



इवलक़ाइव
Comprehensive **NEWS** Analysis

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Polity & Governance

1. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

Context:

The Government has launched a new Central Sector Scheme Pradhan Mantri **K**isan **S**amman **N**idhi (PM-KISAN) to provide income support to all Small and Marginal landholding farmer families to supplement their financial needs for procuring various inputs related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs. Under the Scheme, the entire financial liability towards transfer of benefit to targeted beneficiaries will be borne by Government of India

- This is a Central Sector Scheme and will be funded fully by the Government of India.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare will transfer the benefit directly into the accounts of the beneficiaries. The amount will be credited into the account of the beneficiary within 48 hours of its release by the government.

Significance:

Around 12 crore small and marginal farmer families are expected to benefit from this. It would not only provide assured supplemental income to the most vulnerable farmer families, but would also meet their emergent needs especially before the harvest season. It would pave the way for the farmers to earn and live a respectable living.

Is Aadhar Mandatory?

Farmers under PM-KISAN, must have Aadhaar identification to get the money from the second instalment, which would be paid by July 2019. However, this would not be compulsory for the first instalment expected to be disbursed by March 31, before the Lok Sabha polls.

2. Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

Context:

The Union Home Ministry has banned the *Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen (TuM)* under the *Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act* for promoting terrorism and radicalizing and recruiting youth for terrorist activities in India. Set up in the 1990s, *TuM* claims to be fighting for the "liberation of Kashmir."

- This law is aimed at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
- Its main objective is to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India.
- The Act makes it a crime to support any secessionist movement or to support claims by a foreign power to what India claims as its territory.

- The UAPA, framed in 1967, has been amended twice since: first in 2008 and then in 2012.

Unlawful activities prevention act impinging on personal liberty

The definition of unlawful activities includes disclaiming or questioning the territorial integrity of India, and causing disaffection against India. These words are staggeringly vague and broad.

- Membership of unlawful and terrorist organizations is a criminal offence, and in the latter case, it can be punished with life imprisonment. But the Act fails entirely to define what membership entails. Chargesheets under the UAPA often cite the seizure of books or magazines, and presence at meetings, as clinching evidence of membership.
- Supreme Court attempted to narrow the scope of these provisions, holding that membership was limited to cases where an individual engaged in active incitement to violence. Anything broader than that would violate the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and of association. The application of this ruling however has been patchy and arbitrary.

No sunset clause

- Unlike its predecessors, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 and Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, both of which had provisions for mandatory periodic review, or a sunset clause, the UAPA has no such provision.
- In addition, the Act authorizes the creation of special courts, with wide discretion to hold in-camera proceedings (closed-door hearings) and use secret witnesses but contains no sunset clause and provisions for mandatory periodic review.
- The 2008 amendments to the UAPA give Indian authorities heightened powers to detain persons without charge, which places them at greater risk of mistreatment and violates basic due process rights.

Way Forward:

It is imperative to eliminate excessive discretion and there is a need for judicial review under the act in order to realize the personal liberty of all the citizens of the modern India .

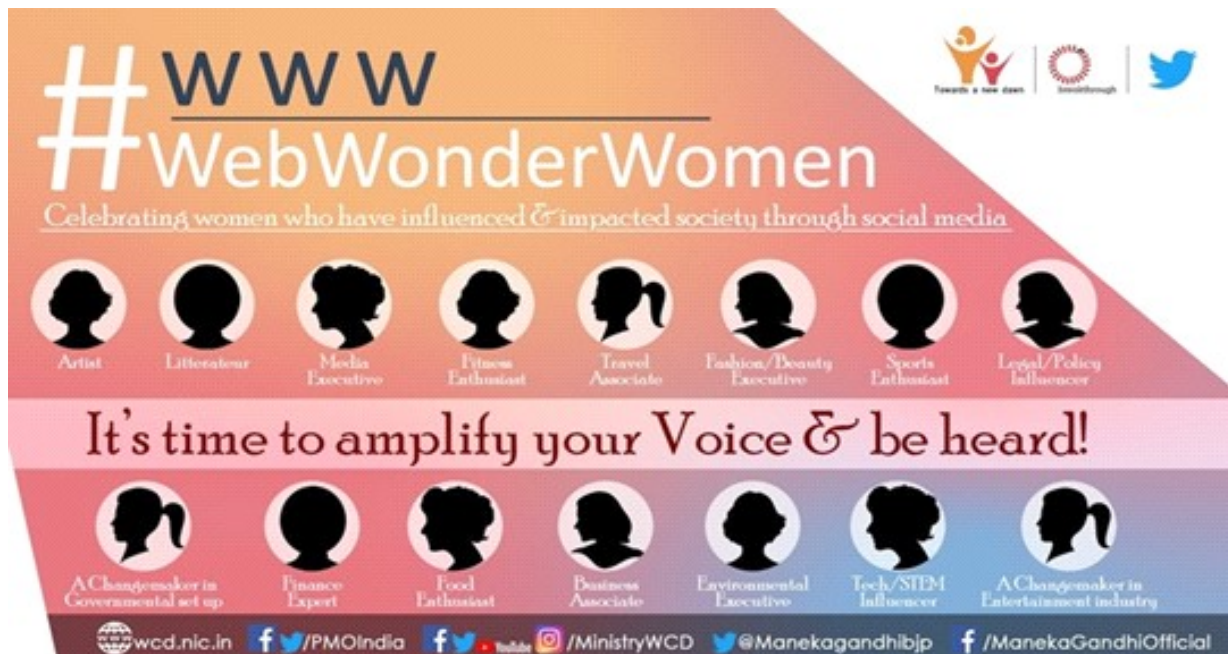
3. Web Wonder Woman Campaign

Context:

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched an online campaign, ‘#www: Web- Wonder Women’.

About the campaign:

- Indian women have always been enterprising and have created a positive impact on society with their hard-work, experience and knowledge.



- #www: WebWonderWomen is a campaign to specially honour and encourage such voices that have in their own capacity driven a positive impact on social media platforms.
- The Campaign's Partners aim to recognize the fortitude of Indian women stalwarts from across the globe that has used the power of social media to run positive & niche campaigns to steer a change in society.

Rules for Nomination

- The Campaign invites Entries via Nominations from across the world, as per the laid out criteria.
- Indian-origin women, working or settled anywhere in the world, are eligible for nomination.
- The shortlisted entries will be open for public voting on Twitter and the finalists will be selected by a specialized panel of judges.
- Nominations have been invited in a large number of categories including Health, Media, Literature, Art, Sports, Environmental protection, fashion among others.

4. Renukaji Multipurpose Dam Project

Context:

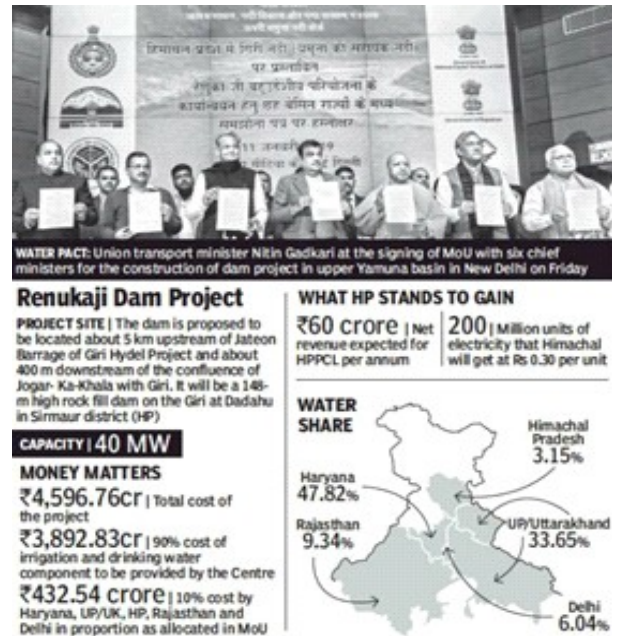
An agreement for Renukaji Dam Multipurpose Project was signed among six states- Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

Renukaji Multi Purpose Project:

- Three storage projects are proposed to be constructed on the river Yamuna and two of its tributaries - Tons and Giri in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh of Upper Yamuna Basin. These include Lakhwar project on river Yamuna in Uttarakhand , Kishau on

river Tons in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and Renukaji on river Giri in Himachal Pradesh.

- These three projects were identified as National Projects in 2008 under which 90% funding of the cost of irrigation & drinking water component will be provided by the Govt. of India as central assistance and the rest 10% cost of the irrigation and drinking water component will be borne by the beneficiary states.



5. Triple Talaq and Citizenship Bill lapse

Context :

The contentious Citizenship (amendment) Bill and the one on banning TripleTalaq lapsed after it failed to get approval in Rajya Sabha.

When will a Bill Lapse in Indian Parliament?

Cases when a bill lapse:

1. A bill originated in the Lok Sabha but pending in the Lok Sabha – lapses.
2. A bill originated and passed by the Rajya Sabha but pending in Lok Sabha – lapses.
3. A bill originated and passed by the Lok Sabha but pending in the Rajya Sabha – lapses.
4. A bill originated in the Rajya Sabha and returned to that House by the Lok Sabha with amendments and still pending in the Rajya Sabha on the date of the dissolution of Lok Sabha- lapses.

Cases when a bill does not lapse:

1. A bill pending in the Rajya Sabha but not passed by the Lok Sabha does not lapse.
2. If the president has notified the holding of a joint sitting before the dissolution of Lok Sabha, does not lapse.
3. A bill passed by both Houses but pending assent of the president does not lapse.
4. A bill passed by both Houses but returned by the president for reconsideration of Rajya Sabha does not lapse.
5. Some pending bills and all pending assurances that are to be examined by the Committee on Government Assurances do not lapse on the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.

Other cases:

- Adjournment (of a sitting) does not affect the bills or any other business pending before the House and the same can be resumed when the House meets again.
- Prorogation (of a session) does not affect the bills or any other business pending before the House. However, all pending notices (other than those for introducing bills) lapse on prorogation and fresh notices have to be given for the next session.
- When Lok Sabha is dissolved, all business including bills, motions, resolutions, notices, petitions and so on pending before it or its committees lapse.

6. Swachh Shakti 2019**Context:**

Recently Swachh Shakti 2019 Awards were distributed by the PM on the occasion of Swachh Shakti 2019 programme.

Swachh Shakti Programme:

- The Swachh Shakti Programme is a national event which aims to bring in to focus the leadership role played by rural women in Swachh Bharat Mission.
- Launched in 2017, the Programme is a part of ongoing activities under the aegis of the Swachh Bharat Mission, launched on October 2, 2014 by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to achieve a clean and Open Defecation Free (ODF) India by October 2, 2019.
- The programme is attended by women panchs and sarpanchs from across the country.
- The first edition of Swachh Shakti programme was launched from Gandhinagar, Gujarat by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on International Women's Day 2017. The second edition was launched from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

7. Rajasthan to scrap Education Criteria**Context:**

The Rajasthan Assembly has passed two Bills which seek to end the minimum education criterion for panchayat and civic poll candidates—Rajasthan Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2019 and the Rajasthan Municipality (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

Background:

- The education criteria was introduced by the previous government, which stipulated that for contesting the zila parishad or panchayat samiti polls, a contestant must have a minimum qualification of secondary education (Class X).

- To contest the sarpanch elections, an aspirant from the general category must have passed Class VIII and a SC/ST aspirant must have passed Class V.

Arguments of Supreme Court:

- Even Haryana had passed a similar law mandating minimum education qualification for those contesting in Panchayat Raj Institutions. The constitutional validity of this law of Haryana was questioned in the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court had upheld the constitutional validity of the law enacted by Haryana government to bar the illiterate from contesting panchayat polls in the state. The Supreme Court had ruled that *“it is only education which gives a human being the power to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad”*.
- The Supreme Court’s interpretation is based on the fact that *uneducated or illiterate people getting elected to the local bodies can easily be misled by officials if they don’t know to write and read*. In such cases, administrative actions that they are going can pose many challenges. The Court has further observed that it is only the education which can give people the power to differentiate between right and wrong, and good and bad.

Conclusion:

- Few experts are of the opinion that the requirement of minimum qualification for contesting elections is against the very spirit of 73rd and 74th amendments.
- It also violates the right of every citizen to vote and to contest elections, which form the basic structure of the constitution.

It may be noted here that due to these restrictions, many able candidates were debarred from contesting elections. In one way, it can be said that this law has prevented many people from coming to the mainstream.

International Relations

8. Macedonia to join NATO

Context: The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) said that Macedonia is to become the alliance's 30th member, following its historic name change.

About NATO:

NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is an international alliance that consists of 29 member states from North America and Europe. It was established at the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1949.

NATO's purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means.

- **POLITICAL** - NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- **MILITARY** - NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO's founding treaty - Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organizations.

Russia's Concerns

- Russia has raised concerns against Macedonia becoming part of NATO. Russia has always accused NATO of destabilizing the Balkans by pushing Macedonia and Montenegro to join NATO.
- Russia sees Balkan nations as its sphere of influence and is against NATO or any other body led by US or EU making inroads to these Balkan countries.
- Russia is mainly concerned because NATO's membership provides a guarantee of mutual defense, provides a welcome insurance policy against possible incursions. Russia perceives this as an attempt by the west to contain it by making inroads to the areas which Russia considers its sphere of influence.

9. India -U.S trade ties

Context

There is apprehension in India over a possible decision by the U.S. Trade Representative to withdraw the Generalised System of Preferences status

Status of India US trade relation

- For India, United States was its second largest export market (16% share) after the European Union (EU, 17%), and third largest source of imports (6%) after China (17%) and the EU (10%) in 2017.

- Bilateral trade in goods and services is about 2% of U.S. world trade, but tripled in value between 2005 and 2017, reaching \$126 billion
- Bilateral trade frictions exist on numerous fronts, but many observers believe bilateral commercial ties could be more extensive if trade and investment barriers were addressed.

Trade Issue between India and US

Trade Balance: The Trump Administration views bilateral trade balances as an indicator of the health of a trading relationship, and has criticized India for a range of unfair trading practices. India rests on the trade relationship in favour of India: Indian exports to the U.S. in 2017-18 stood at \$47.9 billion, while imports were \$26.7 billion. India favors taking a broader view of their trade ties beyond the trade balance.

Tariffs: In March 2018, the U.S. began imposing tariffs on several Indian products. In retaliation, India proposed tariffs on US goods (e.g., nuts, apples, steel, and motorcycles), but has put off implementing these five times in the past year in the hope that a negotiated trade settlement will come through.

Generalized System of Preferences (GSP): In April, the United States launched a review of India's eligibility for GSP. GSP accounted for 12% (\$5.6 billion) of U.S. goods imports from India in 2017.

Services: For India, a key issue is U.S. temporary visa policies, which affect Indian nationals working in the United States. India also continues to seek a "totalization agreement" to coordinate social security protection for workers who split their careers between the two countries.

Agriculture: Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) barriers in India limit U.S. agricultural exports. Recent issue is India's purported compliance with a WTO decision against its ban on U.S. poultry imports and live swine due to avian influenza concerns; the WTO held that India's measures violated WTO SPS rules.

Intellectual Property (IP): The two sides differ on how to balance IP protection to incentivize innovation and support other policy goals, such as access to medicines. India's IP regime remains a top concern for the United States, which designated India again on its "Special 301" Priority Watch List for 2017.

Localization Trade Barriers: The United States continues to press India on its "forced" localization practices.

Investment: India has made FDI reforms, such as raising foreign equity caps for insurance and defence, but barriers remain in multi-brand retail and other sectors.

New e-commerce rules: The move disrupted product listings on Amazon & Walmart and forced it to change its business structures.

Way forward:

India has attempted to address the trade deficit with purchase of American oil, energy and aircraft.

The US and India reportedly are in intensive negotiations to address key trade issues, such as on the U.S. steel and aluminium tariffs and India's GSP status. As WTO members, the United States and India negotiate multilaterally to liberalize trade, but unable to reach a conclusion yet.

Both sides should establish a joint mechanism to address bilateral trade issues, with regular meetings of senior officials as well as a commitment to ensure new market access in time bound manner

India must keep in mind U.S.-China trade war, and if a trade deal with the U.S. is reached, India could be the biggest beneficiary of business deals lost by China

10. India Saudi-Arabia Realties**Context:**

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Defence Minister Mohammed bin Salman will visit India on February 19 and 20 for his first state visit to the country.

Defence trade and energy security are expected to be high on the agenda.

Background:

- India- Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations in 1947 which was followed by high-level visits from both sides. King Saud visited India in 1955 and the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the Kingdom in 1956.
- During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia put itself in the American camp which slowed initial warm as India stood against all alliances.
- In January 2006, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz visited India — the first visit by a Saudi monarch in 51 years and the first top level bilateral visit since Indira Gandhi's trip to Saudi Arabia in 1982.
- The Delhi Declaration signed in 2006 aimed to strengthen ties in areas of energy, trade, science and technology, education, health, and political cooperation on regional and international issues.
- The 2010 Riyadh Declaration furthered on this agreement and focuses on enhancing cooperation on counterterrorism, money laundering, narcotics, arms and human trafficking, and defence and economic cooperation.
- Prime minister Modi visited Riyadh in 2016 and in 2018 met MBS in Argentina on the side-line of the G-20 summit .

Advantage of strategic ties with Saudi Arabia

- **Saudi Arabia's growing regional profile:** Saudi Arabia has substantial influence on the regional politics, especially on the Israeli-Palestinian

peace process, and has cultivated ties with major powers such as the US, Russia, China and the EU. This increasing profile of the country is a call for India to engage further with Saudi Arabia in areas beyond bilateral trade and energy supply.

- **Defence cooperation:** Although India and Saudi Arabia have not signed a defence cooperation agreement, both countries have conducted joint military exercises and are exploring enhanced military cooperation on tackling terrorism in the mountainous areas bordering Yemen.
- **Cooperation against terrorism:** Strengthening India's relations with Saudi Arabia will allow new avenues for India to manage relations within its own neighbourhood and also contribute to the security of the Gulf region.
- **Fighting piracy:** Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and surrounding regions remains a threat to Sea Lines of Communication. Deepening the Indian Navy's cooperation with its Saudi counterpart will contribute significantly to the fight against piracy.
- **To bring peace in Afghanistan:** India and Saudi Arabia share a common interest in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia recently played a major role in bringing some sections of the Taliban to the conference table, and facilitated the dialogue between them and the US.
- **Energy security:** Saudi Arabia is currently the largest supplier of crude oil to India. With particular reference to the 'Strategic Petroleum Reserve', India needs to move beyond mere commodity trade and engage with Saudi Arabia through energy interdependence.
- **Indian Community in Saudi Arabia:** The 2.7 million strong Indian community in Saudi Arabia is the 'most preferred community' and acts as an agent of soft power diplomacy.
- **Investment:** MBS is expected to announce Saudi investments in both India and Pakistan. Recently, Saudi oil giant Aramco and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company have acquired 50% stake in the \$44 billion project in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra.
- **Development of service sector:** India can do a lot when it comes to the development of the services sector in Saudi Arabia, as well as in honing the skills of young Saudis. India can contribute to the Vision 2030 programme that the Crown Prince has developed and projected to the international community.

Conclusion:

- Energy trade has traditionally been the foundation of the India-Saudi relationship. But during the past one decade, there has been a remarkable shift in India's approach to the Saudi Kingdom. The increased focus on security and counterterrorism cooperation points to a maturing relationship that has moved away from a mere energy partnership.

- With the US exercising less of an influence in the Gulf these days, the space is now available for India to put together a diplomatic peace initiative for the region. India should strengthen strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia and People-to-people relations need to be consolidated to strengthen bilateral relations.

11. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

Context:

India's participation in the mega-trade agreement, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has long been debated and sentiments around the subject are quite divided and divergent. Critics warned that India must exercise caution before signing RCEP which goes far beyond trade liberalisation to impose a common set of rules on investment and IPRs.

What is the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)?

- RCEP is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the 10 ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand & Vietnam) and the 6 countries which ASEAN has existing FTAs – India, China, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand.
- The grouping envisages regional economic integration, resulting in the creation of the largest trading bloc in the world, accounting for nearly 45% of the world's population with a combined GDP of \$21.3 trillion.
- It aims at covering trade in goods and services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, competition, intellectual property etc.
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.

Why RCEP?

- The RCEP member countries represent 49% of the world's population and account for 30% of world GDP. It also makes up 29% of world trade and 26% of world FDI inflows.
- According to estimates if the RCEP is implemented it would bring large income gains to not only Asia but the world economy. RCEP will also reduce the overlapping between Asian FTAs.
- RCEP will reduce the trade barriers in Asia and the new rules will be consistent with WTO agreements.
- RCEP will promote easier FDI flows and technology transfers by multinational corporations
- With the rise of protectionism across the world (ex-US & China), RCEP is important for promoting free trade in the region.

How RCEP is significant for India?

Act East Policy: For India, the RCEP provides a decisive platform to influence its strategic and economic status in the Asia-Pacific region and realise the goals of its “Act East Policy”.

Complement existing FTAs:

- The RCEP agreement would complement India's current FTAs with the ASEAN+6 countries = address challenges of implementation issues, overlapping agreements etc.
- Thus RCEP will make rules and regulations for doing trade more efficient = reduce trade costs.

Unlock the true potential of the Indian economy:

- RCEP is expected to harmonize trade-related rules, investment and competition regimes of India with those other countries in the group = Indian companies could enter the regional and global value chains and unlock the true potential of Indian economy.
- It will give a boost to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India.
- RCEP will especially boost textile and pharma industries as it will facilitate the removal of trade barriers such as sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures of these products.

Services sector growth:

- Besides facilitating Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the RCEP will create opportunities for Indian Service Sector companies to access new markets.
- It is because the manufacturing structure in many of these countries is becoming more and more service oriented. This phenomenon is known as Servicification of manufacturing.

Make in India: Make in India will become a global success if India becomes a part of the Asian Value and Supply Chain.

MSMEs: RCEP will also facilitate MSMEs to effectively integrate into the regional value and supply chains, thus promoting their growth.

What are the concerns for India joining RCEP?

Trade deficit: India's trade deficit (Imports > Exports) with various countries have always widened after signing FTAs with them. Example- ASEAN, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, most of which are RCEP nations.

Vulnerable sectors: India's vulnerable agriculture and dairy sectors will be exposed to vagaries of global trade as India is not in a position to compete with Australia and New Zealand, the top performers in these sectors.

The China factor:

- India fears that the RCEP pact will enable China to dump its products at lower prices and finally capture the market.

- India's trade deficit with China is already at \$63 billion which will further rise if India joins RCEP.
- Security concerns have also arisen over Chinese company's influencing market trends in sectors like telecommunication Indian manufacturing is not competitive enough to face the consequences of a free trade regime.
- Rationalization of multiple GST rates is still a work-in-progress. The compliance with the complex GST norms adds to the transaction costs.
- Labour productivity in manufacturing in India is still one of the lowest in the world with regionally fragmented labour laws increase the cost of doing business.
- Make in India seeks to create enabling conditions not only for domestic industries but also for foreign industries = more competition. Considering the above issues, the Indian industry is hardly in a position to compete in a free trade region.

Skewed sectorial growth:

- The issue of trade liberalisation in services is still a bone of contention among RCEP Nations. India wants to capitalise on its pool of skilled labour from improved access to these economies.
- Thus it sought binding commitments to simplify services trade.
- India is even willing to trade up its remaining tariff policy powers in the manufacturing sector to get these concessions for services sector in RCEP.
- However, given the situation of the manufacturing and agriculture sectors in India, it is definitely not a good idea to sacrifice them for the services sector.
- It will promote the skewed nature of sectorial growth.

Raising trade barriers with non-members:

- A preferential trade agreement such as RCEP provides preferential access to certain products by reducing trade barriers such as tariffs for member countries and not for others.
- Hence, a preferential reduction of trade barriers = raise in relative trade barrier against non-members countries of RCEP.

Affect economic sovereignty: Harmonisation of foreign investment rules and IPR laws = take away India's ability to calibrate trade policies according to its needs.

Rigid tariff regime:

- India needs a tariff regime that must be flexible enough to allow tariffs to be calibrated.
- Such flexibilities are provided by WTO's tariff regime, but not in other FTAs like RCEP.

IPR provisions:

- Japan and South Korea are proposing intellectual property provisions referred to as TRIPS-plus, which go far beyond the obligations under the WTO's agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The proposed provisions seek to extend pharma firms' patent terms beyond the usual 20 years (patent term extensions) and also require data exclusivity that limits competition by encouraging monopoly. These will hit our access to affordable medicines.
- Issues related to Intellectual Property Chapter, particularly pacts that constrain our farmers' ability to produce, preserve, exchange and sell seeds need to be rejected. If India makes any agreement like the International Union of New Plant Varieties (UPOV) 1991 (that favors multinationals and is against farmers' interests), it will kill the livelihood of our farmers.

Thus, there are several consequences that may arise in both the short and long run, and they need to be considered before India sign up for RCEP

What India should do?

- India needs to maintain a balance between the opening of its economy and protecting its domestic manufacturing industry.
- In the current scenario of growing protectionism, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership provides an opportunity for the countries to prosper by increasing trade, creating jobs and other economic opportunities and India should make use of such an agreement.
- India must try to extract meaningful concessions for enhancing market access for its services sector. India should also ensure the economic viability of small farmers and small scale industries in the face of relentless import competition.

Economy

12. Special Economic Zones

Context:

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry data show that 230 out of the 373 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in India are operational and have provided employment to as many as 20 lakh people.



Highlights

- In Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Punjab and Chandigarh all approved SEZs are operational while among four States which have more than 50 approved SEZs, Tamil Nadu tops the chart of operational SEZs with 75 per cent of its SEZs functioning without any hitch. Tamil Nadu has 52 SEZs of which 39 are operational.
- In Telangana, which has 57 — the highest number of notified SEZs — only 29 are operational. Karnataka and Maharashtra have 51 SEZs each of which 31 and 30 respectively are operational.
- Kerala, West Bengal, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh are the States where more than 70 per cent SEZs are functioning. Not a single SEZ is operational in the four States of Goa, Nagaland, Jharkhand and Manipur while 71 per cent SEZs in Haryana and 60 per cent in Rajasthan are defunct.
- As many as 239 (64 per cent) SEZs are located in five States including Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

About Special Economic Zones

- SEZs is a geographical area that has economic laws different for a country's general economic laws. They are delineated duty-free enclaves

and shall be deemed to be foreign territory for the purpose of trade, duties and tariffs.

- India enacted The Special Economic Zones, 2005 Act which provided for the establishment, development and management of the SEZs for the promotion of exports.
- The SEZ law also provides for establishment of International Financial Services Centre and Free Trade and Warehousing Zones.
- GIFT city in Gujarat has been established under this law.

Role of state governments in establishing SEZs

- State governments will have a very important role to play in the establishment of SEZs. Representative of the state government, who is a member of the inter-ministerial committee on private SEZ, is consulted while considering the proposal. Before recommending any proposals to the ministry of commerce and industry (department of commerce), the states must satisfy themselves that they are in a position to supply basic inputs like water, electricity, etc.
- In all SEZs the statutory functions are controlled by the government. Government also controls the operation and maintenance function in the seven central government controlled SEZs. The rest of the operations and maintenance are privatized.

Challenges to SEZs:

- Some provisions of SEZ law not operationalized.
- Complexity in undertaking domestic and international business through same units impacting viability of SEZs for manufacturing
- Uncertainty in government policies ex. Withdrawal of Minimum Alternate Tax and Dividend Distribution tax exemptions, announcement of sunset date etc.
- Multiple regulatory stakeholders (Direct tax, indirect tax, exchange controls, State Governments and SEZ authorities) need not necessarily aligned at all times.
- Procedural delays and infrastructural bottlenecks.

Conclusion:

SEZs play a key role in rapid economic development of a country. In the early 1990s, it helped China and there were hopes (perhaps never very high ones, admittedly) that the establishment in India of similar export-processing zones could offer similar benefits — provided, however, that the zones offer similar benefits provided, however, that the zones offered attractive enough concessions.

13. Open Acreage Licensing Programme

Context:

Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas & Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has launched NIO and MRSC for Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) Bid Round-II.

- In this bid round, 14 E&P blocks, with an area of approximately 30,000 sq. km., are being offered for bidding to the investor community under the investor friendly HELP regime.
- 10 blocks are based on Expressions of Interest submitted by the bidders, and 4 blocks have been carved out by the Government based on data received through the National Seismic Programme and the Resource Reassessment Study carried out by the Government.

What is Open Acreage Licensing?

- The government has replaced the New Exploration and Licensing Policy (NELP) with the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP).
- OALP gives an option to a company to select the exploration blocks on its own, without waiting for the formal bid round from the Government.
- Under OALP, a bidder intending to explore hydrocarbons may apply to the Government seeking exploration of any new block which was not already covered by exploration.
- The Government will examine the interest and if it is suitable for award, then the government will call for competitive bids after obtaining necessary environmental and other clearances.
- OALP was introduced as part of the new fiscal regime in exploration sector called Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP).
- So that, it will enable a faster survey and coverage of the available geographical area which has potential for oil and gas discovery.
- Successful implementation of OALP requires building of National Data Repository on geo-scientific data.

Advantages OALP over NELP:

- By placing greater discretion in the hands of explorers and operators, the OALP attempts to address a major drawback in the NELP that forced energy explorers to bid for blocks chosen by the government.
- Companies can now apply for particular areas they think is attractive to invest in, because in the past, the blocks chosen by the government often had only a small fraction of hydrocarbon reserves.
- By offering companies the freedom to choose exactly the areas they want to explore, and their size, the government has a better chance to woo serious energy investors.
- The government also introduced National Data Repository (NDR). It is envisaged as a centralized database of geological and hydrocarbon information that will be available to all.

- It will allow potential investors to make informed decisions and will open up a new sector in India.
- There are a number of companies that simply explore hydrocarbon basins and sell the information they gather. Thus, via NDR, the government seeks to incentivize such prospectors.
- Companies may also submit applications through the year and not just at designated and often infrequent points, as was the case earlier.
- Also, from now on, the auctions will be held twice a year. This will lend more flexibility to the industry.

Concerns with OALP:

The policy awards an extra five points to bidders for acreage if they have already invested in the exploration and development of that area. But it is highly doubtful if this is an acceptable incentive, since the investment needed to simply explore is significant.

Also, no such preference is given to mineral explorers while auctioning mining rights. Instead, a revenue-share from mining operations is their recompense for exploration efforts. Another concern is whether India can attract enough investment to meet the government's objective of reducing oil imports by 10% by 2022, since there are already proven reserves in other parts of the world.

14. Agrarian Distress

Context:

Agrarian distress, in the present context, is mainly in terms of low agricultural prices and, consequently, poor farm incomes. Low productivity in agriculture and related supply side factors are equally important. An issue that is connected is the declining average size of farm holdings and the viability of this size for raising farm incomes.

Prices and incomes:

In the last two years, inflation in agriculture was much lower than overall inflation. The consumer price index (CPI) also shows that the rise in prices for agriculture was much lower than general inflation in recent years. Market prices for several agricultural commodities have been lower than those of MSP. When output increases well beyond the market demand at a price remunerative to producers, market prices decline. In a strange way, it is the success in increasing production that has resulted in this adverse consequence.

Few schemes have been suggested to address the problem of managing declining output prices when output increases significantly. 'Price deficiency compensation' is one such mechanism which amounts to paying the difference between market price and the MSP. However, market prices may continue to fall as supply exceeds normal demand. At the other extreme is the 'open procurement system' that has been in vogue quite effectively in the case of rice and wheat, where procurement is open ended at the MSP.

The option of limited procurement for price stabilization may provide a middle way. Under this scheme, the government will procure the 'excess', leaving the normal production level to clear the market at a remunerative price. Thus, procurement will continue until the market price rises to touch the MSP. The suggested 'limited procurement system' will not work if the MSP is fixed at a level to which the market price will never rise. There are costs involved which will go up as production increases above the average level. The government can sell the procured grain in later years or use them in welfare programmes.

- Some States have introduced farm support schemes, examples being the Rythu Bandhu Scheme (Telangana) and the KALIA scheme (Odisha). One problem with the Telangana model is that it does not cover tenants, who are the actual cultivators.
- Basically, these schemes are income support schemes which will be in operation year after year.

Need for sustainable solution

Raising the MSP, price deficiency payments or income support schemes can only be a partial solution to the problem of providing remunerative returns to farmers.

- A sustainable solution is market reforms to enable better price discovery combined with long-term trade policies favorable to exports. The creation of a competitive, stable and unified national market is needed for farmers to get better prices.
- For better price for farmers, agriculture has to go beyond farming and develop a value chain comprising farming, wholesaling, warehousing, logistics, processing and retailing.

Low productivity

- The next issue is the low productivity of Indian agriculture. Basics such as seeds, fertilizers, credit, land and water management and technology are important. Similarly, investment in infrastructure and research and development are needed.
- Water is the leading input in agriculture. More than 60% of irrigation water is consumed by two crops: rice and sugarcane. It is not investment alone but efficiency in water management in both canal and groundwater that is important. India uses upto three times the water used to produce one tonne of grain in countries such as Brazil, China and the U.S. This implies that water-use efficiency can be improved significantly with better use of technologies that include drip irrigation.
- Yields of several crops are lower in India when compared to several other countries. Technology can help to reduce 'yield gaps' and thus improve productivity.

Land size

Another major issue relates to the shrinking size of farms which is also responsible for low incomes and farmers' distress. The average size of farm holdings declined from 2.3 hectares in 1970-71 to 1.08 hectares in 2015-16. The share of small and marginal farmers increased from 70% in 1980-81 to 86% in 2015-16. The average size of marginal holdings is only 0.38 hectares (less than one acre) in 2015-16.

We need to have policies for land consolidation along with land development activities in order to tackle the challenge of the low average size of holdings. Farmers can voluntarily come together and pool land to gain the benefits of size. Through consolidation, farmers can reap the economies of scale both in input procurement and output marketing.

Conclusion

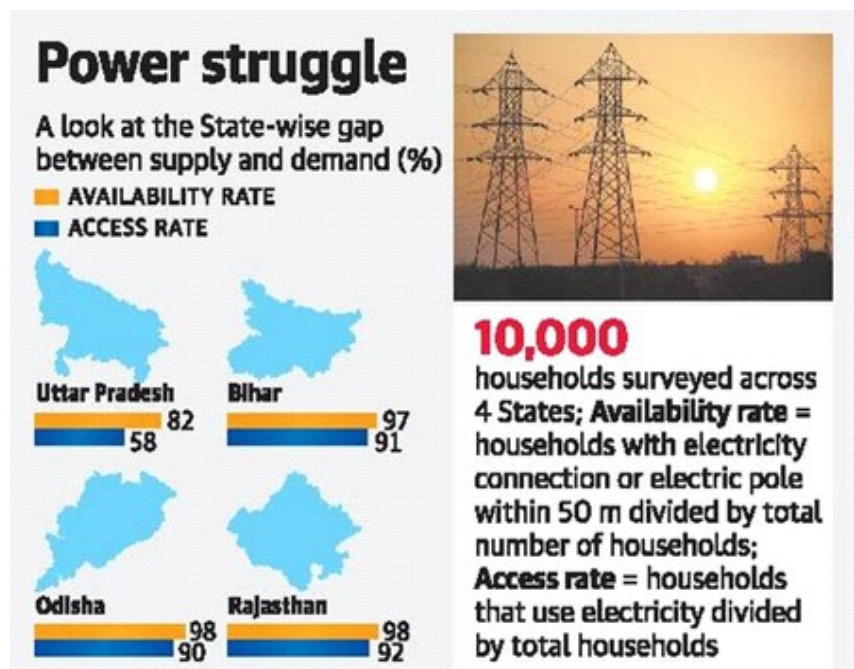
Farmers' distress is due to low prices and low productivity. The suggestions such as limited procurement, measures to improve low productivity, and consolidation of land holdings to gain the benefits of size, can help in reducing agrarian distress. We need a long-term policy to tackle the situation.

15. Rural Electricity

Context:

According to a private sector survey, only 84% of rural households have electricity connection in the four States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and Rajasthan. This is in contrary to Saubhagya Scheme data. The government data claims that 100% household electrification has been achieved in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha; and 99.9% in Rajasthan.

- The study has also found 16% of households use non-grid-electricity sources such as solar home systems, rechargeable batteries, mini-grid electricity, and diesel generators. This is because



Source: Rural Electrification in India: Customer Behaviour and Demand, SmartPower India

- Electricity connections remain financially unviable for poor families,
- Unreliable supply of electricity,

3. Inadequate supply of electricity, and
4. Lack of residence proof.

Saubhagya Scheme-Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana

Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana – ‘Saubhagya’ a new scheme was launched September 2017. Under Saubhagya free electricity connections to all households (both APL and poor families) in rural areas and poor families in urban areas will be provided. There are around 4 Crore un-electrified households in the country and they are targeted for providing electricity connections by December 2018. Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) has been designated as its nodal agency for the Saubhagya scheme.

Salient Features of Saubhagya

- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme in line with DDUGJY.
- The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 installments through electricity bill.
- The electricity connections to un-electrified households include provision of service line cable, energy meter including pre-paid/smart meter, single point wiring. LED lamps and associated accessories in line with technical specifications and construction standard.
- In case of un-electrified households located in remote and inaccessible areas, power packs of 200 to 300 Wp(with battery bank) with a maximum of 5 LED lights, 1 DC Fan, 1 DC power plug etc. may be provided along with the provision of Repair and Maintenance (R&M) for 5 years.
- The details of consumers viz, Name and Aadhar number/ Mobile number/ Bank account/ Driving License/Voter ID etc., as available would be collected by the DISCOMs.
- The defaulters whose connections have been disconnected should not be given benefit of the scheme. However, the utilities may consider settlement of old dues and reconnection as per norms.

16. Unemployment Crisis

Context :

Recently, Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy released its set of unemployment data in India.

- The unemployment rate for men was 4.9% in 2018 and that for women in the same year was much higher at 14.9%.

- Male labour participation rate was 74.5% in 2016. This dropped to 72.4% in 2017 and then to 71.7% in 2018.
- Female labour participation was as low as 15.5% in 2016 which dropped to 11.9% in 2017 and then 11% in 2018.
- Urban female labour participation rates fell faster than rural female participation. In urban India it dropped from 15.2% in 2016 to 10.5% in 2018

Unemployment rate analysis

In India, the government releases two important reports on the labour market to calculate the employment status in the country. One is the Quarterly Employment Survey and the other is the Annual Employment-Unemployment Survey computed by National Sample Survey Organisation. Though the Government of India does not produce any measure of monthly unemployment rate, the Centre for Monitoring India Economy (CMIE), a private enterprise in India has released the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS) to measure unemployment data in India

Measuring unemployment data by NSSO survey

- NSSO measures the employment / unemployment in India and provides three different estimates of employment and unemployment based on different approaches/reference periods used to classify an individual's activity status.

The NSSO defines following three broad Activity Status

- Working (engaged in an economic activity) i.e. 'Employed'
- Seeking or available for work i.e. 'Unemployed'
- Neither seeking nor available for work.

Analysis of Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS)

- India's labour participation rate is very low when compared with world standards and it fell sharply after demonetization to 45% which is 2% of the working age population.
- According to the survey it was not the employed who lost jobs and decided to stop working but largely the unemployed who decided that the labour markets had been so badly vitiated after demonetization that they gave up looking for jobs any further.
- Due demonetization along with GST employment shrunk by 11 million in 2018, especially small enterprises could not compete in a tax-compliant environment and thrown out of business

Key Facts

Findings on Female Labour Participation:

- The CPHS shows that the situation with respect to women's participation in the labour force is extremely poor and substantially much lower than male participation

Reasons for low female labour participation rate:

- Rising household incomes reduces the need for women to join the labour force
- Increased enrolment in higher education by women delays their entry into the labour force
- Cultural and security factors keep women away from the labour market in India.
- Employers are biased against hiring women.

Conclusion:

Considering the unemployment data released by CMIE survey, Government must pay heed to its findings. Since Government of India does not produce any measure of monthly data on unemployment, it must consider these findings to device a policy to manage unemployment rate.

Geography & Environment

17. Satkosia Tiger Reserve

Context: Two elephants are being brought from the Similipal Tiger Reserve to strengthen Patrolling in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve, before approaching the NTCA for resuming the ambitious tiger reintroduction programme in Satkosia. Tiger Re-introduction Programme.

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority has planned to reintroduce tigers in three tiger reserves, where their number have dwindled to the minimum.
- Tiger restocking will happen at the Satkosia forest in Odisha, the western part of Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand and Buxa in West Bengal. ? For Satkosia reintroduction, the Madhya Pradesh government has given in-principle approval to take out three pairs of breeding tigers from Panna.
- Earlier the Tiger reintroduction programme was carried out successfully in Sariska and Panna Tiger Reserves, where their numbers have improved significantly.

About the National Tiger Conservation Authority

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation.
- The National Tiger Conservation Authority has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country by retaining an oversight through advisories/normative guidelines, based on appraisal of tiger status, ongoing conservation initiatives and recommendations of specially constituted Committees.

Project Tiger

'Project Tiger' is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change, providing funding support to tiger range States, for in-situ conservation of tigers in designated tiger reserves, and has put the endangered tiger on an assured path of recovery by saving it from extinction, as revealed by the recent findings of the All India tiger estimation using the refined methodology.

18. Dolphin Census

Context:

Odisha's recent annual census of dolphins in its waters have thrown up some shocking numbers, with the aquatic mammals' population declining from 469 in 2018 to 259 this year.

- The census covered important aquatic ecosystems in the state including the Chilika lake, India's largest brackish water lagoon, spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts, the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary and its nearby areas within the Bhitarkanika National Park in Kendrapara district, Balasore district and the mouth of the Rushukulya river in Ganjam district.

Highlights

- "The 2019 dolphin census report revealed that Gahirmatha is the home of the state's largest dolphin population, having 126 animals,".
- After Gahirmatha, Chilika had the next largest population at 113, followed by the Rushukulya river in Ganjam district, with 15 dolphins and finally, Balasore, with 5 individuals.
- The dolphin species sighted during the state-wide census included the Irrawaddy, the Bottle Nose and the Humpback. The sighting of dolphins depended on the weather condition of the day the census was carried out.

Status of Dolphin

Dolphins have been included in Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972, in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and categorized as 'Endangered' on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List.

19. India's waste-to-energy (WTE) plants

Context:

An analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment revealed that nearly half of India's waste-to-energy (WTE) plants, meant to convert non-biodegradable waste, are defunct. Further, the country's inability to segregate waste has resulted in even the existing plants working below capacity.

Report Highlights

- Since 1987, 15 WTE plants have been set up across the country. However, seven of these plants have since shut down. Apart from Delhi, these include plants at Kanpur, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Vijayawada and Karimnagar.
- The key reasons for closure are the plants' inability to handle mixed solid waste and the high cost of electricity generated by them that renders it unattractive to power companies.
- This track record, however, has not stopped the government from betting big on WTE. The NITI Aayog, as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, envisages 800 megawatt from WTE plants by 2018-19, which is 10 times the capacity of all the existing WTE plants put together.
- It also proposes setting up a Waste-to-Energy Corporation of India, which would construct incineration plants through PPP models.

Currently, there are 40-odd WTE plants at various stages of construction.

Reasons for the inefficiency:

Most wastes that are generated find their way into land and water bodies without proper treatment, causing severe water and air pollution. The problems caused by solid and liquid wastes can be significantly mitigated through the adoption of environment-friendly waste to energy technologies that will allow treatment and processing of wastes before their disposal.

- The environmental benefits of waste to energy, as an alternative to disposing of waste in landfills, are clear and compelling. Waste to energy generates clean, reliable energy from a renewable fuel source, thus reducing dependence on fossil fuels, the combustion of which is a major contributor to GHG emissions.
- These measures would reduce the quantity of wastes, generate a substantial quantity of energy from them, and greatly reduce pollution of water and air, thereby offering a number of social and economic benefits that cannot easily be quantified.

Benefits from waste-to-energy are:

Profitability If the right technology is employed with optimal processes and all components of waste are used to derive value, waste to energy could be a profitable business. When government incentives are factored in, the attractiveness of the business increases further.

Government Incentives The government of India already provides significant incentives for waste to energy projects, in the form of capital subsidies and feed in tariffs. With concerns on climate change, waste management and sanitation on the increase, the government incentives for this sector is only set to increase in future.

The growth of this sector has been affected on account of the following limitations/ constraints:

- Waste-to-Energy is still a new concept in the country;
- Most of the proven and commercial technologies in respect of urban wastes are required to be imported;
- The costs of the projects especially based on bio-methanation technology are high as critical equipment for a project is required to be imported.
- In view of low level of compliance of MSW Rules 2000 by the Municipal Corporations/ Urban Local Bodies, segregated municipal solid waste is generally not available at the plant site, which may lead to non-availability of waste-to-energy plants.
- Lack of financial resources with Municipal Corporations/Urban Local Bodies.
- Lack of conducive policy guidelines from State Governments in respect of allotment of land, supply of garbage and power purchase / evacuation facilities.

20. Land Degradation

Context:

The preliminary assessment report circulated by the Secretariat of UNCCD finds that between 2000 and 2015, 20% of the world's productive and healthy land has degraded.

- Land degradation generally signifies the temporary or permanent decline in the productive capacity of the land.
- According to of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, desertification means "land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities."

Report of Land Degradation:

1. The proportion of degraded land for all land is 19.2% or more than 17.5 million km²
2. The proportion of degraded land for UNCCD regions amounted to 27% in Latin American countries, 24% in Asia, 17% in Africa, 13.7% Northern Mediterranean and 6.7% Central and Eastern Europe

India's Status

According to Report released by ISRO,

- During 2011-2013, 29.3% of land in India underwent land degradation representing an area of 96.4 million hectares.
- Compared with 2003-2005, the country experienced a 0.57% increase in land degradation. The increase in degradation compared with 2003-2005, was high for Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, and the north-eastern states
- The area under desertification (dryland areas) was 82.64 mha in 2011-2013, which rose by 1.16 mha from 2003-2005.
- The top processes leading to degradation/desertification in India were water erosion (10.98% in 2011-2013) followed by vegetation degradation (8.91%) and wind erosion (5.55%).

Causes of Land Degradation:

- **Deforestation:** The removal of trees and other vegetation for firewood, commercial logging or to clear land for farming and settlements is a key factor for land degradation.
- **Overgrazing:** Overgrazing is the grazing of natural pastures at stocking intensifies above the livestock carrying capacity. It leads directly to decreases in the quantity and quality of the vegetation cover and consequent exposure to water and wind erosion.
- **Extension of cultivation onto fragile or marginal lands:** Population increase and poverty has led to the widespread use of fragile lands such as sloping lands, areas of shallow or sandy soils, or with laterite

crusts, etc. for cultivation which result in consequent degradation of land in the area.

- **Improper crop rotations:** As a result of population growth, land shortage and economic pressures, farmers in some areas have adopted cereal-based, intensive crop rotations, based particularly on rice and wheat, in place of the more balanced cereal-legume rotations which has led to consequent soil fertility decline.
- **Unbalanced fertilizer use:** Excessive use of fertilizers have resulted in nutrient imbalance in soil and land degradation.
- **Over pumping of groundwater:** The excessive abstraction of water in excess of natural recharge by rainfall and river seepage has led to decline in water table and contributed to increased soil salinity and consequent soil and land degradation.
- **Pollution:** Pollution caused by dumping scrap metal, plastics and industrial pollutants is a major cause of degrading soil health and land productivity.
- **Mining:** Mining damages the soil and the underlying structure of the land. Chemicals used or mined themselves pollute soil and water courses.
- **Climate Change:** Anthropogenic climate change is recognized as one of the major factors contributing to land degradation by increasing extreme weather events and consequent rise in water and wind erosion.

Way Forward:

- **Watershed Management:** To combat soil loss by water erosion it is important to undertake watershed management initiatives including afforestation and other programmes aimed at checking soil erosion, improving soil moisture, increasing recharge, stabilising river basins and making agriculture and communities climate resilient
- **Reducing Severity of degradation/desertification:** proper land use policy, protection of prime agricultural lands and regular monitoring of highly vulnerable areas should be taken up to reduce severity.
- **Landscape Restoration:** Measures should be taken to assist ecological restoration. For example: natural regeneration can be supported through development of community grazing plans that include seasonal rest.
- **Soil Conservation Practices:** Soil conservation practices should be taken up to prevent or reduce physical loss of

It is important to secure land rights and access to natural resources for the poor. Further, alternative livelihood opportunities should be provided to rural poor in vulnerable areas.

21. Asiatic Lion Conservation Project

Context:

The Centre and the Gujarat government have announced a Rs. 97.85 crore **Asiatic Lion Conservation Project**.

Asiatic Lions

- Asiatic Lions are listed as 'Endangered' under the IUCN Red List.
- Its population is restricted to the state of Gujarat in India.
- With serious conservation efforts of the State and the Union Government, the population of Asiatic lions have increased to over 500 which used to be around 50 by late 1890s.
- As per the 2015 census, there were a total of 523 Asiatic Lions in Gir Protected Area Network.

Key features of the project:

- Key aspects of the conservation project include undertaking "habitat improvement" measures, making more sources of water available, creating a wildlife crime cell, and a task force for the Greater Gir region. 'Greater Gir' that includes, other than the existing Gir National Park, sanctuaries in Girnar, Pania and Mitiyala.
- It would also involve having in place a GPS-based tracking system, which would look at surveillance tracking, animal and vehicle tracking. There would also be an automated sensor grid that would have magnetic sensors, movement sensors and infra-red heat sensors.
- A key outcome of the project is to have a dedicated veterinary institute, lion ambulances and back-up stocks of vaccines that may be required.

Relocation of lions:

- The Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh was identified to be the most suitable for reintroducing the species, according to a Supreme Court-appointed technical expert committee, but there has been no progress on the proposal.

PROJECT LION

Head	Year I	Year II	Year III
Translocation to Barda	54.21	24.21	9.21
Monitoring of Lion	2.24	1.66	0.58
MSTRIPES Patrolling	1.48	0.32	0.12
Disease Profiling	1.22	1.15	1.15
Other exenses	0.35	0.34	0.34

* Rs in crores

SALIENT FEATURES

➤ Rs 99 crore project approved for lion conservation

➤ NTCA, Gujarat forest department and WII to implement it

➤ Barda to be developed as second home for lions within Gujarat

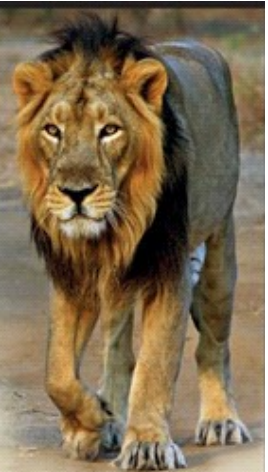
➤ 40-odd lions will be radio collared

➤ Maldharis from Barda to be relocated and will receive compensation of Rs 15 lakh each

➤ Vaccination of feral dogs and cattle

➤ Samples from feral dogs and cattle to be regularly collected to test for CDV, rabies and other diseases

➤ Samples from other wild animals will also be collected to monitor for diseases



- There is a committee of experts from both States examining the suitability of Madhya Pradesh as a potential lion reserve.
- The SC in April 2013 had ordered the translocation of some lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh within six months, but this hasn't happened. This was ordered after several recommendations by expert groups, including the Wildlife Institute of India.
- It emphasised that the long-term survival of the lion as a species was best served if they could be present outside Gujarat, too, so that they are protected against, say, a forest fire, a disease, or calamities.

22. Sela Tunnel

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently laid the foundation stone for the strategically important Sela Tunnel Project in Arunachal Pradesh.

- The project, costing Rs 687 crore, is being constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and would be completed in the next three years.

Significance

- Once the 12.04-km tunnel is complete it will give a fillip to the overall development of the area as it will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang and other areas.
- It will also reduce the travelling time from Tezpur to Tawang by more than an hour and boost tourism and related economic activities in the region.
- Need: Till now, the entry to the area was only through the 13,700-feet Sela Pass, which is covered in snow in the winters making the movement of vehicles difficult.

23. 14th CoP-CBD and Principle of 'Commons'

Context:

- 4th CoP-CBD Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity was held at the Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. (Nov 2018)
- Key focus – "How to govern biological resources (or biodiversity) at different levels for the world's sustainable future?"
- Year 2018 marked the CBD's 25th year of implementation.

CBD reports and studies highlighted that

- Humans have mismanaged biodiversity so badly that we have lost 60% of resources (which can never be recouped).
- Convention's objectives of conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits were being compromised, including by the parties themselves.

Concept: Principle of 'Commons'

- For thousands of years, humans have considered natural resources and the environment as a global public good and communities across the world had carefully managed these resources using the principle of 'Commons'.
- In simple terms, principle of 'Commons' deals with mindset that set of resources such as air, land, water and biodiversity do not belong to one community or individual, but to humanity.
- All developments that we see in the establishment of civilisations across the world as well as agricultural development feeding the world today are a result of such 'Commons' being managed by communities for centuries.
- However, then came the urge of those with money and power to privatise these resources for individual prosperity in the form of property management principles, intellectual property rights and others.

Concept: Principle of sovereign rights over biodiversity

- Convention on Biological Diversity, a multi-lateral environmental agreement, provided legal certainty to countries through the principle of sovereign rights over biodiversity.
- Therefore, in one form, the CBD contributed to states now owning the resources, including their rights on use and management.
- Today, states control and manage biodiversity with strict oversight of who can use what and how.
- The intent of the CBD and having sovereign rights was to manage resources better.
- But the results of such management have been questionable.
- A key reason cited is that 'Commons' and common property resource management principles and approaches are ignored and compromised.

Why 'Principle of Commons' is important?

- According to estimates, a third of the global population depends on 'Commons' for their survival.
- 65% of global land area is under 'Commons', in different forms.
- The significance of 'Commons' in supporting pollination and storing carbon cannot be overlooked.

Importance of 'Commons' for India

- In India, the extent of 'Common' land constitutes around 15-25% of its total geographical area.
- 'Common'-pool resources contribute \$5 billion a year to the incomes of poor Indian households.
- Around 77% of India's livestock is kept in grazing-based or extensive systems and dependent on 'Commons' pool resources. And 53% of

India's milk and 74% of its meat requirements are met from livestock kept in extensive 'Common' systems.

- 'Commons' as resources are not only relevant for rural communities but are now a major provider of livelihood options for both urban and peri-urban populations.

Key concerns:

- Despite their significance, 'Commons' in India have suffered continued decline and degradation.
- National Sample Survey Office data show a 1.9% quinquennial rate of decline in the area of 'Common' lands.
- Micro studies show a much more rapid decline of 31-55% over 50 years, jeopardising the health of systemic drivers such as soil, moisture, nutrient, biomass and biodiversity, in turn aggravating food, fodder and water crises.
- As of 2013, India's annual cost of environmental degradation has been estimated to be ¹ 3.75 trillion per year, i.e. 5.7% of GDP according to the World Bank.

The way ahead:

- 'Commons' becoming uncommon is a major socio-political, economic and environmental problem.
- While the state can have oversight over resource management, but keeping people away from using and managing 'Commons' is against effective governance of 'Commons'.
- The sovereign rights provided for, legally, under the CBD should not be misunderstood by the state as a handle to do away with 'Commons'-based approaches to managing biodiversity, land, water and other resources.
- Rather State and international governing bodies should focus on how and why 'Commons' have been negatively impacted? What needs to be done to save the earth and people?
- There needs to be a review of current governance of biodiversity and natural resources.

Science & Technology

24. Kerala on Trans Fat

Context:

In a first, the Health Department of Kerala has drawn up an action plan to generate public awareness on the harmful effects of trans fatty acids (TFA) in commercially available food items and to encourage the local food industry to meet the current statutory limits set for TFA.

Trans-fats:

Trans-fatty acids (TFAs) or Trans fats are the most harmful type of fats which can have much more adverse effects on our body than any other dietary constituent. These fats are largely produced artificially but a small amount also occurs naturally. Thus in our diet, these may be present as Artificial TFAs and/ or Natural TFAs.


- Artificial TFAs are formed when hydrogen is made to react with the oil to produce fats resembling pure ghee/butter.
- In our diet the major sources of artificial TFAs are the partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVO)/vanaspati/ margarine while the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products, though in small amounts.

Trans fatty acids

Action plan

Massive awareness campaigns

- On harmful effects of trans fat and HFSS¹ in foods at public places, hospitals, movie halls
- IEC² campaigns to rope in celebrities as ambassadors of healthy food



Enforcement activities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify manufacturers and suppliers of PHVOs³ to bakeries, restaurants; collect samples • Monitor retail sales of PHVOs and test samples of various brands • Scientific sessions on TFA and training on using TFA-free alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor oils, fats used for frying, making snacks; test samples • Testing of a range of food products to assess trans fat content • Meetings with bakers, restaurant owners, unorganised sector FBOs⁴ • Preparing guidelines on action to be taken against violators
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1. HIGH FAT, SUGAR, SALT

2. INFORMATION, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION

3. PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED VEGETABLE OILS

4. FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS

Harmful effects:

- TFAs pose a higher risk of heart disease than saturated fats. While saturated fats raise total cholesterol levels, TFAs not only raise total cholesterol levels but also reduce the good cholesterol (HDL), which

helps to protect us against heart disease. Trans-fats consumption increases the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.

- It is also associated with a higher risk of developing obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, metabolic syndrome, insulin resistance, infertility, certain types of cancers and can also lead to compromised fetal development causing harm to the yet to be born baby.

Usage and its Restriction:

- TFA containing oils can be preserved longer, they give the food the desired shape and texture and can easily substitute 'Pure ghee'. These are comparatively far lower in cost and thus add to profit/saving.
- WHO recommends that trans-fat intake be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake and has called for the total elimination of TFAs in global food supply by 2023. FSSAI has proposed to limit TFA limit in foods to 2% and eliminate trans-fats from foods by 2022.

25. Formalin in Fish

Context :

With many in Odisha's dried-fish industry continuing to use formalin despite being warned, the Naveen Patnaik government is planning to take measures including punishments, awareness and introduction of new hygienic methods.

About Formalin:

- Formalin is a toxic, colourless solution that is derived by dissolving formaldehyde gas in water.
- It is a cancer-inducing chemical used to preserve fish and is used as a disinfectant. It is used in the manufacture of pesticides, fertilisers, glue, paper and paint, among other products.
- Formalin causes irritation in the eyes, throat, skin and stomach. In the long run continued exposure causes harm to the kidneys, liver and can even cause cancers.

Text: Bindya Chari; Design: Rakesh Munde

SILENT KILLER

Chemical Structure: O=C


A solution of 35%-40% water in formaldehyde is called formalin

- > The chemical is a colourless, strong-smelling substance used in textile, paper, paint, and construction industries
- > The toxic and carcinogenic chemical is commonly used in preserving bodies in mortuaries

Signs of formalin use

Absence of fish smell
Fish will be stiff, the flesh rubbery and no flies will hover over it

White appearance
Dried fish will be whitish in colour with no odour. The fish will remain stiff even after cooking



Effects of formalin

- > In small quantities, formalin in fish will not show strong reactions but it is known to be a carcinogenic substance
- > Frequently eating foods with formalin can make one sick
- > Contact with formaldehyde solution may cause severe burns to the eyes and skin

Removal of formalin

- > Soak vegetables and fruit in water for an hour before cooking or consuming them

Wash fruits with diluted vinegar

- Formaldehyde is a highly reactive, flammable gas, which means it can become a fire hazard when exposed to flame or heat.

What is the use of formalin?

- Fish is a highly perishable commodity. If it isn't maintained at the proper temperature of 5 degree Celsius, it gets spoilt. To avoid that and increase its shelf life, the sellers now use chemicals such as formalin and ammonia.
- If the point of sale is far from the place of catch, formalin is used as a preservative. Meanwhile, ammonia is mixed with the water that is frozen to keep fish fresh.

26. Climate Change

Context :

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has released a publication titled "India – Spearheading Climate Solutions" on climate actions in India. The publication mentions the key initiatives undertaken by India under various sectors towards combating and adapting to climate change.

Major initiatives of the Government towards combating climate change:

- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** The Action plan covers eight major missions on Solar, Enhanced Energy Efficiency, Sustainable Habitat, Water, Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, Green India, Sustainable Agriculture and Strategic Knowledge on Climate Change.
- **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** ISA was jointly launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the then President of France, Francois Hollande in Paris on the side-lines of CoP 21 in 2015. The vision and mission of the alliance is to provide a dedicated platform for cooperation among solar resource rich countries that lie completely or partial between the Tropics of Capricorn & Cancer.
- **State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC):** State governments have drafted climate strategies aligned with the eight National Missions under the NAPCC. The strategies focus on issues ranging from climate mitigation, energy efficiency, and resource conservation to climate adaptation.
- **FAME Scheme for E-mobility:** Union Government in April 2015 launched Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles (FAME) – India Scheme with an aim to boost sales of eco-friendly vehicles in the country. It is a part of the National Mission for Electric Mobility.
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** The scheme provides LPG connections to five crore below-poverty-line beneficiaries. The connections are given in the name of women beneficiaries to reduce

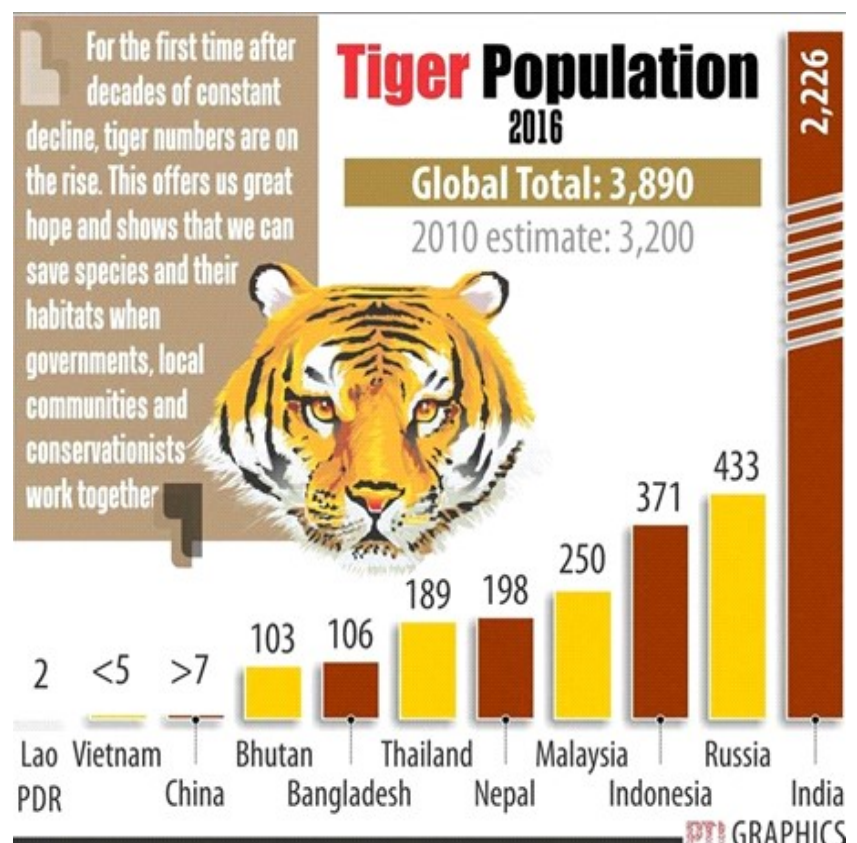
their dependence on fossil fuels and conventional fuel like cow dung for cooking food, thus reducing air pollution.

- **UJALA scheme:** The scheme was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015 with a target of replacing 77 crore incandescent lamps with LED bulbs. The usage of LED bulbs will not only result in reducing electricity bills but also help in environment protection.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission:** Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement) is a campaign that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2, 2014. The campaign seeks to clean the streets, roads and infrastructure of the country's 4041 statutory cities and towns.

27. Tiger Population in India

Status of Tiger Population in India:

1. According to 2014 Tiger Census by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, India's tiger population stood at 2,226 in 2014 as against 1706 in 2010- an increment of 30%.
2. India represents 70% of the global population of tigers
3. Karnataka has the highest number of population of tigers in India, followed by Uttarkhand and Madhya Pradesh
4. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in its 2018 report, declared Jim Corbett National park has the maximum number of tiger- 215
5. According to the latest estimations by NTCA, Orang tiger reserve in Assam has the highest tiger density in India- 35.44 per 100sq.km



Threats to Tiger Population in India:

- **Habitat loss:** Large-scale habitat destruction due to road networks, hydel projects, expansion of agriculture and livestock is a major long term threat to dwindling tiger population in India.

- **Loss of Prey Species:** Loss of forest quality in terms of prey biomass is a major issue affecting survival of tigers in India.
- **Loss of reproduction:** Loss of reproduction owing to disturbance on account of heavily used infrastructure like highways, etc. is a major concern.
- **Human-animal Conflict:** As tigers continue to lose their habitat and prey species, they are increasingly coming into conflict with humans as they attack domestic animals. They are often killed in retaliation by villagers.
- **Poaching and illegal trade:**
- Poaching is the largest immediate threat to tiger population in India. According to government sources, between 2014 and 2016, there was a 63 per cent rise in cases of poaching and confiscation of tiger parts in India.
- Of India's 21 states with tiger reserves, 5 states witnessed a rise in poaching cases between 2014 and 2016- Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Bihar.

Project Tiger: Project Tiger was launched in 1973 by the government of India, based on the recommendations of a Special Task Force of the Indian Board for Wildlife. Initially, the project included nine Tiger reserves; however the number of tiger reserves at present stands at 50. It aims to

- Limit factors that leads to reduction of tiger habitats and to mitigate them by suitable management.
- To ensure a viable population of tigers for economic, scientific, cultural, aesthetic and ecological values.

Tiger Reserves:

- Tiger Reserves are protected areas established under the Project Tiger. The reserves aims at conserving the habitat to ensure a viable population of the tigers along with their prey base in their habitat.
- The amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 in 2006 defined "core" and "buffer" areas of a tiger reserve.
- **Core:** critical or inviolate area and later
- **Peripheral area/ Buffer:** It seeks to foster coexistence with local people for safeguarding the integrity of the core.
- It is mandatory to have a Tiger Conservation Plan for each Tiger Reserve for ensuring the protection of tiger reserves and the livelihood and other interests of the people living in tiger bearing forests or tiger reserves.

Way forward:

- The flow of funds in Project Tiger needs to be streamlined.

- It is important to address human resource crunch by increasing recruitment and imparting better training.
- It is important to improve ground-level infrastructure in forests - vehicles for patrolling, staff quarters with basic facilities, and arms for forest guards.
- It is important to provide incentives to local people for conserving forests along tiger corridors and providing subsidised LPG connections to people to reduce dependence on timber from the forest.
- It is important to relocate villages in tiger reserves. The Shyamaprasad Mukherjee Jan Vikas Scheme which is helping relocate villages, situated in tiger corridors in Maharashtra is a step in right direction.
- Given that one of the biggest challenge to tiger conservation is encroachment upon their habitat, measures should be taken to combat habitat destruction and habitat fragmentation.

Miscellaneous

39. World Government Summit

Context:

The seventh annual World Government Summit is being held in Dubai (UAE).

About:

- The World Government Summit is a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of government worldwide. Each year, the Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments with a focus on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity.
- It is basically a knowledge exchange center at the intersection between government, futurism, technology, and innovation. It functions as a thought leadership platform and networking hub for policymakers, experts, and pioneers in human development.
- The Summit is a gateway to the future as it functions as a stage for analysis of the future trends, issues, and opportunities facing humanity. It is also an arena to showcase innovations, best practice, and smart solutions to inspire creativity to tackle these future challenges.

40. 1st Aqua Mega Food Park in Andhra Pradesh

Context:

The government has commissioned Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park at Tundurru Village in Bhimavaram Mandal, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh.

- This is the 1st Mega Aqua Food Park operationalised exclusively established for fish and marine products processing in the State of Andhra Pradesh.
- It will provide a platform and establish backward and forward linkages covering the entire aqua food processing value chain, quality assurance, food safety and implementation of best practices in post-harvest management.

41. e-AUSHADHI Portal

Context:

Ministry of State (IC) for AYUSH, launched the e-AUSHADHI portal, for online licensing of Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homoeopathy drugs and related matters.

Key facts:

- 1.e-AUSHADHI portal is intended for increased transparency, improved information management facility, improved data usability and increased accountability.
- 2.Timelines will be fixed for processing of application through this portal with SMS and e-mail status updates at each step of the process.
- 3.It will provide real-time information of the licensed manufactures and their products, cancelled and spurious drugs, contact details of the concerned authority for specific grievances.

42. Maithili Language**Context:**

A committee constituted for making a report for the Promotion and Protection of Maithili Language and its scripts, has submitted its report to MHRD in which it has made several recommendations for promotion and protection of Maithili language.

Recommendations of the committee are as follows:

- To establish a Script and Manuscript Centre at Darbhanga in any one of the Universities viz. Kameshwar Singh Sanskrit University or Lalit Narayan Mithila University.
- Early completion of the work pertaining to Unicode Scripts of Mithilakshar by Technology Development of Indian Languages (TDIL) and
- To prepare audio-visual teaching materials for teaching the Mithilakshar scripts.

About Maithili

- Mithilakshar or Tirhuta is the script of broader cultural Mithila. It is an extremely ancient script and is one of the scripts of the broader North Eastern India.
- The scripts of Mithilaksar, Bangla, Assamese, Nebari, Odia and Tibetan are part of the family.
- Mithilakshar had come to its current shape by 10th Century AD. The oldest form of Mithilakshar is found in the Sahodara stone inscriptions of 950 AD. Afterwards, the scripts has been used throughout Mithila from Champaran to Deoghar.

Need for protection:

Use of this script has been on decline since last 100 years and therefore our culture is getting decimated. Because its own script is not being used, the Maithili language is getting developed in a composite manner despite having been accorded a constitutional status in the constitution.

43. DRDO's 'Dare to Dream' contest:

Context:

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has launched 'Dare to Dream', a contest to encourage startups and individuals to come up with innovative defence and aerospace technologies.

- Applicants are invited to send innovative, workable proposals that can impact various related domains. The winning entries, which should specify the plan of executing it into a prototype, stand to get one of five prizes ranging from ₹ 3 lakh to ₹ 10 lakh in two categories.
- The military R&D organisation has asked for solutions in the areas of Artificial Intelligence, Autonomous Systems, Cybersecurity, Hypersonic Technologies, Smart Materials, Quantum Computing, and Soldier as a System.

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