each ATL.
- **Eligibility:** Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.

Significance of ATLs:

- Atal Tinkering Labs have evolved as epicenters for imparting these 'skills of the future' through practical applications based on self-learning.
- Bridging a crucial social divide, Atal Tinkering Labs provide equal opportunity to all children across the spectrum by working at the grassroots level, introducing children to the world of innovation and tinkering.

Need for such labs:

- As the world grapples with evolving technologies, a new set of skills have gained popular acceptance and have come to be in high demand. For India to contribute significantly during this age of rapid technological advancement, there is an urgent need to empower our youth with these 'skills of the future'.
- Equipped with modern technologies to help navigate and impart crucial skills in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the ATLs are at the vanguard of the promoting scientific temper and an entrepreneurial spirit in children today.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** AIM, ATLs and their key features.
- **For Mains:** Need for innovation and efforts by government in this regard.

Sources: pib.

2. National Technology Day

Context:

- Since 1999, May 11 is celebrated as National Technology Day to mark India's technological advancements.

National Technology Day 2018 theme: "Science and Technology for a Sustainable Future".

Significance of the day:

- On May 11, 1998, India detonated three nuclear bombs in the Indian Army's Pokhran Test Range. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam led the Indian team of scientists to successfully test-fire the Shakti-1 nuclear missile at Rajasthan's Pokhran test range.
- Hansa 3, India's first indigenous aircraft was first tested on the same day in 1998 in Bangalore.
- Successful test firing of Trishul, a short range missile made in India, was also done on the same day.
- Every year, on this day, the Technology Development Board of India awards various individuals with national awards for their contribution to indigenous technology.



Sources: pib.

3. Lassa fever

Context:

- Nigeria has announced that it is free from Lassa fever outbreak. The announcement follows the epidemiological review by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

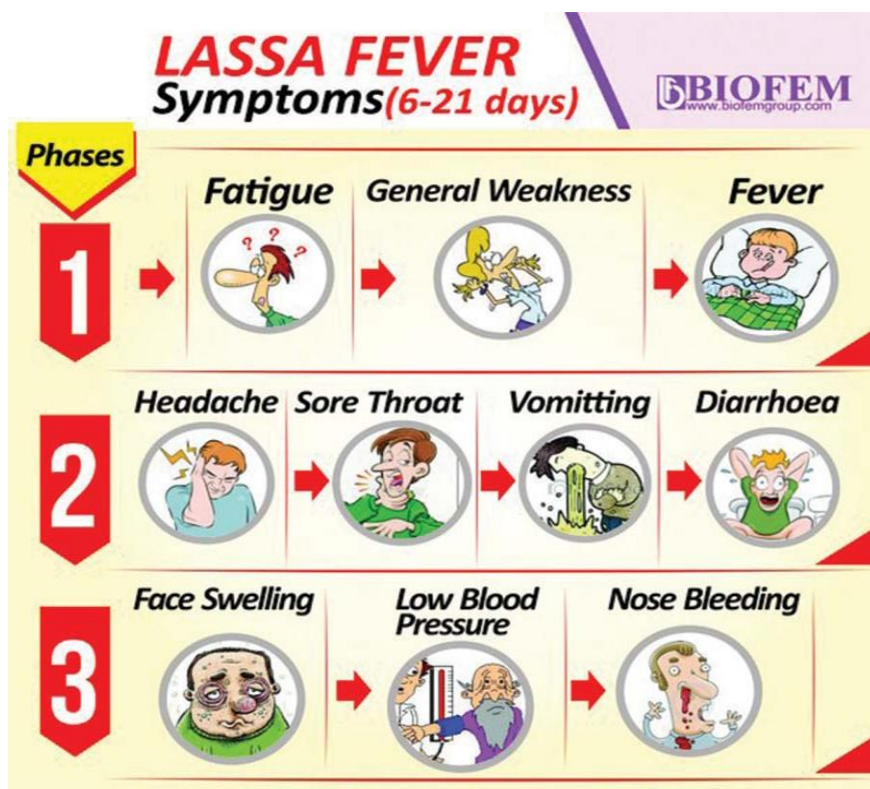
Lassa fever- key facts:

- Lassa fever is an acute viral haemorrhagic illness of 2-21 days duration that occurs in West Africa.
- The Lassa virus is transmitted to humans via contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine or faeces.
- Person-to-person infections and laboratory transmission can also occur, particularly in hospitals lacking adequate infection prevention and control measures.
- Lassa fever is known to be endemic in Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, but probably exists in other West African countries as well.
- The overall case-fatality rate is 1%. Observed case-fatality rate among patients hospitalized with severe cases of Lassa fever is 15%.
- Early supportive care with rehydration and symptomatic treatment improves survival.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** about Lassa fever.
- For Mains:** International cooperation in preventing such outbreaks.

Sources: toi.



4. Elysia chlorotica

What is it?

- It is a green **sea slug** which can suck out an algae's plastids that generate energy from sunlight — and incorporate them into its own biology. In doing so, it becomes an animal with the photosynthetic ability of a plant.

What makes it unique?

- What makes Elysia chlorotica unique is it takes only the plastids, or the organelles that contain chlorophyll and perform photosynthesis, from the algae. The slug then uses its own genome to keep the plastids operating within its own body throughout the rest of its life.

Where is it found?

- The sea slug Elysia chlorotica, a mollusk that can develop to a length of 2 inches has been discovered in intertidal zone between Nova Scotia, Canada, and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, as well as in Florida.



Significance of the discovery:

- Figuring out how the slug keeps these algae-made solar panels functioning could lead to innovations in developing green machines that need only sunlight to generate energy or bioproducts that could be used as biodiesel.

5. ISRO making green propellant

Context:

- Scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) have reported progress in the development of an environment-friendly propellant to power satellites and spacecraft. The new propellant is a blend based on hydroxylammonium nitrate (HAN).

About the new propellant:

- The new HAN-based monopropellant is already being tested. A monopropellant is a chemical propulsion fuel which does not require a separate oxidizer. It is used extensively in satellite thrusters for orbital correction and orientation control.
- The in-house formulation consists of HAN, ammonium nitrate, methanol and water. While methanol was added to reduce combustion instability, the choice of AN was dictated by its capacity to control the burn rate and lower the freezing point of the propellant.

A greener alternative
Is hydrazine, the much-used monopropellant, on its way out?

- Hydrazine has one of the highest specific impulses (kilograms of thrust obtained by the consumption of one kilogram of propellant in one second). Thus, despite its hazardous nature, it is preferred as a propellant

Drawbacks of hydrazine:

- Highly corrosive
- Carcinogenic and toxic
- Storage, handling issues

Replacing Hydrazine:

- ISRO is working on a hydroxylammonium nitrate-based monopropellant (HAN) to replace hydrazine

Low toxicity: HAN is less toxic than hydrazine

Performance: HAN has a density of 1.4 to 1.5 g/cm³, much higher than 1.0 g/cm³ of hydrazine propellants

Safety: HAN is known to not be combustible, thus is a safer alternative

Need for a new propellant:

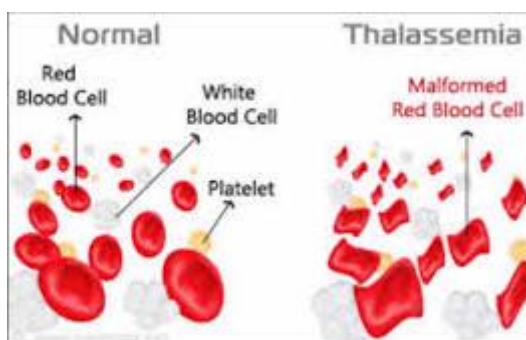
- Presently, hydrazine rocket fuel is being used. However, it is a highly toxic and carcinogenic chemical. Due to its high performance characteristics, hydrazine has dominated the space industry as the choice of propellant for over six decades, despite its environment and health hazards and the challenges faced in its manufacturing, storage, ground handling and transportation.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Thalassemia

- Thalassemia is a chronic blood disorder. It is a genetic disorder due to which a patient cannot make enough hemoglobin found in Red Blood Cells (RBC's). This leads to anemia and patients also require blood transfusions every two to three weeks to survive.
- Thalassemias are inherited disorders passed from parents to children through genes. Each red blood cell can contain between 240 and 300 million molecules of haemoglobin. The severity of the disease depends on the mutations involved in the genes, and their interplay.

- India is the thalassaemia capital of the world with 40 million carriers and over 1,00,000 thalassaemia majors under blood transfusion every month.



Paper 3 Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1. New Shepard rocket and space capsule

Context:

- Blue Origin, the US aerospace company owned by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, has launched its suborbital New Shepard rocket and space capsule.
- The mission marked the company's first test flight of the year and second flight of the New Shepard 2.0 spacecraft.

About New Shepard system:

- The New Shepard system is a fully reusable vertical takeoff, vertical landing (VTVL) space vehicle. The system consists of a pressurized capsule atop a booster.
- The name New Shepard makes reference to the first American astronaut in space, Alan Shepard, one of the original NASA Mercury Seven astronauts.
- New Shepard 2.0 space capsule is designed to fly commercial payloads and up to 6 passengers on suborbital space flights for science and tourism. The capsule features giant windows to give future passengers a stunning view of their launch into space.



What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** New Shepard system.

Sources: et.

2. GRACE-FO mission

Context:

- NASA is set to launch a pair of new spacecraft that will observe our planet's ever-changing water cycle, ice sheets and crust.
- The **Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-On (GRACE-FO) mission**, a partnership between NASA and the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ), will take over where the first GRACE mission left off when it completed its 15-year mission in 2017.

About GRACE- FO mission:

- The Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-on (GRACE-FO) mission is a partnership between NASA and the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ).
- GRACE-FO is a successor to the original GRACE mission, which began orbiting Earth on March 17, 2002. The GRACE missions measure variations in gravity over Earth's surface, producing a new map of the gravity field every 30 days.

- GRACE-FO will carry on the extremely successful work of its predecessor while testing a new technology designed to dramatically improve the already remarkable precision of its measurement system.
- GRACE-FO will continue the work of tracking Earth's water movement to monitor changes in underground water storage, the amount of water in large lakes and rivers, soil moisture, ice sheets and glaciers, and sea level caused by the addition of water to the ocean. These discoveries provide a unique view of Earth's climate and have far-reaching benefits to society and the world's population.

Sources: nasa.

3. Mars InSight probe

Context:

- NASA has launched Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport (InSight), the first-ever mission to study the heart of Mars. It was launched on board Atlas 5 rocket.

About InSight Mission:

- InSight is part of NASA's Discovery Program, managed by the agency's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.
- It will be the first mission to peer deep beneath the Martian surface, studying the planet's interior by measuring its heat output and listening for marsquakes, which are seismic events similar to earthquakes on Earth.
- It will use the seismic waves generated by marsquakes to develop a map of the planet's deep interior.

Significance of the mission:

- The findings of Mars' formation will help better understand how other rocky planets, including Earth, were and are created. But InSight is more than a Mars mission – it is a terrestrial planet explorer that would address one of the most fundamental issues of planetary and solar system science – understanding the processes that shaped the rocky planets of the inner solar system (including Earth) more than four billion years ago.
- By using sophisticated geophysical instruments, InSight would delve deep beneath the surface of Mars, detecting the fingerprints of the processes of terrestrial planet formation, as well as measuring the planet's "vital signs": Its "pulse" (seismology), "temperature" (heat flow probe), and "reflexes" (precision tracking).
- InSight seeks to answer one of science's most fundamental questions: How did the terrestrial planets form?

Why Mars ?

- Previous missions to Mars have investigated the surface history of the Red Planet by examining features like canyons, volcanoes, rocks and soil. However, signatures of the planet's formation can only be found by sensing and studying its "vital signs" far below the surface.
- In comparison to the other terrestrial planets, Mars is neither too big nor too small. This means that it preserves the record of its formation and can give us insight into how the terrestrial planets formed. It is the perfect laboratory from which to study the formation and evolution of rocky planets. Scientists know that Mars has low levels of geological activity. But a lander like InSight can also reveal just how active Mars really is.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** InSights mission and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Bangabandhu Satellite-1

Context:

- The Bangabandhu Satellite-1 mission will be the first to utilize Falcon 9 Block 5, the final substantial upgrade to SpaceX's Falcon 9 launch vehicle. Falcon 9 Block 5 is designed to be capable of 10 or more flights with very limited refurbishment as SpaceX continues to strive for rapid reusability and extremely high reliability.



About Bangabandhu Satellite-1:

- What is it?** Bangabandhu is Bangladesh's first communications satellite. Built by Thales Alenia Space, a Franco-Italian aerospace manufacturer, it is designed to provide a wide range of broadcast and communication services throughout the country for the next 15 years. It is named after Bangladesh's "Father of the Nation"- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
- Applications:** Once operational, citizens of Bangladesh will gain access to the Internet, phone services, radio, backhaul, direct-to-home TV, and other related services.

Significance of the satellite:

- The satellite could open up a lot of opportunities for the country in terms of revenue generation. So far, a majority of Bangladesh's communications was based on rented transponders from neighbouring countries and this satellite will make the country autonomous, in terms of telecommunications and broadcasting services.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Bangabandhu satellite and its applications.

Sources: et.

5. Magnetospheric Multiscale spacecraft (MMS)

Context:

- In a new find, NASA scientists have discovered a new type of magnetic event in turbulent space surrounding Earth. Scientists analysed the data obtained by the NASA's Magnetospheric Multiscale spacecraft (MMS) to find the new magnetic event in near-Earth environment.

What is it?

- Magnetic reconnection is one of the most important processes in the space — filled with charged particles known as plasma — around Earth.
- This fundamental process dissipates magnetic energy and propels charged particles, both of which contribute to a dynamic space weather system that scientists want to better understand, and even someday predict, as we do terrestrial weather.
- Reconnection occurs when crossed magnetic field lines snap, explosively flinging away nearby particles at high speeds.

What's so special about the new discovery?

- Magnetic reconnection has been observed innumerable times in the magnetosphere — the magnetic environment around Earth — but usually under calm conditions.
- The new event occurred in a region called the magnetosheath, just outside the outer boundary of the magnetosphere, where the solar wind is extremely turbulent.
- Previously, scientists didn't know if reconnection even could occur there, as the plasma is highly chaotic in that region. MMS found it does, but on scales much smaller than previous spacecraft could probe.

About Magnetospheric Multiscale Mission:

- MMS investigates how the Sun's and Earth's magnetic fields connect and disconnect, explosively transferring energy from one to the other in a process that is important at the Sun, other planets, and everywhere in the universe, known as magnetic reconnection.
- Four identically instrumented spacecraft measure plasmas, fields, and particles in a near-equatorial orbit that will frequently encounter reconnection in action.

Why understand reconnection?

- Reconnection limits the performance of fusion reactors and is the final governor of geospace weather that affects modern technological systems such as telecommunications networks, GPS navigation, and electrical power grids.

Science Goals:

- MMS reveals, for the first time, the small-scale three-dimensional structure and dynamics of the elusively thin and fast-moving electron diffusion region. It does this in both of the key reconnection regions near Earth, where the most energetic events originate.

Significance of the mission:

- By observing magnetic reconnection in nature, MMS provides access to predictive knowledge of a universal process that is the final governor of space weather, affecting modern technological systems such as communications networks, GPS navigation, and electrical power grids.
- MMS will establish knowledge, methods and technologies applicable to future space weather missions and the future growth and development of space weather forecasting.

Sources: et.

6. NASA Mars Helicopter

Context:

- NASA is planning to send a small helicopter to Mars as part of the space agency's 2020 mission to place a next-generation rover on the Martian surface, marking the first time such an aircraft will be used on another world.

The mission:

- The Mars Helicopter, a small, autonomous rotorcraft, will travel with the agency's Mars 2020 rover mission, currently scheduled to launch in July 2020, to demonstrate the viability and potential of heavier-than-air vehicles on the Red Planet.
- The helicopter also contains built-in capabilities needed for operation at Mars, including solar cells to charge its lithium-ion batteries, and a heating mechanism to keep it warm through the cold Martian nights. But before the helicopter can fly at Mars it has to get there. It will do so attached to the belly pan of the Mars 2020 rover.
- As a technology demonstration, the Mars Helicopter is considered a high-risk, high-reward project. If it does not work, the Mars 2020 mission will not be impacted. If it does work, helicopters may have a real future as low-flying scouts and aerial vehicles to access locations not reachable by ground travel.

Mars 2020:

- Mars 2020 will launch on a United Launch Alliance (ULA) Atlas V rocket from Space Launch Complex 41 at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, and is expected to reach Mars in February 2021.
- The rover will conduct geological assessments of its landing site on Mars, determine the habitability of the environment, search for signs of ancient Martian life, and assess natural resources and hazards for future human explorers.
- Scientists will use the instruments aboard the rover to identify and collect samples of rock and soil, encase them in sealed tubes, and leave them on the planet's surface for potential return to Earth on a future Mars mission.

Sources: et.

7. New sheep insemination technique

Context:

- Scientists at the Central Sheep and Wool Research Institute (CSWRI), Avikanagar, have come up with a new laparoscope-assisted insemination technique for sheep.

About Laparoscope technique:

- The minor invasive laparoscopic technique involves passing a rigid fibre-optic laparoscope into the abdomen through a small incision. The reproductive tract is located through camera and the frozen semen is deposited into the uterus.



Significance of the new technique:

- It has resolved the difficulties involved in freezing of semen and inability to transit the tortuous reproductive tract of the ruminant mammals kept as livestock. It would be of great help in the breed improvement programmes.
- The new technique would help achieve up to 60% survival in the birth of lambs and would have an immense potential for rapid multiplication of elite germplasm. As many as 40 females can be inseminated from a single ejaculate using the technique.

What's important?

- For prelims and Mains:** Laparoscope technique and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

8. Artificial intelligence (AI)

Context:

- Aiming to foster growth for India's nascent artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) ecosystem, NITI Aayog and Google have signed a Statement of Intent (SoI).

Under the program, Google and NITI Aayog will work on the following initiatives:

- Organise trainings for relevant government functionaries to introduce them to open source AI tools with the goal of enabling more effective governance.
- Awarding grants and scholarships to researchers, scholars and university faculty conducting cutting edge research in the field of AI/ML in India.
- Organising AI/ML study jams for students and developers based on Google's Machine Learning Crash Course (MLCC) on the fundamentals of machine learning.
- Incubating Indian AI/ML startups in a program where they will be mentored by Google to better leverage AI in their respective business models.
- Organise a Hackathon focused on using AI/ML and open data sets to solve key challenges within agriculture, education, healthcare, etc. in India.

Background:

- The NITI Aayog has been entrusted to setup a national programme to conduct research and development in frontier technologies such as AI.
- In furtherance of this mandate, NITI Aayog has been developing India's national strategy on AI along with the National Data and Analytics Portal to enable the wide deployment and use of AI.

What is artificial intelligence (AI)?

- Artificial Intelligence comes from computer systems that have been programmed to — or have learnt to — do tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence. Many apps and software are already making mundane work easier by doing a certain part of it for us, based on acquired intelligence.

Concerns associated:

- Automation threatens 69% of the jobs in India, while it's 77% in China, according to a World Bank research. The transition is expected to happen in a decade, according to experts.
- Therefore, if automation is not planned well and addressed holistically, it is a disaster in the making.

New opportunities:

- While there is a risk to jobs due to these trends, the good news is that a huge number of new jobs are getting created as well in areas like cybersecurity, cloud, big data, machine learning and AI.
- The new job roles that will dominate the IT workforce are within digital domains such as big data, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing and cybersecurity.
- It is clearly a time of career pivot for IT professionals to make sure they are where the growth is.

Policy on AI:

- The Union ministry of electronics and information technology, in October 2017, set up an internal committee to advise the government on a policy on artificial intelligence (AI).
- The expert committee will advise the IT ministry on the most apt technologies for India. The government's main focus is to reduce cyber attacks with AI.

Need for a policy on AI:

- The artificial intelligence market is estimated to touch \$153 billion in 2020 and expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 45.4% from 2016 to 2022. However, AI is widely seen as a major challenge in generation of employment as many companies are likely to depend more on it to cut down on human resources.
- Globally too, there is a growing interest in AI. In 2016, the White House initiated work on Preparing for the future of artificial intelligence; in the UK, the House of Commons committee on S&T looked at robotics and artificial intelligence while in 2017, the State Council of China started work on the next generation artificial intelligence development plan.

Seven- point strategy:

- The government has recently drawn up a seven-point strategy that would form the framework for India's strategic plan to use AI.
- The strategy includes developing methods for human machine interactions; ensuring safety and security of AI systems; creating a competent workforce in line with AI and R&D needs, understanding and addressing the ethical, legal and societal implications of AI, measuring and evaluating AI technologies through standards and benchmarks, among others.

Way ahead:

- AI is a complex subject; it would be simplistic to look at it as all bad or all good.
- But robots and AI taking away middle-class, manufacturing jobs in the not-so-distant future is a very real prospect that will have to be addressed by governments sooner than they probably think.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Signatories.
- **For Mains:** AI- significance, challenges, issues, need for policy on this and solutions.

Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: *Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.*

1. WHO global air pollution database

Context:

- WHO recently released global air pollution database in Geneva. WHO monitored 4,300 world cities for their air pollution levels in terms of PM 2.5 levels in the year 2016.
- The PM2.5 includes pollutants like sulfate, nitrate and black carbon, which pose the greatest risk to human health.

Why should India be worried?

- As per the database, 14 out of 15 most polluted cities in the world are from India and the top 14 cities are from India only.
- Kanpur is the most polluted city which came on top with PM 2.5 concentration of 173 micrograms per cubic metre.
- Other Indian cities that registered very high levels of PM2.5 pollutants were Kanpur, Faridabad, Gaya, Patna, Agra, Muzaffarpur, Srinagar, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Patiala and Jodhpur followed by Ali Subah Al-Salem in Kuwait and a few cities in China and Mongolia.
- The national Capital climbed down from the fourth spot, where it appeared in WHO 2015 data, to the sixth spot only.

Level of threat from air pollution worldwide:

- According to a study which drew off the most-recent data 2016 data, 9 out of 10 people are exposed to dangerously high levels of pollutants around the world which leads to the risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases.
- Air pollution levels were the highest in the eastern Mediterranean and southeast Asia. Here, in some of the areas, the airborne toxins were five times the limits set by the WHO. These toxins affected the poor and most vulnerable.
- Air pollution is the reason behind a dozen of diseases which often prove to be lethal. Almost 7 million deaths were caused by household and outdoor pollution in the previous year.

Ujjwala:

- The WHO report has made a special mention of Prime Minister Modi's 'Ujjwala' scheme to provide LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.
- The report said, "While the latest data shows ambient air pollution levels are still dangerously high in most parts of the world, countries also show some positive progress."

Various efforts by the government:

- In November last year, the toxic smog in Delhi forced the Indian Medical Association to declare a public health emergency, advising citizens to stay indoors, and for schools to be shut. The fog, according to experts, was a "deadly mixture of vehicular pollution, construction and road dust and stubble burning."
- In January this year, the Supreme Court asked the central government to look into the problem of air pollution on a nationwide basis and not confine it to Delhi-NCR only, saying reports suggested that many cities like Raipur, Patna, Allahabad were more polluted.
- To combat air pollution, the government in March this year finalised a Comprehensive Action Plan (CAP), "specifically" for Delhi-NCR. The plan has a number of measures including actions to reduce vehicular emissions and control dust from constructions.

Way ahead:

- The World Health Organisation has called upon member-countries in its Southeast Asia region to aggressively address the double burden of household and ambient (outdoor) air pollution, saying the region, which comprises India, accounts for 34% or 2.4 million of the seven million premature deaths caused by household and ambient air pollution together globally every year.

- Therefore, Air pollution needs to be brought under control with urgent and effective action.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** About PM 2.5 and Ujjwala yojana.
- **For Mains:** Air pollution- causes, concerns, challenges and mitigation.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Algae Noctiluca scintillans

What is it?

- It is **green algae** which is behind the **scintillating phenomenon** observed in oceans when they glow fluorescent blue at night.
- The Noctiluca algae is often reported to occur in patches or blooms in the **Northern Arabian Sea**. These striking green blooms often appear to glow at night due to a special phenomenon called **bioluminescence**, earning them the nickname 'sea sparkle'.



Why in news?

- An Indo-US study has found that global warming is leading to large-scale fish kills in the Arabian Sea by fuelling the growth of this **harmful bioluminescent algae**.

Concerns:

- It is believed to be dangerous to ocean life because it **produces ammonia**.
- Their growing abundance is a **cause of concern**, because they adversely affect fish, which do not thrive in such waters.

3. Bhupathy's shieldtail

What is it?

- It is a new species of shieldtail snake found recently from the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu.

Key facts:

- The snake, currently found only in the forests of the Anaikatty hills in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore district, has been named Uropeltis bhupathyi, after the late herpetologist S. Bhupathy, for his contributions to the field.
- The reptile belongs to a family of snakes found only in peninsular India and Sri Lanka. They are non-venomous, mostly burrowing and earthworm-eating, and are called shieldtails after the large, flat tips of their tails, which make them appear almost sliced off.



4. Namami Gange Programme

Context:

- National Mission for Clean Ganga has brought on board Survey of India to facilitate the Ganga rejuvenation task by using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology.
- Through the project, NMCG aims to strengthen planning and implementation at national/state/local levels.

DEM technology:

- The project includes use of Digital Elevation Model (DEM) technology which ensures accurate data collection, an important aspect for river basin management planning.

- DEM technology enables identification of entire topography of an area making it easy for policy makers to analyse the available data thereby supporting the decision-making process.
- Critical hotspots are also easily identified through this technology.

About Namami Gange Programme:

- Namami Gange programme was launched as a mission to achieve the target of cleaning river Ganga in an effective manner with the unceasing involvement of all stakeholders, especially five major Ganga basin States – Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal.
- The programme envisages: River Surface Cleaning, Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure, River Front Development, Bio-Diversity, Afforestation and Public Awareness.

Implementation:

- The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
- In order to improve implementation, a three-tier mechanism has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of a) High level task force chaired by Cabinet Secretary assisted by NMCG at national level, b) State level committee chaired by Chief Secretary assisted by SPMG at state level and c) District level committee chaired by the District Magistrate.
- The program emphasizes on improved coordination mechanisms between various Ministries/Agencies of Central and State governments.

About Survey of India:

- It is the oldest scientific department in the country set up in **1767**. It works under the administrative control of Department of Science & Technology.
- **Functions:** As the nation's Principal Mapping Agency, Survey of India bears a special responsibility to ensure that the country's domain is explored and mapped suitably, provide base maps for expeditious and integrated development and ensure that all resources contribute with their full measure to the progress, prosperity and security of our country now and for generations to come.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Survey of India, Namami Gange Programme.
- **For Mains:** Significance of GIS technology, need for inter- state coordination in river management.

Sources: pib.

5. National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC)

Context:

- National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC) has recently been created by Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

About NWIC:

- NWIC would be a repository of nation-wide water resources data and would work as a Subordinate Office under the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
- NWIC is expected to provide a 'Single Window' source of updated data on water resources & allied themes; and provides value added products and services to all stake holders for its management and sustainable development.
- The centre will also collaborate with leading research institutes nationally as well as internationally to provide technical support to other central and state organizations dealing with water, emergency response for hydrological extremes.
- The centre would be headed by a Joint Secretary level officer.

Background:

- The management of water resources is a highly complex and tedious task that involves expertise of multidisciplinary domains and depend on historical and real time reliable data and information.
- For this, the first requirement is to develop, maintain and update regularly a comprehensive “Water Resources Information System” (WRIS) in public domain for awareness and involvement of all concerned for effective integrated water resources management.
- This is also prerequisite for scientific assessment, monitoring, modelling and Decision Support System (DSS) and Integrated water resource Management.

What's important?

- **For Prelims & Mains:** Need for WRIS and its significance, water conservation- challenges, issues and solutions.

Sources: pib.

6. First organised census for Indus dolphins

Context:

- For the conservation of Indus dolphins – one of the world's rarest mammals – the Punjab government along with WWF-India are conducting the first organised census on their population.

**About Indus Dolphins:**

- A blind species that communicates through echo like bats do, Indus dolphins are one of the seven freshwater dolphins found across the world.
- They are found only in India and Pakistan. In Punjab, they are confined to only a 185 km stretch between Talwara and Harike Barrage in India's Beas river in Punjab.
- The most flourishing population of the Indus dolphin, *platanista gangetica minor*, is found across Pakistan where their numbers are estimated to be around 1,800 over a stretch of 1,500 km of the Indus river.
- It is listed by the IUCN as **endangered** on its red list of threatened species. IUCN suspects the population size of the Indus river dolphins has reduced by more than 50% since 1944.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Indus Dolphins.

Sources: the hindu.

7. Brown peach aphid

What is it? It is an insect that attacks temperate fruit trees.

Why in news? It has been recorded for the first time in Kashmir Valley, the **fruit bowl of India**.

About Brown peach aphid:

- Aphids feed on the saps of plants, attacking plant tissues that transport food to all different plant parts. The brown peach aphid *Pterochloroides persicae* is a notorious pest of peach and almond trees in the Mediterranean regions. In India, the aphid was recorded for the first time in the 1970s from Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.
- The tiny (nearly 3 mm long) aphids thrived best during the months of April, May, September and October.



Concerns:

- The spread of the aphid could affect the local economy which is dependent on fruit trees to a large extent. But if the infestation is not controlled, the invasive aphid can spread fast.

Sources: the hindu.

8. World Migratory Bird Day (May 12) 2018

Context: World Migratory Bird Day 2018 is being celebrated on May 12th this year.

World Migratory Bird Day 2018 theme: “Unifying Our Voices for Bird Conservation”.

About World Migratory Bird Day:

- World Migratory Bird Day is celebrated each year to highlight the need for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. More than 300 events in more than 60 countries to mark World Migratory Bird Day 2018 will include bird festivals, education programmes, media events, bird watching trips, presentations, film screenings and a benefit concert to raise funds for international nature conservation.

Concerns:

- Forty percent of all migratory birds are seeing their number in decline, with one in eight being threatened with global extinction. Major threats include habitat loss and degradation, collision with badly placed wind turbines and power lines, unsustainable harvesting and the illegal killing and taking of birds.

Conservation of migratory species:

- Efforts to conserve migratory birds both globally and regionally are internationally coordinated by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS, also known as the Bonn Convention) and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA). The two UN Environment-administered treaties have been spearheading World Migratory Bird Day since 2006.

About the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS):

- The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range. CMS and its related Agreements on migratory birds bring together governments and other stakeholders to coordinate and further develop conservation policies, to ensure that all flyways in the world benefit from coordination mechanisms that promote cooperation at ground level among the countries involved. It is under aegis of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

About the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA):

- The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is an intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds that migrate along the African-Eurasian Flyway. The Agreement covers 254 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** WMBD, CMS and AEWA.

Sources: toi.

9. South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN)

Context:

- SAWEN recently its first ever meeting in India. Representatives of seven countries participated in the meeting and the members agreed on having an operational framework for strengthening the regional body to combat wildlife crime.
- During the meet six proposals, including tracking of wildlife smuggling route, review of existing laws and a structure for the organisation were tabled.



**South Asia Wildlife
Enforcement Network**

Significance of SAWEN:

- The South Asia region is very vulnerable to illegal traffic and wildlife crimes due to presence of precious biodiversity and large markets as well as traffic routes for wildlife products in the region.
- The collaboration in harmonising as well as enforcing the wildlife protection in the region is considered very important for effective conservation of biodiversity.

How will it help India?

- India along with other member countries will take initiatives to bring “harmonisation and standardisation” in laws and policies to conserve fauna and flora and will also document the trend of poaching, illegal trade and related threats to the natural biodiversity.
- This will also strengthen institutional responses to combat wildlife crime by promoting research and information sharing, training and capacity building, technical support, sharing experiences and outreach and to encourage member countries to prepare and implement their national action plans in curbing wildlife crime.

Background:

- Wildlife crime has emerged as one of the greatest threats to the survival of many wildlife species in South Asia as well as across the globe.
- This organized crime involving multi-billion dollars is highly trans-national and remains flourishing as a result of weak legal framework and/or lax enforcement in the source, transit and destination countries.
- Curbing the wildlife crime demands well coordinated multi-agency and multi-country efforts with high level of commitment and advancement.

Sources: the hindu.

About SAWEN:

- SAWEN is a regional network comprises eight countries in South Asia –Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- It aims at working as a strong regional intergovernmental body for combating wildlife crimes by attempting common goals and approaches for combating illegal trade in the region.

10. Ivory is ‘government property’:

- The Supreme Court, in *Wild Life Warden v Komarrikkal Elias* case, has held that elephant tusk is a property of the Government. The Supreme Court observed that there is a clear “declaration” in the **Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 on elephant tusks being government property.**
- **Section 39(1) (c) of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972** says that an ivory imported into India and an article made from such ivory in respect of which any offence against this Act or any rule or order made thereunder has been committed, shall be deemed to be the property of the state government, and where such animal is hunted in a sanctuary or national park declared by the Central Government, such animal or any animal article, trophy, uncured trophy or meat derived from such animal shall be the property of the Central Government.

**11. Green Skill Development Programme (GSPD)****Context:**

- In its bid to create over five lakh job opportunities by 2021 through green skills, the government has launched GSPD-ENVIS mobile app to begin enrolments in 30 expert course under its Green Skill Development Programme (GSPD).

Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP):

- GSDP is a recent initiative under the ENVIS scheme for skilling the youth in the country. It is an initiative for skill development



in the environment and forest region by the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MoEF&CC) to develop India's youth into employable and/or self-employment, making use of the widespread network and experience of ENVIS Hubs/RPs.

- The Green Skill Development programme endeavours to develop green skilled workers having technical knowledge and commitment to sustainable development, which will help in the attainment of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and National Biodiversity Targets(NBT).

What are Green Skills?

- Green skills are those skills required to adapt processes, services and products to climate change and the environmental rules and necessities related to it.
- They embrace the information, abilities, values and attitudes required to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society.
- India is the second most populous country in the world is bestowed with a large working population.

Why Green Skills?

- Even though India has an advantage of reaping this demographic dividend but high drop-out rates from school coupled with poor vocational skills may hinder in reaping this dividend. There exists a demand-supply gap of skill sets, both cognitive and practical, at various levels in the Environment/ Forest fields in India.
- Green skilling is crucial for making a transition from energy and emissions – intensive economy to cleaner and greener production and service patterns. It also prepares people for green jobs that contribute to preserving or restoring the quality of the environment, while improving human well being and social equity.
- These skills are needed in areas like sewer water treatment, Climate resilient cities, green construction, Solid waste management etc.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Green skills development programme and ENVIS.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for green skills.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

1. Narcotics Control Bureau

Context:

- The third bilateral meeting between Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), India and Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB), Sri Lanka on Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and related matters was recently held in New Delhi.
- NCB, India and PNB, Sri Lanka have recognized the challenging drug situation in the region and identified useful areas of future cooperation including in field of information exchange, control delivery operations and training.

About NCB:

- The Narcotics Control Bureau is the apex coordinating agency. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 which came into effect from the 14th November, 1985 made an express provision for constituting a Central Authority for the purpose of exercising the powers and functions of the Central Government under the Act.
- The Bureau, subject to the supervision and control of the Central Government, is to exercise the powers and functions of the Central Government for taking measures with respect to:
 - ❖ Co-ordination of actions by various offices, State Governments and other authorities under the N.D.P.S. Act, Customs Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act and any other law for the time being in force in connection with the enforcement provisions of the NDPS Act, 1985.

- ❖ Implementation of the obligation in respect of counter measures against illicit traffic under the various international conventions and protocols that are in force at present or which may be ratified or acceded to by India in future.
- ❖ Assistance to concerned authorities in foreign countries and concerned international organisations to facilitate coordination and universal action for prevention and suppression of illicit traffic in these drugs and substances.
- ❖ Coordination of actions taken by the other concerned Ministries, Departments and Organizations in respect of matters relating to drug abuse.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NCB.
- **For Mains:** Drug trafficking menace- Challenges, solutions and the need for international cooperation.

Sources: pib.

2. Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

Context:

- Border Roads Organisation (BRO), is celebrating its Raising Day on 07 May 2018. It is celebrating its 58 years of glorious service to the nation.

Background:

- Since its inception in 1960, so far the Organisation has grown from 02 to 19 projects. The works executed have ensured the territorial integrity and the socio-economic upliftment of the most inaccessible regions of the country as well as India's neighbourhood.

About BRO:

- Functioning under the control of the Ministry of Defence since 2015, the BRO is engaged in road construction to provide connectivity to difficult and inaccessible regions in the border areas of the country.
- It is staffed by officers and troops drawn from the Indian Army's Corps of Engineers, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Army Service Corps, Military Police and army personnel on extra regimental employment.
- Engineering Service and personnel from the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) form the parent cadre of the Border Roads Organisation.
- Currently, the organisation maintains operations in twenty-one states, one UT (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), and neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.
- The BRO operates and maintains over 32,885 kilometres of roads and about 12,200 meters of permanent bridges in the country.

Significance of BRO:

- The Border Roads Organization has played a very important role in both maintenance of security and in the development of border areas. Most of the development in the North Eastern states of India can be attributed to the relentless work done by the BRO. Socio economic development in the most inaccessible nooks and corners of our country are a result of the infrastructural work undertaken by the BRO.
- Apart from its work in India, the BRO has undertaken work in numerous countries thus having contributed immensely towards maintaining friendly and diplomatic relations. The highly-skilled BRO personnel undertook and successfully completed construction of the Delaram-Zaranj Highway in Afghanistan in 2008. The Farkhor and Ayni air bases of Tajikistan were also restored and repaired by the BRO.
- The BRO works in close association with the Indian Army in cases of natural disasters. It is the brave men of the BRO who were responsible for much of the reconstruction work undertaken as a result of the 2004 Tsunami in Tamil Nadu, the 2010 Ladakh flash floods and even during the 2014 Jammu and Kashmir Floods.

Recent reforms:

- With the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) far behind schedule in constructing 73 approved “Indo-China Border Roads” along the northern borders, the defence ministry, in 2017, empowered BRO officials with enhanced financial powers.

Challenges:

- Despite attempts at reform, the BRO remains a divided organisation, with friction between BRO cadre officers, and army officers posted on deputation. The BRO cadre resents a large number of top executive and command positions going to the army.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** BRO.
- **For Mains:** Significance of border roads and the need for reforms in BRO.

Sources: pib.

Facts for Prelims

1. 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Context:

- 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will be held in the holy city of Varanasi in January. It will be organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in association with the Uttar Pradesh government.
- Theme:** "Role of Indian Diaspora in building a New India".

About Pravasi Bharatiya Divas:

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated every year on January 9 to mark the contribution of overseas Indian community in the development of India.
- January 9** was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa, led India's freedom struggle and changed the lives of Indians forever.
- These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and Indian communities in India for mutually beneficial activities.
- These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

2. Exercise Vijay Prahar

Context:

- Formations of South Western Command are carrying out Exercise VIJAY PRAHAR in the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges close to Suratgarh in Rajasthan. The month-long exercise is essentially to practice the troops in penetrative manoeuvres across the obstacle ridden terrain under a nuclear umbrella.

Aim:

- The exercise is aimed to orchestrate wide spectrum of threats which are planned to be tackled through high tempo joint air and land operation involving hundreds of aircrafts, thousands of tanks and artillery pieces supported by real time intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and just in time logistic support.

3. Committee formed to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary

Context:

- A government committee has been formed to coordinate year-long celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary from October 2, 2019.
- The Committee will guide and approve policies, programmes, activities for the commemoration and will also supervise implementation of the decisions taken from time to time.



Key facts:

- The Committee has a total of 125 members, including 116 from India and encompasses the President (as chair), the Vice-President, Prime Minister, Union Ministers, former Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers, senior MPs and political leaders from across party lines.
- It also includes **eminent Gandhians**, social thinkers and activists representing a cross-section of Indian society and regional diversity.
- The Committee also has **nine international members**, including two former Secretaries General of the United Nations – Mr Kofi Annan and Mr Ban Ki-moon – and Nobel laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and former US Vice-President Al Gore.

4. Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Mutual Recognition Agreement between the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA).

About ICAI:

- ICAI is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament of India, The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949', to regulate the profession of Chartered Accountancy in India.

5. APStar-6C

Context:

- China has launched the APStar-6C communications satellite on a Long March-3B/G2 'Chang Zheng-3B/G2' launch vehicle.

Key facts:

- APSTAR-6C is based on CASC DFH-4 platform equipped with 45 transponders in C, Ku, and Ka bands, with a designed service life of 15 years.
- The satellite will replace the in-orbit APSTAR-6 satellite in 2018, providing high power transponder services to customers across the Asia-Pacific region for VSAT, video distribution, DTH and cellular backhaul applications.
- The DFH-4 (DongFangHong-4) platform is a large telecommunications satellite platform from a new generation that keeps high capability in output power and communication capacity ranking with international advanced satellite platforms. The DFH-4 satellite also features strong capabilities against hostile disturbance and jamming.
- The applications for the DFH-4 platform aren't limited to high capacity broadcast communication satellites and can be used for tracking and data relay satellites, regional mobile communication satellites, etc.

6. GravityRAT

What is it?

- It is a malware allegedly designed by Pakistani hackers.
- The RAT was first detected by Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, CERT-In, on various computers in 2017.
- It is designed to infiltrate computers and steal the data of users, and relay the stolen data to Command and Control centres in other countries.
- The 'RAT' in its name stands for Remote Access Trojan, which is a program capable of being controlled remotely and thus difficult to trace.

Why in news?

- It has recently been updated further and equipped with anti-malware evasion capabilities.
- The latest update to the program by its developers is part of GravityRAT's function as

an Advanced Persistent Threat (APT), which, once it infiltrates a system, silently evolves and does long-term damage.

7. Operation Insaniyat

Context:

- India has sent Bangladesh its second relief consignment under Operation Insaniyat to help tens of thousands of displaced Rohingya Muslims who fled Myanmar into Bangladesh following military crackdown in the country.

8. In news- Mount Merapi

What is it?



- It is an active stratovolcano located on the border between Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces, Indonesia. It is the most active volcano in Indonesia and has erupted regularly since 1548.

9. In news- What is the 'Castle doctrine' in Law?

- Also known as the castle law or the defense of habitation law, this refers to a doctrine in the common law tradition which states that a person who acts in self defence against an intruder into his personal property has the right to legal immunity for his actions.
- A person who is defending his home against an intruder can use deadly force to protect himself and still be exonerated for his actions under the law. The defendant employing the castle doctrine will have to justify his action with sufficient evidence and also explain the use of deadly force as an appropriate and reasonable response to the particular threat that was facing him.

