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इशाईक़ा
Comprehensive **NEWS** Analysis

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OUR TEAM

GENERAL STUDIES



Mr. KOUSHIK

Mr. PRANAY AGARWAL

Mr. CHETAN PRAKASH

Mr. NIKHIL SAREEN

Mr. RAVI TEJA

Mr. UDAY SIMHA

Mr. SIVA KUMAR

Mr. VIJAY

OPTIONALS



SOCIOLOGY
Mr. SAROJ SAMAL

Public Administration



MATHEMATICS
Mr. VINNAKOTA SRIKANTH



GEOGRAPHY
Mr. PRIYESH SINGH SENGAR

OTHER OPTIONALS

ANTHROPOLOGY

POLITICAL SCIENCE

TELUGU LITERATURE

HISTORY

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Polity and Governance

1. Collegium System in India – The Controversy of Judiciary

Recently, the Supreme Court Collegium has arbitrarily withdrawn its own decision on appointing two judges and has recommended names of two other judges to the government for elevation to the Supreme Court by superseding 3 judges senior to them. It highlights issues regarding the appointment of judges and the need to understand the system of judicial appointments in India.

What is the collegium system?

- Collegium system in India also called as “Judges- selecting- Judges”, is the system by which the judges are appointed and transferred only by the judges.
- The system has evolved by means of the judgments of the Supreme Court, and not by an Act of Parliament or by a Constitutional provision.
- The Supreme Court Collegium is headed by the Chief Justice of India and comprises 4 other senior most judges of SC.
- A High Court collegium is headed by its Chief Justice and 4 other senior most judges of that court. Names recommended for appointment by a High Court Collegium reaches the government only after approval by the CJI and the Supreme Court collegium.
- The government is mandated to appoint a person as a Supreme Court judge if the collegium reiterates its recommendation

How has the collegium system evolved in India?

- Constitution The constituent assembly adopted a consultative process of appointing judges to make sure that judges are not affected by political influence.
- It avoided legislative interference as well as providing a veto to the Chief Justice.
- Instead, it vested in the President the power to make appointments and transfer judges between high courts.
- The President (normally act on the advice of the council of ministers) was however needed to consult certain authorities such as the CJI or CJ of High Court.

First Judges Case, 1981

- The Supreme Court in the First Judges Case, 1981 ruled that the word “Consultation” could not be interpreted to mean “concurrence” = CJI’s opinion is not binding on the executive.
- The Executive could depart from the CJI’s opinion only in exceptional situations and any such decision could be subject to judicial review.

Second Judges Case, 1993

- The SC in Second Judges Case, 1993 overruled its earlier decisions. It now held that Consultation meant concurrence and that the CJI's opinion enjoys supremacy = binding on the executive.
- This decision was justified by the court claiming that the CJI could be the best option to know and assess the worth of candidates

Third Judges Case, 1998

- The SC in the third Judges Case, 1998 clarified that the collegium would consist of CJI and 4 senior-most judges in case of appointments to the Supreme Court.
- CJI and 2 senior most judges in case of appointments to the High Court

About Three Judges Cases (not third)

- Three Judges Cases = First Judges Case 1981 + Second Judges Case 1993 + Third Judges Case 1998. Over the course of these 3 cases, the court evolved the principle of judicial independence.
- This meant that no other branch of the state (legislature and executive) can interfere with the appointment of judges.
- It is with this principle in mind that the SC introduced the collegium system.

National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)

- The government through 99 constitutional amendments wanted to replace the collegium with the NJAC.
- The NJAC comprised of 3 judges of SC, central law minister, and 2 civil society experts.
- A person would not be recommended by NJAC if any 2 of its members did not accept such recommendation = making appointment process more broad-based.
- However, it was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015 in the Fourth Judges Case.

Fourth Judges Case, 2015

- In the Fourth Judges Case, 2015, the SC upheld the primacy of the collegium by striking down the NJAC law.
- The court's rationale was that the NJAC law offered politicians an equal power in judicial appointments to constitutional courts which is against the provision of "separation of power" under the Basic Structure of the constitution = Ultra Vires of the constitution.
- Thus the SC declared the collegium as part of the Constitution's basic structure = its power could not be removed even through a constitutional amendment.

- However, due to the widespread criticisms against the collegium, the judgment promised to consider necessary measures to improve the collegium system.
- For this purpose, the SC required the government to submit the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP). Memorandum of Procedure (MoP)

Memorandum of Procedure (MoP)

- It is an agreement between the judiciary and the government which contains a set of guidelines for making appointments to the higher judiciary.
- Even though the draft MoP has been sent to the SC by the government, it is stuck between them as certain sections in it are alleged to be of taking away powers of the court to appoint judges.

What are the criticisms of the collegium?

- **Unconstitutional and autocratic:** 'Collegium' is nowhere mentioned in the Constitution and has been evolved by the judiciary itself for retaining the power to select judges by itself.
- **Undemocratic:** Selection of judges by collegium is undemocratic since judges are not elected by the people and are not accountable to the people or to anyone else.
- **Non-transparency and opaque:** (No official procedure for selection + lack of a written manual for functioning + selective publication of records of meetings+ no eligibility criteria of judges) = bring opacity in collegium's functioning.
- **Promotes nepotism:** Sons and nephews of previous judges or senior lawyers tend to be popular choices for judicial roles. Thus it encourages mediocrity in the judiciary by excluding talented ones.
- **Inefficient:** Collegium has not been able to prevent the increasing cases of vacancies of judges and cases in courts.
- **Ignores SC's own guidelines:** The recent supersession in appointment is inconsistent with the view of the Supreme Court in the Second Judge's case, 1993, where it laid that:
 - Seniority amongst Judges in their High Courts and on all India basis is significant and should be given due consideration while making appointments from amongst High Court Judges to the Supreme Court.
 - Unless there is any strong reason to justify a departure, that order of seniority must be maintained between them while making their appointment to the Supreme Court.
- **Against established conventions:** The convention of 'seniority' has long been held as the procedure for appointments but 'supersession' ignores and abdicates this convention, creating space for subjectivity and individual bias in appointments.
- **No reforms made after fourth judge's case:** after striking down the

NJAC, the court did anything to amend the NJAC Act or add safeguards to it that would have made it constitutionally valid. Instead, the court reverted to the old Collegium based appointments mechanism

What is the way forward?

The subjectivity and the inconsistency of the collegium system highlight the need to relook at the process of appointment of judges:

- The NJAC should be amended to make sure that the judiciary retains independence in its decisions and re-introduced in some form or the other. A written manual should be released by the Supreme Court which should be followed during appointments and records of all meeting should be in the public domain in order to ensure transparency and rule-based process.
- Thus, India needs to restore the credibility of the higher judiciary by making the process of the appointing judges transparent and democratic.
- Apart from reforming the collegium system, the quality of judges can also be improved through the implementation of All India Judicial Services (AIJS).

2. Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY)

Objectives of the scheme:

Most productive mining areas in the country are largely areas inhabited by scheduled tribes hence the scheme is focused on:

- To implement various developmental and welfare projects/programs in mining affected areas that complement the existing ongoing schemes/projects of State and Central Government.
- To minimize/mitigate the adverse impacts, during and after mining, on the environment, health and socio-economics of people in mining districts.
- To ensure long-term sustainable livelihoods for the affected people in mining areas.

Features of the scheme:

- The scheme is implemented by the District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) of the respective districts using the funds accruing to the DMF.

The Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015, mandated the setting up of District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) in all districts in the country affected by mining related operations.

In case of all mining leases executed before 12th January, 2015 miners will have to contribute an amount equal to 30% of the royalty payable by them to the DMFs. Where mining leases are granted after 12.01.2015, the rate of contribution would be 10% of the royalty payable.

Affected areas:

- **Directly affected areas** – where direct mining-related operations such as excavation, mining, blasting, beneficiation and waste disposal (overburdened dumps, tailing ponds, transport corridors etc.), etc. are located.
- **Indirectly affected areas** – Those areas where local population is adversely affected on account of economic, social and environmental consequences due to mining-related operations like deterioration of water, soil and air quality, reduction in stream flows and depletion of ground water etc.
- **Affected people:** The scheme lists people who are effected directly and indirectly by mining operations and DMF shall prepare and maintain an updated list of such affected persons/local communities.

Utilisation of Funds:

The scheme mandates that:

- At least 60% of PMKKKY funds to be utilized under drinking water supply, environment preservation and pollution control measures, health care, education, welfare of women and children, skill development and sanitation.
- Up to 40% of the PMKKKY to be utilized under Physical infrastructure, Irrigation, Energy and Watershed Development and ther measures for enhancing environmental quality in mining district.

Of the total amount collected under the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) only 24% has been actually spent, hence there is a need for states to increase the spending under the District Mining Fund (DMF) programme, while ensuring that there is no fund diversion or leakage.

3. Appointment of Chief Information Commissioner

Why in News?

RTI activists have termed the appointment of former Law Secretary Suresh Chandra as a Central Information Commissioner on January 1 an “arbitrary process” as he had not applied for the position.

What is the issue?

- DoPT had informed the Supreme Court that the search committee was to shortlist candidates “out of the applications received.” However, later it was found that shortlisting had been done outside the list of applicants, in violation of procedure laid out by the department in their own affidavit to the Supreme Court.
- However, the department defends its move by saying that the search committee is not restricted to applicants, but to deserving candidates.

Need of the hour:

- We need transparency at every stage, and public scrutiny to prevent such an arbitrary process.

- Centre and states to maintain transparency in appointments of Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners and upload the details of search committees and applicants on website.

Basics about CIC:**Eligibility criteria and process of appointment of CIC/IC:**

Section 12(3) of the RTI Act 2005 provides as follows:

- 1.The Prime Minister, who shall be the Chairperson of the committee;
- 2.The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha; and
- 3.A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

Eligibility:

- Section 12(5) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners shall be persons of eminence in public life with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism, mass media or administration and governance.
- Section 12(6) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that Chief Information Commissioner or an Information Commissioner shall not be a Member of Parliament or Member of the Legislature of any State or Union Territory as the case may be, or hold any other office of profit or connected with any political party or carrying on any business or pursuing any profession.

What is the term of office and other service conditions of CIC?

- Section 13 of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the Chief Information Commissioner shall hold office for a term of five years from the date on which he enters upon his office and shall not be eligible for reappointment.
- Section 13(5)(a) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the salaries and allowances payable to and other terms and conditions of service of the Chief Information Commissioner shall be the same as that of the Chief Election Commissioner.

4. Manipur's new Anti-Lynching Law**Context:**

- Six months have passed since the Supreme Court anguished by "horrific acts of mobocracy" issued several directions to the Union and the State Governments to protect India's "Pluralistic Social Fabric".
- Now, Manipur became the first to pass a law against lynching. Supreme Court gave suggestions for creating a nodal officer to control such crimes in every State, special courts and enhanced punishments.

Introduction:

- Pluralism and tolerance are essential virtues and constitute the building blocks of a truly free and democratic society. Intolerance

arising out of a dogmatic mindset sows the seeds of upheaval.

- The groundswell of public disgust at the lynching's crystallised under the banner of the National Campaign Against Mob Lynching (NCAML), which has initiated a campaign for a law against mob lynching.
- Also known as 'Masuka', short for Manav Suraksha Kanoon (law to protect humans), a draft of the proposed legislation is currently up on the Internet, awaiting suggestions from the public.
- The primary argument of the activists and lawyers advocating an anti-lynching law is that it fills a void in our criminal jurisprudence. It is true that at present there is no law that criminalises mob killings.
- The Indian Penal Code has provisions for unlawful assembly, rioting, and murder but nothing that takes cognisance of a group of people coming together to kill (a lynch mob).

What is meant by Lynching?

- Any act or series of acts of violence or aiding, abetting (encouraging) such act/acts thereof, whether spontaneous or planned, by a mob on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, ethnicity or any other related grounds.
- It excluded solitary hate crimes and for the provisions to apply, it requires that these hate crimes are undertaken by the mobs, defined as a group of two or more individuals, assembled with a common intention of lynching.
- Today, the Hate Crimes attract Section 153 A of IPC. It is related to fostering enmity between the people on the basis of religion, race, language etc.

But, registering this crime requires prior permission of the State Government. Most State Governments use this power to shield perpetrators, who are politically and ideologically connected to the ruling establishment.

Recently, Supreme Court says no mobocracy, need anti-lynching law:

To end mob lynching, Supreme Court gives an 11-point prescription:

A slew of directions, including preventive, remedial and punitive steps, the top court gave to deal with the crime:

- The state governments shall designate a senior police officer in each district for taking measures to prevent incidents of mob violence and lynching.
- The state governments shall immediately identify districts, subdivisions and villages where instances of lynching and mob violence have been reported in the recent past.
- The nodal officers shall bring to the notice of the DGP any inter-district co-ordination issues for devising a strategy to tackle lynching and mob violence related issues.

- It shall be the duty of every police officer to cause a mob to disperse, which, in his opinion, has a tendency to cause violence in the disguise of vigilantism or otherwise.
- Central and the state governments should broadcast on radio and television and other media platforms including the official websites that lynching and mob violence shall invite serious consequence.
- Curb and stop dissemination of irresponsible and explosive messages, videos and other material on various social media platforms. Register FIR under relevant provisions of law against persons who disseminate such messages.
- Ensure that there is no further harassment of the family members of the victims.
- State governments shall prepare a lynching/mob violence victim compensation scheme.
- Cases of lynching and mob violence shall be specifically tried by designated court/fast track court searmarked for that purpose in each district. The trial shall preferably be concluded within six months.
- To set a stern example in cases of mob violence and lynching, the trial court must ordinarily award maximum sentence upon conviction of the accused person.
- If it is found that a police officer or an officer of the district administration has failed to fulfill his duty, it will be considered as an act of deliberate negligence.

Conclusion:

- The court said a country where the rule of law prevails does not allow any such thought. It, in fact, commands for ostracization of such thoughts with immediacy.
- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) does not maintain specific data with respect to lynching incidents in the country.
- 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India.
- The responsibility to maintain law and order and protect life and property, therefore, rests with the respective State Governments. The State Governments are competent to deal with such offences under the extant provisions of laws.
- Manipur Government became the first in the country to hold public officials criminally accountable, if they fail to prevent hate crimes.
- Manipur's Anti-Lynching law laid down the duty and responsibility of the State Government to make arrangements for the protection of victims and witnesses against any kind of intimidation, coercion, inducement, violence etc.
- It prescribes the duty of the State officials to prevent a hostile environment against people of the community, who have been lynched.

- Sometimes, it may include economic and social boycott and humiliation through excluding them from public services such as education, health and other services.

5. India among the most trusted nations globally: Report

Why in news?

The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer report released in Davos

India's status:

- India is among the most trusted nations globally when it comes to government, business, NGOs and media but the country's brands are among the least-trusted.
- India's Global Trust Index increased by 3 points to 52.
- India was at the second place in the informed public category and third place in the general population category.
- Companies headquartered in India, Mexico and Brazil are the least trusted, followed by China and South Korea. Score of India and Brazil is 40% that of Mexico and China stood at 36% and 41%, respectively.

Other countries' status:

- China topped the Trust Index among both the informed public and the general population segments, with scores of 79 and 88 respectively.
- In terms of trust in companies headquartered in countries, the most trusted are those from Switzerland, Germany and Canada.
- There is a growing feeling of pessimism about the future, with only one-in-three mass population respondents in the developed world believing his or her family would be better off in the next five years.

About the survey:

Edelman's Trust Barometer is an annual global trust survey which measures attitudes about the state of trust in business, government, NGOs and the media. The Trust Barometer surveys over 33,000 respondents from 28 different countries. Through the Trust Barometer, Edelman helps its clients better understand the fragile roots of trust and above all, how to navigate these with responsible actions and behavior – helping their businesses and organisations thrive.

6. UDAY Scheme – Is it still the Saviour of Power Sector?

Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) is the financial turnaround and revival package for the electricity distribution companies of India (DISCOMS). It was launched with an aim to find a permanent solution to the financial struggle of the power distribution companies. However, even after 3 years of its implementation, the discoms continue to perform poorly. Therefore, urgent reforms are needed to address this issue and strengthen the power sector in India

What is UDAY scheme?

- Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Power in 2015.
- It seeks to rescue the State Electricity Distribution Companies from the huge amount of debts.
- 27 states and Union territories signed up for UDAY which freed discoms from the burden of debt that they carried. It committed states to assume a share of losses of the discoms starting from fiscal 2016-17.
- It has to be noted that, adopting UDAY is optional for states

Why UDAY Scheme?

Discoms in the country have accumulated losses of around Rs. 3.8 lakh crore and the outstanding debt of around Rs. 4.3 lakh crore (as on March 2015) = They can't supply enough power at affordable rates, which affects the quality of life and overall economic growth and development. Besides, default on bank loans by financially stressed discoms can seriously impact the banking sector and the economy at large. Thus, discoms is trapped in a vicious cycle with operational losses being funded by the debt.

Why are discoms under debt?

Government Subsidies

- The rising base of rural electricity supply is increasingly subsidised and non remunerative.
- Further, the recently launched Saubhagya Scheme, which ensures free electricity connections to village houses, has created further anxieties among the states.

Power loss

- Aggregate technical and commercial losses (AT&C) losses in India are around 22% which is double the global average.
- AT&C losses provide a realistic picture of energy and revenue loss situation.
- AT&C losses consist of 2 elements: technical losses & Commercial losses Technical losses are due to energy dissipated in the conductors and equipment used for power transmission and distribution.
- A large amount of technical losses is due to the old and overloaded transmission and distribution system.
- Commercial losses are due to non-technical losses caused by energy theft, illegal connections on the distribution system, corruption of energy meter, non regular measurement, absence of energy meters, non-payment of electricity used etc.

How does the UDAY scheme work? (Also includes Merits of the scheme)

- It empowers discoms with the chance to solve their financial stress through 4 initiatives as follows. Improving operational efficiencies of discoms.

- Operational efficiency of discoms will be improved through initiatives like compulsory smart metering, upgradation of transformers, meters, special police to catch electricity thieves, etc.
- Energy efficiency measures such as efficient LED bulbs, agricultural pumps, fans & air-conditioners etc. will minimise the AT&C loss.
- Implementing financial discipline on discoms by means of aligning with state finances.
- Under the scheme, state government assumes over 75% share of debts of the state discoms and will issue bonds to finance this debt.
- Discoms are expected to issue bonds for the remaining 25% of their debt.

In short, UDAY would solve the issues of discoms = high demand for power from discoms = higher generation of power from generating units = lesser cost per unit of electricity = 24X7 power for all = Increase in economic activity + improve employment opportunities in the state.

How is the performance?

- Even after 3 years of its implementation, the scheme continues to perform poorly.
- The share of discom losses that states have to bear will increase from 5% in 2016-17 to 10% this fiscal and eventually to 50% by 2019-20.
- The discoms continue to be in trouble, unable to pay the power generating companies for their supplies. Around 21,000 MW of private coal-fired generation capacity is under stress due to the non-payment of debts by discoms.
- Discoms of states like Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra have defaulted on their Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) obligations = these states are forcing the centre to consider options like giving more powers to regulators to penalise discoms.

What are the reasons for poor performance?

Lack of data

There is no data for 11 of the 27 states and Union territories committed for UDAY.

Big targets

- UDAY proposes a steep loss-reduction target for discoms to improve their performance
- Though regulations require tariff revision, many states haven't done it.
- Even those who have revised, the revision falls short of the estimates made under UDAY.

The reasons are as follows

1. Laxity of regulators.

2. Tariffs remain a politically sensitive issue.

For instance, Rajasthan had to roll back tariff increase for agricultural consumers by almost 25 paise resulting in an additional burden of Rs 500 crore.

Issues of power generating companies

- State Electricity Boards (SEBs) are delaying payments to power suppliers
- There are also regulatory dues or increases in tariffs due to new government levies like green cess or a port congestion surcharge.
- Cash strapped SEBs are not signing long-term power purchase agreement (PPAs) with generators who in turn are not in a position to repay their bank loans since they have no steady income stream.

Distribution losses

- Although UDAY succeeded in cutting down distribution losses by around 21%, a major share of losses is still left due to the following reasons Electricity the has not been curbed completely.
- The inadequacy in metering and billing process. Most of the old transformers haven't been replaced with new ones.

Sustainability of the scheme

With several states missing the target over the 3 years, there are doubts over whether discoms could actually utilise this opportunity provided by the central government.

Further, there is also a lack of strategy on dealing with failures to meet targets.

What is the government's stand?

The government is hoping to minimise the AT&C losses to 15% in the 2018-19.

What could be done?

- Private partnership – Discoms should seek active support of private players, particularly in the high AT&C loss areas. Central assistance – Discoms should take the help of central government entities for better management and operational practices.
- Automate tariff revision Tariffs should be increased automatically for at least 3 years with respect to inflation or the percentage given in UDAY agreement, with no regulatory or political interference.
- This tariff system could be subjected to regulatory assessment after the end of the 3 year period.
- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) – To plug leakages in the power subsidies, states could utilise DBT to transfer the electricity subsidies. Big penalties – need to be levied on SEBs for non-supply of electricity. This will force them to sign PPAs.

- Also, when such big penalties are imposed and the cash balances of state governments are on the line, they will themselves petition their electricity regulators asking for tariff hikes and also work towards minimising the rate which has large political patronage.
- Automatic deductions – Agreement need to be signed whereby the dues owed by SEBs are automatically deducted by RBI from the accounts of the state governments and paid to electricity suppliers.
- Innovative reforms – Setting up dedicated police stations for catching electricity thieves is a good idea, however, a better one would be to pay subsidies directly to farmers and others and sell electricity at market rates. Once this is done, the temptation to steal will automatically decrease.

7. The Right Step

Why in news?

SC lifted the ban imposed by Maharashtra government to ban dance bars in the state.

Facts:

- SC permitted dance performances by women in bars and removed the arbitrary rules put in place by the government to curb dance bars.
- SC struck down certain provisions of the Maharashtra Prohibition of Obscene Dance in Hotels, Restaurant and Bar Rooms and Protection of Dignity of Women (Working therein) Act, 2016, to maintain a balance between public interest and the constitutional right to earn a livelihood.

Background:

- Successive governments in Maharashtra have repeatedly banned Mumbai's dance bars despite previous court orders recognizing their right to do business and rights of women to earn livelihood who perform in these establishments.
- State governments contend, without empirical evidence, that dance bars contribute to rising crimes in their vicinities; promote prostitution; the girls working there are vulnerable to trafficking and they corrupt public morality.
- The ban was first imposed by state government in 2005 and struck down by the Bombay High Court in the subsequent year.
- The state had granted no licences since 2005 despite court allowing dance bars to function.

SC's recent guidelines:

- Showering of currency notes on the dancing girls will stay prohibited, but they can be handed a tip.
- Restrictions such as segregating the restaurant area from the performance area have now been termed irrational.

- Restriction against dance-bars located within a kilometre of an educational institution has been termed unreasonable.
- The apex court has directed protection of girls through a legal contract of employment with the bar-owners.
- SC directed the state government to draft reasonable guidelines regarding the antecedents of performers and location of bars etc.
- The court held that obscene dances could not be permitted in a dance bar and an employer permitting them would be jailed for three years.
- On the state's arguments that stringent measures were required to maintain "morality" in society, the court said the administration could not thrust its notion of "morality" on the people and standards of morality in a society change with the passage of time.

Reasons behind SC's decision:

- The ban affected the rights of bar owners and women workers under Article 14 and their right to practice any profession under Article 19(1)(g).
- State government legislated that only a person with "good character", "good antecedents" and without a "criminal record in the past ten years" could obtain bar licences, but such terms are not defined and are arbitrary.

8. It's time to tax ground water use

Context:

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Centre to "not give effect" the December 12, 2018 notification issued by the Union Water Resources Ministry on the extraction of groundwater.

Revised Guidelines to regulate and control Ground Water Extraction in India, December 12th 2018:

Water Conservation Fee (WCF):

The revised guidelines introduced the concept of water conservation fee to discourage inefficient use and wastage of groundwater. It is the certain amount of fee to be paid depending upon the use of abstracted water, area of abstraction and amount of abstracted water.

Who all need to pay the fee?

- All industrial units
- All business establishments; hotels and hospitals
- Infrastructure projects such as residential and office buildings
- Individual households that draw groundwater using a delivery pipe of a greater than 1" diameter

Exemptions

- Agricultural users,

- Users employing non-energised means to extract water,
- Individual households (using less than 1-inch diameter delivery pipe)
- Armed Forces Establishments during operational deployment or during mobilization in forward locations

NOC for groundwater extraction: All industries, business establishments, infrastructure projects and even certain individual households have to obtain NOC through a web-based application system for ground water abstraction. Exemptions for NOC are the same as that of WCF.

Use of recycled and treated sewage water: It seeks to encourage the use of recycled and treated sewage water by industries.

Penalties: Guidelines have provision of action against polluting industries

Groundwater monitoring Instruments: It envisages mandatory requirement of digital flow meters, piezometers and digital water level recorders.

Exemptions:

- Installation of piezometers not mandatory if extraction below 10 m³/day.
- Installation of Digital Water Level Recorders not be mandatory for projects requiring ground water up to 50 m³/day in safe and semi critical assessment units and up to 20 m³/day in critical and overexploited assessment units

Water Audits: Guidelines insist mandatory Water audits for industries extracting groundwater 500 m³/day or more in safe and semi-critical and 200 m³/day or more in critical and over-exploited areas

Rain water harvesting: It calls for mandatory roof top rain water harvesting except for specified industries (industries falling in red and orange categories as per CPCB)

Prevent Groundwater Contamination: It envisages measures to be adopted to ensure prevention of groundwater contamination in premises of polluting industries/ projects.

Significance:

- In the backdrop of growing dependence on groundwater, over-extraction and consequent lowering of water tables, the rules are significant. The concept of WCF which has been introduced in groundwater governance for the first time is definitely a much-awaited reform.
- The high rates of WCF are expected to discourage setting up of new industries in over-exploited and critical areas
- Further, the WCF will act as a deterrent to large scale ground water extraction by industries, especially in over-exploited and critical areas
- The WCF would also compel industries to adopt measures and technology to use water efficiently and avoid any wastage.

- It would also discourage the growth of packaged drinking water units, particularly in over-exploited and critical areas.

Issues with the Guidelines:

- **Liberalization of extraction of groundwater:** The NGT has criticised the guidelines for liberalizing the extraction of groundwater adding to the groundwater crisis which could prove detrimental to the environment.
- **Water Conservation Fee:** According to critics, the water conservation fee virtually gives license to harness groundwater to any extent even in the over-exploited and critical areas
- **Provision for groundwater recharge:** Previously industries engaging in extraction were required to recharge the groundwater sources as well. However, the task would now be carried out by governmental authorities, raising questions not only about effective surveillance but also actual execution.
- **Exemption to Agriculture:** Given that irrigation is the highest consumer of groundwater in India, completely exempting agriculture from WCF has been criticized by critics.
- **Exemption to households:** The guidelines have been criticised as it has exempted households to draw groundwater from single dug well/ bore well/tube well through the delivery pipe of up to 1-inch diameter and certain other categories, even if there is an existing supply of drinking water.
- **Waste water treatment and recycle measures not mandatory:** Waste water treatment and recycle measures have not been made mandatory for infrastructure projects.
- **Reuse of wastewater:** There is no mandatory requirement or specified limits for reuse of wastewater by industries.
- **No check on pollution:** The NGT has observed that there is no check on the injection of pollutants in the groundwater in the notification
- **No check on water quality:** NGT points out that there is no provision with regard to checking on water quality and its remediation if there is contamination.
- **Lack of institutional mechanism:** NGT observes that there is no institutional mechanism to monitor removal and replenishment of groundwater and the guidelines have no does not have provisions for adequate impact assessment or monitoring and compliance mechanism.

Way forward:

Promoting Judicious Use of groundwater in agriculture:

- It is important to formulate policies that promote judicious use of groundwater in agriculture as well.

- Groundwater extraction should be minimized by encouraging the adoption micro-irrigation techniques (drip and sprinklers).
- It is also important to promote and incentivize crop diversification to less water-intensive crops

Wastewater Treatment: Treatment and reuse of wastewater practices and processes must be significantly improved and industries, municipalities should be encouraged to treat and reuse wastewater.

Community-based groundwater management:

- Efforts should be taken to institutionalise and strengthen community-based groundwater management.
- Generating awareness about the status of local groundwater resources, education and social mobilisation should form the core elements of community-based groundwater management.

Recharge: Artificial recharge of groundwater should be focussed upon. It is important to adopt, encourage and promote rainwater harvesting structures

Addressing Leakages: It is important to have technology-based solutions to reduce leakages during water supply

Prevent Pollution: Sustained measures should be taken to prevent pollution of water bodies, contamination of groundwater and ensure proper treatment of domestic and industrial wastewater before discharging

9. Naga peace accord and Naga insurgency

Context:

Naga Peace Accord, 2015 is yet to finalize, but containing Northeast insurgency requires a diverse and broad-based approach.

Naga Peace Accord/ Framework Agreement:

- The agreement was signed in 2015 between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issak-Muivah) NSCN(IM).
- The content of the agreement has not been disclosed but it contains the broad principles that would guide the future deliberations between the Government of India and NSCN (IM).
- Two aspects of the agreement were made public:
 1. Acceptance of the “uniqueness of Naga history and culture” by the Indian Government
 2. The acceptance of the primacy of the Indian Constitution by the NSCN-IM.
- The NSCN-IM accepting the “primacy of the Indian Constitution” is a new development.
- Earlier its objective was to establish an independent sovereign state for the Naga people but now the demand is limited to creation of a

Greater Nagalim by integrating the Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

Background:

- **Shillong Accord, 1975:** Under the accord, Naga National Council (NNC) led by AngamiZapuPhizo, accepted Indian Constitution.

The Naga National Council was formed on February 2, 1946 to hold the Naga people together in one platform as there was no central authority prior to this.

- **NSCN, 1980:** Maoist guerrilla leaders IsakChisiSwu, ThuingalengMuivah and S SKhaplangcreated NSCN in 1980 to oppose the decision of NNC to accept the Indian Constitution.
- **Split between groups, 1988:** Following differences between the top leaders, the group split into the NSCN-IM and the NSCN-K, each accusing the other of undermining Naga interests.
- **NSCN (IM):** After Phizo's death in 1991, the NSCN-IM came to be recognised as the dominant voice of Naga assertion.
- **Ceasefire agreement, 1997:** NSCN-IM and Indian government signed a ceasefire agreement and entered into a peace process to resolve the conflict but even until today, fourteen years later, the 'solution' remains elusive. The NSCN-K also entered into a truce with government in 2001, but has not begun formal talks yet, and is supposedly based in Myanmar.

Framework agreement, 2015:

It contains that:

- Government recognizes the uniqueness of the Naga history and some special arrangements will have to be made for the Nagas, guaranteed under Article 371A of the Constitution.
- As per the report, Nagas had now reached a common understanding with the government that "boundaries of the States will not be touched" and "some special arrangements would be made for the Nagas, wherever they are." (Article 371A accords special status to Nagas)
- Though the government was moving forward with NSCN (IM), the integration, of the other relatively smaller but important armed groupswith the peace talks, like NSCN(K), was a challenge. NSCN (IM) had threatened to pull out from the talks if any other group was engaged by the government.

Significance of the agreement:

- **Sovereignty clause abdicated:** For the first time, NSCN (IM) has expunged its demand of attaining sovereignty for Nagas from Indian state.
- **Shift to peaceful path to conflict resolution:** The agreement is a shift from violence as a preferred method of achieving aims to peaceful dialogue as the Naga groups are regularly holding consultations with Government Interlocutor, R. N. Ravi on arriving at a settlement.

- **Mutual co-existence:** Framework Agreement will give the Nagas maximum sovereign power to grow into a developed political people and it will also strengthen the security of India.
- **Increased receptivity for Indian government:** The agreement proves the government's resolve of resolving the crisis as per the aspirations of Nagas and would generate more trust among Nagas for Indian state.

Criticisms of the Framework agreement:

- **No breakthrough:** The agreement has not been given the due importance:
 - The agreement has become another paper proposal between government and Naga groups as there is no progress since it was signed three years ago.
 - Centre signed a preamble in November 2017 with six Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) to hold further discussions to find a solution to the long-standing Naga issue. However, it is not clear how long it will take to get all the factions on the same page.
- **Secretive agreement:** The exact contours of the agreement have not been disclosed by the government, which has made other rebel groups restive and more active in the region, like increased attacks on Indian military establishments.
- **Failed to get in line NSCN (IM):** NSCN-IM operates the largest extortion network in Nagaland, running parallel government and is the biggest supplier of arms in the Northeast. But the agreement has failed to contain the illegal activities of NSCN (IM).
- **Naga autonomy not viable:** NSCN (IM) has retained the demand of complete autonomy to Nagas in other states which is a threat to the territorial integrity of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Furore in Manipur:** Naga insurgency is linked with insurgency in Manipur, where Naga rebels were active participants in civil unrest of 2016. The talk of "special arrangement for Nagas" has emboldened other factions in Manipur, who expect similar concessions by the government.
- **Agreement not representative:** The agreement has been signed by the government with NSCN (IM), keeping other important stakeholders, like NSCN (K) and tribes of Eastern Nagaland which demand a separate Frontier State, out of the loop, which raises doubts on the efficacy of the 2015 agreement.
- **Excludes important issues:** The agreement fails to touch some critical issues like demand of Nagas for a separate 'flag', non-codification of Naga customary law which promotes exploitation of local Nagas by Naga political groups and development deficit in Naga inhabited areas.

Naga insurgency issue is not a two-party binary and is not just limited to exercise of political control over Naga inhabited areas.

It needs an all comprehensive approach by the government which includes:

- **Wider representation:** Initiation of wider dialogue process including all Naga stakeholders and factions, including civil society groups. Representatives of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal, Myanmar and factions operating in these regions must be a part of fact finding team.
- **Confidence building:** Apart from dialogue, government should initiate confidence building measures through infrastructure creation in the form of health, education and employment generation programmes to address the development deficit in Northeast.
- **Safeguards for locals:** The government's responsibility extends to safeguarding interests of locals against exploitation by Naga factions. The government must get the clause of codification of Naga customary law within a stipulated time frame included in the agreement.
- **Autonomous Councils in Naga areas:**
 - Maximum autonomy may be accorded in ethnic, cultural and developmental realms to autonomous councils for all Naga areas in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and even Assam, through suitable amendment to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
 - Adequate fiscal powers should be devolved to such councils under final Naga settlement, with arrangements for direct transfer of funds to autonomous councils for Naga areas, a system distinct from current policies where transfers are made through state budgets.
- **Statutory pan-Naga Hoho:** A tribal cultural collective body in the form of a pan-Naga Hoho, as the supreme advisory body on Naga cultural matters, could be constituted under an act of parliament. This body would take care of the interests of the Nagas of Nagaland as well of Nagas living elsewhere in the country.
- **Securing the Northeast borders:** Naga rebels have secured a safe refuge in cross border areas of Myanmar from where they carry out hit and run operations, hence the borders should be effectively guarded or sealed in order to drive the rebels at the negotiation table.
- **Mainstreaming rebels:** Disarming rebels with some being absorbed in the state forces after re-training, and the rest being skilled for civil professions with state support could be adopted. Absorption of the re-trained insurgent cadres in the Assam Rifles, a Central force manned by different tribals, is a viable option.

10. South and east India offer more jobs for women

Why in news?

India's official jobs survey, conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) in 2011-12 indeed showed a sharp drop in the female labour force participation rate compared with the mid2000s.

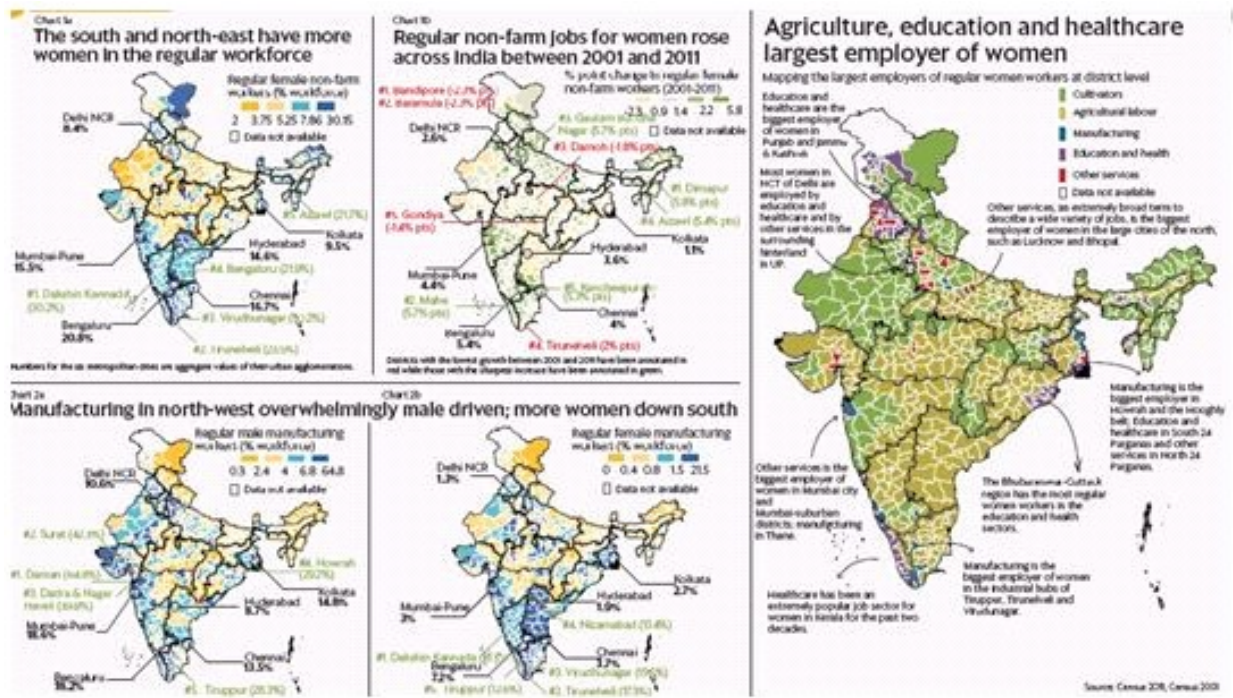
However, it is worth noting that the decline was largely concentrated in rural parts of the country, and seems to have been led primarily by agricultural workers

Fluctuations in female labour force;

- Research by labour economist Jayan Jose Thomas showed that the decline in female agricultural labour force between 2004-05 and 2009-10 followed a sharp rise in female agricultural labour force between 1999-00 and 2004-05, a period of agricultural distress.
- Thomas has argued that the decline in female agricultural labour force in the subsequent period was caused by an improvement in rural wages and living conditions, leading to withdrawal of women from the workforce.
- Indeed, between 1999-2000 and 2011-12, the change in India's female labour force participation rate is small. Census data also corroborates this.
- Between 2001 and 2011, the share of women in the labour force has remained roughly the same, with women accounting for one-third of the overall labour force. Thus, barring the fluctuations in the agricultural sector, women's participation in the economy has been relatively steady.
- In fact, the share of women workers in regular jobs has grown marginally over the past decade, census data shows. Nonetheless, women's overall participation rates in India's labour market have remained low compared to the rest of the world for the past two decades.
- How far this reflects 'choice' is a matter of debate given that such 'choices' are often driven by societal notions about women's role in society. A 2016 survey on social attitudes found that a significant share of men and women cutting across the rural-urban divide feel that married women whose husbands earn a good living should not work outside the home.
- Also, even if society has become more accepting of working women today, the balance of work at home remains tilted against the modern Indian woman, making it harder for her to get a job even if they may be working (at home) all the time. Yet, as with everything else in the country, there are sharp variations in women's participation in the labour market across India.

Women in India and participation in the Economy:

- Nationally, women in regular non-farm jobs account for less than one-fifth (19%) of the regular workforce and less than one-tenth (9%) of the overall workforce.
- But in the south and in several parts of the east (including the Northeast), the shares of women in regular non-farm jobs are significantly higher.
- These parts of the country also saw a greater increase in the share of



women in regular non-farm jobs. Among states, Manipur (33.3%), Mizoram (33%), and Meghalaya (31.7%) have the highest share of women in regular non-farm jobs. Among large states (with 10 million plus population), Tamil Nadu (25%), Karnataka (24.5%) and Andhra Pradesh (23.8%) have more women in regular nonfarm jobs than others.

- One reason why the share of women workers is relatively low in India is the relatively small size of its manufacturing sector. In large parts of Southeast Asia and even in neighboring Bangladesh, the growth of manufacturing fuelled women's participation in the labor market, improving a range of gender-related outcomes.
- In India, manufacturing growth has been relatively lower, and in parts of the country where manufacturing has grown rapidly, the impact on jobs has been mixed. While manufacturing has indeed raised women's participation in the workforce in the industrial belts of south India, in the northwestern belts, the effect has been relatively muted.
- It is worth noting that parts of the country with relatively better sex ratios and higher female literacy also tend to have on an average more women workers, suggesting that deep cultural norms may be at work to deny women the same opportunities as men
- Occupational segregation tends to diminish opportunities for women even more. Women tend to be concentrated in a few sectors, such as education and healthcare, and miscellaneous services, far more than men.
- Although the farm sector is the biggest employer of both men and women, among nonfarm sectors, education and healthcare is the biggest employer for women. In several districts of the country, this sector is the largest employer of women. In contrast, in no district of the country, this sector leads in the employment of men.

International Relations

11. MoU on Maritime issues between India and Denmark:

Signing of the MoU will pave way for both countries for exploration of areas for bilateral collaboration:

- Facilitating cross-border cooperation and investments between the maritime sectors of India and Denmark;
- Enabling both the countries to exchange expertise, publications, information, data and statistics to improve mutual capabilities for ensuring quality shipping; cooperation in the field of green maritime technology and shipbuilding, granting the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS) the status of Recognized Organization (RO), cooperation in the fields of maritime training and education;
- Research and development for sustained cooperation in the field of merchant shipping and maritime transport related matters; and
- It will also further extend and deepen the cooperation on the opportunities of mutual benefits to both the countries, at both bilateral and international level.

12. MoU between India and Japan on Development of Advanced Model Single Window:

The MoU would lead to cooperation between India and Japan on the development of 'Advanced Model Single Window' and its operationalization in Central and State Governments in India for taking administrative procedures necessary for business operations, and to develop a structure in which those procedures are completed in an expeditious manner, so as to accelerate India's effort to promote Ease of Doing Business in India. The 'Advanced Model Single Window' is based on the best practices in and outside India, with measurable parameters and identifies possible obstacles for establishment of the Single Window in India. It will thus, facilitate investments.

13. MoU between India and France on technical bilateral cooperation in the field of new and renewable energy:

India and France aim to establish the basis for a cooperative institutional relationship to encourage and promote technical bilateral cooperation on new and renewable issues on the basis of mutual benefit, equality and reciprocity. The technical cooperation will cover joint research working groups, pilot projects, and capacity building programs, study tour, case studies and the sharing of experience/expertise.

14. Signing of the TOR provides tax assistance to Swaziland:

It will give impetus to India's support in capacity building in tax matters in developing countries.

Background:

- The Tax Inspectors without Borders (TIWB) Programme which is jointly launched by UNDP and OECD is intended to support developing countries to strengthen national tax administrations through building audit capacity and to share this knowledge with other countries.
- The TIWB Programme aims to strengthen tax administrations of developing countries by transferring technical know-how and skills to their tax auditors, and through the sharing of general audit practices and dissemination of knowledge products with them.
- The TIWB Programme complements the efforts of the international community to strengthen cooperation on tax matters and contribute to domestic tax mobilisation efforts of developing countries.
- India has been supportive in capacity building in tax matters in developing countries.
- India being a global leader in this respect has a very important role to play in South-South Cooperation in tax matters.

15. Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojana

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojana. The features of the Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojana are:

- Under the scheme, a group of Indian diaspora will be taken on a government-sponsored tour of religious places in India twice a year
- The first batch of 40 people participated in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2019 held in Varanasi
- Those selected would be taken to religious places of all major religions in India
- The government will bear all the expenses including the airfare from their country of residence
- People of Indian-origin aged 45 to 65 can apply and avail the benefits under the scheme
- The Scheme accords first preference to people from Girmitiya countries such as Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica.

Girmitiya countries

Girmitiya's are the descendants of indentured Indian laborers brought to Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, East Africa, the Malay Peninsula, Caribbean and South America (Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname) to work on sugarcane plantations for the prosperity of the European settlers.

The term Girmitiya was coined by the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi who referred to himself as first Girmitiya. The countries where these indentured Indian labourers settled are known as Girmitiya countries.

Economy

16. RBI: on the horns of a dilemma

Why in news?

After changing the stance of the monetary policy in the October review meeting to 'calibrated tightening' from 'neutral', the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under Shaktikanta Das may choose to change the stance back to 'neutral' again in the February review meeting, after retail inflation grew at the slowest pace in 18 months. December retail inflation came in at 2.19% on the back of softening food and fuel prices.

Important Facts:

- The monetary policy committee (MPC) of the RBI decided to keep the key interest rate unchanged at 6.5% in the policy review meeting in December.
- Amid slowing retail inflation and sluggish economic growth, the clamour for a rate cut has gained momentum with the industry bodies, which met Mr. Das last week, suggesting a 50 basis point (bps) interest rate cut along with similar reduction in the cash reserve ratio requirements of banks. (100 basis points = 1 percentage point).
- If the RBI decides to lower the interest rate, a change in stance to 'neutral' will only be natural. A neutral stance would mean there is a scope for interest rates to move either way, as opposed to calibrated tightening which means rates can only go up.

Inflation assessment:

- Even if the RBI is guided by headline inflation numbers for policy-making purposes, the divergence in major components of inflation creates the dilemma of whether to lower the rate or not.
- The RBI Governor acknowledged that the divergences and volatility among the components becomes a challenge for assessment of inflation.
- Some of the major components like inflation in food, fuel, and inflation excluding food and fuel, have shown wide divergences.
- This apart, though food inflation has turned negative since October 2018 and fuel inflation has been highly volatile, inflation, excluding food and fuel, remains sticky at close to 6%.

Expansionary policy:

- There is scope for expansionary policy when inflation is low.
- Over the years, the fiscal deficit down and the fiscal prudence was very good.
- Inflation, which was in double digits, has been reduced to 2.2% and [is] under control.

- “But there are some distressed sectors like agriculture, MSMEs which are in need of desperate support from the government.
- The current situation specifically says liquidity is required in the economy, distress sectors need to be taken care of, banks need to expand credit, and there is a resource constraint from the government side.
- So, there is a scope for expansionary policy when inflation is under control,

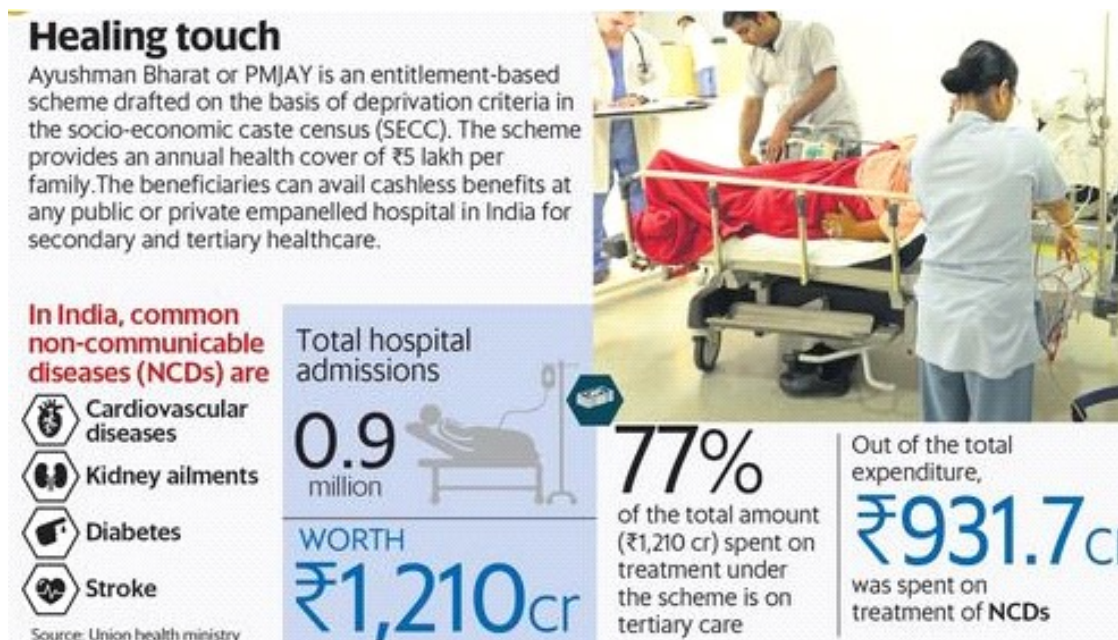
17. PMJAY spending gives a boost to govt's focus on tertiary care

Why in news?

According to the latest data available with ministry of health and family welfare, around 900,000 patients have availed treatment benefits worth ¹ 1,210 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana

Important facts

- 77% of money spent under the Ayushman Bharat scheme has been on tertiary healthcare.
- Out of the total expenditure, the maximum amount was spent on treatment of non-communicable diseases
- The top tertiary specialties for treatment based on admissions amount were cardiology, cardiothoracic and vascular surgery, orthopaedics, urology and neurosurgery



India's Non-Communicable Disease (NCDs) Burden

- According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s report 'India: Health of the Nation's States', 2018, the estimated proportion of all deaths due to NCDs has increased from 37.09% in 1990 to 61.8% in 2016.

- As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2015-16), 11% of women and 15% of men of age 15-49 are hypertensive.
- In India, the Global Disease Burden (GBD) 2015 ranks chronic kidney disease as the eighth leading cause of death.
- According to WHO, 8.7% Indian population in the age group of 20 and 70 years is diabetic.

About PMJAY:

- The PMJAY aims to provide health insurance to poor and vulnerable families by providing coverage from secondary and tertiary hospitalizations.
- It seeks to cover poorest 40% of India's population- 100 million families
- Under the scheme a health cover of ₹ 5 lakh per family per year is provided

18. SEBI Regulations and their attempt to limit Insider Trading

Why in news?

SEBI lays down mechanism to prevent insider trading on the recommendations of the TK Viswanathan committee

What is Insider Trading?

- Insider trading is the buying or selling of a security by someone who has access to nonpublic information about the security. Insider trading can be illegal or legal depending on when the insider makes the trade. It is illegal when the material information is still nonpublic.
- The term 'insider' has been defined under Regulation 2(e) of SEBI (Prohibition of Insider Trading) Regulations, 1992. Basically, the term 'insider' can be classified into three broad categories, which are:
 - Persons who are connected to the company,
 - Persons who were connected with the company,
 - Persons who are deemed to be connected to the company.

In order to become an insider a person has to fulfill three elements:

- The person should be a natural person or legal entity;
- The person should be connected person or deemed to be connected;
- Acquisition of the unpublished price sensitive information by virtue of such connection.

Mechanism to prevent insider trading

- According to SEBI Promoters will be held responsible for violation of insider trading norms, if they possess unpublished price-sensitive information (UPSI) regarding the company without any **"legitimate purpose"**.
- **Legitimate purpose** – Sharing of the UPSI by an insider with partners,

collaborators, lenders, customers, suppliers, merchant bankers, legal advisors, auditors, insolvency professionals or other advisors or consultants, provided that such sharing has not been carried out to evade or circumvent the prohibitions of these regulations.

- The board of directors to maintain digital database containing the names of such persons or entities with whom the information is shared.
- A promoter who does not hold any position on the board will not be considered a person having “Legitimate Purpose” to hold UPSI.
- Advisors who need access to UPSI, needs to be informed that the information shared with them is insider information and they should apply it only for the purpose meant.
- Identification data of recipients must be maintained.

Cases under spotlight: Cyrus Mistry, the former Chairman of Tata Sons, had alleged that information related to Tata group companies was being shared with Ratan Tata.

Recommendation of Kotak committee: Committee has recommended flow of unpublished price sensitive information (UPSI) shall be considered for ‘legitimate purpose’, and not an offence under the SEBI (Insider Trading) for those who:

- Is part of the promoter group?
- Has a nominee director on the board.
- The information should be pursuant to a formal agreement in accordance with the regulations.
- Communication of information must comply with the Insider Trading Regulations.

19. Detecting the movement of illegitimate funds is a challenging task

Money Laundering: Money laundering is a process of converting illegitimate money into legitimate money to avoid law enforcement agencies scrutiny

Illegitimate Money and Money Laundering: Illegitimate money drives the world of crime and money laundering is oxygen line which assists illegitimate money to thrive

Forms of Illegitimate Money:

- Black Money: resulting from tax evasion
- Pink Money: resulting from drug trafficking
- Red Money: resulting from crime acts

Stages of Money Laundering:

- Placement: refers to first use of illegitimate money which is in form of cash. For Eg. depositing illegitimate cash in bank or giving loan

- Layering: refers to creation of paper trail to conceal origin of illegitimate money. For Eg. taking loan against bank deposit and buying property A (first layer) and then after some time sell property A and buy property B (second layer) and so on. Profits generated is used to pay loan making difficult for law enforcement agency to unravel source of money
- Integration: refers to stage where number of layers leads to illegitimate money getting integrated into the financial system

Difficulties in Money Laundering Detection:

- Cases where money laundering reach advance layers in layering stage and in integrating stage
- Cases where money laundering structures involve various countries (tax havens), making it cumbersome and time consuming to trace the original ownership of money

Effects of Money Laundering:

- Negatively Impact legitimate business, law abiding citizen, global economy
- Costs nation's economic progress, security and social justice

International's Efforts to counter Money Laundering:

- 1988: United Nations convention (Vienna convention) to prevent drug-related money laundering: includes international cooperation to fight money laundering and relaxation in bank secrecy law to curb criminal use of financial system
- 1989: Basel Committee on Banking Supervision decided that banks should assist law enforcement agencies in tackling money laundering
- 1989: Financial Action Task Force (FATF) an intergovernmental body created for development and promotion of national and international policies to combat money laundering and terror financing. India became its member in 2010
- 1995: Egmont Group, consisting of Financial Intelligence Units (FIU) of 155 countries to enforce the international cooperation. India joined it in 2007

India's Effort to counter Money Laundering:

- 2005: Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 (PMLA): primary agency responsible for enforcing the act is the Directorate of Enforcement
- 2004: Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) : responsible for collecting intelligence from the financial sector and sharing it with investigative agencies

Geography and Environment

20. Flamingo festival

Why in news?

- The three-day annual Flamingo Festival was held at Pulicat Lake and Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary in Sullurpet mandal.
- Flamingo Festival is held every year to promote tourism in Pulicat and Nellapattu.

Key Facts:

- Flamingo Festival is being organised for the past 12 years. Migratory birds from Siberia have visited this place during winter season for breeding.
- Over 90000 migratory birds arrive at Pulicat region for breeding this season. Usually around 80 different avian species migrate to Pulicat for breeding.
- They hunt in shallow waters of lake and breed there. Once the breeding season concludes, they will go away to their native land with their offspring in tow.

Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary

- Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary is one of the biggest habitats for some hundreds of pelicans and other birds. It is located about 20 km north of the Pulicat Lake on the Andhra Pradesh-Tamil Nadu border.
- This sanctuary spread in an area about 459 hectares and plays important role in nesting of various birds especially migratory birds.
- Every year during winter season from October to March, different species of migratory birds, roosting migrants and some rare and endangered species from various parts of the world visit the habitat.

Pulicat Lake

- Pulicat Lake is the second largest brackish water lake or lagoon in India after Chilika Lake. It is located on border of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with over 96% of it in Andhra Pradesh and 4% in Tamil Nadu situated on Coromandal Coast in South India.
- The lake is the second largest brackish water ecosystem in the country after the Chilika lake in Odisha.
- The lake encompasses Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary. The barrier island of Sriharikota separates the lake from the Bay of Bengal and is home to Satish Dhawan Space Centre. Arani and Kalangi are two rivers which feed the lagoon.
- The Buckingham Canal, a navigation channel, is part of the lagoon on its western side.

21. Rajasthan's State bird may be extinct soon

Why in news?

The state bird of Rajasthan, Great Indian Bustard (GIB) has been declining in numbers over the past several years

Important Facts

Great Indian Bustard

- The Great Indian Bustard, one of the heaviest flying birds, was categorised as “critically endangered” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2011
- **Habitat in India:** Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary (Gurgaon), Desert National Park (Rajasthan) and the Lala-Parjau sanctuary in western Kutch (Gujarat)

Concerns:

- With rampant hunting and declining grasslands, the population of the Great Indian Bustard has dwindled.
- Project Bustard launched in 2013 by the Rajasthan government have not made significant progress.
- No progress has yet been made on the proposal for establishing a captive breeding centre at Sorsan in Kota district and a hatchery in Jaisalmer's Mokhala village for conservation

Suggestions

A group of wildlife conservationists has advocated setting up an incubation unit at Jaisalmer district's Sudasri (considered the sanctum sanctorum of the Desert National Park) so as to step up recruitment rate of the bird species.

22. REDD+ strategy

Context:

A new study by Delhi-based non-profit Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has revealed that Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), the programme initiated by the United Nations in 2005 to mitigate climate change through enhanced forest management in developing countries, has largely failed to achieve its objectives.

Background:

Since its formalization in 2006, REDD+ had emerged as the most prominent global mechanism to integrate the role of forests in climate change. It was touted as a win-win situation for biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and local livelihoods. More than 300 REDD+ initiatives have taken off since 2006. The mechanism has been enshrined in the Paris Agreement of 2015, and its implementation is transitioning from smaller, isolated projects to larger, jurisdictional programmes with support from bilateral and multilateral agencies.

Highlights of the Study:

- Large-scale finance for REDD+ has been a major issue as carbon markets have not materialised and international funding commitments for REDD+ have been much lower than expected.
- REDD+ implementation costs have been high and benefits for local communities from REDD+ projects have been minimal. There is need to rethink the REDD+ mechanism based on these experiences and the findings emerging from new research on the potential of forests to mitigate climate change. India's REDD+ strategy:
- Complying with the UNFCCC decisions on REDD+, India has prepared its National REDD+ Strategy.
- The Strategy builds upon existing national circumstances which have been updated in line with India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, Green India Mission and India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to UNFCCC.
- The strategy report has been prepared by Indian Council of Forestry Research & Education (ICFRE), Dehradun.

About REDD+:

- In simple terms, REDD+ means "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation", conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.
- REDD+ is a mechanism developed by Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- It creates a financial value for the carbon stored in forests by offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low carbon paths to sustainable development.
- Developing countries would receive results-based payments for results based actions.
- REDD+ goes beyond simply deforestation and forest degradation and includes the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

23. Compressed Bio-Gas**Context:**


Government is promoting the use of Compressed Biogas (CBG) as an alternative green transport fuel, which is purified and compressed biogas, produced through a process of anaerobic decomposition from various waste/ biomass sources including Municipal solid waste.

About Compressed Natural Gas and Governments Approach:

Towards promoting CBG, Oil PSUs have launched 'Sustainable Alternative towards Affordable Transportation' i.e. 'SATAT' initiative (Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas).

Under this initiative, Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) and GAIL have invited Expression of interest (EOI) to procure CBG from potential entrepreneurs for establishment of 5000 CBG plants across the country. To increase indigenous production of ethanol, the Government has taken many steps:

1. Re-introduction of administered price mechanism,
2. Opening of alternate route for ethanol production,
3. Regular Interaction with States, Industries Development and Regulation (IDR) Act Amendment, Interest Subvention scheme namely – “Scheme for augmenting and enhancing ethanol production capacity”,
4. National Policy on Biofuels – 2018,

ALTERNATIVE FUEL	
<p>NATURAL GAS It's a gaseous fuel, 87-92% of which is methane but may also contain ethane, propane, and heavier hydrocarbons</p>	<p>IN SOME PLACES, a sulphur-based odourant is normally added to CNG to facilitate leak detection</p>
<p>COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS (CNG) Natural gas used as fuel for vehicles, compressed by applying pressure</p>	<p>NATURAL GAS IS lighter than air and will normally dissipate in case of a leak</p>
<p>VEHICLES FUELLED BY NATURAL GAS operate according to the same principles as vehicles with standard combustion engines: fuel is mixed with air and fed into a cylinder where it is ignited by a spark plug</p>	
	

The first 2G ethanol bio-refinery to be set up by Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited in Bathinda, Punjab. The Government has notified National Policy on Biofuels-2018 under which Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare under Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has been entrusted with the task of production of plant materials through Nurseries and plantations for biofuels in coordination with other Ministries.

Advantages:

- It causes lesser corrosion and wear to the body of engine.

- It is environmentally benign due to lower emissions of carbon and particulate matter per equivalent distance travelled; and being lighter than air.
- It is safer in case there is a spill.

Way Forward:

There are some limits to the CNG cars too. For example, if one wants to drive outside Delhi or Mumbai, they cannot complete the journey only on CNG, especially for taxi companies and they have to fill up petrol at some point which makes the journey expensive. Diesel variant of such cars would have made sense, but the technology of CNG kits is limited to petrol cars (petrol-CNG) right now. The government has to have a proper roadmap for such vehicles in future.

24. Western Ghats

Context:

The Committee on Government Assurances in the Rajya Sabha has urged the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to constitute a committee to address the issues and grievances of local people in Western Ghats. The Committee on Government Assurances has submitted a report in this regard.

Committee and its Highlights

The Committee on Government Assurances had examined issues regarding the categorization of the Western Ghats as ESA as per the recommendations of two

Committees led by Madhav Gadgil and K. Kasturirangan. The Committee on Government Assurances examined 62 assurances during its deliberations with various State governments and other organizations, and had visited Pune, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru, before preparing its report.

- Over 56,000 square kilometers of ecologically sensitive areas (ESA) in the Western Ghats could not be earmarked as 'no-go' zones due to State governments' 'insensitivity'.
- The recent monsoon floods in Kerala and parts of Karnataka should serve as alarm bells for the administrations in the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, which have failed to mark ESA in the Western Ghats.



- The committee is of the view that implementation of the recommendations of the Kasturirangan report is only possible with active support of local population.
- It also requires consultation with the State government at micro level to achieve the objectives of saving the Western Ghats.

Ecologically Sensitive Areas:

- ESAs are defined as those areas 'that are ecologically and economically important, but vulnerable even to mild disturbances, and hence demand careful management'. There are three important categories of attributes that need to be considered in defining the ecological salience /significance/ sensitivity of an area:
 1. Abiotic attributes,
 2. biotic attributes and
 3. Anthropological or socio-cultural attributes.
- Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 (EPA) gives power to the Central Government i.e. the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to take all measures that it feels are necessary for protecting and improving the quality of the environment and to prevent and control environmental pollution.
- To meet this objective, the Central Government can restrict areas in which any industries, operations or processes or class of industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards. Thus the government came up with the concept of Eco Sensitive Zones.

25. Protest against proposed bird sanctuary in Manipur

Important Facts:

- Manipur Government has proposed a bird sanctuary at Loktak lake in Bishnupur district
- The people in the village are protesting because once the bird sanctuary will be established, the fishing will be banned in the lake and poor people who drive their livelihood will starve to death.
- The villagers of Thingnunggei are poor and they have no other means of earning a livelihood except for catching fish and plucking vegetables from the lake.

Why Government proposed bird sanctuary:

- Loktak is largest freshwater lake in India and attract thousands of Migratory birds.
- However, in a recent year, there has been sharp decline in their number which has forced the state government to provide protection to these migratory species.

Reason for declining number of Birds:

- Poaching is the one of the main reason cited
- Human intrusion and Hydro Electric power projects are also responsible for decline.

About Loktak lake:

- Largest freshwater Lake in North-East India
- It is known for its circular floating swamps (called phumdis in the local language).
- The Phumdis are collection of heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matter.
- The lake was initially designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention and it was also listed under the Montreux Record
- Keibul Lamjao National Park located at the south western part of the lake. It is the world's only floating national park and is home to the endangered Manipuri brow-antlered deer, Sangai (State Animal)
- Keibul Lamjao National Park was initially declared as a Sanctuary in 1966, was subsequently declared a National Park in 1977

Science and Technology

26. Methanol-blending in petrol reduces carbon dioxide emission: ARAI study

Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) study observation:

Methanol (M-15) blended with petrol used in BS IV cars lead to reduced CO₂ emission in real world condition

Significance of Study:

- Provide evidence based alternative fuel option to India's huge crude oil import worth 7 Lakh Crore per year
- Base for Indigenous pollution-free technology to substitute import and save money
- Adopting methanol in this scale would bring down pollution in country by more than 40%
- India's can have its own Indigenous fuels at cost about 19/liter which would be about 30% cheaper than any available fuel

Why Methanol?

- Methanol can be produced from Natural Gas, Indian High Ash Coal, Bio-mass, MSW, stranded and flared gases
- Methanol is a clean burning fuel which can replace both petrol & diesel in transportation, LPG
- Methanol burns efficiently producing no particulate matter and almost nil (SO)_x and (NO)_x emissions

Niti Aayog Road Map for Methanol Blending:

- NITI Aayog has drawn comprehensive plan to replace 20% of crude import from methanol
- Production of methanol from Indian high ash coal from indigenous technology would reduce CO₂ emission and meet Paris Agreement target of CO₂ sequestration (2.5-3bn tonne)
- Almost 40% of Methanol Production can be produced through bio-mass, stranded gas and municipal solid waste

Government Efforts:

- Government aims to increase fuel blending to 20% by 2030
- Ensured assistance in all research efforts in methanol blending
- Government has commissioned Scania buses running on 100% bio-ethanol

27. India ranks third in research on artificial intelligence

Why in news?

An analysis by research agency Itihaasa, has ranked India third in the world in terms of high quality research publications in artificial intelligence (AI)

Methodology of the analysis:

The agency had computed the number of citable documents in the field of AI between 2013 and 2017 as listed out by Scimago.

Note: Scimago a compendium that tracks trends in scientific research publications

Observations

- China ranked first with 37, 918 documents followed by the United States with 32,421 documents and India with 12,135 documents
- When analysed by taking into account the number of times an article is referenced (citations), India ranked only fifth, behind the United Kingdom, Canada, the U.S. and China.
- The Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Information Technology were among the key centres for AI research.
- The article observes that India must work at improving the quality of its research output in AI

28. ISRO's 2019 agenda

Context: The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has proposed 32 missions in 2019 including the Chandrayaan-2 project to the moon. Of these, 14 are launch vehicles, 17 satellites and one technology demonstration mission.

About ISRO

- Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) was established in 1969. Aryabhata - First Indian Satellite was launched on April 19, 1975. It was launched from the former Soviet Union.
- It provided India with the basis of learning satellite technology and designing. Since its beginning, ISRO has created a special place for itself in the space technology world through continuous low cost innovations.
- ISRO has made India proud in various missions such as Mangalyaan, Chandrayaan-1 etc. ISRO is planning to send Indians to space through its Gaganyaan mission in 2022. Mission 2019 In 2019, ISRO is trying to implant various innovations in its technology.
- Now, ISRO is working on a new technology where life to this "dead" last stage of PSLV, also called PS4 stage, for six months after its launch.
- This will be the most cost-effective way to perform experiments in space as there is no need to launch a separate rocket for the purpose.

Launch pad

ISRO has several missions planned for 2019. A look at some of them:

■ AFP



- The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle is likely to undergo trial flights
- GISAT, the first Indian geo-Imaging satellite to work in the geostationary 36,000 km orbit, is planned for take-off during September-November
- Heavy-lift MkIII launcher will put to orbit the lunar landing mission Chandrayaan-2
- It will undergo human rating for being able to orbit around Earth with 3 Indian astronauts

Its Achievements:

- Among the space agency's achievements in 2018 were launch of the heaviest satellite GSAT-29 (3,423 kg) on November 14 and building the heaviest communication satellite GSAT-11 (5,854 kg), launched on December 5 onboard the Arianespace space agency's rocket from French Guiana on the north Atlantic coast of South America.
- ISRO has received approval for the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV), along with a dedicated launch pad, and is working on reusable launch vehicle development.
- The space agency has been working on national programmes for the socio-economic security and sustainable development, including that of national geo-spatial energy information system, enhanced earth observational capabilities, real-time disaster management like during floods in Kerala and north eastern states last year.

ISRO has also tied up with the Ministry of Home Affairs to provide technical support for establishing an integrated control room for emergency management.

29. Japan satellite blasts into space to deliver artificial meteors

Objective:

Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) conducted initial experiment for celestial show called "shooting stars on demand" service over Hiroshima early 2020; World's first artificial meteor shower.

Physical Make-up and Working:

- JAXA launched small Epsilon 4 rocket containing seven micro satellites developed by Startup AEL Co. Ltd

- Micro-satellites payload contains 400 tiny chemical balls which glows brightly as it hurtle through atmosphere simulating meteor shower
- Such chemical balls would shine for several seconds before they are completely burnt well before reaching earth

Innovation:

- Possibility to simulate multi-colored flotilla of shooting star through tinkering the chemical ingredients in balls to change colors
- Glow brightness would be visible even in light polluted metropolis of Tokyo
- Micro satellites would also demonstrate various “innovative” technologies

Future Step: ALE Co. Ltd aims to target “whole world” with its products and plans to build stockpile of shooting stars in space which can be delivered across world

30. Fuel cells versus LI batteries is much heat, a lot of gas

Why in news?

Article presents the debate between lithium-ion (LI) battery and the hydrogen fuel cell, the two important sources of power to drive the motor in an electric vehicle (EV).

Important Facts:

Why there is debate over source of power:

- To meet the reduction target which was decided during the Paris climate deal, the world requires ending the hegemony of Internal Combustion engine in the next decade and replacing it with electric vehicles.
- There are currently two important sources of power to drive the motor in an electric vehicle (EV).
 - **The first is a lithium-ion (LI) battery** – LI is widely known and is the source of EV power for the Tesla range of cars (Hybrid Cars)
 - **Second a hydrogen fuel cell** – Hydrogen power is available in a few cars like the Toyota Mirai, Hyundai Nexa, and Honda Clarity.
- Prevailing debate is over the use of source of power in term of energy efficiency and the GHG impact to drive the electric vehicles in future.

Hydrogen Fuel Cells: Fuel cells use an electrochemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen, catalyzed by platinum, to produce energy.

Advantage of Fuel Cell:

- Electricity produced from renewable sources.
- Production of energy is cheap comparatively.
- Energy so produced will leave no impact on environment as exhaust is the combination product—water.

Challenges and Disadvantage:

- The challenge is to produce hydrogen in an energy-efficient manner, transport it to distribution points and store it in gaseous or liquid form in a car.
- Hydrogen is abundant and can be made from water, but process is expensive as it is created through either electrolysis or cracking hydrocarbon and can create pollution.
- Electrolysis involves splitting water into its constituent components of hydrogen and oxygen, an inefficient process that takes an enormous amount of energy (much less efficient than creating electricity using batteries)
- Cracking hydrocarbons involves making hydrogen from non-renewable natural gas in a process that creates enormous CO₂ emissions

About Lithium-Ion Batteries: In Lithium-ion batteries, the chemical energy is converted electric energy.

Advantage:

- Batteries are rechargeable (e.g. batteries used in phones)
- Large amount of energy can be stored into a relatively small space.
- They can provide the instant torque to the electric motor.

Disadvantages:

- Long charging time.
- Batteries are also expensive.
- Non-Availability of quick-charge stations.

Challenges for India:

- India largely dependent on imported energy.
- Lack of research and development in India on either EVs or Fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs).
- India does not provide a meaningful subsidy for either EVs or FCEVs.
- The government has proposed an increased subsidy under a scheme called Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME II).
- The aggregate budget is said to be ₹ 5,500 crores but exactly how that will apply to individual vehicles is not clear and the bill has not yet been passed in Parliament.

Way Forward:

- India must take a concrete steps towards incentivizing both EVs and FCEVs.
- Intervention is required in research and development under Indian conditions with a particular focus on affordability.

31. How Hazira gun factory adds to India's firepower

Why in news?

Prime Minister of India has recently inaugurated Larsen & Toubro's Armoured Systems Complex (ASC) at Hazira in Gujarat

Important Facts

- ASC is a complex to manufacture and integrate advanced armoured platforms such as self-propelled howitzers, infantry combat vehicles, future-ready combat vehicles and battle tanks.
- At the ASC in Hazira- the first private facility in the country where the K9 Vajra self-propelled Howitzer guns will be manufactured.
- L&T had signed a transfer of technology contract for guns with South Korean company Hanwha Corporation.

How will the ASC contribute to make in India?

- The K9 Vajra-T systems are being developed with 50% indigenous content (by value).
- It involves local production of over 13,000 components per gun system through a supply chain of about 400 local tier 1 manufacturers and more than 100 small and medium enterprises.

How will K9 Vajra-T help the Indian Army?

Advantages of K9 Vajra:

- deep fire support with longer firing range,
- qualitative superiority to overcome a numerical inferiority
- higher rate of fire and accuracy,
- effective and reliable fire support in all kinds of circumstances
- Higher mobility and protection.

Miscellaneous

32. Hyderabad's Chowmahalla Palace, fit for the Nizams once again

Why in news?

Restoration of the Chowmahalla Palace to its age-old grandeur is being planned

Historical Significance:

- Chowmahalla palace is palace of the Nizams of Hyderabad state and seat of the Asaf Jahi dynasty
- Chowmahalla construction began in late 18th century and completed in mid of 19th century during reign of Asaf Jah V
- Memorable moment of palace was coronation of Mukarram Jah Nizam VII in 1967

About Asaf Jahi Dynasty:

- Dynasty was founded by Mir Qamar-ud-Din Siddiqi, a viceroy of the Deccan under the Mughal emperors from 1713 to 1721
- Mir Qamar-ud-Din Siddiqi took title of Asaf Jahi in 1724 and ruled independently thereafter on account of weakening Mughal influence in Deccan region

Restoration Efforts:

- Restoration work of palace was started in 2000 by Princess Esra, former wife of Mukarram Jah
- Multi disciplinary team of architects, historian, conservationist and urban designer took part in reviving the historic complexes within the palace

UNESCO Recognition:

- Chowmahalla received the coveted UNESCO Asia Pacific Heritage Merit award for cultural heritage conservation in 2010

About UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation:

- Recognizes exemplary efforts by individuals and organizations to restore or conserve structures, places and properties of heritage value in the region since 2000
- It aims to encourage other property owners to undertake conservation projects within their communities, either independently or by seeking public-private partnerships

33. Kumbh Mela

Kumbh Mela or **Kumbha Mela** is a mass Hindu pilgrimage of faith in which Hindus gather to bathe in a sacred or holy river.

Traditionally, four fairs are widely recognized as the Kumbh Melas:

1. Prayagraj Kumbh Mela,
2. Haridwar Kumbh Mela,
3. Nashik-Trimbakeshwar Simhastha, and
4. Ujjain Simhastha.

These four fairs are held periodically at one of the following places by rotation:

- a) Allahabad (Prayagraj),
- b) Haridwar,
- c) Nashik district (Nashik and Trimbak),
- d) Ujjain.

The main festival site is located on the banks of a river: the Ganges (Ganga) at Haridwar; the confluence (Sangam) of the Ganges and the Yamuna and the invisible Sarasvati at Allahabad; the Godavari at Nashik; and the Shipra at Ujjain. Bathing in these rivers is thought to cleanse a person of all their sins.¹

- At any given place, the Kumbh Mela is held every 12 years. There is a difference of around 3 years between the Kumbh Melas at Haridwar and Nashik; the fairs at Nashik and Ujjain are celebrated in the same year or one year apart.
- The exact date is determined, following the Vikram Samvat calendar and the principles of Jyotisha, according to a combination of zodiac positions of the Jupiter, the Sun and the Moon. At Nashik and Ujjain, the Mela may be held while a planet is in Leo (Simha in Hindu astrology); in this case, it is also known as **Simhastha**.
- At Haridwar and Allahabad, a *Maha* (“Great”) Kumbh Mela is held every 12 years, with an *Ardha* (“Half”) Kumbh Mela six years later. The priests at other places consider their local fairs to be Kumbh Melas; for example, the Mahamaham festival at Kumbakonam, held every 12 years, is described as a Kumbh Mela. Other places where fairs have been called Kumbh Mela include Kurukshetra and Sonepat.
- The exact age of the festival is uncertain. According to medieval Hinduism, Lord Vishnu spilled drops of Amrita (the drink of immortality) at four places, while transporting it in a kumbha (pot). These four places are identified as the present-day sites of the Kumbh Mela. The name “Kumbh Mela” literally means “kumbha fair”. It is known as “Kumbh” in Hindi (due to schwa deletion); in Sanskrit and some other Indian languages; it is more often known by its original name “Kumbha”.
- The festival is the largest peaceful gathering in the world, and considered as the “world’s largest congregation of religious pilgrims”. There is no precise method of ascertaining the number of pilgrims, and the estimates of the number of pilgrims bathing on the most auspicious day may vary.

- It has been inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

34. ASI finds 2,300-year-old artefacts in Odisha

Why in news?

Archeological Survey of India finds 2,300-year-old artefacts in Odisha

Important Facts:

- Artefacts believed to be 2,300-year-old at the Asurgarh Fort in Odisha's Kalahandi district.
- It reveals a number of brick structures. Wedge shaped bricks are also noticed in the circular structures.
- Most of the structures have terracotta tiles with grooves and hole for socketing.
- It is assumed that Asurgarh people during that time probably used stone rubbles and tile fragments for flooring their houses and the streets.
- Silver punch marked coins, silver and copper toe ring and earrings, beads of carnelian, jasper, beryl, garnet, agate and coral has also been found.
- Other discovered artefacts include, glass bangle pieces of different designs and colours, sling balls, pestle, iron equipment like small wheel, ring, and arrow head.
- Silver punch mark coins indicates about long distant trade and association of hinterland people with seafaring people.

About Asurgarh Fort

- Fort is surrounded by moat on its northern, eastern and southern sides.
- Sandul river flows to the north.
- The fort had four wide gates in four cardinal directions and at each gate was installed one guardian deity.
- Deities are named as Ganga at the eastern gate, Kalapat at the western, Vaishnavi at the northern and Dokri at the southern gate

35. 'Operation Kabaddi':

Why in news?

Former army commanders have revealed the details of this operation in the book, Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics.

What is it?

- It was to be the largest planned operation by the Indian Army to end cross-LoC infiltration by capturing at least 25 selected Pakistani posts

along the Line of Control (LoC) in September 2001. However, owing to some issues it was not carried out.

- Operation Kabaddi would include a “wide spectrum of evolving punitive operations such as the execution of deliberate fire assaults to destroy military and terrorist points, and area targets across the LoC; ambushes and raids across the LOC; and company, battalion, and brigade-sized deliberate offensive attacks to capture objectives of tactical importance across the LoC that would improve the Indian Army’s counter-insurgency (CI) posture.”
- The objective of Operation Kabaddi was to change the geography of the LoC with access to tactical points there, which would then help the Army tackle the infiltration of militants by the Pakistani side.

36. Maniyaro:

- MANIYARO is a variety of folk dance of Gujarat.
- It carries the sentiments of heroism in the Dandiya RAAS of Maher community in Gujarat.
- In Gujarat and especially in Saurashtra region, generally Men wear traditional costumes, having preset sized wooden sticks and present Maniyaro.
- Maniyaro is usually being played with the ancient instruments like Drum, Flute, and RAVAN Hattho etc.
- Lyrics of the songs that are being sung in Maniyaro are sometimes flowing enjoyment, at times expressing the feeling of separation and sometimes inspiring heroism.

37. India’s second defence industrial corridor:

Why in news?

Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor has been inaugurated.

Key facts:

- The corridor is the second defence corridor being set up by the government to support various defence manufacturing units. The first one is being established in Uttar Pradesh.
- The corridor is also referred to as the Tamil Nadu Defence Production Quad as the nodal cities form a quadrilateral with one of them at the centre.
- The key aim behind setting up defence industrial corridors is to ensure connectivity among various defence industrial units. The development of the defence corridor will help facilitate a well-planned and efficient industrial base that will lead to an increased defence production in the country.

38. Small Wood brown butterfly:

What is it?

After a span of 120 long years, researchers in Sikkim have rediscovered the Small Wood brown butterfly species from Bakhim in Khanchendzonga National Park.

Key facts:

- The Small Wood brown butterfly, scientifically known as *Lethe nicetella* is named after its brown-coloured wings patched with white round spots.
- It is amongst the smallest members of the genus *Lethe*, with wings that are up to 50 millimeters long.
- The species is endemic to the eastern Himalayas and occurs in forests lying between elevations of 1,800-2,800 metres.
- Distribution: Across the world, species of *Lethe* are found in Sunda Islands, Japan, Siberia, Himalayas and peninsular India. Of the 41 species of *Lethe* that are found in India, 32 species are reported from Sikkim alone.

39. Shiva kumara Swami

Why in news?

- Shiva kumara Swami, the 111-year-old seer of Siddaganga Mutt, Karnataka passed away.
- He was popularly known as “Nadedaduva Devaru” (Walking God).
- The Lingayat seer was known for his humanitarian work in education.
- A Padma Bhushan awardee, the seer founded over 125 institutions and was a follower of the Virakta Lingayat tradition.
- He had followers across caste and religious barriers.
- He became a seer of the mutt in 1941, had a long stint of 78 years.

OUR BRANCHES

Hyderabad : Indira Park

Domalguda

Ph: 040-27620440, +91 991 244 1137

Email: ias.analog@gmail.com

Hyderabad : Madhapur

100 Ft Road, Ayyappa Society,

Ph: 040-48522831, +91 990 856 4438

Email : ias.analog@gmail.com

Vizag : Dwaraka Nagar

Office-3, 3rd Floor, GK Towers,

Ph: 0891- 2546686, +91 998 513 6789

Email : ias.analogvizag@gmail.com

Hyderabad : Ashok Nagar

Above OBC Bank

Ph: 8121046686, +91 991 244 1138

Email : ias.analog@gmail.com

New Delhi : Old Rajinder Nagar

57/12, Third Floor,

Ph : 011- 49785868, +91 880 028 3132

Email : ias.analog.delhi@gmail.com

Guntur : Arundalpet

2nd Floor, Eluri Mansion 2/1,

Ph: +91 996 335 6789

Email : ias.analog.guntur@gmail.com

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Fathima Zeba
HT No : 786820

83



Srivastava
HT No : 29379

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Mourya
HT No : 255748

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Mishra
HT No : 262146

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