



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

CURRENT AFFAIRS

JULY 2019

Table of Contents

GENERAL STUDIES – I	6
Topics: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.	6
1. UNESCO World Heritage Sites	6
2. Kartarpur Sahib pilgrim corridor	6
3. Swadesh Darshan Scheme	7
Topics: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.	8
Lal Bahadur Shastri	8
Topic: Salient features of Indian Society; Diversity	9
Uniform Civil Code	9
Topics: Role of Women; issues; empowerment	10
1. Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana	10
2. POCSO Act	10
3. 'Internet Saathi' programme	11
4. One Stop Centre Scheme	12
5. Nirbhaya fund	12
6. National Creche Scheme	13
Topics: Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.	14
1. Aspirational districts programme	14
2. India enters 37-year period of demographic dividend	14
Topics: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.	15
1. El Niño	15
2. How lightning strikes?	16
GENERAL STUDIES - II	18
Topics: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.	18
1. Article 370	18
2. Article 35A and related issues	19
Topics: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.	20
Karnataka crisis: SC's Kihoto Hollohan order of 1992/ Role of Speaker	20
Topics: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.	21
1. President appoints Governors	21
2. Finance Commission of India	22
Topics: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.	24
1. Leader of Opposition	24
2. What is a privilege motion?	24
3. Inter-state River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill	25
4. Whip	26
5. Parliamentary Standing Committees	26
6. What is a floor test or trust vote?	28
Topics: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.	28
1. Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal	28
2. Renaming of states	29
Topics: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.	30
1. Human Rights courts	30
2. Foreigners Tribunals	30
3. Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA)	31
4. SEBI and its autonomy	31
5. National Data Quality Forum (NDQF)	32
6. Central Wakf Council	33
Topics: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.	33
1. One nation-one ration card	33
2. Jal Shakti Abhiyan	34
3. Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN)	34
4. North East Venture Fund (NEVF)	35

5. Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019	35
6. Section 375 of the IPC	36
7. Section 124 of IPC	36
8. Surrogacy regulation bill	37
9. Transgender Rights Bill	38
10. Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019	39
11. Private member's Bill calls for two-child norm	39
12. Draft tenancy law	41
13. Privatisation of the Railways	41
14. Guidelines for crèches at workplaces	42
15. Seva Bhoj Yojna	43
16. National Investigation Agency (Amendment) Bill 2019	44
17. The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2019	44
18. Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019	45
19. Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2019	47
20. When a juvenile is tried as an adult, when not?	48
21. National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill	49
22. PRASAD scheme	50
23. Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)	51
24. Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage), Bill 2019	52
25. Consumer Protection Bill	53

Topics: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

1. Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)	54
2. Maratha Reservation issue	55
3. 'PAHAL' scheme	56
4. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao'	56
5. LaQshya	56
6. Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana	57
7. National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)	58
8. Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976	58
9. Atal Bimbit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna	59
10. Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPy)	60
11. PMUY	60
12. Pension scheme for small retail traders and shopkeepers	61
13. Van Dhan Yojana	61
14. POCSO court	63

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

1. WHO guidelines on self-care interventions for health	63
2. STRIDE scheme	65
3. Non-communicable diseases	65
4. 2019 "State of the Education Report for India: Children with Disabilities"	66
5. Drugs and Cosmetic Rules, 1945	67
6. Measles	69
7. The malaise of malnutrition	69
8. Global MPI 2018	70
9. Paramarsh scheme	72
10. Ebola virus	72
11. Chandipura virus	73
12. The three-language formula	73
13. e-cigarettes	74
14. Kala Azar	75
15. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)	76
16. Global Innovation Index	77

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

1. The importance of democratic education	77
2. 10 th Schedule of the Constitution	78
3. Electronically transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)	79
4. State poll funding	80
5. Compulsory voting	81

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

1. Central welfare database of citizens	82
2. Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS)	83
3. Broadband Readiness Index for states	83
4. Government e Marketplace (GeM)	84
5. Data Localization	84

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations. Simla Agreement and its relevance amid Trump's Kashmir Mediation Gaffe

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

1. Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue	88
-----------------------------------	----

2. UKIERI Mobility Programme	89
3. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)	89

Topics: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora. **90**

1. US Senate clears proposal to bring India on a par with its Nato allies	90
2. Base Erosion and Profit Shifting	91
3. Fairness of High-Skilled Immigrants Act, 2019 or HR 1044	92

Topics: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate. **93**

1. UN resolution on torture	93
2. International Whaling Commission (IWC)	94
3. UN Palestine refugee agency	95
4. Henley Passport Index	95
5. International Court of Justice	96
6. Port integrity campaign	97
7. World Food Programme	97
8. UNODC	98
9. International Solar Alliance	99
10. NAM	99

GENERAL STUDIES - III **101**

Topics: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment. **101**

1. Highlights of the Union Budget 2019-20	101
2. Key Highlights of Economic Survey 2018-19	105
3. Global warming impact on jobs in India	108
4. Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES)	108
5. Core Investment Companies (CICs)	109
6. Govt is considering enhancing RBI powers	110
7. India to be a \$5-trillion economy	110
8. Basel Norms	111
9. Jobless growth becomes more systemic	112

Topics: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth. **113**

1. Why is India opting for overseas bonds?	113
2. Sovereign bonds	114
3. New Code on Wages	115
4. AP Employment of Local Candidates in Industries and Factories Bill, 2019	117
5. Amendments to The Companies Act	117
6. Regulatory sandbox	118

Topics: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers. **120**

1. Zero Budget Natural Farming	120
2. The GM cotton conundrum	122
3. Schemes to support organic farming in the country	123
4. Silk Samagra	124

Topics: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions, economics of animal rearing. **124**

1. Kisan Credit Card Scheme	124
2. Minimum Support Prices (MSPs)	125
3. National Dairy Plan	126
4. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)	126
5. Rashtriya Gokul Mission	127

Topics: Infrastructure related issues. **128**

1. National Grid	128
2. NIIF	129
3. Bharatmala Pariyojana	129
4. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III (PMGSY-III)	130
5. Sagarmala	130
6. Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Initiative	131
7. Why power costs vary, and uniform national rate is difficult to implement?	132
8. Open Acreage Licensing Policy	132
9. Urja Ganga	133
10. Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2019	133
11. Regional Air Connectivity- UDAN	134
12. Grid Connected Rooftop Solar Programme	135
13. Dam Safety Bill 2019	135

Topics: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology. **137**

1. Statistics Day	137
2. Neutrino project	137
3. Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)	138

<i>Topics: Awareness in space.</i>	139	<i>Topics: Various Security Forces, their mandate</i>	166
1. PUNCH mission	139	Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs)	166
2. Launch-abort test	139		
3. NASA to launch Dragonfly	140	<i>Topics: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security. Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges.</i>	167
4. Hayabusa2	140		
5. Chandrayaan 2	141		
6. Thirty Meter Telescope	143		
7. Russia Launches Spektr-RG	144		
8. NavIC	144		
9. NASA's Kepler Space telescope	145		
<i>Topics: Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.</i>	146		
1. Ramanujan Machine	146		
2. Block Chain Technology	147		
3. Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS)	148		
4. GI Certification	149		
<i>Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.</i>	150	<i>Topics: Cybersecurity related issues.</i>	168
1. Fly ash	150	1. Why is India setting up a mobile phone handsets database?	168
2. Coral Rehab Programme	151	2. Inter-ministerial group suggests banning of private cryptocurrencies in India	169
3. Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)	151	3. Ban or regulate? — On India's policy on cryptocurrencies	170
4. Is desalination realistically a help in harnessing potable water from the sea?	152		
5. Picking out plastic: on recycling and waste management	153		
6. Jalyukta Shivar	154		
7. Botanical Survey of India has come up with the first comprehensive census of orchids of India- key highlights	155		
8. Blue flag project	156		
9. The wheels to a low-carbon transport system	156		
10. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species	157		
11. Indian Forest Act amendment	158		
12. Biofuels	159		
13. International Tiger Day: 29 July	160		
14. Effects of El Niño and Antarctic Oscillation On Air Pollution	161		
<i>Topics: Disaster and management.</i>	163		
1. Why Assam is prone to floods and what's the solution?	163		
2. International Charter 'Space And Major Disasters'	164		
<i>Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas.</i>	165		
AFSPA	165		
		FACTS for PRELIMS	172
		1. Cabinet approves merger / amalgamation of NIMH with ICMR- NIOH	172
		2. Colistin banned in animal food industry	172
		3. National Skill Development Fund (NSDF)	172
		4. Public libraries	172
		5. Rashtriya Aavishkar Abhiyan (RAA)	172
		6. Aadhaar Seva Kendra' (ASKs)	172
		7. Centre and IBM to jointly study on using AI in Agriculture	173
		8. Turnover ratio	173
		9. Export Credit Guarantee Corporation	173
		10. Organized Group 'A' Status to Indian Railway Protection Force (RPF) Service	173
		11. National Centre for Disease Control	173
		12. Shodhganga	173
		13. Shodhgangotri	173
		14. Utkarsha 2022	173
		15. Swadhar Greh Scheme	173
		16. International Cooperation Scheme	174
		17. NLCPR	174
		18. National Translation Mission (NTM)	174
		19. Why Rajasthan HC judges don't want to be called 'My Lord'?	174
		20. Gafa tax	174
		21. Merchant Discount Rate	174
		22. Demands for Grants	174
		23. Jan Jagrukta Abhiyaan	175
		24. Kaushal Yuva Samwaad	175
		25. National Youth Corps	175
		26. Incredible India Campaign	175
		27. Urban Haats	175
		28. Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana	175
		29. Upliftment of Women of Backward Communities	176

30. Sangeet Natak Akademi	176
31. Reservation of Limboo and Tamang Communities	176
32. Honey Mission	176
33. Manghdechhu hydropower project	176
34. Longest electrified tunnel in Indian Railways	177
35. Dibang Multipurpose Project (MPP)	177
36. Meghalaya to have State Water Policy	177
38. 'Didi Ke Bolo' campaign	177
39. Muthulakshmi Reddi	177
40. mKisan	177
41. JATAN- software for Digitization of Archaeological Museum	177
42. Automated multimodal biometric identification system (AMBIS)	177
43. CARE4U app	177
44. Securitypedia	178
45. Gandhian Young Technological Innovation (GYTI) Awards	178
46. Microdots	178
47. Red Mud	178
48. Spent pot lining (SPL)	178
49. Plan Bee	178
50. Non-pneumatic Anti-Shock Garment (NASG)	178
51. Molecular mechanism behind latent TB	178
52. Ploonet	179
53. Kargil Vijay Diwas	179
54. The Territorial army	179
55. Nag- Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM)	179
56. Spike missile	179
57. Bhabha Kavach	179
58. Sagar Maitri Mission-2	179
59. Operation Sudarshan	180
60. Garuda VI	180
61. Strum Ataka	180
62. Operation Thirst	180
63. Operation Milap	180
64. Gharial (Gavial or fish eating crocodile)	180
65. Chrysomallon squamiferum	180
66. American pocket shark, or <i>Mollisquama mississippiensis</i>	181
67. Dracaena cambodiana	181
68. Prophaetulla antiqua	181
69. Jute fibre converted into low-cost bio-degradable cellulose sheets	181
70. Sahiwal cattle	181
71. Tamil yeoman	181
72. UNESCO's World Heritage List	181
73. 'Kharchi Puja' Begins in Tripura	182
74. Jagannath Rath Yatra	182
75. Ashadhi Beej	182
76. Kerala Champions Boat League	182
77. Markandeshwar temple in Maharashtra	182
78. Shawala Teja Singh Temple	183
79. Republic of Benin	183
80. Demilitarized Zone	183
81. India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue	183
82. Infosys opens cyber defence centre in Romania	183
83. Red Corner notices	183
84. NASA's Dragonfly robot	183
85. Tiangong 2	183
86. Hyperbola-1	184
87. Green tax on plane tickets	184
88. Non-resident Keralite investment company	184
89. World Population Day 2019	184

GENERAL STUDIES - I

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

1. UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

What to study?

- For Prelims: UNESCO WHS- important sites.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for conservation of WHS.

Context: India gets its **38th UNESCO World HERITAGE SITE** as Pink City Jaipur.

- With Successful inscription of Jaipur City, India has **38 world heritage sites, that include 30 Cultural properties, 7 Natural properties and 1 mixed site.**

Selection of a site:

- **To be selected**, a World Heritage Site **must be an already classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance** (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area). It may **signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of our intellectual history on the planet.**

UNESCO world heritage site:

- A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a **place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** as **of special cultural or physical significance.**
- The list is maintained by the **international World Heritage Programme** administered by the **UNESCO World Heritage Committee**, composed of 21 **UNESCO member states** which are elected by the General Assembly.
- Each World Heritage Site **remains part of the legal territory of the state** wherein the site is located and **UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.**

Legal status of designated sites:

- UNESCO designation as a World Heritage Site provides **prima facie evidence** that such culturally sensitive sites are legally protected pursuant to the Law of War, under the **Geneva Convention**, its articles, protocols and customs, together with other treaties including the **Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and international law.**

What are endangered sites?

- A site may be added to the List of World Heritage in Danger if **there are conditions that threaten the characteristics for which the landmark or area was inscribed on the World Heritage List.** Such problems may involve armed conflict and war, natural disasters, pollution, poaching, or uncontrolled urbanization or human development.
- This danger list is intended to **increase international awareness of the threats and to encourage counteractive measures.**
- **Review:** The state of conservation for each site on the danger list is reviewed on a yearly basis, after which the committee may request additional measures, delete the property from the list if the threats have ceased or consider deletion from both the List of World Heritage in Danger and the World Heritage List.

2. KARTARPUR SAHIB PILGRIM CORRIDOR

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Location and significance of the corridor, issues involved in its construction.

Context: The second round of talks with Pakistan on the modalities for operationalisation of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor was recently held at Wagah, Pakistan.

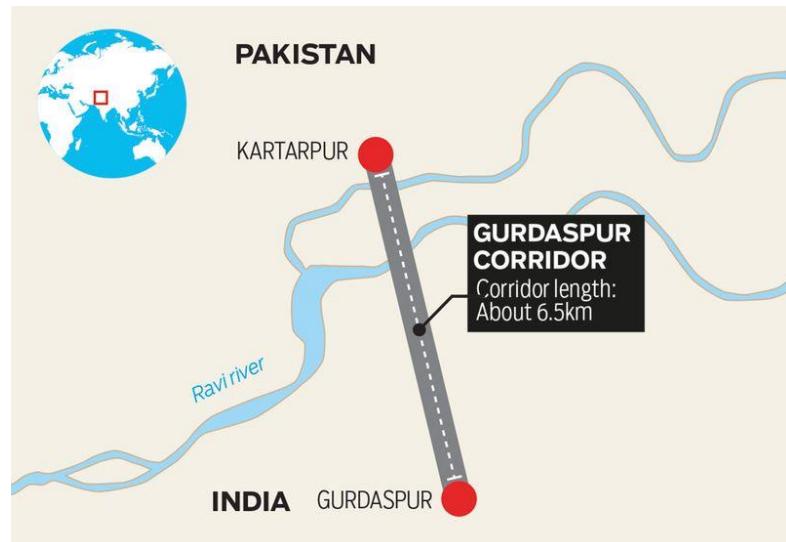
- Pakistan has agreed in principle to allow visa-free, year-long travel to the Sikh shrine.

Concerns raised by India:

- India conveyed its concerns to Pakistan on the possible attempts by individuals and groups to disrupt the Kartarpur Sahib pilgrimage and the possible flooding of the Dera Baba Nanak due to earth-filled embankment road or a causeway proposed by Islamabad.

What is the “Kartarpur Corridor” project?

- The corridor – often dubbed as the “Road to Peace” – will connect Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan’s Kartarpur with Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India’s Gurdaspur district.
- The construction of the corridor will allow visa-free access to pilgrims from India. The proposal for the corridor has been on the table since 1988, but tense relations between the two countries led to the delay.



Background:

- The Union Cabinet has already approved the building and development of the **Kartarpur corridor** from Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur district to the international border, in order to facilitate pilgrims from India to visit **Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur on the banks of the Ravi river**, in Pakistan, where Shri Guru Nanak Devji spent eighteen years.

Implementation:

- The Kartarpur corridor will be implemented as an **integrated development project** with Government of India funding, to provide smooth and easy passage, with all the modern amenities.

The shrine:

- The gurdwara in Kartarpur stands on the bank of the Ravi, about 120 km northeast of Lahore.
- It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539.
- The shrine is visible from the Indian side, as Pakistani authorities generally trim the elephant grass that would otherwise obstruct the view.
- Indian Sikhs gather in large numbers for darshan from the Indian side, and binoculars are installed at Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak.

3. SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims: First tribal circuit under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Key features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme.

Context: The Ministry of Tourism, under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, has identified tribal circuit as one of the fifteen thematic circuits for development of tourism infrastructure in the country with the objective of showcasing tribal culture, art, handicrafts and providing livelihood and enhance employment opportunities for tribal populations in the country.

- Ministry of Tourism under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme has identified Tirthankar Circuit as one of the fifteen thematic circuits for development in the country. All the sites associated with Jainism are covered under this circuit.
- Ministry has sanctioned the project “Development of Tirthankar Circuit: Vaishali-Arrah-Masad-Patna-Rajgir-Pawapuri-Champapuri in Bihar”.**

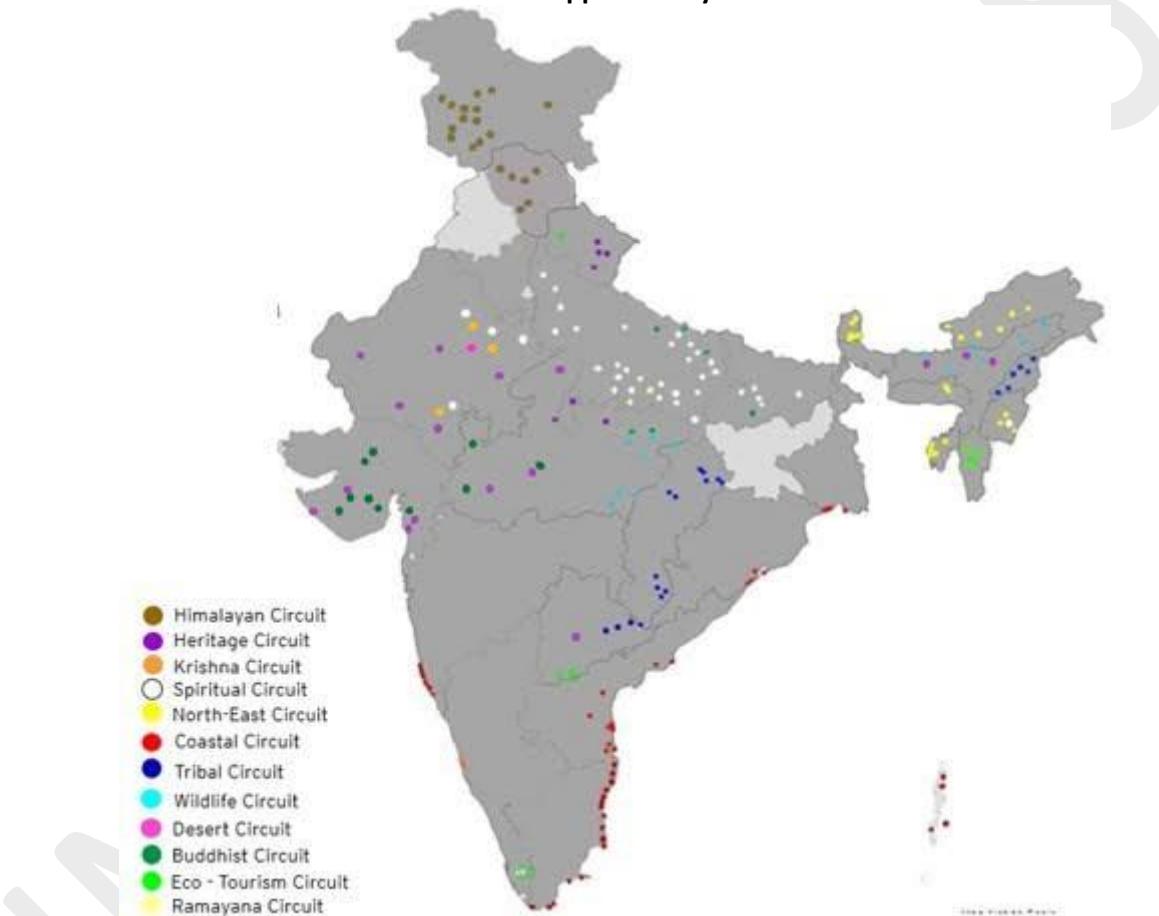
About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- Tourism Ministry** launched the scheme.

- **Objective:** to develop **theme-based tourist circuits** in the country. These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- The scheme is **100% centrally funded** for the project components undertaken for public funding.
- To leverage the voluntary funding available for **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives** of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.
- **Funding of individual project will vary** from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by PMC (Programme Management Consultant).
- A **National Steering Committee (NSC)** will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.
- A **Mission Directorate headed by the Member Secretary, NSC** as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/ UTs governments and other stakeholders.
- **PMC will be a national level consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.**



Topics: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.

LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI

- **Context:** PM visits Varanasi Unveils Lal Bahadur Shastri statue at Varanasi airport.

Lal Bahadur Shastri- related facts:

Pre- independence:

- Lal Bahadur Shastri was **born on 2nd October, 1904 at Mughalsarai, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh**.
- He was given the title "**Shastri**" meaning "**Scholar**" by **Vidya Peeth** as a part of his bachelor's degree award.
- He introduced a slogan "**Jai Jawan Jai Kisan**" and played a pivotal role in shaping India's future.

- He became a life member of the **Servants of the People Society (Lok Sevak Mandal)**, founded by Lala Lajpat Rai. There he started to work for the upliftment of backward classes, and later he became the President of that Society.
- He participated in the non-cooperation movement and the Salt Satyagraha.

Post-independence:

- He was the second Prime Minister of Independent India.
- In 1961, he was appointed as Home Minister, and he appointed the Committee on Prevention of Corruption. He created the famous “**Shastri Formula**” which consisted of the language agitations in Assam and Punjab.
- He promoted the **White Revolution**, a national campaign to increase milk production. He also promoted the **Green Revolution**, to increase the food production in India.
- In 1964, he signed an agreement with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, in concern with the status of Indian Tamils in Ceylon. This agreement is known as **Srimavo-Shastri Pact**.
- He was awarded the **Bharat Ratna** the India's highest civilian award posthumously in 1966.
- He signed **Tashkent Declaration** on 10 January, 1966 with the Pakistan President, Muhammad Ayub Khan to end the 1965 war.

Topic: Salient features of Indian Society; Diversity

UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Constitutional provisions related to Uniform Civil Code.
- For Mains: UCC- need, concerns, challenges and is it suitable for India?

Context: The Delhi High Court was recently informed that the issue of framing a Uniform Civil Code will be placed for consideration before the **22nd Law Commission** once it is constituted.

India needs a Uniform Civil Code for the following reasons:

- A secular republic needs a common law for all citizens rather than differentiated rules based on religious practices.
- Another reason why a uniform civil code is needed is gender justice. The rights of women are usually limited under religious law, be it Hindu or Muslim. The practice of triple talaq is a classic example.
- Many practices governed by religious tradition are at odds with the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Indian Constitution.
- Courts have also often said in their judgements that the government should move towards a uniform civil code including the judgement in the Shah Bano case.

Why is UCC is not desirable at this point?

- **Secularism cannot contradict the plurality** prevalent in the country. Besides, cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for threat to the territorial integrity of the nation.
- The term ‘secularism’ has meaning only if it assures the expression of any form of difference. This diversity, both religious and regional, should not get subsumed under the louder voice of the majority. At the same time, discriminatory practices within a religion should not hide behind the cloak of that faith to gain legitimacy.

What is needed now?

- The way forward may not be UCC, but the codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and can be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the

What is uniform civil code?

- Uniform civil Code is a proposal to have a generic set of governing laws for every citizen without taking into consideration the religion.

What the constitution says?

- Article 44 of the Constitution says that there should be a Uniform Civil Code. According to this article, “The State shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India”. Since the Directive Principles are only guidelines, it is not mandatory to use them.

Constitution. By codification of different personal laws, one can arrive at certain universal principles that prioritise equity rather than imposition of a Uniform Code, which would discourage many from using the law altogether, given that matters of marriage and divorce can also be settled extra-judicially.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Role of Women; issues; empowerment

1. MAHILA KISAN SASHAKTIKARAN PARIYOJANA

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features, objectives and significance of the programme, issues related to feminization of agriculture.

Context: In line with the provisions of National Policy for Farmers (NPF) (2007), the Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Rural Development is implementing a programme exclusively for women farmers namely, **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)**.

- Funding** support to the tune of up to 60% (90% for North Eastern States) for such projects is provided by the Government of India.

Need for feminization of agriculture:

- Rural women form the most productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. More than 80% of rural women are engaged in agriculture activities for their livelihoods. About 20 per cent of farm livelihoods are female headed due to widowhood, desertion, or male emigration.
- Agriculture support system in India strengthens the exclusion of women from their entitlements as agriculture workers and cultivators.** Most of the women-headed households are not able to access extension services, farmers support institutions and production assets like seed, water, credit, subsidy etc. As agricultural workers, women are paid lower wage than men.

About Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana:

- The “Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana” (MKSP), a sub component of the Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM) seeks to improve the present status of women in Agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities available to empower her.
- MKSP recognizes the identity of “Mahila” as “Kisan” and strives to build the capacity of women in the domain of agro-ecologically sustainable practices.
- It has a clear vision to reach out to the poorest of poor households and expand the portfolio of activities currently handled by the Mahila Kisan.
- The focus of MKSP is on capacitating smallholders to adopt sustainable climate resilient agro-ecology and eventually create a pool of skilled community professionals. Its objective is to strengthen smallholder agriculture through promotion of sustainable agriculture practices such as Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA), Non Pesticide Management (NPM), Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF), Pashu-Sakhi model for doorstep animal care services, Sustainable regeneration and harvesting of Non-Timber Forest Produce.

(Q) Discuss the problems faced by women farmers in India. Also discuss how those problems could be solved.

2. POCSO ACT

What to study?

- For Prelims: POCSO Act provisions.
- For Mains: Sexual abuse of children- prevention and need for stringent provisions.
- Context:** Union Cabinet has approved the **Amendments in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.**

Key changes proposed:

- It will make punishment more stringent for committing sexual crimes against children including death penalty.
- It includes provision of death penalty in cases of sexual offences against children.
- The amendments also provide for levy of fines and imprisonment to curb child pornography.
- Amendments are also proposed to protect children from sexual offences in times of natural calamities and in other situations where children are administered, in any way, any hormone or any chemical substance, to attain early sexual maturity for the purpose of penetrative sexual assault.

Impact:

- The amendment is expected to discourage the trend of child sexual abuse by acting as a deterrent due to strong penal provisions incorporated in the Act.
- It intends to protect the interest of vulnerable children in times of distress and ensures their safety and dignity.
- The amendment is aimed to establish clarity regarding the aspects of child abuse and punishment thereof.

POCSO Act:

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

(Q) Discuss the merits and demerits of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012

3. 'INTERNET SAATHI' PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the initiative.
- **Context:** Google India and Tata Trusts are set to expand their '**Internet Saathi**' digital literacy programme for rural women to villages in Punjab and Odisha.
- **Coverage:** Currently, the programme has reach of 2.6 lakh villages across 18 states. On adding Punjab and Odisha the programme will now **extend its reach to 20 states in India**.

About Internet Saathi:

- It is **joint initiative of Google India and Tata Trusts**.
- It aims to facilitate digital literacy among women in rural India.
- The programme aims to train Saathis in villages that can in turn help educate other women from their village in the use of the internet.

Significance of the initiative:

- It has contributed towards bridging **digital gender divide** in rural India. Women trained under this initiative have started their own micro-business such as stitching, honeybee farming, and beauty parlours. Many under programme are also driving awareness for issues like girl child education, menstrual hygiene and more within their communities.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. ONE STOP CENTRE SCHEME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features, need for and significance of the scheme.
- Context:** The Government of India is implementing **One Stop Centre (OSC)** scheme for setting up One Stop Centre since 1st April 2015 **to support women affected by violence.**

About the scheme:

- Popularly known as **Sakhi**, Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has formulated this **Centrally Sponsored Scheme.**
- It is a **sub-scheme of Umbrella Scheme for National Mission for Empowerment of women** including Indira Gandhi Matritav Sahyaog Yojana.
- Under the scheme, **One Stop Centres are being established across the country to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in phased manner.**
- Target group:** The OSC will support all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.

Funds:

- The Scheme will be funded through **Nirbhaya Fund**. The Central Government will provide 100% financial assistance to the State Government /UT Administrations under the Scheme.

Need for protection:

- Gender Based Violence (GBV)** is a global health, human rights and development issue that transcends geography, class, culture, age, race and religion to affect every community and country in every corner of the world.
- The Article 1 of UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence 1993** provides a definition of gender – based abuse, calling it “any act of gender – based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.
- In India, gender based violence has many manifestations;** from the more universally prevalent forms of domestic and sexual violence including rape, to harmful practices such as, dowry, honour killings, acid attacks, witch – hunting, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, child marriage, sex selective abortion, sati etc.

5. NIRBHAYA FUND

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the fund, its objectives and its administration.
- For Mains: Significance of the fund and issues related to its utilization.

Context: A total of 59 proposals/schemes have been received from various Ministries and State Governments and UT Administrations under Nirbhaya Fund during the last three years 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 onwards.

- Till date, 30 projects/ schemes have been appraised and recommended by the Empowered Committee of officers for funding under Nirbhaya Fund.
- The Fund is **administered by Department of Economic Affairs of the finance ministry.**

The Centres will be integrated with a Women Helpline to facilitate access to following services:

- Emergency response and rescue services.
- Medical assistance.
- Assistance to women in lodging the FIR.
- Psycho- social support and counselling.
- Legal aid and counselling.
- Shelter
- Video conferencing facility.

Issues with Nirbhaya Fund:

- The government has been accused of **keeping Nirbhaya Fund unutilised**. With rise in cases of sexual harassment and crimes against women there is a crying need for implementation of such funds.

Way ahead:

- Government should improve coordination between the ministries for speedier implementation of projects under the schemes of this nature. Delay caused by lengthy inert-ministerial coordination must not be allowed to compromise women's safety. The Government and legislators must act proactively on delivering equality and security to women.

6. NATIONAL CRECHE SCHEME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.

Context: National Crèche Scheme is being implemented as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** through States/UTs with effect from 01.01.2017.

About National Creche Scheme:

- The Scheme is being **implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development**.
- It is a **centrally sponsored scheme**.
- It aims at **providing a safe place for mothers to leave their children while they are at work**, and thus, is a measure for empowering women as it enables them to take up employment.
- **Coverage:** It is an intervention towards protection and development of children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years.

Features:

- Provides for day care facilities to the children of working mothers.
- Provides supplementary nutrition, health care inputs like immunization, polio drops, basic health monitoring, sleeping facilities, early stimulation (for children below 3 years), pre-school education for children aged between 3-6 yrs.

Significance:

- This scheme facility enables the parents to leave their children while they are at work and where the children are provided with a stimulating environment for their holistic development.
- This scheme ensures to improve the health and nutrition status of the children.
- It promotes physical, social, cognitive and emotional/holistic development of the children.
- It also educates and empowers parents/caretakers for the better childcare.
- The scheme is being structurally revised with the enhanced financial norms, stringent monitoring and sharing pattern between the Government of India and the implementing agencies and NGOs.

Eligibility Criteria:

- The State Government, Voluntary Institutions, Mahila Mandals with the know report of service in the field of child welfare department and registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 or registered as a Public Trust at least for the period for last 2 years are eligible for applying for the financial assistance from the fund.

Fund sharing:

- The fund sharing pattern under National Creche Scheme amongst Centre, States/UTs & Non-Governmental Organisations/Voluntary Organisations for all recurring components of the scheme is in **the ratio of 60:30:10 for States, 80:10:10 for North Eastern States and Himalayan States and 90:0:10 for UTs**.

Why the Centre must invest more in the National Creche Scheme?

- The physical and cognitive development of a child begins in the womb, and 90% of it happens before she is three. It is in this time period that good nutrition is critical.

Topics: Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

1. ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Aspirational Districts Programme, key performers.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for such programmes.

Context: DoNER Secretary chairs meeting of Nodal officers of Aspirational districts of North Eastern region.

Focus of the programme:

- To enable **optimum utilization of their potential**, this program focuses closely on **improving people's ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy**. Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure are this programme's core areas of focus.

Significance of the scheme:

- If these districts are transformed, there would be tremendous **improvement in the internal security environment of the country**.
- If Prabhari officers can bring convergence in the development efforts of different Ministries and state Governments and the schemes specially launched by Home Ministry in these districts, **it would serve as a great opportunity to ensure rapid development in the country**.

(Q) The aspirational districts programme will play a key role in bridging the development gap vital to social and political stability. Examine.

About Aspirational Districts Programme:

- Launched in January 2018, the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
- The broad contours of the programme are **Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan**.
- With **States as the main drivers**, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

2. INDIA ENTERS 37-YEAR PERIOD OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: TFR, demographic dividend- meaning, opportunities and challenges.

Context: Since 2018, **India's working-age population** (people between 15 and 64 years of age) **has grown larger than the dependant population** (defined as children aged 14 or below as well as people above 65 years of age).

- This bulge in the working-age population is **going to last till 2055, or 37 years from its beginning**.

Significance:

- This transition **happens largely because of a decrease in the total fertility rate** (TFR, which is the number of births per woman) after the increase in life expectancy gets stabilised.
- Many Asian economies — Japan, China, South Korea — were able to use this '**demographic dividend**', defined by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as the growth potential that results from shifts in a population's age structure.

What does the data say about India's TFR?

- The government's Sample Registration System in 22 states shows that TFR for India declined to 2.2 in 2017 after being stable at 2.3 between 2013 and 2016. **TFR indicates the average number of children expected to be born to a woman during her reproductive span of 15-49 years**.

How does TFR vary between urban and rural areas?

- The total fertility rate has more than halved in both urban and rural areas, falling even below the replacement level in the former where it is 1.7, down from 4.1 in 1971. In rural areas, TFR has fallen from 5.4 to 2.4 during the same period. For rural areas, it varies from 1.6 in Delhi and Tamil Nadu to 3.3 in Bihar. For urban areas,

the variation is from 1.1 in Himachal Pradesh to 2.4 in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Of the 22 states, only six have a TFR of 2 or more in urban areas. There are 10 states where TFR is below 2 in rural regions.

How does fertility vary between age groups?

- The 25-29 age is the most fertile, except in Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, where it peaked between 20 and 24. Only J&K hits the peak after 30.

Why is TFR falling?

- Higher education, increased mobility, late marriage, financially independent women and overall prosperity are all contributing to a falling TFR. It goes below 2 in both urban and rural areas, where girls complete schooling and reduces further as they pass college. Bihar, with the highest TFR of 3.2, had the maximum percentage of illiterate women at 26.8%, while Kerala, where the literacy rate among women is 99.3%, had among the lowest fertility rates. As more cities come up, people move for jobs and employment tenure gets shorter, TFR may fall further.

What does this mean for policymakers?

- India has entered a 37-year period of demographic dividend, which could spell faster economic growth and higher productivity.
- As such, the government needs to engineer its policies to harness the opportunity.
- It must also formulate policies to take care of higher medical costs as the population ages and productivity shrinks.
- As more people live away from their parents, India will also need to have an affordable social security system that provides pension to the elderly and takes care of their daily needs and medical expenses.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

1. EL NIÑO

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: ENSO- El Nino and La Niña- causes, effects and impacts, global climate change and ENSO cycle.

Context: A weak El Nino prevailing in the Pacific Ocean since the start of this year is beginning to dissipate. Over the next two months, a fully neutral condition is likely to be restored in the Pacific Ocean, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Climate Prediction Centre of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the US.

What is ENSO?

- ENSO is nothing but **El Nino Southern Oscillation**. As the name suggests, it is an **irregular periodic variation of wind and sea surface temperature that occurs over the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean**.
- ENSO **affects the tropics** (the regions surrounding the equator) and the **subtropics** (the regions adjacent to or bordering the tropics).
- The **warming phase of ENSO is called El Nino**, while the **cooling phase is known as La Niña**.

What is El Nino?

- El Nino is a **climatic cycle characterised by high air pressure in the Western Pacific and low air pressure in the eastern**.
- In **normal conditions, strong trade winds travel from east to west across the tropical Pacific**, pushing the warm surface waters towards the western Pacific. The surface temperature could witness an increase of 8 degrees Celsius in Asian waters. At the same time, **cooler waters rise up towards the surface in the eastern Pacific on the coasts of Ecuador, Peru, and Chile**. This process called upwelling aids in the development of a rich ecosystem.

What causes El Nino?

- El Nino sets in when there is **anomaly in the pattern**. The westward-blowing trade winds weaken along the Equator and due to changes in air pressure, the surface water moves eastwards to the coast of northern South America. The central and eastern Pacific regions warm up for over six months and result in an El Nino condition.
- The temperature of the water could rise up to 10 degrees Fahrenheit above normal. **Warmer surface waters increase precipitation and bring above-normal rainfall in South America, and droughts to Indonesia and Australia.**

Sources: Indian Express.

2. HOW LIGHTNING STRIKES?

What is lightning, and how does it strike?

- It is a very **rapid — and massive — discharge of electricity in the atmosphere**, some of which is directed towards the Earth's surface.
- These discharges are **generated in giant moisture-bearing clouds** that are 10-12 km tall.

How does it strike?

- The base of these clouds typically lies within 1-2 km of the Earth's surface, while their top is 12-13 km away. **Temperatures towards the top of these clouds are in the range of minus 35 to minus 45 degrees Celsius.**
- As water vapour moves upward in the cloud, the **falling temperature causes it to condense. Heat is generated in the process, which pushes the molecules of water further up.**
- As they move to temperatures below zero degrees celsius, the water droplets change into small ice crystals. They continue to move up, gathering mass — until they are so heavy that they start to fall to Earth.
- This leads to a system in which, simultaneously, **smaller ice crystals are moving up and bigger crystals are coming down.**
- **Collisions follow, and trigger the release of electrons** — a process that is very similar to the generation of sparks of electricity. As the moving free electrons cause more collisions and more electrons, a **chain reaction ensues.**
- This process results in a situation in which the **top layer of the cloud gets positively charged, while the middle layer is negatively charged.** The electrical potential difference between the two layers is huge — of the order of a billion to 10 billion volts. In very little time, a **massive current, of the order of 100,000 to a million amperes, starts to flow between the layers.**
- An enormous amount of heat is produced, and this leads to the heating of the air column between the two layers of the cloud. **This heat gives the air column a reddish appearance during lightning. As the heated air column expands, it produces shock waves that result in thunder.**

How does this current reach the Earth from the cloud?

- While the **Earth is a good conductor of electricity**, it is **electrically neutral**. However, in comparison to the middle layer of the cloud, it becomes positively charged. As a result, about 15%-20% of the current gets directed towards the Earth as well. It is this flow of current that results in damage to life and property on Earth.
- There is a **greater probability of lightning striking tall objects** such as trees, towers or buildings. Once it is about 80-100 m from the surface, lightning tends to change course towards these taller objects. This happens because **air is a poor conductor of electricity**, and electrons that are travelling through air seek both a better conductor and the shortest route to the relatively positively charged Earth's surface.

Sources: Indian Express.



INSIGHTS ONLINE

PRELIMS TEST SERIES - 2020

to
Make you UPSC-Ready!

Prelims Textbook Approach 2020 &
Prelims Subject-Wise Based Approach 2020

Subscribe Now at <https://www.insightsactivlearn.com> | www.insightsonindia.com



GENERAL STUDIES - II

Topics: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

1. ARTICLE 370

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of Article 370 and related facts.
- For Mains: Arguments in favour and against the removal of Article 370, what is the right move and can an amendment solve the issue?

Context: The government has said that Article 370, which provides for special status to Jammu and Kashmir, is a temporary provision in the Constitution and Article 35A, which gives special rights to the natives of the state, was added through a Constitution order issued by the President of India.

- The reply came in response to a question on whether the government is going to repeal articles 370 and 35A and whether repeal of these articles in any way violate United Nations regulations or any international obligation of the country.

What is Article 370?

- Article 370 of the Indian Constitution is a ‘temporary provision’ which grants special autonomous status to Jammu & Kashmir.
- Under Part XXI of the Constitution of India, which deals with “Temporary, Transitional and Special provisions”, the state of Jammu & Kashmir has been accorded special status under Article 370.
- All the provisions of the Constitution which are applicable to other states are not applicable to J&K.

Important provisions under the article:

- According to this article, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications, Parliament needs the state government's concurrence for applying all other laws. Thus the state's residents live under a separate set of laws, including those related to citizenship, ownership of property, and fundamental rights, as compared to other Indians.
- Indian citizens from other states cannot purchase land or property in Jammu & Kashmir.
- Under Article 370, the Centre has no power to declare financial emergency under Article 360 in the state. It can declare emergency in the state only in case of war or external aggression. The Union government can therefore not declare emergency on grounds of internal disturbance or imminent danger unless it is made at the request or with the concurrence of the state government.
- Under Article 370, the Indian Parliament cannot increase or reduce the borders of the state.
- The Jurisdiction of the Parliament of India in relation to Jammu and Kashmir is confined to the matters enumerated in the Union List, and also the concurrent list. There is no State list for the State of Jammu and Kashmir.
- At the same time, while in relation to the other States, the residuary power of legislation belongs to Parliament, in the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the residuary powers belong to the Legislature of the State, except certain matters to which Parliament has exclusive powers such as preventing the activities relating to cession or secession, or disrupting the sovereignty or integrity of India.
- The power to make laws related to preventive detention in Jammu and Kashmir belong to the Legislature of J & K and not the Indian Parliament. Thus, no preventive detention law made in India extends to Jammu & Kashmir.
- Part IV (Directive Principles of the State Policy) and Part IVA (Fundamental Duties) of the Constitution are not applicable to J&K.

How should the centre counter the growing unrest in the region?

- Focus on investing in J&K's infrastructure.
- Absence of an effective information and communication plan has hobbled the government's ability to respond even when it is on the moral high ground. This must be immediately corrected.

- **Standard operating procedures** must require the use of lethal force only when there is an imminent threat to life and property, force should be used proportionately and not as a punitive measure.
- What is needed at the moment is the deployment of **new socio-cultural resources, and a new operational culture** to wind down the militancy without alienating more locals who could either join or influence their relatives and friends to join various terrorist organisations.
- **Lethal force should be the last resort**, used only when lives are threatened. Promptly investigating allegations of abuses and prosecuting those responsible is key to resolving this mess.
- **Externally**, wide-ranging peace talks between India and Pakistan, the Indian administration and ‘azaadi’ groups is needed and **internally**, peace-building on the ground by multiple stakeholders involved is necessary.
- **Article 35 A:** It lets the J&K Legislature decide the “permanent residents” of the State, prohibits a non-J&K resident from buying property in the State and ensures job reservation for its residents.

Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) Critically comment on the history of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, its implications and relevance for the Union of India.

2. ARTICLE 35A AND RELATED ISSUES

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of Article 35A.
- For Mains: Controversies and issues associated, is it discriminatory in nature? do we need to scrap Article 35A? other alternatives.

Context: The Union Home Ministry’s order of rushing 10,000 additional paramilitary personnel to Kashmir followed by a police missive on riot control equipment have amplified apprehensions on the ground about the removal of the **Article 35A and Article 370**.

What is Article 35A?

- Article 35A is a provision incorporated in the Constitution giving the Jammu and Kashmir Legislature a carte blanche to decide who all are ‘**permanent residents**’ of the State and confer on them special rights and privileges in public sector jobs, acquisition of property in the State, scholarships and other public aid and welfare.
- The provision mandates that **no act of the legislature coming under it can be challenged for violating the Constitution or any other law of the land**.

How did it come about?

- Article 35A was **incorporated into the Constitution in 1954 by an order of the then President** Rajendra Prasad on the advice of the Jawaharlal Nehru Cabinet.
- The controversial **Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order of 1954 followed the 1952 Delhi Agreement** entered into between Nehru and the then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Sheikh Abdullah, which extended Indian citizenship to the ‘State subjects’ of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The Presidential Order was **issued under Article 370 (1) (d) of the Constitution**. This provision allows the President to make certain “exceptions and modifications” to the Constitution for the benefit of ‘State subjects’ of Jammu and Kashmir.
- So, **Article 35A was added to the Constitution as a testimony of the special consideration** the Indian government accorded to the ‘permanent residents’ of Jammu and Kashmir.

Critical side of Article 35A:

- How Article 35A is against the “very spirit of oneness of India” as it creates a “class within a class of Indian citizens”?
- It treats non-permanent residents of J&K as ‘**second-class**’ citizens.
- Non-permanent residents of J&K are **not eligible for employment under the State government and are also debarred from contesting elections**.
- **Meritorious students are denied scholarships** and they cannot even seek redress in any court of law.

- Further, the issues of refugees who migrated to J&K during Partition are still not treated as '**State subjects**' under the J&K Constitution.
- It was inserted unconstitutionally, bypassing Article 368 which empowers only Parliament to amend the Constitution.
- The laws enacted in pursuance of Article 35A are **ultra vires of the fundamental rights conferred by Part III of the Constitution, especially, and not limited to, Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (protection of life).**

What needs to be done?

- This matter requires the **active participation of all stakeholders**. It is necessary to give confidence to the residents of J&K that **any alteration in status quo will not take away their rights but will boost J&K's prosperity as it will open doors for more investment, resulting in new opportunities.**
- Article 35A, which was incorporated about six decades ago, now requires a relook, especially given that J&K is now a well-established democratic State.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

KARNATAKA CRISIS: SC'S KIHOTO HOLLOHAN ORDER OF 1992/ ROLE OF SPEAKER

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Anti- defection law- implementation, issues, role and powers of speaker, need and significance.

Context: In the arguments in the Supreme Court in the case related to the political crisis in Karnataka, advocate has cited the landmark judgment in **Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachillhu And Others (1992)**, in which the court upheld the **sweeping discretion available to the Speaker in deciding cases of disqualification of MLAs**.

What was the Kihoto Hollohan case?

- The law covering the disqualification of legislators and the powers of the Speaker in deciding such matters became part of the statute book in 1985 when the **Tenth Schedule to the Constitution** was adopted.
- A constitutional challenge to the Tenth Schedule was settled by the apex court in **Kihoto Hollohan**.
- The principal question before the Supreme Court in the case was whether the powerful role given to the Speaker violated the doctrine of Basic Structure — the judicial principle that certain basic features of the Constitution cannot be altered by amendments by Parliament, laid down in the landmark judgment in **Kesavananda Bharati vs State Of Kerala (1973)**.

What is the extent of the Speaker's powers?

- Paragraph 6(1) of the Tenth Schedule describes the Speaker's sweeping discretionary powers: "**If any question arises as to whether a member of a House has become subject to disqualification under this Schedule, the question shall be referred for the decision of the Chairman or, as the case may be, the Speaker of such House and his decision shall be final.**"

What did the Supreme Court rule in Hollohan?

The majority judgement:

- The Speakers/Chairmen hold a pivotal position in the scheme of Parliamentary democracy and are guardians of the rights and privileges of the House. They are expected to and do take far reaching decisions in the Parliamentary democracy. **Vestiture of power to adjudicate questions under the Tenth Schedule in them should not be considered exceptional.**
- The Schedule's provisions were "**salutary and intended to strengthen the fabric of Indian Parliamentary democracy by curbing unprincipled and unethical political defections.**"

Minority view:

- The tenure of the Speaker, who is the authority in the Tenth Schedule to decide this dispute, is dependent on the continuous support of the majority in the House and, therefore, he does not satisfy the requirement of such an independent adjudicatory authority.
- An independent adjudicatory machinery for resolving disputes relating to the competence of Members of the House is envisaged as an attribute of the democratic system which is a basic feature of our Constitution... [the Speaker's] choice as the sole arbiter in the matter violates an essential attribute of the basic feature.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

1. PRESIDENT APPOINTS GOVERNORS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Constitutional provisions related to the office of governor.
- For Mains: Significance and issues associated with the office of governor- is he merely a rubber stamp, comparison of powers with the President and frequent removals.

Context: By exercising his authority under Article 156 of the constitution, President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed new Governors for Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh.

Governors of States in India:

- Governor is the **nominal head** of a state, unlike the Chief Minister who is the real head of a state in India.
- According to an amendment in the Constitution of India (**7th Constitutional Amendment Act**), brought about in 1956, **the same person can be the Governor of two or more states**.

Appointment and removal:

- The governors and lieutenant-governors are **appointed by the president for a term of 5 years**.
- The term of governor's office is normally 5 years but it **can be terminated earlier by**: Dismissal by the president on the advice of the prime minister of the country, at whose pleasure the governor holds office or Resignation by the governor. Thus, the term is subject to pleasure of the president.
- There is **no provision of impeachment**, as it happens for the president.
- **Article 157 and Article 158** of the Constitution of India specify eligibility requirements for the post of governor.

Powers:

- Like the President of India, the Governor of any state in India is vested with **certain executive, legislative and judicial powers**.
- He or she also possesses **certain discretionary or emergency powers**.
- But one major difference in the powers enjoyed by the President and those enjoyed by the Governor is, the **Governor does not have any diplomatic or military powers**.

Some discretionary powers are as follows:

- Governor **can dissolve the legislative assembly** if the chief minister advises him to do following a vote of no confidence. Following which, it is up to the Governor what he/ she would like to do.
- Governor, on his/ her discretion can **recommend the president about the failure of the constitutional machinery in the state**.
- On his/ her discretion, the Governor **can reserve a bill passed by the state legislature for president's assent**.
- If there is no political party with a clear-cut majority in the assembly, **Governor on his/ her discretion can appoint anybody as chief minister**.
- Governor determines the **amount payable by the Government of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram to an autonomous Tribal District Council** as royalty accruing from licenses for mineral exploration.
- Governor can **seek information from the chief minister with regard to the administrative and legislative matters of the state**.

- Governor has discretion to refuse to sign to an ordinary bill passed by the state legislature.

Problem with constitutional design:

- The governor is merely appointed by the president on the advice of the Central government.
- Unlike the president, a governor does not have a fixed term. He/she holds office at the pleasure of the ruling party in the centre. Both **the manner of the appointment and the uncertainty of tenure conspire to make the incumbent an object of the Central government in politically charged circumstances.**

2. FINANCE COMMISSION OF INDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About FC- roles, objectives, functions, criteria used and need for reforms.

Context: Cabinet approves extension of the term of the Fifteenth Finance Commission up to 30th November, 2019.

What is the Finance Commission?

- The Finance Commission is **constituted by the President under article 280** of the Constitution, mainly to give its **recommendations on distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the States and amongst the States themselves.**
- **Two distinctive features of the Commission's work involve** redressing the vertical imbalances between the taxation powers and expenditure responsibilities of the centre and the States respectively and equalization of all public services across the States.

What are the functions of the Finance Commission?

- It is the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to:
 - the distribution between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them and the allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds;
 - the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India;
 - the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
 - any other matter referred to the Commission by the President in the interests of sound finance.
- The Commission determines its procedure and have such powers in the performance of their functions as Parliament may by law confer on them.

Who appoints the Finance Commission and what are the qualifications for Members?

- The Finance Commission is **appointed by the President** under Article 280 of the Constitution. As per the provisions contained in the Finance Commission [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act, 1951 and The Finance Commission (Salaries & Allowances) Rules, 1951, the Chairman of the Commission is selected from among persons who have had experience in public affairs, and the four other members are selected from among persons who:
 - are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as Judges of a High Court; or
 - have special knowledge of the finances and accounts of Government; or
 - have had wide experience in financial matters and in administration; or
 - have special knowledge of economics.

The recommendations of the Finance Commission are implemented as under:

- Those to be implemented by an order of the President: The recommendations relating to distribution of Union Taxes and Duties and Grants-in-aid fall in this category.
- Those to be implemented by executive orders: Other recommendations to be made by the Finance Commission, as per its Terms of Reference

When was the first Commission Constituted and how many Commissions have been Constituted so far?

- The First Finance Commission was constituted vide Presidential Order dated 22.11.1951 under the chairmanship of Shri K.C. Neogy on 6th April, 1952. Fifteenth Finance Commissions have been Constituted so far at intervals of every five years.

Why is there a need for a Finance Commission?

- The Indian federal system allows for the division of power and responsibilities between the centre and states. Correspondingly, the taxation powers are also broadly divided between the centre and states. State legislatures may devolve some of their taxation powers to local bodies.

Formula used for distribution:

- The share in central taxes is distributed among states based on a formula. Previous Finance Commissions have considered various factors to determine the criteria such as the population and income needs of states, their area and infrastructure, etc. Further, the weightage assigned to each criterion has varied with each Finance Commission.

The criteria used by the 11th to 14th Finance Commissions are:

- Population is an indicator of the expenditure needs of a state. Over the years, Finance Commissions have used population data of the 1971 Census. The 14th Finance Commission used the 2011 population data, in addition to the 1971 data. The 15th Finance Commission has been mandated to use data from the 2011 Census.
- Area is used as a criterion as a state with larger area has to incur additional administrative costs to deliver services.
- Income distance is the difference between the per capita income of a state with the average per capita income of all states. States with lower per capita income may be given a higher share to maintain equity among states.
- Forest cover indicates that states with large forest covers bear the cost of not having area available for other economic activities. Therefore, the rationale is that these states may be given a higher share.

Grants-in-Aid:

- Besides the taxes devolved to states, another source of transfers from the centre to states is grants-in-aid. As per the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission, grants-in-aid constitute 12% of the central transfers to states. The 14th Finance Commission had recommended grants to states for three purposes: (i) disaster relief, (ii) local bodies, and (iii) revenue deficit.

Need for permanent status:

- Finance commissions have over the past several decades adopted different approaches with regard to principles of tax devolution, grants to be given to states and fiscal consolidation issues. In other words, there has to be continuity and change between finance commissions.
- There is a need to ensure broad consistency between Finance Commissions so that there is some degree of certainty in the flow of funds, especially to the states. This has become even more critical in the post GST scenario.
- If it is given permanent status, the Commission can function as a leaner entity in the intervening period till the next Finance Commission is set up in a full-fledged manner. During the intervening period, it can also address issues arising from implementation of the recommendations of the finance commission.

Table 2: Weight of criteria used by 11th to 14th Finance Commissions

Criteria	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th
Income Distance	62.5	50.0		50.0
Population 1971	10.0	25.0	25.0	17.5
Population 2011				10.0
Index of Infrastructure	7.5			
Fiscal Discipline	7.5	7.5	17.5	
Tax Effort	5.0	7.5		
Fiscal Capacity Discipline				47.5
Area	7.5	10.0	10.0	15.0
Forest Cover				7.5
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Reports of the 1st to 14th Finance Commissions; PRS.

(Q) Discuss the role that Finance Commission play in improving centre state administrative relations?

Topics: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

1. LEADER OF OPPOSITION

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: LoP- status, roles, significance and what needs to be done to strengthen the office of LoP?

Context: Congress seeks Leader of the Opposition post.

Who is the Leader of Opposition?

- The LOP is leader of the largest party that has not less than one-tenth of the total strength of the house.
- It is a statutory post defined in the Salaries and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977.

Significance of the office:

- LoP is referred to as the ‘shadow Prime Minister’.
- She/he is expected to be ready to take over if the government falls.
- The LoP also plays an important role in bringing cohesiveness and effectiveness to the opposition’s functioning in policy and legislative work.
- LoP plays a crucial role in bringing bipartisanship and neutrality to the appointments in institutions of accountability and transparency – CVC, CBI, CIC, Lokpal etc.

What reforms are needed?

- There arises a problem when no party in opposition secures 55 or more seats. In such situations, the numerically largest party in the opposition should have the right to have a leader recognised as leader of the opposition by the speaker.
- Besides, the 10% formulation is inconsistent with the law ‘the salary and allowances of leaders of opposition in Parliament Act, 1977’ which only says that the largest opposition party should get the post.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. WHAT IS A PRIVILEGE MOTION?

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about Privilege motion and privilege committee.

Context: Trinamool MP Mahua Moitra has moved a breach of privilege motion in the Lok Sabha against a private Hindi news channel and its Editor for reporting that her first speech in Parliament was plagiarised.

What is a privilege motion?

- Parliamentary privileges are certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament, individually and collectively, so that they can “effectively discharge their functions”. When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is punishable under law of Parliament.

Who can move it? How?

- A notice is moved in the form of a motion by any member of either House against those being held guilty of breach of privilege. Each House also claims the right to punish as contempt actions which, while not breach of any specific privilege, are offences against its authority and dignity.

What are the rules governing privilege?

- Rule No 222 in Chapter 20 of the Lok Sabha Rule Book and correspondingly Rule 187 in Chapter 16 of the Rajya Sabha rulebook governs privilege. It says that a member may, with the consent of the Speaker or the Chairperson, raise a question involving a breach of privilege either of a member or of the House or of

a committee thereof. The rules however mandate that **any notice should be relating to an incident of recent occurrence and should need the intervention of the House**. Notices have to be given before 10 am to the Speaker or the Chairperson.

What is the role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha Chair?

- The Speaker/RS chairperson is **the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion. The Speaker/Chair can decide on the privilege motion himself or herself or refer it to the privileges committee of Parliament**. If the Speaker/Chair gives consent under Rule 222, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.

What is the privileges committee?

- In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker nominates a committee of privileges consisting of 15 members as per respective party strengths. A report is then presented to the House for its consideration. The Speaker may permit a half-hour debate while considering the report. The Speaker may then pass final orders or direct that the report be tabled before the House.
- A resolution may then be moved relating to the breach of privilege that has to be unanimously passed. In the Rajya Sabha, the deputy chairperson heads the committee of privileges, that consists of 10 members.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. INTER-STATE RIVER WATER DISPUTES (AMENDMENT) BILL

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features, need for and significance of the bill.

Context: Cabinet approves **Inter-State River Water disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019**.

- The Bill seeks to **amend the Inter State River Water Disputes Act, 1956** with a view to streamline the adjudication of inter-state river water disputes and make the present institutional architecture robust.

Features of the bill:

- Disputes Resolution Committee:** The Bill requires the **central government to set up a Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC)**, for resolving any inter-state water dispute amicably. **The DRC will get a period of one year, extendable by six months**, to submit its report to the central government.
- Members of DRC:** Members of the DRC will be from relevant fields, as deemed fit by the central government.
- Tribunal:** The Bill proposes to set up an Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal, for adjudication of water disputes, if a dispute is not resolved through the DRC. This tribunal can have multiple benches. **All existing tribunals will be dissolved and the water disputes pending adjudication before such existing tribunals will be transferred to this newly formed tribunal.**
- Composition of the Tribunal:** The tribunal shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and not more than six nominated members (judges of the Supreme Court or of a High Court), nominated by the Chief Justice of India.

Drawbacks of Interstate Water Dispute Act, 1956:

- The Inter State Water Dispute Act, 1956 which provides the legal framework to address such disputes **suffers from many drawbacks as it does not fix any time limit for resolving river water disputes**.
- Delays are on account of no time limit for adjudication by a Tribunal**, no upper age limit for the Chairman or the Members, work getting stalled due to occurrence of any vacancy and no time limit for publishing the report of the Tribunal.
- The River Boards Act 1956**, which is supposed to facilitate inter-state collaboration over water resource development, remained a 'dead letter' since its enactment.
- Surface water is controlled by **Central Water Commission (CWC)** and ground water by **Central Ground Water Board of India (CGWB)**. Both bodies work independently and there is no common forum for common discussion with state governments on water management.

4. WHIP

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Whip- meaning, need, misuse and the need for reforms.

How is it used?

- In India **all parties can issue a whip to their members**. Parties appoint a **senior member from among their House contingents to issue whips** — this member is called a Chief Whip, and he/she is assisted by additional Whips.

What is it?

- A whip in parliamentary parlance is a **written order** that party members be present for an important vote, or that they vote only in a particular way.
- The term is derived from the old British practice of “**whipping in**” lawmakers to follow the party line.

Kinds of Whips:

- A **one-line whip**, underlined once, is usually issued to inform party members of a vote, and allows them to abstain in case they decide not to follow the party line.
- A **two-line whip** directs them to be present during the vote.
- A **three-line whip** is the strongest, employed on important occasions such as the second reading of a Bill or a no-confidence motion, and places an obligation on members to toe the party line.

Defiance of Whip:

- In India, rebelling against a three-line whip can put a lawmaker’s membership of the House at risk. The anti-defection law allows the Speaker/Chairperson to disqualify such a member; the only exception is when more than a third of legislators vote against a directive, effectively splitting the party.

Importance of whips in our political system:

- In the parliamentary form of Government, Whips of various political parties are the vital links of the internal organization of parties, inside the legislatures. The efficient and smooth functioning of Parliament and State Legislatures depends, to a considerable extent, upon the office of the Whip. The Whips can be rightly said to be the managers of the parties within the legislatures.

Sources: Indian Express.

5. PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEES

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Parliamentary standing committees- roles, need, functions and significance.

Context: Eleven of the 22 Bills introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament have been passed, which makes it a highly productive session after many years. But these Bills have been passed without scrutiny by **parliamentary standing committees**, their purpose being to enable detailed consideration of a piece of legislation.

What's the issue?

- After the formation of the 17th Lok Sabha, parliamentary standing committees have not been constituted as consultations among parties are still under way. Partly as a result of this, the Bills were passed without committee scrutiny. They were discussed in Parliament over durations ranging between two and five hours.

Why have parliamentary committees?

- Parliament is the embodiment of the people’s will. Committees are an **instrument of Parliament for its own effective functioning**.
- Committees are **platforms for threadbare discussion on a proposed law**.
- The **smaller cohort of lawmakers**, assembled on the basis of the proportional strength of individual parties and interests and expertise of individual lawmakers, could have more open, intensive and better-informed discussions.
- Committee meetings are ‘**closed door**’ and **members are not bound by party whips**, which allows them the latitude for a more meaningful exchange of views as against discussions in full and open Houses where grandstanding and party positions invariably take precedence.

- Members of Parliament may have great acumen but they would **require the assistance of experts in dealing with such situations**. It is through committees that such expertise is drawn into lawmaking.
- Executive accountability to the legislature is enforced through questions in Parliament also, which are answered by ministers. However, department standing committees go one step further and hear from senior officials of the government in a closed setting, **allowing for more detailed discussions**.
- This mechanism also enables parliamentarians to **understand the executive processes closely**.

What are the types of committees?

- Most committees are '**standing**' as their existence is uninterrupted and usually reconstituted on an annual basis; some are '**select**' committees formed for a specific purpose, for instance, to deliberate on a particular bill. Once the Bill is disposed of, that select committee ceases to exist. Some **standing committees** are departmentally related.
- Financial control is a critical tool for Parliament's authority over the executive; hence **finance committees** are considered to be particularly powerful. **The three financial committees** are the Public Accounts Committee, the Estimates Committee and the Committee on Public Undertakings.

Powers:

- Parliamentary committees draw their authority from **Article 105 (on privileges of Parliament members)** and **Article 118 (on Parliament's authority to make rules for regulating its procedure and conduct of business)**.

Significance:

- Committee reports are usually exhaustive and provide authentic information on matters related to governance. Bills that are referred to committees are returned to the House with significant value addition. Parliament is not bound by the recommendations of committees.

What these committees do?

- Support Parliament's work.
- Examine ministerial budgets, consider Demands for Grants, analyse legislation and scrutinise the government's working.
- Examine Bills referred to by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha.
- Consideration of Annual Reports.
- Consideration of national basic long term policy documents presented to the House and referred to the Committee by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

Advantages of having such committees:

- The deliberations and scrutiny by committees ensure that Parliament is able to fulfil some of its constitutional obligations in a politically charged environment.
- They also help in obtaining public feedback and building political consensus on contentious issues.
- They help develop expertise in subjects, and enable consultation with independent experts and stakeholders.
- The committees perform their functions without the cloud of political positioning and populist opinion.
- These committees allow the views of diverse stakeholders.
- They function through the year.
- They also offer an opportunity for detailed scrutiny of bills being piloted by the government.
- They increase the efficiency and expertise of Parliament.
- Their reports allow for informed debate in Parliament.

How can these committees be made more effective?

- Parliamentary committees don't have dedicated subject-wise research support available. The knowledge gap is partially bridged by expert testimony from government and other stakeholders. Their work could be made more effective if the committees had **full-time, sector-specific research staff**.
- The national commission to review the working of the Constitution has recommended that in order to strengthen the committee system, **research support should be made available to them**.
- Currently, the rules of Parliament don't require every bill to be referred to a parliamentary committee for scrutiny. While this allows the government greater flexibility and the ability to speed up legislative business,

it comes at the cost of ineffective scrutiny by the highest law-making body. **Mandatory scrutiny of all bills by parliamentary committees would ensure better planning of legislative business.**

Sources: the Hindu.

6. WHAT IS A FLOOR TEST OR TRUST VOTE?

- A floor test is a **constitutional mechanism**. It is used to determine if the incumbent government enjoys the support of the legislature.

How it takes place?

- This voting process happens in the state's Legislative Assembly or the Lok Sabha at the central level.
- Technically, the chief minister of a state is appointed by the Governor. The appointed chief minister usually belongs to the single largest party or the coalition which has the 'magic number'. The **magic number is the total number of seats required to form a government, or stay in power**. It is the half-way mark, plus one. In case of a tie, the Speaker casts the deciding vote
- However, at times, a government's majority can be questioned. **The leader of the party claiming majority has to move a vote of confidence.**
- If some MLAs remain absent or abstain from voting, the **majority is counted on the basis of those present and voting**. This effectively reduces the strength of the House and in turn brings down the majority-mark.
- **The voting process can happen orally, with electronic gadgets or a ballot process.**
- The **Governor can also ask the Chief Minister to prove his or her majority in the House** if the stability of the government comes into question.

Composite floor test:

- While there is another test, Composite floor test, which is **necessitated when more than one person stake the claim to form the government and the majority is not clear.**
- **Governor may call a special session to assess** who has the majority. The majority is counted based on those present and voting and this can be done through voice vote also.

Topics: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

1. SUTLEJ YAMUNA LINK (SYL) CANAL

What to study?

- For prelims: Geographical location of SYL canal and associated rivers.
- For mains: Dispute over the construction of this canal, concerns and what needs to be done?

Context: The recent Supreme Court order asking Punjab, Haryana and Centre to sort out **SYL issue** amicably, has brought to centre stage the contentious issue of sharing of waters between the two states.

What is the Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal, and the controversy over it?

- The **creation of Haryana from the old (undivided) Punjab in 1966** threw up the problem of giving Haryana its share of river waters. **Punjab was opposed to sharing waters of the Ravi and Beas with Haryana**, citing riparian principles, and arguing that it had no water to spare.
- However, Centre, in 1976, issued a notification **allocating to Haryana 3.5 million acre feet (MAF) out of undivided Punjab's 7.2 MAF.**
- **The Eradi Tribunal** headed by Supreme Court Judge V Balakrishna Eradi was set up to reassess availability and sharing of water. The Tribunal, in 1987, **recommended an increase in the shares of Punjab and Haryana to 5 MAF and 3.83 MAF, respectively.**
- To enable Haryana to use its share of the waters of the Sutlej and its tributary Beas, **a canal linking the Sutlej with the Yamuna**, cutting across the state, was planned.
- **A tripartite agreement was also negotiated between Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan** in this regard.

- However, following the protests in Punjab, the Punjab Assembly passed **The Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004**, terminating its water-sharing agreements, and thus jeopardising the construction of SYL in Punjab.

Why is Haryana's claim?

- Haryana has been staking claim on Ravi-Beas waters through SYL canal on the plea that providing water for irrigation was a tough task for the state. In southern parts, where the underground water had depleted up to 1700 feet, there was a problem of drinking water.
- Haryana has been invoking its contribution to the central food bowl and lamenting that justice had been denied to the state by not providing it its rightful share in the water as assessed by a tribunal.

Sources: the hindu.

2. RENAMING OF STATES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Procedure to change the name of states in India.

Context: Over the years, several demands have been made, for reasons that could be either political or administrative, to change the name of West Bengal.

- A request in 2018 was rejected by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in November 2018 due to the similarity between "Bangla" and "Bangladesh".

Rationale behind renaming:

- The state government first proposed the renaming in 2016. West Bengal argues for the change saying **bureaucrats and politicians from the state often complain that they are asked to speak at the end of every national-level meeting in Delhi**. This was because the speakers' lists at such meeting are prepared according to **alphabetical order of the states they represent**. If West Bengal gets the new name, it will leapfrog from bottom of the list to the top of the pecking order.
- The renaming will help the state appear at the **fourth spot after Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Assam** in the alphabetic order of the states.

The procedure of renaming of the state can be initiated by either the Parliament or the State Legislator and the procedure is as follows:

- The renaming of a state **requires Parliamentary approval under Article 3 and 4** of the Constitution.
- A **bill for renaming a state may be introduced in the Parliament on the recommendation of the President**.
- Before the introduction of the bill, **the President shall send the bill to the respective state assembly** for expressing their views within a stipulated time. **The views of the state assembly are not binding**, neither on the President nor on the Parliament.
- On the expiry of the period, the bill will be sent to the Parliament for deliberation. **The bill in order to take the force of a law must be passed by a simple majority**.
- The bill is **sent for approval to the President**. After the approval of the said bill, the bill becomes a law and the name of the state stands modified.

Initiation by a State:

- If any fresh proposal comes from states to the Home Ministry, it will prepare a note for the Union Cabinet for an amendment to the Schedule 1 of the Constitution. Thereafter, a Constitution Amendment Bill will be introduced in Parliament, which has to approve it with a simple majority, before the President gives his assent to it.

Sources: the hindu.

Topics: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1. HUMAN RIGHTS COURTS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: human rights courts- provision with regards to its establishment, composition, objectives and why there is delay in setting up of such courts?

Context: The Supreme Court has sought a response from the Central government, the States and the Union Territories on the prolonged delay for over a quarter of a century **to establish exclusive human rights courts in each district and appointing special public prosecutors in them.**

What's the issue?

- The **Human Rights Act** had called for the **establishment of special courts in each district to conduct speedy trial of offences arising out of violation and abuse of human rights.**

Establishment:

- Section 30 of the Act** envisages that a State government, with the concurrence of the Chief Justice of High Court, by notification, specify for each district a court of session as a court of human rights for the speedy trial of violation of rights. Whereas **Section 31** of the Act provides the State government to specify and appoint a special public prosecutor in that court.

Need:

- To uphold and protect the basic and fundamental rights of an individual** it is an indispensable obligation upon the State **to provide affordable, effective and speedy trial** of offences related to violation of human rights which can only be achieved by setting up special courts in each district as provided under the Act.

Background:

- From 2001 to 2010, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** recorded that 14,231 i.e. 4.33 persons died in police and judicial custody in the country. This includes 1,504 deaths in police custody and 12,727 deaths in judicial custody from 2001-2002 to 2009-2010, and a large majority of these deaths being a direct consequence of torture in custody, the petition said.
- India Human Rights Report 2018** threw light on various rights violations such as police brutality, torture and excess custodial and encounters deaths, horrible conditions in prisons and detention centres, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention, denial of fair public trial.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. FOREIGNERS TRIBUNALS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Foreigners Tribunal-need, composition, Functions and significance.

Context: According to Assam government data presented in an affidavit to the Supreme Court and in the Assembly this year, Foreigners' Tribunals have declared 1,03,764 persons foreigners between 1985 and August 2018.

How do Foreigners' Tribunals work?

- The Foreigners' Tribunals — 100 existing and 200 more to be functional by September 1 — are **quasi-judicial bodies** meant to "furnish opinion on the question as to whether a person is or is not a foreigner within the meaning of **Foreigners Act, 1946**".
- In 1964, the Centre passed the **Foreigners' (Tribunals) Order under provisions of Section 3 of the Act.**
- The FTs get **two kinds of cases:** those against whom a "reference" has been made by border police, and those whose names in the electoral rolls have a D (Doubtful) against them.

Under what provision do Foreigners' Tribunals pass ex parte orders?

- **Section 9 of the Foreigners Act** says that “the onus of proving that such person is not a foreigner or is not a foreigner of such particular class or description, as the case may be, shall, notwithstanding anything contained in the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, lie upon such person”.
- Thus, **the accused has to prove he or she is an Indian**. Since the onus is on the person, if he or she is absconding and doesn't appear before the **tribunal, the member can pass an ex parte order**.

Can an accused contest an ex parte order?

- The said order **may be reviewed by the Foreigners' Tribunal if sufficient reasons are shown by the proceededee** for his absence or for having no knowledge about the cases, within the absence or for having no knowledge about such order.

What happens if an ex parte order does not come up for review, or a review fails?

- If police can track the person after the order, he or she will be arrested and put into a detention camp. If not, the person will be an ‘untraced foreigner’. Many ‘declared foreigners’ appeal in the High Court and then the Supreme Court against an order by the FT.

Sources: Indian Express.

3. ENVIRONMENT POLLUTION (PREVENTION AND CONTROL) AUTHORITY (EPCA)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: EPCA- objectives, composition and significance.

Context: To reduce air pollution in Delhi, the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) has requested the Supreme Court to intervene in the “grossly inadequate” public transport infrastructure of the city.

About Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA):

- EPCA was constituted with the objective of '**protecting and improving**' the **quality of the environment** and '**controlling environmental pollution**' in the **National Capital Region**.
- The EPCA also assists the apex court in various environment-related matters in the region.
- EPCA is **Supreme Court mandated body** tasked with taking various measures to tackle air pollution in the National Capital Region. It was **notified in 1998 by Environment Ministry under Environment Protection Act, 1986**.

Composition:

- Besides the chairman, the EPCA has 14 members, some of whom are the environment secretary of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT), chairperson of the New Delhi Municipal Council, transport commissioner of the NCT, the commissioners of various municipal corporations of Delhi and professors at IIT Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Functions:

- To protect and improve quality of environment and prevent and control environmental pollution in National Capital Region.
- To enforce Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in NCR as per the pollution levels.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. SEBI AND IT'S AUTONOMY

- **Context:** As part of the **Finance Bill** introduced in Parliament, the Centre had proposed **amendments to the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992** that were seen as affecting SEBI's financial autonomy.

What's the issue?

- The amendments required that after **25% of its surplus cash in any year is transferred to its reserve fund, SEBI will have to transfer the remaining 75% to the government**.

- It was felt that the Centre's decision to suck out SEBI's surplus funds will affect its autonomy. Therefore, **SEBI asked the centre to reconsider its decision.**
- But, the government has rejected the plea, thus paving the way for further conflict.

Analysis:

- Prima facie, there seems to be very little rationale in the government's decision to confiscate funds from the chief markets regulator.
- For one, **it is highly unlikely that the quantum of funds that the government is likely to receive from SEBI will make much of a difference to the government's overall fiscal situation.**
- In fact, the amendment seek to increase control over the regulator rather than by financial considerations. This is particularly so given that the recent amendments require SEBI to seek approval from the government to go ahead with its capital expenditure plans.

Concerns:

- A regulatory agency that is at the government's mercy to run its financial and administrative operations **cannot be expected to be independent.**
- The lack of financial autonomy can affect SEBI's plans to improve the quality of its operations by investing in new technologies and other requirements to upgrade market infrastructure.
- This can affect the **health of India's financial markets** in the long run.

What needs to be done?

- Regulatory agencies such as SEBI need to be given full powers over their assets and be made accountable to Parliament. Stripping them of their powers by subsuming them under the wings of the government will affect their credibility.

5. NATIONAL DATA QUALITY FORUM (NDQF)

What to study?

- For prelims: NDQF- features, need and launched by?
- For mains: The need for data management, challenges present and measures to address them.

Context: Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s **National Institute for Medical Statistics (ICMR-NIMS)**, in partnership with Population Council, has launched the **National Data Quality Forum (NDQF)**.

Aims:

- The NDQF aims at establishing protocols and good practices when dealing with data collection, storage, use and dissemination that can be applied to health and demographic data, as well as replicated across industries and sectors.
- The NDQF aims to do brainstorming, piloting and employ advanced modeling techniques in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data analytics along with using technology-based solutions to improve data quality.

Roles and functions:

- NDQF will integrate learnings from scientific and evidence-based initiatives and guide actions through periodic workshops and conferences.
- It will fetch quality data in upcoming health studies and surveys such as **National Family Health Survey (NFHS).**

Benefits and significance:

- Its activities will help establish protocols and good practices of data collection, storage, use and dissemination that can be applied to health and demographic data, as well as replicated across industries and sectors noted a release issued by ICMR.

Need:

- Data on health and demographics in India is plagued by incomplete information, overestimation, and under- and over-reporting that lead to hindrance in policy planning.

Challenges present:

- lack of comparability and poor usability of national level data sources.
- discordance between system and survey level estimates.
- increased questionnaire length and questions on socially restricted conversation topics that translate to poor data quality.
- age-reporting errors or non-response and intentional skipping of questions.
- underreporting due to subjective question interpretation and incompleteness.
- paucity of data to generate reliable estimates on mortality as major barriers to quality data.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. CENTRAL WAKF COUNCIL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Objectives, composition, functions and significance of the Central Wakf Council.

Context: A national conference of **Central Waqf Council (CWC)** was recently held.

What is it?

- Central Wakf Council is a **statutory body** established in 1964 by the Government of India under **Wakf Act, 1954 (now a sub section the Wakf Act, 1995)**.
- It has been established **for the purpose of advising Centre on matters pertaining to working of the State Wakf Boards and proper administration of the Wakfs in the country**.
- It is a **permanent dedication of movable or immovable properties for religious, pious or charitable purposes as recognized by Muslim Law, given by philanthropists**.

Composition and appointments:

- The Council is headed by a Chairperson, who is the **Union Minister in charge of Wakfs** and there are maximum 20 other members, appointed by Government of India as stipulated in the Wakf Act.

Topics: *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

1. ONE NATION-ONE RATION CARD

What to study?

- For prelims: key features of the proposed scheme, PDS.
- For mains: Need for, significance of the scheme and challenges in its implementation.

Context: Government all set to implement “**One nation-one ration card**” scheme throughout India by 30th June, 2020.

About the scheme:

- One Nation One Ration Card (RC) will ensure **all beneficiaries especially migrants can access PDS across the nation from any PDS shop of their own choice**.
- **Benefits:** no poor person is deprived of getting subsidised foodgrains under the food security scheme when they shift from one place to another. It also aims to remove the **chance of anyone holding more than one ration card** to avail benefits from different states.
- **Significance:** This will provide freedom to the beneficiaries as they will not be tied to any one PDS shop and reduce their dependence on shop owners and curtail instances of corruption.

Challenges:

- **Prone to corruption:** Every state has its own rules for Public Distribution System (PDS). If ‘One Nation, One Ration Card’ is implemented, it will further boost corruption in an already corrupted Public Distribution System.

- The scheme will increase the woes of the common man and, the middlemen and corrupt PDS shop owners will exploit them.
- Tamil Nadu has opposed the proposal of the Centre, saying it would result in undesirable consequences and is against federalism.

2. JAL SHAKTI ABHIYAN

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: features, need for and significance of the campaign.

Context: Jal Shakti Abhiyan for Water Conservation Launched.

Key facts:

- It is a time-bound, **mission-mode campaign** that would focus on 1,592 “water-stressed” blocks in 257 districts.
- The campaign will run **through citizen participation** during the monsoon season, from 1st July, 2019 to 15th September, 2019.
- The 1,592 blocks, identified as “water-stressed” as per the Central Ground Water Board’s 2017 data, include 313 critical blocks, 1,000-odd over-exploited blocks and 94 blocks with least water availability (for states without water-stressed blocks).
- Jal Shakti Abhiyan is a **collaborative effort of various Ministries** of the Government of India and State Governments, being coordinated by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- Under the campaign, teams of officers from the central government will visit and work with district administration in water stressed blocks, to ensure **five important water conservation interventions**.
- **These will be** water conservation and rainwater harvesting, renovation of traditional and other water bodies/tanks, reuse, bore well recharge structures, watershed development and intensive afforestation.
- **Other measures:** These water conservation efforts will also be supplemented with special interventions including the development of Block and District Water Conservation Plans, promotion of efficient water use for irrigation and better choice of crops through Krishi Vigyan Kendras.
- A large-scale **communications campaign** has also been planned alongside the JSA involving mass mobilisation of different groups including school students, college students, swachhagrahis, Self Help Groups, Panchayati Raj Institution members, youth groups (NSS/NYKS/NCC), defence personnel, ex-servicemen and pensioners, among various others.

3. REGISTER OF INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS OF NAGALAND (RIIN)

What to study?

- For prelims: RIIN- key features, aims and objectives.
- For mains: need, challenges and significance.

Context: Nagaland government has decided to set up a **Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN)** with the aim of preventing fake indigenous inhabitants’ certificates.

Key features:

- The RIIN will be the **master list of all indigenous inhabitants of the state**.
- The RIIN list will be based on “**an extensive survey**”.
- It will **involve official records of indigenous residents from rural and (urban) wards** and would be prepared under the supervision of the district administration.
- This **provisional list will then be published in all villages, wards** and on government websites by September 11, 2019.

What will the unique identity look like?

- All **indigenous inhabitants** of the state would be issued a **barcoded and numbered Indigenous Inhabitant Certificate**.

What is an ILP?

- The process will be conducted across Nagaland and will be done as part of the online system of **Inner Line Permit (ILP)**, which is already in force in Nagaland.
- **Inner Line Permit (ILP)** is an official travel document required by Indian citizens residing outside certain “protected” states while entering them. The ILP is issued by the Government of India and is obligatory for all those who reside outside the protected states. With the ILP, the government aims to regulate movement to certain areas located near the international border of India.

Origin of ILP:

- ILP's origin dates back to the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873**, which protected the British Crown's interest in tea, oil and elephant trade.
- It prohibited “**British subjects**” or Indians from entering into these protected areas.
- After Independence, in 1950, the word “British subjects” was replaced by **Citizens of India** and the focus of the ban on free movement was explained as a bid to protect tribal cultures in northeastern India.
- Currently, the **Inner Line Permit is operational in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.**
- **It can be issued for travel purposes solely.**

How will be the process be monitored?

- The entire exercise will be monitored by the **Commissioner of Nagaland**. In addition, the state government will designate **nodal officers of the rank of a Secretary to the state government**. Their role will be to monitor the implementation. However, they will have no say in the adjudication process.

How will the RIIN be updated?

- Once the RIIN is finalised, **no fresh indigenous inhabitant certificates will be issued except to newborn babies born to the indigenous inhabitants of Nagaland.**

Sources: Indian Express.

4. NORTH EAST VENTURE FUND (NEVF)

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Objectives, funding and significance of NEVF.

About North East Venture Fund (NEVF):

- **Set up by North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Limited (NEDFi)** in association with Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (M-DoNER).
- It is the **first dedicated venture capital fund for the North Eastern Region**.
- **Objective:** to contribute to the entrepreneurship development of the NER and achieve attractive risk-adjusted returns through long term capital appreciation by way of investments in privately negotiated equity/ equity related investments.
- The **investment under this scheme ranges from Rs. 25 lakh to Rs.10 crore per venture**, which is long term in nature with investment horizon of 4-5 years.

5. CENTRAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (RESERVATION IN TEACHERS' CADRE) BILL, 2019

- **Context:** Parliament passes the **Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019**.

Key features:

- The Bill provides for **reservation of teaching positions in central educational institutions for persons belonging to:** (i) Scheduled Castes, (ii) Scheduled Tribes, (iii) socially and educationally backward classes, and (iv) economically weaker sections.
- **Reservation of posts:** The Bill provides for reservation of posts in direct recruitment of teachers (out of the sanctioned strength) in central educational institutions. For the purpose of such reservation, a central educational institution will be regarded as one unit. This implies that the allocation of teaching posts for

reserved categories would be done on the basis of all positions of the same level (such as assistant professor) across departments.

- **Coverage and exceptions:** The Bill will apply to ‘central educational institutions’ which include universities set up by Acts of Parliament, institutions deemed to be a university, institutions of national importance, and institutions receiving aid from the central government.
- **However, it excludes certain institutions** of excellence, research institutions, and institutions of national and strategic importance which have been specified in the Schedule to the Bill. It also excludes minority education institutions.

6. SECTION 375 OF THE IPC

What to study?

- For prelims: about POCSO, Section 375.
- For mains: need for gender neutrality, associated concerns, challenges and measures needed.

Context: Defending India’s gender-specific rape law under which the perpetrator of the offence can only be a ‘man’, the Centre has told the Delhi High Court that “**the existing definition of rape under Section 375 (rape) should be left untouched**”.

Why? (Arguments by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA):

- These sections have been enacted to protect and keep a check on the rising level of sexual offences against women in the country.
- The existing definition of rape under **Section 375** should be left untouched as the “ambit of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, which covers all forms of sexual offences against minors, and Section 377 of the IPC were adequate to cover all sexual offences”.

Background:

- The MHA’s affidavit came in response to a public interest petition claiming that **the existing law pertaining to rape was gender specific and protects only females**.
- The High Court had previously asked the Centre to clarify its stand on the issue, particularly in view of the **recommendation of the Law Commission of India, to make rape laws “gender neutral”**.

Arguments by the petitioner:

- Gender neutrality is a simple recognition of reality — men sometimes fall victim to the same, or at least very similar, acts to those suffered by women.
- Male rape is far too prevalent to be termed an anomaly or freak incident. By not having gender-neutral rape laws, we are denying a lot more men justice than is commonly thought.
- In India, sexual crimes against boys under 18 years are covered under the POCSO Act, but once they become adults they do not have any legal recourse.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. SECTION 124 OF IPC

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Section 124, need for, concerns and alternatives available.

Context: The Union government has no plans to repeal **sedition law as it is needed to effectively combat anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements**, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai told Rajya Sabha.

What is Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code?

- Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life or any shorter term, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.

Why should it be scrapped?

- Draconian laws such as the Section 124-A only serve to give a legal veneer to the regime's persecution of voices and movements against oppression by casting them as anti-national.

What has Supreme Court ruled?

- The Supreme Court has persistently held that for the offence of sedition to be satisfied, there has to be a causal relationship between speech and acts of violence, and mere speech, regardless of how subversive it is, does not amount to sedition.

Short term measures to be put up in place:

- **All speech-related offences should be made bailable offences;** this would lessen the harmful impact of using arrest and custody as a way of harassing anyone exercising their rights under Article 19(1)(a).
- The offences should be made **non-cognisable** so that there is at least a judicial check on the police acting on the basis of politically motivated complaints.
- In the case of hate speech, it is important to **raise the burden of proof on those who claim that their sentiments are hurt** rather than accept them at face value. And finally, it is crucial that **courts begin to take action against those who bring malicious complaints against speech acts.**

Sources: the Hindu.

8. SURROGACY REGULATION BILL

What to study?

- For prelims: key features of the bill.
- For mains: need for regulation, concerns and issues associated with surrogacy.

Context: The Cabinet has approved the introduction of **Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019** that aims to prohibit commercial surrogacy in India.

Key features of the bill:

- The Bill proposes to regulate surrogacy in India by establishing a **National Surrogacy Board** at the central level and **state surrogacy boards** and appropriate authorities in the state and Union Territories.
- The purpose of the Bill is **to ensure effective regulation of surrogacy, prohibit commercial surrogacy, and allow ethical surrogacy.**
- While **commercial surrogacy will be prohibited**, including sale and purchase of human embryos and gametes, **ethical surrogacy for needy couples** will be allowed on fulfilment of stipulated conditions.
- It will also **prevent exploitation of surrogate mothers and children born through surrogacy.**
- **There will not be any financial implications**, except for the meetings of the National and State Surrogacy Boards and appropriate authorities, which will be met out of the administrative budgets of respective departments.

Need for regulation:

- India has emerged as a **surrogacy hub** for couples from other countries and there have been reports concerning unethical practices, exploitation of surrogate mothers, abandonment of children born out of surrogacy, and rackets involving intermediaries importing human embryos and gametes. **The 228th report of the Law Commission of India** has recommended prohibiting commercial surrogacy and **allowing altruistic surrogacy** by enacting suitable legislation.

What is an altruistic surrogacy arrangement?

- The Bill includes contracting a '**close relative**' as a surrogate by a heterosexual married couple who have been childless for five years of their marriage.

(Q) Analyse the ethical and economic implications of latest surrogacy bill.

9. TRANSGENDER RIGHTS BILL

What to study?

- For Prelims: Definitions included and key features of the bill.
- For Mains: Significance of the bill, criticisms and the need for a comprehensive review.

Context: Cabinet approves **The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019.**

Impact:

- The Bill will benefit a large number of transgender persons, mitigate the stigma, discrimination and abuse against this marginalized section and bring them into the mainstream of society. This will lead to inclusiveness and will make the transgender persons productive members of the society.

Background:

- Transgender community is among one of the most marginalized communities in the country because they don't fit into the stereotypical categories of gender of 'men' or 'women'. Consequently, they face problems ranging from social exclusion to discrimination, lack of education facilities, unemployment, lack of medical facilities and so on. The Bill shall empower the transgender community socially, educationally and economically.

New definition:

- According to the new definition, a **transgender person is somebody "whose gender does not match the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-men or trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons having socio-cultural identities such as kinnar, hijras, aravani, and jogta".**

Highlights of the Bill:

- The Bill aims to stop discrimination against a transgender person in various sectors such as education, employment, and healthcare. It also directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes for them.
- The Bill states that a person will be recognised as transgender on the basis of a certificate of identity issued through the district screening committee. This certificate will be a proof of identity as transgender and confer rights under this Bill.
- Going by the bill, **a person would have the right to choose to be identified as a man, woman or transgender, irrespective of sex reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy.**
- It also **requires transgender persons to go through a district magistrate and "district screening committee" to get certified as a transperson.**
- The **committee would comprise** a medical officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, a government official, and a transgender person.

Criticisms:

- The Bill is **silent on granting reservations to transgender persons.**
- The bill has prescribed punishments for organised begging. However, the Bill **doesn't provide anything to better to condition in those areas, it doesn't provide for reservation.**
- The Transgender Bill **does not mention any punishments for rape or sexual assault of transgender persons** as according to Sections 375 and 376 of the Indian Penal Code, rape is only when a man forcefully enters a woman.

Need of the hour:

- The Bill must recognise that gender identity must go beyond biological; gender identity is an individual's deep and personal experience. It need not correspond to the sex assigned at birth. It includes the personal sense of the body and other expressions such as one's own personal inducing proceeds.

(Q) The new law on rights of transgender fail to take into account the lived realities of the lives of transgenders. Discuss.

10. BANNING OF UNREGULATED DEPOSIT SCHEMES BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features and significance of the Bill.
- For Mains: Need for a legislation on this, recent issues and concerns associated with such schemes.

Context: Rajya Sabha passes the **Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019**.

Significance and impact:

- The Bill will immediately **tackle the menace of illicit deposit-taking activities in the country** launched by rapacious operators, which at present are exploiting regulatory gaps and lack of strict administrative measures to dupe poor and gullible people of their hard-earned savings, an official statement said.
- It will **altogether ban unregulated deposit taking schemes**, and the law has adequate provisions for punishment and disgorgement or repayment of deposits in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.

Key provisions of the Bill:

- **Substantive banning clause** which bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme. The Bill bans unregulated deposit taking activities altogether, by making them an offence ex-ante rather than the existing legislative-cum-regulatory framework which only comes into effect ex-post with considerable time lags.
- **Creation of three different types of offences**, namely, running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.
- **Severe punishment and heavy pecuniary fines** to act as deterrent.
- **Provisions for disgorgement or repayment of deposits** in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.
- **Attachment of properties / assets by the Competent Authority, and subsequent realization of assets for repayment to depositors.**
- Clear-cut **time lines** have been provided for attachment of property and restitution to depositors.
- Creation of an **online central database**, for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country.

The Bill defines “Deposit Taker” and “Deposit” comprehensively:

- “**Deposit Takers**” include all possible entities (including individuals) receiving or soliciting deposits, except specific entities such as those incorporated by legislation.
- “**Deposit**” is defined in such a manner that deposit-takers are restricted from camouflaging public deposits as receipts, and at the same time, not to curb or hinder acceptance of money by an establishment in the ordinary course of its business.

Why do we need a comprehensive law on this?

- To deal with the menace of illicit deposit taking schemes, as in the recent past, there have been rising instances of people in various parts of the country being defrauded by illicit deposit taking schemes.
- The worst victims of these schemes are the poor and the financially illiterate, and the operations of such schemes are often spread over many States.

11. PRIVATE MEMBER’S BILL CALLS FOR TWO-CHILD NORM

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Concerns and issues associated with the proposed two-child policy.

Context: A nominated MP has introduced a private member’s Bill- **Population Regulation Bill, 2019**- in the Rajya Sabha, seeking to **enforce a two-child norm by giving incentives for those adopting the small family practice and penalties for those contravening it**.

Highlights of the Bill:

- It suggests that **people with more than two living children should be “disqualified” from being chosen as an MP, MLA or a member of any body of the local self government** after the commencement of the Act.
- Similarly, it suggests that **government employees should give an undertaking that she or he will not procreate more than two children**.
- It says **those government employees who have more than two children on or before the commencement of the Act should be exempted**.
- **Other penalties include** reduction in subsidies on loans and interest rates on savings instruments, reduction in benefits under the public distribution system, and higher than normal interest rates for availing loans from banks and financial institutions.
- The provisions of the Bill also list out **several benefits for Central and public sector enterprise employees who adopt the two-child norm** “by undergoing sterilization operation himself or of the spouse”.

Criticisms related to two- child policy:

- India is a country with a **booming technology industry, one that relies on young people**. There is fear that, by restricting the number of children that can be born, **there will not be enough educated young people in the next generation to carry on India’s technological revolution**.
- Critics also argue that the **population growth of India will slow down naturally as the country grows richer and becomes more educated**.
- There are already **well-documented problems with China’s one-child policy**, namely the gender imbalance resulting from a strong preference for boys and millions of undocumented children who were born to parents that already had their one child. **These problems risk being replicated in India with the implementation of their two-child policy**.
- By interfering with the birth rate, India faces a **future with severe negative population growth**, a serious problem that most developed countries are trying to reverse. With **negative population growth, the number of old people receiving social services is larger than the young tax base that is paying for the social services**. In this case, **taxes must be increased and young people risk contributing way more than they will receive in the future**.
- The law related may also be **anti-women**. Human rights activists argue that, not only does the law discriminate against women right from birth (through abortion or infanticide of female fetuses and babies), but divorce and familial abandonment are at risk of increasing if a man with a large family wants to run for political office. In addition, women in India are, by and large, uneducated and illiterate and, as such, are often unaware of the two-child policy.
- A legal restriction to two children could **force couples to go for sex-selective abortions as there are only two ‘attempts’**. A significant proportion of such women, especially those from lower socio-economic strata, would be forced to go for unsafe abortions because of issues of access and affordability. **Besides being inhumane, this is bound to create gender imbalances**.

Are urgent and aggressive steps to control population required for India?

- It is indeed a fact that **population of India is growing and will continue to grow for the next couple of decades**. This is because, as compared to the past, there is a higher proportion of people in the marriageable age group who will produce children, and people are now living longer.
- However, **the fertility rates are also declining**. The average number of children that a woman is expected to bear in her lifetime is called the total fertility rate (TFR). **A TFR of about 2.1 is considered as replacement-level fertility – if achieved, it will lead the population to stabilise in the long run**.
- As per **National Family Health Survey** data, **the country-level TFR in India is 2.23**, which is not hugely above the desired level of 2.1.
- **Twenty states/UTs have achieved the replacement-level TFR, another five have got it below 2.2**, with the remaining 11 states (including Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh) having a higher rate. Though these 11 states/UTs accounts for 42% of country’s population, they are already showing a fall in their TFRs.

Sources: Indian Express.

(Q) In 2050, India’s population is projected to be 1.69 billion, which will be higher than that of China. Do you think with Population Regulation Bill, India be able to handle its overpopulation crisis? Critically analyse.

12. DRAFT TENANCY LAW

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of the draft and need for a law in this regard.

Context: Centre has proposed a **Model Tenancy Law to regulate renting of premises.**

Highlights of the draft:

- It mandates the **landowner** to give a notice in writing three months before revising rent.
- It advocates **appointing district collector as rent authority and heavy penalty on tenants for overstaying.**
- According to it, **tenants overstaying will have to pay double the rent for two times and four times thereafter.**
- The **security deposit** to be paid by the tenant in advance will be a **maximum of two months' rent.**
- Both landlord and tenant will have to submit a copy of rent agreement to the district Rent Authority** which will also have the power to revise or fix rent following a request either by landlord or tenant.
- States will be free to **adopt the law owing to land being state subject.**
- States will be required to **constitute rent courts and rent tribunal.**
- If the landowner refuses to carry out the required repairs, **the tenant can get the work done and deduct the same from periodic rent.**
- A **landowner cannot enter the rented premises without 24-hour prior notice** to carry out repairs or replacement.
- Landowner cannot cut power and water supply in case of a dispute with the tenant.**
- Rent Authority may direct for compensation** on the person responsible for cutting off or withholding the essential supply.
- The Rent Authority may levy a **penalty be paid to the landowner or tenant** if it finds that the application was made frivolously or vexatiously.

Significance:

- It is an important piece of legislation that promises **to ease the burden on civil courts, unlock rental properties stuck in legal disputes, and prevent future tangles** by balancing the interests of tenants and landlords.

Need for a law in this regard:

- Young, educated job seekers migrating to large metropolises often complain of onerous tenancy conditions and obscene sums of money as security deposits that they are asked to fork out to lease accommodation. In some cities, tenants are asked to pay security deposits amounting to 11 months of rent. Also, some house owners routinely breach tenants' right to privacy by visiting the premises unannounced for sundry repair works. Whimsical rent raises are another problem for tenants, many of whom complain of being squeezed as "captive customers".
- Besides, **Tenants are often accused of "squatting" on the rented premises, or trying to grab the property.**

13. PRIVATISATION OF THE RAILWAYS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: privatisation of railways- pros and cons, Debroy committee recommendations.

Context: Government rules out **privatisation of railways.**

Recommendations by Bibek Debroy Committee:

- The Bibek Debroy Committee, which was set up to suggest ways to mobilise resources for the Indian Railways and restructure the Railway Board, has favoured **privatisation of rolling stock: wagons and coaches.**

Rail Privatisation:

Pros:

- **Improved Infrastructure** – It will lead to better infrastructure which in turn would lead to improved amenities for travelers.
- **Balancing Quality of Service with High Fares** – The move would foster competition and hence lead to overall betterment in the quality of services.
- **Lesser Accidents** – Because private ownership is synonymous with better maintenance, supporters of privatisation feel that it will reduce the number of accidents, thus resulting in safe travel and higher monetary savings in the long run.

Cons:

- **Coverage Limited to Lucrative Sectors** – An advantage of Indian Railways being government-owned is that it provides nation-wide connectivity irrespective of profit. This would not be possible with privatisation since routes which are less popular will be eliminated, thus having a negative impact on connectivity. It will also render some parts of the country virtually inaccessible and omit them from the process of development.
- **Fares** – Given that a private enterprise runs on profit, it is but natural to assume that the easiest way of accruing profits in Indian Railways would be to hike fares, thus rendering the service out of reach for lower income groups. This will defeat the entire purpose of the system which is meant to serve the entire population of the country irrespective of the level of income.
- **Accountability** – Private companies are unpredictable in their dealings and do not share their governance secrets with the world at large. In such a scenario it would be difficult to pin the accountability on a particular entity, should there be a discrepancy.

Key recommendations made by Debsroy committee:

- Link increase in passenger fares to better passenger services
- Create a separate company for railway infrastructure
- Open access for any new operator who wishes to enter the market for operating trains
- Separate suburban services and run them as joint ventures with state governments.
- Private entry into running both freight and passenger trains in competition with Indian Railways
- Separation of rail track from rolling stock

Sources: the Hindu.

14. GUIDELINES FOR CRÈCHES AT WORKPLACES

What to study?

- For Prelims: Maternity Benefit Act- key features, Guidelines on crèches at workplaces.
- For Mains: Significance of the act and challenges in its implementation, what needs to be done?

Context: Data on provision of **mandatory crèche services at establishments is not maintained centrally**. The complaints received for violation of provision of the Act by respective Governments are dealt with as per the provisions of the Act.

Legal provisions:

- In March 2017, Parliament passed the **Maternity Benefit Amendment Act, 2017**, enhancing paid maternity leave from a period of 12 weeks to 26 weeks. **The law is applicable to all institutions with 10 or more employees**. It also makes it **mandatory for every organisation with 50 or more employees to have a crèche**.

The guidelines include:

- **A crèche be either at the workplace or within 500 metres of it. Alternatively, it could also be in the beneficiaries' neighbourhood.**
- The facility should be **open for eight to 10 hours** and if the employees have a shift system, then the crèche should also be run accordingly.
- A crèche must have a **minimum space of 10 to 12 square feet per child to ensure that she or he can play, rest and learn**. There should be no unsafe places such as open drains, pits, garbage bins near the centre.

- The crèches should have **at least one guard**, who should have undergone police verification. There should also be at least one supervisor per crèche and a trained worker for every 10 children under three years of age or for every 20 children above the age of three, along with a helper.
- **No outsiders** such as plumbers, drivers, electricians be allowed inside the crèche when children are present.
- A **crèche monitoring committee** with representations from among crèche workers, parents and administration should be formed.
- There should also be a **grievance redressal committee** for inquiring into instances of sexual abuse.

The Maternity Benefit Act:

- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, **applies to establishments employing 10 or more than 10 persons in factories, mines, plantation, shops & establishments and other entities.**
- The main purpose of this Act is **to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for certain period before and after child birth and to provide maternity benefit and certain other benefits.**
- The Act was **amended through the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017.**

The amendment has brought in major changes to the law relating to maternity benefits. These are:

- **It extends the period of maternity benefit from 12 weeks to 26 weeks** of which not more than eight weeks can precede the date of the expected delivery. This exceeds the International Labour Organisation's minimum standard of 14 weeks and is a positive development. However, a woman who has two or more surviving children will be entitled to 12 weeks of which not more than six weeks can precede the date of the expected delivery.
- Women who legally adopt a child below the age of three months or a "commissioning mother" will be entitled to **maternity benefit for 12 weeks** from the date on which the child is handed over to her. A commissioning mother is defined as a biological mother who uses her egg to create an embryo implanted in another woman.
- It gives **discretion to employers to allow women to work from home** after the period of maternity benefit on mutually agreeable conditions.
- It introduces a provision which requires **every establishment to intimate a woman at the time of her appointment of the maternity benefits available to her.**

(Q) Maternity benefit Act has increased the entry barrier for women in Labour Force. Discuss.

15. SEVA BHOJ YOJNA

What to study?

- For Prelims: 'Seva Bhoj Yojna'- features.
- For Mains: GST and its implications, issues associated and reforms to resolve them.

About Seva Bhoj Yojana:

- **Union Ministry of Culture** has launched- 'Seva Bhoj Yojna'- **a scheme to reimburse central share of CGST and IGST on food, prasad, langar or bhandara offered by religious and charitable institutions.**
- The scheme seeks to reimburse the central government's share of Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) and Integrated Goods and Service Tax (IGST) on purchase of raw items such as ghee, edible oil, atta, maida, rava, flour, rice pulses, sugar and jaggery, which go into preparation of food/prasad/langar/bhandara offered free of cost by religious institutions.
- The main objective of the scheme is **to lessen the financial burden of such charitable religious institutions, which provide free of cost without any discrimination to the general public and devotees.**

Eligibility:

- **The charitable religious institutions including temples, gurudwara, mosque, church, dharmik ashram, dargah, monasteries, which fulfill the following criteria are eligible for the grant:**
- The institutions that have been in existence for at least five years before applying for financial assistance/grant.
- The institutions that serve free food to at least 5000 people in a month.

- The institutions covered under Section 10(23BBA) of the Income Tax Act or those registered as Society under Societies Registration Act (XXI of 1860) or as a Public Trust under any law for the time being in force of statuary religious bodies constituted under any Act or institutions registered under Section 12AA of Income Tax Act.

16. NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of the Bill, about NIA and the need for enhanced powers.

Context: The Lok Sabha has passed the **National Investigation Agency (Amendment) Bill 2019**.

Key features of the Bill:

- The Bill amends the **NIA Act, 2008** and provides for a **national-level agency to investigate and prosecute offences listed in a schedule (scheduled offences)**.
- It allows for the creation of **Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences** which include offences under Acts such as the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967.
- As per the Bill, the NIA will now have the **power to investigate the following offences, in addition**: (i) human trafficking, (ii) offences related to counterfeit currency or bank notes, (iii) manufacture or sale of prohibited arms, (iv) cyber-terrorism, and (v) offences under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.
- Jurisdiction:** The officers of the NIA have the same powers as other police officers in relation to the investigation of such offences, across India. In addition, **officers of the NIA will have the power to investigate scheduled offences committed outside India**, subject to international treaties and domestic laws of other countries.
- The **central government may direct the NIA to investigate such cases, as if the offence has been committed in India. The Special Court in New Delhi will have jurisdiction over these cases**.
- The Bill states that **the central government may designate Sessions Courts as Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences**. The central government will **need to consult the Chief Justice of the High Court under which the Sessions Court is functioning**, before designating it as a Special Court. When more than one Special Court has been designated for any area, the cases will be distributed among the courts by senior-most judge.
- The **state governments may also designate Sessions Courts as Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences**.

17. THE MOTOR VEHICLES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features, significance and the need for the bill.
- The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2019 seeks to **amend the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988** to provide for road safety.

Key highlights:

- Compensation for road accident victims:** The central government will develop a scheme for cashless treatment of road accident victims during golden hour. The central government may also make a scheme for providing interim relief to claimants seeking compensation under third party insurance.
- Compulsory insurance:** The Bill requires the central government to constitute a **Motor Vehicle Accident Fund**, to provide compulsory insurance cover to all road users in India.
- The fund will be utilised for:** (i) treatment of persons injured in road accidents as per the golden hour scheme, (ii) compensation to representatives of a person who died in a hit and run accident, (iii) compensation to a person grievously hurt in a hit and run accident, and (iv) compensation to any other persons as prescribed by the central government.
- This Fund will be credited through:** (i) payment of a nature notified by the central government, (ii) a grant or loan made by the central government, (iii) balance of the Solatium Fund (existing fund under the Act to provide compensation for hit and run accidents), or (iv) any other source as prescribed by the central government.

- **Good samaritans:** The Bill defines a good samaritan as a person who renders emergency medical or non-medical assistance to a victim at the scene of an accident. The assistance must have been (i) in good faith, (ii) voluntary, and (iii) without the expectation of any reward. **Such a person will not be liable for any civil or criminal action for any injury to or death of an accident victim, caused due to their negligence in providing assistance to the victim.**
- **Recall of vehicles:** The Bill allows the central government to order for recall of motor vehicles if a defect in the vehicle may cause damage to the environment, or the driver, or other road users.
- **The manufacturer of the recalled vehicle will be required to:** (i) reimburse the buyers for the full cost of the vehicle, or (ii) replace the defective vehicle with another vehicle with similar or better specifications.
- **National Transportation Policy:** The central government may develop a National Transportation Policy, in consultation with state governments. The Policy will: (i) establish a planning framework for road transport, (ii) develop a framework for grant of permits, and (iii) specify priorities for the transport system, among other things.
- **Road Safety Board:** The Bill provides for a National Road Safety Board, to be created by the central government through a notification. The Board will advise the central and state governments on all aspects of road safety and traffic management including.
- **Offences and penalties:** The Bill increases penalties for several offences under the Act.
- **Taxi aggregators:** The Bill defines aggregators as digital intermediaries or market places which can be used by passengers to connect with a driver for transportation purposes (taxi services). These aggregators will be issued licenses by state. Further, they must comply with the Information Technology Act, 2000.

18. RIGHT TO INFORMATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For prelims: key features of RTI, amendments proposed and the need.
- For main: significance of RTI, issues present and measures to address these issues.

Context: The Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019 that amends the Right to Information Act, 2005 has been introduced in Lok Sabha.

- However, former information commissioners and RTI activists have come out strongly against the move by the central government to amend the RTI Act, 2005.

Amendments include:

- The Centre shall have the **powers to set the salaries and service conditions of Information Commissioners** at central as well as state levels.
- **Term of the central Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners:** appointment will be “for such term as may be prescribed by the Central Government”.
- While the original Act prescribes salaries, allowances and other terms of service of the state Chief Information Commissioner as “the same as that of an Election Commissioner”, and the salaries and other terms of service of the State Information Commissioners as “the same as that of the Chief Secretary to the State Government”, the amendment proposes that these “shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government”.

What does the RTI Act do?

- Under the RTI Act, 2005, Public Authorities are required to make disclosures on various aspects of their structure and functioning.
- **This includes:** (i) disclosure on their organisation, functions, and structure, (ii) powers and duties of its officers and employees, and (iii) financial information.

Need:

- The intent of such suo moto disclosures is that **the public should need minimum recourse through the Act to obtain such information**. The intent behind the enactment of the Act is **to promote transparency and accountability in the working of Public Authorities**.

Who is included in the ambit of ‘Public Authorities’?

- ‘Public Authorities’ include bodies of self-government established under the Constitution, or under any law or government notification. **For instance, these include Ministries, public sector undertakings, and regulators.** It also includes any entities owned, controlled or substantially financed and non-government organizations substantially financed directly or indirectly by funds provided by the government.

How is the right to information enforced under the Act?

- The Act has established **a three tier structure for enforcing the right to information guaranteed under the Act.**
- Public Authorities designate some of their officers as **Public Information Officers**.
- The first request for information goes to **Central/State Assistant Public Information Officer and Central/State Public Information Officer**, designated by the Public Authorities. These Officers are required to provide information to an RTI applicant within 30 days of the request.
- Appeals from their decisions go to an **Appellate Authority**.

Information Commissions:

- Appeals against the order of the Appellate Authority go to the State Information Commission or the Central Information Commission.
- **These Information Commissions consists** of a Chief Information Commissioner, and up to 10 Information Commissioners.

What does the Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019 propose?

- The Bill changes the terms and conditions of service of the CIC and Information Commissioners at the centre and in states.
- The Bill states that the central government will notify the term of office for the CIC and the ICs.
- The Bill states that the salaries, allowances, and other terms and conditions of service of the central and state CIC and ICs will be determined by the central government.

Why is it being opposed?

- The original Act had quantified the tenures, and defined the salaries in terms of existing benchmarks. The amendments are being viewed as implying that, in effect, the terms of appointment, salaries and tenures of the Chief Information Commissioners and Information Commissioners can be decided on a **case-to-case basis by the government**. This will take away the independence of the RTI authorities.
- Therefore, the Bill is being seen as a “**threat to the independence**” of the Central Information Commissioner.
- By **diminishing the status of the CIC, IC and State CIC from that of a Supreme Court judge** would reduce their ability to issue directives to senior government functionaries.
- The amendments would **empower the Centre to make rules to decide the tenure, salary, allowances and other terms of service of information commissioners of the Central and also State Information Commissions**. This will fundamentally weaken the institution of the information commissions as it will adversely impact the ability of commissioners to function in an independent manner.
- The government has **brought about the Bill in complete secrecy and there have been no public consultations on the Bill**, which will impact the fundamental right to information of the citizens of the country.

What are the government’s stated grounds for bringing the amendments?

- The statement of objects says “the mandate of Election Commission of India and Central and State Information Commissions are different. Hence, **their status and service conditions need to be rationalised accordingly**”.
- **CIC has been given the status of a Supreme Court Judge**, but his judgments can be challenged in the High Courts.
- Therefore, the amendments Have been brought to correct certain anomalies in the RTI Act. It does not dilute the Act in anyway and it was passed in a hurry in 2005. **RTI Amendments would strengthen the overall RTI structure.**

Over the last 14 years, how far has the RTI Act served the purposes for which it was introduced?

- The RTI Act is regarded as one of the most successful laws of independent India. It has given ordinary citizens the confidence and the right to ask questions of government authorities. According to estimates, nearly 60 lakh applications are being filed every year. It is used by citizens as well as the media. The law is seen as having acted as a deterrent for government servants against taking arbitrary decisions.

Sources: the Hindu.

THEN AND NOW

TERM

2005 ACT: Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners (ICs) at central and state levels will serve for five years.

2019 BILL: Central government will notify the term of office.

SALARY

2005 ACT: At central level, salary of CIC and ICs equivalent to salary of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, respectively. At state level, equivalent to salary of Election Commissioners and Chief Secretary, respectively.

2019 BILL: Salaries, allowances, and other terms and conditions of service of central and state CIC and ICs will be determined by the central

government.

DEDUCTIONS

2005 ACT: At the time of appointment, if CIC and ICs (at central and state levels) are receiving pension or any other retirement benefits for previous government service, their salaries will be reduced by an amount equal to that pension. Previous government service includes service under: (i) the central government, (ii) state government, (iii) corporation established under a central or state law, and (iv) company owned or controlled by the central or state government.

2019 BILL: The Bill removes these provisions.

Source: PRS Legislative Research

(Q) Discuss the role played by key stakeholders under the Right to Information Act of India.

(Q) The Right to Information (RTI) has emerged as an effective tool for citizen's dispute resolution. Should the ambit of RTI be expanded to politicians and Judiciary too? Give your opinion with substantial justification.

19. PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (AMENDMENTS) BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the bill, NHRC and SHRC.
- For Mains: Human Rights related issues.

Context: Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill 2019 passed in Lok Sabha.

- The bill aims to accelerate the process of appointment of chairperson and members of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

Salient Features of the Bill:

- The Bill amends **the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993**. The Act provides for a **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), State Human Rights Commissions (SHRC), as well as Human Rights Courts**.
- **Composition of NHRC:** Under the Act, the chairperson of the NHRC is a person who has been a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The Bill amends this to provide that a person who has been Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, or a Judge of the Supreme Court will be the chairperson of the NHRC.
- **Inclusion of woman member:** The Act provides for two persons having knowledge of human rights to be appointed as members of the NHRC. The Bill amends this to allow three members to be appointed, of which at least one will be a woman.
- **Other members:** Under the Act, chairpersons of various commissions such as the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, and National Commission for Women are members of the NHRC. The Bill provides for including the chairpersons of the National Commission for Backward Classes, the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities as members of the NHRC.
- **Chairperson of SHRC:** Under the Act, the chairperson of a SHRC is a person who has been a Chief Justice of a High Court. The Bill amends this to provide that a person who has been Chief Justice or Judge of a High Court will be chairperson of a SHRC.
- **Term of office:** The Act states that the chairperson and members of the NHRC and SHRC will hold office for five years or till the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier. The Bill reduces the term of office to three years or till the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier. Further, the Act allows for the reappointment of members of the NHRC and SHRCs for a period of five years. The Bill removes the five-year limit for reappointment.
- **Powers of Secretary-General:** The Act provides for a Secretary-General of the NHRC and a Secretary of a SHRC, who exercise powers as may be delegated to them. The Bill amends this and allows the Secretary-General and Secretary to exercise all administrative and financial powers (except judicial functions), subject to the respective chairperson's control.
- **Union Territories:** The Bill provides that the central government may confer on a SHRC human rights functions being discharged by Union Territories. Functions relating to human rights in the case of Delhi will be dealt with by the NHRC.

Benefits:

- The Amendment will strengthen the Human Rights Institutions of India further for effective discharge of their mandates, roles and responsibilities.
- Moreover, the amended Act will be in perfect sync with the agreed global standards and benchmarks towards ensuring the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual in the country.
- The amendment will also make National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) more compliant with the **Paris Principle** concerning its autonomy, independence, pluralism and wide-ranging functions in order to effectively protect and promote human rights.

Sources: the Hindu.

20. WHEN A JUVENILE IS TRIED AS AN ADULT, WHEN NOT?

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of JJ Act and the amendments, need, concerns and what is the way out?

Context: In 2016, a 17-year-old was booked for the murder of his three-year-old neighbour in Mumbai. The Mumbai city **Juvenile Justice Board** as well as a children's court directed that he be tried as an adult under the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015**. Last week, the Bombay High Court set aside these orders and directed that the accused be tried as a minor, saying the Act is reformatory and not retributive.

When is a child tried as an adult?

- The **Juvenile Justice Act of 2000** was amended in 2015 with a provision allowing for **Children in Conflict with Law (CCL)** to be tried as adults under certain circumstances.
- The Act defines a **child as someone who is under age 18**. For a CCL, age on the date of the offence is the basis for determining whether he or she was a child or an adult.

- The amended Act distinguishes children in the age group 16-18 as a category which can be tried as adults if they are alleged to have committed a heinous offence — one that attracts a minimum punishment of seven years. The Act does not, however, make it mandatory for all children in this age group to be tried as adults.

Why was this distinction made?

- The amendment was proposed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2014. This was in the backdrop of the gang-rape of a woman inside a bus in Delhi in 2012, leading to her death. One of the offenders was a 17-year-old, which led to the Ministry proposing the amendment (although it could not have retrospectively applied to him).
- The then Minister, Maneka Gandhi, cited an increase in cases of offenders in that age group; child rights activists objected to the amendment.
- The J S Verma Committee constituted to recommend amendments also stated that it was not inclined to reduce the age of a juvenile from 18 to 16. The amendment was made in 2015.

When can a child be tried as an adult?

- As per Section 15 of the JJ Act, there are three criteria that the Juvenile Justice Board in the concerned district should consider while conducting a preliminary assessment to determine whether the child should be tried as an adult or under the juvenile justice system, which prescribes a maximum term of three years in a special home. The criteria are:
 - Whether the child has the mental and physical capacity to commit such an offence.
 - Whether the child has the ability to understand its consequences.
 - The circumstances in which the offence was committed.
 - If the Board finds that the child can be tried as an adult, the case is transferred to a designated children's court, which again decides whether the Board's decision is correct.

Sources: Indian Express.

21. NATIONAL MEDICAL COMMISSION (NMC) BILL

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the National Medical Commission bill.
- For Mains: MCI- issues, performance, concerns and need for superseding.

National Medical Commission Bill:

- The bill provides for the constitution of four autonomous boards entrusted with conducting undergraduate and postgraduate education, assessment and accreditation of medical institutions and registration of practitioners under the National Medical Commission.
- Composition of National Medical Commission: It will have government nominated chairman and members, and the board members will be selected by a search committee under the Cabinet Secretary. There will be five elected and 12 ex-officio members in the commission.
- As per the Bill, the government, under the National Medical Commission (NMC), can dictate guidelines for fees up to 40% of seats in private medical colleges. The bill also has a provision for a common entrance exam and licentiate (exit) exam that medical graduates have to pass before practising or pursuing PG courses. For MBBS, students have to clear NEET, and before they step into practice, they must pass the exit exam.
- Recognised medical institutions don't need the regulator's permission to add more seats or start PG course. This mechanism is to reduce the discretionary powers of the regulator.
- Earlier, medical colleges required the MCI's approval for establishment, recognition, renewal of the yearly permission or recognition of degrees, and even increase the number of students they admitted. Under the new bill, the powers of the regulator are reduced to establishment and recognition. This means less red tape, but also less scrutiny of medical colleges.

Significance and the need:

- The Bill seeks to regulate medical education and practice in India.
- The Bill attempts to tackle two main things on quality and quantity: Corruption in medical education and shortage of medical professionals.

- The Bill aims to overhaul the corrupt and inefficient Medical Council of India, which regulates medical education and practice and replace with National medical commission.

Why is Medical Council of India being replaced?

- The Medical Council of India has repeatedly been found short of fulfilling its mandated responsibilities.
- Quality of medical education is at its lowest ebb; the current model of medical education is not producing the right type of health professionals that meet the basic health needs of the country because medical education and curricula are not integrated with the needs of our health system.
- Medical graduates lack competence in performing basic health care tasks like conducting normal deliveries; instances of unethical practice continue to grow due to which respect for the profession has dwindled.
- Compromised individuals have been able to make it to the MCI, but the Ministry is not empowered to remove or sanction a Member of the Council even if he has been proved corrupt.

Concerns:

- A bridge course allowing **alternative-medicine practitioners to prescribe modern drugs** is mentioned in the bill. Unscientific mixing of systems and empowering of other practitioners through bridge courses will only pave the way for substandard doctors and substandard medical practice. This will seriously impact patient care and patient safety
- Indian Medical Association (IMA) opposed the bill that it will **cripple the functioning of medical professionals** by making them completely answerable to the bureaucracy and non-medical administrators. **NMC will become subservient** to the health ministry, given that the representation of the medical profession in the new regulatory framework is minimal.
- The bill **takes away the voting right of every doctor in India** to elect their medical council.
- The bill **allows private medical colleges to charge at will**, nullifying whatever solace the NEET brought. The proposed NMC Bill discreetly intends to equate the **post-graduate degrees given by MCI or proposed NMC and the National Board of Examination (NBE)**, which is unjustified too.
- Standards have been laid down for MCI courses, but not for NBE courses** which are often run in private hospitals and nursing homes.
- It would replace an elected body (Medical Council of India, MCI) with one where representatives are “nominated.”

Background:

- The **Medical Council of India** was first established in 1934 under the **Indian Medical Council Act, 1933**. This Act was repealed and replaced with a new Act in 1956. Under the 1956 Act, the **objectives of MCI include**:
- Maintenance of standards in medical education through curriculum guidelines, inspections and permissions to start colleges, courses or increasing number of seats.
- Recognition of medical qualifications.
- Registration of doctors and maintenance of the All India Medical Register.
- Regulation of the medical profession by prescribing a code of conduct and taking action against erring doctors.

Sources: the hindu.

22. PRASAD SCHEME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key Objectives and significance of the scheme.

Context: To implement the PRASAD scheme a Mission Directorate has been set up in the Ministry of Tourism.

PRASAD Scheme:

- Introduced in 2015, the **Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD)** is a government scheme that focuses on identifying and developing the pilgrim sites across the country to enrich the religious tourism experience.
- It was launched by **Union Ministry of Tourism**.

- It aims at integrated development of pilgrimage destinations in planned, prioritised and sustainable manner to provide complete religious tourism experience.

Objectives:

- Harness pilgrimage tourism for its direct and multiplier effect upon employment generation and economic development.
- Enhance tourist attractiveness in sustainable manner by developing world class infrastructure in the religious destinations.
- It also seeks to promote local art, culture, handicraft, cuisine, etc.

Funding:

- Under it, Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance (CFA) to State Governments for promoting tourism at identified destinations. For components within public funding under this scheme, Central Government will provide **100% fund**. For improved sustainability of project, it also seeks to involve Public Private Partnership (PPP) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as well.

23. PRADHAN MANTRI BHARTIYA JANAUSHADHI PARIYOJANA (PMBJP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of PMBJP and Janaushadhi Suvidha.
- For Mains: Health facilities for the underprivileged- need and efforts by the government, generic medicines and their increasing popularity worldwide.

Context: Under Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP), a total of 5440 dedicated retail outlets selling affordable generic medicines are functional in the country as on 15.07.2019.

About PMBJP:

- 'Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana' is a campaign **launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals**, Govt. Of India, to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through special kendra's known as **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra**.
- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra (PMBJK)** have been set up to provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.
- Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI)** is the implementing agency of PMBJP. BPPI (Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertakings of India) has been established under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. of India, with the support of all the CPSUs.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE SCHEME:

- Ensure access to quality medicines.
- Extend coverage of quality generic medicines so as to reduce the out of pocket expenditure on medicines and thereby redefine the unit cost of treatment per person.
- Create awareness about generic medicines through education and publicity so that quality is not synonymous with only high price.
- A public programme involving Government, PSUs, Private Sector, NGO, Societies, Co-operative Bodies and other Institutions.
- Create demand for generic medicines by improving access to better healthcare through low treatment cost and easy availability wherever needed in all therapeutic categories.

What is a generic medicine?

- There is **no definition of generic or branded medicines under the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules, 1945** made thereunder. However, generic medicines are generally those which contain same amount of same active ingredient(s) in same dosage form and are intended to be administered by the same route of administration as that of branded medicine.
- The price of an unbranded generic version of a medicine is generally lower than the price of a corresponding branded medicine** because in case of generic version, the pharmaceutical company does not have to spend money on promotion of its brand.

How are they regulated in India?

- Drugs manufactured in the country, irrespective of whether they are generic or branded, are required to comply with the same standards as prescribed in the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** and **Rules, 1945** made thereunder for their quality.

24. MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON MARRIAGE), BILL 2019

What to Study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Bill proposed.
- For Mains: Need, significance and challenges in implementation.
- Context:** Parliament has passed the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019** criminalising triple talaq. After President Kovind signs the bill, it will become the law and will replace the 1986 **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act**.

Background:

- The Supreme Court's judgment in the **Shayara Bano case** held that the practice of **talaq-e-biddat (or triple talaq) unconstitutional**. After the judgement, government passed **Muslim protection Bill** also known as, Triple Talaq Bill in Lok Sabha but there have been criticism about the legal and procedural aspects of the bill.

Significance of the bill:

- The proposed Bill will protect the rights of married Muslim women and prevent divorce by the practice of instantaneous and irrevocable '**talaq-e-biddat**' by their husbands.
- It provides the **rights of subsistence allowance, custody of minor children to victims of triple talaq i.e. talaq-e-biddat**.

Key provisions of the Bill:

- The Bill makes **all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void (i.e. not enforceable in law) and illegal**.
- Definition:** It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
- Offence and penalty:** The Bill makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine. (A cognizable offence is one for which a police officer may arrest an accused person without warrant.)
- The offence will be cognizable only if information relating to the offence is given by:**(i) the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared), or (ii) any person related to her by blood or marriage.
- The Bill provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused. The bail may be granted only after hearing the woman (against whom talaq has been pronounced), and if the Magistrate is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.
- The offence may be compounded by the Magistrate upon the request of the woman** (against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.
- Allowance:** A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children. The amount of the allowance will be determined by the Magistrate.
- Custody:** A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children. The manner of custody will be determined by the Magistrate.

Issues with the bill:

- The bill introduced in Parliament proposes a three-year jail term for a man divorcing his wife through triple talaq. Although most Muslim women feel it is time to end the practice, they are wary of **the slipshod manner in which the government has passed the bill in the Lok Sabha**.

- If the aim of the law is to protect the rights of women, how is that possible with their husbands in prison? If they have children under the age of 18, who will take care of their education, health, financial and other needs? The woman will not be protected but instead be vulnerable to more abuse.
- The Bill does not provide the victimised woman **any additional benefits in terms of her rights in marriage and divorce**.
- Since the Bill says that triple talaq is cognizable and non-bailable, **married Muslim man become vulnerable target** as policemen can arrest and investigate the accused with or without the complaint from wife or any other person.

Way ahead:

- The legislation brings India at par with other Muslim majority states including Pakistan and Bangladesh. This was long overdue for a country that has taken pride in its adherence to the principles of secularism, democracy, and equality.
- Personal laws of other religious communities, Hindus and Christians, have gone through renditions to address some concerns relating to gender equality in matters of inheritance and polygamy. Despite the gains, gender equality does not permeate all aspects of civil law. This legislation presents an opportunity to put in place a civil code that steeped in equality—across faiths and gender.

(Q) Do you agree that Abolition of Triple Talaq by the parliament has corrected a historical wrong done to Muslim women and that it is a victory of gender justice and will further equality in society? Discuss.

25. CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL

What to study?

- For prelims: Key features of the bill.
- For mains: issues present with the Act, need for reforms and significance.

Context: The Lok Sabha has passed **the Consumer Protection Bill 2019**, which seeks to give enhanced protection to interests of consumers and timely settlement of their grievances.

Key features of the Bill include:

- **Definition of consumer:** A consumer is defined as a person who buys any good or avails a service for a consideration. It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service for commercial purpose. It covers transactions through all modes including offline, and online through electronic means, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling.
- **Rights of consumers:** Six consumer rights have been defined in the Bill, including the right to: (i) be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property; (ii) be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services; (iii) be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices; and (iv) seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practices.
- **Central Consumer Protection Authority:** The central government will set up a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers. It will regulate matters related to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements. The CCPA will have an investigation wing, headed by a Director-General, which may conduct inquiry or investigation into such violations.
- **CCPA will carry out the following functions, including:** (i) inquiring into violations of consumer rights, investigating and launching prosecution at the appropriate forum; (ii) passing orders to recall goods or withdraw services that are hazardous, reimbursement of the price paid, and discontinuation of the unfair trade practices, as defined in the Bill; (iii) issuing directions to the concerned trader/ manufacturer/ endorser/ advertiser/ publisher to either discontinue a false or misleading advertisement, or modify it; (iv) imposing penalties, and; (v) issuing safety notices to consumers against unsafe goods and services.
- **Penalties for misleading advertisement:** The CCPA may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement. In case of a subsequent offence, the fine may extend to Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of up to five years.
- **Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission:** Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions (CDRCs) will be set up at the district, state, and national levels.

- **A consumer can file a complaint with CDRCs in relation to:**(i) unfair or restrictive trade practices; (ii) defective goods or services; (iii) overcharging or deceptive charging; and (iv) the offering of goods or services for sale which may be hazardous to life and safety.
- **Jurisdiction of CDRCs:** The District CDRC will entertain complaints where value of goods and services does not exceed Rs one crore. The State CDRC will entertain complaints when the value is more than Rs one crore but does not exceed Rs 10 crore. Complaints with value of goods and services over Rs 10 crore will be entertained by the National CDRC.
- **Product liability:** Product liability means the liability of a product manufacturer, service provider or seller to compensate a consumer for any harm or injury caused by a defective good or deficient service. To claim compensation, a consumer has to prove any one of the conditions for defect or deficiency, as given in the Bill.

Significance:

- Presently Consumer only have a single point of access to justice, which is time consuming. Additional swift executive remedies are proposed in the bill through **Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)**.
- **Deterrent punishment** to check misleading advertisements and adulteration of products.
- **Product liability** provision to deter manufacturers and service providers from delivering defective products or deficient services.
- **Ease of approaching** Consumer Commission and Simplification of Adjudication process.
- **Scope for early disposal of cases** through mediation.

Issues with the Bill:

- The Bill does not address the **fundamental problem of protracted and complicated litigation, the bane of consumer forums constituted under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986**. Instead, it provides an alternative to the consumer forums, in the form of mediation.
- The Bill does provide for a regulator, but **there is no proper focus on the duties of the regulator**.
- Even the **definition of 'consumer rights'** in the Bill is not simple and straight forward, so that consumers at least know what their entitlements are.

(Q) Discuss the salient features of the Consumer Protection Bill, 2019. How far will it address the unfair trade practices? Critically analyse.

Topics: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

1. RASHTRIYA VAYOSHRI YOJANA (RVY)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of RVY and about ALIMCO.
- For Mains: Significance of the programme and similar policies for the aid of old aged.

Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana:

- The Scheme aims at **providing Senior Citizens, belonging to BPL category and suffering from any of the age-related disability/infirmity** Low vision, Hearing impairment, Loss of teeth and Locomotor disability, with such **assisted-living devices** which can restore near normalcy in their bodily functions, overcoming the disability/infirmity manifested.
- **Funding:** This is a **Central Sector Scheme**, fully funded by the Central Government. The expenditure for implementation of the scheme will be met from the "**Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund**".
- Under the scheme, **free of cost distribution of the devices**, commensurate with the extent of disability/infirmity that is manifested among the eligible senior citizens will take place.
- **In case of multiple disabilities/infirmities** manifested in the same person, the assistive devices will be given in respect of each disability/impairment.
- Beneficiaries in each district will be **identified by the State Governments/UT Administrations through a Committee chaired by the Deputy Commissioner/District Collector**.
- As far as possible, **30% of the beneficiaries in each district shall be women**.

Need of hour:

- With more than 70% of the 104 million elderly living in the rural hinterland, any serious initiative to improve the lot of senior citizens must incorporate adequate budgetary support for social welfare spending on the relevant programmes.
- With the number of the elderly in India set to surge by 2050 to almost 300 million, or about a fifth of the population, governments need to make more comprehensive efforts to address the problems of elderly.

2. MARATHA RESERVATION ISSUE

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: provisions in regard to reservations in India, issues present, need for revamping the policy.

Context: The Bombay High Court has upheld the constitutional validity of **reservation for the Maratha community in education and government jobs in Maharashtra**, but directed that it be slashed from the present 16 per cent to 12 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.

Background:

- The Marathas who are almost **one-third of Maharashtra's population** are not a homogeneous community. Historically, they evolved from the farming caste of **Kunbis** who took to military service in medieval times and started assuming a separate identity for themselves. Even then they claimed hierarchy of 96 clans.

But the real differentiation has come through the post-independence development process, creating classes within the caste:

- A tiny but powerful section of elites that came to have control over cooperatives of sugar, banks, educational institutions, factories and politics, called gadhivarcha (topmost strata) Maratha.
- The next section comprising owners of land, distribution agencies, transporters, contracting firms, and those controlling secondary cooperative societies, is the wadyavarcha (well-off strata) Maratha.
- The rest of the population of Marathas comprising small farmers is the wadivarcha (lower strata) Maratha.

Need for reservations:

- Reservation in India is the **process of facilitating people** in education, scholarship, jobs etc that were faced historical injustice.
- Reservation is a form of **quota-based affirmative action**. Reservation is governed by constitutional laws, statutory laws, and local rules and regulations.
- The system of reservation in India **comprises a series of measures**, such as reserving access to seats in the various legislatures, to government jobs, and to enrolment in higher educational institutions.
- The reservation is **undertaken to address the historic oppression, inequality and discrimination** faced by those communities and to give these communities a place. It is intended to realise the promise of equality enshrined in the Constitution.
- The primary objective of the reservation system in India is to **enhance the social and educational status of underprivileged communities and thus improve their lives**.

Why there is a need to reexamine reservation policy?

- Unlike in the late Sixties and again in the late Eighties, when the reservation discourse originated in a deep sense of unfairness of the social system, today's **reservation discourse draws its strength from unfair development policies**.
- Reservation is **increasingly seen as a remedy for the adverse effects of ill-thought out development policies**.
- Reservation is also **called 'Discrimination in Reverse' or Reverse Discrimination**. This terminology connotes that reservation, which works as a protection to the reserved categories i.e. scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes, acts as a reverse discrimination against the upper castes.
- For political parties reservation discourse is convenient because it allows them to keep **subscribing to the consensus over economic policies, avoiding a critical approach to the root causes of the problem**.

What needs to be done?

- The government will have to expand the economic aspect and create fresh opportunities so that people, especially young people, who leave agriculture are absorbed in non-farm sectors.
- It is time that India made a critical assessment of its affirmative action programmes.
- The government should consider the economic, political and social wellbeing of the community and make a balanced decision.
- Problems of these castes should be addressed through government schemes and programmes.
- Progressive steps should be taken to ensure that poorer section among the backward communities get the benefit of reservation system.
- The policy of reservation should be gradually phased out after it serves its purpose.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. 'PAHAL' SCHEME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features and significance of the scheme.

Context: Estimated savings/benefits of Rs. 59,599 crore upto March, 2019 under 'PAHAL' scheme.

Pratyaksh Hanstantrit Labh (PaHaL) scheme:

- Aims to reduce diversion and eliminate duplicate or bogus LPG connections.
- Under PaHaL, LPG cylinders are sold at market rates and entitled consumers get the subsidy directly into their bank accounts.

4. BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO'

What to study?

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

Context: All States and UTs except West Bengal have constituted the **State Task Force headed by Chief Secretary/ UT Administration as per the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme guidelines.**

About BBBP:

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

Significance and the need for scheme:

- The trend of decline in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) has been unabated since 1961. The decline from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001 and further to 918 in 2011 is alarming. The social construct discrimination against girls on one hand, easy availability, affordability and subsequent misuse of diagnostic tools on the other hand, have been critical in increasing Sex Selective Elimination of girls leading to low Child Sex Ratio.
- **Child Sex Ratio** is defined as number of girls per 1000 of boys between 0-6 years of age. Hence, a decline in the CSR is a major indicator of women disempowerment. The ratio reflects both, pre-birth discrimination manifested through gender biased sex selection and post birth discrimination against girls.

5. LAQSHYA

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features, objectives and significance of the programme.

- **Context:** Government of India has launched “**LaQshya**” (**Labour room Quality improvement Initiative**) to improve quality of care in labour room and maternity operation theatres in public health facilities.

About LaQshya:

- It's a **multipronged approach focused at Intrapartum and immediate postpartum period.**
- **Aim:** To reduce preventable maternal and newborn mortality, morbidity and stillbirths associated with the care around delivery in Labour room and Maternity Operation Theatre and ensure respectful maternity care.

Objectives:

- To reduce maternal and newborn mortality & morbidity due to hemorrhage, retained placenta, preterm, preeclampsia and eclampsia, obstructed labour, puerperal sepsis, newborn asphyxia, and newborn sepsis, etc.
- To improve Quality of care during the delivery and immediate post-partum care, stabilization of complications and ensure timely referrals, and enable an effective two-way follow-up system.
- To enhance satisfaction of beneficiaries visiting the health facilities and provide Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) to all pregnant women attending the public health facilities.

Following types of healthcare facilities have been identified for implementation of LaQshya program:

- Government medical college hospitals.
- District Hospitals & equivalent health facilities.
- Designated FRUs and high case load CHCs with over 100 deliveries/month (60 in hills and desert areas)

6. PRADHAN MANTRI SHRAM YOGI MAAN-DHAN YOJANA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: The scheme- features, significance, need and potential.

Context: 30,85,205 Persons Enrolled in PM-SYM as on July 10, 2019.

About Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana:

- Launched by the **Union Ministry of Labour and Employment**. The scheme was **announced in the Interim Budget 2019**.
- PM-SYM is a **voluntary and contributory pension scheme** that will engage as many as 42 crore workers in the **unorganised sector**.

Eligibility:

- The **unorganised sector workers, with income of less than Rs 15,000 per month and who belong to the entry age group of 18-40 years**, will be eligible for the scheme.
- Those workers **should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)**.
- He or she **should not be an income tax payer**.

Benefits:

- **Minimum Assured Pension:** Each subscriber under the scheme will receive minimum assured pension of Rs 3000 per month after attaining the age of 60 years.
- **In case of death during receipt of pension:** If the subscriber dies during the receipt of pension, his or her spouse will be entitled to receive 50 percent of the pension as family pension. This family pension is applicable only to spouse.
- **In case of death before the age of 60 years:** If a beneficiary has given regular contribution and dies before attaining the age of 60 years, his or her spouse will be entitled to continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or may even exit the scheme.

Contribution to the scheme:

- **Contribution by the Subscriber:** The subscriber is required to contribute the prescribed contribution amount from the age of joining the scheme till the age of 60 years.

- **Medium of contribution:** The subscriber can contribute to the PM-SYM through ‘auto-debit’ facility from his or her savings bank account or from his or her Jan-Dhan account.
- **Equal contribution by the Central Government:** Under the PM-SYM, the prescribed age-specific contribution by the beneficiary and the matching contribution by the Central Government will be made on a ‘50:50 basis’.

Need of the hour:

- Along with the social security, Government should ramp up skilling of the workforce, take steps to generate more jobs in the formal sector, change labour laws to include informal workers.
- It will in effect provide wage protection, job security, social security to the workers and ultimately alleviate the hardships they face.
- Eventually it will boost the overall economic growth of the country.

7. NATIONAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME (NSAP)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features, performance and significance of NSAP.

About National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP):

- The NSAP is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the Ministry of Rural Development**. It came into effect from 15th August, 1995.
- It represents a significant step towards the fulfillment of the DPSP in **Article 41 of the Constitution**. In particular, Article 41 of the Constitution of India directs the State to provide public assistance to its citizens in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want within the limit of its economic capacity and development.
- It aims to provide financial assistance to the elderly, widows and persons with disabilities in the form of social pensions.
- **Coverage:** It currently covers more than three crore people who are below the poverty line (BPL), including about 80 lakh widows, 10 lakh disabled and 2.2 crore elderly.

Presently NSAP comprises of five schemes, namely:

- Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS).
- Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS).
- Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS).
- National Family Benefit Scheme NFBS).
- Annapurna

8. BONDED LABOUR (ABOLITION) ACT, 1976

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the law, measures needed for their relocation.

Context: Low conviction rate under the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976.

Possible reasons for low conviction:

- General social bias.
- Nature of bonded labour being migrants, absentism of Witnesses due to their migratory Nature.
- DM/SDM Courts not as proficient in trial as judicial Courts.

About the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976:

- The Act is being **implemented by the concerned State Govts./UTs**.
- The Act provides for an **institutional mechanism at the district level in the form of Vigilance Committees**.
- For the purpose of implementing the provisions of this Act, the **State Governments/UTs may confer, on an Executive Magistrate, the powers of a Judicial Magistrate of the first class or second class for trial of offences under this Act**.

- Government of India has introduced a revamped **Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers- 2016**, under which **financial assistance** to the tune of Rs.1.00 (one) lakh, Rs.2.00 (two) lakhs & Rs. 3.00 (three) lakhs are provided to released bonded labourers based on their category and level of exploitation along with other non-cash assistance for their livelihood.

Background:

- Bonded Labour or bandhua mazdoori was historically associated with rural economies where peasants from economically disadvantaged communities were bound to work for the landlords. In the present times, however, bonded labour is found to exist in both rural and urban pockets in unorganised industries such as brick kilns, stone quarries, coal mining, agricultural labour, domestic servitude, circus and sexual slavery.

9. ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJNA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the programme.

About Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna:

- The **Employee's State Insurance (ESI)** has approved this scheme **for Insured Persons (IP) covered under the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948**.
- **Aim:** It aims to financially support those who lost their jobs or rendered jobless for whatsoever reasons due to changing employment pattern.
- Its beneficiaries will be insured persons covered under Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 for period of two years continuously.

Key features:

- **Cash assistance:** Under the scheme, relief will be payable in cash directly to bank account of insured persons in case of unemployment. This financial assistance will be given to insured persons even while they search for new engagement. Beneficiary insured workers will be paid money, from their own contribution towards ESI scheme, in cash through bank account transfer.
- **Under this scheme,** workers will be able to draw 47% of their total contributions towards ESIC after remaining unemployed for at least three months from date of leaving their previous jobs. They can choose to receive the cash at one go or in instalments. It will be applicable to all factories and establishments employing at least 10 workers.

The eligibility conditions and other features of the scheme are as under:

- The **Insured Person should have been rendered unemployed during the period the relief is claimed**.
- The Insured Person should have been in **insurable employment for a minimum period of two years**.
- The **Insured Person should have contributed not less than 78 days during each of the preceding four contribution periods**.
- The **contribution in respect of him should have been paid or payable by the employer**.
- The **contingency of the unemployment should not have been as a result of any punishment for misconduct or superannuation or voluntary retirement**.
- **In case the IP is working for more than one employers** and is covered under the ESI scheme he will be considered unemployed only in case he is rendered **unemployed with all employers**.

About ESI:

- ESI is **self-financing social security and health insurance scheme** for Indian workers.
- It is **autonomous corporation by statutory creation under Ministry of Labour and Employment**, Government of India.
- It is **managed by Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)** according to rules and regulations stipulated there in the ESI Act 1948.

10. PRADHAN MANTRI ROZGAR PROTSAHAN YOJANA (PMRKY)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of the scheme, beneficiaries.
- For Mains: Significance and performance of the scheme.

Context: The total number of employees benefited under **Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRKY)** from 01.04.2016 to 31.03.2019 is 1.18 crore.

About Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana:

- The scheme “Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana” (PMRKY) was **announced in the Budget for 2016-17**.
- The **objective** of the scheme is **to promote employment generation**.
- The scheme is being **implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment**.
- Under the scheme **employers would be provided an incentive** for enhancing employment by reimbursement of the 8.33% EPS contribution made by the employer in respect of new employment.
- The PMRKY scheme is **targeted for workers earning wages upto Rs. 15,000/- per month**.

Significance of the scheme:

PMRKY has a dual benefit –

- The employer is incentivised for increasing the employee base in the establishment through payment of EPF contribution of 12% of wage, which otherwise would have been borne by the employer.
- A large number of workers find jobs in such establishments.
- A direct benefit of the scheme is that these workers have access to social security benefit through Provident Fund, Pension and Death Linked Insurance.

11. PMUY

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMU- key features.
- For Mains: PMUY- objectives, features, significance and measures needed to sustain the momentum.

Context: The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has been a huge success since its launch on May 1, 2016 and is set to meet the next big milestone of achieving 80 million household connections within the first hundred days of the government.

- Till date, the scheme has garnered 72 million connections, with the government fueling the process of achieving the original target in the next 100 days. In other words, about **93 to 94 per cent households now have access to cooking gas**.

About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana **aims to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households**.
- **Who is eligible?** Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
- **Identification of households:** Eligible households will be identified in consultation with state governments and Union territories. The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Key objectives of the scheme are:

- Empowering women and protecting their health.
- Reducing the serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuel.
- Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
- Preventing young children from significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning the fossil fuel.

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

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

Need of the hour:

- The PMUY is a bold and much-needed initiative, but it should be recognised that this is just a first step. The real test of the PMUY and its successor programmes will be in how they translate the provision of connections to sustained use of LPG or other clean fuels such as electricity or biogas.
- Truly smokeless kitchens can be realized only if the government follows up with measures that go beyond connections to actual usage of LPG. This may require concerted efforts cutting across Ministries beyond petroleum and natural gas and including those of health, rural development and women and child welfare.

12. PENSION SCHEME FOR SMALL RETAIL TRADERS AND SHOPKEEPERS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features and significance of the scheme.

Context: The Centre's pension scheme for small traders- **Pradhan Mantri Laghu Vyapari Maan-dhan, Yojana 2019**– has been notified and is being introduced on a trial basis.

Key features:

- Under the scheme all small shopkeepers, retail traders and self-employed persons are assured a **minimum of Rs.3,000 monthly pension after attaining 60 years of age**.
- **Eligibility:** All small shopkeepers, self-employed persons and retail traders aged between 18-40 years and with Goods and Service Tax (GST) turnover below Rs.1.5 crore can enrol for pension scheme.
- To be eligible, **the applicants should not be covered under the National Pension Scheme, Employees' State Insurance Scheme and the Employees' Provident Fund or be an Income Tax assessee**.
- The scheme is based on **self-declaration** as no documents are required except bank account and Aadhaar Card.
- The **Central Government will make matching contribution** (same amount as subscriber contribution) i.e. equal amount as subsidy into subscriber's pension account every month.

Sources: the Hindu.

13. VAN DHAN YOJANA

What to study?

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

Context: Training Workshop for implementing teams of Van Dhan Yojana Organized.

About Van Dhan Vikas Kendras initiative:

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

Implementation:

- The scheme will be implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level.

- At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at grassroot level.
- Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.
- Composition: As per the plan, TRIFED will facilitate establishment of MFP-led multi-purpose Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, a cluster of 10 SHGs comprising of 30 tribal MFP gatherers each, in the tribal areas.

Significance of MFP:

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

The image consists of two main parts. On the left, there is a vertical promotional graphic with a red background. The text 'MASTERING ANSWER WRITING SKILLS MATTERS' is at the top in white, followed by 'CORE BATCH' and '2020' in large white font. Below this is a circular logo with a stylized figure reading a book. On the right, there is a photograph of a person's hand with pink nail polish writing in a notebook with a yellow pen. The background is blurred, showing other people in what appears to be a classroom or study environment.

**MASTERING
ANSWER
WRITING SKILLS
MATTERS**

CORE BATCH

2020

APPLY NOW!

Subscribe Now : www.insightsactivelearn.com

 INSIGHTSIAS
SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

14. POCSO COURT

What to study?

- For Prelims: POCSO Act provisions.
- For Mains: Sexual abuse of children- prevention and need for stringent provisions, causes for delay in pending cases.

Context: The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to set up **special courts in each district across the country that have over a 100 cases of child abuse and sexual assault pending trial under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.**

Need for special courts:

- Present **Slow pace of action** on protection of children from sexual predators. As per available data, number of victims compensated under Pocso were 3% in 2015, 4% in 2016 and 5% in 2017. Around 1.5 lakh cases are pending trial before 670 designated courts.
- Though the Act mandates trial to be completed in one year, the deadline is impossible to achieve as each designated trial judge is saddled with a few hundred cases in addition to the trial of other cases.

Guidelines by the SC for Setting up of special courts:

- Such courts will be **funded by the central government**. The fund will not only take care of the appointment of the presiding officer but also appointments of support persons, special public prosecutors, court staff and infrastructure, including creation of childfriendly environment and vulnerable witness court rooms.
- **Awareness:** WCD ministry shall facilitate screening of “short clips intended to spread awareness of the subject in general, namely, prevention of child abuse and prosecution of crimes against children, in every movie hall and could also be transmitted by various television channels at regular intervals.
- **A child helpline number** should also be displayed in such clips and at schools and other public places.

Background:

- Kerala has **the worst judge-case ratio**, as it has set up just three designated courts for 14 districts with each required to deal with 2,211 cases.
- Chhattisgarh and Punjab have **the lowest average** of 51 cases per designated court.

Recent amendments proposed:

- Union Cabinet has approved the **Amendments in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.**

Key changes proposed:

- It will make **punishment more stringent for committing sexual crimes against children including death penalty.**
- It includes provision of death penalty in cases of sexual offences against children.
- The amendments also provide for **levy of fines and imprisonment** to curb child pornography.
- Amendments are also proposed to **protect children from sexual offences in times of natural calamities and in other situations where children are administered, in any way, any hormone or any chemical substance**, to attain early sexual maturity for the purpose of penetrative sexual assault.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. WHO GUIDELINES ON SELF-CARE INTERVENTIONS FOR HEALTH

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features, need for and significance of the guidelines.

Context: The WHO has launched its first **guidelines on self-care interventions for health**.

SELF CARE INTERVENTIONS BRING HEALTH SERVICES TO PEOPLE

SELF-CARE REQUIRES:



#SelfCare

human
reproduction
programme
hrp
research for impact

World Health
Organization

Need for self-care interventions:

- As per an estimate by 2035 the world will face a shortage of nearly 13 million healthcare workers. Currently at least 400 million people worldwide lack access to the most essential health services.

What is Self-Care?

- It is the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health-care provider.

Significance:

- Self-care interventions represent a significant push towards new and greater self-efficacy, autonomy and engagement in health for self-careers and caregivers.
- Self-care is also a means for people who are negatively affected by gender, political, cultural and power dynamics, including those who are forcibly displaced, to have access to sexual and reproductive health services, as many people are unable to make decisions around sexuality and reproduction.

Key guidelines:

- The guidelines **focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights**.
- **Some of the interventions include** self-sampling for human papillomavirus (HPV) and sexually transmitted infections, self-injectable contraceptives, home-based ovulation predictor kits, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) self-testing and self-management of medical abortion.
- These guidelines **look at the scientific evidence** for health benefits of certain interventions that can be done outside the conventional sector, although sometimes with the support of a health-care provider.
- They **do not replace high-quality health services nor are they a shortcut to achieving universal health coverage**.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. STRIDE SCHEME

What to study.

- For prelims and mains: key features, need for and significance of the scheme.

Context: UGC announces new Initiative – **Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy (STRIDE)** to boost research culture in India.

Key features:

- STRIDE will provide **support to research projects that are socially relevant, locally need-based, nationally important and globally significant**.
- STRIDE shall **support research capacity building as well as basic, applied and transformational action research** that can contribute to national priorities with focus on inclusive human development.
- STRIDE shall **support creation, development and integration of new ideas, concepts and practices for public good and strengthening civil society**.

STRIDE Objectives:

- To identify young talent, strengthen research culture, build capacity, promote innovation and support trans-disciplinary research for India's developing economy and national development.
- To fund multi institutional network high-impact research projects in humanities and human sciences.

Significance:

- STRIDE scheme will strengthen research culture and innovation in colleges and Universities and help students and faculty to contribute towards India's developing economy with help of collaborative research. Focus on Humanities and Human Sciences will boost quality research on Indian languages and knowledge systems.

3. NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

What to study?

- For Prelims: What are NCDs?
- For Mains: NCDs- concerns, challenges posed and need for international cooperation in fighting NCDs.

Context: According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report entitled "**India: Health of the Nation's States**", Contribution of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to total death in the Country was 61.8% in 2016, as compared to 37.9% in 1990.

- In the States of **Kerala, Goa and Tamil Nadu**, due to epidemiological transition, fewer deaths are recorded for Communicable, maternal, neonatal and nutritional diseases, thereby raising share of NCDs in total deaths.
- **Risk factors for NCDs** inter alia include ageing, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, high blood pressure, , high blood sugar, high cholesterol and overweight.

What are NCDs?

- Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), also known as **chronic diseases**, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors.

- The main types of NCDs are cardiovascular diseases (like heart attacks and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes.

What are the socioeconomic impacts of NCDs?

- NCDs threaten progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a target of reducing premature deaths from NCDs by one-third by 2030.
- Poverty is closely linked with NCDs. The rapid rise in NCDs is predicted to impede poverty reduction initiatives in low-income countries, particularly by increasing household costs associated with health care. Vulnerable and socially disadvantaged people get sicker and die sooner than people of higher social positions, especially because they are at greater risk of being exposed to harmful products, such as tobacco, or unhealthy dietary practices, and have limited access to health services.
- In low-resource settings, health-care costs for NCDs quickly drain household resources. The exorbitant costs of NCDs, including often lengthy and expensive treatment and loss of breadwinners, force millions of people into poverty annually and stifle development.

4. 2019 “STATE OF THE EDUCATION REPORT FOR INDIA: CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES”

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key highlights of the report, concerns and measures needed for upliftment.

Context: The 2019 “State of the Education Report for India: Children with Disabilities” has been released by the UNESCO.

- The report highlights accomplishments and challenges with regards to the right to education of children with disabilities (CWDs).

Key highlights of the report:

- There are 78,64,636 children with disability in India constituting 1.7% of the total child population.
- Three-fourths of the children with disabilities at the age of five years and one-fourth between 5-19 years do not go to any educational institution.
- The number of children enrolled in school drops significantly with each successive level of schooling.
- There are fewer girls with disabilities in schools than boys with disabilities in schools.
- A large number of children with disabilities do not go to regular schools but are enrolled at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).
- The percentage of children attending schools is the lowest among those with multiple disabilities, mental illnesses and mental retardation.

Challenges ahead:

- Significant gaps remain, even though successive government schemes and programs have brought large numbers of children with disabilities into schools.
- Only 61 percent of CWDs aged between 5 and 19 were attending an educational institution compared to the overall figure of 71 percent when all children are considered.
- Around 12 percent of CWDs dropped out of school, which is comparable with the overall percentage of dropouts among all children. 27 percent of CWDs never attended any educational institution, as opposed to the overall figure of 17 percent when the entire child population is taken into account.
- A review of enrolment figures at NIOS shows a decline for most categories of disabilities between 2009 and 2015.

Why the attitude of parents and teachers toward mainstream education important?

- To accomplish the goal of inclusive education besides accessibility to physical infrastructure, processes in the school, assistive and ICT technology and devices being essential resources.

The report has made certain recommendations to improve the state of education for CWDs:

- Amend the RTE Act to better align with the RPWD Act by including specific concerns of education of such children.

- Establish a **coordinating mechanism** under HRD Ministry for effective convergence of all education programmes of children with disabilities.
- Ensure **specific and adequate financial allocation in education budgets** to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities.
- **Strengthening data systems** to make them robust and reliable and useful for planning.
- Massively **expand the use of information technology** for the education of children with disabilities.
- Give a **chance to every child and leave no child with disability behind**.
- **Transform teaching practices** to aid the inclusion of diverse learners.
- **Overcome stereotypes** and build positive dispositions towards children with disabilities, both in the classroom and beyond.

Way ahead:

- Inclusive education is complex to implement and requires a fine understanding of diverse needs of children and their families across different contexts. India has made considerable progress in terms of putting in place a robust legal framework and a range of programmes and schemes that have improved enrolment rates of children with disabilities in schools.
- However, **further measures are needed to ensure quality education for every child to achieve the goals and targets of agenda 2030** and more specifically **Sustainable Development Goal 4**.

Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) We still have much to do to ensure an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities through empowering them. Discuss the steps taken by government in this regard and examine how far have we been successful in empowering the differently abled?

5. DRUGS AND COSMETIC RULES, 1945

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Generic drugs- significance, concerns, usage and efforts by the government to promote them.

Context: The Central Government is considering amendments to the **Drugs and Cosmetic Rules, 1945** to ensure that registered medical practitioners dispense only generic medicines.

Background:

- A proposal was recently received by the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)** committee wherein the **Drugs Consultative Committee (DCC)** was apprised that registered medical practitioners can supply different categories of medicines including vaccines to their patients under the exemption provided, with certain conditions, under **Schedule K of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945**. As of now there are no specified types of medicines which can be supplied by doctors to their patients.
- It is now proposed that **registered medical practitioners shall supply generic medicines only** and physicians samples shall be supplied free of cost.

What is a Generic Medicine?

- Generic medicines are **unbranded medicines which are equally safe and having the same efficacy as that of branded medicines** in terms of their therapeutic value. The prices of generic medicines are much cheaper than their branded equivalent.

Why are they cheaper?

- Since the manufacture of these generic drugs do not involve a repeat of the extensive clinical trials to prove their safety and efficacy, it costs less to develop them. Generic drugs are, therefore, cheaper.
- However, because the compounds in the generic versions have the same molecular structure as the brand-name version, **their quality is essentially the same**.

Why aren't generic drugs more popular?

- **Lack of awareness about them.**

- Since they are cheap, **people who can afford branded drugs don't buy them believing them to be of inferior quality**. Chemists have to hand out exactly what's written on the prescription and most doctors except in government hospitals don't hand out generic drugs.
- Also, private doctors never hand out generic drugs because there are no kickbacks or incentives involved from pharma companies.
- The government or specifically the government's Department of Pharmaceuticals is also to blame for the lack of awareness.

However, there are three fundamental areas of concern:

- **Efficacy of Indian-made drugs:** Oftentimes, such drugs have been found to contain less than the required amount of active pharmaceutical ingredient (API), rendering them ineffective.
- **Lack of data integrity:** The poorly managed documentation practices of Indian generic firms featured as the primary criticism flagged by foreign regulatory authorities. The lack of reliable and complete data on the test results of specific drug batches, along with inconsistencies in the records presented, meant that inspection and verification of drug quality was extremely difficult.
- **Hygiene standards of the manufacturing plants:** Individuals suffering from illness are especially susceptible to infections, and inspections of generic drug plants reveal pest infestations and dilapidated infrastructure.

Various efforts by the government:

- '**Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana**' is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. of India, **to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses** through special kendra's known as **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra**.
- **Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI)** is the implementing agency of PMBJP. BPPI (Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertakings of India) has been established under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. of India, with the support of all the CPSUs.

Branded Drugs V/S Generic Drugs

The most important thing to note down between branded drugs and the generic drugs is



- 1.) Both contain the similar active ingredients and generic drugs are equally effective and safe as the branded ones. So it can be said that there is no major difference between the two drug types.
- 2.) However generic drugs are available at a lower price and thus it makes it affordable for most of the people.
- 3.) There is a difference in the color of a generic drug and the brand name drug.



Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) Discuss merits and demerits of compulsory prescription of generic medicines.

6. MEASLES

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Measles- causes, symptoms, spread and vaccines.

Context: Sri Lanka has made health history after spending three years free of any new measles cases and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared that the deadly childhood infection has been eliminated in the island nation.

- Sri Lanka is the **fifth country in WHO's Southeast Asia region to eliminate measles**. The other four countries are Bhutan, Maldives, DPR Korea and Timor-Leste.

About Measles:

- What is It?** Measles is a highly **contagious viral disease**. It remains an important cause of death among young children globally, despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine.
- Spread:** Measles is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons.
- Initial symptoms**, which usually appear 10–12 days after infection, include high fever, a runny nose, bloodshot eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth. Several days later, a rash develops, starting on the face and upper neck and gradually spreading downwards.
- Vulnerability:** Severe measles is more likely among poorly nourished young children, especially those with insufficient vitamin A, or whose immune systems have been weakened by HIV/AIDS or other diseases.
- The most serious complications** include blindness, encephalitis (an infection that causes brain swelling), severe diarrhoea and related dehydration, and severe respiratory infections such as pneumonia.
- Prevention:** Routine measles vaccination for children, combined with mass immunization campaigns in countries with low routine coverage, are key public health strategies to reduce global measles deaths.
- Preventive efforts:** Under the Global Vaccine Action Plan, measles and rubella are targeted for elimination in five WHO Regions by 2020. WHO is the lead technical agency responsible for coordination of immunization and surveillance activities supporting all countries to achieve this goal.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. THE MALAISE OF MALNUTRITION

- Context:** A new report, '**Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019**', authored by the Government of India and the United Nations World Food Programme, has been released.

Questions raised?

- Why despite rapid economic growth, declining levels of poverty, enough food to export, and a multiplicity of government programmes, malnutrition amongst the poorest remains high?

Key findings:

- The poorest sections of society caught in a trap of poverty and malnutrition**, which is being **passed on from generation to generation**.
- Mothers who are hungry and malnourished produce children who are stunted, underweight and unlikely to develop to achieve their full human potential.**
- The effects of malnourishment in a small child are not merely physical. Undernutrition can affect cognitive development by causing direct structural damage to the brain and by impairing infant motor development.** This in turn affects the child's ability to learn at school, leading to a lifetime of poverty and lack of opportunity.

Concerns :

- The report highlights **the failure of the Indian state to ensure that its most vulnerable citizens are provided adequate nutrition in their early years**.
- India has long been home to the **largest number of malnourished children in the world**.

Efforts by government in this regard and challenges ahead:

- The government's **National Nutrition Mission (renamed as Poshan Abhiyaan)** aims to reduce stunting (a measure of malnutrition that is defined as height that is significantly below the norm for age) by 2% a year, bringing down the proportion of stunted children in the population to 25% by 2022.
- But even this modest target will require **doubling the current annual rate of reduction in stunting**.
- A year after it was launched, **State and Union Territory governments have only used 16% of the funds allocated to them**.
- Anganwadis are key to the distribution of services to mothers and children. But **many States, including Bihar and Odisha, which have large vulnerable populations, are struggling to set up functioning anganwadis, and recruit staff**.

Key areas that need immediate attention:

- **The key to ending the tragedy of child nutrition lies with a handful of State governments:** the highest levels of stunted and underweight children are found in Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. **Malnutrition is a reflection of age-old patterns of social and economic exclusion.** Over 40% of children from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are stunted. Close to 40% of children from the Other Backward Classes are stunted. The lack of nutrition in their childhood years can reduce their mental as well as physical development and condemn them to a life in the margins of society.
- **Stunting and malnourishment starts not with the child, but with the mother.** An adolescent girl who is malnourished and anaemic tends to be a mother who is malnourished and anaemic. This in turn increased the chances of her child being stunted.

Way ahead:

- In terms of immediate actions that can yield quick results, **four priorities for the child** would be the initiation of breastfeeding within one hour after birth, exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life, introduction of appropriate complementary foods after six months, and bi-annual vitamin A supplementation with deworming for children under five.
- To realize the potential of demographic dividend, **India must ensure that its children grow healthily.** Economic growth of 9% can not guarantee good health to the citizens if the state do not take pains to redistribute wealth properly to make India a safer place for its children to grow with dignity.

8. GLOBAL MPI 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of MPI.
- For Mains: Highlights, key findings and significance of the report, concerns for India and measures needed to reduce the poverty.

Context: Global MPI 2019 Report prepared by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the **Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative**.

- In the 101 countries assessed—31 low income, 68 middle income and 2 high income—about 1.3 billion people are “**multi-dimensionally poor**”.

Definition of MPI poor:

- Multi-dimensional poverty defines poor not only on the basis of income, but on other indicators, including poor health, poor quality of work and the threat of violence.

Key findings:

India specific:

- **Incidence of multidimensional poverty almost halved between 2005-06 and 2015-16**, climbing down to 27.5%, indicating that the number of poor people in India fell by more than 271 million within ten years.
- **Incidence of multidimensional poverty halved in India due to faster progress among the poorest in the country.** Among states, Jharkhand had the greatest improvement, with Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland only slightly behind.

- However, Bihar was still the poorest state in 2015- 16, with more than half of its population living in poverty. In 2015-16, the four poorest states – Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh – were home to 196 million multidimensional poor people – over half of all the people living in multidimensional poverty in India.
- Least poor regions also saw reduction in poverty. Relative to their starting levels, they netted some of the highest rates of reduction. For example, Kerala, one of the least poor regions in 2006, reduced its MPI by around 92%.
- The positive trend of pro-poor poverty reduction was seen also across religions and caste groups. In both cases, the poorest groups (Muslims and Scheduled Tribes) reduced poverty the most over the ten years from 2005-06 to 2015-16.
- The poorest district is Alirajpur in Madhya Pradesh, where 76.5% of people are poor – the same as Sierra Leone in Sub-Saharan Africa. Only eight countries have higher rates of MPI.

Sources: the Hindu.



Learn from the **best**
to get the **best results!**

**Offline Guidance
Program
(OGP) - 2020**

Admissions Open - Apply Now

Subscribe Now: www.insightsactivelearn.com



9. PARAMARSH SCHEME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched ‘Paramarsh’ – a University Grants Commission (UGC) scheme.

About Paramarsh:

- The scheme is for **Mentoring National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) Accreditation Aspirant Institutions** to promote Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- The scheme will be a paradigm shift in the concept of **mentoring of institution by another well performing institution to upgrade their academic performance** and enable them to get accredited by focusing in the area of curricular aspects, teaching-learning & evaluation, research, innovation, institutional values & practices etc.

Implementation:

- The Scheme will be operationalized through a “**Hub & Spoke**” model wherein the Mentor Institution, called the “Hub” is centralized and will have the responsibility of guiding the Mentee institution through the secondary branches the “Spoke” through the services provided to the mentee for self improvement.

Significance and impact of the scheme:

- The scheme is expected to have a major impact in addressing a national challenge of improving the quality of Higher Education in India.
- This allows a centralized control over operational efficiency, resource utilization to attain overall development of the mentee institution.
- The scheme will lead to enhancement of overall quality of the Mentee Institutions and enhance its profile as a result of improved quality of research, teaching and learning methodologies.
- Mentee Institution will also have increased exposure and speedier adaptation to best practices.
- The scheme will also facilitate sharing of knowledge, information and opportunities for research collaboration and faculty development in Mentee Institutions.
- Mentor-Mentee relationship will not only benefit both the institutions but also provide quality education to the 3.6 crore students who are enrolling to Indian Higher Education system at present.

10. EBOLA VIRUS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Ebola- the disease, spread, causes, treatment and vulnerability.
- For Mains: Epidemics- spread, global concern and joint efforts in this regard.

Context: Ebola outbreak in DR Congo has been declared as a **global health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO)**.

What is public health emergency of international concern?

- Public health emergency of international concern is defined as an “**extraordinary event that is determined to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response.**” The public emergency announcement is the highest level of alarm that is only raised during the gravest of outbreaks.

Background:

- This is the **fifth time in history that WHO has declared a public health emergency**. The previous declarations were for the devastating Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-2016 that took lives of more than 11000 people, spread of Zika virus in Latin America, 2009 Swine flu epidemic and for polio in 2014.
- **WHO only declares a disease or outbreak a global emergency when it threatens to affect other countries and requires a coordinated international response.**

How will declaration of global health emergency help?

- The declaration of a global health emergency will bring larger international focus on the alarming issue and it will also help bring in more financial and technical support. At the same time, the declaration can cause governments of neighbouring nations to panic and overreact by shutting down borders.

What you need to know about Ebola?

- **Ebola virus disease (EVD)**, formerly known as **Ebola haemorrhagic fever**, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans.
- **Transmission:** The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human-to-human transmission.
- **The average EVD case fatality rate is around 50%.** Case fatality rates have varied from 25% to 90% in past outbreaks.
- **Prevention:** Community engagement is key to successfully controlling outbreaks. Good outbreak control relies on applying a package of interventions, namely case management, surveillance and contact tracing, a good laboratory service and social mobilisation.
- **Early supportive care with rehydration, symptomatic treatment improves survival.** There is as yet no licensed treatment proven to neutralise the virus but a range of blood, immunological and drug therapies are under development.

Sources: the Hindu.

11. CHANDIPURA VIRUS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: About the virus, symptoms, effects and prevention.
- **Context:** Chandipura virus detected in Gujarat.

What is it?

- Named after the **Maharashtra village** where the virus was first discovered, the likely vector (carrier) of the virus is the female **phlebotomine sandfly**. It has been detected in sand flies in Senegal and Nigeria, apart from India. The virus is known to cause **inflammation of the brain**, and progresses rapidly from an influenza-like illness to coma and death.
- Chandipura virus (CHPV) belongs to the **Rhabdoviridae family in the order Mononegavirales** of the genus Vesiculovirus. Interestingly, its continuing mutating trend has enhanced its lethality to cause human infections, unlike its genetic cousin, the vesicular stomatitis virus (VSV).

Symptoms:

- Sudden high fever accompanied by headaches and altered consciousness.
- Convulsions.
- Vomiting and nausea.
- Unconsciousness

Key facts:

- The virus **predominantly infects children between the ages of 2-16**, spreading through the bite of a sandfly, and in some cases, even the mosquito during the monsoon and pre-monsoon season.
- It is **distantly related to the virus that causes rabies** and is known to have a case fatality between 55-75 per cent.

Sources: the Hindu.

12. THE THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: the three language formula, need, concerns associated over imposition of Hindi and the need for reforms.

- **Context:** The Tamil Nadu government has once again reiterated its opposition to the three-language formula proposed by the Centre in the **draft National Education Policy**.

What is the formula?

- It is commonly understood that the three languages referred to are Hindi, English and the regional language of the respective States.

Origin:

- Though the teaching of Hindi across the country was part of a long-standing system, it was crystallised into a policy in an official document only in the National Policy on Education, 1968. This document said regional languages were already in use as the media of education in the primary and secondary stages.
- In addition, it said, "At the secondary stage, State governments should adopt and vigorously implement the three-language formula, which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking States."
- In the 'non-Hindi speaking States', Hindi should be studied along with the regional language and English. It added: "Suitable courses in Hindi and/or English should also be available in universities and colleges with a view to improving the proficiency of students in these languages up to the prescribed university standards."

What did NEP 1968 say on promotion of Hindi as the link language?

- On promotion of Hindi, the NPE 1968 said every effort should be made to promote the language and that "in developing Hindi as the link language, due care should be taken to ensure that it will serve, as provided for in Article 351 of the Constitution, as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India. The establishment, in non-Hindi States, of colleges and other institutions of higher education which use Hindi, as the medium of education should be encouraged".

Why is there opposition to the teaching of Hindi which crystallised into a policy in an official document in 1968?

- The origin of the linguistic row, however, goes back to the debate on official language. In the Constituent Assembly, Hindi was voted as the official language by a single vote. However, it added that English would continue to be used as an associate official language for 15 years.
- The Official Languages Act came into effect on the expiry of this 15-year period in 1965. This was the background in which the anti-Hindi agitation took place. However, as early as in 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru had given an assurance in Parliament that English would continue to be in use as long as non-Hindi speaking people wanted it.

What needs to be done?

- There are numerous attractive ways to promote a language to the desired extent. So, instead of prescribing a set of languages, Draft NEP 2019 should give the freedom to choose "any three languages of 8th Schedule of the Constitution or official languages of the Union of India" as offered in the scheme of studies by the Boards of Secondary Education. This is a win-win solution for all.

Sources: the Hindu.

13. E-CIGARETTES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: e-cigarettes- concerns, effects on health, need for regulation, challenges associated and measures needed.

Context: Government's proposal to ban e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) needs to be welcomed as such a move will ensure that Indians, especially, children, are kept away from these pernicious products.

Background:

- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has recommended 'complete' ban on Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), including e-cigarettes. The recommendation is based on currently available scientific evidence.

Why ICMR has recommended a complete ban?

- **Addictive in nature:** e-cigarettes and other such devices contained not only nicotine solution, that was highly addictive, but also harmful ingredients like flavoring agents and vaporisers. Availability of flavour variants and attractive designs are adding to allure of devices, and globally there was an increasing trend of e-cigarettes consumption among youth and adolescents.
- **Use of ENDS or e-cigarettes can open a gateway for new tobacco addiction** among the masses as on the balance, these have a negative impact on public health.
- Prolonged use of ENDS or e-cigarettes has documented adverse impact on humans which includes DNA damage, respiratory/cardiovascular/ neurological Disorders, carcinogenic/cellular/molecular/immunological Toxicity and even have adverse effects on fetal development and pregnancy.
- **Research has found that youths using e-cigarettes (or other such devices) are more likely to use regular cigarettes in later period.** The exposure to ENDS increases the likelihood to experiment with regular products and increase intention to indulge in cigarette smoking.

What are e-cigarettes?

- An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a **battery-powered vaporizer that mimics tobacco smoking**. It works by heating up a nicotine liquid, called “juice.”
- Nicotine juice (or e-juice) comes in various flavors and nicotine levels. **e-liquid is composed of five ingredients:** vegetable glycerin (a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste) and propylene glycol (a solvent most commonly used in fog machines.) propylene glycol is the ingredient that produces thicker clouds of vapor.
- **Proponents** of e-cigs argue that the practice is **healthier than traditional cigarettes** because users are only inhaling water vapor and nicotine.

Why its hard to regulate them?

- As e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA)**, which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.
- **Need for regulation:** The current unregulated sale of e-cigarettes is dangerous for a country like India where the number of smokers is on the decline (WHO Global Report, 2015) as it increases the possibility of e-cigarettes becoming a gateway for smoking by inducing nicotine addiction and perpetuating smoking by making it more attractive, thereby encouraging persons to become users of tobacco as well as e-cigarettes.

WHO report on e-cigarettes and effects:

- As per the report, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) (also known as e-cigarettes) emits nicotine, the addictive component of tobacco products. In addition to dependence, nicotine can have adverse effects on the development of the foetus during pregnancy and may contribute to cardiovascular disease.
- The WHO report further says that although nicotine itself is not a carcinogen, it may function as a “tumour promoter” and seems to be involved in the biology of malignant disease, as well as of neurodegeneration.
- Foetal and adolescent nicotine exposure may have long-term consequences for brain development, potentially leading to learning and anxiety disorders.
- The evidence is sufficient to warn children and adolescents, pregnant women, and women of reproductive age against ENDS use and nicotine.

Sources: the Hindu.

14. KALA AZAR

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: The disease, its causes, spread, symptoms and prevention.

Context: Study warns **Kala azar patients can infect others even after treatment**. Research showed that patients with the condition can be a source of infection for others in their community.

Symptoms of Visceral Leishmaniasis (kala azar)



- Enlargement of the spleen
- Enlargement of the liver
- Night sweats
- Severe temperature or irregular bouts of fever that can last for weeks
- Bleeding
- Blackening of the skin
- Scaly skin
- Dark and ashen skin
- Cough
- Weakness
- Substantial weight loss

Background:

- Kala-azar is **endemic to the Indian subcontinent** in 119 districts in four countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal).
- This disease is the **second-largest parasitic killer in the world**. **Elimination** is defined as **reducing the annual incidence of Kala Azar (KA) to less than 1 case per 10,000 people at the sub-district level**.

Kala-azar:

- **What is it?** **Visceral leishmaniasis (VL)**, also known as **kala-azar**, **black fever**, and **Dum dum fever**, is the most severe form of leishmaniasis and, without proper diagnosis and treatment, is associated with high fatality.
- **Spread:** Caused by **protozoan parasites of the Leishmania genus**, migrates to the internal organs such as the liver, spleen (hence “visceral”), and bone marrow.
- **Signs and symptoms** include fever, weight loss, fatigue, anaemia, and substantial swelling of the liver and spleen.

Sources: the hindu.

15. DEEN DAYAL UPADHYAYA GRAMEEN KAUSHALYA YOJANA (DDU-GKY)

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features, need for and significance of the scheme.

About Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana or DDU-GKY:

- The Vision of DDU-GKY is to “**Transform rural poor youth into an economically independent and globally relevant workforce**”.
- It aims to **target youth, in the age group of 15–35 years**.
- DDU-GKY is a **part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)**, tasked with the dual objectives of adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families and cater to the career aspirations of rural youth.

Objectives:

- Enable Poor and Marginalized to Access Benefits.
- Mandatory coverage of socially disadvantaged groups (SC/ST 50%; Minority 15%; Women 33%).
- Shifting Emphasis from Training to Career Progression.

- Post-placement support, migration support and alumni network.
- Proactive Approach to Build Placement Partnerships.
- Guaranteed Placement for at least 75% trained candidates.
- Enhancing the Capacity of Implementation Partners
- Nurturing new training service providers and developing their skills.
- Greater emphasis on projects for poor rural youth in Jammu and Kashmir (HIMAYAT).

16. GLOBAL INNOVATION INDEX

What to study?

- For Prelims: GII- performance of India and other countries.
- For Mains: Need for innovation and government efforts to promote innovation.

Context: Global Innovation Index 2019 has been released.

- GII rankings are **based on 80 indicators**, from traditional measurements like research and development investments and international patent and trademark applications.
- **Theme for the year 2019 is – Creating Healthy Lives – The Future of Medical Innovation**, which aims to explore the role of medical innovation as it shapes the future of healthcare.
- It is **published by a specialized agency of the United Nations – the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in association with Cornell University and graduate business school INSEAD**.

India's performance:

- India's rank has been improved as it has reached at 52nd position in 2019. India was at 57th position in 2018.
- In terms of innovation and newly-emerging technologies India has been performing well and has improved its position by 29 places in the global index since 2015.
- India had ranked 81 in 2015, which rose to 66 in 2016, 60 in 2017 and 57 in 2018. India continues to be the most innovative economy in central and southern Asia.

Key Findings:

- **Public R&D expenditures**, particularly in some high-income countries, **are growing slowly or not at all**.
- Global landscape of science, innovation, and technology has undergone important shifts over the last decades.
Asian economies especially middle-income one, are rapidly contributing to global research and development (R&D) and international patenting rates via WIPO's International Patent System.

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

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

Need for democratic education:

- Democratically elected governments in our times are neither efficient nor wise. They show a propensity to fail at achieving their national goal — a high quality of life for all people. High rate of literacy, alone, would not solve the problem.
- The solution then is not just education per se, but **universal education of a certain kind, one that is focused on improving the quality of our democracy**. Our current education system does not focus on education in democracy or what we might call democratic education. Nor does it build on elements of democratic culture embedded in our traditions.

What then are the core elements of democratic education?

- It requires the **cultivation of democratic virtues**. For instance, **the ability to imagine and articulate a minimally common good**. This requires that we distinguish what is merely good for me from what is the good of all. And since each of us may develop our own distinct idea of the common good, to find an overlapping common good.
- **An ability to handle difference and disagreement and to retain, despite this difference**, the motivation to arrive at the common good through conversation, debate, dialogue and deliberation.

- Also crucial is a **spirit of compromise**, of moderation, and a willingness, within acceptable value parameters, of mutual give and take.
- More important is the ability to participate in a particular **historical narrative**. Members of a political community become better citizens when they relate to critical issues through historically inherited terms of debate, a continuing narrative, a specific ongoing conversation. The reflection of that debate in political decision-making is central to the members' feeling of engagement and participation.
- Individuals become effective and meaningful citizens **only by learning the terms set by debates around these specific issues**. Since a useful entry to them is available through rich debates in the Constituent Assembly, a familiarity with them is a crucial ingredient of democratic education in India.

What then is democratic education?

- Conceived broadly, it is a historically specific enterprise, determined by the inherited vocabulary of specific political languages and the terms of debates in a particular community. It is designed specifically to enable conversation on issues central to a particular community, to strive for agreement where possible and to live peacefully with disagreement where it is not. In short, it involves social and historical awareness and key democratic virtues.

2. 10TH SCHEDULE OF THE CONSTITUTION

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of 10th schedule of the constitution, dismissal, exceptions and judicial review of the decision.
- For Mains: Significance of anti-defection law, concerns associated with its misuse and measures to improve its transparency.

Context: 10 MLAs from Karnataka may face **disqualification for anti-party activities and defying whips**. The ball is now in speaker's court as he has powers to invoke the **10th Schedule of the Constitution, also known as the Anti-defection Act**.

What is the anti-defection law?

- The **Tenth Schedule** was inserted in the Constitution in 1985 by the **52nd Amendment Act**.
- It lays down the process by which **legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature** based on a petition by any other member of the House.
- The decision on question as to disqualification on ground of defection is **referred to the Chairman or the Speaker of such House, and his decision is final**.
- The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.

Disqualification:

- If a member of a house belonging to a political party:
- Voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party, or**
- Votes, or does not vote in the legislature**, contrary to the directions of his political party. However, if the member has taken prior permission, or is condoned by the party within 15 days from such voting or abstention, the member shall not be disqualified.
- If an independent candidate joins a political party after the election.
- If a nominated member joins a party six months after he becomes a member of the legislature.

Exceptions under the law:

- Legislators may change their party without the risk of disqualification in certain circumstances. **The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided that at least two-thirds of its legislators are in favour of the merger**. In such a scenario, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.

Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review:

- The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review. This condition was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992, thereby allowing appeals against the Presiding Officer's

decision in the High Court and Supreme Court. However, it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.

Advantages of anti-defection law:

- Provides stability to the government by preventing shifts of party allegiance.
- Ensures that candidates remain loyal to the party as well the citizens voting for him.
- Promotes party discipline.
- Facilitates merger of political parties without attracting the provisions of Anti-defection
- Expected to reduce corruption at the political level.
- Provides for punitive measures against a member who defects from one party to another.

Various Recommendations to overcome the challenges posed by the law:

- **Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms:** Disqualification should be limited to following cases:
 - A member voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party
 - A member abstains from voting, or votes contrary to the party whip in a motion of vote of confidence or motion of no-confidence. Political parties could issue whips only when the government was in danger.

Law Commission (170th Report)

- Provisions which exempt splits and mergers from disqualification to be deleted.
- Pre-poll electoral fronts should be treated as political parties under anti-defection
- Political parties should limit issuance of whips to instances only when the government is in danger.

Election Commission:

- Decisions under the Tenth Schedule should be made by the President/ Governor on the binding advice of the Election Commission.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What are the main features of India's anti-defection law? Also examine interpretations and recommendations made by the courts and committees on the law. Do you think, instead of the Speaker, the decision on defections should be decided by an external neutral body such as the Election Commission? Comment

3. ELECTRONICALLY TRANSMITTED POSTAL BALLOT SYSTEM (ETPBS)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Who is a Service Voter, how can he cast vote, significance and challenges associated, Key features of ETPBS.

Context: In the seven phases Lok Sabha polls, a record 18,02,646 eligible personnel were enrolled and 10,84,266 voted through the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) or e-postal ballots.

Electronically transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS):

- ETPBS is developed by Election Commission of India with the help of Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), for the use of the Service Voters.
- It is a fully secured system, having two layers of security. Secrecy is maintained through the use of OTP and PIN and no duplication of casted Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot (ETPB) is possible due to the unique QR Code.
- Persons working in paramilitary forces and the military and government officials deployed in diplomatic missions outside India are classified as Service Voters.

Significance and benefits:

- This system enables the entitled service voters to cast their vote using an electronically received postal ballot from anywhere outside their constituency.
- The voters who make such a choice will be entitled for Postal Ballot delivered through Electronic Media for a particular election.
- The developed System is implemented inline with the existing Postal Ballot System. Postal Ballot will be transmitted through Electronic Means to the voters.

- It enables the voters to cast their vote on an electronically received postal ballot from their preferred location, which is outside their originally assigned voting constituency.
- This system would be an easier option of facilitating voting by the electors as the time constraint for dispatch of postal ballot has been addressed using this system.

Class of Electors who are eligible for ETPBS:

- Service Voters, other than those who opt for proxy voting (Classified Service Voters).
- The wife of a Service Voter who ordinarily resides with him.
- Overseas Voters.

Features:

- Service voters can avail this service from anywhere outside their constituency.
- System facilitates creation of service voter electoral roll data.
- Easy, Efficient and Hassle free.
- It is a secure system, having two layer security.
- OTP is required to download encrypted Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot file.
- Secrecy is maintained and no duplicate of casted ETPB is possible due to QR code.
- PIN is required to decrypt, print and deliver ETPB.

4. STATE POLL FUNDING

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: State funding of elections- need, issues and feasibility, electoral reforms in general.

Context: Equating the expenditure limit on election expenses with prohibition, Congress MP Rajeev Gowda has moved a private member's bill- **Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill**- in the Rajya Sabha that seeks **removal of the limit and state funding of elections as part of reforms to the way polls are financed in India**.

Why remove the expenditure Limit?

- The limit on expenditure is seen as counter productive and only helped those with black money to bribe individual voters and crippled honest candidates.

What needs to be done- proposals made in the bill?

- Instead of imposing a limit, **transparency should be brought in**. The candidates should be allowed to legitimately raise funds.
- **Ensure state funding**- The bill proposed a **National Election Fund**, under which each political party could be allotted funds according to their recent electoral performance.

What is state or public funding of elections?

- This means that **government gives funds to political parties or candidates for contesting elections**.
- Its main purpose is **to make it unnecessary for contestants to take money from powerful moneyed interests so that they can remain clean**.

Why public funding is good?

- Political parties and candidates need money for their electoral campaigns, to keep contacts with their constituencies, to prepare policy decisions and to pay professional staff. Therefore, **public funding is a natural and necessary cost of democracy**.
- Public funding **can limit the influence of interested money and thereby help curb corruption**.
- Public funding can **increase transparency** in party and candidate finance and thereby help curb corruption.
- In societies where many citizens are under or just above the poverty line, they cannot be expected to donate large amounts of money to political parties or candidates. If parties and candidates receive at least a **basic amount of money from the State the country could have a functioning multi-party system without people having to give up their scarce resources**.

Why are some people opposed to this idea?

- Those against this idea wonder **how a Government that is grappling with deficit budgets, can provide money to political parties** to contest elections.
- They also warn that state funding would **encourage every second outfit to get into the political arena merely to avail of state funds**.
- Also, given that state expenditure on key social sectors such as primary healthcare is “pitifully small”, the very idea of the Government giving away money to political parties to contest polls, is revolting.

Why it is difficult to go for public funding?

- The funds that a political party advances to its party candidates in an election vary from one candidate to another, and there is much **variation across political parties in this regard**.
- Assuming that there are five contending candidates in a constituency, and even if each one of them does not spend as much, but just half of their elected counterpart, an amount of about ₹15 crore will be spent in each constituency, which with about 4,215 MLAs in India works out to an about ₹13,000 crore per annum.
- While the legal limit that a Lok Sabha candidate can spend is ₹70 lakh, a victorious candidate on an average does not spend less than ₹10 crore for the purpose. Suppose we assume again an average of five candidates per constituency, and halving the amount to losers, about ₹30 crore will be spent in each Lok Sabha constituency, and given 543 members of the Lok Sabha, about ₹3,300 crore per annum.
- Then there are elections to the Upper Houses, both at the Centre and in some States, and the local governing bodies. Hence, it is argued that public funding places unnecessary burden on the exchequer.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. COMPULSORY VOTING

- **Context:** The **Compulsory Voting Bill, 2019**, has been introduced by a ruling party MP in Lok Sabha.

Attempts in the past to make voting compulsory:

- The idea of **making voting compulsory was rejected by Dr. B R Ambedkar on account of practical difficulties** during the discussion on the People's Representation Bill in Parliament in the year 1951.
- Since then, many committees have discussed the issue and one such committee was **Dinesh Goswami Committee (1990)**.
- **Many Private member's bills were introduced for making voting compulsory.**

Arguments in favour of compulsory voting:

- **Strengthen democracy-** If compulsory voting was introduced, Parliament will be able to reflect more accurately, the will of the electorate. Compulsory voting will ensure that people take politics more seriously and will begin to take more proactive role. Further, citizens who live in a democratic state have a duty to vote, which is an essential part of that democracy.
- **Benefits the prevention of extremist and special interest groups from grabbing power.** Otherwise if less number of people vote then it becomes easier for the special interest groups to motivate a small section of people and influence the outcome of the election process.
- **Financial resources can be saved** as Election Commission no longer needs to spend money in convincing people about the need to vote.

Arguments against making voting compulsory:

- **Practical difficulties** such as remoteness of polling booths, difficulties faced by certain classes of people like daily wage labourers, nomadic groups, disabled, pregnant women etc. in casting their vote.
- Compulsory voting may be in **violation of the fundamental rights of liberty and expression** that are guaranteed to citizens in a democratic state. So every individual should be able to choose whether or not he or she wants to vote. Active participation in a democratic set up must be voluntary, and not coerced.
- **The expenditure increases with enforcing compulsory voting.** For instance, the cost per voter in 2009 LokSabha elections is Rs.12. If in case a large number of voters who do not want to vote presses NOTA button, then it becomes an unnecessary expenditure without any decisive outcome on the election.

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

1. CENTRAL WELFARE DATABASE OF CITIZENS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Need for database, significance, challenges in the absence of data and measures to improve data accuracy.

Context: Economic Survey moots central welfare database of citizens.

About the Proposed Central Welfare Database of citizens:

- It will be created by **merging different data maintained by separate Ministries and departments** — which can be tapped for enhancing ease of living for citizens, particularly the poor.
- Governments can create data as a public good** within the legal framework of data privacy. Care must also be taken not to impose the “elite’s preference of privacy on the poor, who care for a better quality of living the most.”
- Private sector may be granted access** to select database for a fee.
- The datasets talked about include** administrative data such as birth and death records, pensions, tax records, marriage records; survey data such as census data, national sample survey data; transactions data such as e-national agriculture market data, UPI data, institutional data and public hospital data on patients.

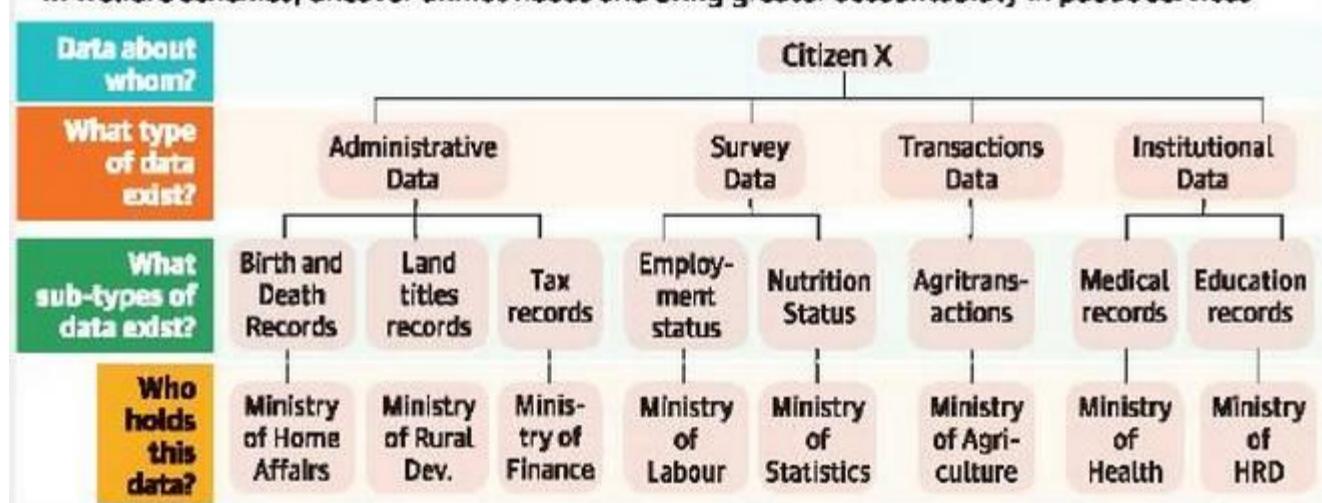
Significance:

- The government already has a rich repository of administrative, survey, institutional and transactions data about citizens, but **these data were scattered across numerous government bodies**. Merging these distinct datasets would generate multiple benefits with the applications being limitless.
- The government **could utilise the information embedded in these distinct datasets to enhance ease of living for citizens, enable truly evidence-based policy, improve targeting in welfare schemes, uncover unmet needs, integrate fragmented markets, bring greater accountability in public services and generate greater citizen participation in governance, etc.**

What data can do for you

SOURCE: ECONOMIC SURVEY 2018-19

Integrating information in distinct datasets can help enhance ease of living, improve targeting in welfare schemes, uncover unmet needs and bring greater accountability in public services



Note: Names of some Ministries abbreviated. Data types and sub-types are illustrative examples and not exhaustive
Sources: the Hindu.

2. CRIME AND CRIMINAL TRACKING NETWORK SYSTEM (CCTNS)

What to study?

- For Prelims: CCTNS, difference between CCTNS and NATGRID.
- For Mains: CCTNS- need and benefits, smart policing, police reforms.

Context: Against a target of covering 14306 police stations, a total of 14874 police stations (excluding police stations in Bihar) have been covered under the **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)**, which includes new police stations.

What is CCTNS project?

- Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) is a project initiated in June 2009 which aims at creating a **comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policing at the Police Station level**. This will be done through adoption of principles of e-Governance, and creation of a nationwide networked infrastructure for evolution of IT-enabled state-of-the-art tracking system around “investigation of crime and detection of criminals”. CCTNS is a **Mission Mode Project (MMP)** under the National e-Governance Plan of Govt. of India.

What it does?

- The Project will **interconnect about 15000 Police Stations and additional 5000 offices of supervisory police officers** across the country and digitize data related to FIR registration, investigation and charge sheets in all Police Stations.
- It will **not only automate Police functions at Police station and higher levels but will also create facilities and mechanism to provide public services** like registration of online complaints, ascertaining the status of case registered at the police station, verification of persons etc.
- In 2015, an additional objective of establishing a basic platform for an **Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)** was added to the Project.

Benefits:

- The Full implementation of the Project with all the new components would lead to a Central citizen portal having linkages with State level citizen portals that will provide a number of citizen friendly services like Police Verification for various purposes including passport verification, reporting a crime including cyber-crime and online tracking of the case progress etc.
- The project will enable National level crime analytics to be published at increased frequency, which will help the policy makers as well as lawmakers in taking appropriate and timely action, it will also enable Pan-India criminal/accused name search in the regional language for improved inter-state tracking of criminal movement. This would lead to development of a national database of crimes and criminals.

3. BROADBAND READINESS INDEX FOR STATES

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features, need for and significance of the index.

Context: DoT and Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop a **Broadband Readiness Index (BRI)** for Indian states and Union Territories (UT).

- **The index will include indicators such as** percentage of households using computers/ laptops with internet connection, percentage of households with fixed broadband connection, internet users as a percentage of the population, smartphones density, percentage of households with at least one digitally literate member, etc.

Objectives:

- Appraise the condition of the underlying digital infrastructure and related factors at state/UT levels.
- Provide useful insights into strategic choices made by states for investment allocations in ICT programmes,

the statement said.

- Encourage states to cross learn and jointly participate in achieving the overall objective of digital inclusion and development in India.

Significance:

- The framework will not only evaluate a state's relative development but also allow for better understanding of a state's strengths and weaknesses that can feed into evidence-based policy making.

Background:

- The National Digital Communication Policy (NDCP) 2018 acknowledged the need for building a robust digital communications infrastructure leveraging existing assets of the broadcasting and power sectors including collaborative models involving state, local bodies and the private sector.
- The policy recommended that an index for states and UTs be developed to attract investments and address Right of Way (RoW) challenges across India.

4. GOVERNMENT E MARKETPLACE (GEM)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About GeM and its features.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for GeM.

Context: A government meeting was recently held to review and formulate an action plan for **Government e Marketplace (GeM)** to achieve a target for Rs. lakh crore Gross Merchandise Volume (GMV) on GeM in FY 2019-20.

About GeM:

- **What is it?** GeM is a state-of-the-art national public procurement platform of Ministry of Commerce and Industries, that has used technology to remove entry barriers for bonafide sellers and has created a vibrant e-marketplace with a wide range of goods and services.
- **Aim:** GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.
- **Features:** It facilitates online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organisations / PSUs. It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users, achieve the best value for their money.

5. DATA LOCALIZATION

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is data localization, Highlights of Srikrishna panel report.
- For Mains: Data localisation- Why government wants this? Concerns expressed by stakeholders and possible solutions.

Context: American digital payments player PayPal is working with its partners on localisation of data as mandated by the Reserve Bank of India.

What does Data Localization mean?

- Data localization is the **act of storing data on any device that is physically present within the borders of a specific country where the data was generated.**

Why data localization is necessary for India?

- For securing citizen's data, data privacy, data sovereignty, national security, and economic development of the country.
- Recommendations by the RBI, the **committee of experts led by Justice BN Srikrishna**, the draft ecommerce policy and the draft report of the cloud policy panel show signs of data localisation.
- The extensive data collection by technology companies, has allowed them to process and monetize Indian users' data outside the country. Therefore, **to curtail the perils of unregulated and arbitrary use of personal data, data localization is necessary.**

- Digital technologies like machine learning (ML), artificial intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) can generate tremendous value out of various data. It can turn disastrous if not contained within certain boundaries.
- With the advent of cloud computing, Indian users' data is outside the country's boundaries, leading to a conflict of jurisdiction in case of any dispute.
- Data localization is an opportunity for Indian technology companies to evolve an outlook from services to products. International companies will also be looking at the Indian market, and this will benefit the growth of the local ecosystem.
- More data centres in India could mean new, power-hungry customers for India's renewable energy market. That means Data localisation could boost India's renewable energy.

Policies that imply data localization:

- The Srikrishna Committee wants to localise data for law enforcement to have easy access to data, to prevent foreign surveillance, to build an artificial intelligence ecosystem in India, and because undersea cables through which data transfers take place are vulnerable to attacks.
- Reserve Bank of India has also imposed a hard data localisation mandate on payment systems providers to store payment systems data only in India.
- Barring limited exceptions, telecom service providers are not allowed to transfer user information and accounting information outside India.
- Goals set in the Draft National Digital Communications Policy 2018, and the Guidelines for Government Departments for Contractual Terms related to Cloud Storage 2017, draft e-commerce policy and the draft report of the cloud policy panel show signs of data localization.

Concerns / Challenges:

- Several of the recommendations in including the draft e-commerce policy, falter on a key ground like they gloss over the negative economic impact of data localization. This approach exhibits lack of evidence-based policy making.
- Having data in India does not mean that domestic companies will be able to access this data. Localization might aid the growth of the data centre and the cloud computing industry in India, but as matter of wider public policy, such an approach is extremely myopic.
- Mandating localization is less of a solution for data protection and might be less relevant to promote e-commerce.
- Given the comparative trade advantages enjoyed by one section of Indian industry in this context, mandating a strict data localization regime could be perceived as a restrictive trade barrier and spur retaliatory measures.
- There is a possible rise in prices of foreign cloud computing services in case of a data localisation, and its impact on MSMEs as well as start-ups relying on these services.
- The possibility of triggering a vicious cycle of data localisation requirements by other countries as a response to India's possible data localisation will be detrimental for the global data economy.
- Growth will be restricted if data cannot be aggregated internationally. Infrastructure in India for efficient data collection and management is lacking.

Need of the hour:

- There is an urgent need to have an integrated, long-term strategy for policy creation for data localisation.
- Data localisation needs to integrate a wide range of social, political and economic perspectives.
- Creating an opportunity for local data centres all over the country.
- Devising an optimal regulatory and legislative framework for data processors and data centres operating in the country.
- Adequate infrastructure in terms of energy, real estate, and internet connectivity also needs to be made available for India to become a global hub for data centres.
- Adequate attention needs to be given to the interests of India's Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries, which are thriving on cross border data flow.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

SIMLA AGREEMENT AND ITS RELEVANCE AMID TRUMP'S KASHMIR MEDIATION GAFFE

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Simla agreement- origin, impact and outcomes, has it been successful?

Context: Donald Trump's offer to help India and Pakistan resolve the Kashmir issue has snowballed into a major controversy after India refuted the US President's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made a request in this regard.

- With this, the focus has shifted back on past "bilateral agreements", including the **1972 Simla Agreement**.

India's response:

- India has reiterated its longstanding position that **there is no room for mediation in Kashmir or on any other India-Pakistan issue** and that all outstanding matters between the two countries would be resolved through bilateral dialogue — but only when Pakistan ends cross-border terrorism in India.

What is Simla Agreement and why was it signed?

- The Simla Agreement was signed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on 2 July **1972**, following a full-blown war between India and Pakistan in 1971.
- The Simla Agreement was "much more than a peace treaty seeking to reverse the consequences of the 1971 war (i.e. to bring about withdrawals of troops and an exchange of PoWs)." It was a comprehensive blueprint for good neighbourly relations between India and Pakistan.
- Under the Simla Agreement both countries undertook to **abjure conflict and confrontation** which had marred relations in the past, and to work towards the establishment of durable peace, friendship and cooperation.
- The two countries not only agreed to put an end to "**conflict and confrontation**" but also work for the "**promotion of a friendly and harmonious relationship and the establishment of durable peace in the sub-continent**, so that both countries may henceforth devote their resources and energies to the pressing task of advancing the welfare of their peoples."

How was this to be achieved?

- In order to achieve this objective, both the governments agreed that that the **principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations would govern bilateral relations and differences would be resolved by "peaceful means** through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them."
- Regarding Jammu and Kashmir, the two sides had agreed that the line of control "**resulting from the ceasefire of December 17, 1971 shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognized position of either side**. Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations. Both sides further undertake to **refrain from the threat or the use of force in violation of this Line.**"
- Both governments had also agreed that their respective Heads would **meet again at a "mutually convenient time in the future the representatives of the two sides will meet to discuss further the modalities and arrangements for the establishment of durable peace and normalization of relations**, including the questions of repatriation of prisoners of war and civilian internees, a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir and the resumption of diplomatic relations."

India had three primary objectives at Shimla:

- First, a lasting solution to the Kashmir issue or, failing that, an agreement that would constrain Pakistan from involving third parties in discussions about the future of Kashmir.
- Second, it was hoped that the Agreement would allow for a new beginning in relations with Pakistan based upon Pakistan's acceptance of the new balance of power.
- Third, it left open the possibility of achieving both these objectives without pushing Pakistan to the wall and creating a revanchist anti-India regime.

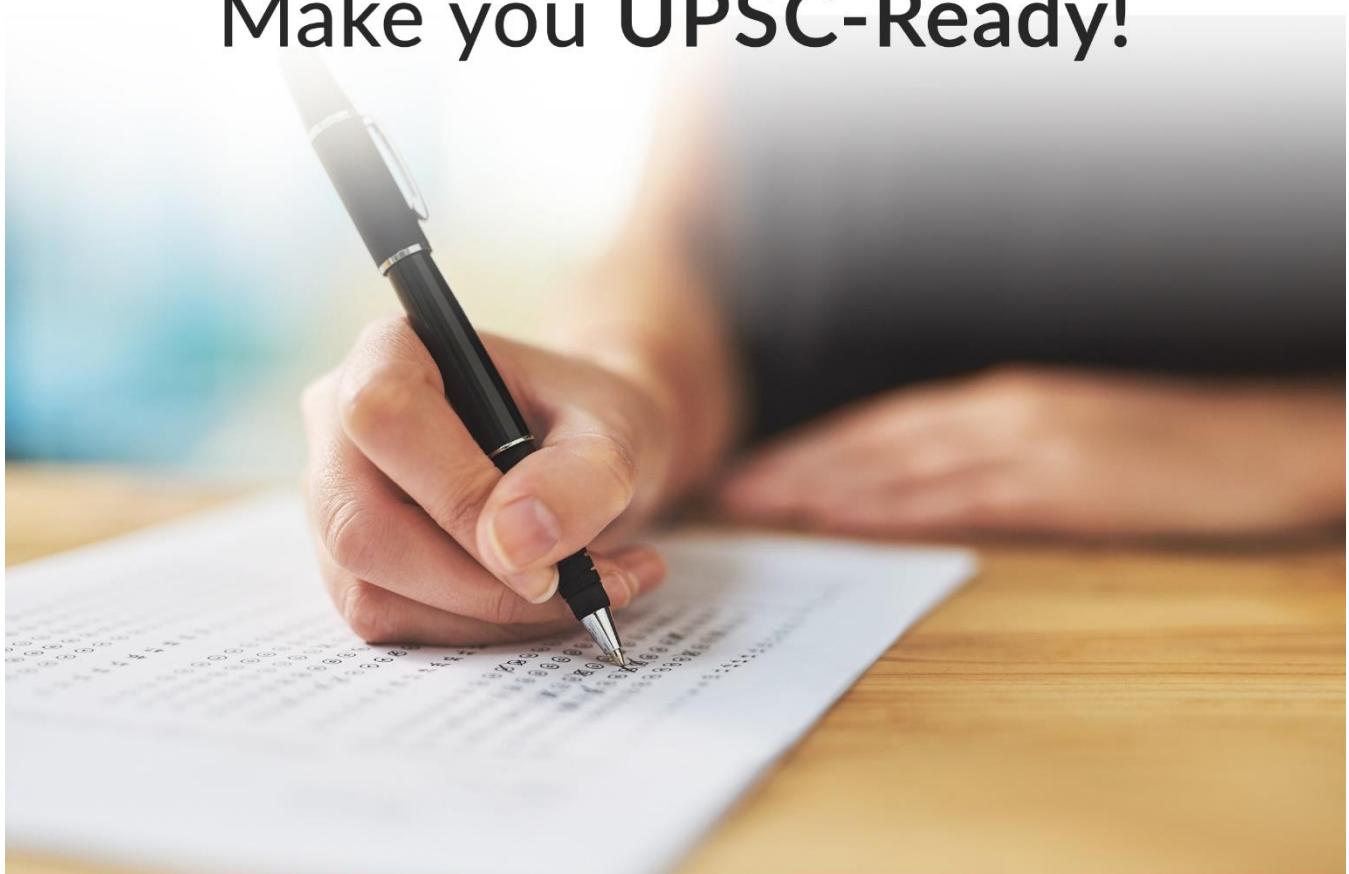
Sources: Indian Express.



INSIGHTS OFFLINE

PRELIMS TEST SERIES - 2020

to
Make you UPSC-Ready!



Prelims Textbook Approach 2020 &
Prelims Subject-Wise Based Approach 2020

Subscribe Now at <https://www.insightsactivlearn.com> | www.insightsonindia.com

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

1. INDO-PACIFIC REGIONAL DIALOGUE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Overview of regions and countries in Indo- pacific region, important straits.
- For Mains: Significance and potential of the region, need for international cooperation to maintain peace and order in the region.

Context: The term **Indo-Pacific** has been gaining traction in Indian policy circles for some time now, it achieved operational clarity after the Indian vision was presented by Prime Minister in his keynote address at the **Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018**.

What is it?

- Geographically, the Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian and the Pacific Oceans between the east coast of Africa and the American west coast and their several littoral countries. As a term to denote an **economic and strategic community**, it has been in use among scholars of international relations and geopolitics since the first decade of this century, around the same time as China's rise.

Mechanisms for India to integrate with Indo-Pacific Policy:

- India's **Act East policy** remains the bedrock of the national Indo-Pacific vision and the centrality of **ASEAN** is embedded in the Indian narrative.
- India has been an active participant in mechanisms like the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.
- India has also been convening the **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium**, in which the navies of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) participate.
- India has boosted its **engagements with Australia and New Zealand and has deepened its cooperation with the Republic of Korea**.
- Through the Forum for **India-Pacific Islands Cooperation**, India is stepping up its interactions with the Pacific Island countries.
- India views the Indo-Pacific as a **geographic and strategic expanse, with the 10 ASEAN countries connecting the two great oceans**.

Challenges ahead for Indo-Pacific regional policy:

- The integration of the IORA means that attention will continue to be focused on the IOR. This can be a result of the growing **Chinese footprint in the Indian Ocean and Chinese diplomacy in the region**.
- There are still challenges for India, especially how it will **integrate the Quadrilateral initiative** which got revived in 2017 with its larger Indo-Pacific approach.
- **There are differences between India's vision and the U.S.'s strategy for the Indo-Pacific** even as countries like China and Russia view the Indo-Pacific with suspicion.

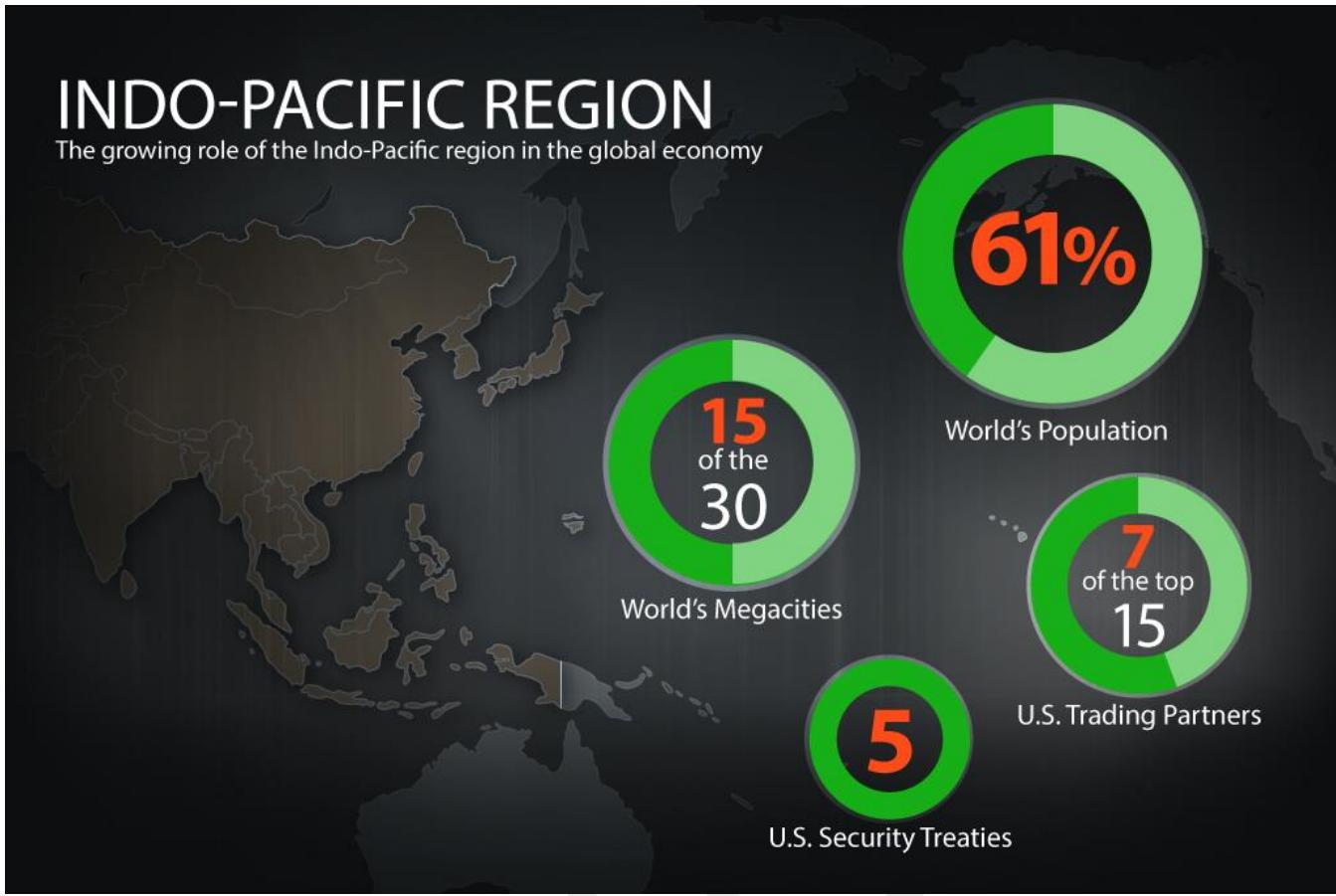
Efforts by the US:

- The **renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command** as well as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act in December 2018 showcase Washington's more serious engagement with the Indo-Pacific.

IPRD- Indo- Pacific Regional Dialogue:

- The idea of an Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) was first conceptualised and conducted in 2018, as the apex level **conference of the Indian Navy, organised by the National Maritime Foundation as the Navy's Knowledge Partner**.
- The permanent theme of this annual dialogue is a **review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region**.
- The aim is to focus attention on the Indo-Pacific, as a maritime geographical-entity, while deliberating aspects of great relevance to regional geopolitics.

Sources: Indian Express.



2. UKIERI MOBILITY PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features and significance of the programme.

Context: India and UK have joined hands together for **UKIERI Mobility Programme: Study in India** which will allow UK students to visit India for higher studies.

About the UK India Education & Research Initiative (UKIERI) Mobility Programme: Study in India:

- It will be a **bilateral pilot programme which will support UK universities to collaborate with Indian partners to send UK students to India as part of their studies.**
- It provides **flexible grants to UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and their Indian partner institutions** to design and deliver academically rigorous short-term mobility opportunities in India for undergraduate students from UK HEIs.

The aims and objectives of the Programme:

- Increase the levels of outward student mobility from the UK.
- Enhance the employability of UK graduates, recognizing the positive correlation between international experience, academic performance and graduate employability.
- Support the internationalization of Indian higher education institutions in line with the Government of India's 'Study in India' programme through the diversification of the student body, and through establishing links with the potential to seed deeper institutional partnerships and research collaboration.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (RCEP)

What to study?

- For prelims: RCEP- Key facts and Geographical location of member countries.
- For mains: Why is India concerned, gains and losses from this, what India needs to do?

- **Context:** The 16-nation group led by ASEAN countries is making a push for India to sign the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Free Trade Agreement.**

Why has it assumed so much significance in recent times?

- When inked, it would become **the world's biggest free trade pact.** This is because the 16 nations account for a total GDP of about \$50 trillion and house close to 3.5 billion people. India (GDP-PPP worth \$9.5 trillion and population of 1.3 billion) and China (GDP-PPP of \$23.2 trillion and population of 1.4 billion) together comprise the RCEP's biggest component in terms of market size.

Why is India concerned?

- **Greater access to Chinese goods may have impact on the Indian manufacturing sector.** India has got massive trade deficit with China. Under these circumstances, India proposed differential market access strategy for China.
- There are demands by other RCEP countries for lowering customs duties on a number of products and greater access to the market than India has been willing to provide.

Why India should not miss RCEP?

- If India is out of the RCEP, it would make its **exports price uncompetitive with other RCEP members' exports** in each RCEP market, and the ensuing export-losses contributing to foreign exchange shortages and the subsequent extent of depreciation of the rupee can only be left to imagination. Some of the sectors that have been identified as potential sources of India's export growth impulses under RCEP to the tune of approximately \$200 billion.
- There are more compelling trade and economic reasons for RCEP to become India-led in future, than otherwise. **India would get greater market access in other countries not only in terms of goods, but in services and investments also.**

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) India should not allow the RCEP trade deal to fail. Do you agree. Comment.

What you need to know about RCEP?

- RCEP is proposed between the **ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the **six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs** (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
- RCEP negotiations were **formally launched in November 2012** at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
- **Aim:** RCEP aims to boost goods trade by eliminating most tariff and non-tariff barriers — a move that is expected to provide the region's consumers greater choice of quality products at affordable rates. It also seeks to liberalise investment norms and do away with services trade restrictions.

Topics: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. US SENATE CLEARS PROPOSAL TO BRING INDIA ON A PAR WITH ITS NATO ALLIES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the bill, implications if enacted, overview of NATO.

Context: The US Senate has passed a legislative provision that brings India on par with Washington's **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** allies and countries such as Israel and South Korea for increasing defence cooperation.

- The **National Defense Authorization Act or NDAA** for fiscal 2020, that contained the proposal was passed by the US Senate recently.

What it contains?

- The legislative provision provides for **increased US-India defence cooperation in the Indian Ocean** in areas of humanitarian assistance, counterterrorism, counter-piracy, and maritime security.

Significance:

- The US has already recognized India as a “**major defence partner**” in 2016. This allows India to buy more advanced and sensitive technologies from America on par with that of the **closest allies and partners of the US**, and ensures enduring cooperation in this sphere. The passage of the NDAA clarifies in greater detail what the closer defence cooperation actually means and entails.

Background:

- The **National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)** is the name for each of a series of United States federal laws specifying the annual budget and expenditures of the U.S. Department of Defense. The first NDAA was passed in 1961.

About North Atlantic Treaty Organization (North Atlantic Alliance):

- It is an **intergovernmental military alliance**.
- Treaty that was **signed on 4 April 1949**.
- **Headquarters** — Brussels, Belgium.
- Headquarters of Allied Command Operations — Mons, Belgium.
- **Significance:** It constitutes a system of **collective defence whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party**.

Objectives:

- **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 organisations.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. BASE EROSION AND PROFIT SHIFTING

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: BEPS- meaning, concerns associated and measures in place.

Context: The government has ratified the international agreement to curb **base erosion and profits shifting (BEPS)**— **Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures**, a bid to stop companies from moving their profits out of the country and depriving the government of tax revenue.

What is BEPS?

- Base erosion and profit shifting refers to the **phenomenon where companies shift their profits to other tax jurisdictions, which usually have lower rates, thereby eroding the tax base in India**.

About the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting:

- The Convention is an **outcome of the OECD / G20 BEPS Project** to tackle base erosion and profit shifting through tax planning strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations where there is little or no economic activity, resulting in little or no overall corporate tax being paid.
- The Convention **implements two minimum standards relating to prevention of treaty abuse and dispute resolution through Mutual Agreement Procedure**.
- The Convention will not function in the same way as an Amending Protocol to a single existing treaty, which would directly amend the text of the Covered Tax Agreements. Instead, **it will be applied alongside existing tax treaties, modifying their application in order to implement the BEPS measures**.
- The Convention ensures **consistency and certainty in the implementation** of the BEPS Project in a multilateral context. The Convention also provides **flexibility to exclude a specific tax treaty and to opt out of provisions or parts of provisions through making of reservations**.

- A list of Covered Tax Agreements as well as a list of reservations and options chosen by a country are required to be made at the time of signature or when depositing the instrument of ratification.

Benefits for India:

- The Multilateral Convention will enable the application of BEPS outcomes through modification of existing tax treaties of India in a swift manner.
- It is also in India's interest to ensure that all its treaty partners adopt the BEPS anti-abuse outcomes.
- The Convention will enable curbing of revenue loss through treaty abuse and base erosion and profit shifting strategies by ensuring that profits are taxed where substantive economic activities generating the profits are carried out and where value is created.

Background:

- BEPS is of major significance for developing countries due to their heavy reliance on corporate income tax, particularly from multinational enterprises. Estimates since 2013 conservatively indicate annual losses of anywhere from 4 to 10 per cent of global corporate income tax revenues, or \$100-\$240 billion annually.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. FAIRNESS OF HIGH-SKILLED IMMIGRANTS ACT, 2019 OR HR 1044

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: What is green card? Recent changes proposed and impact of these changes.

What is it? It is a Bill passed by the US lawmakers aimed at lifting the current seven per cent country-cap on issuing Green Cards.

Key changes proposed:

- As per the present system, out of the total number of family-based immigrant visas to be given by the US in a particular year, the people of a country can be given a maximum of seven per cent of such visas. The new Bill seeks to increase this seven per cent per-country limit to 15 per cent.
- Similarly, it also seeks to eliminate the seven per cent per-country cap on employment-based immigrant visas.
- It also removes an offset that reduced the number of visas for individuals from China.
- The bill also establishes transition rules for employment-based visas from FY 2020-22 by reserving a percentage of EB-2 (workers with advanced degrees or exceptional ability), EB-3 (skilled and other workers) and EB-5 (investors) visas for individuals from other than the two countries that get the largest number of such visas.
- As per another provision of the Bill, not more than 85 per cent of the unreserved visas, would be allotted to immigrants from any single country.

Impact:

- The Bill will create a first-come, first-served system providing certainty to workers and families and enabling the US companies to flourish and compete in a global economy as they hire the brightest people to create products, services, and jobs, regardless of where they were born.

How will this law help the Indian IT professionals working there?

- Lifting the per-country cap on Green Card would mainly benefit high-tech professionals on H-1B work visas from countries like India, for whom the wait for Green Card is more than a decade.
- Under current rules, citizens of India are getting about 25 percent of all the professional employment green cards each year. If this bill becomes law citizens of India will get more than 90 percent of the professional employment green cards.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

1. UN RESOLUTION ON TORTURE

What to study?

- For prelims: key features of the resolution.
- For mains: Why India abstained from voting, concerns, issues and what needs to be done?

Context: India joined ranks with Russia and 42 other nations to abstain from voting on a **General Assembly resolution aimed at examining options to end trade in goods used for capital punishment and torture.**

- The resolution was introduced by **Romania**.

India's arguments:

- Incorporating capital punishment into the scope of this resolution “**raises concerns that it may be an attempt to place it on par with torture.**”
- India has voted against the resolution as a whole, as **it goes against statutory law in India**. The death penalty is exercised in ‘**rarest of rare**’ cases, where the crime committed is so heinous that it shocks the conscience of the society.
- Indian law provides for all **requisite procedural safeguards**, including the right to a fair trial by an independent Court, presumption of innocence, the minimum guarantees for defence, and the right to review by a higher court.

Background:

- The 193-member UN General Assembly recently adopted the **resolution Towards torture-free trade: examining the feasibility, scope and parameters for possible common international standards**’ by a recorded vote of 81 in favour to 20 against, with 44 abstentions.

What is the resolution all about?

- The resolution requests the secretary-general to seek the views of member states on the feasibility and possible scope of a range of options to establish common international standards for the import, export and transfer of goods used for capital punishment and for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- It asks the secretary-general to submit a report on the subject to the General Assembly at its 2019-20 session.
- It also requests the secretary-general to establish a group of governmental experts to examine, beginning in 2020, the feasibility and scope of the goods to be included, and draft parameters for a range of options to establish common international standards on the matter.
- It asks for the transmission of the report of the group of experts to the General Assembly for consideration at its 2020-21 session.

What is capital punishment?

- Capital punishment also called as death penalty is the execution of an offender sentenced to death after conviction by a court of law.

Problems with death penalty:

- The death penalty is **error-ridden**. For Instance, Between January 1, 2000 and June 31, 2015, the Supreme Court imposed 60 death sentences. It subsequently admitted that it had erred in 15 of them (25%).
- The landmark SC judgment in 2009 in the **Santosh Bariyar case** in which Justice Sinha went to the extent of admitting the undue influence of public opinion in awarding death. The Bariyar verdict pointed to” the **danger of capital sentencing becoming a spectacle in the media**”.
- The death penalty **unfairly targets the poor and marginalised**.

Arguments in favour:

- The punishment is **not arbitrary because**, it comes out of a judicial process.
- It is being implemented in the “**rarest of the rare**” cases and the fact is during the last 13 years, only four people have been executed.

- Its **constitutionality is upheld**, even in liberal democracies like U.S. It is not reflection of uncivilised society.
- **India's neighbourhood is not peaceful, unlike Scandinavia.** India has got troubled borders. Several forces are trying to destabilise the very idea of our Nation from across the Border.
- The **sacredness of life can only be seen to be protected, if those who take it away are proportionately punished.**

Way ahead:

- Two-thirds of countries in the world has abolished it. India certainly does not need it as it serves no purpose. The evidence is all to the contrary. For deterrence to work, the severity of the punishment has to coexist with the certainty and swiftness of the punishment.

Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) Does the death penalty stop crime? Do you think India abolish capital punishment? Critically analyze.

2. INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION (IWC)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About IWC- composition, functions and significance.
- For Mains: Moratorium on commercial whaling, concerns over Japan's move and the way ahead.

Context: Japan has resumed commercial whale hunting after a hiatus of more than 30 years, defying calls from conservation groups to protect animals once hunted to the brink of extinction.

Background:

- Tokyo has for decades fiercely defended whale hunting despite heavy criticism from the international community. The government and local authorities celebrate the practice as a tradition with a long history and cultural significance akin to the hunting of whales in countries such as Norway and Iceland, where commercial hunting is permitted, or among indigenous communities in the United States and Canada.

About IWC:

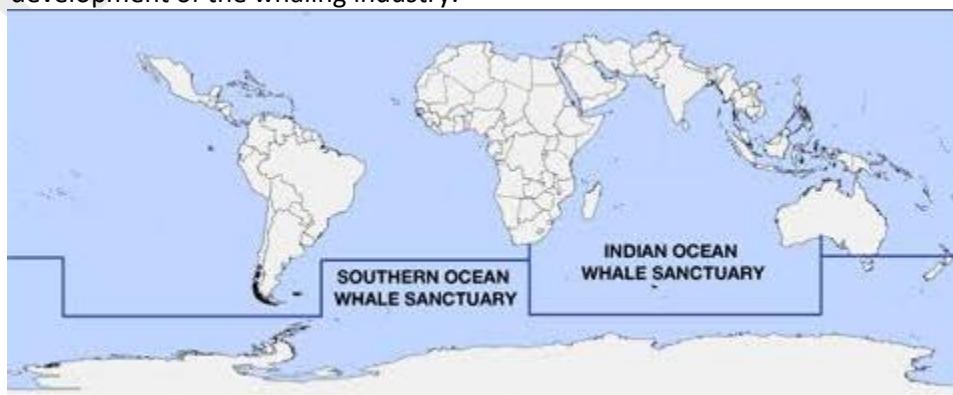
- It is an international body **set up under International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW)**.
- **Functions:** ICRW governs the commercial, scientific, and aboriginal subsistence whaling practices of fifty-nine member nations.
- In 1986, it adopted a **moratorium on commercial whaling. This ban still continues.**

Whale sanctuary:

- In 1994, it created the **Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary** surrounding the continent of Antarctica. Here, the **IWC has banned all types of commercial whaling**.
- **Only two such sanctuaries** have been designated by IWC till date. Another is **Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary** by the tiny island nation of the Seychelles.

Objectives:

- To provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks.
- For orderly development of the whaling industry.



Sources: the hindu.

3. UN PALESTINE REFUGEE AGENCY

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: UNRWA- functions, funding, significance and challenges.

Context: India pledges to contribute USD 5 million in 2019 to **UN Palestine refugee agency**.

Background:

- India has increased its annual financial contribution fourfold to the **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)** core budget, from USD 1.25 million in 2016 to USD 5 million in 2018.

UNRWA:

- It is a **relief and human development agency** that was established in 8 December 1949.
- UNRWA has been providing **health, education, relief and social services, as well as emergency humanitarian assistance**, across its **five fields of operation Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip** since 1950.
- The Agency currently serves 5.4 million Palestinian refugees 20% of the world's refugees.

Concerns and challenges:

- The UN agency is going through a **difficult financial situation** due to voluntary contributions from a limited donor base.
- There is a **projected shortfall of more than USD 200 million** against a funding requirement of approximately **USD 1.2 billion** for UNRWA this year.
- The shortfall may impact the **agency's ability to provide essential services** to the Palestine refugees, notably in the fields of education, health, and assistance to the most vulnerable refugees.

Need of the hour:

- Traditional donors of UNRWA should consider enhancing their contributions.
- Non-donor member states should consider contributing to UNRWA in solidarity with the Palestine refugees.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. HENLEY PASSPORT INDEX

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Passport Index- features, performance of various countries and significance of the index.

Context: Henley Passport Index 2019 has been released. The Index is based on data provided by the International Air Transport Authority (IATA) and covers 199 passports and 227 travel destinations.

About the index:

- The **Henley Passport Index (HPI)** is a global **ranking of countries according to the travel freedom for their citizens**.
- It started in 2006 as **Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index (HVRI)** and was modified and renamed in January 2018.
- The HPI consists of a **ranking of passports** according to how many other territories can be reached '**visa-free**'.

Performance of India:

- India is **ranked at 86** with a mobility score of 58. India's rank has improved from the earlier position of 79th in January 2019.
- The score points out that **Indian passport holders can access 58 countries around the world without a prior visa**.
- India **shares the 86th position with Mauritius and Sao Tome and Principe**.

Global performance:

- Asian countries dominate the rankings with **Japan and Singapore holding onto the top spot with a score of 189**, after they unseated Germany from its first position at the beginning of 2018.
- With a few notable exceptions, the latest rankings from the Henley Passport Index show that **countries around the world increasingly view visa openness as crucial to economic and social progress**.
- **Afghanistan at 109th is last on the list** with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of just 25.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about ICJ and comparison with ICC, Jadhav's case and what can India do now in this case?

Context: International Court of Justice (ICJ) has directed Pakistan to review conviction order of Kulbhushan Jadhav and, until then, put his death sentence on hold. ICJ has also asked Pakistan to allow India consular access at earliest.

Key observations made by the ICJ:

- Islamabad has violated **Article 36 of Vienna Convention of Consular Relations, 1963**, by not informing India about Jadhav's arrest immediately after Pakistan Army had taken him into custody.
- India had been deprived of '**right to communicate with and have access to Jadhav, to visit him in detention and to arrange for his legal representation**'.

About ICJ:

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is **the principal judicial body of the UN**. Established in 1946 **to replace the Permanent Court of International Justice**, the ICJ mainly operates under the statute of its predecessor, which is included in the UN Charter.
- It has **two primary functions**: to settle legal disputes submitted by States in accordance with established international laws, and to act as an advisory board on issues submitted to it by authorized international organizations.

Members of the Court:

- The International Court of Justice is **composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council**.
- These organs vote simultaneously but separately. **In order to be elected, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes in both bodies**. In order to ensure a measure of continuity, **one third of the Court is elected every three years**. Judges are eligible for re-election.

Who nominates the candidates?

- Every **state government, party to the Charter**, designates a group who propose candidates for the office of ICJ judges. This group includes four members/jurists of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (machinery which enables arbitral tribunals to be set up as desired and facilitates their work) also picked by the State. Countries not part of the statute follow the same procedure where a group nominates the candidates.
- Each group is limited to nominate four candidates, two of whom could be of their nationality. Within a fixed duration set by the Secretary-General, the names of the candidates have to be sent to him/her.

What are the qualifications of ICJ judges?

- A judge should have a high moral character.
- A judge should fit to the qualifications of appointment of highest judicial officers as prescribed by their respective states or.
- A judge should be a juriconsult of recognized competence in international law.

The 15 judges of the Court are distributed as per the regions:

- Three from Africa.

- Two from Latin America and Caribbean.
- Three from Asia.
- Five from Western Europe and other states.
- Two from Eastern Europe.

Independence of the Judges:

- Once elected, a Member of the Court is a delegate neither of the government of his own country nor of that of any other State. Unlike most other organs of international organizations, the Court is not composed of representatives of governments. Members of the Court are independent judges whose first task, before taking up their duties, is to make a solemn declaration in open court that they will exercise their powers impartially and conscientiously.
- In order to guarantee his or her independence, no Member of the Court can be dismissed unless, in the unanimous opinion of the other Members, he/she no longer fulfils the required conditions. This has in fact never happened.

Sources: the hindu.

6. PORT INTEGRITY CAMPAIGN

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: features and significance of the cam, about MACN.

Context: Maritime Anti-Corruption Network starts port integrity campaign in India.

What is it?

- The campaign, which **aims to reduce and (in the long term) eliminate integrity issues and bottlenecks to trade during operations in Indian ports**, is a collective action of MACN, the Government of India, international organizations, and local industry stakeholders.
- The **main activities of the campaign include** implementation of integrity training for port officials and the establishment of clear escalation and reporting processes.

About MACN:

- Maritime Anti-Corruption Network (MACN) is a **global business network of over 110 companies working to tackle corruption in the maritime industry**.
- **Established in 2011** by a small group of committed maritime companies.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on WFP and its programmes.

Context: Coffee Table Book commemorating 50 years of partnership with UNWFP towards food and nutrition security in India has been launched.

- The book showcases **key milestones achieved by the Government of India in its efforts to make the nation free from hunger and malnutrition and WFP's role in this endeavour**.

About WFP:

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is the **food assistance branch of the United Nations** and the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- The WFP strives to **eradicate hunger and malnutrition, with the ultimate goal in mind of eliminating the need for food aid itself**.
- It is a **member of the United Nations Development Group and part of its Executive Committee**.
- Born in 1961, WFP pursues a **vision of the world in which every man, woman and child has access at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life**.
- The WFP is **governed by an Executive Board which consists of representatives from member states**.

- The WFP operations are funded by voluntary donations from world governments, corporations and private donors.
- WFP food aid is also directed to fight micronutrient deficiencies, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat disease, including HIV and AIDS.

The objectives of the World Food Programme are:

- Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies.
- Support food security and nutrition and (re)build livelihoods in fragile settings and following emergencies.
- Reduce risk and enable people, communities and countries to meet their own food and nutrition needs.
- Reduce under-nutrition and break the inter-generational cycle of hunger.
- Zero Hunger in 2030.

“World Hunger Map”:

- **Alibaba Cloud**, the cloud computing arm of Alibaba will work with WFP to develop digital “**World Hunger Map**”. The map will help to monitor global hunger and operations to end scourge by 2030 which is one of UN’s key Sustainable Development goals. It also aims to boost efficiency of interventions and shorten emergency response times.

8. UNODC

What to study?

- For Prelims: Highlights of the report, about UNODC.
- For Mains: Significance of the report and concerns raised, need for comprehensive measures.

Context: The **Global Study on Homicide 2019** has been published by the **UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**.

Key findings:

- **Asia**, which accounts for 60% of the global population, **recorded the lowest rate of homicide in 2017** with only 2.3 killings per 1,00,000 people.
- **Americas had the highest homicide rate**.
- About 4,64,000 people across the world were victims of homicidal violence in 2017, an increase from 395,542 in 1992. The **number of homicides in 2017 far surpassed the 89,000 killed in armed conflicts in the same period**.
- The **global homicide rate**, measured as the victims of homicide per 1,00,000 people, declined from 7.2 in 1992, to 6.1 in 2017.
- **Asia accounted for 23% of total homicide victims worldwide**.
- **Asia's low continental average, however, can be partly explained by the huge populations of countries** such as China, Japan and Korea, which all boast less than one homicide per 100,000 people in a year. In addition, their secret lies in the push for **modernization policies** – with a special emphasis on educational achievements – along with a culture that rewards long-term plans.
- **Young men at highest risk** in all regions.
- **While women and girls account for a far smaller share of victims than men, they continue to bear “by far the greatest burden” of intimate partner** and family-related homicide, the report finds, adding that more than nine in 10 suspects in homicide cases are men.

Need of the hour:

- In a bid to help Governments tackle homicide, **the UNODC report identifies several drivers of the problem**, in addition to organized crime. They include firearms, drugs and alcohol, inequality, unemployment, political instability and gender stereotyping.
- It “is possible” to tackle the threat from criminal networks with “**targeted” policies**. These include community engagement and police patrols, as well as policing reform, whose aim is to strengthen trust in officers among the local population.
- For those young men already caught up in criminal gangs, **they need help “so that they can extricate themselves”** through social work, rehabilitation programmes and awareness-raising about non-violent alternatives.

The three pillars of the UNODC work programme are:

- Field-based technical cooperation projects to enhance the capacity of Member States to counteract illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.
- Research and analytical work to increase knowledge and understanding of drugs and crime issues and expand the evidence base for policy and operational decisions.
- Normative work to assist States in the ratification and implementation of the relevant international treaties, the development of domestic legislation on drugs, crime and terrorism, and the provision of secretariat and substantive services to the treaty-based and governing bodies.

Sources: the Hindu.

About UNODC:

- Established in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention, UNODC is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime.
- UNODC relies on voluntary contributions, mainly from Governments, for 90% of its budget.
- UNODC is mandated to assist Member States in their struggle against illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.

9. INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: ISA- key facts, significance and India's solar power potential.

Context: Palau has become **76th signatory country to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA).**

Background:

- The agreement of the International Solar Alliance was open for signature during the COP22 at Marrakech on November 15, 2016. The signatories of the agreement include India, France, Australia, UAE, UK, Japan amongst others.

About ISA:

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is an alliance of more than 122 countries initiated by India, most of them being sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, now extended to all members of UN.
- The Paris Declaration establishes ISA as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar energy among its member countries.
- Objectives: The ISA's major objectives include global deployment of over 1,000GW of solar generation capacity and mobilisation of investment of over US\$ 1000 billion into solar energy by 2030.
- What it does? As an action-oriented organisation, the ISA brings together countries with rich solar potential to aggregate global demand, thereby reducing prices through bulk purchase, facilitating the deployment of existing solar technologies at scale, and promoting collaborative solar R&D and capacity building.
- When it entered into force? When the ISA Framework Agreement entered into force on December 6th, 2017, ISA formally became a de-jure treaty based International Intergovernmental Organization, headquartered at Gurugram, India.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. NAM

What to study?

- For prelims: NAM- origin, Objectives, composition and members.
- For mains: Its relevance today for India and the world, need for reorganisation.

Context: Ministerial meeting of Coordinating Bureau of **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** was held recently in Caracas, capital of Venezuela.

- Theme for 2019– Promotion and Consolidation of Peace through Respect for International Law.
- Issues raised by India at NAM Meet included- Climate change, Digital Technologies and Terrorism.

Suggestions by India:

- Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) needs to be re-examined and revise its methodology.
- The grouping needs to undertake a new journey.

About NAM:

- Founded in 1961 in Belgrade.
- It was created by the heads of Yugoslavia, India, Egypt, Ghana and Indonesia.
- The Non-Aligned Movement was formed during the Cold War as an organization of States that did not seek to formally align themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but sought to remain independent or neutral.
- The movement represented the interests and priorities of developing countries. The Movement has its origin in the Asia-Africa Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955.

Key features of the NAM policy:

- The policy of non-alignment was based on the five principles of Panchasheel, which directed international conduct. These principles which were envisaged and formulated in 1954, were mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; non interference in each other's military and internal affairs; mutual non aggression; equality and mutual benefit and finally, peaceful coexistence and economic cooperation
- The policy of non-alignment meant the acceptance of the inevitability of war but on the conviction that it could be avoided.
- The non-aligned movement emerged from India's initiative for formulating an independent foreign policy.
- This independent foreign policy was based on a solid moral and sound political foundation.
- The non-alignment was a strategy designed to maximise newly independent India's gains from the world system. Nonalignment did not mean to choose to become a hermit kingdom.

How has NAM benefited India?

- NAM played an important role during the Cold War years in furthering many of the causes that India advocated: Decolonisation, end to apartheid, global nuclear disarmament, ushering in of new international economic and information orders.
- NAM enabled India and many newly born countries in 1950's and 1960's their sovereignty and alleviated the fears of neo-colonialism.
- Soft-Power Leadership: NAM made India a leader for many countries who didn't want to ally with the then global powers USA or USSR. India became a soft-power leader which still holds good till date.
- Balanced friendship: India's non-alignment gave her the opportunity to get the best of both the global superpowers of the time in terms of aid, military support etc. This was in line with her objectives of national development.

Why NAM's authority is said to be slowly eroding?

- The end of cold war lead to unipolar world and now tending towards multi-polarity. The NAM is now reached irrelevance.
- NAM could not push for reforms in the global bodies like UN, IMF, WTO.
- Inability to find solution to the West-Asian crisis. Withdrawal of one of the founder members- Egypt, after the Arab Spring.
- Most of the members are economically weak; hence they have no say in world politics or economy.

Sources: the Hindu.

GENERAL STUDIES - III

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

1. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UNION BUDGET 2019-20

10-point Vision for the decade:

- Building Team India with Jan Bhagidari: Minimum Government Maximum Governance.
- Achieving green Mother Earth and Blue Skies through a pollution-free India.
- Making Digital India reach every sector of the economy.
- Launching Gaganyaan, Chandrayan, other Space and Satellite programmes.
- Building physical and social infrastructure.
- Water, water management, clean rivers.

Blue Economy.

- Self-sufficiency and export of food-grains, pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables.
- Achieving a healthy society via Ayushman Bharat, well-nourished women & children, safety of citizens.
- Emphasis on MSMEs, Start-ups, defence manufacturing, automobiles, electronics, fabs and batteries, and medical devices under Make in India.

Towards a 5 Trillion Dollar Economy:

- Indian economy to become a 3 trillion-dollar economy in the current year.
- What needs to be done to make India a 5 trillion dollar economy? What has the government proposed?

(1) To promote digital economy:

- TDS of 2% on cash withdrawal exceeding Rs. 1 crore in a year from a bank account.
- Business establishments with annual turnover more than Rs. 50 crore shall offer low cost digital modes of payment to their customers and no charges or Merchant Discount Rate shall be imposed on customers as well as merchants.

(2) Banking and Financial Sector:

Present state:

- NPAs of commercial banks reduced by over Rs. 1 lakh crore over the last year.
- Record recovery of over Rs. 4 lakh crore effected over the last four years.
- Provision coverage ratio at its highest in seven years.
- Domestic credit growth increased to 13.8%.

Proposals:

- PSBs: Rs. 70,000 crore proposed to be provided to PSBs to boost credit; Steps to be initiated to empower accountholders to have control over deposit of cash by others in their accounts.
- NBFCs: Proposals for strengthening the regulatory authority of RBI over NBFCs to be placed in the Finance Bill; Requirement of creating a Debenture Redemption Reserve will be done away with to allow NBFCs to raise funds in public issues; Steps to allow all NBFCs to directly participate on the TReDS platform; Return of regulatory authority from NHB to RBI proposed, over the housing finance sector; Steps to be taken to separate the NPS Trust from PFRDA; Reduction in Net Owned Fund requirement from Rs. 5,000 crore to Rs. 1,000 crore proposed.

Achievements during 2014-19:

- 1 trillion dollar added to Indian economy over last 5 years (compared to over 55 years taken to reach the first trillion dollar).
- India is now the 6th largest economy in the world, compared to 11th largest five years ago.
- Indian economy is globally the 3rd largest in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)
- Strident commitment to fiscal discipline and a rejuvenated Centre-State dynamic provided during 2014-19.
- Structural reforms in indirect taxation, bankruptcy and real estate carried out.
- Average amount spent on food security per year almost doubled during 2014-19 compared to 2009-14.
- Patents issued more than trebled in 2017-18 as against the number in 2014.

- **CPSEs:** Target of Rs. 1, 05,000 crore of disinvestment receipts set for the FY 2019-20. Government to offer an investment option in ETFs on the lines of Equity Linked Savings Scheme (ELSS).

(3) Women empowerment:

- Approach shift from **women-centric-policy making to women-led initiatives** and movements.
- Women SHG interest subvention program proposed to be expanded to all districts; **Overdraft of Rs. 5,000 to be allowed for every verified women SHG member having a Jan Dhan Bank Account; One woman per SHG to be eligible for a loan up to Rs. 1 lakh under MUDRA Scheme.**

(4) Youth:

- New **National Education Policy** to be brought.
- **National Research Foundation (NRF)** proposed.
- Rs. 400 crore provided for “**World Class Institutions**”, for FY 2019-20, more than three times the revised estimates for the previous year.
- ‘**Study in India**’ proposed to bring foreign students to study in Indian higher educational institutions.
- Draft legislation to set up **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)**, to be presented.
- **Khelo India Scheme to be expanded** with all necessary financial support.
- **National Sports Education Board for development of sportspersons** to be set up under **Khelo India**, to popularize sports at all levels.
- **Stand-Up India Scheme** to be continued for the period of 2020-25. The Banks to provide financial assistance for demand based businesses.

(5) Rural India:

- **Electricity and clean cooking facility to all willing rural families by 2022.**
- A robust fisheries management framework through **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** to be established by the Department of Fisheries.
- **Target of connecting the eligible and feasible habitations advanced from 2022 to 2019** with 97% of such habitations already being provided with all weather connectivity.
- 1,25,000 kilometers of road length to be upgraded over the next five years under **PMGSY III**.
- **Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industry and Entrepreneurship' (ASPIRE)** consolidated.
- 10,000 new **Farmer Producer Organizations** to be formed, to ensure economies of scale for farmers.
- **Zero Budget Farming** in which few states' farmers are already being trained to be replicated in other states.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission** to achieve Har Ghar Jal (piped water supply) to all rural households by 2024.
- **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) fund** can be used **Jal Shakti Abhiyan**.
- **Universal Obligation Fund** under a PPP arrangement to be utilized for speeding up **Bharat-Net**.

(6) Misc:

- Proposal to consider issuing **Aadhaar Card for NRIs with Indian Passports on their arrival** without waiting for 180 days.
- Revamp of **Indian Development Assistance Scheme (IDEAS)** proposed.
- Direct tax incentives proposed for an **International Financial Services Centre (IFSC)**.
- **Securities Transaction Tax (STT)** restricted only to the difference between settlement and strike price in case of exercise of options.
- **Capital gains exemptions** from sale of residential house for investment in start-ups extended till FY21.
- ‘**Angel tax**’ issue resolved- start-ups and investors filing requisite declarations and providing information in their returns not to be subjected to any kind of scrutiny in respect of valuations of share premiums.
- **Funds raised by start-ups to not require scrutiny from Income Tax Department.**
- **Tax rate reduced to 25% for companies with annual turnover up to Rs. 400 crore.**
- **Surcharge increased** on individuals having taxable income from Rs. 2 crore to Rs. 5 crore and Rs. 5 crore and above.
- Government to organize an **annual Global Investors Meet in India**, using **National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF)** as an anchor to get all three sets of global players (pension, insurance and sovereign wealth funds).

- **Statutory limit for FPI investment in a company is proposed to be increased** from 24% to sectoral foreign investment limit. **FPIs to be permitted to subscribe to listed debt securities issued by REITs and InvITs.**
- **NRI-Portfolio Investment Scheme Route** is proposed to be merged with the Foreign Portfolio Investment Route.
- **Credit Guarantee Enhancement Corporation** to be set up in 2019-2020.
- **Tax rates for individuals having taxable income from Rs. 2 cr – 5 cr and Rs. 5 cr & above to be increased** by around 3 % and 7 % respectively.
- **Scheme of Fund for Upgradation and Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI)** aims to set up more Common Facility Centres for generating sustained employment opportunities.

New Space India Limited (NSIL):

- It is a Public Sector Enterprise incorporated as a new **commercial arm of Department of Space** to tap the benefits of the Research & Development carried out by ISRO.
- **Functions:** The Company will spearhead commercialization of various space products including production of launch vehicles, transfer technologies and marketing of space products.

In a nutshell, India needs:

- Simplification of procedures.
- Incentivizing performance.
- Red-tape reduction.
- Making the best use of technology.
- Accelerating mega programmes and services initiated and delivered so far.

Background:

What is Budget?

- The Annual Financial Statement or the Statement of the Estimated Receipts and Expenditure of the Government of India in respect of each financial year is popularly known as the Budget.

(1) Presentation of the budget:

- The Budget is presented to Lok Sabha **on such day as the President may direct**. Immediately after the presentation of the Budget, **the following three statements under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 are also laid on the Table of Lok Sabha:**
 1. The Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement.
 2. The Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement.
 3. The Macro Economic Framework Statement.

(2) General Discussion on the Budget:

- **No discussion on Budget takes place on the day it is presented to the House.**
- Budgets are discussed in two stages—the General Discussion followed by detailed discussion and voting on the demands for grants.

Consideration of the Demands for Grants by Departmentally Related Standing Committees of Parliament:

- With the creation of Departmentally Related Standing Committees of Parliament in 1993, **the Demands for Grants of all the Ministries/Departments are required to be considered by these Committees.**
- After the General Discussion on the Budget is over, the House is adjourned for a fixed period. During this period, the Demands for Grants of the Ministries/ Departments are considered by the Committees.
- These Committees are required to make their reports to the House within specified period without asking for more time and make separate report on the Demands for Grants of each Ministry.

Discussion on Demands for Grants:

- The demands for grants are presented to Lok Sabha along with the Annual Financial Statement. These are not generally moved in the House by the Minister concerned. The demands are assumed to have been moved and are proposed from the Chair to save the time of the House. After the reports of the Standing Committees

are presented to the House, the House proceeds to the discussion and voting on Demands for Grants, Ministry-wise.

- **The scope of discussion at this stage is confined to a matter which is under the administrative control of the Ministry and to each head of the demand as is put to the vote of the House.** It is open to members to disapprove a policy pursued by a particular Ministry or to suggest measure for economy in the administration of that Ministry or to focus attention of the Ministry to specific local grievances. At this stage, cut motions can be moved to reduce any demand for grant but no amendments to a motion seeking to reduce any demand is permissible.

(3) Cut Motions:

- The motions to reduce the amounts of demands for grants are called 'Cut Motions'. The object of a cut motion is to draw the attention of the House to the matter specified therein.

Cut Motions can be classified into three categories:

1. Disapproval of Policy Cut.
 2. Economy Cut.
 3. Token Cut.
- The **Speaker decides whether a cut motion is or is not admissible** and may disallow any cut motion when in his opinion it is an abuse of the right of moving cut motions or is calculated to obstruct or prejudicially affect the procedure of the House or is in contravention of the Rules of Procedure of the House.

(4) Guillotine:

- On the last of the allotted days for the discussion and voting on demands for grants, at the appointed time the Speaker puts every question necessary to dispose of all the outstanding matters in connection with the demands for grants. This is known as guillotine. The guillotine concludes the discussion on demands for grants.

(5) Appropriation Bill:

- After the demands for grants have been passed by the House, a Bill to provide for the appropriation out of the Consolidated Fund of India of all moneys required to meet the grants and the expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund of India is introduced, considered and passed. **The introduction of such Bill cannot be opposed. The scope of discussion is limited to matters of public importance or administrative policy implied in the grants covered by the Bill and which have not already been raised during the discussion on demands for grants.**
- The Speaker may require members desiring to take part in the discussion to give advance intimation of the specific points they intend to raise and may withhold permission for raising such of the points as in his opinion appear to be repetition of the matters discussed on a demand for grant.
- **No amendment can be proposed to an Appropriation Bill which will have the effect of varying the amount or altering the destination of any grant so made or of varying the amount of any expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund of India, and the decision of the Speaker as to whether such an amendment is admissible is final.** An amendment to an Appropriation Bill for omission of a demand voted by the House is out of order.
- In other respects, the procedure in respect of an Appropriation Bill is the same as in respect of other Money Bills.

(6) Finance Bill:

- "Finance Bill" means a Bill ordinarily introduced every year **to give effect to the financial proposals of the Government of India for the next following financial year and includes a Bill to give effect to supplementary financial proposals for any period.**
- The Finance Bill is **introduced immediately after the presentation of the Budget.** The introduction of the Bill cannot be opposed. The Appropriation Bills and Finance Bills may be introduced without prior circulation of copies to members.
- **The Finance Bill usually contains** a declaration under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, 1931, by which the declared provisions of the Bill relating to imposition or increase in duties of customs or excise come into force immediately on the expiry of the day on which the Bill is introduced. In view of such provisions and the

provision of Act of 1931, the Finance Bill has to be passed by Parliament and assented to by the President before the expiry of the seventy-fifth day after the day on which it was introduced.

- As the Finance Bill contains taxation proposals, it is considered and passed by the Lok Sabha only after the Demands for Grants have been voted and the total expenditure is known. The scope of discussion on the Finance Bill is vast and members can discuss any action of the Government of India. The whole administration comes under review.
- The procedure in respect of Finance Bill is the same as in the case of other Money Bills.

2. KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF ECONOMIC SURVEY 2018-19

(1) Private Investment as the Key Driver of Growth, Jobs, Exports and Demand:

- Target:** Sustained **real GDP growth rate of 8%** needed for a **\$5 trillion economy by 2024-25**.
- Need of the hour:** “**Virtuous Cycle**” of savings, investment and exports catalyzed and supported by a favorable demographic phase required for sustainable growth.
- Private investment**— key driver for demand, capacity, labor productivity, new technology, creative destruction and job creation.

Key ingredients for a self-sustaining virtuous cycle:

- Presenting data as a public good.
- Emphasizing legal reforms.
- Ensuring policy consistency.
- Encouraging behavior change using principles of behavioral economics.
- Nourishing MSMEs to create more jobs and become more productive.
- Reducing the cost of capital.
- Rationalizing the risk-return trade-off for investments.

(2) Using insights from behavioural economics to create an aspirational agenda for social change:

- From ‘**Beti Baco Beti Padhao**’ to ‘**BADLAV**’ (**Beti Aapki Dhan Lakshmi Aur Vijay Lakshmi**).
- From ‘**Swachh Bharat**’ to ‘**Sundar Bharat**’.
- From ‘**Give it up**’ for the LPG subsidy to ‘**Think about the Subsidy**’.
- From ‘**Tax evasion**’ to ‘**Tax compliance**’.

(3) Nourishing Dwarfs to become Giants: Reorienting policies for MSME Growth:

- Focus on enabling MSMEs to grow for achieving greater profits, job creation and enhanced productivity.**
- Concerns: Dwarfs** (firms with less than 100 workers) despite being more than 10 years old, account for more than 50% of all organized firms in manufacturing by number. **Contribution of dwarfs to employment is only 14%** and to productivity is a mere 8%. **Large firms (more than 100 employees)** account for 75% employment and close to 90% of productivity despite accounting for about 15% by number.

What needs to be done?

Unshackling MSMEs and enabling them to grow by way of:

- A sunset clause of less than 10 years**, with necessary grandfathering, for all size-based incentives.
- Deregulating labor law restrictions** to create significantly more jobs, as evident from Rajasthan.
- Re-calibrating Priority Sector Lending (PSL)** guidelines for direct credit flow to young firms in high employment elastic sectors.
- Focus on service sectors such as tourism**, with high spillover effects on other sectors such as hotel & catering, transport, real estate, entertainment etc., for job creation.

(4) Data as public good:

- As data of societal interest is generated by the people, data can be created as a **public good within the legal framework of data privacy**.
- Need of hour: Government must intervene in creating data as a public good**, especially of the poor and in social sectors.
- Merging the distinct datasets held by the Government already** would generate multiple benefits.

(5) How to Ramp up Capacity in the Lower Judiciary?

- **Challenges:** Delays in contract enforcement and disposal resolution are arguably now the single biggest hurdle to the ease of doing business and higher GDP growth in India. Around 87.5 per cent of pending cases are in the District and Subordinate courts.
- **What needs to be done?** 100 per cent clearance rate can be achieved by filling out merely 2279 vacancies in the lower courts and 93 in High Courts.
- States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal need special attention.
- **Productivity improvements** of 25 percent in lower courts, 4 percent in High Courts and 18 percent in Supreme Court can clear backlog.

(6) India's Demography at 2040: Planning Public Good Provision for the 21st Century:

Expectations:

- Sharp slowdown in population growth expected in next 2 decades.
- Most of India to enjoy demographic dividend while some states will transition to ageing societies by 2030s.
- National Total Fertility Rate expected to be below replacement rate by 2021.
- Working age population to grow by roughly 9.7mn per year during 2021-31 and 4.2mn per year during 2031-41.
- Significant decline to be witnessed in elementary school-going children (5-14 age group) over next two decades.
- **What needs to be done?** States need to consolidate/merge schools to make them viable rather than build new ones.
- Policy makers need to prepare for ageing by investing in health care and by increasing the retirement age in a phased manner.

(7) Enabling Inclusive Growth through Affordable, Reliable and Sustainable Energy:

Challenges:

- 5 times increase in per capita energy consumption needed for India to increase its real per capita GDP by \$5000 at 2010 prices, and enter the upper-middle income group.
- 4 times increase in per capita energy consumption needed for India to achieve 0.8 Human Development Index score.
- Market share of electric cars only 0.06% in India while it is 2% in China and 39% in Norway.

Present state:

- India now stands at 4th in wind power, 5th in solar power and 5th in renewable power installed capacity.
- **Savings:** Rs 50,000 crore saved and 108.28 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions reduced by energy efficiency programmes in India.
- Share of renewable (excluding hydro above 25 MW) in total electricity generation increased from 6% in 2014-15 to 10% in 2018-19. Thermal power still plays a dominant role at 60% share.

Measures suggested:

- Access to fast battery charging facilities needed to increase the market share of electric vehicles.

(8) A well-designed minimum wage system as a potent tool for protecting workers and alleviating poverty.

Challenges:

- Present minimum wage system in India has 1,915 minimum wages for various scheduled job categories across states.
- 1 in every 3 wage workers in India not protected by the minimum wage law.

Need of the hour:

- Rationalize minimum wages as proposed under the **Code on Wages Bill**.
- Minimum wages to all employments/workers proposed by the Survey.
- 'National Floor Minimum Wage' should be notified by the Central Government, varying across five geographical regions.

- **Minimum wages** by states should be fixed at levels not lower than the ‘**floor wage**’.
- **Minimum wages can be notified based either on the skills or on geographical region** or on both grounds.
- ‘**National level dashboard**’ under the Ministry of Labour & Employment for regular notifications on minimum wages.
- **Toll-free number to register grievance** on non-payment of the statutory minimum wages.

Part - 2

(1) State of the Economy in 2018-19: A Macro View:

- **India still the fastest growing major economy** in 2018-19.
- **Growth of GDP moderated to 6.8 per cent** in 2018-19 from 7.2 per cent in 2017-18.
- Inflation contained at 3.4 per cent in 2018-19.
- **Non-Performing Assets** as percentage of Gross Advances **reduced** to 10.1 per cent at end December 2018 from 11.5 per cent at end March 2018.
- **Investment growth recovering.**
- **Fiscal deficit of Central Government declined** from 3.5 percent of GDP in 2017-18 to 3.4 percent in 2018-19.
- **Prospects of pickup in growth** in 2019-20 on the back of further increase in private investment and acceleration in consumption.

(2) Sustainable Development and Climate Change:

- **India’s SDG Index Score** ranges between 42 and 69 for States and between 57 and 68 for UTs: **Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are the front runners** with a score of 69 amongst states. **Chandigarh and Puducherry** are the front runners with a score of 68 and 65 respectively **among the UTs**.
- **Need of the hour:**
- **For mainstreaming Resource Efficiency** approach in the development pathway for achieving SDGs, a national policy on Resource Efficiency should be devised.
- **Prevention, control and abatement** of air pollution
- Augmenting the air quality monitoring network across the country.
- **Scale and size of investments required to implement India’s NDC requires mobilizing international public finance and private sector resources** along with domestic public budgets.

(3) Agriculture and Food Management:

Challenges:

- Agriculture sector in India typically goes through **cyclical movement in terms of its growth**.
- Gross Value Added (GVA) in agriculture **decelerated** to 2.9 per cent in 2018-19.
- **Gross Capital Formation (GCF)** in agriculture as percentage of GVA marginally **declined** to 15.2 per cent in 2017-18 as compared to 15.6 per cent in 2016-17.

Developments:

- The **public sector GCF in agriculture** as a percentage of GVA **increased** to 2.7 per cent in 2016-17 from 2.1 per cent in 2013-14.
- **Women’s participation** in agriculture **increased** to 13.9 per cent in 2015-16 from 11.7 per cent in 2005-06 and their concentration is highest (28 per cent) among small and marginal farmers.
- A shift is seen in the number of operational land holdings and area operated by **operational land holdings towards small and marginal farmers**.

What needs to be done?

- 89% of groundwater extracted is used for irrigation. Hence, focus should shift from land productivity to ‘**irrigation water productivity**’.
- Thrust should be on **micro-irrigation to improve water use efficiency**.
- **Organic and natural farming techniques including Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF)** can improve both water use efficiency and soil fertility.
- Adopting appropriate technologies through **Custom Hiring Centers and implementation of ICT** are critical to **improve resource-use efficiency** among small and marginal farmers.

- **Diversification** of livelihoods is critical for inclusive and sustainable development in agriculture and allied sectors.
- Policies should **focus on - Dairying** as India is the largest producer of milk - **Livestock rearing** particularly of small ruminants.

(4) Social Infrastructure, Employment and Human Development:

- The **public investments in social infrastructure** like education, health, housing and connectivity is critical for inclusive development.

Encouraging Skill Development by:

- **Introduction of the skill vouchers** as a financing instrument to enable youth obtain training from any accredited training institutes.
- **Involving industry in setting up of training institutes in PPP mode;** in curriculum development; provision of equipment; training of trainers etc.
- **Personnel of Railways and para-military** could be roped in for imparting training in difficult terrains.
- **Create a database of Instructors**, skill mapping of rural youth by involving local bodies to assess the demand-supply gaps are some of the other initiatives proposed.

3. GLOBAL WARMING IMPACT ON JOBS IN INDIA

- **Context:** The report, ‘**Working on a warmer planet: The impact of heat stress on labour productivity and decent work**’ anticipates an increase in “heat stress” resulting from global warming.
- It projects **global productivity losses equivalent to 80 million full-time jobs in 2030**, and the projection of **34 million jobs would make India the worst affected**.

How global warming impacts jobs?

- **Effects:** Excess heat during work is an occupational health risk and restricts workers’ physical functions and capabilities, work capacity and thus, productivity.
- **Loss in jobs:** In 2030, 2.2% of total working hours worldwide will be lost because of higher temperatures, a loss equivalent to 80 million full-time jobs. This is equivalent to global economic losses of US\$2,400 billion.

Concerns for India:

- **Asia:** The region projected to lose the most working hours is southern Asia, at 5% in 2030, corresponding to around 43 million jobs, respectively. A third of the southern Asian countries have already incurred losses greater than 4%.
- **India**, which lost 4.3% of working hours in 1995 because of heat stress, is projected to lose 5.8% of its working hours in 2030, which corresponds to 34 million jobs.
- **Sector-wise Impact:** The report projects losses in working hours as 9.04% in agriculture (in shade), 5.29% in manufacturing, 9.04% in construction, and 1.48% in services. Although most of the impact in India will be felt in the agricultural sector, more and more working hours are expected to be lost in the construction sector, where heat stress affects both male and female workers.

Global scenario:

- Globally, the two sectors projected to be hit worst **are agriculture and construction**, with agriculture worse affected.
- The **ILO says 940 million people around the world work in the agricultural sector**, which is projected to account for 60% of working hours lost due to heat stress by 2030. In construction, an estimated 19% of global working hours is likely to be lost.

4. TRADE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EXPORT SCHEME (TIES)

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: TIES- key features, challenges faced by exporters and significance and the need for support.

Context: The Department of Commerce has approved financial assistance for three trade promotion centres under the **‘Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES)’**.

- These centres are located in Manipur, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh.

About TIES:

- The scheme **replaces** a centrally sponsored scheme — **Assistance to States for creating Infrastructure for the Development and growth of Exports (ASIDE)**.
- The objective of the TIES is **to enhance export competitiveness** by bridging gaps in export infrastructure, creating focused export infrastructure and first-mile and last-mile connectivity.
- **Eligibility:** The Central and State Agencies, including Export Promotion Councils, Commodities Boards, SEZ Authorities and Apex Trade Bodies recognised under the EXIM policy of Government of India; are eligible for financial support under this scheme.
- The scheme would provide **assistance for setting up and up-gradation of infrastructure projects** with overwhelming export linkages like the Border Haats, Land customs stations, quality testing and certification labs, cold chains, trade promotion centres, dry ports, export warehousing and packaging, SEZs and ports/airports cargo terminuses.

5. CORE INVESTMENT COMPANIES (CICs)

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: CICs- significance, challenges and their regulation.

Context: The Reserve Bank has constituted a **working group that will review the regulatory and supervisory framework for core investment companies**.

- The **six-member working group is to be headed by Tapan Ray**, non-executive chairman, Central Bank of India and former secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- **The terms of reference of the working group include** examination of the current regulatory framework for CICs in terms of adequacy, efficacy and effectiveness of every component thereof and suggest changes therein.

Background:

- In August 2010, RBI had introduced a separate framework for the regulation of systemically important **core investment companies (CICs)**, recognising the difference in the business model of a holding company relative to other non-banking financial companies.

What are Core Investment Companies (CICs)?

- CICs are **non-banking financial companies with asset size of ₹100 crore and above** which carry on the **business of acquisition of shares and securities**, subject to certain conditions.
- CICs, which are **allowed to accept public funds, hold not less than 90% of their net assets in the form of investment in equity shares**, preference shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in group companies.
- **Investments of CIC in the equity shares** (including instruments compulsorily convertible into equity shares within a period not exceeding 10 years from the date of issue) in group companies **constitutes not less than 60% of its net assets as mentioned in clause**.
- **Exemption:** CICs having asset size of below Rs 100 crore are exempted from registration and regulation from the RBI, except if they wish to make overseas investments in the financial sector.

What do the term public funds include? Is it the same as public deposits?

- **Public funds are not the same as public deposits.** Public funds include public deposits, inter-corporate deposits, bank finance and all funds received whether directly or indirectly from outside sources such as funds raised by issue of Commercial Papers, debentures etc. However, even though public funds include public deposits in the general course, it may be noted that CICs/CICs-ND-SI cannot accept public deposits.

Need:

- This Concept was originated in order to safeguard NBFCs which are formed for group investments from stringent RBI procedures.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. GOVT IS CONSIDERING ENHANCING RBI POWERS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key issues, need for enhanced powers and what needs to be done?

Context: The government is actively considering a **proposal from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seeking more powers** to improve its regulatory and supervisory mechanism for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).

Why is this being proposed?

- Recent defaults and delays** in loan repayments by a section of NBFCs have shaken the confidence in the financial markets, leading to fears that potential solvency risks at certain companies can be contagious.
- Liquidity for NBFCs with default ratings has completely dried up**, creating broader challenges for policymakers.

What changes are being sought by RBI?

- In the light of recent developments, there is a case for having a fresh look at their regulation and supervision. Need of the hour is **to have an optimal level of regulation and supervision so that the NBFC sector is financially resilient and robust.**

Need:

- More powers will enable RBI to close regulatory gaps between banks (which are tightly regulated) and NBFCs. The RBI has already reduced the periodicity of the NBFC supervision to 12 months from 18 months earlier.

What is the scale of the challenge?

- NBFCs were the largest net borrowers** of funds from the financial system with gross payables of around Rs 8.44 lakh crore and gross receivables of around Rs 7.23 lakh crore as on end-March 2019.
- These **companies depend largely on public funds** such as bank borrowings, debentures and commercial papers, which account for 70 per cent of the total liabilities of the sector.
- When banks and mutual funds stop fresh loans to NBFCs facing default possibility, it **can potentially lead to contagion in the financial markets.**

Sources: Indian Express.

7. INDIA TO BE A \$5-TRILLION ECONOMY

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: India's present state and what needs to be done to achieve the targets?

Context: The government has announced that its main goal is to **make India a \$5-trillion economy by the end of this term.**

Present state:

- In 2014, India's GDP was \$1.85 trillion. Today it is \$2.7 trillion and India is **the sixth-largest economy in the world.**
- Essentially the reference is to **the size of an economy as measured by the annual GDP.**

Are Indians the sixth-richest people in the world?

- No. That **India is the sixth-largest economy does not necessarily imply that Indians are the sixth-richest people on the planet.**
- GDP per capita** gives a better sense of how an average resident of an economy might be faring. It reveals a **very different, and indeed a more accurate picture** of the level of prosperity in the respective economies.
- For instance, on average, a UK resident's income was 21 times that of an average Indian in 2018.
- Still, the richest 1% of Indians own 58.4% of wealth. The richest 10% of Indians own 80.7% of the wealth.

Can India achieve the target by 2024?

- The answer would depend essentially on the assumption about economic growth.

- If India grows at 12% nominal growth (that is 8% real GDP growth and 4% inflation), then from the 2018 level of \$2.7 trillion, India would reach the 5.33 trillion mark in 2024. India must keep growing at a rapid pace to attain this target.

How will GDP per capita change when India hits the \$5-trillion mark?

- If by 2024 India's GDP is \$5.33 trillion and India's population is 1.43 billion (according to UN population projection).
- India's per capita GDP would be \$3,727.
- This would be considerably more than what it is today, still it will be lower than Indonesia's GDP per capita in 2018.

Sources: Indian Express.

8. BASEL NORMS

What to study?

- For prelims: Key features and overview of Basel norms.
- For mains: Significance, need for and challenges in implementation.

Context: An assessment of compliance with Basel Norms was recently conducted by the **Regulatory Consistency Assessment Programme (RCAP)**. RCAP is part of the Basel committee.

- The assessment focused on the completeness and consistency of the domestic regulations in force on 7 June 2019, as applied to commercial banks in India, with the Basel large exposures framework.

Background:

- Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) is the primary global standard setter for the prudential regulation of banks, has 45 members, comprising central banks and bank supervisors from 28 jurisdictions.

Key findings:

- The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) norms on large exposures for banks are not only compliant with the Basel requirements, they are stricter in some areas as well.
- This is highest possible grade. In some other respects, the Indian regulations are stricter than the Basel large exposures framework. For example, banks' exposures to global systemically important banks are subject to stricter limits, in line with the letter and spirit of the Basel Guidelines, and the scope of application of the Indian standards is wider than just the internationally active banks covered by the Basel framework.

What are Basel guidelines?

- Basel guidelines refer to broad supervisory standards formulated by group of central banks- called the **Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS)**. The set of agreement by the BCBS, which mainly focuses on risks to banks and the financial system are called **Basel accord**.
- **Basel** is a city in Switzerland which is also the headquarters of Bureau of International Settlement (BIS).
- The purpose of the accords is to ensure that financial institutions have enough capital on account to meet obligations and absorb unexpected losses.

BASEL-I:

- Introduced in 1988.
- Focused almost entirely on credit risk, it defined capital and structure of risk weights for banks.
- The minimum capital requirement was fixed at 8% of risk-weighted assets (RWA).
- India adopted Basel 1 guidelines in 1999.

BASEL-II:

- Published in 2004. The guidelines were based on three parameters:
 1. Banks should maintain a minimum capital adequacy requirement of 8% of risk assets.
 2. Banks were needed to develop and use better risk management techniques in monitoring and managing all the three types of risks that is credit and increased disclosure requirements. The three types of risk are- operational risk, market risk, capital risk.

3. Banks need to mandatory disclose their risk exposure to the central bank.

Basel III:

- In **2010**, Basel III guidelines were released. These guidelines were introduced in response to the financial crisis of 2008.
- Basel III norms aim at making most banking activities such as their trading book activities more capital-intensive.
- The guidelines aim to promote a more resilient banking system by focusing on four vital banking parameters viz. capital, leverage, funding and liquidity.
- Presently Indian banking system follows Basel II norms.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. JOBLESS GROWTH BECOMES MORE SYSTEMIC

- Findings of the latest employment survey, called the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (2017-18)**, are a cause for concern as the scenario is still far from anything that would denote decent employment.

The two biggest issues here are:

1. shrinking share of the labour force—

- labour force participation rate (% of people working or seeking work in the above-15 years age category) in the earlier survey of 2012 was 55.5%. This has shrunk to 49.7% in 2018. There is an absolute decline in the number of workers from 467.7 million in 2012 to 461.5 million in 2018.

2. rising unemployment.

- The figure for the overall unemployment rate at 6.1% is 2.77 times the same figure for 2012.

Key findings:

- The rise in overall unemployment has both locational and gender dimensions:
- The highest unemployment rate of a severe nature was among the urban women at 10.8%; followed by urban men at 7.1%; rural men at 5.8%; and rural women at 3.8%.
- Severe unemployment among men at 6.2% was higher than among women at 5.7%.

1. Increasing gender gap:

- Given the sharp decline in women's labour force participation rate, they have been losing out heavily due to the double whammy of exclusion from the labour force and an inability to access employment when included in the labour force. The decline in women's labour force participation from 31% to 24% means that India is among the countries with the lowest participation of women in the labour force.

2. Educated unemployment:

- Defined as unemployment among those with at least a secondary school certificate, it is at 11.4% compared to the previous survey's figure of 4.9%.

3. Unemployment rates go up as levels of education go up:

- Among those with secondary school education, it is 5.7% but jumps to 10.3% when those with higher secondary-level education are considered.
- The highest rate is among the diploma and certificate holders (19.8%); followed by graduates (17.2); and postgraduates (14.6%).

4. Youth unemployment rate (unemployment among those in the 15-29 years age category):

- It has reached a high 17.8%. Even here, the women stand more disadvantaged than the men, especially urban women, whose unemployment rate of 27.2% is more than double the 2012 figure of 13.1%. The rate for urban men, at 18.7%, is particularly high as well.

Way ahead:

- The overall conclusion here is that the trend of 'jobless growth' that was till recently confined largely, if not only, to the organised sector has now spread to other sectors of the economy, making it more generalised. This calls for a thorough re-examination of the missing linkages between growth and employment.

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

1. WHY IS INDIA OPTING FOR OVERSEAS BONDS?

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Overseas bonds- uses, need, significance and challenges, what is crowding- out- effect?

Context: The government has announced its plans to raise a portion of its gross borrowing from **overseas markets**. The government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will reportedly finalise the plans for the **overseas issue of sovereign bonds by September**. While several commentators have argued that this is a risky move, the government itself is convinced that **it will help boost private investment in the country**.

What is an overseas bond issue?

- A government bond or sovereign bond is a form of debt that the government undertakes wherein it issues bonds with the promise to pay periodic interest payments and also repay the entire face value of the bond on the maturity date. So far, the government has only issued bonds in the domestic market.

What are the benefits of an overseas bond issue?

- The government has been arguing that **the quantum of its borrowing within India is 'crowding out' the private sector**. In other words, it is saying that government borrowing is at such a level that **there are not enough funds available for the private sector to adequately meet its credit and investment needs**.
- If the private sector cannot borrow adequately, then it cannot invest as it wants to, and **that cripples one major engine of economic growth**.
- Therefore, **borrowing overseas allows the government to raise funds in such a way that there is enough domestic credit available for the private sector**.

What are the risks?

- With this, **India might follow the path of some Central and South American countries such as Mexico and Brazil**. In the 1970s, several of these countries borrowed heavily overseas when the global market was flush with liquidity. But then, when their currencies depreciated sharply a decade later, these countries were in big trouble as they could not repay their debt.
- India is not likely to be viewed as a risky proposition by the international market and so is likely to fetch an attractive rate for the bonds. **Cheap and plentiful funds, however, should not encourage the government to borrow too heavily from abroad**.
- This would also lead to a **quicker increase to its foreign exchange reserves**, which would lead to a stronger rupee at a time when it is already appreciating against the dollar. **A stronger rupee would encourage imports at a time when the government is trying to curb them, and discourage exports at a time when they are being encouraged**.
- On the other hand, a rupee depreciation for whatever external reason would prove even more disastrous as it would make it **far more expensive for India to repay its external debt**.
- Another problem with an overseas bond issue is that **the government would not be able to inflate itself out of trouble**. That is, in the domestic market, if the government does ever reach the stage where it is finding it difficult to repay its debt, it can simply print more money, let inflation rise quickly and repay its debt. This is not an option in an overseas bond issue. The Indian government cannot print foreign currency to repay its debt.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. SOVEREIGN BONDS

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Sovereign bonds- uses, need, significance and challenges?

Context: The government has announced its plans to raise a portion of its gross borrowing from overseas markets. With the help of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the government will finalise the plans for the overseas issue of sovereign bonds by September.

What exactly are sovereign bonds?

- A bond is like an IOU. The issuer of a bond promises to pay back a fixed amount of money every year until the expiry of the term, at which point the issuer returns the principal amount to the buyer. When a government issues such a bond it is called a sovereign bond.

Why is India borrowing in external markets in external currency?

- Indian government's domestic borrowing is **crowding out private investment** and preventing the interest rates from falling even when inflation has cooled off and the RBI is cutting policy rates.
- If the government was to borrow some of its loans from outside India, there will be investable money left for private companies to borrow;** not to mention that interest rates could start coming down.
- A sovereign bond issue will **provide a yield curve** — a benchmark — for Indian corporates who wish to raise loans in foreign markets. This will help Indian businesses that have increasingly looked towards foreign economies to borrow money.
- Globally, and especially in the advanced economies where the government is likely to go to borrow, the **interest rates are low** and, thanks to the easy monetary policies of foreign central banks, there are a lot of surplus funds waiting for a product that pays more.
- In an ideal scenario, it could be win-win for all:** Indian government raises loans at interest rates much cheaper than domestic interest rates, while foreign investors get a much higher return than is available in their own markets.

What is the controversial part?

- The current controversy relates to **India's sovereign bonds that will be floated in foreign countries and will be denominated in foreign currencies.**
- This would differentiate these proposed bonds from either government securities (or G-secs, wherein the Indian government raises loans within India and in Indian rupee) or Masala bonds (wherein Indian entities — not the government — raise money overseas in rupee terms).
- The difference between issuing a bond denominated in rupees and issuing it in a foreign currency (say US dollar) is the **incidence of exchange rate risk**.
- If the loan is in terms of dollars, and the rupee weakens against the dollar during the bond's tenure, the government would have to return more rupees to pay back the same amount of dollars. If, however, the initial loan is denominated in rupee terms, then the negative fallout would be on the foreign investor.

Why are so many cautioning against this move?

- The **volatility in India's exchange rate is far more than the volatility in the yields of India's G-secs** (the yields are the interest rate that the government pays when it borrows domestically). This means that although the government would be borrowing at "cheaper" rates than domestically, the eventual rates (after incorporating the possible weakening of rupee against the dollar) might make the deal costlier.
- Borrowing outside would not necessarily reduce the number of government bonds the domestic market will have to absorb.** That's because if fresh foreign currency comes into the economy, the RBI would have to "neutralise" it by sucking the exact amount out of the money supply. This, in turn, will require selling more bonds. If the RBI doesn't do it then the excess money supply will create inflation and push up the interest rates, thus disincentivising private investments.
- Based on the unpleasant experience of other emerging economies, many argue that a **small initial borrowing is the thin end of the wedge.** It is quite likely that the government will be tempted to dip into the foreign markets for more loans every time it runs out of money. At some point, especially if India does not take care

of its fiscal health, the foreign investors will pull the plug on fresh investments, creating dire consequences for India.

Sources: Indian Express.

3. NEW CODE ON WAGES

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of the new code, need, significance, need for uniform wage across the country.
- Context:** The Code on Wages Bill, 2019 passed in Lok Sabha, which seeks to define the norms for fixing minimum wages that will be applicable to workers of organised and unorganised sectors, except government employees and MGNREGA workers.
- The bill will amalgamate the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.

Background:

- The code on wages is one of the four codes that would subsume 44 labour laws with certain amendments to improve the ease of doing business and attract investment for spurring growth.
- The four codes will deal with wages, social security, industrial safety and welfare, and industrial relations.

What are the determining factors?

- As per the Bill, minimum wages will be linked only to factors such as skills and geographical regions.
- Present status:** At present, minimum wages are fixed on the basis of categories such as skilled, unskilled, semi-skilled, high skilled, geographical regions, and nature of work such as mining and are applicable for 45 scheduled employments in the central sphere and 1709 scheduled employments in states.
- As per the new Bill, the minimum wages across the country would be only linked to factors of skills and geographical regions, while the rest of the factors have been removed.

Floor Wage:

- A National Floor Level Minimum Wage will be set by the Centre to be revised every five years, while states will fix minimum wages for their regions, which cannot be lower than the floor wage.
- The current floor wage, which was fixed in 2017, is at Rs 176 a day, but some states have minimum wages lower than it such as Andhra Pradesh (Rs 69) and Telangana (Rs 69).

Key highlights:

- Coverage:** The Code will apply to all employees. The central government will make wage-related decisions for employments such as railways, mines, and oil fields, among others. State governments will make decisions for all other employments.
- Wages include** salary, allowance, or any other component expressed in monetary terms. This does not include bonus payable to employees or any travelling allowance, among others.
- Floor wage:** According to the Code, the central government will fix a floor wage, taking into account living standards of workers. Further, it may set different floor wages for different geographical areas. Before fixing the floor wage, the central government may obtain the advice of the Central Advisory Board and may consult with state governments.
- The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments must be higher than the floor wage.** In case the existing minimum wages fixed by the central or state governments are higher than the floor wage, they cannot reduce the minimum wages.
- Fixing the minimum wage:** The Code prohibits employers from paying wages less than the minimum wages. Minimum wages will be notified by the central or state governments. This will be based on time, or number of pieces produced. The minimum wages will be revised and reviewed by the central or state governments at an interval of not more than five years. While fixing minimum wages, the central or state governments may take into account factors such as: (i) skill of workers, and (ii) difficulty of work.
- Overtime:** The central or state government may fix the number of hours that constitute a normal working day. In case employees work in excess of a normal working day, they will be entitled to overtime wage, which must be at least twice the normal rate of wages.

- **Payment of wages:** Wages will be paid in (i) coins, (ii) currency notes, (iii) by cheque, (iv) by crediting to the bank account, or (v) through electronic mode. The wage period will be fixed by the employer as either: (i) daily, (ii) weekly, (iii) fortnightly, or (iv) monthly.
- **Deductions:** Under the Code, an employee's wages may be deducted on certain grounds including: (i) fines, (ii) absence from duty, (iii) accommodation given by the employer, or (iv) recovery of advances given to the employee, among others. These deductions should not exceed 50% of the employee's total wage.
- **Determination of bonus:** All employees whose wages do not exceed a specific monthly amount, notified by the central or state government, will be entitled to an annual bonus. The bonus will be at least: (i) 8.33% of his wages, or (ii) Rs 100, whichever is higher. In addition, the employer will distribute a part of the gross profits amongst the employees. This will be distributed in proportion to the annual wages of an employee. An employee can receive a maximum bonus of 20% of his annual wages.
- **Gender discrimination:** The Code prohibits gender discrimination in matters related to wages and recruitment of employees for the same work or work of similar nature. Work of similar nature is defined as work for which the skill, effort, experience, and responsibility required are the same.
- **Advisory boards:** The central and state governments will constitute advisory boards. **The Central Advisory Board will consist of:** (i) employers, (ii) employees (in equal number as employers), (iii) independent persons, and (iv) five representatives of state governments. **State Advisory Boards will consist of** employers, employees, and independent persons. Further, one-third of the total members on both the central and state Boards will be women. **The Boards will advise** the respective governments on various issues including: (i) fixation of minimum wages, and (ii) increasing employment opportunities for women.

Significance:

- This is expected to effectively reduce the number of minimum wage rates across the country to 300 from about 2,500 minimum wage rates at present.
- Codification of labour laws will **remove the multiplicity of definitions and authorities**, leading to ease of compliance without compromising wage security and social security to workers.
- It is expected to provide for an appellate authority between the claim authority and the judicial forum which will lead to speedy, cheaper and efficient redressal of grievances and settlement of claims as that of earlier.

Key Issues and Analysis:

- Central government may set a national minimum wage. Further, it may set separate national minimum wages for different states or regions. In this context, two questions arise: **(i) the rationale for a national minimum wage, and (ii) whether the central government should set one or multiple national minimum wages.**
- States have to ensure that minimum wages set by them are not lower than the national minimum wage. If existing minimum wages set by states are higher than the national minimum wage, they cannot reduce the minimum wages. **This may affect the ability of states to reduce their minimum wages if the national minimum wage is lowered.**
- The time period for revising minimum wages will be set at five years. Currently, state governments have flexibility in revising minimum wages, as long as it is not more than five years. It is **unclear why this flexibility has been removed, and five years has been set for revision.**
- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, prohibits employers from discriminating in wage payments as well as recruitment of employees based on gender. While the Code prohibits gender discrimination on wage-related matters, **it does not include provisions regarding discrimination during recruitment.**

Need for a national minimum wage:

- One argument for a national minimum wage is **to ensure a uniform standard of living across the country**. At present, there are differences in minimum wages across states and regions.
- Such differences are attributed to the fact that both the central and state governments set, revise and enforce minimum wages for the employments covered by them.
- The **introduction of a national minimum wage may help reduce these differences and provide a basic standard of living for all employees across the country.**

4. AP EMPLOYMENT OF LOCAL CANDIDATES IN INDUSTRIES AND FACTORIES BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of the bill, need, significance, concerns, challenges and alternatives present.

Context: Andhra Pradesh clears bill granting 75% reservation in jobs for locals in factories.

AP Employment of Local Candidates in Industries and Factories Bill, 2019- highlights:

- The bill seeks to provide **75% reservation for locals in factory jobs**.
- Coverage:** The reservation in jobs for local people of the state will extend to industries, factories, joint venture units and projects taken up under Public-Private Partnership initiatives.
- The concerned factories will need to take up **training programmes** of the local workforce in case they don't have the requisite skills.

Rationale behind this move:

- With growth in industries, the demand for land has been increasing. Since most of the land requirement is **met by acquiring private agricultural lands, the land owners are being displaced and deprived of their occupation and thereby loss of income**.
- Local people have complained that **industrialisation in their areas have deprived them of means of livelihood**.
- To address this gap, the government has brought this legislation.

Will it help?

- The Andhra Pradesh government's proposed law to enforce 75 percent reservation for local candidates in private sector jobs **may be right in intent, but conceptually flawed and may have little practical value beyond political jingoism**.
- This would mean **irrespective of the availability, all private sector enterprises will have to ensure a minimum of 75 percent employment for local candidates**.
- In the absence of local candidates of a particular skill level, the law would force the employers to recruit them anyway and train them. The government has promised help to upskill the staff, but this could be **time-consuming**. Businesses that have to remain nimble to adapt their business strategies to changing market situations may find it tough to meet this requirement.
- A provision of such sweeping import could in fact hinder the state's economic growth by **affecting the ease of doing business**. Ease of recruiting talent is a major aspect that influences the index.
- If job creation is the intention, the move **may become counterproductive**.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. AMENDMENTS TO THE COMPANIES ACT

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of the companies act, need for amendments and significance.

Context: Govt introduces bill to amend companies law in Lok Sabha. It amends the Companies Act, 2013.

Need:

- The amendments aim to ensure **more accountability and better enforcement** to strengthen the corporate governance norms and compliance management in corporate sector.

Key features of the Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2019:

- Allows companies to **transfer their unspent CSR funds to a separate account** and the same has to be spent within three financial years. In case, the money remains unspent, then it should be transferred to any fund specified in Schedule VII of the Act.
- Provides more teeth to the central government to deal with violators and **reducing burden on special courts**.

- Seeks to enable the **National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)** to perform its functions through divisions and executive body.
- Seeks to empower **Registrar of Companies (RoC)** to initiate action for removal of a company's name if the latter is not carrying out business activities as per the Act.
- Proposes to **transfer some functions from NCLT to the Central government** such as dealing with applications for change of financial year and conversion from public to private companies.
- **In order to curb the menace of shell companies**, the Bill proposes making **non-maintenance of registered office and non-reporting of commencement of business grounds** for striking off the name of the company from the register of companies.

6. REGULATORY SANDBOX

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Regulatory sandbox- meaning, features, need and significance.

Context: The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) will soon allow the use of regulatory sandbox (RS) to promote new, innovative products and processes in the industry.

About IRDAI sandbox:

- For the IRDAI sandbox, an applicant should have a net worth of Rs 10 lakh and a proven financial record of at least one year.
- Companies will be allowed to test products for up to 12 months in five categories.
- Applicants can test products for up to a period of one year in five categories – insurance solicitation or distribution, insurance products, underwriting, policy and claims servicing.

What is a regulatory sandbox?

- A regulatory sandbox is a safe harbour, where businesses can test innovative products under relaxed regulatory conditions. Typically, participating companies release new products in a controlled environment to a limited number of customers for a limited period of time.

Significance and benefits of a regulatory sandbox:

- The “regulatory sandbox” will help fintech companies launch innovative products at a lower cost and in less time.
- The sandbox will enable fintech companies to conduct live or virtual testing of their new products and services.
- These companies will also be able to test the viability of the product without a wider and expensive rollout.
- It will help companies to experiment with fintech solutions, where the consequences of failure can be contained and reasons for failure analysed.

Need:

- According to NITI Aayog, India is one of the fastest growing fintech markets globally, and industry research has projected that \$1 trillion, or 60% of retail and SME (small and medium sized enterprises) credit, will be digitally disbursed by 2029.
- The Indian fintech ecosystem is the third largest in the world, attracting nearly \$6 billion in investments since 2014. Fintech or financial technology companies use technology to provide financial services such as payments, peer-to-peer lending and crowdfunding, among others.
- Therefore, in order to protect customers and safeguard the interests of all stakeholders, and streamline their influence on the financial system, there is need for a regulatory and supervisory framework for fintech firms.

Sources: Indian Express.



INTEGRATED PRELIMS CUM MAINS TEST SERIES 2019-2020 – EBS APPROACH

FEATURES :

- Single Timetable for both Prelims and Mains Preparation
- Concept of EBS for Mains (Essential, Breakthrough and Simulation Tests)

Elementary approach will lay more emphasis on building the basics, especially static component of the syllabus

Breakthrough tests – will test your ability to link Facts and Concepts with current affairs

Simulation tests will give real exam like feeling to help you consolidate and finally put to Test effectiveness of Mains preparation.

- 46 Mains Tests (Sectional 20, Full Length 16 and Essay 10)
 - 51 Prelims Tests (General Studies 41, CSAT – 10)
- Value Addition Material will be provided for important topics
 - Video Discussions will be uploaded for Mains tests
- Detailed, well researched synopsis will be made available for all mains tests
 - A mentor will be assigned to clarify your doubts from October 2019
 - Tests timings are flexible.



50% discount on Prelims 2021

Free 3 months Mains test series after Prelims for those who write all 46 Mains tests

50% discount on 3 months Mains test series after Prelims for those who write at least half of the tests.

Address:

Nanda ashirwad complex, 3rd floor, above village hyper market,
chandralayout main road, dwarka nagar, Attiguppe - 560072

Ph. 9449259488, 7483163074

Apply Now at

www.insightsactivelearn.com | www.insightsonindia.com

Topics: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

1. ZERO BUDGET NATURAL FARMING

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of ZBNF.
- For Mains: Significance of ZBNF, advantages of ZBNF.

Context: Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget speech said **zero budget farming is already being practiced in some states of the country**. Sitharaman said **emphasis on zero budget farming will help double the farming income in days to come**.

Several States, including Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, have been aggressively driving a shift towards this model.

What is it and how did it come about?

- Zero budget natural farming (ZBNF) is a method of **chemical-free agriculture** drawing from traditional Indian practices.
- It was **originally promoted by Maharashtrian agriculturist and Padma Shri recipient Subhash Palekar**, who developed it in the mid-1990s as an alternative to the Green Revolution's methods driven by chemical fertilizers and pesticides and intensive irrigation.

Need and significance:

- Rising cost of these external inputs was a leading cause of indebtedness and suicide among farmers, while the impact of chemicals on the environment and on long-term fertility was devastating.
- Without the need to spend money on these inputs — or take loans to buy them — the cost of production could be reduced and farming made into a “zero budget” exercise, breaking the debt cycle for many small farmers.

Features of ZBNF:

- Instead of commercially produced chemical inputs, the ZBNF promotes the application of **jeevamrutha** — a mixture of fresh desi cow dung and aged desi cow urine, jaggery, pulse flour, water and soil — on farmland. This is a **fermented microbial culture** that adds nutrients to the soil, and acts as a catalytic agent to promote the activity of microorganisms and earthworms in the soil.
- A similar mixture, called **bijamrita**, is used to treat seeds, while concoctions using neem leaves and pulp, tobacco and green chillis are prepared for insect and pest management.

The four-wheels of zero budget natural farming require locally available materials:

- Water vapour condensation for better soil moisture.
- Seed treatment with cow dung and urine-based formulations.
- Mulching and soil aeration for favourable soil conditions.
- Ensure soil fertility through cow dung and cow urine-based concoctions

Benefits of ZBNF:

- The ZBNF method promotes **soil aeration, minimal watering, intercropping, bunds and topsoil mulching and discourages intensive irrigation and deep ploughing**.
- As both a social and environmental programme, it **aims to ensure that farming – particularly smallholder farming – is economically viable by enhancing farm biodiversity and ecosystem services**.
- It **reduces farmers' costs** through eliminating external inputs and using in-situ resources to rejuvenate soils, whilst simultaneously increasing incomes, and restoring ecosystem health through diverse, multi-layered cropping systems.

What is Zero Budget Natural Farming?

- Zero Budget Natural Farming, as the name implies, is a **method of farming where the cost of growing and harvesting plants is zero**.
- This means that farmers **need not purchase fertilizers and pesticides in order to ensure the healthy growth of crops**.
- It is, basically, a **natural farming technique that uses biological pesticides instead of chemical-based fertilizers**.
- Farmers use earthworms, cow dung, urine, plants, human excreta and such biological fertilizers for crop protection**.
- It reduces farmers' investment**.
- It also protects the soil from degradation.

- **Cow dung from local cows has proven to be a miraculous cure to revive the fertility and nutrient value of soil.** One gram of cow dung is believed to have anywhere between 300 to 500 crore beneficial micro-organisms. These micro-organisms decompose the dried biomass on the soil and convert it into ready-to-use nutrients for plants.
- **Resilient food systems** are the need of the day given the variability of the monsoons due to global warming and declining groundwater in large parts of India. The drought-prone regions in India are reportedly seeing promising changes already in farms with the ZBNF.
- **Zero budget natural farming requires only 10 per cent water and 10 per cent electricity** than what is required under chemical and organic farming. ZBNF may improve the potential of crops to adapt to and be produced for evolving climatic conditions.

Is it effective?

- A limited 2017 study in Andhra Pradesh claimed a sharp decline in input costs and improvement in yields. However, reports also suggest that many farmers, have reverted to conventional farming after seeing their ZBNF returns drop after a few years, in turn raising doubts about the method's efficacy in increasing farmers' incomes.
- ZBNF critics note that India needed the Green Revolution in order to become self-sufficient and ensure food security.
- They warn against a wholesale move away from that model without sufficient proof that yields will not be affected.
- Sikkim, which has seen some decline in yields following a conversion to organic farming, is used as a cautionary tale regarding the pitfalls of abandoning chemical fertilizers.

Is the budgetary support enough?

- Despite the ZBNF buzz caused by the Budget speech, the Finance Minister did not actually announce any new funding to promote it.
- Last year, the Centre revised the norms for the **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana**— Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied sector Rejuvenation (RKVY-RAFTAAR), a flagship Green Revolution scheme with an allocation of ₹3,745 crore this year, and the **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana**, which has an allocation of ₹325 crore and is meant to promote organic farming and soil health.
- Under the revised guidelines, both Centrally-sponsored schemes now allow States to use their funds to promote the ZBNF, vedic farming, natural farming, cow farming and a host of other traditional methods.

What lies ahead?

- NITI Aayog has been among the foremost promoters of ZBNF. However, its experts have also warned that **multi-location studies are needed to scientifically validate the long-term impact and viability of the model** before it can be scaled up and promoted country-wide.
- If found to be successful, **an enabling institutional mechanism could be set up to promote the technology.**

Government initiatives to support ZBNF:

- Government of India has been promoting organic farming in the country through the dedicated schemes of **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)** since 2015-16 and also through **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)**.
- In the revised guidelines of **PKVY** scheme during the year 2018, various organic farming models like Natural Farming, Rishi Farming, Vedic Farming, Cow Farming, Homa Farming, Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) etc. have been included wherein flexibility is given to states to adopt any model of Organic Farming including ZBNF depending on farmer's choice.

Why does it matter?

- According to National Sample Survey Office (**NSSO**) data, almost 70% of agricultural households spend more than they earn and more than half of all farmers are in debt.
- In States such as Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, levels of indebtedness are around 90%, where each household bears an average debt of ₹1 lakh.
- In order to achieve the Central government's promise to double farmers income by 2022, one aspect being considered is natural farming methods such as the ZBNF which reduce farmers' dependence on loans to purchase inputs they cannot afford. Meanwhile, inter-cropping allows for increased returns.
- The Economic Survey has also highlighted the ecological advantages.

- Under the **RKVY** scheme, organic farming/ natural farming project components are considered by the respective State Level Sanctioning Committee (SLSC) according to their priority/ choice.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What do you understand by Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF). Discuss its economic and environmental benefits vis a vis conventional farming practices.

2. THE GM COTTON CONUNDRUM

- Context:** A few Haryana farmers have defied a government restriction against sowing banned **HT Bt Cotton in Hisar**. However, the government is determined to curb its spread.

What's the extent of HT Bt Cotton in India?

- In the absence of government approval, production of HT Bt seed is illegal**, but farmers say it's available in those states where it's being grown defying the laws.
- A section of farmers have started sowing its seeds particularly in **Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana** for the past few years.
- A government panel had found that **the HT Bt Cotton was grown in 15 per cent of the areas in these states during 2017-18 while this percentage was 5 per cent for Punjab**.

Why is it preferred by the farmers?

- According to supporters of HT Bt Cotton, it's preferred **to reduce the cost of labour** as de-weeding is an extremely labour intensive activity involving 40 per cent of the total cost for growing cotton.
- The farmers have felt the impact of HT Bt Cotton in terms of **lower costs and reduced crop losses leading to higher production and income**.

Bt crops in India:

- Indian government in 2010 had imposed a moratorium, leaving **Bt Cotton as the only genetically modified crop permitted for cultivation in the country**.

What do the opponents of HT Bt Cotton say?

- Such seeds will cause more diseases among humans and animals apart from causing damage to the environment.

Do we need GM crops?

Yes and why?

- Higher crop yields.
- Reduced farm costs.
- Increased farm profit.
- Improvement in health and the environment.

No and why?

- Lack of clarity:** It is clear that the technology of genetic engineering is an evolving one and there is much, especially on its impact on human health and environment that is yet to be understood properly. The scientific community itself seems uncertain about this.
- While there are many in this community who feel that the benefits outweigh the risks, others point to the irreversibility of this **technology and uncontrollability of the Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)** once

What is HT Bt cotton?

- Herbicide-tolerant Bt (HT Bt) Cotton** is genetically modified crop of **unapproved genes which is not permissible in India**.

Significance:

- Technically, **herbicide** is like a **poison** which is used to destroy unwanted vegetation.
- The technique in the HT Bt Cotton makes the crop **resistant to herbicide** following modification in genes of the seeds.
- Normally, when an herbicide is sprayed, then it destroys unwanted vegetation along with causing harm to the cotton crop also. So, farmers use less herbicide in their fields.
- But with the **introduction of HT Bt Cotton**, there won't be any impact of herbicide on the cotton crop while the unwanted vegetation will be destroyed.
- This will lead to more use of chemicals in fields causing harm to other crops.

- introduced in the ecosystem.** Hence, they advocate a precautionary approach towards any open release of GMOs.
- **Threat to domestic crops:** One of the concerns raised strongly by those opposing GM crops in India is that many important crops like rice, brinjal, and mustard, among others, originated here, and introducing genetically modified versions of these crops could be a major threat to the vast number of domestic and wild varieties of these crops.
 - In fact, globally, **there is a clear view that GM crops must not be introduced in centres of origin and diversity.** India also has mega biodiversity hotspots like the Eastern Himalayas and the Western Ghats which are rich in biodiversity yet ecologically very sensitive. Hence it will only be prudent for us to be careful before we jump on to the bandwagon of any technology.
 - **There is also a potential for pests to evolve resistance** to the toxins produced by GM crops and the risk of these toxins affecting nontarget organisms. There is also the danger of unintentionally introducing allergens and other anti-nutrition factors in foods.

3. SCHEMES TO SUPPORT ORGANIC FARMING IN THE COUNTRY

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Organic farming in the country, significance, challenges and schemes in this regard.

Context: Government of India has been encouraging/promoting organic farming under two dedicated Schemes, namely, **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER) and Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)** since 2015.

- Organic Farming has also been supported under other Schemes viz **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)** and **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), Network Project on Organic Farming** under ICAR. **Third party certification of organic farming** is promoted by Agriculture Processed Food and Export Development Authority (**APEDA**), Ministry of Commerce.

Background:

- Total farm area currently under Organic Certification is taken up in an area of 27.70 lakh hectares in the country including 5.98 lakh hectares under Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) , 0.639 lakh hectares under Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER) , 19.38 lakh hectares under National Program for Organic Production (NPOP) of APEDA and 1.70 lakh hectares under other initiatives.

About MOVCDNER:

- **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** has launched this Central Sector Scheme named "**Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region**" (MOVCDNER) for implementation in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.
- The scheme aims at development of certified organic production in a value chain mode to link growers with consumers and to support the development of entire value chain starting from inputs, seeds, certification and creation of facilities for collection, aggregation, processing, marketing and brand building initiative.
- The assistance is provided for cluster development, on/off farm input production, supply of seeds/planting materials, setting up of functional infrastructure, establishment of integrated processing unit, refrigerated transportation, pre-cooling/ cold stores chamber, branding, labelling and packaging, hiring of space, hand holdings, organic certification through third party, mobilization of farmers/processors etc.

Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)

- Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana is an elaborated component of **Soil Health Management (SHM)** of major project **National Mission of Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)**.

Implementation:

- Under PKVY Organic farming is promoted through the adoption of the **organic village by cluster approach and PGS certification**.
- **Fifty or more farmers will form a cluster having 50-acre land** to take up the organic farming under the scheme.
- The produce will be **pesticide residue free** and will contribute to improving the health of the consumer.

Organic farming and its significance:

- Organic cultivation doesn't involve the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and thus helps to maintain a harmonious balance among the various complex ecosystems.
- It improves the quality of the soil which further improves the standards of the crops produced there.
- In the long term, organic farming leads in subsistence of agriculture, bio-diversity conservation and environmental protection.
- It will help in building the soil health resulting in sustainable increased crop production.

4. SILK SAMAGRA

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of the scheme and overview of silk industry in India.

Context: Tamil Nadu, which has been ranked among the leading silk producing States in the country, will receive about Rs 6.22 crore under the **Silk Samagra** — an Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry (ISDSI).

About Silk Samagra:

- It is initiated by the **Central Silk Board**.
- The scheme **comprises four major components viz.** (i) Research & Development, Training, Transfer of Technology and Information Technology Initiatives, (ii) Seed Organizations, (iii) Coordination and Market Development and (iv) Quality Certification Systems (QCS) / Export Brand Promotion and Technology Up-gradation.
- The **main objective of the scheme** is to maintain Breeders stock, Breed improvement through R&D Projects, Development of mechanized practices, Technology translation through Sericulture Information Linkages and Knowledge System (SILKS) Portal, Mobile Application for Stakeholders and for seed quality monitoring etc.
- The **main aim of "Silk Samagra" Scheme** is to empower downtrodden, poor & backward tribal families through various activities of sericulture in the country including women.

Sericulture in India:

- Sericulture is an agro-based cottage industry having huge **employment and income generating potential** in rural and semi-urban areas.
- It is estimated that sericulture industry provides employment to approximately 91.20 lakh persons (including 3.40 lakh persons in the State of Tamil Nadu) in rural and semi-urban areas in the country as of March-2019.
- Of these, a sizeable number of workers belong to the economically weaker sections of society, including women. This is mainly due to implementation of Government schemes and efforts made by State/ Central Government.

Key facts:

- India is the **2nd largest producer of silk in the world after China**.
- It is **largest consumer of silk in the world**.
- It is **the only country in the world that produces all 5 varieties of silk on a commercial scale**— Mulberry, Oak Tasar & Tropical Tasar, Muga and Eri.
- Holds the global **monopoly for production of the famed golden 'Muga' silk**.

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

1. KISAN CREDIT CARD SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: KCC scheme- features and significance.

Context: The Government of India has extended the facility of **Kisan Credit Card (KCC)** to **fisheries and animal husbandry farmers** to help them meet their working capital needs.

Kisan Credit Card Scheme:

- The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme was announced in the Budget speech of 1998-99 to fulfil the financial requirements of the farmers at various stages of farming through institutional credit.
- The model scheme was prepared by the **National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)** on the recommendation of **V Gupta committee**.
- The KCC scheme is being implemented by the all **Co-operative banks, Regional Rural Banks and Public Sector Banks throughout the country**.
- Scheme covers risk of KCC holders against death or permanent disability resulting from accidents.

Other Salient features of the Scheme:

- **Revolving cash credit facility** involving any number of drawals and repayments within the limit.
- **Limit to be fixed on the basis of operational land holding, cropping pattern and scale of finance.**
- Entire production credit needs for full year plus ancillary activities related to crop production to be considered while fixing limit.
- **Card valid for 5 years** subject to annual review. As incentive for good performance, credit limits could be enhanced to take care of increase in costs, change in cropping pattern, etc.
- **Conversion/reschedule of loans also permissible** in case of damage to crops due to natural calamities.
- Operations may be through issuing branch (and also PACS in the case of Cooperative Banks) through other designated branches at the discretion of bank.
- **Crop loans disbursed under KCC Scheme** for notified crops are covered under Crop Insurance Scheme, to protect the interest of the farmer against loss of crop yield caused by natural calamities, pest attacks etc.

Objectives:

- To provide adequate and timely credit support from the banking system to the farmers at the cheap rate of interest.
- To provide credit at the time of requirement.
- To support post-harvest expenses.
- To provide Working capital for maintenance of farm assets and activities allied to agriculture.
- Investment credit requirement for agriculture and allied activities (land development, pump sets, plantation, drip irrigation etc.)
- Consumption requirements of farmers.

2. MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICES (MSPS)

What to study?

- For Prelims: MSP- crops covered, how is it decided.
- For Mains: MSP- need, significance, concerns and rectifying measures.

Context: Union Cabinet has announced a Minimum Support Price (MSP) of 14 Kharif crops.

About MSP:

- In theory, an MSP is the minimum price set by the Government at which farmers can expect to sell their produce for the season. When market prices fall below the announced MSPs, procurement agencies step in to procure the crop and ‘support’ the prices.

Who announces?

- The **Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs** announces MSP for various crops at the beginning of each sowing season based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- The CACP takes into account demand and supply, the cost of production and price trends in the market among other things when fixing MSPs.

Why is it important?

- Price volatility makes life difficult for farmers. Though prices of agri commodities may soar while in short supply, during years of bumper production, prices of the very same commodities plummet.
- MSPs ensure that farmers get a minimum price for their produce in adverse markets.
- MSPs have also been used as a tool by the Government to incentivise farmers to grow crops that are in short supply.

3. NATIONAL DAIRY PLAN

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Government support for increasing milk production in the country through various schemes and key features of such schemes.

Context: Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying is implementing World Bank assisted National Dairy Plan – I in 18 States to support milk cooperatives and milk producer companies along with breeding improvement initiative.

Key features of the scheme:

- National Dairy Plan Phase I (NDP I) is a Central Sector Scheme.
- Funding will be through a line of credit from the International Development Association (IDA), which along with the share of the Government of India will flow from DADF to NDDB and in turn to eligible End Implementing Agencies (EIAs).
- NDP I will focus on 18 major milk producing states namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh which together account for over 90% of the country's milk production.

Objectives:

- To help increase productivity of milch animals and thereby increase milk production to meet the rapidly growing demand for milk.
- To help provide rural milk producers with greater access to the organised milk-processing sector.
- End Implementation Agencies (EIAs) would be State Cooperative Dairy Federations; District Cooperative Milk Producers Unions; Cooperative form of enterprises such as Producer Companies; State Livestock Development Boards; Central Cattle Breeding Farms (CCBF), Central Frozen Semen Production and Training Institute (CFSP&TI), Regional Stations for Forage Production and Demonstration (RSFP&D); Registered Societies/ Trusts (NGOs); Section 25 Companies, subsidiaries of statutory bodies, ICAR Institutes and Veterinary/ Dairy Institutes/Universities that meet the eligibility criteria for each activity as may be decided by the National Steering Committee (NSC).

Background:

- India's milk production increased from 165.40 MMT in 2016-17 to 176.35 MMT in 2017-18, a growth rate of 6.62 per cent.
- The country ranks first in global milk production.
- The per capita availability of milk in India during 2017-18 was 375 gm/day and by 2023-24, it is estimated to increase to 592 gm/day.

(Q) During the past three years, India has outpaced the global milk production with an annual growth rate of 5.53% compared with the 2.09% achieved globally. Examine how is it made possible.

4. PRADHAN MANTRI FASAL BIMA YOJANA (PMFBY)

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMFBY- key features.
- For Mains: PMFBY performance analysis, shortcomings and ways to address them.

Context: Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) envisages use of improved technology to reduce time gap for settlement of claims of farmers.

- Accordingly, the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, through Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre (MNCFC), has involved 8 agencies/ organizations to carry out pilot studies for Optimization of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) in various States under PMFBY.

About PMFBY:

- Launched in April, **2016**, after rolling back the earlier insurance schemes viz. **National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS)**, **Weather-based Crop Insurance scheme** and **Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS)**.
- **Premium:** It envisages a **uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for Kharif crops, and 1.5% for Rabi crops**. The premium for annual **commercial and horticultural crops will be 5%**.
- The scheme is **mandatory for farmers who have taken institutional loans from banks**. It's **optional for farmers who have not taken institutional credit**.

Challenges at present:

- **Insufficient reach and the issue of penetration.**
- **Data constraints:** With just around 45% of the claims made by farmers over the last three crop seasons data for the last rabi season is not available paid by the insurance companies.
- **Low payout of claims:** The reason for the very low payout of claims is that only few state governments are paying their share of the premiums on time and till they do, the central government doesn't pay its share either. Till they get the premium, insurance companies simply sit on the claims.
- **Gaps in assessment of crop loss:** There is hardly any use of modern technology in assessing crop damages. There is lack of trained outsourced agencies, scope of corruption during implementation and the non-utilisation of technologies like smart phones and drones to improve reliability of such sampling
- **Less number of notified crops** than can avail insurance, Inadequate and delayed claim payment.
- **High actuarial premium rates:** Insurance companies charged high actuarial premium rates. If states delay notifications, or payment of premiums, or crop cutting data, companies cannot pay compensation to the farmers in time.
- **Poor capacity to deliver:** There has been no concerted effort by the state government and insurance companies to build awareness of farmers on PMFBY. Insurance companies have failed to set-up infrastructure for proper Implementation of PMFBY. PMBY is not beneficial for farmers in vulnerable regions as factors like low indemnity levels, low threshold yields, low sum insured and default on loans make it a poor scheme to safeguard against extreme weather events.

(Q) Discuss technology's benefits for crop insurance in India.

5. RASHTRIYA GOKUL MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Rashtriya Gokul Mission – features and significance, significance of the dairy sector.

Context: In order to complement and supplement the efforts made by the States and Union Territories for enhancing milk production and productivity of bovines, Government has been implementing **Rashtriya Gokul Mission** throughout the country for development and conservation of bovine population thereby enhancing their production and productivity.

About Rashtriya Gokul Mission:

- To conserve and develop indigenous bovine breeds, government has launched '**Rashtriya Gokul Mission**' under the **National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development (NPBBD)**.

The Mission is being implemented with the objectives to:

- development and conservation of indigenous breeds.
- undertake breed improvement programme for indigenous cattle breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock.
- enhance milk production and productivity.

Objectives:

- Providing financial support to farmers suffering crop loss/damage arising out of unforeseen events.
- Stabilizing the income of farmers to ensure their continuance in farming.
- Encouraging farmers to adopt innovative and modern agricultural practices.
- Ensuring flow of credit to the agriculture sector which contributes to food security, crop diversification and enhancing growth and competitiveness of agriculture sector besides protecting farmers from production risks.

- upgrade nondescript cattle using elite indigenous breeds like Gir, Sahiwal, Rathi, Deoni, Tharparkar, Red Sindhi.
- distribute disease free high genetic merit bulls for natural service.

Implementation:

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

Gokul Gram:

- Funds under the scheme will be allocated for the establishment of **Integrated Indigenous Cattle Centres** viz “Gokul Gram”.
- Gokul Grams will be established in: i) the native breeding tracts and ii) near metropolitan cities for housing the urban cattle.
- Gokul Gram will act as **Centres for development of Indigenous Breeds and a dependable source for supply of high genetic breeding stock to the farmers in the breeding tract.**
- The Gokul Gram will be **self sustaining and will generate economic resources from sale of A2 milk (A2 milk is cow's milk that mostly lacks a form of β-casein proteins called A1 and instead has mostly the A2 form), organic manure, vermi-composting, urine distillates, and production of electricity from bio gas for in house consumption and sale of animal products.**
- The Gokul Gram will also function as **state of the art in situ training centre** for Farmers, Breeders and MAITRI’s.
- The Gokul Gram will **maintain milch and unproductive animals in the ratio of 60:40and will have the capacity to maintain about 1000 animals.** Nutritional requirements of the animals will be provided in the Gokul Gram through in house fodder production.
- Gokul Gram will also be **set up near to metropolitan cities for managing urban cattle.** Metropolitan Gokul Gram will focus on genetic upgradation of urban cattle.

Topics: Infrastructure related issues.

1. NATIONAL GRID

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is National Grid? UTs out of it, capacity and cross border transmissions.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for National Grid, India’s energy demands and the role of National Grid in fulfilling these demands.

Context: The FM has promised a blueprint this year for developing “water grids” on the line of power grids in the country to push the government’s ‘One Nation, One Grid’ concept.

What is National Grid?

- It is the **high-voltage electric power transmission network** in mainland India, **connecting power stations and major substations and ensuring that electricity generated anywhere in mainland India can be used to satisfy demand elsewhere.**

Benefits of a National Grid:

- Better availability resulting in lesser power cuts.
- More stability in power.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. NIIF

What to study?

- For Prelims: Particulars of NIIF and funds under NIIF.
- For Mains: Significance of NIIF and the need for Infrastructure funding.

Context: National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) Signs MoU with National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) for funding highway projects.

About NIIF:

- The government had set up the ₹40,000 crore NIIF in 2015 as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable greenfield, brownfield and stalled infrastructure projects.
- The Indian government is investing 49% and the rest of the corpus is to be raised from third-party investors such as sovereign wealth funds, insurance and pension funds, endowments, etc.
- NIIF's mandate includes investing in areas such as energy, transportation, housing, water, waste management and other infrastructure-related sectors in India.
- NIIF currently manages three funds each with its distinctive investment mandate. The funds are registered as Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

The three funds are:

- **Master Fund:** The Master Fund is an infrastructure fund with the objective of primarily investing in operating assets in the core infrastructure sectors such as roads, ports, airports, power etc.
- **Fund of Funds:** Fund of Funds anchor and/or invest in funds managed by fund managers who have good track records in infrastructure and associated sectors in India. Some of the sectors of focus include Green Infrastructure, Mid-Income & Affordable Housing, Infrastructure services and allied sectors.
- **Strategic Investment Fund:** Strategic Investment Fund is registered as an Alternative Investment Fund II under SEBI in India. The objective of "Strategic Fund" is to invest largely in equity and equity-linked instruments. The Strategic Fund will focus on green field and brown field investments in the core infrastructure sectors.

(Q) Discuss the significance of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) and the need for Infrastructure funding in India.

3. BHARATMALA PARIYOJANA

What to study?

- For Prelims: Bharatmala, NHAI.
- For Mains: Infrastructure development- need, challenges and solutions.

Context: The Government of India has approved Phase-I of Bharatmala Pariyojana with financial outlay of Rs 5,35,000 crore to develop 24,800 km Highways along with 10,000 km residual NHDP stretches over a period of five years.

What is Bharatmala project?

- Bharatmala Project is the second largest highways construction project in the country since NHDP, under which almost 50,000 km of highway roads were targeted across the country.
- Bharatmala will look to improve connectivity particularly on economic corridors, border areas and far flung areas with an aim of quicker movement of cargo and boosting exports.

About NHAI:

- The National Highways Authority of India was constituted by an act of Parliament, the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988.
- It is responsible for the development, maintenance and management of National Highways entrusted to it and for matters connected or incidental thereto.
- The Authority was operationalised in Feb, 1995.

4. PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA-III (PMGSY-III)

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: features and significance of PMGSY, need for enhanced rural connectivity.

Context: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for the launch of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III (PMGSY-III).

Key facts:

- Under the PMGSY-III Scheme, it is proposed to consolidate 1,25,000 Km road length in the States.
- It involves **consolidation of Through Routes and Major Rural Links connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals.**
- The funds would be **shared in the ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and State** for all States except for 8 North Eastern and 3 Himalayan States (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand) for which it is 90:10.

Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism Area (RCPLWEA):

- Government launched Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism affected Areas in the year 2016 as a separate vertical under PMGSY to provide all-weather road connectivity with necessary culverts and cross-drainage structures in 44 districts (35 are worst LWE affected districts and 09 are adjoining districts), which are critical from security and communication point of view.
- Under the Scheme, 5,066 Km road length has been sanctioned.

Progress under PMGSY:

- A total of 5,99,090 Km road length has been constructed under the scheme since inception till April, 2019 (inclusive of PMGSY-I, PMGSY-II and RCPLWEA Scheme).

PMGSY-I:

- PMGSY was launched in December, 2000 with an objective **to provide single all-weather road connectivity to eligible unconnected habitation of designated population size (500+ in plain areas and 250+ in North-East, hill, tribal and desert areas as per Census, 2001)** for overall socio-economic development of the areas.

5. SAGARMALA

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features, need for and significance of the programme.

Context: Government on Monday said it has created about 10,000 jobs under its ambitious '**Sagarmala**' initiative during the last three years.

About Sagarmala:

- The Sagarmala project seeks to develop a **string of ports around India's coast**.
- The objective of this initiative is to promote "**Port-led development**" along India's 7500 km long coastline.
- It aims to **develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.**
- Nodal ministry:** The Union Ministry of Shipping has been appointed as the nodal ministry for this initiative.
- To implement this, State governments would set up **State Sagarmala committees**, headed by the chief minister or the minister in charge of ports.
- At the central level, a **Sagarmala Development Company (SDC)** will be setup to provide equity support to assist various special purpose vehicles (SPVs) setup for various projects.

The Sagarmala initiative will address challenges by focusing on three pillars of development, namely:

- Supporting and enabling Port-led Development through appropriate policy and institutional interventions and providing for an institutional framework for ensuring inter-agency and ministries/departments/states' collaboration for integrated development.
- Port Infrastructure Enhancement, including modernization and setting up of new ports.
- Efficient Evacuation to and from hinterland.

Why is it important?

- India is located along key international trade routes in the Indian Ocean and has a long coastline of over 7,500 km. Yet, **capacity constraints and lack of modern facilities at Indian ports** tremendously elongates the time taken to ship goods in and out of the country and has held back India's share in world trade.
- Developing rivers as **inland waterways** can also help save domestic logistics costs too.
- Sagarmala could boost India's merchandise exports to \$110 billion by 2025 and create an estimated 10 million new jobs (four million in direct employment).

6. SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE TOWARDS AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION (SATAT) INITIATIVE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: SATAT initiative- key objectives, significance and brief overview on CNG and CBG.

Context: The government has said that the **SATAT initiative** has the potential of addressing environmental problems arising from landfill emissions, farm stubble burning, etc. and also bring down dependency on oil/gas import. Till June, 2019, Oil Marketing Companies and Gas Marketing Companies have awarded Letter of Intent (LoI) for 344 plants for production and supply of CBG.

About the initiative:

- The initiative is aimed at providing a **Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)** as a developmental effort that would **benefit both vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs**.
- **Compressed Bio-Gas plants** are proposed to be set up mainly through independent entrepreneurs.
- CBG produced at these plants will be **transported through cascades of cylinders to the fuel station networks of OMCs for marketing as a green transport fuel alternative**.
- The entrepreneurs would be able to **separately market the other by-products** from these plants, including **bio-manure, carbon-dioxide, etc.**, to enhance returns on investment.
- This initiative is expected to generate **direct employment for 75,000 people** and produce **50 million tonnes of bio-manure for crops**.

There are multiple benefits from converting agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste into CBG on a commercial scale:

- Responsible waste management, reduction in carbon emissions and pollution.
- Additional revenue source for farmers.
- Boost to entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment.
- Support to national commitments in achieving climate change goals.
- Reduction in import of natural gas and crude oil.
- Buffer against crude oil/gas price fluctuations.

What is CBG?

- Compressed Bio-Gas is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential. With **calorific value (~52,000 KJ/kg)** and other properties similar to CNG, Compressed Bio-Gas can be used as an alternative, renewable automotive fuel.

Background:

- Bio-gas is **produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste / bio-mass sources** like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc. After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has pure **methane content of over 95%**.

Way ahead:

- The potential for Compressed Bio-Gas production from various sources in India is estimated at about 62 million tonnes per annum.
- Going forward, **Compressed Bio-Gas networks can be integrated with city gas distribution (CGD) networks** to boost supplies to domestic and retail users in existing and upcoming markets.
- Besides retailing from OMC fuel stations, Compressed Bio-Gas can at a later date be injected into CGD pipelines too for efficient distribution and optimised access of a cleaner and more affordable fuel.

7. WHY POWER COSTS VARY, AND UNIFORM NATIONAL RATE IS DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT?

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: How power tariffs are determined? Need for uniform national rate and challenges therein.

Context: Few lawmakers have suggested that **power tariffs should be uniform across the country so that affordable power is available to all.**

How do states decide power tariffs?

- The electricity tariff paid by consumers in each state is directly **reflective of the cost of power procurement by the power distribution companies (discoms)** in the state.
- There are **state-specific factors** for this.

Is the idea of having a flat countrywide rate feasible?

- The **State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs)** decide on the power tariff after utilities file their cost of power with the regulators. Because **power tariffs entail a number of state-specific factors**, a uniform nationwide tariff is a proposition that would be difficult to implement.

Background:

- States such as Jharkhand or Odisha or Chhattisgarh, which have had coal-fired thermal capacity, would typically have lower tariffs because of the base-load capacities that they possess.
- States such as Himachal or Uttarakhand would have low tariffs because of hydropower capacities that are either fully or partially depreciated, and from which the home state, under the Ministry of Power's Tariff Policy, gets access to 40 per cent of the power free of cost.
- A state like Gujarat, which has capacities based on imported coal, will have comparatively higher tariffs. States such as Delhi or Punjab, which buy power from outside to meet domestic requirements either through long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs) or spot power purchases at the power exchanges (PXs), have higher tariffs, as their power mix has high-cost power.

Sources: Indian Express.

8. OPEN ACREAGE LICENSING POLICY

What to study?

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

Context: Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas signs contracts for 32 blocks awarded under Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) Bid Rounds – II & III.

What is Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)?

- The OALP, a critical part of the **Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy**, provides uniform licences for exploration and production of all forms of hydrocarbons, enabling contractors to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources.
- Fields are offered under a **revenue-sharing model** and throw up marketing and pricing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced.
- Under the OALP, once an explorer selects areas after evaluating the **National Data Repository (NDR)** and submits the EoI, it is to be put up for competitive bidding and the entity offering the maximum share of oil and gas to the government is awarded the block.
- NDR has been created to provide explorers' data on the country's repositories, allowing them to choose fields according to their capabilities. Data received through the National Seismic Programme, an in-depth study of 26 sedimentary basins, are continuously being added to the NDR.

Background:

- The Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) replacing the erstwhile New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) was approved in March 2016 and the Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) along with the National Data Repository (NDR) were launched in June 2017 as the key drivers to accelerate the Exploration and Production (E&P) activities in India.
- **The main features of HELP** are Revenue Sharing Contract, single Licence for exploration and production of conventional as well as unconventional Hydrocarbon resources, marketing & pricing freedom, etc.

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

- In 2015-2016, India's crude oil import dependence rose to 81% from 78.5%. In last five years, India has seen overall decline in exploration and production of conventional resources.
- New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) created in 1997 ended the state dominance and created a competitive environment leading to liberalization of oil and gas exploration and production industry. However, it failed to keep the momentum of production growth and attracting the foreign investment.
- Bureaucratic hurdles like multiple approvals and sanctions, cost overruns, and disputes led to some oil majors leaving their awarded blocks and exit from the space.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. URJA GANGA

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Urja Ganga Project- key features.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for such projects for India, especially for NE region India.

About the Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga project:

- The gas pipeline project aims to provide piped cooking gas to residents of Varanasi and later to millions of people in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha.
- **Significance:** According to GAIL, with the Urja Ganga project, 20 lakh households will get PNG connections.
- **Background:** GAIL has built a network of trunk pipelines covering the length of around 11,000 km. With Urja Ganga project, this number will further increase by 2540 km.

10. AIRPORTS ECONOMIC REGULATORY AUTHORITY OF INDIA (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: AERA- key features, composition, functions and recent amendments proposed.

Context: Rajya Sabha recently passed the **Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2019**.

- The Bill amends the **Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008**.

Background:

- The **Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008** established the **Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (AERA)**.
- **Functions:** AERA regulates tariffs and other charges for aeronautical services provided at civilian airports with annual traffic above 15 lakh passengers. It also monitors the performance standard of services across these airports.

Why was AERA created, and what is its role?

- To ensure that **private airport operators do not misuse their monopoly**, the need for an independent tariff regulator in the airport sector was felt. Consequently, the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008 (AERA Act) was passed which set up AERA.

What changes are being proposed in the Bill?

- The Bill seeks to do two things:
- **Definition of major airports:** Currently, the AERA Act defines a major airport as one with annual passenger traffic over 15 lakh, or any other airports as notified by the central government. The Bill increases the threshold of annual passenger traffic for major airports to over 35 lakh.
- **Tariff determination by AERA:** Under the Act, AERA is responsible for determining the: (i) tariff for aeronautical services every five years, (ii) development fees, and (iii) passengers service fee. It can also amend the tariffs in the interim period. The Bill adds that AERA will not determine: (i) tariff, (ii) tariff structures, or (iii) development fees, in certain cases. These cases include those where such tariff amounts were a part of the bid document on the basis of which the airport operations were awarded. AERA will be consulted (by the concessioning authority, the Ministry of Civil Aviation) before incorporating such tariffs in the bid document, and such tariffs must be notified.

Why is the Act getting amended?

- The exponential growth of the sector has put tremendous pressure on AERA, while its resources are limited. Therefore, if too many airports come under the purview of AERA, it will not be able to perform its functions efficiently.

How would the Bill affect the regulatory regime?

- Currently, there are 32 major airports (annual traffic above 15 lakh), and AERA regulates tariffs at 27 of these. As per the Bill, AERA will regulate 16 major airports (annual traffic above 35 lakh). The remaining 16 airports will be regulated by AAI.
- Till 2030-31, air traffic in the country is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 10-11%. This implies that in a few years, the traffic at the other 16 airports will increase to over 35 lakh and they will again fall under the purview of AERA.
- This may lead to constant changes in the regulatory regime at these airports.

11. REGIONAL AIR CONNECTIVITY- UDAN

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of RCS.
- For Mains: Significance, challenges and potential of RCS.

Context: Giving further fillip to Regional Connectivity in the country, 8 more routes (including 2 DoNER Routes) became functional Under **Regional Connectivity Scheme/UdeDeshKaAamNagrik- UDAN scheme** of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

About UDAN:

- UDAN, launched in April 2017, is a flagship scheme of the Union Government **to enable air operations on unserved routes, connecting regional areas, to promote balanced regional growth and to make flying affordable for masses.**
- The UDAN Scheme is a key component of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) which was launched in June 2016.

Objectives of the scheme:

- The primary objective of RCS is to facilitate / stimulate regional air connectivity by making it cheap and affordable.
- Promoting affordability of regional air connectivity is envisioned under RCS by supporting airline operators through: Concessions and Financial (viability gap funding or VGF) support.

Significance:

- The scheme gives India's aviation sector a boost by giving a chance to small and first-time operators to be a part of the rapid growth in passenger traffic.

12. GRID CONNECTED ROOFTOP SOLAR PROGRAMME

What to Study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, significance and potential of rooftop solar energy, challenges therein.

Context: Government has set a target for installation of **Rooftop Solar projects (RTS) of 40,000 MegaWatt (MW) by 2022** in the country including installation of RTS on rooftop of houses.

What is rooftop solar?

- Rooftop solar installations — as opposed to large-scale solar power generation plants — can be installed on the roofs of buildings. As such, they fall under two brackets: **commercial and residential**. This simply has to do with whether the solar panels are being installed on top of commercial buildings or residential complexes.

What are the benefits?

- Rooftop solar provides companies and residential areas the option of an **alternative source of electricity** to that provided by the grid.
- While the **main benefit of this is to the environment**, since it reduces the dependence on fossil-fuel generated electricity, solar power can also **augment the grid supply in places where it is erratic**.
- Rooftop solar also has the great benefit of being able to provide **electricity to those areas that are not yet connected to the grid** — remote locations and areas where the terrain makes it difficult to set up power stations and lay power lines.

What is the potential for rooftop solar in India?

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has pegged the market potential for rooftop solar at **124 GW**. However, only 1,247 MW of capacity had been installed as of December 31, 2016. That is a little more than 3% of the target for 2022, and 1% of the potential.

Why is it not being adopted widely?

- One of the major problems with rooftop solar — and what affects solar energy generation in general — is the **variability in supply**. Not only can the efficiency of the solar panels vary on any given day depending on how bright the sunlight is, but the solar panels also produce no electricity during the night. Arguably, night is when off-grid locations most need alternative sources of electricity.
- Storage is one solution.** Storage technology for electricity, however, is still underdeveloped and storage solutions are expensive. Most residential customers will find the cost of installing both rooftop solar panels and storage facilities prohibitive. Residential areas also come with the associated issues of **use restrictions of the roof** — if the roof is being used for solar generation, then it cannot be used for anything else.
- Another major reason why rooftop solar is not becoming popular is that the **current electricity tariff structure renders it an unviable option**. Many states have adopted a net metering policy, which allows disaggregated power producers to sell excess electricity to the grid. However, the subsidised tariffs charged to residential customers undermine the economic viability of installing rooftop solar panels. The potential profit simply does not outweigh the costs.

Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) India has made remarkable strides in renewable energy during the recent years, which has emerged as an integral part of the solution to nations energy needs. Discuss the steps taken by the government in this direction.

13. DAM SAFETY BILL 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights of the Bill and key functions of the National Dam Safety Authority, concerns expressed by states over the Bill.

Context: Opposition MPs in the Lok Sabha have expressed deep reservations about the Centre's decision to introduce the **Dam Safety Bill, 2019**, asserting that the legislation, which is ostensibly aimed at providing uniform safety measures across the country, would undermine the powers of State governments since water is a State subject.

Concerns raised:

- The bill is too focused on structural safety and not on operational safety.
- There is inadequate compensation to the people affected by dams.
- There is need for an independent regulator as well as for a precise definition of stakeholders.
- Many states say it encroaches upon the sovereignty of States to manage their dams, and violates the principles of federalism enshrined in the Constitution. They see it as an attempt by the Centre to consolidate power in the guise of safety concerns.

Why Centre is introducing this Bill?

- Though the subject does not fall under the purview of Parliament, the Centre has decided to introduce this bill mainly because dam safety is an issue of concern in the country. And there are no legal and institutional safeguards in this regard.

Highlights of Dam Safety Bill, 2019:

- The Bill provides for proper surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of all specified dams in the country to ensure their safe functioning.
- The Bill provides for constitution of a **National Committee on Dam Safety** which shall evolve dam safety policies and recommend necessary regulations as may be required for the purpose.
- The Bill provides for establishment of **National Dam Safety Authority** as a regulatory body which shall discharge functions to implement the policy, guidelines and standards for dam safety in the country.
- The Bill provides for constitution of a State Committee on Dam Safety by State Government.

Significance:

- The Bill will help all the States and Union Territories of India to adopt uniform dam safety procedures which shall ensure safety of dams and safeguard benefits from such dams. This shall also help in safeguarding human life, livestock and property.
- It addresses all issues concerning dam safety including regular inspection of dams, Emergency Action Plan, comprehensive dam safety review, adequate repair and maintenance funds for dam safety, Instrumentation and Safety Manuals. It lays onus of dam safety on the dam owner and provides for penal provisions for commission and omission of certain acts.

Need:

- Over the last fifty years, India has invested substantially in dams and related infrastructures, and ranks third after USA and China in the number of large dams. 5254 large dams are in operation in the country currently and another 447 are under construction. In addition to this, there are thousands of medium and small dams.
- While dams have played a key role in fostering rapid and sustained agricultural growth and development in India, there has been a long felt need for a uniform law and administrative structure for ensuring dam safety.
- The Central Water Commission, through the National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS), Central Dam Safety Organization (CDSO) and State Dam Safety Organizations (SDSO) has been making constant endeavours in this direction, but these organizations do not have any statutory powers and are only advisory in nature.
- This can be a matter of concern, especially since about 75 percent of the large dams in India are more than 25 years old and about 164 dams are more than 100 years old. A badly maintained, unsafe dam can be a hazard to human life, flora and fauna, public and private assets and the environment.
- India has had 36 dam failures in the past.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. STATISTICS DAY

What to study?

- For Prelims: Statistics day, ISI.
- For Mains: Important contributions of PC Mahalanobis.

National Statistics Day:

- In recognition of the notable contributions made by Late Professor **Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis** in the fields of statistics, statistical system and economic planning, Government of India in 2007, has designated **29th June as the “Statistics Day”** in the category of Special Days to be celebrated every year at the National level.
- The **objective** of celebration of this Day is to create public awareness about the importance of statistics in socio-economic planning and policy formulation, to acknowledge the contribution of Prof. Mahalanobis, and to pay homage to him.
- **Theme:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) keeping in view India's commitment towards achieving these goals.

Other contributions:

- PC Mahalanobis became **1st Indian statistician to receive world recognition** and is called as **Father of Indian Statistics**.
- The **Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)** at Kolkata, set up by Prof. Mahalanobis in 1931, and was declared an **autonomous “Institute of National Importance”** through an act of Parliament in 1959.
- ISI celebrates 29th June as the **“Worker Day”**.
- In 1936 he introduced statistical measure called **Mahalanobis distance**, widely used in cluster analysis and classification techniques for which he is widely known.

2. NEUTRINO PROJECT

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Neutrino project, significance and what are neutrinos?

Context: Setting up of Neutrino Observatory.

About the project:

- The **India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)** Project is a **multi-institutional effort** aimed at building a world-class **underground laboratory** with a rock cover of approx.1200 m for **non-accelerator based high energy and nuclear physics research in India**. The initial goal of INO is to **study neutrinos**.
- It is a mega-science project **jointly funded by the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST)**.

The project includes:

- Construction of an underground laboratory and associated surface facilities at **Pottipuram in Bodi West hills of Theni District of Tamil Nadu**.
- Construction of an **Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector** for studying neutrinos.
- Setting up of **National Centre for High Energy Physics at Madurai**, for the operation and maintenance of the underground laboratory, human resource development and detector R&D along with its applications.

What are neutrinos?

- Neutrinos, first proposed by Swiss scientist Wolfgang Pauli in 1930, are **the second most widely occurring particle in the universe**, only second to photons, the particle which makes up light. In fact, neutrinos are

so abundant among us that every second, there are more than 100 trillion of them passing right through each of us — we never even notice them.

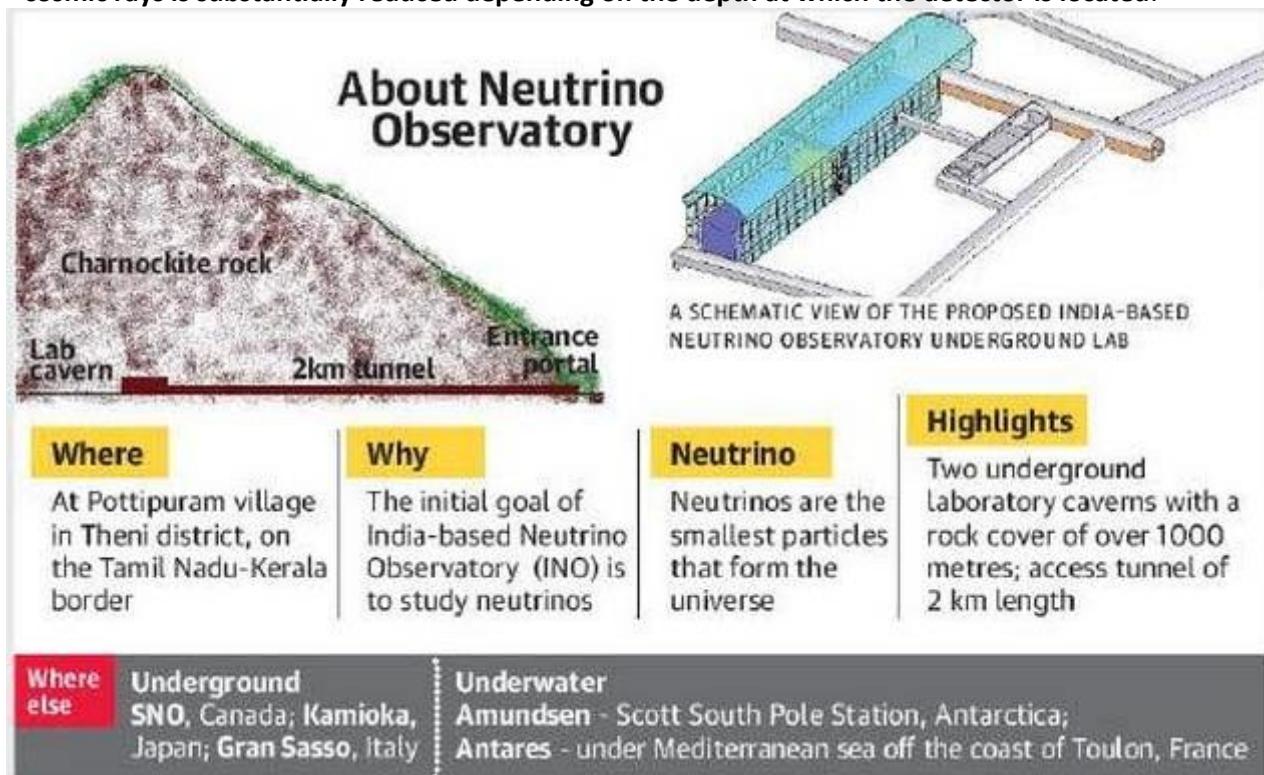
- **Neutrinos occur in three different types, or flavours.** These are separated in terms of different masses. From experiments so far, we know that neutrinos have a **tiny mass**, but the ordering of the neutrino mass states is not known and is one of the key questions that remain unanswered till today. This is a major challenge INO will set to resolve, thus completing our picture of the neutrino.

Why detect them?

- Neutrinos hold the key to several important and fundamental questions on the origin of the Universe and the energy production in stars. Another important possible application of neutrinos is in the area of **neutrino tomograph of the earth**, that is detailed investigation of the structure of the Earth from core on wards. This is possible with neutrinos since they are the only particles which can probe the deep interiors of the Earth.

Why should the laboratory be situated underground?

- Neutrinos are notoriously difficult to detect in a laboratory because of their extremely **weak interaction with matter**. The background from cosmic rays (which interact much more readily than neutrinos) and natural radioactivity will make it almost impossible to detect them on the surface of the Earth. This is the reason most neutrino observatories are located deep inside the Earth's surface.
- The overburden provided by the Earth matter is transparent to neutrinos whereas most background from cosmic rays is substantially reduced depending on the depth at which the detector is located.



(Q) Critically examine the uses of understanding of neutrinos, and significance of its research for India.

3. DEEP OCEAN MISSION (DOM)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Polymetallic nodules, features of Deep Sea Mission, ISA.
- For Mains: Significance and relevance of such missions, usefulness for India's energy security.

Context: Ministry Of Earth Sciences Plans Rs 8000 Crore '**Deep Ocean Mission**' To Boost India's Sea Exploration Capabilities. The mission proposes to explore the deep ocean similar to the space exploration started by ISRO about 35 years ago.

Features of the Mission:

- The **focus of the mission** will be on deep-sea mining, ocean climate change advisory services, underwater vehicles and underwater robotics related technologies.
- **Two key projects** planned in the ‘Deep Ocean Mission’ report include a **desalination plant** powered by tidal energy and a **submersible vehicle** that can explore depths of at least 6,000 metres.

Significance of the Mission:

- The ‘Deep Ocean Mission’ plan will enable India to develop capabilities **to exploit resources in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB)**.
- **India has been allotted 75,000 square kilometres in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) by UN International Sea Bed Authority** for exploration of poly-metallic nodules. CIOB reserves contain deposits of metals like iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt.

Potential:

- It is envisaged that 10% of recovery of that large reserve can meet the energy requirement of India for the next 100 years. It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of polymetallic nodules are available at the bottom of the seas in the Central Indian Ocean.

Sources: the hindu.

Topics: Awareness in space.

1. PUNCH MISSION

- **Context:** NASA has selected an US based Indian researcher to lead its **PUNCH mission which will image the Sun**.

About PUNCH (Polarimeter to Unify the Corona and Heliosphere):

- It is focused on **understanding the transition of particles from the Sun’s outer corona to the solar wind that fills interplanetary space**.
- It will **consist of a constellation of four microsatellites** that through continuous 3D deep-field imaging, will observe the corona and heliosphere as elements of a single, connected system.
- The **mission is expected to be launched in 2022**.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. LAUNCH-ABORT TEST

- **Context:** NASA recently carried out a successful test of a **launch-abort system** for the Orion capsule designed to take U.S. astronauts to the Moon.

About Launch Abort System (LAS):

- It is designed to **activate in the event of a rocket malfunction, on the pad or in flight**.
- The LAS **consists of three different types of solid-fuel rocket motors** that will work in synchrony with one another.
- In case of a launch-pad or in-flight failure, the abort tower rocket provides 400,000 pounds of thrust, pulling the crew capsule away.

Background:

- The Orion spacecraft is a major component of NASA’s newly-named **Artemis program**, which aims to return U.S. astronauts to the lunar surface in 2024.

Sources: the Hindu.

What are PMN?

- Polymetallic nodules (also known as **manganese nodules**) are potato-shaped, largely **porous nodules found in abundance carpeting the sea floor of world oceans in deep sea**.
- **Composition:** Besides manganese and iron, they contain nickel, copper, cobalt, lead, molybdenum, cadmium, vanadium, titanium, of which nickel, cobalt and copper are considered to be of economic and strategic importance.

3. NASA TO LAUNCH DRAGONFLY

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key objectives, significance of the mission and related facts on Titan.

Context: NASA plans to launch an **unmanned nuclear-powered drone, Dragonfly** as early as 2026 to search for life on **Saturn's largest moon, Titan**.

Key facts:

- Dragonfly aims to search for signs of microbial alien life on Saturn's moon Titan**, while navigating its earth-like gravity and aerodynamics in the process.
- The mission will **succeed NASA's Cassini probe**, which ended its 13-year mission orbiting Saturn in September 2017 by diving into Saturn's atmosphere.
- Dragonfly mission is a **part of NASA's New Frontiers program**, which includes a series of space exploration missions, which are being conducted with the purpose of researching several of the Solar System bodies, including the dwarf planet Pluto.
- The New Frontiers programme also includes** Pluto probe New Horizons, Jupiter probe Juno and OSIRIS-Rex asteroid mission.
- The Dragonfly mission **replaces a previously discontinued concept project called Titan Saturn System Mission (TSSM)**, which required a balloon probe to circumnavigate Titan.

Why study Titan?

- Titan is an analog to the very early Earth, and can provide clues to how life may have arisen on our planet.
- Titan is **larger than the planet Mercury and is the second largest moon in our solar system**.
- As it orbits Saturn, it is about 886 million miles (1.4 billion kilometers) away from the Sun, about 10 times farther than Earth. Because it is so far from the Sun, **its surface temperature is around -290 degrees Fahrenheit (-179 degrees Celsius)**. Its **surface pressure is also 50 percent higher than Earth's**.

Objectives of the mission:

- Explore diverse environments from organic dunes to the floor of an impact crater where liquid water and complex organic materials key to life once existed together for possibly tens of thousands of years.
- Study how far prebiotic chemistry may have progressed.
- Investigate the moon's atmospheric and surface properties and its subsurface ocean and liquid reservoirs.
- Search for chemical evidence of past or extant life.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. HAYABUSA2

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Objectives and significance of the mission, Asteroid Ryugu.

Context: Japan's **Hayabusa2** spacecraft, which successfully made its second touchdown on asteroid Ryugu on July 12, 2019, has become **the first ever space probe to gather material from beneath the surface of an asteroid**.

Hayabusa:

- In mid-September 2005, Hayabusa landed on the asteroid **Itokawa**, and managed to collect samples in the form of grains of asteroidal material. It returned to Earth with the samples in June 2010, thereby becoming **the first spacecraft to return asteroid samples to Earth for analysis**.

Hayabusa2:

- It is **an asteroid sample-return mission operated by the Japanese space agency, JAXA**.
- It was launched on 3 December 2014 and rendezvoused with **near-Earth asteroid 162173 Ryugu** on 27 June 2018.
- It is in the process of surveying the asteroid for a year and a half, departing in December 2019, and returning to Earth in December 2020.

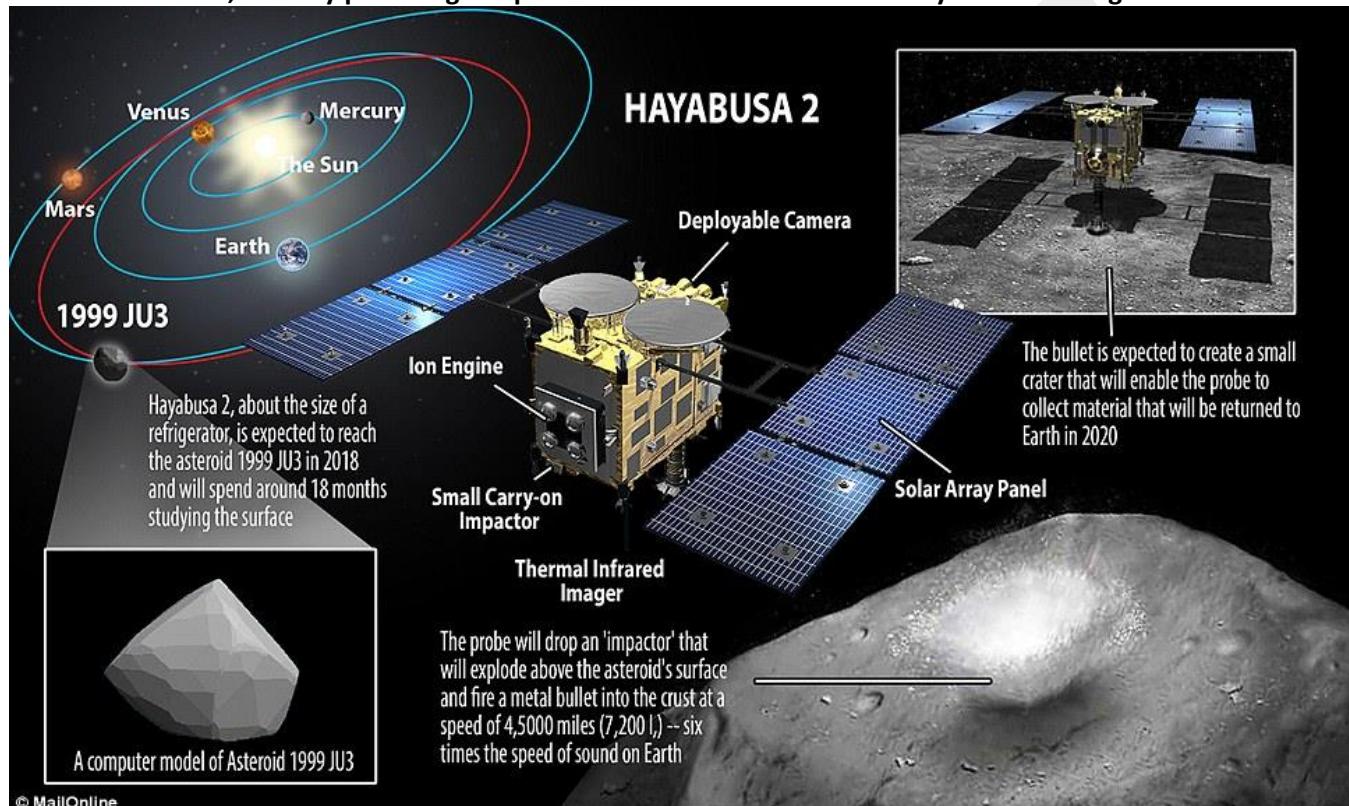
- Hayabusa2 carries multiple science payloads for remote sensing, sampling, and four small rovers that will investigate the asteroid surface to inform the environmental and geological context of the samples collected.

The scientific objectives of Hayabusa2 mission are twofold:

- To characterize the asteroid from remote sensing observations (with multispectral cameras, near-infrared spectrometer, thermal infrared imager, laser altimeter) on a macroscopic scale
- To analyse the samples returned from the asteroid on a microscopic scale.

What is the significance of the mission?

- **Ryugu** is a C-type asteroid – a relic from the early days of the Solar System. Scientists think that **C-type asteroids contain both organic matter, and trapped water, and might have been responsible for bringing both to Earth, thereby providing the planet with the materials necessary for life to originate.**



© MailOnline

Sources: et.

5. CHANDRAYAAN 2

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key objectives, significance, payloads of the mission.

Context: With the successful launch of India's Moon mission Chandrayaan-2, all eyes are now on September 7 when the lander and rover modules of the spacecraft will make a soft landing on the surface of the moon.

- The 640-tonne **GSLV Mk-III rocket** successfully injected the 3,850-kg Chandrayaan-2 composite module into the Earth's orbit. According to the revised flight sequence, Chandrayaan-2 would spend 23 days in the Earth's orbit.

Chandrayaan-2 mission:

- In September 2008, the Chandrayaan-2 mission was approved by the government for a cost of Rs 425 crore.
- It is India's **second mission to the moon**.
- It aims **to explore the Moon's south polar region**.
- The mission is an important step in India's plans for planetary exploration, a program known as **Planetary Science and Exploration (PLANEX)**.
- There are **three components of the mission, an orbiter, a lander and a rover**.

- The mission payloads include — Terrain Mapping Camera which will generate a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) of the entire moon, Chandrayaan 2 Large Area Soft X-ray Spectrometer which will test the elemental composition of the Moon's surface Solar X-Ray Monitor which will provide solar X-ray spectrum inputs for CLASS.
- The orbiter will be deployed at an altitude of 100 kilometers above the surface of the Moon. The lander will then separate from the orbiter, and execute a soft landing on the surface of the Moon, unlike the previous mission which crash landed near the lunar south pole.
- The lander, rover and orbiter will perform mineralogical and elemental studies of the lunar surface.
- The rover is named Pragyan.
- The mission's lander is named Vikram after Dr Vikram A Sarabhai, the Father of the Indian Space Programme.

Objectives of the mission:

- The primary objective of Chandrayaan-2 is to demonstrate the ability to soft-land on the lunar surface and operate a robotic rover on the surface. Scientific goals include studies of lunar topography, mineralogy, elemental abundance, the lunar exosphere, and signatures of hydroxyl and water ice.

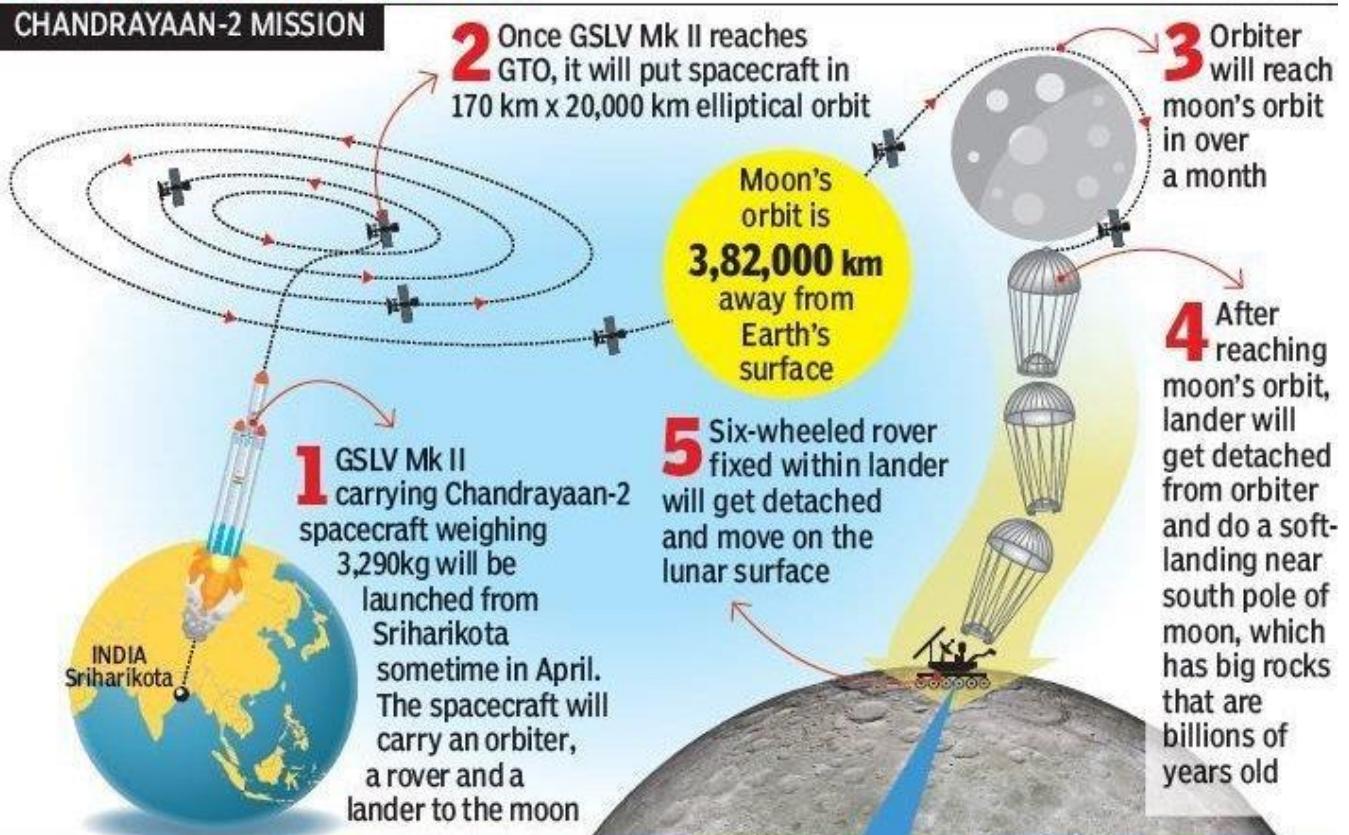
GSLV Mk-III:

- Developed by ISRO, the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark-III is a three-stage vehicle.
- Primarily designed to launch communication satellites into geostationary orbit.
- It has a mass of 640 tonnes that can accommodate up to 8,000 kg payload to LEO and 4000 kg payload to GTO.
- GSLV Mk-III vehicle is powered by two solid motor strap-ons (S200), a liquid propellant core stage (L110) and a cryogenic stage (C25), that has been designed for carrying the four-tonne class satellites.
- The C25 is powered by CE-20, India's largest cryogenic engine, designed and developed by the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre.

JOURNEY TO MOON

CHANDRAYAAN-2 MISSION

Graphic: Arpit Sharma



Rover has been designed in such a way that it will have power to spend a **lunar day or 14 Earth days** on moon's surface

It will walk up to 150-200 metres and conduct several experiments and on-site chemical analysis of lunar surface

Rover will send data & images of moon back to Earth via the orbiter in 15 minutes

Why the south polar region of the moon?

- According to ISRO, the lunar south pole is an interesting surface area, which remains in shadow as compared to the north pole. There is a possibility of the presence of water in permanently shadowed areas around it, the agency said, adding craters in the south pole region have cold traps and contain fossil records of the early solar system.

The challenges along the way:

- Challenges involved in the moon landing are identifying trajectory accurately; taking up deep space communication; trans-lunar injection, orbiting around the moon, taking up soft landing on the moon surface, and facing extreme temperatures and vacuum.

India: 4th Country to Land a Spacecraft on Moon:

- India will become the **fourth country to land a spacecraft on the Moon**. So far, all the landings have been in the areas close to the Moon's equator.
- This is mainly because, this **area receives more sunlight, which is required by solar powered instruments**.
- But Chandrayaan-2 will make a landing at a site where no earlier mission has gone, i.e., **near the South Pole of the Moon**. It can contain clues to the fossil records of early Solar System.
- The unexplored territory gives an opportunity for the Mission to discover something new. The South Pole of the Moon holds possibility of presence of water. In addition, this area is also supposed to have ancient rocks and craters that can offer indications of history of the Moon.

Sources: Indian Express.

(Q) Chandrayaan 2 is yet another audacious attempt being made by ISRO in the field of space research. Examine the distinctiveness and significance of such a mission.

6. THIRTY METER TELESCOPE

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: TMT- objectives and significance, location.
- Context:** Thirty Meter Telescope Set to Begin Construction.

Background:

- The mega telescope completed its design and development phase in 2009, but legal challenges from Native Hawaiian activists — who treasure Mauna Kea for cultural and religious reasons — have hounded the telescope.

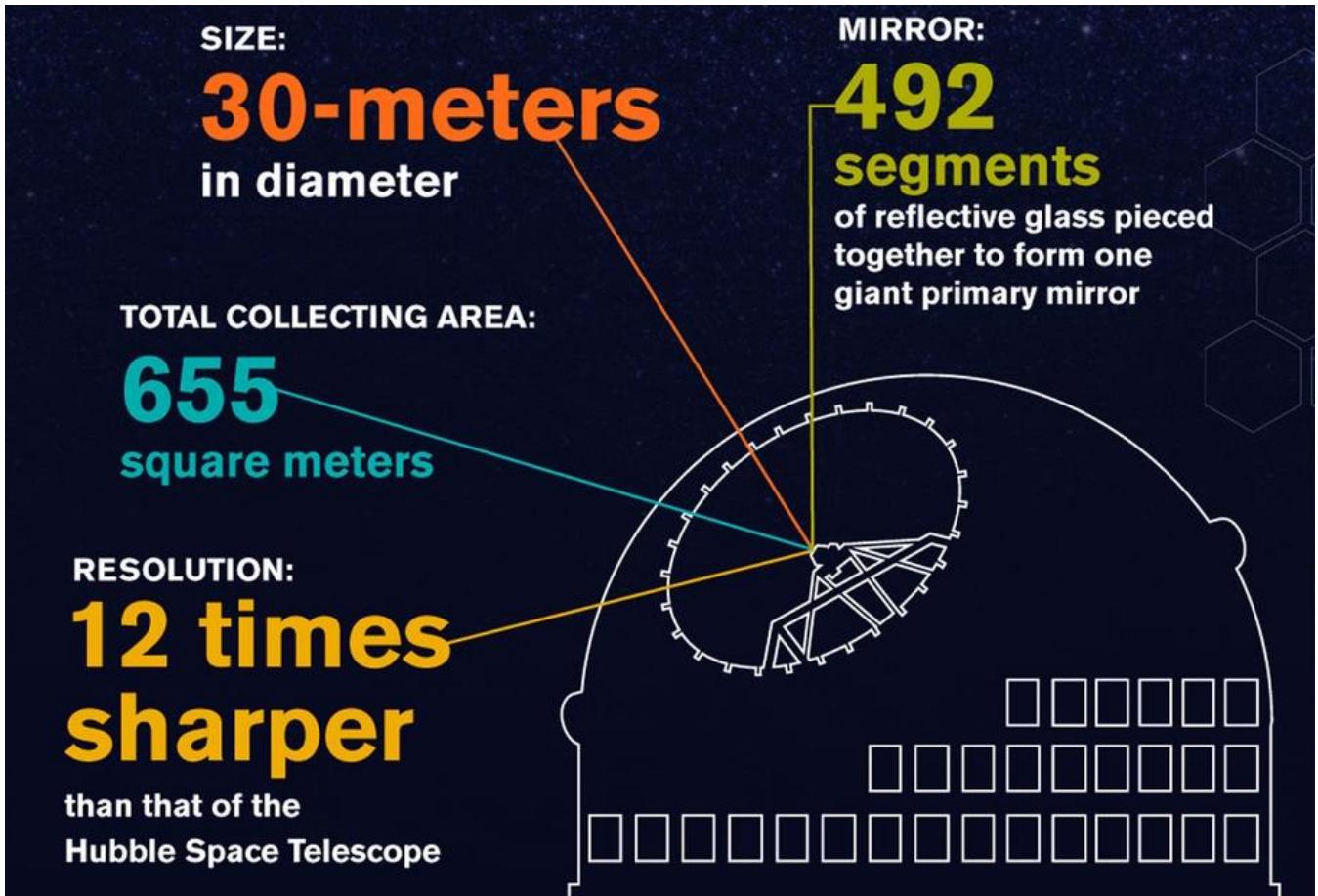
About TMT:

- The Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) is a proposed **astronomical observatory with an extremely large telescope (ELT)**.
- It is an **international project** being funded by scientific organisations of Canada, China, India, Japan and USA.
- Planned location:** Mauna Kea on the island of Hawaii in the US state of Hawaii.
- The TMT is designed for **near-ultraviolet to mid-infrared observations**, featuring adaptive optics to assist in correcting image blur.

Potential:

- TMT will enable scientists **to study fainter objects far away from us** in the Universe, which gives information about early stages of evolution of the Universe.
- It will give us **finer details of not-so-far-away objects like undiscovered planets and other objects in the Solar System** and planets around other stars.

Sources: Down to Earth.



7. RUSSIA LAUNCHES SPEKTR-RG

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Objectives, launch and significance of the mission.

Context: Spektr-RG is a Russian–German high-energy astrophysics space observatory launched recently. It follows on from the Spektr-R satellite telescope launched in 2011.

About Spektr- RG:

- The **Spektrum-Röntgen-Gamma mission**, also known as **Spektr-RG**, is a joint **project between the Russian space agency, Roscosmos, and the German space agency, DLR**.
- Position:** Spektr-RG will be placed in a stable orbit in space called a **Lagrange point (specifically, L2)**, where the gravitational forces of two large objects — in this case, the sun and the Earth — balance each other out.
- This location will allow Spektr-RG to perform its observations while using a minimal amount of fuel.
- Objectives:** The spacecraft is expected to detect 100,000 galaxy clusters, 3 million supermassive black holes, tens of thousands of star-forming galaxies, the presence of plasma (superheated gas) and many more types of objects.
- The observatory **includes two X-ray mirror telescopes**, called ART-XC and eROSITA.
- A key goal of Spektr-RG will be to **investigate the mysterious cosmic components referred to as “dark matter” and “dark energy”**.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. NAVIC

What to study?

- For Prelims: Navic and its key features.
- For Mains: Significance, applications and potential of Navic.

Context: ISRO is in talks with processing chip manufacturers such as Qualcomm to substitute the existing Global Positioning System (GPS) with the Indian version of satellite navigation.

What is NAVIC?

- Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) is an independent regional navigation satellite system designed to provide position information in the Indian region and 1500 km around the Indian mainland.

Services provided:

- IRNSS would provide two types of services, namely Standard Positioning Services available to all users and Restricted Services provided to authorised users.

How many satellites does NAVIC consist of?

- It is a regional system and so its constellation will consist of seven satellites. Three of these will be geostationary over the Indian Ocean, i.e., they will appear to be stationary in the sky over the region, and four will be geosynchronous – appearing at the same point in the sky at the same time every day. This configuration ensures each satellite is being tracked by at least one of fourteen ground stations at any given point of time, with a high chance of most of them being visible from any point in India.

Why it is necessary to have indigenous global navigation system?

- Having a global navigation system bolsters the ability of a nation to serve as a net security provider, especially through the guarantee of such assurance policies. It can also play a significant role in relief efforts post disasters such as the tsunami in the Indian Ocean region in 2004 and the Pakistan-India earthquake in 2005.



Sources: the hindu.

9. NASA'S KEPLER SPACE TELESCOPE

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Kepler telescope, TESS.
- For Mains: What are exoplanets, significance of their findings.

Context: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) has discovered a new planetary system called **TESS Object of Interest (TOI) 270**.

- Where is it located? TOI 270 is about 73 light years away from Earth, and is located in the constellation Pictor (Pictor is a constellation in the southern celestial hemisphere).

About TESS mission:

- The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is a **NASA mission** that will look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth's sky. It was led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with seed funding from Google.
- **Mission:** The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets. TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure of solar systems outside of our Earth, and provide insights into how our own solar system formed.
- **Orbit:** TESS will occupy a never-before-used orbit high above Earth. The elliptical orbit, called P/2, is exactly half of the moon's orbital period; this means that TESS will orbit Earth every 13.7 days.
- **How it works?** It will use transit method to detect exoplanets. It watches distant stars for small dips in brightness, which can indicate that planet has passed in front of them. Repeated dips will indicate planet passing in front of its star. This data has to be validated by repeated observations and verified by scientists.

Significance of the mission:

- TESS is designed to build on the work of its predecessor, the Kepler space telescope, which discovered the bulk of some 3,700 exoplanets documented during the past 20 years and is running out of fuel.
- Nasa expects to pinpoint thousands more previously unknown worlds, perhaps hundreds of them Earth-sized or "super-Earth" sized – no larger than twice as big as our home planet.
- Those are believed the most likely to feature rocky surfaces or oceans and are thus considered the best candidates for life to evolve. Scientists have said they hope TESS will ultimately help catalog at least 100 more rocky exoplanets for further study in what has become one of astronomy's newest fields of exploration.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. RAMANUJAN MACHINE

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Ramanujan Machine- features, how it works? And what are Conjectures?

Context: Scientists from Technion — Israel Institute of Technology have developed a concept they have named the **Ramanujan Machine**, after the Indian mathematician.

What is it?

- **It is not really a machine but an algorithm**, and performs a very unconventional function.

What it does?

- The Ramanujan machine is more of a concept than an actual machine—it exists as a network of computers running algorithms dedicated to finding conjectures about fundamental constants in the form of continued fractions—these are defined as fractions of infinite length where the denominator is a certain quantity plus a fraction, where a latter fraction has a similar denominator, etc.)
- **The purpose of the machine is to come up with conjectures** (in the form of mathematical formulas) that humans can analyze, and hopefully prove to be true mathematically.

Why Ramanujan?

- The algorithm reflects the way Srinivasa Ramanujan worked during his brief life (1887-1920). With very little formal training, he engaged with the most celebrated mathematicians of the time, particularly during his stay in England (1914-19), where he eventually became a **Fellow of the Royal Society and earned a research degree from Cambridge**.
- Throughout his life, **Ramanujan came up with novel equations and identities —including equations leading to the value of pi** — and it was usually left to formally trained mathematicians to prove these.

What's the point?

- **Conjectures** are a major step in the process of making new discoveries in any branch of science, particularly mathematics. Equations defining the fundamental mathematical constants, including pi, are invariably elegant. New conjectures in mathematics, however, have been scarce and sporadic, the researchers note in their paper, which is currently on a pre-print server. The idea is to enhance and accelerate the process of discovery.

How good is it?

- The paper gives examples for previously unknown equations produced by the algorithm, including for values of the constants pi and e. The Ramanujan Machine proposed these conjecture formulas by matching numerical values, without providing proofs. **It has to be remembered, however, that these are infinite series, and a human can only enter a finite number of terms to test the value of the series.** The question is, therefore, whether the series will fail after a point. The researchers feel this is unlikely, because they tested hundreds of digits.
- Until proven, it remains a conjecture. By the same token, until proven wrong, a conjecture remains one. It is quite possible that the algorithm will come up with conjectures that may take years to prove.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. BLOCK CHAIN TECHNOLOGY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Blockchain technology- what is it? How it operates? Concerns and potential.

What are Blockchains?

- Blockchains are a new data structure that is secure, **cryptography-based, and distributed across a network.**
- The technology **supports cryptocurrencies** such as Bitcoin, and the transfer of any data or digital asset.
- Spearheaded by Bitcoin, blockchains **achieve consensus among distributed nodes, allowing the transfer of digital goods without the need for centralized authorisation of transactions.**

Benefits of blockchain technology:

- As a public ledger system, blockchain records and validate each and every transaction made, which makes it secure and reliable.
- All the transactions made are authorized by miners, which makes the transactions immutable and prevent it from the threat of hacking.
- Blockchain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.
- It allows decentralization of the technology.

How it operates?

- The technology allows transactions to be simultaneously **anonymous and secure, peer-to-peer, instant and frictionless.**
- It does this by distributing trust from powerful intermediaries to a large global network, which through mass collaboration, clever code and cryptography, enables a tamper-proof public ledger of every transaction that's ever happened on the network.
- A block is the "**current**" part of a blockchain which records some or all of the recent transactions, and once completed, goes into the blockchain as permanent database. Each time a block gets completed, a new block is generated. Blocks are linked to each other (like a chain) in proper linear, chronological order with every block containing a hash of the previous block.

What real world problem does blockchain solve?

- As of today nothing, but blockchain backers say it solves the problem of '**trust**'. Because the major cost of any transaction or exchange of services or goods is the act of verification — VISA charges fees to ensure that your card swipe is connected to your account or a property charges you for the effort of ensuring that you are entering into a genuine transaction — blockchain asks you to trust the energy-intensive nature of mathematical problems and have them masquerade them as 'locks' to secure your money, confidential documents or any kind of information.

- While blockchain has the aura of transparency — anybody supposedly can check the history of a ‘block’ — it is at its core impervious to common sense. However, just as the inability to grasp in a visceral sense how letters typed on a mobile phone transform and make their way into another phone instantaneously a continent away does not stop people from using WhatsApp, blockchain technology has created enough hype and drama to have drawn the world’s wealthiest to invest in it and inveigle it into ordinary lives.

How blockchain can be used in public administration?

- Blockchain has the potential to **optimize the delivery of public services**, further India’s fight against corruption, and create considerable value for its citizens.
- By maintaining an immutable and chronologically ordered record of all actions and files (“blocks”) linked together (“chain”) in a distributed and decentralized database, Blockchain creates an efficient and cost-effective database that is virtually tamper-proof. By doing so, blockchain promises to create more transparent, accountable, and efficient governments.
- In addition to creating a more efficient government, blockchain can also help create a more honest government. A public blockchain, like the one Bitcoin uses, records all information and transactions on the decentralized database permanently, publicly, and most importantly, securely. By allowing governments to track the movement of government funds, blockchain can hold state and local actors accountable for any misappropriations.
- Blockchain not only deters corruption through accountability, but it can also do so by bypassing the middleman entirely. Earlier this year, the World Food Programme began testing blockchain-based food and cash transactions in Pakistan’s Sindh province. Refugees in Jordan’s Azraq camp are now using the same technology, in conjunction with biometric registration data for authentication, to pay for food.
- With Aadhaar cards becoming nearly ubiquitous in India, adopting blockchain could be the next logical step in India’s pursuit of becoming a digital economy. Blockchain can play an important role in storing individuals’ data, helping conduct secure transactions, maintaining a permanent and private identity record, and turning India into a digital society.

Way ahead:

- Technology has always proved to be disruptive, creating new opportunities and jobs and destroying old ones. If blockchain’s appeal lies in its appeal to destroy intermediaries — banks, courts, lawyers — it is unlikely to be smooth sailing.
- Moreover, there is already serious theorising by economists that shows how blockchain has its own vulnerabilities and susceptibility to creating new hegemons, power networks, cartels and challenges to global energy consumption.

Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) What do you understand by blockchain technology? Evaluate its prospects and challenges.

3. AUTOMATED FACIAL RECOGNITION SYSTEM (AFRS)

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: AFRS- features, need, concerns and significance.

Context: On June 28, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) released a Request for Proposal for an Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS) to be used by police officers across the country.

What is automated facial recognition?

- AFRS works by maintaining a large database with photos and videos of peoples’ faces. Then, a new image of an unidentified person — often taken from CCTV footage — is compared to the existing database to find a match and identify the person. The artificial intelligence technology used for pattern-finding and matching is called “**neural networks**”.

What does the NCRB request call for?

- The NCRB, which manages crime data for police, would like to use automated facial recognition to identify criminals, missing people, and unidentified dead bodies, as well as for “crime prevention”.

- Its Request for Proposal calls for gathering CCTV footage, as well as photos from newspapers, raids, and sketches.
- The project is aimed at being compatible with other biometrics such as iris and fingerprints.
- It will be a mobile and web application hosted in NCRB's Data Centre in Delhi, but used by all police stations in the country. "Automated Facial Recognition System can play a very vital role in improving outcomes in the area of Criminal identification and verification by facilitating easy recording, analysis, retrieval and sharing of Information between different organisations."

How will the new database fit in what already exists?

- NCRB has proposed integrating this facial recognition system with multiple existing databases. The most prominent is the NCRB-managed **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS)**. Facial recognition has been proposed in the CCTNS program since its origin.
- The idea is that integration of fingerprint database, face recognition software and iris scans will massively boost the police department's crime investigation capabilities. It will also help civilian verification when needed. No one will be able to get away with a fake ID.
- It also plans to offer citizen services, such as passport verification, crime reporting, online tracking of case progress, grievance reporting against police officers, and more.
- The new facial recognition system will also be integrated with Integrated Criminal Justice System (ICJS), as well as state-specific systems, the Immigration, Visa and Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT), and the Koya Paya portal on missing children.

Concerns:

- Cyber experts across the world have cautioned against government abuse of facial recognition technology, as it can be used as tool of control and risks inaccurate results.
- Amid NCRB's controversial step to install an automated facial recognition system, India should take note of the ongoing privacy debate in the US.
- In the absence of data protection law, Indian citizens are more vulnerable to privacy abuses.
- Use of surveillance cameras and facial recognition constrict the rights of particular class of people.
- In the US, the FBI and Department of State operate one of the largest facial recognition systems.
- International organisations have also condemned the Chinese government on its use of surveillance cameras and facial recognition to constrict the rights of Uighurs, a mostly Muslim minority.
- The AFRS is being contemplated at a time when **India does not have a data protection law**. In the absence of safeguards, law enforcement agencies will have a high degree of discretion. This can lead to a mission creep. The Personal Data Protection Bill 2018 is yet to come into force, and even if it does, the exceptions contemplated for state agencies are extremely wide.

Need of the hour:

- The notion that sophisticated technology means greater efficiency needs to be critically analysed. A deliberative approach will benefit Indian law enforcement, as police departments around the world are currently learning that the technology is not as useful in practice as it seems in theory.
- Police departments in London are under pressure to put a complete end to use of facial recognition systems following evidence of discrimination and inefficiency. San Francisco recently implemented a complete ban on police use of facial recognition. India would do well to learn from their mistakes.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. GI CERTIFICATION

What to study?

- For Prelims: GI tags and about Rasagulla and controversy surrounding its origin.
- For Mains: Significance of GI tags.

Context: Odisha has bagged the geographical indication (GI) tag for its local version of "**Rasagola**".

- This GI tag, numbered 612, is the second for Odisha. **It got its first GI tag for Kandhamal Haldi.**

Background:

- This tag comes amid a years-long debate between West Bengal and Odisha over where the sweet had originated.
- West Bengal and Odisha had staked their claim on **GI tag for Rasagola**. In 2017, West Bengal secured the GI tag for its "**Banglar Rasogolla**".
- Bengalis claim that the Rasgulla was invented in the 19th century by Nobin Chandra Das at his Bagbazar residence in Kolkata, while Odias believe that the tradition of Niladri Bije where Rasgulla is offered started in the 12th century.
- Now with Odisha also securing a certificate for a similar but somewhat differently named delicacy, it seems both will be relishing the sweet end.

About GI tag:

- A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.

Significance of a GI tag:

- Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

Security:

- Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.
- **Provisions in this regard:** GI is covered as element of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under **Paris Convention for Protection of Industrial Property**.
- At international level, **GI is governed by WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)**. In India, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999 governs it.

Sources: the hindu.

Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. FLY ASH

What to study?

- For prelims: What is fly ash, how is it produced and where it can be used?
- For mains: Concerns associated with its contamination, what needs to be done and legislative measures necessary.

Context: The National Green Tribunal has sought a report from the authorities on the current status on disposal and management of fly ash. The report has been sought, following a plea alleging unscientific handling of fly ash generated by a unit of NTPC.

What is Fly Ash?

- Fly ash is a major source of PM 2.5 (fine, respirable pollution particles) in summer. It becomes air borne, and gets transported to a radius of 10 to 20 kms.
- It can settle on water and other surfaces.
- **Fly ash contains heavy metals** from coal, a large amount of PM 2.5 and black carbon (BC).
- Proper disposal of fly ash is still not happening in many places.

What can be done?

- Fly ash, **the end product of combustion during the process of power generation in the coal based thermal power plants**, is a proven **resource material for many applications of construction industries** and currently is being utilized in manufacturing of Portland Cement, bricks/blocks/tiles manufacturing, road embankment construction and low-lying area development, etc.

- At present, 63% of the fly ash is being utilised and target is for 100% utilisation of the fly ash. **There is need for education and awareness generation.**
- Road contractors and construction engineers need to know the benefits of using fly ash in construction.**
- Measures need to be taken **to reduce the cost of construction of roads using fly ash by way of tax structure, subsidies and transportation services.**
- Besides, there is a **need to prevent the ash from coming to the power plant by washing the coal at its place of origin.** The government should also come out with a policy to encourage fly ash use in cement plant.

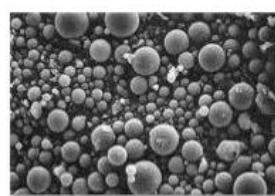
Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What is fly ash? In the past few years concerns have been raised over its environmental impact from several quarters. What are these concerns? How they can be addressed? Examine.

What is Coal Fly Ash?



One of the by-products of burning coal



Good structural qualities

Contains heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, and radioactive solids

Currently, not considered hazardous by EPA (subject to change)

2. CORAL REHAB PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: coral bleaching- causes, effect and various ways to restore.

Why in News? The **National Centre for Coastal Research's (NCCR)** proposal of dropping 'melted plastic rocks or slabs' on the seabed for growing coral reefs and address the problem of disposal of plastic waste has drawn criticism from the Gulf of Mannar (GoM) Marine National Park, which has been implementing **coral rehabilitation programme** since 2002.

What's the issue?

- The NCCR suggested that plastic waste materials could simply be wound around as hard substrates as a way of disposing of them and help build coral colonies.
- Therefore, researchers have expressed apprehensions that the NCCR's 'innovative idea' for the growth of marine organisms like algae for coral reefs building would destroy the existing coral reef colonies.
- Corals in the GoM were already stressed and bleached under climate change and the NCCR's idea would turn the reefs into graveyards.

About the Coral Rehabilitation Programme:

- The GoM Marine National Park has been implementing the corral rehabilitation programme since 2002.
- It has so far covered eight sq km areas in GoM region, where coral reefs suffered bleaching and degradation due to climate change and high temperature.
- The program employs 'concrete frame slabs' method.
- Corals would start growing in 60 days using the concrete frames as sub-state. The acropora coral species grow by 10 to 12 cm per year on these slabs.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Kalasa- Banduri project.
- For Mains: All about EIA.

Context: State-level officers tasked with environmental assessment have objected to several clauses in a draft law that proposes the creation of district-level environment impact assessment authorities.

What's the issue?

- The proposed Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2019, makes the District Magistrate (DM) the chairperson of an expert authority, or the District Environment Impact Assessment Authority (DEIAA), that will accord environment clearance for “minor” mining projects.
- District Magistrate (DM) in the State is also the ‘District Mining officer’ who is tasked with executing mining licence deeds. These officers usually had a “target” to collect revenues from mining activities. Making the DM the chairman (of the DEIAA) would be self-serving for grant of environmental clearance.

About EIA:

- Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is a formal process used to predict the environmental consequences of any development project. Environment Impact Assessment in India is statutory backed by the Environment Protection Act in 1986, which contains various provisions on EIA methodology and process.
- **Rationale behind EIA:** EIA looks into various problems, conflicts and natural resource constraints which may not only affect the viability of a project but also predict if a project might harm to the people, their land, livelihoods and environment. Once these potential harmful impacts are predicted, the EIA process identifies the measures to minimize those impacts.
- **The objective of the EIA is to:** Identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project prior to taking a decision on its implementation. Mitigation of harmful impacts and maximizes the beneficial effects.
- **Once the assessment is complete, the EIA findings are communicated to all stakeholders** viz. developers, investors, regulators, planners, politicians, affected communities etc. On the basis of the conclusion of EIA process, the government can decide if a project should be given environment clearance or not. The developers and investors can also shape the project in such a way that its harms can be mitigated and benefits can be maximized.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. IS DESALINATION REALISTICALLY A HELP IN HARNESSING POTABLE WATER FROM THE SEA?

- **Context:** With warnings from India’s top policy-makers and reports of major cities in India struggling to stave off a water crisis, there’s talk about exploring the idea of desalination, or obtaining freshwater from salt water.

What is desalination technology?

- To convert salt water into freshwater, the most prevalent technology in the world is reverse osmosis (RO).
- **How it works?** A plant pumps in salty or brackish water, filters separate the salt from the water, and the salty water is returned to the sea. Fresh water is sent to households.
- Seawater has Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) — a measure of salinity — close to 35,000 parts per million (ppm), or equivalent to 35 g of salt per one litre/kg of water. An effective network of RO plants reduce this down to about 200-500 ppm.
- **Challenges:** Engineering RO desalination plants have to factor in various constraints, for instance, salt levels in the source water that is to be treated, the energy required for the treatment and disposing of the salt back into the sea.

Osmosis and RO:

- **Osmosis** involves ‘a solvent (such as water) naturally moving from an area of low solute concentration, through a membrane, to an area of high solute concentration.
- A reverse osmosis system applies an external pressure to reverse the natural flow of solvent and so seawater or brackish water is pressurised against one surface of the membrane, causing salt-depleted water to move across the membrane, releasing clean water from the low-pressure side’.

How popular is it in India?

- Years of water crises in Chennai saw the government set up two desalination plants between 2010 and 2013. Each supplies 100 million litres a day (MLD); together they meet little under a fourth of the city’s water

requirement of 830 MLD. Buoyed by the success of these plants, the city's water authorities are planning to install two more plants.

- Last year, **Gujarat** announced plans of setting up a 100 MLD RO plant at the Jodiya coast in Jamnagar district. This would go a long way in 'solving' the water availability problems in the drought-prone Saurashtra region.
- **Other plants of a similar size are expected to come up in Dwarka, Kutch, Dahej, Somnath, Bhavnagar and Pipavav**, which are all coastal places in Gujarat.
- There are also a slew of desalination plants that cater to industrial purposes. For now, India's real-world experience with desalination plants is restricted to Chennai.

What are the problems with RO plants?

- **Deposition of brine** (highly concentrated salt water) along the shores.
- **Hyper salinity along the shore affects plankton, which is the main food for several of these fish species.**
- The high pressure motors needed to draw in the seawater end up **sucking in small fish and life forms, thereby crushing and killing them** — again a loss of marine resource.
- Construction of the RO plants required **troves of groundwater**. This was freshwater that was sucked out and has since been replaced by salt water, rendering it unfit for the residents around the desalination plants.
- **Cost and time:** On an average, it costs about ₹900 crore to build a 100 MLD-plant and, as the Chennai experience has shown, about five years for a plant to be set up.
- **To remove the salt required, there has to be a source of electricity**, either a power plant or a diesel or battery source. Estimates have put this at about 4 units of electricity per 1,000 litres of water. It is estimated that it cost ₹3 to produce 100 litres of potable water.

Is RO water healthy?

- In the early days of RO technology, there were concerns that desalinated water was shorn of vital minerals such as calcium, magnesium, zinc, sodium, potassium and carbonates. They are collectively referred to as **TDS. Higher quantities of these salts in desalination plants tend to corrode the Seawater has Total Dissolved Solids (TDS)**— a measure of salinity — close to 35,000 parts per million (ppm), or equivalent to 35 g of salt per one litre/kg of water. An effective network of RO plants reduce this down to about 200-500 ppm. and filtration system in these plants. So ideally, a treatment plant would try to keep the TDS as low as possible. Highly desalinated water has a TDS of less than **50 milligrams per litre, is pure, but does not taste like water**. Anything from 100 mg/l to 600 mg/l is considered as good quality potable water.
- Most RO plants put the water through a '**post-treatment**' process whereby salts are added to make TDS around 300 mg/l.

Are there technological alternatives?

- **Low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technique** works on the principle that water in the ocean 1,000 or 2,000 feet below is about 4° C to 8° C colder than surface water. So, salty surface water is collected in a tank and subject to high pressure (via an external power source). This pressured water vapourises and this is trapped in tubes or a chamber. Cold water plumbed from the ocean depths is passed over these tubes and the vapour condenses into fresh water and the resulting salt diverted away.
- **Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion:** It will draw power from the vapour generated as a part of the desalination process. This vapour will run a turbine and thereby will be independent of an external power source. While great in theory, there is no guarantee it will work commercially. For one, this ocean-based plant requires a pipe that needs to travel 50 kilometres underground in the sea before it reaches the mainland.

5. PICKING OUT PLASTIC: ON RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

- **Context:** Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has put 52 producers, brand owners and importers on notice, **for failing to take responsibility for their plastic waste.**

What's the issue?

- It is eight years since the concept of **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) was incorporated into the Plastic Waste Management Rules**, but municipal and pollution control authorities have failed to persuade commercial giants to put in place a system to collect and process the waste.

- Tighter rules in 2016 and some amendments two years later put the onus on producers and brand owners to come up with an action plan for the retrieval of waste within six months to a year, but that too failed to take off.

Concerns:

- Mountains of garbage with a heavy plastic load have been growing in suburban landfills, out of sight of city dwellers. Without determined steps, the crisis is certain to worsen.
- Given the role played by packaging, the waste management problem is likely to become alarming.

Need of the hour:

- The two prongs of the solution are packaging innovation that reduces its use by using alternatives, and upscaling waste segregation, collection and transmission.
- Recovering materials from garbage should be a high priority, considering that India is the third highest consumer of materials after China and the U.S.; the Economic Survey 2019 estimates that India's demand for total material will double by 2030 at current rates of growth.
- Plastics may be less expensive than other inputs in manufacturing, but recycling them into new products extends their life and provides a substitute for virgin material.
- Keeping them out of the environment reduces clean-up and pollution costs. Companies can form waste cooperatives in India, employing informal waste-pickers.
- Making municipal and pollution control authorities accountable is also equally important.

6. JALYUKTA SHIVAR

What to study?

- For prelims: Key features of the programme.
- For mains: Water scarcity problem in India and Maharashtra in particular, causes, challenges and measures proposed.

What is Jalyukta Shivar?

- It is the flagship programme of the Maharashtra government launched in December 2014.
- Aim: To make 5,000 villages free of water scarcity.

Implementation:

- The scheme targets drought-prone areas by improving water conservation measures in order to make them more water sustainable. The scheme envisages to arrest maximum run-off water, especially during the monsoon months, in village areas known to receive less rainfall, annually.
- Under the scheme, decentralised water bodies were installed at various locations within villages to enhance the groundwater recharge.
- It also proposed to strengthen and rejuvenate water storage capacity and percolation of tanks and other sources of storage.
- Dedicated committees were formed to assist in construction of watersheds like farm ponds, cement nullah bunds alongside rejuvenating the existing water bodies in the villages.

Why was the scheme introduced?

- About 82 per cent area of Maharashtra falls in rainfed sector while 52 per cent of area is drought prone. This, when coupled with natural rainfall variability and long dry spells during the monsoons, severely hampers agriculture activities.

How does this intervention work?

- Under the scheme, water streams in a locality are deepened and widened, which would later be connected to the newly constructed chains of cement nullah bunds in the village.
- Besides, efforts would be made to arrest and store water in small earthen dams and farm ponds in such areas. While new interventions are made, maintenance of existing sources like canals and all kinds of wells would be undertaken.

- Activities like desilting of water conservation structures and repairs of canals are undertaken to help improve water storage and percolation at the site.
- Additionally, recharge of dug and tubewells would be taken up in specific locations.
- Real time information of water availability due to such interventions would be gathered from each village of every tehsil from all districts and the same would be fed into a common portal.

What are the outcomes of the scheme?

Long- term outcomes:

- To strengthen the rural economy, which continues to be largely agriculture-driven.
- Improve farmer income by addressing the basic problem pertaining to availability of water for farming or irrigation purposes.
- Reducing water scarcity in villages that have limited natural supply.
- Improving in risk management or becoming drought resilient and improving water availability through effective management.

Short- term outcomes:

- Reduction in the run-off water and diverting it to some kind of storage.
- Increasing water storage capacity.
- Increasing the rate of groundwater recharge.
- Enhancing soil fertility and ultimately, improving farm productivity.

Sources: Indian Express.

7. BOTANICAL SURVEY OF INDIA HAS COME UP WITH THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE CENSUS OF ORCHIDS OF INDIA- KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Total number of orchid species or taxa to 1,256.

Orchids can be broadly categorised into three life forms:

1. **epiphytic** (plants growing on another plants including those growing on rock boulders and often termed lithophyte).
2. **terrestrial** (plants growing on land and climbers).
3. **mycoheterotrophic** (plants which derive nutrients from mycorrhizal fungi that are attached to the roots of a vascular plant).

Distribution:

- About 60% of all orchids found in the country, which is 757 species, are epiphytic, 447 are terrestrial and 43 are mycoheterotrophic.
- The epiphytic orchids are abundant up to 1800 m above the sea level and their occurrence decreases with the increase in altitude.
- Terrestrial orchids, which grow directly on soil, are found in large numbers in temperate and alpine region whereas mycoheterotrophic orchids, mostly associated with ectomycorrhizal fungi, are found in temperate regions, or are found growing with parasites in tropical regions.

State-wise distribution:

- Himalayas, North-East parts of the country and Western Ghats are the hot-spots of the beautiful plant species.
- The highest number of orchid species is recorded from Arunachal Pradesh with 612 species, followed by Sikkim 560 species and West Bengal; Darjeeling Himalayas have also high species concentration, with 479 species.
- While north-east India rank at the top in species concentration, the Western Ghats have high endemism of orchids.
- Kerala has 111 of these endemic species while Tamil Nadu has 92 of them.
- Among the 10 bio geographic zones of India, the Himalayan zone is the richest in terms of orchid species followed by Northeast, Western Ghats, Deccan plateau and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

- **Protection:** The entire orchid family is listed under **appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)** and hence any trade of wild orchid is banned globally.

8. BLUE FLAG PROJECT

- **Context:** The Union Environment Ministry has selected 12 beaches in India to vie for a '**Blue Flag**' certification, an international recognition conferred on beaches that meet certain criteria of cleanliness and environmental propriety.
- **These beaches are at** Shivrajpur (Gujarat), Bhogave (Maharashtra), Ghoghla (Diu), Miramar (Goa), Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka), Kappad (Kerala), Eden (Puducherry), Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu), Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh), Golden (Odisha), and Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands).

Criteria:

- There are nearly 33 criteria that must be met to qualify for a Blue Flag certification, such as the water meeting certain quality standards, having waste disposal facilities, being disabled-friendly, have first aid equipment, and no access to pets in the main areas of the beach. Some criteria are voluntary and some compulsory.

Sources: the Hindu.

About Blue flag programme:

- The Blue Flag Programme for beaches and marinas is run by the international, non-governmental, non-profit organisation **FEE (the Foundation for Environmental Education)**.
- It started in France in 1985 and has been implemented in Europe since 1987, and in areas outside Europe since 2001, when South Africa joined. **Japan and South Korea are the only countries in South and southeastern Asia to have Blue Flag beaches. Spain tops the list with 566 such beaches; Greece and France follow with 515 and 395, respectively.**

9. THE WHEELS TO A LOW-CARBON TRANSPORT SYSTEM

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Impact of road transport system on climate change and measures needed to reverse this trend.

Context: Studies show that India's road transport emissions are **small in global comparison but increasing exponentially**. In fact, the **Global Carbon Project** reports that India's carbon emissions are rising more than **two times as fast as the global rise in 2018**.

Background:

- Globally, the transport sector accounts for a quarter of total emissions, out of which three quarters are from road transport.

Why reduce CO₂ emissions from road transport?

- Reducing CO₂ emissions of road transport leverages multiple co-benefits, for example, improving air quality and increasing physical activity, which are critical for well-being, particularly in urban areas.

What needs to be done?

- The action requires an understanding of how **emissions vary with spatial context**. In India, **income and urbanisation are the key determinants of travel distance and travel mode choice and, therefore, commuting emissions**.
- **Mayors and town planners should organise cities around public transport and cycling**, thereby improving mobility for many, while limiting car use.
- **India should double down in its strategy to transition to electric two and three-wheelers**. India is the third-largest market for automobiles; about 25 million internal combustion engines were sold in 2017, including about 20 million two-wheelers.
- **Compact cities improve accessibility and reduce emissions** from transport and even the building sector. City managers should ensure that existing urban areas provide short routes and fast access to schools, hospitals and jobs, otherwise, residents would be required to travel long distances.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. IUCN RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Categorization of IUCN red list, features and criteria, recent additions from India to the list.

Context: The latest update to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species shows that more and more species assessed are being threatened with extinction.

- The IUCN Red List assesses 1,05,732 species. The current update breaks the 1,00,000 species barrier, making it the largest such assessment of species.
- According to the new updated list, **28,338 species are threatened with extinction.**

Key findings:

- Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history — and the rate of species extinction is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely.
- According to the global assessment, one million animal and plant species are under extinction. Moreover, thousands of these would extinct within decades.
- The new list brings out an alarming rate of decline of freshwater and deep-sea species. For example, over 50 per cent of Japan's endemic freshwater fishes are under extinction. The main drivers of this decline are the loss of free-flowing rivers and increasing agricultural and urban pollution.

About IUCN red list of threatened species:

- The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species.
- It uses a set of quantitative criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species. These criteria are relevant to most species and all regions of the world. With its strong scientific base, The IUCN Red List is recognized as the most authoritative guide to the status of biological diversity.

The IUCN Red List Categories:

- The IUCN Red List Categories define the extinction risk of species assessed. Nine categories extend from NE (Not Evaluated) to EX (Extinct).
- Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) and Vulnerable (VU) species are considered to be threatened with extinction.

The IUCN system uses a set of five quantitative criteria to assess the extinction risk of a given species. In general, these criteria consider:

- The rate of population decline.
- The geographic range.
- Whether the species already possesses a small population size.
- Whether the species is very small or lives in a restricted area.
- Whether the results of a quantitative analysis indicate a high probability of extinction in the wild.

Significance:

- The IUCN Red List brings into focus the ongoing decline of Earth's biodiversity and the influence humans have on life on the planet. It provides a globally accepted standard with which to measure the conservation status of species over time.
- Scientists can analyze the percentage of species in a given category and how these percentages change over time; they can also analyze the threats and conservation measures that underpin the observed trends.

Sources: the hindu.

11. INDIAN FOREST ACT AMENDMENT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Indian Forest Act and amendments.
- For Mains: Need for review and the expected outcomes.

Context: Across India, activists for tribal rights have said the proposed IFA amendments will divest tribals and other forest-dwelling communities of their rights over forest land and resources.

Highlights of the draft amendments:

- The amendment defines **community** as “**a group of persons specified on the basis of government records living in a specific locality and in joint possession and enjoyment of common property resources, without regard to race, religion, caste, language and culture**”.
- **Forest is defined to include** “any government or private or institutional land recorded or notified as forest/forest land in any government record and the lands managed by government/community as forest and mangroves, and also any land which the central or state government may by notification declare to be forest for the purpose of this Act.”
- While the preamble of IFA, 1927, said the Act was focused on laws related to transport of forest produce and the tax on it, the **amendment has increased the focus to** “conservation, enrichment and sustainable management of forest resources and matters connected therewith to safeguard ecological stability to ensure provision of ecosystem services in perpetuity and to address the concerns related to climate change and international commitments”.
- **Increased role of states:** The amendments say if the state government, after consultation with the central government, feels that the rights under FRA will hamper conservation efforts, then the state “may commute such rights by paying such persons a sum of money in lieu thereof, or grant of land, or in such other manner as it thinks fit, to maintain the social organisation of the forest dwelling communities or alternatively set out some other forest tract of sufficient extent, and in a locality reasonably convenient, for the purpose of such forest dwellers”.
- **The amendment also introduces a new category of forests — production forest.** These will be forests with specific objectives for production of timber, pulp, pulpwood, firewood, non-timber forest produce, medicinal plants or any forest species to increase production in the country for a specified period.

Concerns with regard to the present Draft Bill:

- The draft Bill reinforces the idea of bureaucratic control of forests, providing immunity for actions such as use of firearms by personnel to prevent an offence.
- The hard-line policing approach is reflected in the emphasis on creating infrastructure to detain and transport the accused.
- To penalise entire communities through denial of access to forests for offences by individuals. Such provisions invariably affect poor inhabitants, and run counter to the empowering and egalitarian goals that produced the Forest Rights Act.
- For decades now, the Forest Department has resisted independent scientific evaluation of forest health and biodiversity conservation outcomes. In parallel, environmental policy has weakened public scrutiny of decisions on diversion of forests for destructive activities such as mining and large dam construction.
- Impact assessment reports have mostly been reduced to a farce, and the public hearings process has been undermined.
- The exclusion of ‘village forestry’ from the preview of Forest Right Act (forest official supersedes Gram Sabha) is legally contradictory and would add confusion on the ground.

Indian Forest Act, 1927:

- The Indian Forest Act, 1927 was largely based on previous Indian Forest Acts implemented under the British. The most famous one was the Indian Forest Act of 1878.
- Both the 1878 act and the 1927 one sought to consolidate and reserve the areas having forest cover, or significant wildlife, to regulate movement and transit of forest produce, and duty leviable on timber and other forest produce.
- It also defines the procedure to be followed for declaring an area to be a **Reserved Forest**, a **Protected Forest** or a **Village Forest**.
- It defines what a forest offence is, what are the acts prohibited inside a Reserved Forest, and penalties leviable on violation of the provisions of the Act.

- The draft mentions that the state governments could take away the rights of the forest dwellers if the government feels it is not in line with “conservation of the proposed reserved forest” by payment to the people impacted or by the grant of land.

The need for review:

- Many reports like the MB Shah report of 2010 and the TSR Subramanian report of 2015, have talked about amending the IFA.

Sources: the Hindu.

12. BIOFUELS

What to study?

- For Prelims: National Biofuel Policy- key features, classification of biofuels.
- For Mains: Biofuels- significance, policies for their promotion and challenges therein.

Context: The Government has allowed the direct sale of biodiesel (B100) for blending with high speed diesel to all consumers, in accordance with the specified blending limits and the standards specified by the Bureau of Indian Standards, with effect from 29th June, 2017.

Background:

- The **National Policy on Biofuels-2018** approved by the Government envisages an indicative target of **20% blending of ethanol in petrol and 5% blending of bio-diesel in diesel by 2030**.

National Policy on biofuels- salient features:

- Categorization:** The Policy categorises biofuels as “Basic Biofuels” viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and “Advanced Biofuels” – Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.
- Scope of raw materials:** The Policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.
- Protection to farmers:** Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.
- Viability gap funding:** With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.
- Boost to biodiesel production:** The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.

Expected benefits:

- Import dependency:** The policy aims at reducing import dependency.
- Cleaner environment:** By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be further reduction in Green House Gas emissions.
- Health benefits:** Prolonged reuse of Cooking Oil for preparing food, particularly in deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. Used Cooking Oil is a potential feedstock for biodiesel and its use for making biodiesel will prevent diversion of used cooking oil in the food industry.
- Employment Generation:** One 100klpd 2G bio refinery can contribute 1200 jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.
- Additional Income to Farmers:** By adopting 2G technologies, agricultural residues/waste which otherwise are burnt by the farmers can be converted to ethanol and can fetch a price for these waste if a market is developed for the same.

Significance of Biofuels:

- Globally, biofuels have caught the attention in last decade and it is imperative to keep up with the pace of developments in the field of biofuels.
- Biofuels in India are of strategic importance as it augers well with the ongoing initiatives of the Government such as Make in India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill Development and offers great opportunity to integrate with the ambitious targets of doubling of Farmers Income, Import Reduction, Employment Generation, Waste to Wealth Creation.

Classification of Biofuels:

- **1st generation biofuels** are also called conventional biofuels. They are made from things like sugar, starch, or vegetable oil. Note that these are all food products. Any biofuel made from a feedstock that can also be consumed as a human food is considered a first-generation biofuel.
- **2nd generation biofuels** are produced from sustainable feedstock. The sustainability of a feedstock is defined by its availability, its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on land use, and by its potential to threaten the food supply. No second generation biofuel is also a food crop, though certain food products can become second generation fuels when they are no longer useful for consumption. Second generation biofuels are often called “advanced biofuels.”
- **3rd generation biofuels** are biofuel derived from algae. These biofuels are given their own separate class because of their unique production mechanism and their potential to mitigate most of the drawbacks of 1st and 2nd generation biofuels.

(Q) Discuss the importance of biofuels for India? Critically examine whether the national policy on biofuels will help India unlock its biofuel potential?

13. INTERNATIONAL TIGER DAY: 29 JULY

What to study?

- For Prelims: International Tiger Day- significance and theme, Tiger population- state- wise, country- wise and other key facts, Important tiger reserves, M- Stripes.
- For Mains: Dwindling tiger population- causes, concerns and conservation efforts- both national and international.

Context: Global Tiger Day, often called **International Tiger Day**, is an annual celebration to raise awareness for tiger conservation, held annually on **29 July**.

- It was **created in 2010 at the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit**.
- The **goal of the day** is to promote a global system for protecting the natural habitats of tigers and to raise public awareness and support for tiger conservation issues.

4th cycle of all India Tiger Estimation:

- On the eve Global Tiger Day, a census report of tigers in India-‘**The Tiger Estimation Report 2018**’- has been released.

Key findings:

- 2967 tigers are present in India. Highest number of tigers have found in **Madhya Pradesh** (526), after that Karnataka has 524 and Uttarakhand is accommodating 442 tigers.
- In five years, the number of protected areas increased from 692 to over 860, community reserves from 43 to over 100.
- While the 2014 census pegged the total number of striped big cats in the country at 2,226, the 2010 census put the figure at 1,706 and the 2006 version at 1,411, indicating that tiger numbers have been on the up.
- While Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest number of tigers, Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu registered the “maximum improvement” since 2014.
- Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in their tiger numbers while tiger numbers in Odisha remained constant. All other states witnessed a positive trend.

Tiger protection in India- Concerns and challenges:

- India has one of the **lowest per capita forest areas** in the world. Depletion of forests is responsible for reduction of tiger habitats.
- **Reduced food base:** As forestlands fall to development projects, habitable land for animals that make for the tiger's food base are also reduced.
- **Poaching:** Another issue that has hindered tiger conservation in India and globally is poaching, which will persist as long as there is an illegal market for tiger body parts.
- **Climate change:** Rising sea level as a result of climate change is on the verge of wiping out Sundarbans, one of the last remaining habitats of the Bengal tigers.

Conservation efforts:

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has launched the **M-STIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers – Intensive Protection and Ecological Status)**, a mobile monitoring system for forest guards.
- At the **Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010**, leaders of 13 tiger range countries resolved to do more for the tiger and embarked on efforts **to double its number in the wild, with a popular slogan 'T X 2'**.
- The **Global Tiger Initiative (GTI)** program of the World Bank, using its presence and convening ability, brought global partners together to strengthen the tiger agenda.
- Over the years, the initiative has institutionalised itself as a separate entity in the form of the **Global Tiger Initiative Council (GTIC), with its two arms** –the Global Tiger Forum and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program.
- The **Project Tiger**, launched way back in 1973, has grown to more than 50 reserves amounting to almost 2.2% of the country's geographical area.

Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) The centrality of tiger agenda is an ecological necessity for the sustainability of our environment. In this context, examine the steps taken by India to conserve tigers?

14. EFFECTS OF EL NIÑO AND ANTARCTIC OSCILLATION ON AIR POLLUTION

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Causes and effects of El Niño and Antarctic Oscillation on pollution levels.

Context: Team of researchers affiliated with various institutions in China and the U.S. has discovered that **data from El Niño and Antarctic Oscillation events can be used to foretell air pollution levels in northern India.**

Background:

- In recent years, northern India has experienced poor air quality, significantly in the winter months, to the extent that the nation has some of the worst air quality in the world—surpassing even China. Researchers have additionally found that **in some years, pollution ranges appear worse than regular because of weather conditions.**

Key findings:

- El Niño occasions tend to end in lowered wind speeds within the area, which **prevented airborne pollutants from moving out of densely populated areas.**
- Antarctic Oscillation occasions create stronger winds in some components of northern India and weaken them in others, resulting in **uneven impacts on pollution levels.**

Significance:

- The model they have developed shows 75% accuracy in predicting pollution levels, and the prediction can be done even a season in advance.
- India has been emerging as one of the world's most polluted countries, with particulate matter PM 2.5 levels spiking more than 999 microgram per cubic metre in parts of Delhi last year.
- Studying a combination of El Niño, Antarctic Oscillation and the anomalies in sea surface temperature during autumn (September-November), can help forecast the pollution conditions in winter (December-February).
- The statistical model developed by the team can also help the government in adjusting policies and strategies for pollution control before winter comes, the paper published in Science Advances adds.

What is Antarctic Oscillation?

- The Antarctic oscillation (AAO) is a **low-frequency mode of atmospheric variability of the southern hemisphere**.
- It is also known as the **Southern Annular Mode (SAM)**.
- It is defined as a **belt of westerly winds or low pressure surrounding Antarctica which moves north or south as its mode of variability**.
- In its positive phase, the westerly wind belt that drives the Antarctic Circumpolar Current intensifies and contracts towards Antarctica, while its negative phase involves this belt moving towards the Equator.
- Effects: Winds associated with the Southern Annular Mode cause oceanic upwelling of warm circumpolar deep water along the Antarctic continental shelf, which has been linked to ice shelf basal melt, representing a possible wind-driven mechanism that could destabilize large portions of the Antarctic Ice Sheet.

Sources: the Hindu.

LEARN MORE BY **TAKING TESTS!**

Yearlong Mains Test series – 2020

SUBSCRIBE NOW!



*T&C Apply



Subscribe now at

mains.insightsactivelearn.com | www.insightsonindia.com

1. WHY ASSAM IS PRONE TO FLOODS AND WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

- **Context:** Assam is in the grip of yet another flood.

Why are floods so destructive in Assam?

- Apart from incessant rainfall during the monsoon, **there are many contributory factors, natural and man-made.**
- At the crux is the very nature of the river **Brahmaputra** —dynamic and unstable. Its 580,000 sq km basin spreads over four countries: China, India, Bangladesh and Bhutan, with diverse environments.
- The Brahmaputra features among the world's top five rivers in terms of discharge as well as the **sediment** it brings.
- The vast amount of sediment comes from Tibet, where the river originates. That region is cold, arid and lacks plantation. Glaciers melt, soil erodes and all of it results in a **highly sedimented river**.
- By the time the river enters Assam — a state comprising primarily floodplains surrounded by hills on all sides — **it deposits vast amounts of this silt, leading to erosion and floods**. As the river comes from a high slope to a flat plain, its velocity decreases suddenly and this results in the river unloading the sediment. **The river's channels prove inadequate amid this siltation, leading to floods.**
- Again, because of the **earthquake-prone nature of the region**, the river has not been able to acquire a stable character. Following the devastating earthquake of 1950, the level of the Brahmaputra rose by two metres in Dibrugarh area in eastern Assam.
- Besides these natural factors are the **man-made ones — habitation, deforestation, population growth in catchment areas (including in China)** — which lead to higher sedimentation. For example, the sediment deposition itself creates temporary sandbars or river islands.
- It is common for people to settle in such places, which restricts the space the river has to flow. When rainfall is heavy, it combines with all these factors and leads to destructive floods. This happens very frequently.

Has the government tried to address the factors that cause floods?

- In its master plan on the river in 1982, the Brahmaputra Board had suggested that **dams and reservoirs be built to mitigate floods**. The idea of dams, however, has traditionally been a double-edged sword. While one of their objectives is to regulate the release of flood waters, the release when it comes can sometimes be beyond the capacity of the channels downstream. In the Brahmaputra basin, locals and environmentalists protested against dam-building plans on grounds of displacement and destruction of ecology, preventing the plans from moving forward.
- As such, the government has been using only one approach towards floods: **building embankments on the river**. Embankments were proposed only as an interim and ad hoc measure for short-term mitigation. Their lack of durability has often been on display. Most embankments built in the 1980s are not strong enough. Since they were temporary measures, the government did not spend on high-specification embankments. These are weak and are regularly breached.
- The government also considered **dredging**, basically digging up the riverbed and making the river “deeper”. However, experts have strongly advised against this simply because the Brahmaputra sediment yield is among the highest in the world.

What's the issue?

- The government's measures have been “**piecemeal**” and “**short-term**”. They are not addressing the problem at the source — they are firefighting.

But, is there a long-term solution?

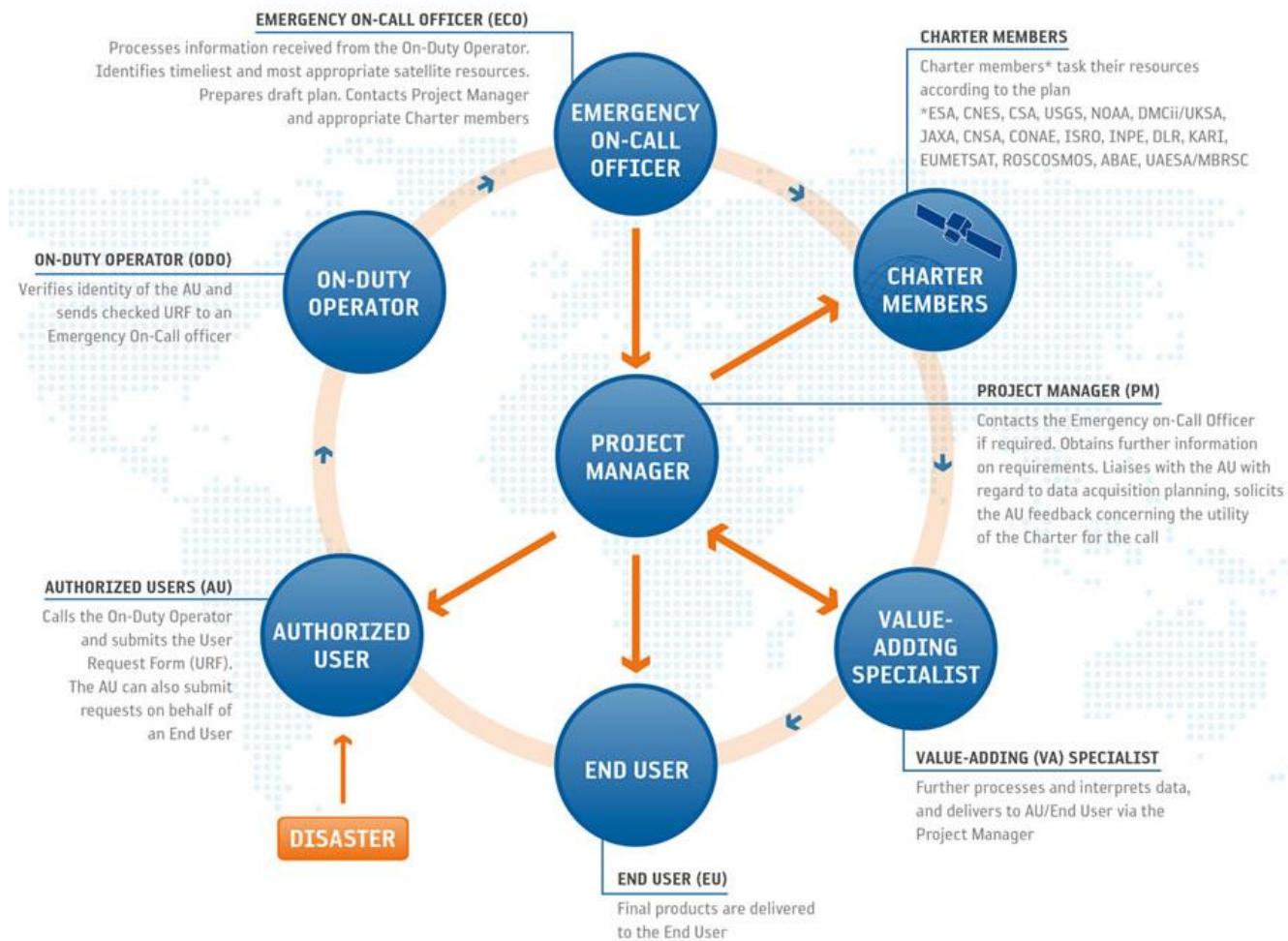
- There needs to be “a basin-wide approach” to the problem. That should ideally bring in all the basin-sharing countries on board.
- Besides, interstate relationships, political cooperation and the role of the government are also important.
- The government can also try **flood-plain zoning**, which is done the US. Depending on the vulnerability of the area, you divide them into categories, and accordingly ban certain activities on it: like farming, building a house etc.

2. INTERNATIONAL CHARTER 'SPACE AND MAJOR DISASTERS'

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features, need for and significance of the charter.

Context: India, by virtue of being a member of the **International Charter 'Space and Major Disasters'** has received a satellite data related to the Assam floods from other member nations including France, Russia and China.



About International Charter 'Space and Major Disasters':

- It is a **non-binding charter**.
- It provides for the **charitable and humanitarian related acquisition of and transmission of space satellite data to relief organizations** in the event of major disasters.
- Initiated by the **European Space Agency and the French space agency CNES** after the UNISPACE III conference held in Vienna, Austria in July 1999.
- It officially came into operation on November 1, 2000 after the Canadian Space Agency signed onto the charter on October 20, 2000.
- Only **agencies that possess and are able to provide satellite-based Earth Observation data** can be members of the International Charter. The members cooperate on a **voluntary basis**.

How it works?

- The Charter is a worldwide collaboration, through which satellite data are made available for the benefit of disaster management. By combining Earth observation assets from different space agencies, the Charter allows resources and expertise to be coordinated for rapid response to major disaster situations; thereby helping civil protection authorities and the international humanitarian community.

- This unique initiative is able to mobilise agencies around the world and benefit from their know-how and their satellites through a single access point that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and at no cost to the user.

Need:

- Faced with a major emergency, rescue and relief organisations that are armed quickly with reliable and accurate information are better equipped to save lives and limit damage to property, infrastructure and the environment.
- Satellites routinely monitoring Earth from space and delivering data to support rapid damage mapping offer an objective tool to aid disaster management.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas.

AFSPA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: AFSPA- features, draconian provisions, misuses and need for review.

Context: Centre has declared entire State of Nagaland a ‘disturbed area’ for a period of 6 more months under **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)**.

What does the AFSPA mean?

- In simple terms, **AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”**.

Powers given to armed forces:

- They have **the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law**.
- If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also **arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms**.
- Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.

What is a “disturbed area” and who has the power to declare it?

- A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under **Section 3 of the AFSPA**. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
- The **Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area**. A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette. As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary”.

What's the origin of AFSPA?

- The Act came into force in the context of increasing violence in the Northeastern States decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control.
- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and it was approved by the President on September 11, 1958. It became known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.

What has been the role of the judiciary?

- There were questions about the constitutionality of AFSPA, given that law and order is a state subject. The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of AFSPA in a 1998 judgement (**Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India**).
- In this judgement, the Supreme Court arrived at certain conclusions including (a) a **suo-motto declaration can be made by the Central government**, however, it is desirable that the state government should be consulted by the central government before making the declaration; (b) AFSPA does not confer arbitrary powers to declare an area as a ‘disturbed area’; (c) the declaration has to be for a limited duration and there

should be a periodic review of the declaration 6 months have expired; (d) while exercising the powers conferred upon him by AFSPA, the authorised officer should use minimal force necessary for effective action, and (e) the authorised officer should strictly follow the 'Dos and Don'ts' issued by the army.

WHAT IS ARMED FORCES SPECIAL POWERS ACT?

► **Introduced in 1958**, AFSPA confers on members of the armed forces special powers to rein in suspects in areas declared "disturbed" on account of insurgent activities or similar threats. It has been in **force in Manipur since 1980**, and the alleged **excesses committed under it are the reasons** why activist Irom Sharmila has been on a **hunger strike since 2000**.

WHAT ARE SPECIAL POWERS?

AFSPA allows any commissioned officer, warrant officer and non-commissioned officer – or any other



person of equivalent rank – to:

- Fire upon or use force against any person acting 'in contravention of any law for the time being in force in the disturbed area'
- Arrest suspicious people without warrant
- Destroy any structure suspected to house an arms dump, shelter from which armed attacks are made or are likely to be made
- Conduct searches without warrants for evidence, to recover a wrongfully confined person or property or arms or explosives
- **AFSPA bars prosecution or proceedings – except with Centre's nod – against personnel for action committed while exercising powers under the Act**

Has there been any review of the Act?

- On November 19, 2004, the Central government appointed a five-member **committee headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy** to review the provisions of the act in the north eastern states.
- The committee submitted its report in 2005, which included the following recommendations: (a) AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967; (b) The Unlawful Activities Act should be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and (c) grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.
- The 5th report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission on public order has also recommended the repeal of the AFSPA.
- These recommendations have not been implemented.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Various Security Forces, their mandate

INTEGRATED BATTLE GROUPS (IBGS)

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: IBGs- features, composition, need for and significance.

Context: Army's first **Integrated Battle Groups** to be structured by end of next month.

What are IBGs?

- IBGs are brigade-sized, agile, self-sufficient combat formations, which can swiftly launch strikes against adversary in case of hostilities.
- Each IBG would be tailor-made based on Threat, Terrain and Task and resources will be allotted based on the three Ts.
- They need to be light so they will be low on logistics and they will be able to mobilise within 12-48 hrs based on the location.
- An IBG operating in a desert needs to be constituted differently from an IBG operating in the mountains.
- The IBGs will also be defensive and offensive. While the offensive IBGs would quickly mobilise and make thrust into enemy territory for strikes, defensive IBGs would hold ground at vulnerable points or where enemy action is expected. The composition of the IBGs would also depend on this.

Topics: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security. Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges.

1. UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES (PREVENTION) ACT

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: UAPA- features, significance, concerns over its misuse and need.

Context: The Centre has banned a separatist group, **Sikhs for Justice**, on grounds of secessionism under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**.

Background:

- Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), formed in 2007, is a US-based group seeking a separate homeland for Sikhs — a “Khalistan” in Punjab.**
- Operating out of the United States**, the group has been trying to build a campaign for secession of Punjab.

About the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA):

- 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.

The law is contested for few draconian provisions:

- The Act introduces a vague definition of terrorism to encompass a wide range of non-violent political activity, including political protest.
- It empowers the government to declare an organisation as ‘terrorist’ and ban it. Mere membership of such a proscribed organisation itself becomes a criminal offence.
- It allows detention without a chargesheet for up to 180 days and police custody can be up to 30 days.
- It creates a strong presumption against bail and anticipatory bail is out of the question.
- It creates a presumption of guilt for terrorism offences merely based on the evidence allegedly seized.
- It authorises 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.

Sources: the Hindu.

(Q) The ambiguous nature of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 (UAPA) gives unreasonable power to authorities. Examine.

2. UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES (PREVENTION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For prelims: Key features of the bill.
- For mains: Need for amendments, concerns associated and other associations issues.

Context: Lok Sabha passes the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019.

Key features of the Bill:

- The Bill amends the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- Who may commit terrorism:** Under the Act, the central government may designate an organisation as a terrorist organisation if it: (i) commits or participates in acts of terrorism, (ii) prepares for terrorism, (iii) promotes terrorism, or (iv) is otherwise involved in terrorism. The Bill additionally empowers the government to designate individuals as terrorists on the same grounds.

- **Approval for seizure of property by NIA:** If the investigation is conducted by an officer of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the approval of the Director General of NIA would be required for seizure of properties that may be connected with terrorism.
- **Investigation by NIA:** Under the Act, investigation of cases may be conducted by officers of the rank of Deputy Superintendent or Assistant Commissioner of Police or above. The Bill additionally empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases.
- **Insertion to schedule of treaties:** The Act defines terrorist acts to include acts committed within the scope of any of the treaties listed in a schedule to the Act. The Schedule lists nine treaties, including the Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997), and the Convention against Taking of Hostages (1979). The Bill adds another treaty to the list. This is the **International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005)**.

Background:

- The UAPA – an upgrade on the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act TADA, which was allowed to lapse in 1995 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was repealed in 2004 — was originally passed in 1967 under the then Congress government led by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Eventually amendments were brought in under the successive United Progressive Alliance (UPA) governments in 2004, 2008 and 2013.

(Q) Discuss how Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) impinges on the personal liberty of citizens of India.

Topics: Cybersecurity related issues.

1. WHY IS INDIA SETTING UP A MOBILE PHONE HANDSETS DATABASE?

Context: The **National Telecom Policy of 2012** calls for the establishment of a **National Mobile Property Registry** to address the issue of “security, theft, and other concerns including reprogramming of mobile handsets”.

- Based on this, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) under the Ministry of Communications initiated a **Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR)** for mobile service providers.
- The DoT issued a memorandum in July 2017 announcing the CEIR with a pilot project led by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited in Maharashtra.
- In January 2018, this project was handed over to the **Centre for Development of Telematics (CDOT)**. Now, it is all set to roll out.

What is CEIR?

- Based on a 2008 order from the DoT, **every mobile network provider** in India has an **Equipment Identity Register (EIR)**, or a database of the phones connected to its network. These EIRs will now share information with a **single central database**, the **CEIR**.
- In essence, **it will be a repository of information on all mobile phones connected to networks across India**.
- CEIR will have **information on the device's International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number** (every phone or mobile broadband device has this unique 15 digit code that precisely identifies the device), model, version, and “other information”.
- It will also know **if the phone is blacklisted, and the reason why it has been blacklisted**.

What is the purpose of a CEIR?

- Such centralised databases are meant to **identify and block stolen or illegal mobile phones** across networks. **Currently**, when a customer reports a mobile phone as missing or stolen, mobile service providers have the ability to blacklist the phone's IMEI in their EIRs and block it from accessing their network. But if the SIM is changed to a new network, it can continue to be in use.
- With a CEIR, **all network operators will be aware that the phone is blacklisted**.
- The CEIR will also access the GSMA's database of IMEI numbers to check whether the phone is authentic. There are cases of phones being in use with duplicate IMEI numbers, or with all zeroes instead of an authentic IMEI number.
- The CEIR will **also be able to block services to subscribers**. This ability had rested with individual networks till now.

- It also enables “**IMEI-based lawful interception**”, which means allowing legal authorities to use CEIR data.

What are the issues with having a CEIR?

- Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) raises a key issue with the CEIR — **who should maintain such a high-value database? Should it be the service provider, or a neutral third party?**
- Another major issue is **cloning**, or reprogramming stolen or unauthorised mobile phones to attach existing genuine IMEI numbers. **Blocking cloned IMEI numbers could result in the authentic ones also being blocked.**

2. INTER-MINISTERIAL GROUP SUGGESTS BANNING OF PRIVATE CRYPTOCURRENCIES IN INDIA

What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Cryptocurrency- meaning, features, need for regulation and key recommendations.

Context: Inter-Ministerial Committee on Virtual Currencies headed by finance secretary Subhash Chandra Garg has submitted its report to the government. The committee set up by Centre has also proposed a **draft bill ‘Banning of Cryptocurrency & Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2019’**.

Key recommendations:

- **Ban on all forms of private cryptocurrencies.**
- **Impose a fine of up to Rs 25 crore and imprisonment** of as much as 10 years for anyone dealing in them.
- RBI and the government may look at the **introduction of an official digital currency in the country**.
- Establish a **specific group by the department of economic affairs with participation by the RBI**, department of financial services and the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) for examining and developing an appropriate **model of digital currency in India**.
- The panel backed use of **distributed ledger technology (DLT) or blockchain for selected areas**. It has asked the department of economic affairs to take the necessary measures to facilitate the use of DLT in the financial field after identifying its uses.
- It has also suggested the **use of DLT to reduce compliance costs for know-your-customer (KYC) requirements**.
- **Data localisation requirements proposed in the draft Data Protection Bill may need to be applied carefully**, including with respect to the storage of critical personal data so as to ensure that there is no adverse impact on Indian firms and Indian consumers who may stand to benefit from DLT-based services.

Implications:

- The recommendations, if accepted by the government, will be a blow to digital currency aspirants in India such as Facebook as well as exchanges currently operating in the country by circumventing Reserve Bank of India (RBI) norms by undertaking peer-to-peer trading.

Definition:

- Cryptocurrency has been defined as “any information or code or number or token not being part of any official digital currency, generated through cryptographic means or otherwise, providing a digital representation of value which is exchange with or without consideration, with the promise or representation of having inherent value in any business activity which may involve risk of loss or an expectation of profits or income, or functions as a store of value or a unit of account and includes its use in any financial transaction or investment, but not limited to, investment schemes.”

Why IMC proposed Ban on Cryptocurrency?

- All the cryptocurrencies have been created by non- sovereigns and are in this sense entirely private enterprises.
- There is no underlying intrinsic value of these cryptocurrencies back they lack all the attributes of a currency.
- There is no fixed nominal value of these private cryptocurrencies i.e. neither act as any store of value nor they are a medium of exchange.
- Since their inceptions, cryptocurrencies have demonstrated extreme fluctuations in their prices.

- These cryptocurrencies cannot serve the purpose of a currency. The private cryptocurrencies are inconsistent with the essential functions of money/currency, hence private cryptocurrencies cannot replace fiat currencies.
- A review of global practices show that they have not been recognised as a **LEGAL** tender in any jurisdiction.
- Committee also recommends that all exchanges, people, traders and other financial system participants should be prohibited from dealing with cryptocurrencies.

(Q) What do you understand by cryptocurrency? Do you think legalising the crypto market can help beneficiaries emerge from the shadows and make productive investments in an economy witnessing a digital transformation? Critically analyse.

3. BAN OR REGULATE? — ON INDIA'S POLICY ON CRYPTOCURRENCIES

- **Context:** An inter-ministerial committee recently recommended that India should ban all private cryptocurrencies.
- The Reserve Bank of India has also repeatedly warned the public of the risks associated with dealing with cryptocurrencies.

Why the committee has recommended for a complete ban?

- Governments and economic regulators across the world are wary of private cryptocurrencies. These Cryptocurrencies need **neither a central issuing authority nor a central validating agency for transactions**.
- These **currencies can exist and thrive outside the realm of authority and regulation**.
- They are even deemed a **threat to the official currency and monetary system**.

Is banning cryptocurrencies the most effective way to respond?

- Seven jurisdictions, that the report cites, **have not banned cryptocurrencies outright**. Many of them, including Canada, Thailand, Russia and Japan, seem to be moving on the path of **regulation**, so that transactions are within the purview of anti-money laundering and prevention of terror laws.
- Even in China, which India has taken a cue from, the ban has not achieved its objectives. Trading in China is now low but not non-existent.
- Therefore, there are no official or other data available that point towards misuse of cryptocurrencies for illegal ends.

What is a cryptocurrency and how they operate?

- A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency that uses cryptography for security. Cryptocurrencies use decentralized technology to let users make secure payments and store money without the need to use their name or go through a bank.
- They run on a distributed public ledger called blockchain, which is a record of all transactions updated and held by currency holders. The most common cryptocurrencies are Bitcoin, Ethereum, Ripple, and Litecoin.

Concerns associated with the use of cryptocurrencies:

- The government is wary that **regulation will provide legitimacy to “what is currently ambiguous,” and may lead to further rise in its valuation and end up contributing “to the investment bubble”**.
- A **currency that is not based on any real economic activity**, unlike a sovereign currency whose value is based on the relative value of a tradeable basket of goods and services, cannot *prima facie* inspire much comfort.
- The **security offered by encryption of cryptocurrency may be breached by hackers** who are always lurking for any point of weakness. This may end up costing investors huge amounts of money because prices are attached to the currencies.
- Cryptocurrency exists only in essence such that there are no physical coins and notes. As a result, there is, therefore, **no central place where the currency can be deposited for safe keeping**.
- Cryptos are feared not just for their sheer speculative propensities, but also for their **capacity to undermine sovereign currencies**.
- Virtual currency is being traded **anonymously** over the Internet and used for a host of anti-national and illegal activities, from terror funding to illicit trade of arms and drugs and so on.
- The online use of this currency, was without any border restrictions or geographical constraints, resulting in danger to the **integrity and sovereignty of the nation**.

Benefits of cryptocurrencies:

- **Secure nature:** Cryptocurrencies are encoded into a database.
- **No transaction fees** are usually charged for transactions involving cryptocurrency.
- Cryptocurrency does away with the **need for a regulator**.
- By making everything public, cryptocurrency negates the **need for a middleman**.
- No individual or organisation can manipulate Bitcoins because it is **cryptographically secure and do not contain customers' personal information**.

What can be done?

- If authorised as an electronic payment system or designated a legal instrument, cryptocurrencies will fall under the purview of the RBI; capital gains and business transactions will be liable to tax, and foreign payments are also going to fall under the auspices of Foreign Exchange Management Act.
- Regulated cryptocurrencies will enshrine robust consumer protection provisions. In terms of benefits, this could be a force multiplier in India's quest for financial inclusion, parallel to the electronic payment modalities such as digital wallets and Aadhaar Enabled Payment System.
- It could further reduce the cost associated with remittances, which brings annual earnings of close to 62 billion USD to India.
- It would also attract future business entrepreneurs, leading to innovation, generation of job and wealth creation in the due process of payments processing, e-commerce and taxation.

FACTS for PRELIMS

1. CABINET APPROVES MERGER / AMALGAMATION OF NIMH WITH ICMR- NIOH

- **Context:** Cabinet has approved to dissolve National Institute of Miners' Health (NIMH) and merge / amalgamate with ICMR-National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), Ahmedabad, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW). NIMH, ICMR, NIOH, MoM and **Impact:** The merger / amalgamation of NIMH with NIOH will prove beneficial to both the Institutes in term of enhanced expertise in the field of occupational health besides the efficient management of public money.

Background:

- NIMH was set up by Government of India in 1990 and registered as a Society under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, 1960.
- It is an **autonomous Institute under Ministry of Mines (MoM).**

2. COLISTIN BANNED IN ANIMAL FOOD INDUSTRY

- **Context:** Manufacture, sale and distribution of colistin and its formulations for food-producing animals, poultry, aqua farming and animal feed supplements have been prohibited in an order issued by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

What is colistin and why has it been banned?

- Colistin is a valuable, **last-resort antibiotic** that saves human lives in critical care units.
- **Indiscriminate use** of colistin has led to rise of anti-microbial resistance in the country.
- If the use of colistin as a growth factor in animals is cut down and it is limited to therapeutic usage only, **the chances of developing resistance to it goes down.**

3. NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT FUND (NSDF)

- It was incorporated on 23rd December, 2008 as a trust under the **Indian Trust Act, 1882.**
- It is **fully owned by the Government**, to act as a receptacle for financial contributions from Governmental sources, bilateral/ multilateral and other agencies and other private sector donors who would prefer to provide funds through the Government.
- Its main objective is to **enhance, stimulate and develop the skills of Indian youth force** by various **sector specific programmes.**
- The Trust accepts donation, contribution in cash or kind from the Contributors for furtherance of objectives of the Fund.

4. PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- There are **six Public Libraries under administrative control of Ministry of Culture** namely National Library, Kolkata, Central Reference Library, Kolkata, Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi, Delhi Public Library, Delhi, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna and Rampur Raza Library, Rampur.
- **Public libraries function under the administrative control of the respective State/UT library authority.**
- National Mission on Libraries has a scheme for providing financial assistance for upgradation of infrastructure of one State Central Library and one District Library in each State/UT as NML Model Library.

5. RASHTRIYA AAVISHKAR ABHIYAN (RAA)

- It was launched in 2015.
- It is a **convergent framework across School Education and Higher Education** to motivate **children of the age group from 6-18 years** in learning Science, Mathematics and Technology through observation, experimentation, inference drawing, model building, etc. **both through inside and outside classroom activities and processes.** It seeks to **create curiosity, excitement and spirit of innovation and exploration amongst school children** by encouraging higher education institutions to become Mentoring Institutions and assist secondary and elementary schools in the study of Science and Mathematics.
- **Major interventions under RAA provided under Integrated scheme for School Education – Samagra Shiksha**, include conduct of Science Exhibition, Book Fair, Quiz Competition, exposure/study visits for students to Higher Education institutions, participation of students in Inter-school/State/National level Science & Maths Competitions/Olympiads, strengthening of School Science and Mathematics laboratories, use of teaching-learning equipment and material including Digital models and use of technology in Science and Mathematics teaching.

6. AADHAAR SEVA KENDRA' (ASKS)

- **Context:** The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has operationalized 1st 'Aadhaar Seva Kendra' (ASKs) in Delhi and Vijayawada.
- ASKs seek to **provide more touch points to public for availing Aadhaar enrolment and updation services.**
- **About UIDAI:** Established as an attached office of the erstwhile Planning Commission, UIDAI is now a **statutory authority under the provisions of Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act,**

2016 under the aegis of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

7. CENTRE AND IBM TO JOINTLY STUDY ON USING AI IN AGRICULTURE

- **Context:** Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) with IBM India Private Limited for undertaking a pilot study to utilise Artificial Intelligence (AI) and weather technology solutions in agriculture in selected pilot districts.
- **The pilot study will be undertaken in 3 districts of Bhopal, Rajkot and Nanded in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra respectively.**

8. TURNOVER RATIO

- **Context:** According to the World Bank, India's turnover ratio at 58 in 2018 was a 43 per cent drop from 101 recorded in 2004.
- **What is it?** A turnover ratio represents the amount of assets or liabilities that a company replaces in relation to its sales. The concept is useful for determining the efficiency with which a business utilizes its assets.
- In most cases, a high asset turnover ratio is considered good, since it implies that receivables are collected quickly, fixed assets are heavily utilized, and little excess inventory is kept on hand. This implies a minimal need for invested funds, and therefore a high return on investment.
- Conversely, a low liability turnover ratio (usually in relation to accounts payable) is considered good, since it implies that a company is taking the longest possible amount of time in which to pay its suppliers, and so has use of its cash for a longer period of time.

9. EXPORT CREDIT GUARANTEE CORPORATION

- ECGC is a premier export credit agency of the Government of India to provide Export Credit Insurance Services to facilitate exports from the country.
- The ECGC offers credit insurance schemes to exporters to protect them against losses due to non-payment of export dues by overseas buyers due to political and / or commercial risks.
- It functions under the administrative control of Ministry of Commerce & Industry, and is managed by a Board of Directors comprising representatives of the Government, Reserve Bank of India, banking, and insurance and exporting community.

10. ORGANIZED GROUP 'A' STATUS TO INDIAN RAILWAY PROTECTION FORCE (RPF) SERVICE

- **Context:** Cabinet approves Grant of Organized Group 'A' Status to Indian Railway Protection Force (RPF) Service and consequential benefits of Non-Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU).
- **Impact:** This will end stagnation, improve career progression of the officers and keep up their

motivational level. Eligible officers of RPF will get benefitted.

About NFFU scheme:

- Non Functional Upgrade (NFU) also called "non-functional financial up-gradation" (NFFU) is the name of a scheme to reward civil servants of 49 'Organized Central Group A Services' with automatic time bound pay promotions till the Higher Administrative Grade (HAG).
- This scheme ensures that all civil servants, at a minimum, retire at the HAG pay grade, a grade equated by Government with Lt Generals, Vice Admirals, and Air Marshals of Armed Forces.
- The promotion under NFU scheme are independent of organizational requirements, vacancy, level of responsibility or span of control of a post.

11. NATIONAL CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL

- **Context:** 110th Annual Day of NCDC.

About NCDC:

- It is an institute under the Indian Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- It was established in July 1963 for research in epidemiology and control of communicable diseases.
- It was previously known as National Institute of Communicable Diseases.

12. SHODHGANGA

- It is a digital repository for research scholars across Universities and Institutes to deposit, re-use & share their Theses & Dissertations in digital formats including scanned documents.
- It is in open access to the world-wide academic community.

13. SHODHGANGOTRI

- Under this initiative, research scholars / research supervisors in universities could deposit an electronic version of approved synopsis submitted by research scholars to the universities for registering themselves under the Ph.D.

14. UTKARSHA 2022

- **What is it?** It is a three- year road map for medium term objective to be achieved for improving regulation, supervision of RBI. It was recently finalised by the RBI. This medium-term strategy is in line with Global central banks' plan to strengthen regulatory and supervisory mechanism.

15. SWADHAR GREH SCHEME

- The Swadhar scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.

- The scheme **provides shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need.**
- The **beneficiaries include** widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.
- The **implementing agencies** are mainly NGOs.

16. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION SCHEME

- The **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)** is implementing International Cooperation (IC) Scheme.
- **Objective:** enhance competency of MSMEs, capturing new markets for their products, exploring new technologies for improving manufacturing capacity, etc.
- **Financial assistance** is provided under the Scheme on reimbursement basis to the eligible State /Central Government Organisations, Registered Industry Associations and Societies/Trusts associated with the promotion and development of MSME sector to visit/participate in international exhibitions /trade fairs/buyer-seller meet etc. abroad and also for holding International conferences/seminars/workshops in India which are in the interest of MSME sector.

17. NLCPR

- The broad objective of the **Non-lapsable Central Pool of Resources scheme** is to ensure speedy development of infrastructure in the **North Eastern Region** by increasing the flow of budgetary financing for new infrastructure projects/schemes in the Region.
- Both **physical and social infrastructure sectors** such as Irrigation and Flood Control, Power, Roads and Bridges, Education, Health, Water Supply and Sanitation –**are considered for providing support** under the Central Pool, with projects in physical infrastructure sector receiving priority.
- **Funds from the Central Pool can be released for State sector as well as Central sector projects/schemes.** However, the funds available under the Central Pool are **not meant to supplement the normal Plan programmes** either of the State Governments or Union Ministries/ Departments/ Agencies.
- The **Ministry for Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER)** allocates funds from **NLCPR** to various Northeast states for infrastructure projects.

18. NATIONAL TRANSLATION MISSION (NTM)

- It is a scheme launched in 2008 which is being **implemented through the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore.**
- **Objective:** to establish translation as an industry in general and to facilitate higher education by making

knowledge texts accessible to students and academics in Indian languages.

- **Under the scheme,** the books of knowledge texts mostly text books of various subjects prescribed in Universities and Colleges are being translated in **all Languages of the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India.**

19. WHY RAJASTHAN HC JUDGES DON'T WANT TO BE CALLED 'MY LORD'?

- **Context:** Rajasthan High Court resolved to censure the salutations "My Lord" and "Your Lordship" from courtroom protocol – a practice that has been inherited from British rule.

Why censure?

- As the words "My Lord" and "Your Lordship" are **relics of a Colonial past**, it is proposed to incorporate the above rule showing respectful attitude to the Court.

Customs in other countries:

- In **UK**, judges of the Court of Appeals and the High Court are to be addressed in court as "My Lord" or "My Lady", Circuit judges as "Your Honour", Magistrates as "Your Worship", or "Sir" or "Madam", and District judges and Tribunal judges as "Sir" or "Madam".
- In **US**, "Mr." is only used in addressing the Chief Justice. Others are referred to as "Justice Scalia," "Justice Ginsburg," or "Your Honor."
- In **Singapore**, the Judge/Registrar can be addressed as "Your Honour".
- In **Australia** as well, in the High Court and the Federal Court, the judges are to be addressed as "Your Honour".

20. GAFA TAX

- **What is it?** It is a legislation — dubbed the **GAFA tax** — an acronym for Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon — passed recently by France Parliament.
- With this, **France has become the first major economy to impose a tax on digital giants.**
- The new law aims at plugging a taxation gap that has seen some internet heavyweights paying next to nothing in countries where they make huge profits.
- The law will levy a 3 per cent tax on total annual revenues of the largest tech firms providing services to French consumers.

21. MERCHANT DISCOUNT RATE

- **Merchant Discount Rate** (alternatively referred to as the **Transaction Discount Rate or TDR**) is the sum total of all the charges and taxes that a digital payment entails.

22. DEMANDS FOR GRANTS

- **Article 113** of the Constitution of India mandates that estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India are included in the Annual Financial

Statement, which are required to be voted by the Lok Sabha, and submitted in the form of demand for grants.

- The demands for grants are presented to the Lok Sabha along with the Annual Financial Statement. More than one Demand may be presented for a Ministry or Department depending on the nature of expenditure.
- Regarding Union Territories without Legislature, a separate demand is presented for each of such Union Territories.
- Each demand initially gives separately the totals of (i) 'voted' and 'charged' expenditure; (ii) the 'revenue' and the 'capital' expenditure and (iii) the grand total on gross basis of the amount of expenditure for which the demand is presented. This is followed by the estimates of expenditure under different major heads of account. The breakup of the expenditure under each major head between 'Plan' and 'Non-Plan' is also given. The amounts of recoveries are also shown.

Why in News? Lok Sabha approves the demands for grants under Road Transport and Highways for 2019-20.

23. JAN JAGRUKTA ABHIYAAN

- It is a campaign to be launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in Delhi to sensitize and mobilise the community on measures for prevention and control of Vector Borne Diseases (VBDs) like Malaria, Dengue and Chikungunya.

24. KAUSHAL YUVA SAMWAAD

- Commemorating World Youth Skills Day on July 15, 2019 and celebrating 4th Anniversary of the Skill India Mission, the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship has announced launch of "Kaushal Yuva Samwaad" (A Youth Dialogue).
- Kaushal Yuva Samwaad is aimed at creating an open dialogue with the youth across all skill training centres to hear their views, ideas, opportunities and recommendations which could help the Ministry in scaling the existing programs and improve overall efficiency of its projects.
- Kaushal Yuva Samwaad is being organized across all Skill India training centres, namely, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKK), Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Polytechnics, Institutes under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Jan Shikshan Sansthan, DDU-GKY Centres and other fee-based training centres across the country.

25. NATIONAL YOUTH CORPS

- National Youth Corps (NYC) is a scheme of the Department of Youth Affairs implemented through Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS).
- National Youth Volunteers (NYVs) are engaged under the scheme National Youth Corps (NYC) initially for a period of 01 year extendable

upto 02 years on an honorarium of ₹ 5,000/- per month.

About Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan: Nehru Yuva Kendras was established in 1972. Later in 1987 under Rajiv Gandhi Government it became Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, an autonomous organization under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

26. INCREDIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN

- Context:** The Incredible India "Find the Incredible You" campaign released globally by the Ministry of Tourism during 2018-19 has been declared winner of the PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) Gold Award 2019 in the "Marketing – Primary Government Destination" category.
- The campaign strategy was to shift the focus from the external experience of tourist destinations to the internal experience of travelers themselves.
- PATA Gold Awards are given to tourism industry organizations and individuals making outstanding contribution towards the successful promotion of the travel industry throughout the Asia Pacific Region.
- Founded in 1951, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) is a not-for profit association that is internationally acclaimed for acting as a catalyst for the responsible development of travel and tourism to, from and within the Asia Pacific region.

27. URBAN HAATS

- It is an initiative of the Ministry of Textiles of the Government of India.
- The objective of the scheme "Infrastructure and Technology Support" is to setup a permanent marketing infrastructure in big towns/metropolitan cities to provide direct marketing facilities to the handicrafts artisans/handloom weavers.
- The scheme is implemented through State Handicrafts/Handlooms Development Corporations/Tourism Development Corporations/Urban Local Bodies with sufficient financial resources and organizational capacity to implement the project.
- The financial ceiling for Urban Haat is Rs. 300 lakh for each unit. 80% of the admissible amount is borne by the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and 20% contributed by the implementing agency.

28. AMBEDKAR HASTSHILP VIKAS YOJANA

- The Government launched the Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana (AHVY) in the year 2001-2002.
- The scheme was launched with a view to mobilize the artisans into Self Help Groups and training the groups on various aspects of forming and running the community business enterprises for self sustainability of artisans.

The objective of this scheme is to:

- Mobilise and generate awareness of typical handicraft arts for their overall development and progress.
- Provide training to artisans and expose them to greater market to sell their handicraft products.
- Provide proper education and market knowledge to artisans so that they learn the market techniques to get better results.

29. UPLIFTMENT OF WOMEN OF BACKWARD COMMUNITIES

- **National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC)**, an organization under the aegis of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has the following two women specific schemes for targeted women whose annual family income is less than Rs. 3.00 lakh per annum-
 1. **Mahila Samridhi Yojana**: To provide Micro Finance to women entrepreneurs of Backward Classes.
 2. **New Swarnima Scheme for Women**: Term Loan to inculcate the spirit of self-dependence among the women of Backward Classes.

30. SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI

- The Sangeet Natak Akademi – India's national academy for music, dance and drama – is the **first National Academy of the arts set-up by the Republic of India**. It was created by a resolution of Government of India.
- It was set up in 1952.
- The academy functions as the apex body of the performing arts in the country to preserve and promote the vast cultural heritage of India expressed in music, dance and drama.
- It also works with governments and art academies in states and territories of the country.
- The academy Renders advice and assistance to the government of India in the task of formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the field. It carries a part of the responsibilities of the state for fostering cultural contacts between regions in the country, as well as between India and the world.
- The Akademi Awards are the **highest national recognition conferred on eminent artistes**. Each year the Academy awards Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowships, **Ratna Sadsya**, to distinguished individuals for their contribution to the field of arts, music, dance and theatre. Ustad Bismillah Khan award is given to young artists for their talent in the fields of music, dance and drama.
- The **Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar** is conferred upon artists below the age of 40 years.

31. RESERVATION OF LIMBOO AND TAMANG COMMUNITIES

- **Context**: A proposal for reservation of seats for **Limboo** and **Tamang** communities in **Sikkim Legislative Assembly** is under consideration of the Government of India.
- **Article 371F(f) and Article 332** of the Constitution of India govern reservation of seats in the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim and the issue of seat reservation for Limboo and Tamang communities is being considered under these provisions of Constitution of India.
- The **Limbu** are **Kirati people** indigenous and native to the Himalayan Limbuwan region of the Indian subcontinent, in what is now modern-day Eastern Nepal, Northern Sikkim, India and Western Bhutan.
- The **Tamang** are the **largest Tibetic ethnic group of Nepalis and Indian Gorkhas**.
- Traditionally **Buddhist** by religion. Indian Tamangs are also a significant number in Sikkim and Darjeeling. Peculiar to Tamang people are **complex marriage restrictions within the community**.

32. HONEY MISSION

- **Context**: **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)** has distributed over 1.10 lakh bee-boxes across India in last one and half years under its **Honey Mission**. This has created over 11,000 new jobs for the farmers, unemployed youths and tribal people; 430 metric tonnes of honey worth Rs 4 crore has been extracted through these bee-boxes only.

About Honey Mission:

- It was launched in August 2017. Under this mission KVIC provides beekeepers:
- Practical training about examination of honeybee colonies.
- Acquaintance with apicultural equipments.
- Identification and management of bee enemies and diseases.
- Honey extraction and wax purification.
- Management of bee colonies in spring, summer, monsoon, autumn and winter seasons.
- Loans for setting up processing units, packaging units and labelling units for honey.

33. MANGHDECHHU HYDROPOWER PROJECT

- The Mangdechhu hydroelectric project is a 720MW run-of-river power plant built on the **Mangdechhu River in Trongsa Dzongkhag District of central Bhutan**.
- Mangdechhu is one of the ten hydroelectric projects planned under the Royal Government of Bhutan's initiative to generate 10,000MW hydropower by 2020 with **support from the Indian Government**.

34. LONGEST ELECTRIFIED TUNNEL IN INDIAN RAILWAYS

- **Context:** South Central Railway (SCR) has commissioned the longest electrified tunnel in Indian Railways.
- **How long is it?** 6.6 kilometres.
- **Where?** It is situated between Cherlopalli and Rapuru Railway stations in Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh.

35. DIBANG MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT (MPP)

- **Context:** Cabinet approves 2880 MW Dibang Multipurpose Project in Arunachal Pradesh Rs. 1600 crore expenditure approved.
- Dibang Multipurpose Project (Dibang MPP) is envisaged as a storage-based hydro-electric project with flood moderation as the key objective.
- This is the largest ever Hydro Electric Projects to be constructed in India. The dam is 278 metres high and will be the highest dam in India once completed.
- The Project is located on river Dibang, in Lower Dibang Valley District of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The project envisages construction of a 278 m high Concrete Gravity Dam.

36. MEGHALAYA TO HAVE STATE WATER POLICY

- The Meghalaya Cabinet has approved a draft water policy to address water usages, issues of conservation and protection of water sources in the State.
- With this, Meghalaya will become the 1st state in India to ensure conservation of water and have its own State Water Policy.
- The policy's objective is to recognise water resources as a common pool resource, to provide hygienic water for drinking, domestic needs, sanitation and livelihood development.
- The policy includes measures like building check dams to conserve rainwater, rainwater harvesting systems, controlling inappropriate use of groundwater and maintaining the quality of water.

38. 'DIDI KE BOLO' CAMPAIGN

- **Context:** Didi Ke Bolo campaign has been launched in West Bengal.

About the campaign:

- **Aim:** To address the public grievances and other social issues.
- Under the initiative, every citizen of West Bengal can directly contact chief minister. People can reach out to her by calling on a specific number.
- **Main objective of this campaign** is to improve citizen's participation and engagement by providing a platform. By this campaign every citizen can share suggestion and problems for required actions.

39. MUTHULAKSHMI REDDI

- **Context:** Google has created a doodle on Muthulakshmi Reddi's 33rd birth anniversary.
- **Who is she?** Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi was India's first legislator and also known as woman of many firsts.
- **Tamil Nadu** Government declared that every year hospitals will celebrate her birth anniversary as 'Hospital Day.'
- She became the first female surgeon in a government hospital and the first woman legislator in the country during British India.

40. MKISAN

- mKisan SMS Portal for farmers enables all Central and State government organizations in agriculture and allied sectors to give information/services/advisories to farmers by SMS in their language, preference of agricultural practices and location.

41. JATAN- SOFTWARE FOR DIGITIZATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

- Human Centres Design and Computing Group has developed JATAN: Virtual Museum software which is used for creating the digital collections in various museums and digital archival tools that are used in background for managing the National Portal and Digital Repository for Indian Museums.

42. AUTOMATED MULTIMODAL BIOMETRIC IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM (AMBIS)

- **Maharashtra** has become the first state in the country to adopt automated multimodal biometric identification system (AMBIS)
- It aims to create a criminal database by addition of iris and face biometrics. Under this system, a digital database of fingerprints and photographs of criminals will be prepared, that will lead to a subsequent hike in conviction rate.

43. CARE4U APP

- **Context:** IIT Kharagpur team develops app CARE4U for elderly people.

Key features of the app:

- The android-based app will connect the caregiver to the elderly person.
- The app has a record of medical histories, allergies' account, an SOS button, real time location tracking and so on.
- The network-based fall detection algorithm in the app installed on the phone of the elderly can detect whether the elderly has fallen down.
- If there is a fall, it automatically calls the caregiver and emergency services along with the exact location of the elderly person.
- CARE4U can also detect emotions and whenever the elderly opens the app, the phone takes his

- picture and a mood index is calculated. This detects whether the person is sad or not and automatically updates the caregiver with the time stamp.
- It has a 'Medicine Reminder' feature to remind both the elderly as well as the caregiver that it is time for the former to take medicine.

44. SECURITYPEDIA

- The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has launched Securitypedia, an online encyclopaedia as a one stop repository of information on security related practices across the globe.
- It contains extensive information on technical learning, CISF manuals, case studies, technical compendium, etc.

45. GANDHIAN YOUNG TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION (GYTI) AWARDS

- SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions) celebrates the creativity and innovation of young technological students by recognising their outstanding projects with Gandhian Young Technological Innovation (GYTI) Awards.
- These Awards celebrate the spirit of student innovation in all the fields of engineering, science, technology and design through extremely affordable/frugal solution or the ones pushing the technological edge.

46. MICRODOTS

- Why in News? The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has issued a draft notification amending Central Motor Vehicle Rules, allowing motor vehicles and their parts, components, assemblies, sub-assemblies to be affixed with permanent and nearly invisible microdots.

What are microdots?

- Microdot technology involves spraying the body and parts of the vehicle or any other machine with microscopic dots, which give a unique identification.
- These microdot can be read physically with a microscope and identified with ultra violet light source.
- The microdots and adhesive will become permanent fixtures/affixation which cannot be removed without damaging the asset, that is the vehicle itself.
- Benefits: Use of this technology will help check theft of vehicles and also use of fake spare parts.

47. RED MUD

- Context: Ministry of mines organises a workshop on Effective utilization of Red Mud.
- Red Mud is a solid waste generated during the aluminium production process.
- Concerns: This is an environmental concern due to presence of impurities such as caustic soda and others minerals.

- Background:** Global generation of red mud is more than 150 million tons and there exists a global inventory of more than 3 billion tons. Red mud generation in India is around 9 million tons per year.

48. SPENT POT LINING (SPL)

- Spent pot lining (SPL) from the aluminium industries is produced by the smelting plants.
- It contains high level of cyanide and fluoride and is carcinogenic in nature and must be scientifically utilised or detoxified.
- It has also been classified as hazardous waste under the Schedule to the Hazardous Waste Management Rules, 2016.

49. PLAN BEE

- What is it?** It is an amplifying system imitating the buzz of a swarm of honey bees to keep wild elephants away from railway tracks. It is a unique strategy adopted by Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR).
- Why in news?** It has earned the best innovation award in Indian Railways for the 2018-19 fiscal.

50. NON-PNEUMATIC ANTI-SHOCK GARMENT (NASG)

- What is it?** The Non-pneumatic Anti-shock Garment (NASG) is a first-aid device used to stabilize women who are suffering from obstetric hemorrhage and shock.
- Uses:** This simple device helps women survive delays in getting to a hospital and getting the treatment that they need. It can be applied by anyone after a short, simple training.
- Benefits:** This device decreases blood loss, recovers women from shock and keeps them alive while they are traveling to a hospital or awaiting treatment.

How it works?

- The non-pneumatic anti-shock garment (NASG) applies pressure to the lower body and abdomen, thereby forcing the blood that was getting accumulated in the pelvic area to other essential organs of the body. The neoprene garment quickly stabilizes vitals and gives doctor enough time for treatment.

51. MOLECULAR MECHANISM BEHIND LATENT TB

- Context:** Kolkata Scientists figure out molecular mechanism behind latent TB. Scientists have figured out how tuberculosis bacterium is released from its reservoir inside the human body.

How it occurs?

- A macrophage is an important part of the immune system. The word 'macrophage' literally means a 'big eater'. It is an amoeba-like organism and its job is to clean the body of microscopic debris and invaders. It has an innate ability to locate and consume

- invaders such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites.
- However, the story is different with TB bacterium. Instead of killing it, the **macrophage creates a sac-like formation called granuloma around it**. **Granuloma** keeps the bacillus contained and under control. The equilibrium can last for even several decades **until it gets broken leading to release of infectious bacteria into the human body**. This can happen due to several reasons such as lowered immunity because of physical weakness or infections such as HIV.

52. PLOONET

- Researchers have modelled the formation of **exomoons** around gas giant exoplanets. They projected that the massive planets would kick moons out of orbit and send them on their way — or the researchers believe that angular momentum between the giant exoplanet and moon would allow the moon to essentially escape the gravity of the planet.
- The remnants of the expelled moon would end up circling its star with an eccentric orbit similar to Pluto's. The researchers have dubbed these rogue exomoons "ploonets."

53. KARGIL VIJAY DIWAS

- Context:** Indian Army declared the Kargil mission successful on **July 26, 1999**; since then the day has been celebrated annually as Kargil Vijay Diwas.
- India launched '**Operation Vijay**' to clear the Kargil sector of infiltration by Pakistani soldiers and Kashmiri militants on the Indian side of the Line of Control.
- Background:** The war took place between May and July of 1999 in Jammu and Kashmir's Kargil district. It began with the infiltration of both Pakistani troops and terrorists into Indian territory. The infiltrators positioned themselves in key locations that gave them a strategic advantage during the start of the conflict.
- Safed Sagar**, the Indian Air Force's operation, was a major part of the Kargil war. It used air power at the height of 32,000 feet for the first time.

54. THE TERRITORIAL ARMY

- India's first Governor General Shri C Rajagopalachari formally inaugurated the **Indian Territorial Army on October 9 in 1949**.
- It is an **organization where volunteers apply for a short period of training every year**, so as to be ready to tackle any emergent situation or to serve for the defence of India.
- The Territorial Army, also known as the '**Terriers**', is considered the **second line of national defence after the regular Army**.
- The Territorial Army is **part of a Regular Army and its present role is to relieve the Regular Army from static duties and assist civil administration in**

dealing with natural calamities and maintenance of essential services in situations where life of the communities is affected or the security of the country is threatened and to provide units for Regulars Army as and when required.

- Territorial Army **comes under the Defence Ministry**.

55. NAG- ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE (ATGM)

- Context:** Indian Army has successfully conducted summer user trials of NAG, 3rd Generation Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM).

Key facts:

- The NAG missile is a third-generation anti-tank guided missile, which has top attack capabilities that can effectively engage and destroy all known enemy tanks during day and night.
- It uses an imaging infrared seeker in lock-on-before-launch mode.
- It is launched from NAG missile carrier (NAMICA) which is capable of carrying up to 6 combat missiles.
- Range:** Minimum-500 metres and Maximum- 4 kilometres.
- Developed** by DRDO.

56. SPIKE MISSILE

- Context:** Indian Army places order for Israeli anti-tank Spike missiles.
- Israeli anti-tank Spike missiles from Israel are **multi-platform, cutting-edge precise, multi-mission, and multi-range electro-optical missiles**. These missiles have **capabilities of fire, observe, update, fire-and-forget as well as allowing attack of hidden targets**.
- Israeli anti-tank Spike missiles are **manufactured by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd**.
- These missiles have the **capability of targeting anything at a range of four kilometers**. These can be deployed in both plains and mountains.

57. BHABHA KAVACH

- Context:** India's first Lightest and indigenous Bullet Proof Jacket '**Bhabha Kavach**' from Ordnance Factory Board gets nod of MHA.

Key facts:

- Developed by OFB and MIDHANI this state-of-the-art jacket can withstand 7.62mm hard steel core or bullets fired from an AK-47 rifle, 5.56mm INSAS bullet and even the recently decommissioned 7.65mm bullet of self-loading rifle (SLR).
- It is half KG lesser than the prescribed weight of MHA along with the 360 Degree Protection and has achieved the protection level of NIJ III+.
- Bhabha Kavach only weighs 9.2kg and is a major breakthrough for the Indian armed forces.

58. SAGAR MAITRI MISSION-2

- Context:** DRDO Research Ship INS Sagardhwani Embarks on **Sagar Maitri Mission-2**.

- **SAGAR MAITRI** is a unique initiative of DRDO which aligns with the broad objective of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's policy declaration "**Safety And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**" to promote closer co-operation in socio-economic aspects as well as greater scientific interaction especially in ocean research among Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) countries.
- Under the aegis of PM's policy, specific scientific component of DRDO is "**MAITRI (Marine & Allied Interdisciplinary Training and Research Initiative)**".
- **SAGAR MAITRI Mission-2** commemorates the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of India's lone research ship INS Kistna's missions as part of the historic International Indian Ocean Expeditions (IIOE), which took place during 1962-65.
- As part of the mission, INS Sagardhwani will **revisit the selected tracks of INS Kistna and provide NPOL scientists ample opportunities to collaborate and garner a close working relationship with the oceanographic counterparts of the IOR countries**.
- The prime objectives of the **SAGAR MAITRI Mission** are data collection from the entire North Indian Ocean, focussing on the the Andaman Sea and adjoining seas and establishing long-term collaboration with eight IOR countries in the field of ocean research and development.
- The programme also aims at establishing long term scientific collaboration with these countries in the field of 'Ocean Research & Development' and data collection with a focus in the Andaman Sea.

59. OPERATION SUDARSHAN

- **What is it?** Border Security Force (BSF) has launched a massive exercise, code named as Sudarshan, to fortify Anti-Infiltration Grid along Pakistan border in Punjab and Jammu.

60. GARUDA VI

- **What is it?** It is a bilateral air exercise between **Indian Air Force and French air force**. The latest edition is being held in France.
- It is aimed at enhancing interoperability level of French and Indian crews in air defence and ground attack missions.

61. STRUM ATAKA

- India has signed a deal with Russia for acquiring **Strum Ataka anti-tank missile** for its fleet of Mi-35 attack choppers of Indian Air Force (IAF).

62. OPERATION THIRST

- It is an all- India drive **launched by the Railway Protection Force (RPF)** to curb menace of selling unauthorised packaged drinking water in railway stations.

63. OPERATION MILAP

- The operation Milap under which **children are rescued** was launched in December 2014.

- Under this project, the **Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) of the Delhi Police** develops information, rescues the trafficked or kidnapped person and arrests the kidnappers.
- The rescued children are counselled and also given requisite medical attention.

64. GHARIAL (GAVIAL OR FISH EATING CROCODILE)

- **Context:** Odisha renews effort to revive gharial population.

Key facts:

- **Critically Endangered**— IUCN Red List.
- The male gharial has a **distinctive boss at the end of the snout**, which resembles an earthenware pot.
- **Habitat**— foremost flowing rivers with high sand banks that they use for basking and building nests.
- Gharials once inhabited all the major river systems of the Indian Subcontinent, from the **Irrawaddy River in the east to the Indus River in the west**. Their distribution is now limited to only 2% of their former range
- **India:** Girwa River, Chambal River, Ken River, Son River, Mahanadi River, Ramganga River
- **Nepal:** Rapti-Narayani River
- **Threats:** Hunting for skins, trophies and indigenous medicine, and their eggs collected for consumption, Decrease of riverine habitat as dams, barrages, irrigation canals and artificial embankments were built; siltation and sand-mining changed river courses

Conservation:

- **Schedule 1** species under Indian wildlife act, 1972.
- **Project Crocodile** began in 1975 (Government of India+ United Nations Development Fund + Food and Agriculture Organization) — intensive captive breeding and rearing program.
- **Protected areas:** National Chambal Sanctuary and Katerniaghata Wildlife Sanctuary.

65. CHRYSOMALLON SQUAMIFERUM

- **What is it?** It is a scaly- foot snail found at only three spots in the Indian Ocean.
- **Why in News?** It has become the first species to be officially declared threatened due to deep-sea mining.

Key facts:

- Chrysomallon squamiferum is found at three hydrothermal vents in the Indian Ocean, east of Madagascar.
- It was added by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to its updated Red List of Endangered Species on July 18, 2019.

66. AMERICAN POCKET SHARK, OR MOLLISQUAMA MISSISSIPIENSIS

- **What is it?** It is a new species of pocket-sized pocket shark found recently in the **Gulf of Mexico**.
- It is only the third out of more than 500 known shark species that may squirt luminous liquid.

67. DRACAENA CAMBODIANA

- **Context:** A group of researchers has discovered **Dracaena cambodiana**, a dragon tree species in the Dongka Sarpo area of West Karbi Anglong, Assam.
- This is for the first time that a dragon tree species has been reported from India.
- The Dracaena seeds are usually dispersed by birds. But due to the large fruit size, only a few species of birds are able to swallow the fruits, thus limiting the scope of its natural conservation.
- Dracaena cambodiana is an important medicinal plant as well as an ornamental tree.
- It is a major source of dragon's blood, a precious traditional medicine in China.

68. PROAHAETULLA ANTIQUA

- It is a new species of vine snake discovered recently by researchers from the Western Ghats that dates back 26 million years.
- The species, endemic to southern Western Ghats, is thought to have evolved during the mid-Oligocene.

69. JUTE FIBRE CONVERTED INTO LOW-COST BIO-DEGRADABLE CELLULOSE SHEETS

- **Context:** Scientists in Bangladesh have developed a method to convert Jute fibre into low-cost bio-degradable cellulose sheets named '**Sonali**' which can be used as wrapping material and carrying bag.
- **Uses:** The Eco-friendly jute poly bags made up of Sonali can be used in garments and food packaging work and they are not harmful for human health.

70. SAHIWAL CATTLE

- Sahiwal is considered to be one of the best milch cattle breed of India.
- The breed derives its name from **Sahiwal area in Montgomery district of Punjab in Pakistan**.
- These animals are also known as "Lambi Bar", "Lola", "Montgomery", "Multani" and "Teli".

71. TAMIL YEOMAN

- **Context:** Tamil yeoman (*Cirrochroa thais*) butterfly species endemic to Western Ghats has been declared the state butterfly of Tamil Nadu.

Key facts:

- Uniformly orange in colour with a dark brown outer ring, Tamil Yeoman is among the 32 butterfly species found in the Western Ghats.

- This butterfly species moves in groups in large numbers, but only in a few places. Also known as **Tamil Maravan**, which means warrior, these butterflies are found mainly in the hilly areas.
- For the first time Tamil Nadu has declared its state butterfly and only fifth in the country to do so. Maharashtra was the first to declare **Blue Mormon** as its state butterfly, followed by Uttarakhand (Common peacock), Karnataka (Southern bird wings) and Kerala (Malabar banded peacock).



72. UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE LIST

- **Context:** The World Heritage Committee inscribed seven cultural sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

These sites include:

- **Burial Mounds (Bahrain):** The burial mounds are evidence of the Early Dilmun civilization, around the 2nd millennium BCE, during which Bahrain became a trade hub, whose prosperity enabled the inhabitants to develop an elaborate burial tradition applicable to the entire population.
- **Budj Bim Cultural Landscape (Australia):** Composed of channels, dams and weirs, they are used to contain floodwaters and create basins to trap, store and harvest the kooyang eel (*Anguilla australis*), which has provided the population with an economic and social base for six millennia.
- **Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City (China):** Located in the Yangtze River Basin on the southeastern coast of the country, the archaeological ruins of Liangzhu (about 3300-2300 BCE) reveal an early regional state with a unified belief system based on rice cultivation in Late Neolithic China.
- **Jaipur City, Rajasthan (India):** The fortified city of Jaipur, in India's northwestern state of Rajasthan was founded in 1727 by Sawai Jai Singh II. Unlike other cities in the region located in hilly terrain, Jaipur was established on the plain and built

according to a grid plan interpreted in the light of Vedic architecture.

- **Ombilin Coal Mining Heritage of Sawahlunto, (Indonesia):** Built for the extraction, processing and transport of high-quality coal in an inaccessible region of Sumatra, this industrial site was developed by the Netherlands' colonial government from the late 19th to the beginning of the 20th century with a workforce recruited from the local population and supplemented by convict labour from Dutch-controlled areas.
- **Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group: Mounded Tombs of Ancient Japan (Japan):** Located on a plateau above the Osaka Plain, this property includes 49 kofun (old mounds in Japanese). These kofun have been selected from a total of 160,000 in Japan and form the richest material representation of the Kofun period, from the 3rd to the 6th century CE. They demonstrate the differences in social classes of that period and reflect a highly sophisticated funerary system.
- **Megalithic Jar Sites in Xiengkhouang — Plain of Jars (Lao People's Democratic Republic):** The Plain of Jars, located on a plateau in central Laos, gets its name from more than 2,100 tubular-shaped megalithic stone jars used for funerary practices in the Iron Age.

73. 'KHARCHI PUJA' BEGINS IN TRIPURA

- The annual "Kharchi Puja" and festival is meant to cleanse the sins of mortal souls.
- Originally a Hindu tribals' festivity, it is now observed by all communities and religions.
- The festival features 14 deities – Shiva, Durga, Vishnu, Laxmi, Saraswati, Kartik, Ganesha, Brahma, Abadhi (God of water), Chandra, Ganga, Agni, Kamdev and Himadri (Himalaya).
- This year the Kharchi Puja mela will be celebrated with the theme of 'Nesha Mukta Tripura and Save Water'.

74. JAGANNATH RATH YATRA

- Popularly known as the 'Festival of Chariots', Rath Yatra festival in honour of Puri's Lord Jagannath is grand celebration.
- The festival is dedicated to Lord Jagannath, his sister Goddess Subhadra and elder brother Balabhadra.
- All the three deities of the temple – Jagannath, Subhadra and Balabhadra – travel in three different chariots during this festival. The chariots are called Nandighosha, Taladhwaja, and Devadalana respectively.
- New chariots for all the three deities are constructed every year using wood even if the architect of the chariots remain similar. Four wooden horses are attached to each chariot.

75. ASHADHI BEEJ

- It is an auspicious day for farming communities in North India especially Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and

some other places. This festival is celebrated mainly to predict the monsoon.

76. KERALA CHAMPIONS BOAT LEAGUE

- The Champions Boat League (CBL) has been conceived by tourism officials in Kerala on the model of the Indian Premier League (IPL) to transform the state's legendary and historically-significant 'vallamkali' (snake boat races) into a world-class sporting event.
- The snake boat, or 'chundam vallam' is essentially a long canoe that can seat up to 100 rowers and can have a length between 100 and 138 feet in length. While the front portion of the boat tapers with a pointy end, the rear end can rise up to a height of 20 feet — the entire wooden structure resembling a snake with its raised hood, hence the name.
- **Background:** Snake boat races owe their origins as far back as the 13th century when princely kingdoms, located in present-day Alappuzha along the backwaters, would have raging battles in the water. These battles used to be fought on the snake boats especially constructed for the purpose. In fact, the construction mechanisms of such boats are even said to be recorded in the Vedas.

77. MARKANDESHWAR TEMPLE IN MAHARASHTRA

- **Context:** Restoration work of Markandeshwar temple in Maharashtra by Archaeological Survey of India is in full swing.

About the temple:

- Known as the "Khajuraho of Vidarbha", the temple of Markandadeo is situated on the bank of River Wainganga in district Gadchiroli of Maharashtra.
- The temples belong to the Nagara group of temples of North India.
- On stylistic grounds, their date ranges in between 9-12th centuries CE.
- The temples belong to saiva, vaishnava and saka faith. Most of the temples have a simple plan, with ardhamandapa, mandapa, antarala and garbhagriha forming the component of the entire set up.



78. SHAWALA TEJA SINGH TEMPLE

- **Context:** 1,000-year-old Shawala Teja Singh Temple located in Sialkot city of Pakistan, which was sealed for last 72 years, has been re-opened for devotees for the 1st time since partition.
- **Shawala Teja Singh temple** is an ancient Hindu temple which was built by Sardar Teja Singh. It is dedicated to Hindu deity Shiva.

79. REPUBLIC OF BENIN

- **Context:** India has offered a USD 100 million line of credit to Benin for its development projects.

Where is it located?

- It is a country in West Africa. It is bordered by Togo to the west, Nigeria to the east, and Burkina Faso and Niger to the north.



80. DEMILITARIZED ZONE

- **Context:** US President Donald Trump recently met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at the **Demilitarized Zone**.
- **What is it?** The DMZ, which runs across the Korean Peninsula, is 248 kilometres long and 4 kilometres wide. Created as a buffer at the close of the 1950-53 Korean War, it's jointly overseen by the American-led UN Command and North Korea.

81. INDIA-RUSSIA STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DIALOGUE

- **Why in News?** Second India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue is being held.
- The IRSED was established following a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation during the 19th edition of the Annual India-Russia Bilateral Summit, which was held on October 5, 2018, in New Delhi.
- The First India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue was held in St. Petersburg in 2018.

82. INFOSYS OPENS CYBER DEFENCE CENTRE IN ROMANIA

- **Context:** Infosys has announced the launch of its state-of-the-art **Cyber Defence Center in Bucharest, Romania**.
- **Functions:** The Defence Center will provide end-to-end, real-time, 24/7 cyber security monitoring and protection services to support European and global businesses on their digital transformation journey. These services, including security monitoring, management and remediation, threat hunting, security analytics, incident discovery, and response will be delivered by certified and highly skilled cyber security professionals.

83. RED CORNER NOTICES

- **Context:** Based on Red Corner notices, 27 accused persons extradited to India till 1st April 2019.
- **What is it?** Red Notice is issued by Interpol and is meant to facilitate quick location and arrest of a person abroad and providing the information to the national agency / authority on whose request the Notice was issued. The Red Notice is not a prerequisite for and may not necessarily lead to the extradition of a fugitive offender for which there is a separate legal process to be followed.

84. NASA'S DRAGONFLY ROBOT

- **Context:** NASA has planned to return to Saturn's moon Titan with a nuclear-powered drone, **Dragonfly**.
- Dragonfly aims to search for signs of microbial alien life on Saturn's moon Titan, while navigating its earth-like gravity and aerodynamics in the process.
- The mission will succeed **NASA's Cassini probe**, which ended its 13-year mission orbiting Saturn in September 2017 by diving into Saturn's atmosphere.
- Dragonfly mission is a part of **NASA's New Frontiers program**, which includes a series of space exploration missions, which are being conducted with the purpose of researching several of the Solar System bodies, including the dwarf planet Pluto.
- **The New Frontiers programme** also includes Pluto probe New Horizons, Jupiter probe Juno and OSIRIS-Rex asteroid mission.
- The Dragonfly mission replaces a previously discontinued concept project called **Titan Saturn System Mission (TSSM)**, which required a balloon probe to circumnavigate Titan.

85. TIANGONG 2

- It is a space station launched by China. It is part of China's plan to establish a manned space station around 2022.
- It is placed at 380 kilometres above Earth. There are two astronauts on board. Tiangong 2 will be used to test space technology and conduct medical and space experiments.

86. HYPERBOLA-1

- **Context:** iSpace, a Chinese startup, has launched first commercial rocket of China- **Hyperbola-1**– into the Earth's orbit.
- Hyperbola-1 is carrying the **CAS-7B CubeSat (microsatellite)**. It is an amateur radio mission which is developed by the Beijing Institute of Technology. Hyperbola-1 is also carrying a satellite for **Aerospace Science and Technology Space Engineering Development Co. Ltd.**
- **About Hyperbola-1:** It is around 68,000 pounds (31 metric tons) with three lower stages burning pre-packed solid propellants, and a liquid-fueled upper stage for a final orbital injection maneuver. This rocket is able to deliver up to 573 pounds (260 kilograms) of payload mass to a 310-mile-high (500 kilometer) sun-synchronous polar orbit.

87. GREEN TAX ON PLANE TICKETS

- **Context:** France to impose green tax on plane tickets from 2020.
- The new measure is expected to bring in some €182 million a year which will be **invested in greener transport infrastructures**, notably rail. It will **only be applied on outgoing flights and not those flying into the country**.

88. NON-RESIDENT KERALITE INVESTMENT COMPANY

- **Context:** To channel investments from overseas Keralites for major infrastructure development in the state, the Kerala state Government has decided to form an **NRK investment company**.

About NRK investment company:

- **Ownership:** NRK Investment and Holding Company Ltd. will be formed with **74% share capital from**

NRKs, the state government will hold the remaining 26% stake.

- **The Chief Executive Officer of Norka Roots will be the Special Officer of the new company.**
- The company can set up a **special purpose vehicle or subsidiary company for the purpose**.
- **Roles and functions:** Construction of NRI townships and other projects related to basic infrastructure development will be taken up by the new company.

Background:

- Established in 2002, **NORA ROOTS** is the arm of the state government to promote and execute several welfare activities for millions of Non-resident Keralites across the globe. Key objectives of the agency are to effectively address the challenges faced by the NRKs, protect their rights, rehabilitate the returnees etc.

89. WORLD POPULATION DAY 2019

- World Population Day observed on **July 11** every year with aims and objectives to spread knowledge about population related issues across the world.
- This year's World Population Day calls for **global attention to the unfinished business of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development**.
- The event was **established by the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme in 1989**. It was **inspired by the public interest in Five Billion Day on July 11, 1987**, the approximate date on which the world's population reached five billion people.
- **Most populous countries in the world:** China remains the most populous country in the world with 1.4 billion inhabitants (18.4 per cent of world population) followed by India with 1.3 billion inhabitants (17.7 per cent of world population).