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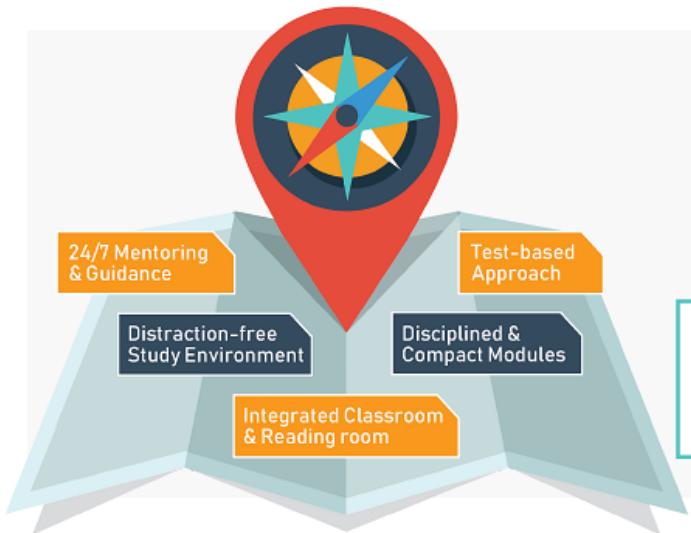
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GS PAPER - I

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

1. Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS)

Context:

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

About CIHTS:

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

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** CIHTS and Buddhist circuit.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Tholu Bommalata

Context:

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



Background:

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

About Tholu Bommalata:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. Nathu La

Context:

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



Background:

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

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra:

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

Facts for Prelims:

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

Sources: the hindu.

4. Lalit Kala Akademi

Context:

- President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed Mumbai-based sculptor Uttam Pacharne the chairman of Lalit Kala Akademi.

Lalit Kala Akademi:

- The Lalit Kala Akademi or National Academy of Art is India's National Academy of Fine Arts.
- It is an autonomous organization, established at New Delhi in 1954 to promote and propagate understanding of Indian art, both within and outside the country.
- It does so through providing scholarships, a fellow program, and sponsoring and organizing numerous exhibitions in India and overseas.

Sources: the hindu.

5. Sadharan Brahmo Samaj

Context:

- Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (SBS), the party funded by Rabindranath Tagore's father in the initial years, has entered into a legal battle with the West Bengal State government over its decision to dissolve the governing bodies of eight colleges in Kolkata run by the organisation.

What's the issue?

- The governing bodies of the eight colleges were dissolved following the decision of the State's Minority Affairs and Madrasah Education Department to not to grant the SBS the status of a minority religion.
- The order argued that since SBS is not a "separate minority religion", the related colleges administered by it should be treated as "non-minority Government-aided Colleges."

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Sadharan Brahmo Samaj- its principles and doctrines, important leaders associated.

Sadharan Brahmo Samaj:

- The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was formed in May 1878. Mr. **Anandamohan Bose** was appointed the first President Mr. Shib Chandra Deb the first Secretary and Mr. Umesh Chandra Dutta the Assistant Secretary. It was formed as a result of schisms in the Brahmo Samaj.
- Debendranath Tagore**, father of Rabindranath Tagore was actively involved with the organisation.
- The Samaj had faith in a Supreme Being and believed that existence after Death is natural to man. It regarded the relation between God and men to be direct and immediate. It did not believe in the infallibility of any man or any scripture.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav-2018

Context:

- To celebrate the idea of unity in diversity, the Ministry of Culture is organising the the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav in Tehri, Uttarakhand. *The paired state for Uttarakhand under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat matrix is Karnataka*, and while troupes from all over the country will be performing, special emphasis is being given to Karnataka.

Facts for Prelims:

- The Ministry of Culture is organising the event under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat matrix.
- Tehri Lake Festival where one can explore the water sports, organized by the Uttarakhand Tourism every year, will be subsumed within the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav.

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:

- The Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme was launched by the Prime Minister on 31st October, 2016 to promote engagement amongst the people of different states/UTs so as to enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Sanskriti Mahotsav, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.
- For Mains:** Need for cultural integrity.

About RSM:

- Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav** was conceived by the **Ministry of Culture** in the year 2015, when the Ministry decided to organize it with an intent to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Country in all its rich and varied dimensions, viz Handicrafts, Cuisine, Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Documentation and Performing Arts- Folk, Tribal, Classical and Contemporary- all in one place.

Sources: the hindu.

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

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

Context:

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

Guidelines:

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

Background:

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

POCSO Act:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme

Context:

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



Concerns:

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

Way ahead:

- Declining sex ratio is a silent emergency. But the crisis is real, and its persistence has profound and frightening implications for society and the future of humankind. Clearly, there is a need to go beyond slogans and institute tangible schemes.
- Enforcement of the law that prohibits determination of the sex of the foetus must go hand in hand with massive social investments to protect both immediate and long-term prospects of girls — in the form of cash incentives through registration of births, a continuum of health care, early educational opportunities and social protection. Half-measures cannot produce a dramatic reversal of the shameful national record.

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

3. One Stop Centres (OSCs)

Context:

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

About One Stop Centres (OSCs):

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

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.

4. Domestic Violence Act applies after divorce too

Context:

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

What is Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005?

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

Way ahead:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

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5. Bharosa

Context:

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

Bharosa:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

About UNDP:

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

Important functions:

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

6. 'Samarth'

Context:

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

NSQF:

- National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) organizes qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude. These levels are defined in terms of learning outcomes which the learner must possess regardless of whether they were acquired through **formal**, **non-formal** or **informal** learning.
- There are 10 levels in the framework, with the entry level being 1, and the highest level being 10. This will enable a person to acquire desired competency levels, transit to the job market and, at an opportune time, return for acquiring additional skills to further upgrade competencies.
- The framework would be anchored and operationalized by the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Finance,

About Samarth scheme:

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

mandated to coordinate and harmonize skill development efforts of the Government of India and the private sector.

Significance of NSQF:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

7. INSV Tarini

Context:

- INSV Tarini has completed a historic global Circumnavigation. This is the first-ever Indian circumnavigation of the globe by an all-women crew.



Significance:

- The expedition titled '**Navika Sagar Parikrama**' is in consonance with the National policy to empower women to attain their full potential. It has showcased '**Nari Shakti**' on the world platform and helped change societal attitudes and mindset towards women in India by raising visibility of their participation in challenging environs.

About the Journey:

- During her **254 day long voyage**, the vessel has covered over 22,000 Nautical miles, visiting five countries – Australia, New Zealand, Falkland Islands (UK), South Africa and Mauritius.
- During the course of her voyage, the **vessel has met all criteria of circumnavigation**, viz. crossing the Equator twice, crossing all Longitudes, as also the three great capes (Cape Leeuwin, Cape Horn and Cape of Good Hope).
- The expedition was covered in six legs, with halts at 5 ports: Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands), Cape Town (South Africa) and Port Louis (Mauritius).

INSV Tarini:

- INSV Tarini is a 56 foot sailing vessel built in India by M/s Aquarius Shipyard Pvt Ltd, Goa. It was inducted into the Indian Navy recently in February 2017.
- It has Raymarine navigation suite and an array of satellite communication systems for perfect navigation anywhere in the world. It showcases the 'Make in India' initiative on the International forum.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** INSV Tarini, Navika Sagar Parikrama, Nari Shakti and Criteria of circumnavigation.

Sources: the hindu.

8. Women Entrepreneurship Platform

Context:

- NITI Aayog and actor Sushant Singh Rajput have decided to collaborate towards promoting the Women Entrepreneurship Platform launched by the NITI Aayog.

About the Women Entrepreneurship Platform:

- **Aim:** The initiative is aimed at building an ecosystem for women across India to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations, scale-up innovative initiatives and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their businesses. This will be done through an enabling network of industry collaborations, partnerships, mentors and peer-to-peer connect.
- **What it does?** From providing unique services such as credit evaluation of women-led startups by CRISIL and potential equity investments through an INR 10 crore fund established by DICE Districts, the WEP opens up avenues of growth and opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

As an enabling platform, WEP is built on three pillars- Iccha Shakti, Gyaan Shakti & Karma Shakti where:

- Iccha Shakti represents motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to start their business.
- Gyaan Shakti represents providing knowledge and ecosystem support to women entrepreneurs to help them foster entrepreneurship.
- Karma Shakti represents providing hands-on support to entrepreneurs in setting-up and scaling up businesses.

Background:

- According to Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs, India scored an overall 41.7 points, ranking 49 among 54 economies globally with comparatively low in Women Business Ownership percentages.

Need for economic empowerment of women:

- Economically empowered women are major catalysts for development. There is greater recognition of the positive relationship between increased economic activity by women and improved social outcomes.
- Women often tend to reinvest their income in their children's education, health and nutrition. This has a positive impact on the potential for economic growth

Challenges:

- India presents lower opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, participation in the workforce or engagement in entrepreneurial activities.
- Lack of education, technological know-how and cultural bias coupled with stringent business and government regulations are some key impediments that happen to undermine women's ability to rise to positions of leadership and take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities in India.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** WEP and its aim, Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs.
- **For Mains:** Significance of women entrepreneurs for the overall growth of the country.

Sources: pib.

9. Women Safety Division in MHA

Context:

- MHA has created a new Division to address issues of women safety comprehensively.

About the Women Safety Division:

- The division, headed by a joint secretary level officer, would deal with all aspects of women's safety in coordination with the relevant ministries, departments and state governments.

- Besides dealing with crimes against women, the new division will deal with crimes against SCs and STs, crimes against children and elderly persons, the anti-trafficking cell, matters relating to prison legislation and prison reforms, all schemes under the Nirbhaya fund, Crime and Criminal Tracking and Network System and the National Crime Records Bureau.
- In order to address offences against women, particularly rape, in a time-bound manner, the division would focus to enhance capacity of the existing administrative, investigative, prosecution and judicial machinery, along with appropriate measures for rehabilitation of victims and bringing attitudinal changes in society.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Women Safety Division.
- For Mains:** Security of women- Challenges, issues and solutions.

Sources: pib.

10. Irish abortion referendum

Context:

- In its recent referendum, Ireland voted decisively to repeal one of the world's more restrictive abortion bans, sweeping aside generations of conservative patriarchy and dealing the latest in a series of stinging rebukes to the Roman Catholic Church. The vote repeals the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution.



What is the eighth amendment?

- The eighth amendment is a clause inserted into the Irish constitution after a referendum in 1983. It recognises an equal right to life for both mother and unborn child, effectively prohibiting abortion in almost all cases.

Why was it introduced?

- Abortion had been illegal in Ireland since the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861. But with reform under way around Europe and many countries opting to permit abortions on request until 12 weeks or more, anti-abortion campaigners in Ireland sought the greater security of a constitutional amendment.

What does the law say now?

- Two further referendums were held in 1992, resulting in the 13th amendment, which allows women to travel in and out of Ireland to have an abortion (pro-repeal campaigners say 170,000 have done so), and the 14th, which authorises information about abortion services overseas. In 2013, the law was changed to permit abortions when doctors feel a woman's life may be at risk from pregnancy complications or suicide. Otherwise, a doctor unlawfully performing an abortion faces prosecution and up 14 years in jail.

Way ahead:

- Repeal of the 8th amendment would allow the government to legislate on abortion. The proposed legislation will bring Ireland into line with the majority of European countries, allowing for abortion on request up to the 12th week of pregnancy (subject to medical regulation). After 12 weeks abortion would only be available in cases of fatal foetal anomaly, if the pregnant woman's life was at risk or if her health was at risk of serious harm. Cases after 12 weeks would have to be approved by two doctors.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** 8th amendment to the Irish constitution.
- For Mains:** Abortion related issues.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 1 Topic: Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

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

Context:

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

About the ICCC:

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

Facts for Prelims:

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

About Smart City mission- Key facts:

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

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. Swachh Survekshan 2018

Context:

- The Swachh Survekshan 2018 results have been announced. It was organized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), under the aegis of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), assessed 4203 Urban Local

Bodies. Compared to the previous surveys, this year's exercise allocated substantial weightage to the feedback from citizens based on their daily experience.

The on-field survey for Swachh Survekshan was conducted by an independent agency and the data for ranking of the cities collected from 3 sources:

- **Service Level Progress:** To verify whether systems and processes are in place in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to implement Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) in the most efficient way.
- **Direct Observation:** To verify and assess general cleanliness in the cities by making random field visits in different parts of the city and public conveniences (Community/Public Toilets).
- **Citizens Feedback:** To collect feedback directly from citizens and monitor the performance of Swachhata App, a citizens grievance Mobile App.

Performance of various cities:

- Indore has emerged as the cleanest city, followed by Bhopal and Chandigarh. Indore was the cleanest city last year as well.
- Jharkhand has been adjudged as the best performing state, followed by Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.
- Cleanest State Capital/UT: Greater Mumbai.
- India's 'Cleanest big City': Vijaywada (Andhra Pradesh).
- India's 'Fastest Mover' big City: Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh).
- India's Best City in 'Citizens Feedback': Kota (Rajasthan).
- India's Best City in 'Innovation & Best Practices': Nagpur (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Solid Waste Management': Navi Mumbai (Maharashtra).
- India's Cleanest Medium City: Mysuru (Karnataka).
- India's 'Fastest Mover' Medium City: Bhiwandi (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Citizens Feedback': Parbhani (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Innovation & Best Practices': Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh).
- India's Best City in 'Solid Waste Management': Mangalore (Karnataka).
- India's Cleanest Small City: New Delhi Municipal Council.
- India's 'Fastest Mover' Small City: Bhusawal (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Citizens Feedback': Giridih (Jharkhand).
- India's Best City in 'Innovation & Best Practices': Ambikapur (Jharkhand).
- India's Best City in 'Solid Waste Management': Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh).

Previous surveys:

- In 2016, Swachh Survekshan was conducted in 73 cities having a population of one million or more and capital city of States/ UTs and Mysore had bagged the award of being the cleanest city of India.
- In 2017, the scope of Swachh Survekshan was enlarged to cover 434 cities having a population of one lakh or more and Capital city of states/ UTs and Indore was awarded as cleanest city of India.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Rankings of cities in various categories.
- **For Mains:** Swachh Bharat Mission- Significance, challenges and solutions.

Sources: the hindu.

GS PAPER - II

Paper 2 Topic: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

Cauvery Management Scheme

Context:

- The Supreme Court has ordered the Central government to implement its draft Cauvery Management Scheme after finding it in consonance with its February 16 judgment. The court also found the draft scheme in conformity with Section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act.



Background:

- The apex court, in its verdict delivered on February 16, had asked the Centre to frame the Cauvery management scheme, including creation of the Cauvery Management Board, for release of water from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

Modifications made by the Court:

- The top court had modified the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) award of 2007 and made it clear that it will not be extending the time for this on any ground.
- It had raised the 270 tmcft share of Cauvery water for Karnataka by 14.75 tmcft and reduced Tamil Nadu's share, while compensating it by allowing extraction of 10 tmcft groundwater from the river basin, saying the issue of drinking water has to be placed on a "higher pedestal".

About the Cauvery Management Scheme:

- The Cauvery water management scheme will deal with the release of water from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.
- It will be implemented by the Cauvery Management Authority (CMA). CMA will be the sole body to implement the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal award as modified by the apex court. The Centre would have no say in it except for issuing administrative advisories to it.

What's the dispute?

- The dispute began with Karnataka's demand of 'equitable sharing of the waters' after it expanded farming activities in the Cauvery basin.
- It claimed that the previous agreements, which happened between erstwhile Madras Presidency and Kingdom of Mysore in 1924, were highly skewed to what is present day Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu used to get about 602 TMC of the total water, leaving only about 138 TMC for Karnataka.

Facts for Prelims:

- Cauvery River rises on Brahmagiri Hill of the Western Ghats in south-western Karnataka state. It flows in a south-easterly direction for 475 miles through the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- Before emptying into the Bay of Bengal south of Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, the river breaks into a large number of distributaries forming a wide delta called the "garden of southern India." The river is important for its irrigation canal projects.
- In the upper course, at the Krishnaraja Sagara, the Kaveri is joined by two tributaries, the Hemavati and Lakshmantirtha, where a dam was constructed for irrigation.
- Upon entering Tamil Nadu, the Kaveri continues through a series of twisted wild gorges until it reaches Hogenakkal Falls. There the Mettur Dam was constructed for irrigation and hydel power.
- The Kaveri's main tributaries are the Kabani (Kabbani), Amaravati, Noyil, and Bhavani rivers.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: 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.

Inter-State Council (ISC)

Context:

- Inter-State Council Standing Committee under the chairmanship of Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh completes its deliberations on Punchhi Commission report.

Background:

- The recommendations in Volume VI of the Punchhi Commission report are related to Environment, Natural Resources and Infrastructure. The recommendations in Volume VII are related to Socio-economic Development, Public Policy and Good Governance.

About the inter-state council:

What is it?

- The Council is a recommendatory body to investigate and discuss subjects, in which some or all of the states or the union government have a common interest.

Key facts:

- Article 263 of the Constitution of India provides for the establishment of an Inter-State Council.
- It considers recommendations for the better coordination of policy and action, and also matters of general interest to the states.
- The inter-state council is not a permanent constitutional body for coordination between the states and union government. It can be established ‘at any time’ if it appears to the President that the public interests would be served by the establishment of such a council.

Punchhi Commission:

- Punchhi Commission notified in 2005 submitted its report in 2010.
- The recommendations of the Punchhi Commission, which are contained in seven Volumes pertain to History of Centre-State Relations in India; Constitutional Governance and Management of Centre-State Relations; Centre-State Financial Relations and Planning; Local Self-Governments and Decentralized Governance; Internal Security, Criminal Justice and Centre-State Cooperation; Environment, Natural Resources & Infrastructure; and Socio-Economic Development, Public Policy and Good Governance.

The Council shall consist of:

- Prime minister who is the chairman.
- Chief ministers of all states who are members.
- Chief ministers of union territories and administrators of UTs as members.
- Six union ministers of cabinet rank in the union council of ministers nominated by the prime minister are also members.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Inter- state council- composition, functions and constitutional provisions.
- **For Mains:** Punchhi commission report- highlights.

Sources: pib.

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

1. Finance Commission

Context:

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

The role and functions of the Advisory Council will be:

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

About the Finance Commission:

What is a Finance Commission?

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

Composition of Finance Commission:

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

Qualifications:

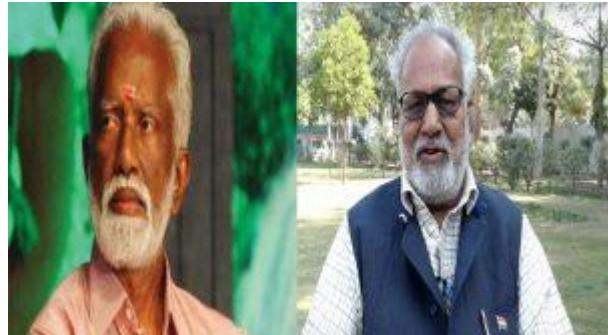
- The Chairman shall have vast experience in Public affairs and other four members shall be selected among persons who a) have qualifications as par with a judge of HC, b) has special knowledge of Finance and Accounts of govt, c) have vast experience in financial matters and d) have special knowledge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

Sources: pib.

2. New governors appointed

Context:

- Ganeshi Lal and Kummanam Rajasekharan have been appointed as Governors of Odisha and Mizoram respectively by the President of India.



Governors of States in India:

- Governor is the head of the Executive power of any state in India, just like the President who is the head of the executive power in the Union. But, 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, 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. 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.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Constitutional provisions related to the office of governor.

- **For Mains:** Controversies surrounding the office of the governor.

Sources: pib.

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

1. Indian Petroleum & Explosives Safety Service (IPESS)

Context:

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

Significance of the move:

- To remove acute stagnation in all grades and uplift the morale of the workforce and enhance its performance, it has been decided to form Group 'A' Service of the technical cadre of PESO in the name of IPESS and restructure the newly-formed service.
- The measure will enhance the capacity and efficiency of the organization and it will also enhance career progression of its Group 'A' officers.

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

About PESO:

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

2. Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission

Context:

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

Key facts:

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

Background:

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

Key facts for Prelims:

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

INTRODUCTION

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

About IPC:

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

What's important ?

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. TRIFED

Context:

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

Key facts:

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

About TRIFED:

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

What it does ?

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

What's important ?

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

Sources: pib.

4. Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)

Context:

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

Key facts:

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

Need for a unified umbrella authority:

- Presently, the trade defence mechanism in India lacks optimality and takes more than a year to complete proceedings in cases pertaining to unfair trade practices. Currently, the Directorate General of Anti-dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) deals with anti-dumping and CVD cases, Directorate General of Safeguards (DGS) deals with safeguard measures and DGFT deals with quantitative restriction (QR) safeguards.
- The DGTR will bring DGAD, DGS and Safeguards (QR) functions of DGFT into its fold by merging them into one single national entity. This provides comprehensive and swift trade defence mechanism in India.
- The creation of DGTR will also provide a level playing field to the domestic industry. In the last three years, India initiated more than 130 anti-dumping/countervailing duty/safeguard cases to deal with the rising incidences of unfair trade practices and to provide a level playing field to the domestic industry.

Functions of DGTR:

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

What's important?

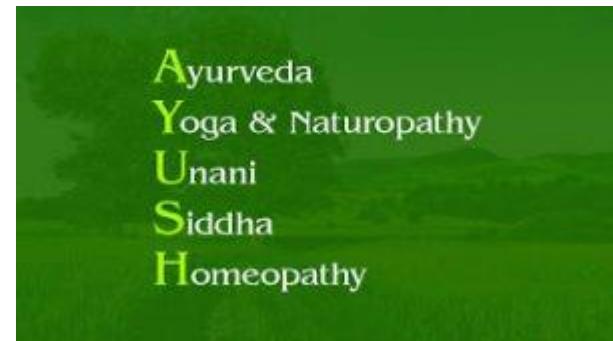
- For Prelims:** About DGTR.
- For Mains:** Need for comprehensive and swift trade defence mechanism in India.

Sources: pib.

5. “AYUSH” finds a place in English Language

Context:

- The Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology has decided to adopt the word ‘AYUSH’ in Hindi and English languages for scientific and technical purposes.
- As approved by the Commission, the word ‘ayush’ will have the meaning “Traditional and Non-Conventional Systems of Health Care and Healing which include Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa, Homoeopathy etc.

**Background:**

- The “AYUSH” became popular as the acronym for five traditional and complementary systems of medicine, namely Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy and successfully adopted and used in all Government communications.

Implications:

- This decision will give a boost to India’s efforts to find a place for the Indian Systems of Healthcare in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the World Health Organization. The Indian systems finding a place in ICD will lead to their international acceptance, increased rigor of research in them and their over-all development.

About International Classification of Diseases (ICD):

- The International Classification of Diseases is the standard diagnostic tool for epidemiology, health management, and clinical purposes. This includes the analysis of the general health situation of population

groups. It is used to monitor the incidence and prevalence of diseases and other health problems, providing a picture of the general health situation of countries and populations.

- The first international classification edition, known as the International List of Causes of Death, was adopted by the International Statistical Institute in 1893. WHO was entrusted with the ICD at its creation in 1948. The ICD is revised periodically and is currently in its 10th revision.

Uses of ICD:

- Uses include monitoring of the incidence and prevalence of diseases, observing reimbursements and resource allocation trends, and keeping track of safety and quality guidelines. They also include the counting of deaths as well as diseases, injuries, symptoms, reasons for encounter, factors that influence health status, and external causes of disease.

Facts for Prelims:

Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology:

- The Commission for Scientific & Technical Terminology (CSTT) was set up on December 21, 1960 by a resolution of Government of India under the proviso to Clause (4) of Article 344 of the Constitution with the objective to evolve and define scientific and technical terms in Hindi and all Indian languages; publish glossaries, definitional dictionaries, encyclopaedia.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** ICD- 10, CSTT.
- For Mains:** Significance and the need of ICD.

Sources: pib.

6. Advance rulings (AAR)

Context:

- The GST council has asked the Centre and states to expedite setting up of appellate authorities for aggrieved entities to appeal against orders of the authority for advance rulings (AAR).

Background:

- With AARs in different states started giving rulings since March, it has become imperative for the Centre as well as states to set up the appellate authority for advance ruling (AAAR).
- So far only 12 states, including West Bengal, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, have issued notifications for setting up AAARs. However, these have not become operational as the members have not yet been appointed.

The broad objectives for setting up a mechanism of Advance Ruling are:

- Provide certainty in tax liability in advance in relation to an activity proposed to be undertaken by the applicant.
- Attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
- Reduce litigation.
- Pronounce ruling expeditiously in a transparent and inexpensive manner.

About AAAR:

- As per the state GST law, the appellate authority will have two members – the chief commissioner of central tax as designated by CBIC and the commissioner of state tax.
- The appellate authority has been mandated to pass order within 90 days of the filing of appeal.
- Under the GST (goods and services tax) law, an aggrieved party can file an appeal against the order of the authority for advance rulings within 30 days, which may be further extended by a month.

What is an Advance Ruling?

- “Advance ruling” means a decision provided by the Authority or the Appellate Authority to an applicant on matters or on questions specified in sub-section (2) of section 97 or subsection (1) of section 100 of the CGST Act, 2017, in relation to the supply of goods or services or both being undertaken or proposed to be undertaken by the applicant.

'Authority for advance ruling' (AAR) and 'Appellate authority for advance ruling' (AAAR):

- The Authority for advance ruling constituted under the provisions of State Goods and Services Tax Act or Union Territory Goods and Services Tax Act shall be deemed to be the Authority for advance ruling in respect of that State or Union territory under the CGST Act, 2017 also.
- The Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling constituted under the provisions of a State Goods and Services Tax Act or a Union Territory Goods and Services Tax Act shall be deemed to be the Appellate Authority in respect of that State or Union territory under the CGST Act, 2017 also.
- Thus it can be seen that both the Authority for Advance Ruling (AAR) & the Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling (AAAR) is constituted under the respective State/Union Territory Act and not the Central Act.***
- This would mean that the ruling given by the AAR & AAAR will be applicable only within the jurisdiction of the concerned state or union territory. It is also for this reason that questions on determination of place of supply cannot be raised with the AAR or AAAR.

What happens when there is difference of opinion among the members?

- Before giving the ruling, AAR must hear the applicant or his authorised representative as well as the jurisdictional officers of CGST/SGST.
- If there is a difference of opinion between the two members of AAR, they shall refer the point or points on which they differ to the AAAR for hearing the issue. If the members of AAAR are also unable to come to a common conclusion in regard to the point(s) referred to them by AAR, then it shall be deemed that no advance ruling can be given in respect of the question on which difference persists at the level of AAAR.

What's important?

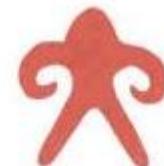
- For Prelims:** AAR, AAAR- powers, composition and jurisdiction.
- For Mains:** Advance ruling- need, significance and challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

7. Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)

Context:

- Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is engaged in restoration works of a trove of more than 600 pages of rare Tibetan manuscripts which contains Buddha's teachings written in gold letters. The restoration work is being carried out at Mak Dhog Monastery in West Bengal.



INTACH
UK TRUST

**The Indian National Trust
for Art and Cultural Heritage**

Facts:

- The manuscripts contain the **ancient Tibetan text called Gyetongba**, which contains teachings of Buddhism. The manuscripts are in the **Tibetan script Sambhota**, named after its inventor.

About INTACH:

- INTACH is an autonomous non-governmental Indian non-profit society that seeks to preserve Indian culture and heritage. It was founded in 1984.
- In 2007, the United Nations awarded INTACH a special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** INTACH, Gyeetongba and Sambhota.
- For Mains:** Significance of Buddha's teachings.

Sources: the hindu.

8. NCDRC

Context:

- Former Supreme Court judge Justice R K Agrawal has been appointed the President of the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC).

Statutory provisions:

- Section 21** of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 posits that the National Consumer shall have jurisdiction to entertain a complaint valued more than one crore and also have Appellate and Revisional jurisdiction from the orders of State Commissions or the District fora as the case may be.
- Section 23** of Consumer Protection Act, 1986, provides that any person aggrieved by an order of NCDRC, may prefer an Appeal against such order to Supreme Court of India within a period of 30 days.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** NCDRC, Consumer Protection Act- Key features.
- For Mains:** Dispute redressal mechanisms and their significance.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Citizenship Bill

Context:

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

WHAT IS THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL 2016 ?

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

WHAT DOES IT WANT ?

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

WHY ARE PEOPLE IN ASSAM NOT HAPPY ABOUT IT ?

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

Assam Accord:

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. The accord

brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.

- As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.
- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

Sources: the hindu.

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

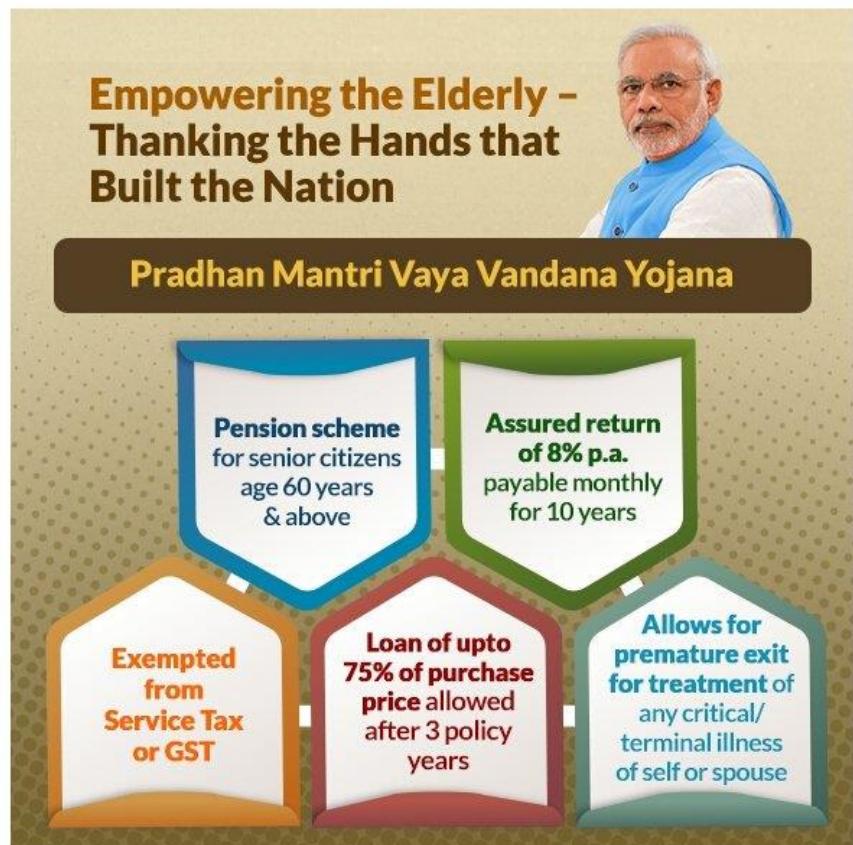
1. Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVYY)

Context:

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

About PMVYY:

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



Key features of the scheme:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

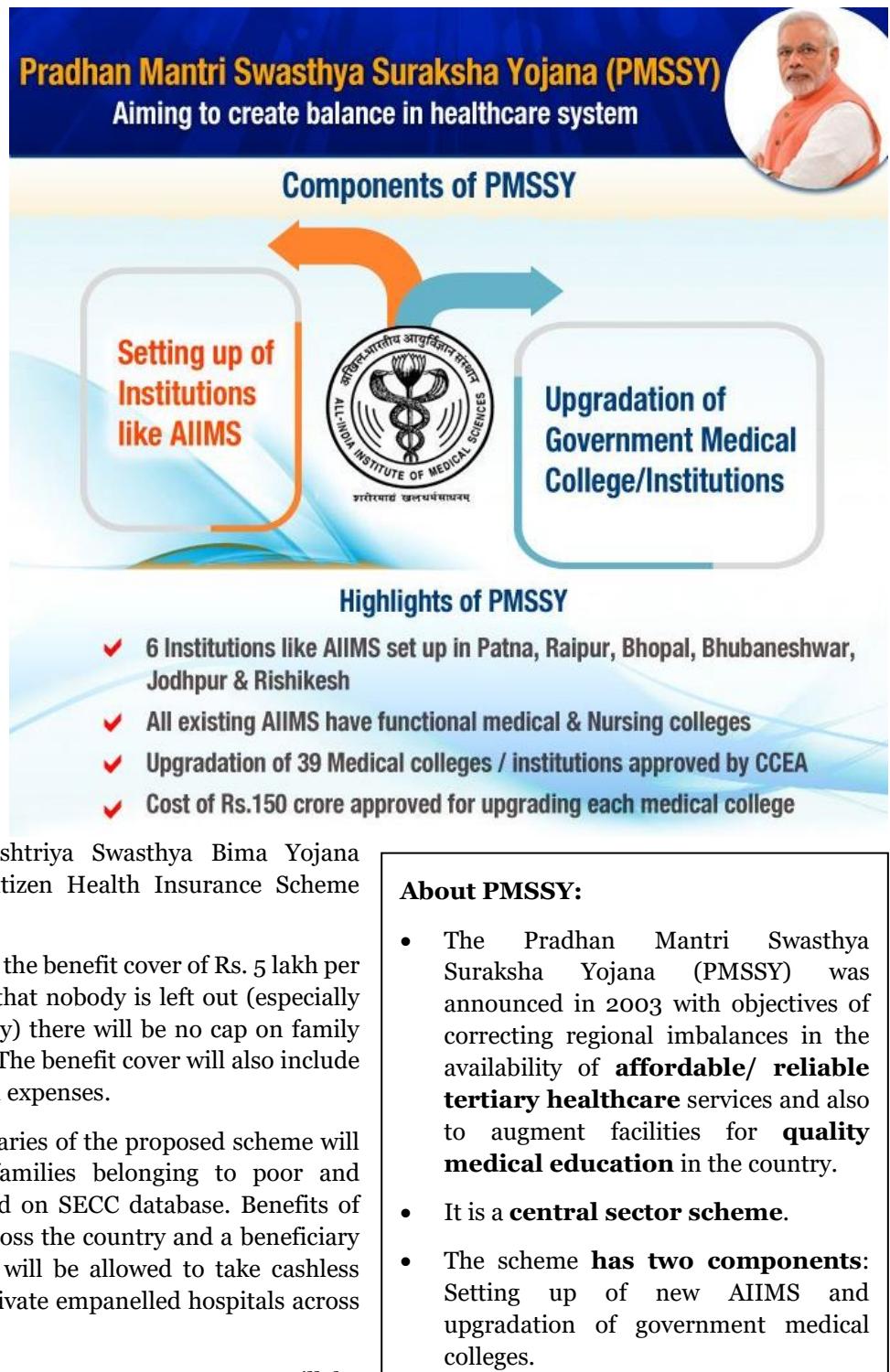
2. Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)

Context:

- In a major boost to the expansion of healthcare infrastructure in the country, the Union Cabinet Chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the continuation of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) beyond 12th Five Year Plan to 2019-20.
- The Centre has signed MoU with four States – Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Union Territory of Chandigarh for implementing Ayushman Bharat.

Highlights of the scheme:

- **It will subsume the ongoing centrally sponsored schemes** - Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).
- **Coverage:** The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.
- **Target:** The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database. Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- **Role of state governments:** State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.
- **Council:** For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.



Who is eligible?

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

Implementation Strategy:

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

Benefits of the scheme:

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

Significance of the scheme:

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

Employment Generation:

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

Way ahead:

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

What's important?

- For Prelims:** PMSSY, Ayushman Bharat- Particulars of the scheme.
- For Mains:** Significance of the scheme and the need for universal access to healthcare facilities in the country. Need for universal health coverage.

Sources: pib.

3. Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)

Context:

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

Background:

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

About PMJVK:

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

States/Districts covered:

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

What's important?

- For Prelims:** PMJVK and its significance.

Sources: pib.

4. Van Dhan Vikas Kendras

Context:

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

Implementation:

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

About Van Dhan Vikas Kendras initiative:

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

Significance of MFP:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

5. Senior Citizen draft Bill**Context:**

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

Key provisions in the Bill:

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

Elderly as a resource:

- The elderly should be seen as a blessing, not a burden. The elderly are becoming the fastest growing, but underutilized resource available to humanity. Rather than putting them aside, physically (and mentally), to be cared for separately, they should be integrated into the lives of communities where they can make a substantial contribution to improving social conditions.

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

Way ahead:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

6. Overcrowding in prisons

Context:

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

What are open prisons?

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

Background:

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

Management of prisons:

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

Need for reforms:

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

Way ahead:

- Indian jails have often been dubbed as a university for grooming criminals due to pathetic and inhumane conditions. In the absence of a robust Whistleblower Protection Act and structural changes to address the issues

of overcrowding and understaffing, India's prisons will continue to be heaven for politically connected criminals and hell for socio-economically disadvantaged undertrials, some regular media uproars notwithstanding.

- Fundamental rights of prisoners cannot be placed in the back-burner and the Centre and the states need to be more pro-active in sensitising staff about the need to treat prisoners as humanely as possible.

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

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

Context:

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

Impact:

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

What's the issue?

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

About SC/ST Act:

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

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** SC/ST Act and 9th schedule of the constitution.
- **For Mains:** Need for review of the act and issues related to judicial overreach.

Sources: the hindu.

8. Atal Pension Yojana

Context:

- Atal Pension Yojana has added over 1 crore subscribers since its launch in May 2015, the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) said recently. Atal Pension Yojana (APY) was launched in May 2015 and current number of subscriber stands at 1.10 crore.

About APY:

What is it?

- The Atal Pension Yojana became operational from June 1, 2015 and is available to all the citizens of India in the age group of 18-40 years.

Features:

- Under the scheme, a subscriber would receive a minimum guaranteed pension of Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, depending upon his contribution, from the age of 60 years.
- The same pension would be paid to the spouse of the subscriber and on the demise of both the subscriber and the spouse, the accumulated pension wealth is returned to the nominee.
- The Central Government would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years, that is, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, to those who join the NPS before 31st December, 2015 and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not Income Tax payers.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Key features of APY.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for inclusive growth.

Sources: pib.

9. ALIMCO

Context:

- Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD-Divyangjan Shashaktikaran Vibhag), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO) for the Financial Year 2018-19. It covers major developments to be achieved in this year for the Empowerment of Divyangjan of the country.

About ALIMCO:

- ALIMCO is a “Not For Profit” Central Public Sector Undertaking working under the administrative control of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
- For past 40 years, it has been relentlessly manufacturing various types of aids and appliances on mass scale to meet the requirements of PwDs including orthopedically, visual and hearing impaired etc.
- Since its inception, it has been serving on an average around two lakhs of disabled population every year and has supplied 42 lakhs of aids & appliances (approx.).

Need for their empowerment:

- A country can truly progress only when it is able to build an all-inclusive society, in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified life.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** ALIMCO.
- **For Mains:** Empowerment of Divyangjan- need and government initiatives in this regard.

Sources: pib.

10. "Transformation of aspirational" districts programme

Context:

- The Tata Trusts has joined hands with the government to help it in development initiatives in eight worst Naxal-affected districts in Chhattisgarh, which were covered under the “transformation of aspirational” districts programme.
- As per the pact, the Tata Trusts will help the government in conducting surveys and providing ground level and technical support in raising the living standards of citizens and ensuring inclusive growth for all.

About Transformation of Aspirational Districts Programme:

- ‘Transformation of Aspirational Districts’ was launched in January with an aim to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts in the country.

Implementation strategy:

- 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.
- This will converge the central and state schemes, collaborate central, state and district collectors to strengthen these districts by identifying the low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress and then rank the district by getting the data on a real-time basis.

Selection of backward districts:

- The 115 districts, including 35 affected by left-wing extremism, were selected on parameters like deprivation (extent of landless households), health & nutrition (institutional delivery, stunting of children and wasting in children), education (elementary dropout rate and adverse pupil-teacher ratio) and infrastructure (un-electrified homes, lack of toilets, villages not connected by road and lack of drinking water).

Significance of the scheme:

- 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.
- Under the programme, identified districts are prodded and encouraged to first catch-up with the best district within their state, and subsequently aspire to become one of the best in the country, by competing with, and learning from others.

Need for the development of backward districts:

- India cannot grow at a high rate on a long run until these districts catch up, whatever high are the GDP numbers, it has no meaning until the benefit of growth percolates down to very basic level. Ensuring progress in areas facing the most severe challenges and improving conditions in remote and rural regions are prerequisites for India to reach the next stage of its economic and human development.
- Through its massive scale and innovative use of data, the aspirational districts programme (ADP) will help India move towards its goals.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Transformation of Aspirational Districts programme, Prabhari officers.
- For Mains:** Cooperative federalism and its significance.

Sources: pib.

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

1. Gujarat to offer PNG subsidy

Context:

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

Key facts:

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

About the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

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

Implementation:

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

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. National Telecom Policy

Context:

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

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

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

Key features:

- Major goals:** The policy has outlined goals such as providing broadband for all, creating 4 million additional jobs in the digital communications sector, apart from enhancing the contribution of the digital communications sector to 8% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) from less than 6% in 2017.

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

Sources: pib.

3. DNA profiling Bill

Context:

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

Background:

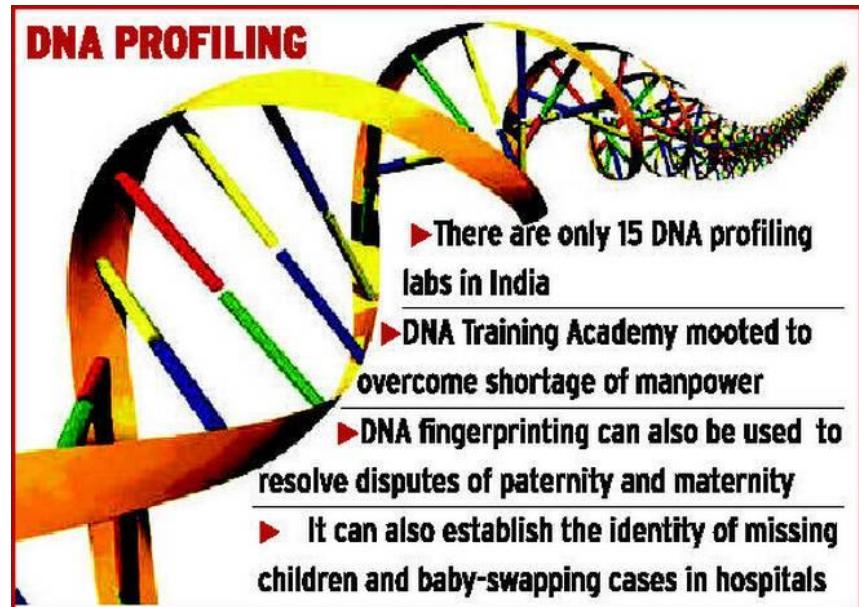
- The government was responding to a PIL petition on the use of DNA profiling for identifying unclaimed bodies, especially to match them with old cases of missing persons.

Human DNA Profiling Bill:

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

Highlights of the Human DNA Profiling Bill:

- The bill proposes to allow collection of samples from private parts of human body for DNA profiling and data preservation with the approval of a regulatory body.



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

Law commission report:

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

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

- DNA profiling Board:** Constitution of a DNA Profiling Board, a statutory body to undertake functions such as laying down procedures and standards to establish DNA laboratories and grant accreditation to such laboratories; and advising the concerned ministries/departments of the Central and state governments on issues relating to DNA laboratories.
- Functions of the Board:** The Board shall also be responsible for supervising, monitoring, inspecting and assessing the laboratories. The Board will frame guidelines for training of the police and other investigating agencies dealing with DNA-related matters. Advising on all ethical and human rights issues relating to DNA testing in consonance with international guidelines will be another function of the Board. It will recommend research and development activities in DNA testing and related issues, etc.
- Security:** DNA profiling would be undertaken exclusively for identification of a person and would not be used to extract any other information.
- National DNA Data Bank:** There shall be a National DNA Data Bank, and Regional DNA Data Banks for the states, to be established by the Central government. The data banks will be responsible for storing DNA profiles received from the accredited laboratories and maintaining certain indices for various categories of data, like crime scene index, suspects' index, offenders' index, missing persons' index and unknown deceased persons' index.
- With a view to assist the kith and kin of missing persons, provisions have been made for proper identification of missing persons on the basis of their bodily samples/substances.

DNA technology- significance and concerns:

- DNA analysis is an extremely useful and accurate technology in ascertaining the identity of a person from his/her DNA sample, or establishing biological relationships between individuals. A hair sample, or even bloodstains from clothes, from a scene of crime, for example, can be matched with that of a suspect, and it can, in most cases, be conclusively established whether the DNA in the sample belongs to the suspected individual.

EVIDENCE VS. RIGHT TO PRIVACY

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

1985: Indian courts accept DNA as evidence in criminal investigation	Government says Bill will be useful in	suspects
	Crime scene investigation	Verification of missing persons
	Maintaining database of convicts and	Investigation of unidentified bodies
		Research work
Activists claim that the Bill could lead to		
Racial and communal profiling		
Violation of privacy		
Longer trial period		
Errant testing and conviction		

As a result, DNA technology is being increasingly relied upon in investigations of crime, identification of unidentified bodies, or in determining parentage.

- But information from DNA samples can reveal not just how a person looks, or what their eye colour or skin colour is, but also more intrusive information like their allergies, or susceptibility to diseases. As a result, there is a greater risk of information from DNA analysis getting misused.

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

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

Context:

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

What's the issue?

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

About MPLAD scheme:

- **What is it?** It was launched in December, 1993, to provide a mechanism for the Members of Parliament to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on locally felt needs.
- **Works under the scheme:** Works, developmental in nature, based on locally felt needs and always available for the use of the public at large, are eligible under the scheme. Preference under the scheme is given to works relating to national priorities, such as provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc. MPs were allowed to spend the money outside their constituency — and outside their State in case of Rajya Sabha— after the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha.
- **Funds:** Funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable. The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.
- **Execution of works:** The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme. They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government. The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.
- **Recommendation of works:** The Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies. The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected. Nominated members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select works for implementation anywhere in the country.

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

5. Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)

Context:

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

Key features of the new policy:

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

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

- India is the 3rd largest consumer of crude oil and petroleum products with oil and gas contributing 34.4% to primary energy consumption. In 2015-2016, India’s crude oil import dependence rose to 81% from 78.5%. In last five years, India has seen overall decline in exploration and production of conventional resources. New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) created in 1997 ended the state dominance and created a competitive environment leading to liberalization of oil and gas exploration and production industry. However, it failed to keep the momentum of production growth and attracting the foreign investment.
- Bureaucratic hurdles like multiple approvals and sanctions, cost overruns, and disputes led to some oil majors leaving their awarded blocks and exit from the space.

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

6. National Policy on Biofuels – 2018

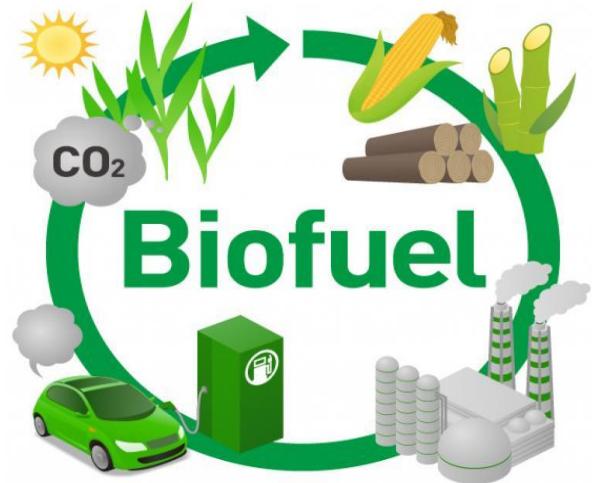
Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved National Policy on Biofuels – 2018.

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 100kpld 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.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Sustainable biofuels, Mission Innovation and Biofuture platform.
- **For Mains:** Biofuels- significance, challenges and solutions.

Sources: pib.

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

1. Limit trans fats

Context:

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

Key recommendations:

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

Saturated fatty acids:

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

Trans fats:

- Trans fatty acids (TFAs) or Trans fats are the most harmful type of fats which can have much more adverse effects on our body than any other dietary constituent. These fats are largely produced artificially but a small amount also occurs naturally. Thus in our diet, these may be present as Artificial TFAs and/ or Natural TFAs.
- Artificial TFAs are formed when hydrogen is made to react with the oil to produce fats resembling pure ghee/butter.
- In our diet the major sources of artificial TFAs are the partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVO)/vanaspati/ margarine while the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products, though in small amounts.

Key to healthy life

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) were responsible for an estimated 39.5 million (72%) of the world's 54.7 million fatalities in 2016, according to WHO



MAJOR KILLER

- Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) were the leading cause of NCD mortality in 2016 and were responsible for nearly half of all NCD deaths

KEY CONCERN

- Dietary saturated fatty acids and trans-fatty acids are of particular concern as high intake is correlated with increased risk of CVDs

SATURATED FATTY ACID SOURCES

- Foods from animal sources such as butter, milk, meat and egg yolk, and some plant-derived products such as cocoa butter, coconut and palm kernel oils

SOURCES OF TRANS-FATTY ACIDS

- Industrially produced from vegetable and fish oils. They are also found in meat and dairy products

Harmful effects:

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

Why they are increasingly being used?

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

Way ahead:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. POSHAN Abhiyaan

Context:

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

Significance of the project:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

About POSHAN Abhiyaan:

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

Other Targets:

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

3. Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved setting up of a new All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Deoghar, Jharkhand under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY).

Significance:

- The setting up of new AIIMS at Deoghar will serve the dual purpose of providing super speciality health care to the population while also helping to create a large pool of doctors and other health workers in this region to be

available for primary and secondary-level institutions/facilities being created under the National Health Mission (NHM).

Significance of the scheme:

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

Employment Generation:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

4. National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation at Bhopal

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the establishment of National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation (NIMHR) at Bhopal.

About NIMHR:

- NIMHR will be the first of its kind in the country in the area of mental health rehabilitation. It will serve as an institution of excellence to develop capacity building in the area of mental health rehabilitation and also help the Government to develop models for effective rehabilitation of persons with mental illness.
- NIMHR has been established as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 under the aegis of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.
- The main objectives of the NIMHR are to provide rehabilitation services to the persons with mental illness, capacity



The Union Cabinet has also approved the proposal to create three Joint Secretary level posts, which include one post of Director of the Institute and two posts of Professors. The main objectives of the NIMHR are to provide rehabilitation services to the persons with mental illness, capacity development in the area of mental health rehabilitation, policy framing and advanced research in mental health rehabilitation.

development in the area of mental health rehabilitation, policy framing and advanced research in mental health rehabilitation.

- The Institute will conduct 12 courses to offer diploma, certificate, graduate, post graduate, M.Phil degrees in the area of mental health rehabilitation.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** NIMHR.
- For Mains:** Mental health- concerns, challenges and solutions.

Sources: pib.

5. WHO list of essential diagnostic tests

Context:

- WHO has published its first Essential Diagnostics List, a catalogue of the tests needed to diagnose the most common conditions as well as a number of global priority diseases. The aim is to provide a tool that can be useful to all countries, to test and treat better, but also to use health funds more efficiently by concentrating on the truly essential tests.

Key facts:

- The list concentrates on in vitro tests – i.e. tests of human specimens like blood and urine. It contains 113 products.
- 58 tests are listed for detection and diagnosis of a wide range of common conditions, providing an essential package that can form the basis for screening and management of patients.
- 55 tests are designed for the detection, diagnosis and monitoring of “priority” diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, hepatitis B and C, human papillomavirus and syphilis.
- Some of the tests are particularly suitable for primary health care facilities, where laboratory services are often poorly resourced and sometimes non-existent. These tests do not require electricity or trained personnel. Other tests are more sophisticated and therefore intended for larger medical facilities.
- For each category of test, the Essential Diagnostics List specifies the type of test and intended use, format, and if appropriate for primary health care or for health facilities with laboratories. The list also provides links to WHO Guidelines or publications and, when available, to prequalified products.

Significance of the list:

- Similar to the WHO Essential Medicines List, which has been in use for four decades, the Essential Diagnostics List is intended to serve as a reference for countries to update or develop their own list of essential diagnostics.
- In order to truly benefit patients, national governments will need to ensure appropriate and quality-assured supplies, training of health care workers and safe use. To that end, WHO will provide support to countries as they adapt the list to the local context.

Need for diagnostic services:

- An accurate diagnosis is the first step to getting effective treatment. However, many people are unable to get tested for diseases because they cannot access diagnostic services. Many are incorrectly diagnosed. As a result, they do not receive the treatment they need and, in some cases, may actually receive the wrong treatment.
- For example, an estimated 46% of adults with Type 2 diabetes worldwide are undiagnosed, risking serious health complications and higher health costs. Late diagnosis of infectious diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis increases the risk of spread and makes them more difficult to treat.

Way ahead:

- WHO will update the Essential Diagnostics List on a regular basis. In the coming months, WHO will issue a call for applications to add categories to the next edition.
- The list will expand significantly over the next few years, as it incorporates other important areas including antimicrobial resistance, emerging pathogens, neglected tropical diseases and additional noncommunicable diseases.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Essential diagnostic list.
- **For Mains:** Diagnostic tests- need, significance, challenges and efforts by government.

Sources: pib.

6. Ebola**Context:**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised the Ebola health risk assessment to “very high” in the Democratic Republic of Congo. While the WHO raised the national public health risk to ‘very high,’ it said the global risk level is “currently low.”

Background:

- More than 11,000 people died in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-2015, mainly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The last outbreak in the DRC was in 2014 and killed more than 40 people. The region affected lies 1,300 km north-east of Kinshasa, close to the border with the Central African Republic.

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.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Ebola outbreak- concerns, challenges and development of vaccines.

Sources: et.

7. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Training (PMMMNMTT)**Context:**

- The National Institute of Educational Research and Planning (NIEPA) is in the process of rolling out the National Resource centre, an initiative that is part of the Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Training (PMMMNMTT).

About the National Resource Centre:

- The National Resource Centre is envisaged as a one-stop point for Indian academicians to enhance their research and teaching skills.
- The centre will enable college and university teachers to access a detailed database of academic resources, including lists of books, top journals and subject experts in their area of interest.

- It will also suggest a mechanism to higher education institutions to assess students' satisfaction with teaching and research in the institutions, so that the faculty are able to figure out what students think about their college/university and make improvements.

The Mission proposes to have following components:

- Schools of Education (in Central Universities).
- Centres of Excellence for Curriculum and Pedagogy.
- Inter-University Centres for Teachers' Education.
- National Resource Centre for Education.
- Centres for Academic Leadership and Education Management.
- Innovations, Awards, Teaching Resource Grant, including Workshop & Seminar, Subject Networks for Curricular Renewal and Reforms.

About PMMMNMTT:

- Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching (PMMMNMTT) is a Scheme launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.
- The aim of the scheme to improve the quality of school and higher education by addressing comprehensively all issues related to teachers, teaching, teacher preparation, professional development, Curriculum Design, Designing and Developing Assessment & Evaluation methodology, Research in Pedagogy and developing effective Pedagogy.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** National Resource Centre and PMMMNMTT.
- For Mains:** Need for cooperation among higher education institutions and its significance.

Sources: pib.

8. India's 1st Sports University In Manipur

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved an ordinance to set up the country's first national sports university in Manipur.
- A bill to set up the university in Imphal is already pending in parliament.
- The ordinance will be on the lines of the bill introduced in Lok Sabha in August, 2017.



Highlights of the Bill:

- Establishment of the University:** The Bill establishes a National Sports University located in Manipur. It will promote sports education in the areas of: (i) sports sciences, (ii) sports technology, (iii) sports management, and (iv) sports coaching. It will function as a national training centre for select sports disciplines. It may also establish campuses and study centres in other parts of the country. The University will be empowered to grant degrees, diplomas and certificates.
- Objectives:** The key objectives of the University are: (i) research, development and dissemination of knowledge in physical education and sports sciences, (ii) strengthening physical education and sports training programmes, (iii) generating knowledge capabilities, skills and competence at various levels, and (iv) training talented athletes to help them to evolve into international level athletes.
- Authorities of the University:** The Bill provides for several authorities under the University. These include: Court, Executive Council, Academic and Activity Council, Board of Sports Studies etc.
- Role the central government:** The central government will review and inspect the functioning of the University. The Executive Council may take action based on the inspection report. If it fails to take action to the satisfaction of the central government, it will have to comply with the directions issued by the central government. Further, the central government may annul any proceeding of the University which is not in line with the Act.
- Funding:** The University will be required to maintain a fund which will be credited with the funds that it receives from the central government, state government, and fees and money received from any other sources

(grants and gifts). All funds of the University will be invested as decided by the Board on the recommendation of the Finance Committee.

Significance of the move:

- Setting up of National Sports University in Manipur will result in giving an opportunity for youth of country in general and of North Eastern States in particular for pursuing courses such as B.PEd, MPEd, Diploma / certificate courses in coaching, physiotherapy, fitness, sports management, sports journalism, etc.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Salient features of the Bill.

Sources: the hindu.

9. 'SamagraShiksha' scheme

Context:

- Union Human Resource Development Ministry has launched **Samagra Shiksha scheme** for school education.

About the Scheme:

- Samagra Shiksha is a program that unifies learning from the pre-school to class 12 levels and encapsulates elements of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and teacher education. The scheme will focus on digital education.

The objectives of the scheme include:

- Provision of quality education.
- Enhancing learning outcomes of students.
- Bridging social and gender gaps in school education and promoting vocationalisation of education.
- Strengthening teacher education institutions like SCERTs and DIETs to improve quality of teachers.
- Annual grant of Rs 5,000 to Rs 20,000 per school for strengthening of libraries.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Samagra Shiksha scheme.
- For Mains:** Reforms in education- need, challenges and government efforts.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

1. Bharat Inclusion Seed Fund'

Context:

- Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad's (IIMA's) centre for innovation, incubation, and entrepreneurship (CIIE) has launched 'Bharat Inclusion Initiative'.

About Bharat Inclusion Initiative:

- The Bharat Inclusion Initiative aims to provide a continuum of solutions to inclusion-focused tech entrepreneurs across the pre-incubation, seed and scale-up stage and help them jump to the next orbit.
- It is a \$25 million initiative that will look to mentor and invest in start-ups in the early stage and seed segment over the next three-four years.
- The fund will look at start-ups in areas such as financial inclusion, livelihood, education, agriculture, and health.
- The initiative received an initial pledge of \$12.5 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and Omidyar Network.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Bharat Inclusive initiative.
- **For Mains:** Startups in India- Need, significance, challenges and solutions.

Sources: toi.

2. Special Category Status for Bihar

Context:

- CM Nitish Kumar has appealed for Special Category Status for Bihar. He has highlighted various issues impeding Bihar's development and implored the central government for granting the Special Category Status (SCS) for the state.

What's the issue?

- Six states — Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Jharkhand, Orissa and Rajasthan — at different points in time have been demanding special category status. However, the Inter-Ministerial Group had rejected Bihar's plea to be considered a special category State.

Reasons for demand:

- It is observed that Bihar not only had the highest number, but also the highest proportion of backward districts compared with any other state. As many as 36 out of 38 districts in Bihar were backward as per the rankings of Inter Ministry Task Group (IMTG). It is also a fact that Bihar has occupied the last rank in terms of real per capita GSDP among all States in all the years 2000 through 2012. Bihar accounted for roughly 2.8 % of the GDP but 8.2% of the country's population during 2009-12.

What is Special Category Status?

- There is **no provision of SCS in the Constitution**; the Central government extends financial assistance to states that are at a comparative disadvantage against others. The concept of SCS emerged in 1969 when the Gadgil formula (that determined Central assistance to states) was approved.

Some prominent guidelines for getting SCS status:

1. Must be economically backward with poor infrastructure.
2. The states must be located in hilly and challenging terrain.
3. They should have low population density and significant tribal population.
4. Should be strategically situated along the borders of neighboring countries.

What kind of assistance do SCS States receive?

- The SCS States used to receive block grants based on the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula, which effectively allowed for nearly 30 per cent of the Total Central Assistance to be transferred to SCS States as late as 2009-10.
- Following the constitution of the NITI Aayog (after the dissolution of the Planning Commission) and the recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC), Central plan assistance to SCS States has been subsumed in an increased devolution of the divisible pool to all States (from 32% in the 13th FC recommendations to 42%) and do not appear in plan expenditure.
- The FFC also recommended variables such as "forest cover" to be included in devolution, with a weightage of 7.5 in the criteria and which could benefit north-eastern States that were previously given SCS assistance. Besides, assistance to Centrally Sponsored Schemes for SCS States was given with 90% Central share and 10% State share.

When was the first Special Category status bestowed?

- The NDC first accorded SCS in 1969 to Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland. Over the years, eight more states were added to the list — Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and, finally, in 2010, Uttarakhand. Until 2014-15, SCS meant these 11 states received a variety of benefits and sops.

Way ahead:

- Considering special status to any new State will result in demands from other States and dilute the benefits further. It is also not economically beneficial for States to seek special status as the benefits under the current dispensation are minimal. States facing special problems will be better off seeking a special package.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** SCS and associated issues.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Umang App

Context:

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

**About Umang app:**

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

What's important?

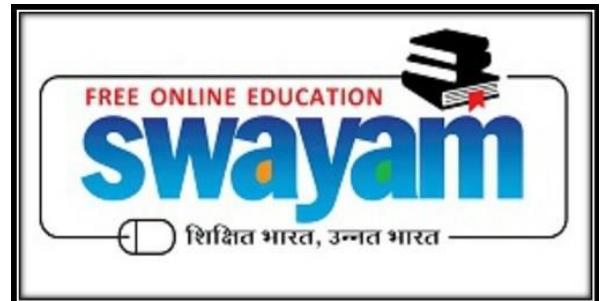
- For Prelims:** UMANG app, EPFO.

Sources: the hindu.

2. SWAYAM

Context:

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

**SWAYAM:**

- It is an online interactive learning platform that provides, not only video lectures, reading material but also assignments/quizzes that could end up in securing credits after completing the assessment system.

- More than 400 Courses are available on SWAYAM covering all the engineering and non-engineering subjects at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
- The UGC has already issued Regulation that allows transfer of credits earned through the courses done through SWAYAM into the academic record of the students.
- It is now possible for the students and others to take courses of the prestigious IITs or IIMs without formally studying there.
- The platform has been constructed by Microsoft with totally indigenous efforts.

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

3. Common Service Centres (CSCs)

Context:

- The network of Common Service Centres (CSCs), which act as access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, are set to be expanded to 2.50 lakh gram panchayats by the year end.

What are CSCs?

- Common Services Centers (CSCs) are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme.
- They are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.



CSCs enable the three vision areas of the Digital India programme:

- Digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen.
- Governance and services on demand.
- Digital empowerment of citizens.

Significance of CSCs:

- CSCs are more than service delivery points in rural India. They are positioned as change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods. They are enablers of community participation and collective action for engendering social change through a bottom-up approach with key focus on the rural citizen.

Key facts:

- The CSC project, which forms a strategic component of the National e-Governance Plan was approved by the Government in May 2006, as part of its commitment in the National Common Minimum Programme to introduce e-governance on a massive scale.
- It is also one of the approved projects under the Integrated Mission Mode Projects of the National e-Governance Plan.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** CSCs, NEP.
- For Mains:** CSCs and their significance.

Sources: pib.

4. PRAGATI

Context:

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, recently chaired his twenty-sixth interaction through PRAGATI – the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation.
- The 25 PRAGATI meetings so far have seen a cumulative review of 227 projects with a total investment of over Rs. 10 lakh crore. Resolution of Public Grievances has also been reviewed across a range of sectors.

About PRAGATI:

What is it?

- PRAGATI is a unique integrating and interactive platform. The platform is aimed at addressing common man's grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

Unique features:

- The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- It also offers a unique combination in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground level situation. It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.
- It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
- Issues to be flagged before the PM are picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, ongoing Programmes and pending Projects.
- The system will ride on, strengthen and re-engineer the data bases of the CPGRAMS for grievances, Project Monitoring Group (PMG) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PRAGATI provides an interface and platform for all these three aspects.
- The system has been designed in-house by the PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Pragati and its unique features.

Sources: pib.

5. PRAAPTI app

Context:

- In a bid to rein in errant distribution companies (discoms) that delay payments to power generation companies, the Power Ministry has launched the Praapti web portal, that aims at bringing transparency in power sector of India.

About PRAAPTI:

- PRAAPTI, Payment Ratification and Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators, will contain all details related to payments.
- The app will enable citizens to monitor the payments that are being made to power generation companies. The app will also allow its users to know the details related to the payments made by the discoms to the power generation company and when it was made.
- PRAAPTI will also enable the consumers to know the performance of their discoms in terms of payments that are being made to the generation companies. Later, the performance of the discoms will be ratified on the basis of payments that were made.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** PRAAPTI app and its significance.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.**1. Gilgit-Baltistan****Context:**

- Pakistan's top civil and military leaders have decided to give greater administrative and financial authority to Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

**Where is Gilgit Baltistan located?**

- It is located in the northern Pakistan. It borders China in the North, Afghanistan in the west, Tajikistan in the north west and Kashmir in the south east. Gilgit-Baltistan is treated as a separate geographical entity by Pakistan. It has a regional Assembly and an elected Chief Minister.
- Gilgit-Baltistan shares a geographical boundary with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and India considers it as part of the undivided Jammu and Kashmir, while Pakistan sees it as a separate from PoK. The USD 46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also passes through this region.
- Gilgit-Baltistan is home to five of the “eight-thousanders” and to more than fifty peaks above 7,000 metres (23,000 ft). Three of the world’s longest glaciers outside the polar regions are found in Gilgit-Baltistan.

India's opposition:

- India has termed as “entirely unacceptable” any possible attempt by Pakistan to declare the Gilgit-Baltistan region, bordering the disputed Pakistan-administered Kashmir, as the fifth province.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Location of Gilgit- Baltistan, eighth thousanders.
- **For Mains:** Controversy over the administration of the region.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Kishanganga project**Context:**

- The 330 MW Kishanganga Hydropower Project was recently inaugurated by the Prime Minister in northern Kashmir's Gurez. The PM also laid down the foundation stone for Pakal Dul hydro power project.

The Kishanganga Hydroelectric project:

- It is an \$864 million dam which is part of a run-of-the-river hydroelectric scheme that is designed to divert water from the Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin.
- It is located 5 km north of Bandipore in Jammu and Kashmir. It also lies to the north of Wular Lake.
- The state of Jammu and Kashmir would be provided with 12 percent of the power generated by the project.

Opposition by Pakistan:

- Pakistan has raised several objections to the Kishanganga Project in the past. Pakistan has complained that the Kishanganga Project affects its own Neelum Jhelum Hydropower Plant. However, India maintains that the project would not have any impact on rivers flowing into the neighbouring country.
- Construction on the dam was temporarily halted by the Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration in October 2011 due to Pakistan's protest of its effect on the flow of the Kishanganga River (called the Neelum River in Pakistan). In February 2013, the Hague ruled that India could divert a minimum amount of water for power generation.

- Pakistan has been flagging concern over designs of India's five hydroelectricity projects – Pakal Dul (1000 MW), Ratle (850 MW), Kishanganga (330 MW), Miyar (120 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW) – being built/planned in the Indus river basin, contending these violate the treaty.

Pakal Dul hydro power project:

- The 1,000 megawatt Pakal Dul hydroelectric power project on Marusadar River, a tributary of Chenab River, in Jammu and Kashmir will provide 12% free power to the state. The project will not only be the largest hydroelectric power project in the state but also the first storage unit.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Kishanganga and Pakal Dul power projects.
- For Mains:** Associated issues between India and Pakistan.

Sources: pib.

3. Nepal: first country in South-East Asia validated for eliminating trachoma

Context:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has validated Nepal for having eliminated trachoma as a public health problem – a milestone, as the country becomes the first in WHO's South-East Asia Region to defeat the world's leading infectious cause of blindness.

Background:

- Trachoma was the second leading cause of preventable blindness in Nepal in the 1980s.
- In 2002, the Government of Nepal stepped up efforts to eliminate the disease with the establishment of a national trachoma programme.
- From 2002 to 2005, following the implementation of sustained control activities, the prevalence of active (inflammatory) trachoma fell by 40%.

About Trachoma:

- What is it?** Trachoma is a chronic infective disease of the eye and is the leading cause of infective blindness globally. Trachoma is a disease of poor environmental and personal hygiene and inadequate access to water and sanitation.
- It affects the conjunctiva under the eyelids. Repeated infections cause scarring leading to in-turning of the eyelashes and eyelids. This further causes damage to the cornea and blindness.

Sources: the hindu.

4. ASEAN India Film Festival

Context:

- India is hosting the ASEAN India Film Festival. The Film Festival will be a platform for people of the film industry of member countries to explore areas of cooperation in the domain of "cinema and cultural cooperation."

Key facts:

- The Film Festival will be non-competitive. The tagline of the Festival is proposed to be 'Friendship through Films'.
- The Directorate of Film Festivals is organising ASEAN India Film Festival in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs (ASEAN Multilateral Division) as part of the series of events to commemorate the 25 years of ASEAN and India relations.

Aim of the Festival:

- As a vehicle of Cultural Exchange, the Directorate of Film Festival aims to provide access to new trends in filmmaking by providing the platform for an exchange of ideas, culture and experiences in the field of cinema.

Participants:

- The ASEAN film festival will have countries which have immense and colourful cultural diversity but share common historical thread. This will be showcased through screenings of films, alongside exchange of ideas, discussions between the film personalities and interactive sessions with the audience.

About ASEAN:

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) which promotes Pan-Asianism and intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational and socio-cultural integration amongst its members and other Asian countries, and globally.
- Its principal aims include accelerating economic growth, social progress, and sociocultural evolution among its members, alongside the protection of regional stability and the provision of a mechanism for member countries to resolve differences peacefully.
- ASEAN is an official United Nations observer, as well as an active global partner. It also maintains a global network of alliances, and is involved in numerous international affairs. Communication by member states takes place in English.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** ASEAN India film festival, ASEAN.
- For Mains:** Significance of cooperation among ASEAN members.

Sources: pib.

5. CLMV conclave

Context:

- 5th India – CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam) Business Conclave was recently held at Phnom Penh, Cambodia. During the conference, government and business community of CLMV countries were invited to actively partner in India's initiative to strengthen manufacturing capacities.

About CLMV:

- Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam collectively, is the third largest economy in ASEAN, followed by Indonesia and Thailand.
- India's trade with the CLMV countries has grown from USD 1.5 bn to more than USD 10 bn in the last 10 years.

CLMV conclave:

- The CLMV conclave is an annual feature which provides an opportunity for Indian business leaders to interact with government and business stakeholders representing the four countries.
- The conclave facilitates to create and provide a platform for the decision makers from CLMV countries to interact with a range of Indian business companies involved in trading, manufacturing, processing, engineering, consultancy, construction etc.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** CLMV countries and conclave.
- For Mains:** Significance of CLMV countries and trade with them.

Sources: pib.

6. India's second IT corridor in China

Context:

- The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has launched its second IT corridor in China to cash in on the burgeoning Chinese software market which remained elusive despite the presence of top Indian technology firms.

Key facts:

- The newly established Digital Collaborative Opportunities Plaza (SIDCOP) platform at Guiyang in China provides market access to Indian IT firms in the huge Chinese market.
- The Guiyang corridor will focus on Big Data. Last December, the NASSCOM established its first SIDCOP platform in the Chinese port city of Dalian, which is India's first IT hub in China. Dalian corridor's focus was on IOT (Internet of Things).
- The corridor is aimed at setting up local offices and assisting companies from Guiyang to establish software and IT units in India.

Background:

- India's top IT firms have a big presence in China, specially multi-nationals and IT Corridor at Dalian which are expected to provide a gateway for the Indian IT-small and medium-sized enterprises.

Way ahead:

- India is a world leader in the area of Information Technology and IT-enabled services with annual revenue of over \$164 billion and exports of over \$120 billion. The country has been demanding China to provide market access to Indian IT and pharmaceutical firms for several years to reduce bilateral trade deficit.
- For India, getting access to China's IT market, valued at over \$493 billion in 2013 by the ministry of industry and information technology of China, is important to address the massive trade deficit which has now spiralled to over \$51 billion. The Chinese IT market grew exponentially since then.
- The two corridors, which were started in collaboration with China's provincial governments, are expected to provide the much-needed big opening for Indian IT firms.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** India's IT corridors and their significance.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Hague Convention

Context:

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

**Background:**

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

The issue of habitual residence:

- Under the treaty, there is the criterion of "habitual residence" of the child, which is used to determine whether the child was wrongfully removed by a parent as well as to seek the return of the child.

- The Committee feels that the concept of habitual residence is not synchronous with the best interest of the child. It is because returning a child to the place of habitual residence may result in sending the child to an inharmonious set-up as well as overlook the fact that a mother is the primary caregiver of the child.

Proposed draft law:

- The panel has prepared a draft law to safeguard the interest of the children, as well as those of the parents, particularly mothers. The proposed legislation lays down nine exceptions under which a child will not be returned to the country of habitual residence.
- The important conditions under which a child's return can be refused are — best interest of the child, domestic violence or mental or physical cruelty or harassment against the parent who fled with the child, the parent claiming the return of the child was not exercising the custody rights at the time of removal, and if there is a grave risk that the child would be exposed to physical or psychological harm.

Significance of the Indian family system:

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

About Hague Abduction Convention:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. A global environment compact

Context:

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

About the resolution:

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

Key facts for Prelims:

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. Mission Innovation

Context:

- The Mission Innovation Ministerial is being held at Malmo-Sweden. India is also taking part in the ministerial.

Mission Innovation:

- Mission Innovation is a global platform of 23 countries and European Union aimed at accelerating clean energy innovations through enhanced Government funding, greater public-private sector partnership and enhanced global cooperation.
- Mission Innovation is complemented by private sector-led investments of extraordinary levels of private capital in clean energy, focusing on early-stage innovations.
- As part of the initiative, participating countries have committed to seek to double their governments' clean energy research and development (R&D) investments over five years, while encouraging greater levels of private sector investment in transformative clean energy technologies. These additional resources will dramatically accelerate the availability of the advanced technologies that will define a future global energy mix that is clean, affordable, and reliable.
- Mission Innovation was announced on November 30, 2015, as world leaders came together in Paris to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change.
- ***India is Founding Member of the Steering Committee*** and also a Member of the two sub-groups: Joint research and Capacity Building and Private Sector Engagement.

Way ahead:

- The power of innovation – driven by sustained public investment in research and development (R&D) coupled with business leadership – can push down costs further and bring fledgling ideas into the mainstream. Further reducing the cost of tomorrow's clean energy technologies, along with adoption of today's clean energy solutions, underpin global strategies to enhance global energy security, drive economic growth, bring life-changing energy services to the poor, and increase ambition in combatting climate change.

Sources: pib.

4. Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

Context:

- Pakistan is hosting its first ever Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SCO-RATS) meeting in Islamabad. The participants of the meeting include the executive committee of the SCO and of RATS along with legal advisors from eight member states.
- The main agenda is to talk over the issue related to terrorist threats in the region and how to overcome them.

About RATS:

- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- The Head of RATS is elected to a three-year term. Each member state also sends a permanent representative to RATS.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** RATS and SCO.

- **For Mains:** Issue of counter terrorism at the international and national level.

Sources: the hindu.

5. Brahmos Missile

Context:

- BrahMos, supersonic cruise missile was recently successfully test fired from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Balasore, Odisha.

Key facts:

- BrahMos is a joint venture between DRDO of India and NPOM of Russia.
- The highly versatile BrahMos has been operationalised in the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force.
- BrahMos is the first Indian missile whose life has been extended from 10 years to 15 years. Life extension of the missile system is yet another step that helps in reducing the cost of BrahMos.
- BrahMos became the first heavy missile system in the world to be integrated successfully on a Sukhoi-30 MKI frontline fighter jet of the Indian Air Force (IAF). The missile can be fired from land, from ships (both vertical and inclined configuration), under-water, and from air.
- BrahMos initially had a range of 300-km, but after India became a part of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the range was extended to 450-km.
- BrahMos can attain a cruise speed of 2.8 Mach and can carry a conventional warhead of almost 300 kg.

About MTCR:

- Established in April 1987, the voluntary MTCR aims to limit the spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks.
- The MTCR regime urges its members, which include most of the world's key missile manufacturers, to restrict their exports of missiles and related technologies capable of carrying a 500-kilogram payload at least 300 kilometers or delivering any type of weapon of mass destruction.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** MTCR, BrahMos missile.
- **For Mains:** India's entry into MTCT- significance and scope.

Sources: the hindu.

6. RIMPAC naval exercises

Context:

- The United States has decided to disinvite China from participating in the Rim of the Pacific naval exercise, held near Hawaii. The decision to withdraw the invitation extended to China was made in response to Chinese activity in the South China Sea.

Background:

- China first participated in the RIMPAC exercises in 2014, as noted by The Diplomat. Back then China's participation was lauded and viewed as a step toward cooperation.
- In Asia's current climate, these exercises are especially important. Tension in both the South China Sea and East China Sea tends to increase during summer months, when activity is on the rise due to the presence of fishing and trade vessels.

What is RIMPAC?

- RIMPAC is the world's largest set of international maritime war games. The exercises occur every two years and are led by the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet, headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii.
- They are seen as a unique opportunity for Pacific Rim nations to cooperate as they train and work together to solve problems. Also, the games are seen as a way of ensuring open access to important shipping lanes in Asia's

increasingly contested waters. The exercises are also a display of power — in the sense that participants are able to understand the technological capabilities of other participants — and thus perhaps act as a deterrent to further aggressive action.

- **Observer nations:** Several observer nations are usually invited, including China, Ecuador, India, Mexico, the Philippines, and Russia. While not contributing any ships, observer nations are involved in RIMPAC at the strategic level and use the opportunity to prepare for possible full participation in the future.

Sources: the hindu.

7. INDOPACOM

Context:

- The US military has renamed its Pacific Command to US-Indo Pacific Command, underlining the growing connectivity between India and Pacific Oceans. The symbolic move came in recognition of the growing importance of the Indian Ocean in US strategic thinking.

What necessitated this move?

- The renaming reflects the existing geographic coverage of the command and the acknowledgment of the increasing connectedness between the two oceans — Pacific and India —, but also, more broadly, the process of India's re-entry into the US government's "Asia" orbit."

Background:

- Formerly known as United States Pacific Command, it is a unified combatant command of the United States Armed Forces responsible for the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. It is the oldest and largest of the unified combatant commands.
- Its commander, the senior U.S. military officer in the Pacific, is responsible for military operations in an area which encompasses more than 100 million square miles, or roughly 52% of the Earth's surface, stretching from the waters off the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India, and from the Arctic to the Antarctic.
- The Commander reports to the President of the United States through the Secretary of Defense and is supported by Service component and subordinate unified commands, including U.S. Army Pacific, U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, U.S. Marine Forces Pacific, U.S. Forces Japan, U.S. Forces Korea, Special Operations Command Korea, and Special Operations Command Pacific.

Significance of INDOPACOM:

- U.S. Indo-Pacific Command is critical for "a region open to investment and free, fair and reciprocal trade, not bound by any nation's predatory economics or threat of coercion, for the Indo-Pacific has many belts and many roads."
- Also, renaming the combatant command is strategically significant, in that it reflects a recognition within the U.S. government that East Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are gradually becoming a single competitive space. It's also shrewd marketing — a way of reaffirming to New Delhi and to the rest of the world that India is, and ought to be, an indispensable pole of the future Asian order.

Way ahead:

- The US move comes in the wake of a series of measures by China that have raised tensions in the South China Sea. China claims almost all of the South China Sea. Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims over the area. The US also rejects China's claims of ownership of the area.
- However, the effectiveness of an Indo-Pacific defense and security strategy and US-India cooperation will still depend on the level of discussion and coordination across combatant commands and bureaus.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** INDOPACOM.
- **For Mains:** Growing significance of Indian Ocean region and the need for international collaboration.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Iran nuclear deal

Context:

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

Background:

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

What is the iran nuclear deal?

- Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.
- Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.
- The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.

Why did Iran agree to the deal?

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

Why is US pulling out of the deal?

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

What about the other countries involved?

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

What happens next?

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

What's important ?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. Trade facilitation pact in services

Context:

- India has pitched for inclusion of the trade facilitation pact on services in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) saying it would help promote growth of the global economy.

Background:

- On the lines of the trade facilitation pact in goods, India has submitted a detailed proposal to the WTO to negotiate a trade facilitation agreement in services (TFS). India is pitching for this pact as the sector contributes over 60% to the GDP and 28% to total employment.

About Trade Facilitation agreement in services:

- The TFS proposal aims at liberalising rules for movement of professionals and other steps to reduce transaction costs with a view to boost growth of the services sector.
- It will focus on issues like liberalised visa regime, long-term visas for business community and freer movement of professionals for the greater benefit of both India and the world, among others.

Key proposals:

- The proposed agreement would set provisions on all four modes of services supply of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).
- For services supplied through “mode 3” (a foreign company setting up subsidiaries or branches to provide services in another country), it suggests streamlining the setting up of businesses through a “single window”.
- For the cross-border movement of services suppliers (known as “mode 4”), it suggests simplifying work permit and visa procedures and ensuring that measures relating to taxation, fees and social security contributions do not unfairly disadvantage foreign service suppliers.
- Other suggestions include enhancing cooperation among authorities, facilitating cross-border data flows, and allowing WTO members to comment on measures before their entry into force. The proposal also foresees special and differential treatment for developing countries.

Need for Trade Facilitation in Services:

- The TFS Agreement, in conjunction with enhanced liberalization commitments, would help realize the fuller potential for trade in services.
- Global trade in services represents a contradiction in the macroeconomic sphere. It has about 70.5% of share in world GDP and 50.9% share in employment.
- However, relative to this, its share in global exports is lower than that of trade in goods, despite having a higher share in GDP. This dichotomy suggests that there are more barriers existing for trade in services as compared to trade in goods.

Way ahead:

- Given this context, and India’s ever-growing global services footprint, it is not surprising that the country has taken the initiative in moving for a TFS Agreement.
- It is expected that the TFS Agreement, in conjunction with enhanced liberalization commitments, would help realize the fuller potential for trade in services. It would both complement and supplement the progressive liberalization of this. By moving the proposal for a TFS Agreement, India has opened the floor for negotiation for more interactive trade in services at the multilateral level.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Trade Facilitation agreement.
- For Mains:** TFS- need, challenges and significance.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Permanent Residency Status scheme

Context:

- Recent report by the government shows that even after two years after it was launched, the Permanent Residency Status (PRS) scheme providing a host of facilities for foreigners who invest at least ₹10 crore under the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) route has not found a single applicant.

Features of the PRS scheme:

- Under the Scheme, suitable provisions will be incorporated in the Visa Manual to provide for the grant of PRS to foreign investors.
- The PRS will be granted for a period of 10 years with multiple entry. This can be reviewed for another 10 years if the PRS holder has not come to adverse notice.
- PRS will serve as a multiple entry visa without any stay stipulation and PRS holders will be exempted from the registration requirements.
- PRS holders will be allowed to purchase one residential property for dwelling purpose.
- The spouse/ dependents of the PRS holder will be allowed to take up employment in private sector (in relaxation to salary stipulations for Employment Visa) and undertake studies in India.

The scheme will be applicable only to foreign investors fulfilling the prescribed eligibility conditions, his/her spouse and dependents. These include:

- The foreign investor will have to invest a minimum of Rs. 10 crores to be brought within 18 months or Rs.25 crores to be brought within 36 months.
- Further, the foreign investment should result in generating employment to at least 20 resident Indians every financial year.

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. WHO Framework Convention on tobacco control

Context:

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



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

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

Significance of the protocol:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

2. Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Context:

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

About ADB:

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

Membership:

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

Voting:

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

Funding:

- ADB raises funds through bond issues on the world's capital markets.

WHO FCTC:

- The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO.
- The objective of FCTC is to provide a framework for supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco control at the national, regional and global levels.
- Article 15 of WHO FCTC envisages elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting.
- India is a party to WHO FCTC.

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

Board of Governors:

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

Loans:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. World Gold Council (WGC)

Context:

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



Highlights of the report:

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

About World Gold Council:

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

What's important?

- For Prelims:** WGC.

Sources: the hindu.

4. 15th Asia Media Summit

Context:

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

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

Host:

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



#AsiaMediaSummit

About the AMS Summit:

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

About AIBD:

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

Founders:

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

Membership:

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

Role and mandate:

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

What's important ?

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

Sources: pib.

5. United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners

Context:

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

About UNPCAP:

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

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** UNPCAP.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Pacific Islands Forum

Context:

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



About Pacific Islands Forum:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: et.

7. NAFTA

Context:

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

Background:

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

What was the purpose of NAFTA?

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

Why is NAFTA controversial?

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.



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8. Islamic Cooperation countries (OIC)

Context:

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

Background:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: et.

About the OIC:

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

9. SCO Cultural Ministers' meeting

Context:

- 15th SCO Cultural Ministers' Meeting is being held in Sanya, China. India is participating in the Cultural Ministers' Meet for first time as full time member.

About SCO:

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an eight-member multilateral organization, established on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- Pakistan also became the full member of SCO along with India, taking its membership to 8.
- After the expansion of membership, SCO represents approximately 42% of the world's population, 20% of its GDP and 22% of the landmass.
- The main objectives of the SCO are to strengthen relations among member states; promote cooperation in various fields like political affairs, economics, and education, culture, tourism, environment protection etc. and promote regional peace, security, and stability among others.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** SCO Cultural Ministers' meet.
- **For Mains:** SCO and its significance.

Sources: pib.

10. World Health Assembly

Context:

- Plenary Meeting of the 71st World Health Assembly is being held at Geneva.
- In addition to its three main themes of celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Organization, the 40th Anniversary of Alma-Ata and WHO's top priority, universal health coverage, it will cover many topics on health throughout the life-course including sexual and reproductive health; early childhood development; maternal, infant and young child nutrition; poliomyelitis and the Global Vaccine Action Plan.



World Health Assembly (WHA):

- The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the forum through which the World Health Organization (WHO) is governed by its 194 member states. It is the world's highest health policy setting body and is composed of health ministers from member states.
- The members of the World Health Assembly generally meet every year in May in Geneva, the location of WHO Headquarters.
- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** WHA and its role.

Sources: the hindu.

11. NATO**Context:**

- Colombia is all set to formally become the NATO's first Latin American "global partner." Colombia will join as a "global partner", which means it will not necessarily have to take part in military action, and will be fully accredited in Brussels. The move would improve Colombia's image on the world stage.
- Areas of cooperation include cyber security, maritime security, terrorism and its links to organised crime, as well as building the capacities and capabilities of the Colombian armed forces.

About NATO:

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded in 1949 and is a group of 29 countries from Europe and North America that exists to protect the people and territory of its members.
- The Alliance is founded on the principle of collective defence, meaning that if one NATO Ally is attacked, then all NATO Allies are attacked.
- The NATO lists Afghanistan, Australia, Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan as "partners across the globe".

What's important?

- For Prelims AND Mains:** NATO and its relevance today.

Sources: the hindu.

12. Global Wind Summit**Context:**

- The first edition of the Global Wind Summit will be held in Hamburg, Germany.

About the Global Wind Summit:

- The conference on wind is the largest and most important meeting of the wind industry worldwide. The event combines two conferences, WindEnergy Hamburg and WindEurope.
- The event will provide a platform for experts from across the globe to discuss innovative and green technologies for harnessing wind energy making.
- The focus of the conferences would be on three major subjects. Dynamic markets, cost efficiency and smart energy. How to develop new markets, make product competitive in auctions and use wind power for all energy applications.

Background:

- India is fourth largest country — after China, the US and Germany — in terms of wind energy installation capacity at around 33 GW. The government has set a target of achieving 60 GW by 2022.

Sources: the hindu.

GS PAPER - III

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

1. Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)

Context:

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

What is PCA?

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

When is PCA invoked?

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

What are the types of sanctions?

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

What will a bank do if PCA is triggered?

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

Impact:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. BSE becomes India's first exchange to be recognized as a DOSM by the US SEC

Context:

- Asia's first stock exchange, the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) has become the first stock exchange in India to have received recognition as a 'Designated Offshore Securities Market' (DOSM) from the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Implications:

- The DOSM status allows the sale of securities to U.S. investors through the trading venue of BSE without registration of such securities with the US SEC and thus eases the trades by US investors in India.

Background:

- Prior to this recognition, investors who wished to sell such securities (i.e., equity or debt securities issued by BSE listed companies in a private placement under the U.S. securities laws) had to take certain measures to ascertain the location of the purchaser prior to re-selling.

The availability of a liquid resale market is expected to:

- Make exempt offerings by BSE-listed companies more attractive to U.S. investors.
- Enhance the attractiveness of Indian Depository Receipts (IDRs) amongst US investors.

What is an IDR?

- An IDR is a depository receipt denominated in Indian rupees issued by a domestic depository in India. Much like an equity share, it is an ownership pie of a company. Since foreign companies are not allowed to list on Indian equity markets, IDR is a way to own shares of those companies. These IDRs are listed on Indian stock exchanges.

IDRs and equity shares:

- IDRs are similar to equity shares. IDR holders have the same rights as shareholders; They can vote for or against company moves or decisions as and when it comes to them, get dividends, bonus and rights issues as and when the company declares them.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** DOSM recognition for BSE.
- For Mains:** IDRs and related issues.

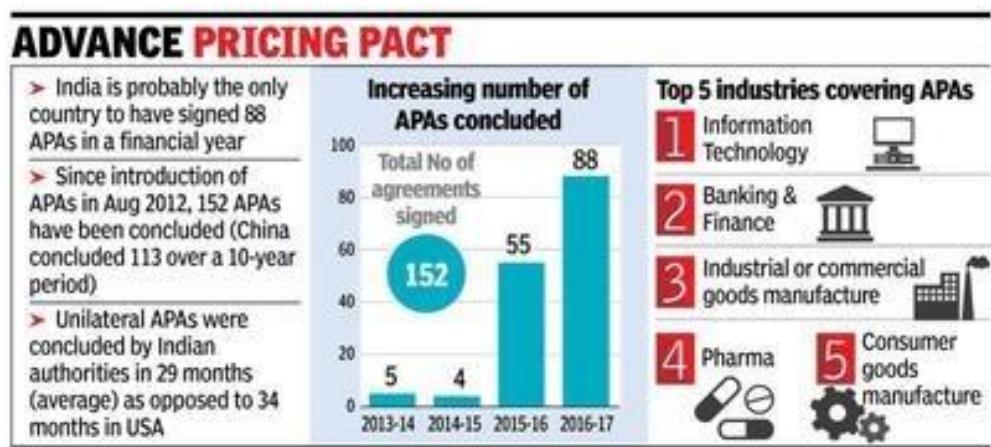
Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Advance Pricing Agreement

Context:

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



About the APA scheme:

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

About CBDT:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

2. FDI confidence index

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

About the FDI confidence index:

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

Performance of India:

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

Performance of other countries:

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

Way ahead:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. National security clearance policy

Context:

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

Background:

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

Policy for national security clearance:

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

Background:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

4. GST Network (GSTN)

Context:

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

What is GSTN?

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

**What's important?**

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

Sources: pib.

5. Merchandise Export from India Scheme

Context:

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

About MEIS:

What is it?

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) is one of the two schemes introduced in Foreign Trade Policy of India 2015-20, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.
- Objective of Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) as per Indian Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 (FTP 2015-20) is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products,



which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India's export competitiveness.

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising out of it.

1. CriSidEx

Context:

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

About CriSidEx:

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

Significance of MSME:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

2. Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)

Context:

- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) that operates Common Service Centres (CSCs).

Key facts:

- Through the MoU, the SIDBI seeks to extend financial support to the Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) of Common Services Centers, with minimum one year of operation, under the Direct Financing Window of SIDBI.
- Under the Direct Financing Window, CSC SPV will approve the list of VLEs, within 25 km distance of SIDBI Branch Offices, who require financial support. To avail the loan, the VLEs need to submit their CSC project, with maximum project outlay of Rs. 3.50 lakh and term loan requirement not exceeding Rs. 2 lakh per project.
- Through the MoU, both CSC SPV and SIDBI seek to work together to bring more citizens under the ambit of financial inclusion. Moreover, it also seeks to enhance the financial viability of CSCs by including additional services in their bouquet of products.

Significance of CSCs:

- CSCs are more than service delivery points in rural India. They are positioned as change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods. They are enablers of community participation and collective action for engendering social change through a bottom-up approach with key focus on the rural citizen.

Key facts:

- The CSC project, which forms a strategic component of the National eGovernance Plan was approved by the Government in May 2006, as part of its commitment in the National Common Minimum Programme to introduce e-governance on a massive scale.
- It is also one of the approved projects under the Integrated Mission Mode Projects of the National eGovernance Plan.

About SIDBI:

- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) was set up on 2nd April 1990 under an Act of Parliament.
- It acts as the Principal Financial Institution for Promotion, Financing and Development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector as well as for co-ordination of functions of institutions engaged in similar activities.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** CSCs, NEP, SIDBI.
- For Mains:** CSCs and their significance, VLEs and their role in rural economy.

Sources: pib.

3. Govt weighs linking drug prices to WPI inflation

Context:

- The government is considering the feasibility of linking the permitted annual increase in prices of non-scheduled formulations to the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) in a bid to regulate the prices of drugs.

Implications:

- The move, if implemented, could deal a big blow to the Pharma- industry. The industry is currently in a situation where there are strong incentives for companies to market non-scheduled formulations to avail to automatic 10% increase. Compounded over five years, the price of a non-scheduled drug goes up by over 60%.

Background:

- The NITI Aayog has recommended an amendment to the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) 2013, suggesting that prices of non-scheduled drugs be also be linked to WPI to regulate them like the prices of scheduled drugs.

What necessitates this?

- According to DPCO 2013, prices of scheduled drugs are revised in line with the wholesale price index (WPI) of the previous calendar year.
- As a corollary, the companies are even required to cut the prices if there is a decline in the annual WPI.
- However, manufacturers of medicines not under price control are allowed to increase the maximum retail price by 10% annually.
- According to DoP, only about 850 drugs are under price control as against the more than 6,000 medicines available in the market of various strengths and dosages.

What are CSCs?

Common Services Centers (CSCs) are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme. They are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.

CSCs enable the three vision areas of the Digital India programme:

- Digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen.
- Governance and services on demand.
- Digital empowerment of citizens.

Concerns:

- Pharma companies see this proposal as a serious adverse development and say it has the potential to cause irreparable damage to the Indian Pharma industry. Given the real annual inflation, increase based only on WPI is not at all reasonable as the industry has to deal with the rising cost of manufacturing.
- Additionally, according to the proposal, in case of a negative WPI, mandating the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) to change the ceiling price of scheduled drugs and it will not be required for individual drugs to reduce their MRPs if they are already lower than such revised ceiling price.
- Pharma lobby groups have supported the equalization of the annual price increase between scheduled and non-scheduled drugs.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: 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. GM mustard

Context:

- Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has asked the developer of GM Mustard to undertake “field demonstration” to generate additional data to check whether the transgenic oilseed affects honey bees and other pollinators and also whether it negatively impacts soil health.

Background:

- GEAC had last year given its nod to this indigenously developed transgenic oilseed and recommended it to the environment ministry for final clearance. However, the government later asked it to re-examine the entire issue after receiving several representations both in support and against GM mustard.

What next?

- The developer – Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants of the Delhi University – will now have to undertake field demonstrations on GM mustard in an area of five acres at two or three different locations to generate relevant data before approaching the regulator again for its consideration of commercial release.

Opposition:

- The GEAC's latest move of asking the applicant to undertake “field demonstration” has drawn flak from farm activists. They have been opposing environmental release of any genetically engineered crops on the ground of its adverse impact on human health and biodiversity even as a sub-committee of the central regulator had concluded in 2016 that the GM mustard would be safe for human consumption and environment.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** GM foods, GEAC and Environment Protection Act.
- **For Mains:** GM crops- Need, concerns, benefits and challenges.

About GEAC:

- The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body constituted in the Ministry of Environment and Forests under ‘Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells 1989’, under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.
- The GEAC is responsible for approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials (Biosafety Research Level trial-I and II known as BRL-I and BRL-II).

Sources: the hindu.

2. Model Contract Farming Act, 2018

Context:

- The government has released the Model Agriculture Produce and Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2018. It is drafted as a promotional and facilitative act and not regulatory in its structure.

Background:

- With a view to integrate farmers with bulk purchasers including exporters, agro- industries etc. for better price realization through mitigation of market and price risks to the farmers and ensuring smooth agro raw material supply to the agro industries, Union Finance Minister in the budget for 2017-18 announced preparation of a "Model Contract Farming Act" and circulation of the same to the States for its adoption.

Salient features of the Act:

- The act lays special emphasis on protecting the interests of the farmers, considering them as weaker of the two parties entering into a contract. It brings contract farming outside the ambit of the APMC Act.
- It provides for a "Registering and Agreement Recording Committee" or an "Officer" at the district/block/taluka level for online registration of sponsor and recording of agreement. The contracted produce will also be covered under crop/livestock insurance in operation.
- In a bid to allay the fears of individual farmers, the act explicitly states that no permanent structure can be developed on farmers' land/premises under such contracts.
- It gives no right, title of interest of the land to the sponsor. Similarly, no rights, title ownership or possession to be transferred or alienated or vested in the contract farming sponsor.
- The act provides for the promotion of Farmer Producer Organization (FPOs)/Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) to mobilise small and marginal farmers. The FPO/FPC can also be a contracting party if so authorized by the farmers.
- As per the law, the contracting party will be obliged to buy the entire pre-agreed quantity of one or more of agricultural produce, livestock or its product of contract farming producer as per contract.
- It also envisages the setting up of Contract Farming Facilitation Group (CFFG) for promoting contract farming and services at village/panchayat level.
- It also includes an accessible and simple dispute settlement mechanism at the lowest level possible for quick disposal of disputes.

What is Contract farming?

- The concept of Contract Farming (CF) refers to a system of farming, in which bulk purchasers including agro-processing/exporting or trading units enter into a contract with farmer(s), to purchase a specified quantity of any agricultural commodity at a pre-agreed price.

Contract farming in India:

- Although varied forms of contract farming existed in pockets in the country, the formal contract farming is not, however, wide spread in India. By and large, cultivation of commercial crops like cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, tea, coffee, rubber and dairy have had some elements of informal contract farming for a long time.

What is the existing regulatory structure?

- Currently, contract farming requires registration with the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) in few states. This means that contractual agreements are recorded with the APMCs which can also resolve disputes arising out of these contracts. Further, market fees and levies are paid to the APMC to undertake contract farming.
- The Model APMC Act, 2003 provided for contract farming and was released to the states for them to use this as reference while enacting their respective laws.
- Consequently, 20 states have amended their APMC Acts to provide for contract farming, while Punjab has a separate law on contract farming. However, only 14 states notified rules related to contract farming, as of October 2016.

What are the issues with the current structure?

- Over the years, expert bodies have identified issues related to the implementation of contract farming. These include: (i) role of APMCs which are designated as an authority for registration and dispute settlement in most states, (ii) provisions of stockholding limits on produce under contract farming, and (iii) poor publicity of contract farming among the farmers about its benefits.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Particulars of APMC Act and Model Contract Farming Act.
- For Mains:** Contract Farming- significance, issues and scope.

Sources: pib.

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

1. 'Gobar Dhan' scheme

Context:

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

Benefits of the scheme:

- This is hugely helpful for the country as India is home to the highest cattle population in the world, close to 300 million in number, with a daily output of 3 million tonnes of dung.
- The Scheme will encourage the farmers to consider dung and other waste not just as a waste but as a source of income.
- It will provide many benefits to the rural people. It will be easier to keep the village clean and sanitized, livestock health will improve and farm yields will increase.
- Biogas generation will increase self-reliance in energy utilized for cooking and lighting.
- Farmers and cattle herders will be helped in augmenting their income. There will be novel opportunities for newer jobs linked to waste collection, transportation, biogas sales etc.
- The scheme also provides a stable fuel supply in the market for oil companies and accessible credit in the market through government schemes and banks for entrepreneurs.

What's important?

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

What is the GOBAR-Dhan Yojana?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. Green Revolution - Krishonnati Yojana

Context:

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

Key objectives of the scheme:

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

The Schemes that are part of the Umbrella Schemes are:

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

Sources: pib.

3. Frozen Semen Station

Context:

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

Key facts:

- The frozen semen station in Purnea will be the first state-of-the-art semen production center of the country.
- The center will develop highly modern bull shade, semen processing lab, feed and godown, agricultural equipment, and other facilities.

About Rashtriya Gokul Mission:

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

Implementation:

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

Gokul Gram:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

4. Micro-irrigation fund

Context:

- The government on Wednesday approved a dedicated Rs5,000 crore fund to bring more land area under micro-irrigation as part of its objective to boost agriculture production and farmer's income.

About the Micro Irrigation Fund:

- 'Micro Irrigation Fund' (**MIF**) has been setup with NABARD under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (**PMKSY**). An allocation of Rs2,000 crore has been made for this fiscal while Rs3,000 crore has been earmarked for the 2019-20 fiscal. NABARD will extend the loan to state governments during this period.
- NABARD will provide this amount to states on concessional rate of interest. Borrowings from NABARD shall be paid back in seven years including the grace period of two years.
- The lending rate under MIF has been proposed at 3% lower than the cost of raising the fund by NABARD. This cost would be met from the ongoing scheme of PMKSY-PDMC (per drop more crop component) by amending the existing guidelines.

Beneficiaries:

- The dedicated fund would supplement the efforts of PMKSY programme and help bring about 10 lakh hectares under micro-irrigation.
- The fund will facilitate States to mobilise resources for their initiatives, including additional (top up subsidy) in implementation of PMKSY-PDMC to achieve the annual target of about 2 million hectares per year during the remaining period of 14th Finance Commission.
- The states might access this fund for innovative integrated projects, including projects in the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode and also for incentivizing micro irrigation.
- Farmers Producers Organization (FPO)/Cooperatives/State Level Agencies can also access the funds with state government guarantee or equivalent collateral. Farmers Co-operatives may access this fund for innovative cluster based community irrigation projects.

PMKSY:

- PMKSY is an umbrella scheme incorporating ongoing schemes of the Ministry like Mega Food Parks, Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure, Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure, etc. and also

new schemes like Infrastructure for Agro-processing Clusters, Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages, Creation / Expansion of Food Processing & Preservation Capacities.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana

Context:

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

About the Saubhagya scheme:

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

Implementation:

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

Salient Features of Saubhagya are:

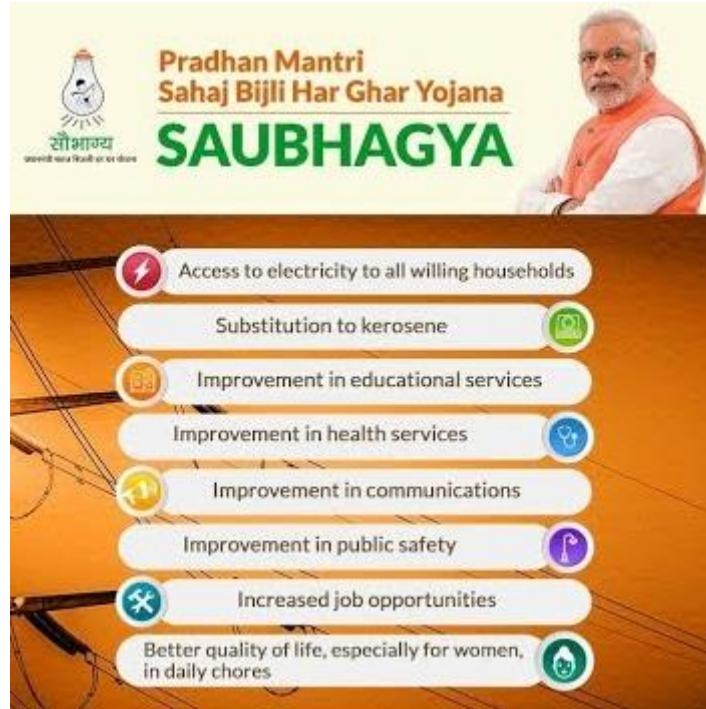
- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme in line with DDUGJY.
- The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC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

The expected outcome of the Scheme is as follows:

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

Way ahead:

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



What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

2. NABH (Nextgen Airports For Bharat) Nirman initiative

Context:

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

About NABH Nirman initiative:

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

Significance of the initiative:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. Green licence plates for e-vehicles

Context:

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

**Significance of the move:**

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

Types of number plates:

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

FAME scheme:

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

vehicles of the President and governors have red licence plates with the national emblem.

Challenges ahead:

- Mainstreaming electric vehicles will require an overhaul of the country's energy and transport infrastructure. For example, EV charging stations will have to be set up on a war footing, and electricity generation will have to improve significantly even as it piggybacks on the push for solar energy. **EV technology** (especially the battery) will have to become much cheaper before it can perform well in a price-sensitive market like India.

Way ahead:

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

Sources: the hindu.

4. Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) Programme

Context:

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

Background:

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

About SPR programme:

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

Need for strategic oil reserves:

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

Facts for Prelims:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

5. National Wind-solar Hybrid Policy

Context:

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

Highlights of the policy:

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

Way ahead:

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

Sources: pib.

6. Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC)

Context:

- Cabinet has approved development of Trunk Infrastructure Components for Integrated Multi Modal Logistics Hub known as "Freight Village" at Nangal Chaudhary in Haryana under Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Project.
- The Freight Village will be connected through Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) at Dabla.

What is a freight village?

- A 'Freight Village' is a specialised industrial estate which attracts companies that require logistics services and can cluster to improve their competitiveness.
- This will allow relocation of retailers, warehouse operators and logistics service providers supplying the regional FMCG market. Due



to its proximity to the main city, it will serve as a distribution centre and as a point of transfer between long distance transport by truck, rail and waterway and short distance distribution with delivery vans. ‘Freight Village’ includes an inter-modal terminal, which facilitates integration between different modes of transport.

About DMIC:

- **What is it?** Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor is a mega infra-structure project of USD 90 billion with the financial & technical aids from Japan, covering an overall length of 1483 KMs between the political capital and the business capital of India, i.e. Delhi and Mumbai. A MoU in this regard was signed in 2006.
- **Components:** The project would include six mega investment regions of 200 square kilometres each and will run through six states Delhi, Western Uttar Pradesh, Southern Haryana, Eastern Rajasthan, Eastern Gujarat, and Western Maharashtra. However, the Project Influence Region of DMIC includes parts of Madhya Pradesh too.
- **Aim:** The project aims to develop an environmentally sustainable, long lasting and technological advanced infrastructure utilizing cutting age Japanese technologies and to create world class manufacturing and investment destinations in this region.

Western Corridor:

- In October 2006, the Indian Government established a dedicated body, the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL), to carry out the project.
- The western DFC will separate freight and passenger traffic to increase the speed of freight movement. It will be used to transport fertilisers, food grains, salt, coal, iron & steel and cement.
- The project will eventually be linked to the Eastern DFC to form four hubs known as India’s Golden Quadrilateral including Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.
- The Western Dedicated Freight Corridor covers a distance of 1504 km of double line electric track from JNPT to Dadri via Vadodara-Ahmedabad-Palanpur-Phulera-Rewari.
- The Western Corridor passes through 5 states- Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** DMIC, freight village and DFC.
- **For Mains:** Need for infrastructure development.

Sources: pib.

7. Zoji La Tunnel

Context:

- The construction of the much-awaited infrastructure project Zoji La tunnel has begun.

About the Zojila pass tunnel:

- **What is it?** It is a 14.2-km long tunnel project in Jammu and Kashmir to provide all-weather connectivity between Srinagar, Kargil and Leh, which remains cut-off from the rest of India during winters due to heavy snowfall. “Zojila tunnel will be the longest bi-directional tunnel in Asia.”
- **Implementation:** The project will be implemented by the ministry of road transport and highways (MoRTH) through the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).
- **Benefits of the tunnel:** The project would enhance the safety of travellers crossing Zojila Pass and reduce the travel time from 3.5 hours to 15 minutes. This pass is most strategic for the entire Kargil sector which has seen intrusion and war in the past. It will further increase the employment potential for the local labourers for the project activities.



Facts for Prelims:

- Zojila pass is situated at an altitude of 11,578 feet on Srinagar-Kargil-Leh National Highway which remains closed during winters (December to April) due to heavy snowfall and avalanches cutting off Leh-Ladakh region from Kashmir.

Sources: pib.

8. Eastern Peripheral Expressway

Context:

- Eastern Peripheral Expressway was recently inaugurated by PM Modi.

About Eastern Peripheral Expressway:

- The 135- km expressway connects National Highway 1 and 2 from the eastern side of Delhi and aims to decongest and de-pollute the national capital by diverting traffic.
- It commences near Kundli in Haryana and terminates near Palwal by passing through Sonepat, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad and Palwal.
- It is India's first highway to be lit by solar power besides provisions of rain water harvesting on every 500 metres on both sides and would showcase 36 national monuments and 40 fountains.
- The state-of-the-art road will have auto challans for over-speeding as cameras will capture speed of vehicles. It will also have provisions of tolling only for the distance travelled. The expressway has an iconic toll plaza at the entry point on Kundli side besides digital art gallery.
- Around 2.5 lakh trees have been planted near it, including transplant of 8-10 year old trees. It also has drip irrigation provision.

**Background:**

- The Eastern and the Western Peripheral Expressways were planned in 2006 following the apex court's order to build a ring road outside the national capital for channelling the traffic not bound for Delhi.

Sources: the hindu.

9. Mission Raftaar'

Context:

- The Indian Railways conducted a one-day workshop 'Mission Raftaar' in which officials discussed ways to increase the average speed of freight and passenger trains. Issues such as "punctuality, rolling stock, removing bottlenecks in terms of traffic, elimination of unmanned level crossings were discussed" at the workshop.

About Mission Raftaar:

- 'Mission Raftaar' aims at doubling the average speed of freight trains and increasing the average speed of coaching trains by 25 kmph over a five-year period.

Significance of the mission:

- The average speed of freight trains is 24 kmph and that of passenger trains, excluding suburban trains, is 44 kmph. Increasing the average speed of trains is considered essential for reducing travel time for passengers, transit time for cargo, operational cost, and improving revenues and the railway's market share.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Mission Raftaar.
- For Mains:** Railway reforms.

Blueprint of Mission Raftaar

Removal of constraints on high-priority
9,100 route km

Raising of Sectional Speed to minimum 130 kmph: Out of 9,100 route km, 6,400 km (70%) have sectional speed of less than 130 kmph

Removal of Level Crossings: There are 2,736 level crossings on 9,100 route km. 931 are already sanctioned for elimination

Removal of Speed Restrictions: On these routes, there are speed restrictions at about 730 locations due to various factors pertaining

to design and maintenance of fixed assets. There is a restriction every 15 km on these routes

Raising of Speeds on Turnouts: At present 10% of turnouts on these routes have a speed of less than 30 kmph and all have a speed of less than 50 kmph

		Talgo coach attractions
LHB coach	Talgo coach	
160	Top-speed (kmph)	220
78	Seating capacity	36
506	Weight per seat ratio (kg)	341
8	Wheels per coach	2 between 2 coaches

30% more efficient as compared to LHB
45% lighter
Low-centre of gravity leads to higher speed and stability on curves

Sources: the hindu.

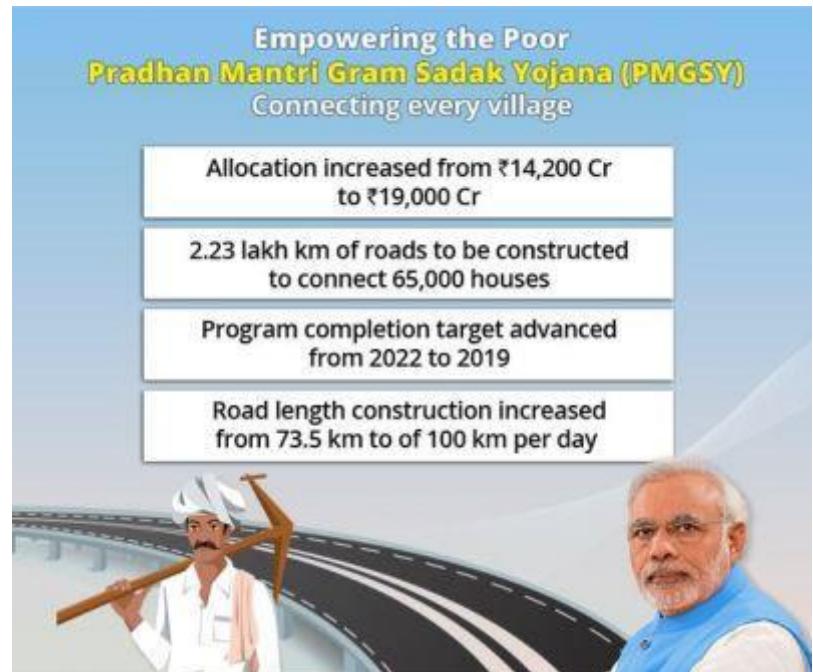
10. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana

Context:

- The Government of India and the World Bank has signed a \$500 million loan agreement to provide additional financing for the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) Rural Roads Project, implemented by Ministry of Rural Development.

About PMGSY:

- PMGSY was launched on 25th December 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country. The programme envisages connecting all habitations with a population of 500 persons and above in the plain areas and 250 persons and above in hill States, the tribal and the desert areas.



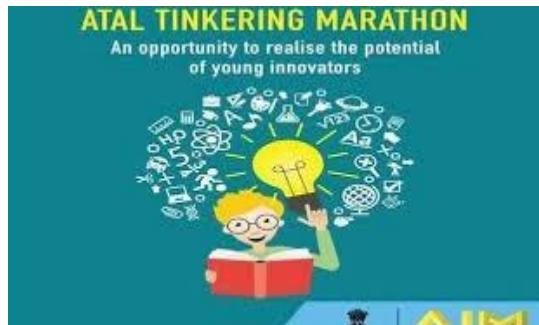
Sources: pib.

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

1. Atal Tinkering Marathon

What is it?

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



Why in news?

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

What are ATLs?

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

Significance of ATLs:

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

Need for such labs:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

2. National Technology Day

Context:

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

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

Significance of the day:

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



Sources: pib.

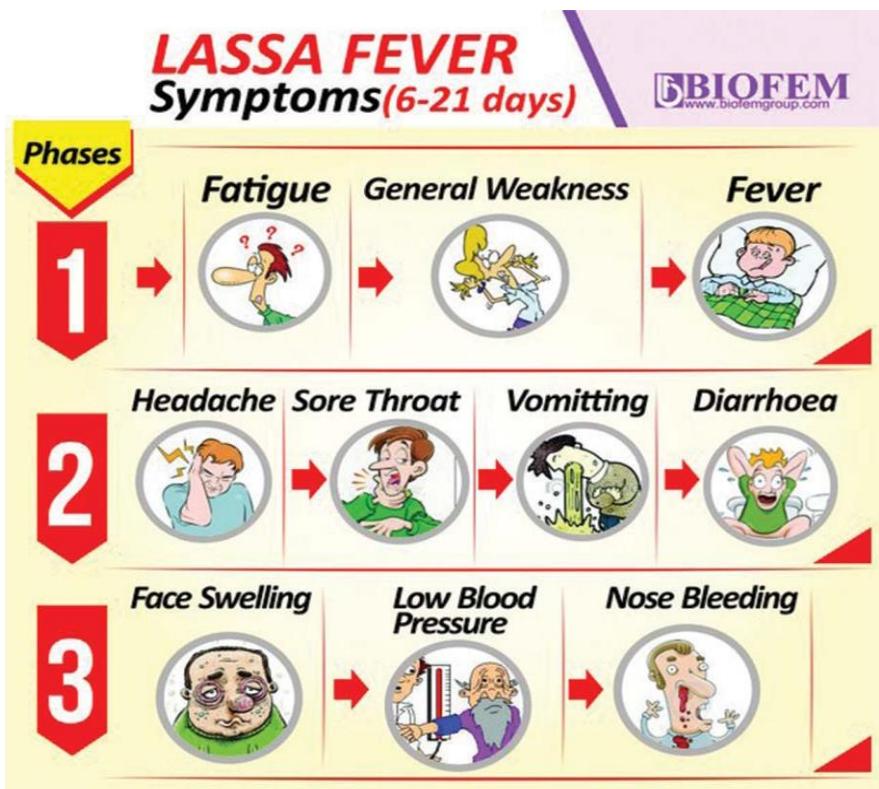
3. Lassa fever

Context:

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

Lassa fever- key facts:

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



What's important?

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

Sources: toi.

4. Elysia chlorotica

What is it?

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



What makes it unique?

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

Where is it found?

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

Significance of the discovery:

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

5. ISRO making green propellant

Context:

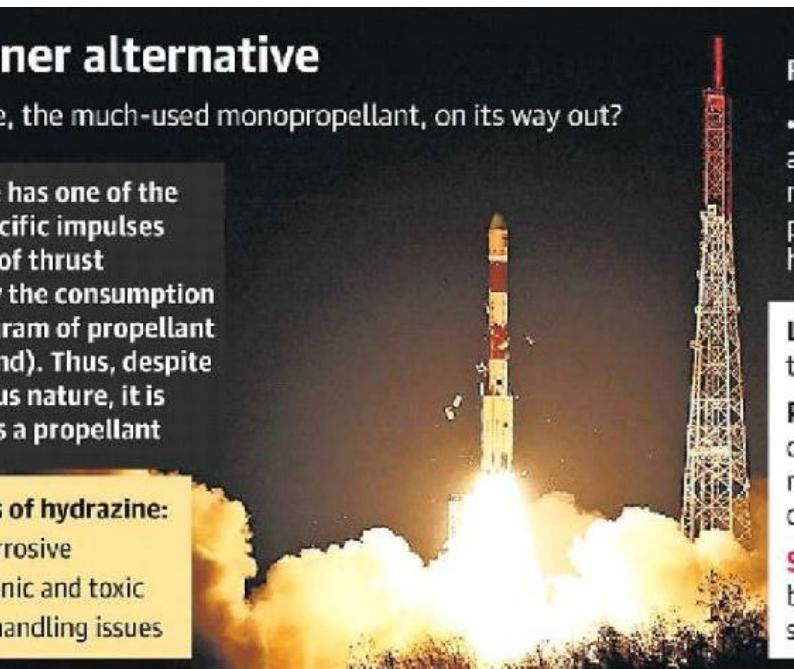
- Scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) have reported progress in the development of an environment-friendly propellant to power satellites and spacecraft. The new propellant is a blend based on hydroxylammonium nitrate (HAN).

About the new propellant:

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

A greener alternative

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



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

Drawbacks of hydrazine:

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

Replacing Hydrazine:

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

Low toxicity: HAN is less toxic than hydrazine

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

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

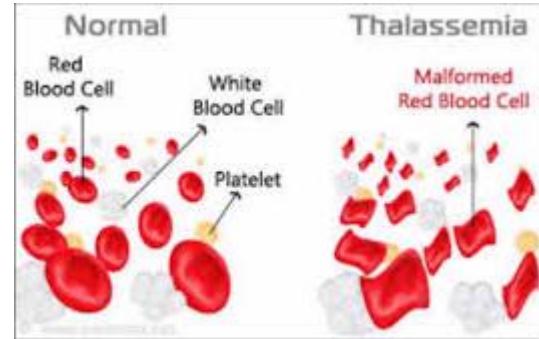
Need for a new propellant:

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

Sources: the hindu.

6. Thalassemia

- Thalassemia is a **chronic blood disorder**. It is a genetic disorder due to which a patient cannot make enough hemoglobin found in Red Blood Cells (RBC's). This leads to anemia and patients also require blood transfusions every two to three weeks to survive.
- Thalassemias are inherited disorders passed from parents to children through genes. Each red blood cell can contain between 240 and 300 million molecules of haemoglobin. The severity of the disease depends on the mutations involved in the genes, and their interplay.
- India is the thalassaemia capital of the world with 40 million carriers and over 1,00,000 thalassaemia majors under blood transfusion every month.



7. Startup Ranking Framework

Context:

- 30 States and Union Territories have participated in the State Startup Ranking Framework 2018 launched by DIPP.



What next?

- The participating States and UTs shall now be evaluated on a score of 100, against 38 action points categorized into 7 areas of intervention such as Startup Policy and implementation, Incubation support, Seed Funding, Angel and Venture Funding, Simplification of Regulations, Easing Public Procurement and Awareness & Outreach.
- In order to evaluate States/UTs in a balanced and transparent manner, the assessment will be based on the aggregate score of the documentary proofs substantiating the implementation of action points by the State/ UT Government and also feedback from Startup ecosystem beneficiaries/components.
- DIPP has appointed seven dedicated evaluation committees involving members from all relevant departments and reputed players in the ecosystem, for evaluating States' responses in each area of intervention.

About the Ranking Framework:

- The key objective of the Startup States and UTs Ranking Framework is to encourage States and UTs to take proactive steps towards strengthening the Startup ecosystems at the local level.
- The Ranking Framework will measure the impact of each step initiated at the local level for building a strong Startup ecosystem. The Ranking Framework will also enable continuous learning through the dissemination of good practices.
- The Ranking Framework is based on the feedback collected from Startup ecosystem stakeholders, which include startups, mentors, investors, accelerators, incubators and the government bodies. Areas which should be given greater thrust like seed funding support, women entrepreneurship are given more score.

Significance of Startups:

- India is home to about 20,000 startups, with about 1,400 beginning operations every year.
- They are not only driving economic growth but also leading to technological innovations and employment generation in every state.
- Entrepreneurs are introducing new solutions everyday and also improving existing processes.
- To encourage and help startups the Govt of India has taken the lead in creating policies and a framework. Many States and UTs have a startup focussed environment with ease of doing business for startups.

Way ahead:

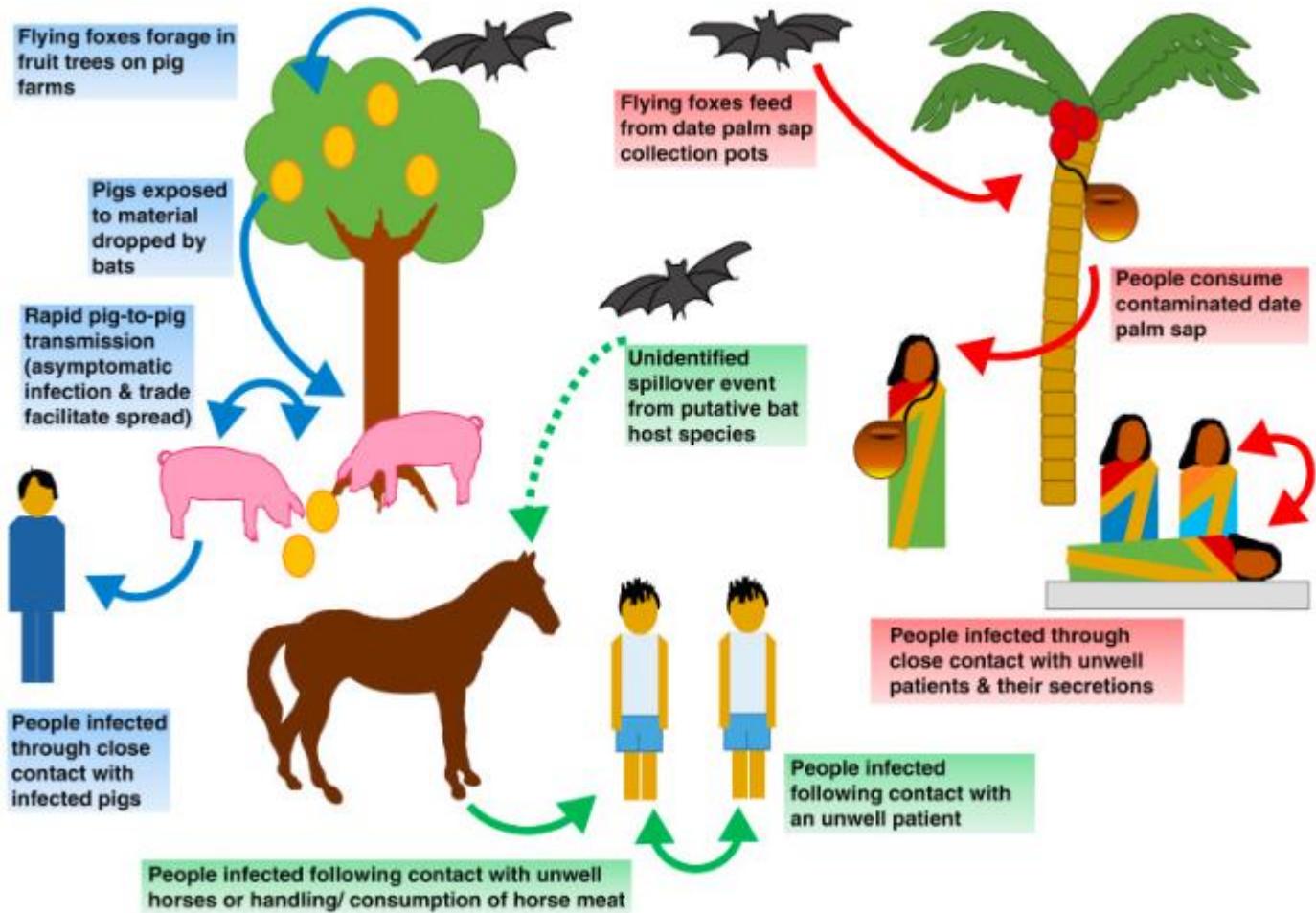
- The Govt has to align its strategies to tap into the infinite potential of young entrepreneurial minds. Startups need help in the journey from idea to business and business to success. States will also have to take proactive steps to enable startup ecosystems at the local level.

Sources: pib.

8. Nipah virus

Context:

- Kerala health department is on high alert in the wake of deaths due to the 'Nipah' virus (NiV). The government has set up a task force to monitor the cases and contain the spread of this fast spreading virus which has a reported mortality rate of 70%.

**When was it first reported?**

- It was first identified in 1998 at Kampung Sungai Nipah village, Malaysia. The virus is named after this village.

What are the symptoms in humans?

- The symptoms of Nipah are similar to that of influenza: fever, muscle pain, and respiratory problems. Inflammation of the brain can also cause disorientation. Late onset of Encephalitis can also occur. Sometimes a person can have an asymptomatic infection, and be a carrier of Nipah and not show any symptoms.

Are there any vaccines?

- Currently, there are no vaccines** for both humans and animals. Intensive supportive care is given to humans infected by Nipah virus.

What is Nipah Virus?

- According to WHO, the Nipah virus infection is a newly emerging zoonosis, that is, a disease transmitted from animals to humans. The virus belongs to a new genus termed Henipavirus (subfamily Paramyxovirinae).
- The natural host of the virus are fruit bats belonging to the family Pteropodidae. In 2004, humans were affected after eating the date palm contaminated by infected fruit bats. Pigs can also act as intermediate hosts.

- According to WHO, ribavarin can reduce the symptoms of nausea, vomiting, and convulsions associated with the disease. Individuals infected need to be hospitalised and isolated. Special care should be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission. Surveillance systems should be established to detect the virus quickly and to initiate appropriate control measures.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Nipah Virus Infection- causes, spread and symptoms.
- For Mains:** Major outbreaks and government preparedness to tackle them.

Sources: the hindu.

9. NIFTEM

Context:

- Food Processing Ministry to collaborate with international labs for wider acceptability of NIFTEM approved products.

About NIFTEM:

- NIFTEM is the brainchild of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) Government of India.
- It was created to cater to the needs of various stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, food processing industry, exporters, policy makers, government and existing institution.
- It works actively for assisting in setting up food standards, businesses incubation and can also include knowledge sharing.
- It would also be an apex institution in the field of food technology and management, networking and co-ordinating with other institutions in the same field in India and Abroad.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** NIFTEM.
- For Mains:** Need for markets for Indian foods worldwide.

Sources: pib.

10. Rustom-2

Context:

- DRDO chairman S Christopher recently said that Rustom- 2 drones will be delivered to the Indian armed forces by 2020.

About Rustom- 2:

- Rustom 2 drone is a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle, developed on the lines of predator drones of the United States. The objective of this drone is to carry out surveillance for the armed forces with an endurance of 24 hours.
- The drone was developed for use by all three services of the Indian armed forces, primarily for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) operations.
- The medium-altitude prototype can fly at over 22,000 ft and is a long-endurance (MALE) UAV that has an approximate flight time of 20 hours.
- It can fly at around 280 km/h and carry a variety of payloads like Medium Range Electro Optic (MREO), Long Range Electro Optic (LREO), Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), Electronic Intelligence (ELINT).
- Rustom 2 can fly missions on manual as well as autonomous modes. The onboard way-point navigation system allows the drone to conduct missions autonomously.

Significance of drones:

- Modern warfare is heavily dependent on drones and India had deployed its imported drones effectively during the surgical strikes it carried out across the Line of Control in Pakistan in September 2016.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Key features of Rustom 2.
- **For Mains:** Drones- uses and challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

11. 4th Room-Temperature Ferromagnetic Element: Ruthenium

Context:

- A platinum-group chemical element called ruthenium (Ru) is the fourth single element to have unique ferromagnetic properties at room temperature.

About Ru:

- Ruthenium is a chemical element with symbol Ru and atomic number 44. It is a rare transition metal belonging to the platinum group of the periodic table. Like the other metals of the platinum group, ruthenium is inert to most other chemicals.
- Most ruthenium produced is used in wear-resistant electrical contacts and thick-film resistors. A minor application for ruthenium is in platinum alloys and as a chemistry catalyst. A new application of ruthenium is as the capping layer for extreme ultraviolet photomasks.
- Ruthenium is generally found in ores with the other platinum group metals in the Ural Mountains and in North and South America. Small but commercially important quantities are also found in pentlandite extracted from Sudbury, Ontario and in pyroxenite deposits in South Africa.
- From an application perspective, Ru is interesting because it does not oxidize easily and theoretical predictions indicate it is particularly temperature-stable, which is an important property allowing scaling of magnetic memories.

Significance of the discovery:

- The discovery could be used to improve sensors, devices in the computer memory and logic industry, or other devices using magnetic materials.

Facts for Prelims:

- Ferromagnetism is the basic mechanism by which certain materials form permanent magnets, or are attracted to magnets.
- So far, only three single elements were found to be ferromagnetic at room temperature: iron (Fe), cobalt (Co), and nickel (Ni); the rare earth element gadolinium (Gd) nearly misses by only 8 degrees Celsius.
- Magnetic materials are very important in industry and modern technology and have been used for fundamental studies and in many everyday applications such as sensors, electric motors, generators, hard disk media, and most recently spintronic memories.

Sources: toI.

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

1. New Shepard rocket and space capsule

Context:

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

About New Shepard system:

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



What's important?

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

Sources: et.

2. GRACE-FO mission

Context:

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

About GRACE- FO mission:

- The Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-on (GRACE-FO) mission is a partnership between NASA and the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ).
- GRACE-FO is a successor to the original GRACE mission, which began orbiting Earth on March 17, 2002. The GRACE missions measure variations in gravity over Earth's surface, producing a new map of the gravity field every 30 days.
- GRACE-FO will carry on the extremely successful work of its predecessor while testing a new technology designed to dramatically improve the already remarkable precision of its measurement system.
- GRACE-FO will continue the work of tracking Earth's water movement to monitor changes in underground water storage, the amount of water in large lakes and rivers, soil moisture, ice sheets and glaciers, and sea level caused by the addition of water to the ocean. These discoveries provide a unique view of Earth's climate and have far-reaching benefits to society and the world's population.

Sources: nasa.

3. Mars InSight probe

Context:

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

Significance of the mission:

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

Why Mars ?

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

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** InSight's mission and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Bangabandhu Satellite-1

Context:

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



About Bangabandhu Satellite-1:

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

Significance of the satellite:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: et.

5. Magnetospheric Multiscale spacecraft (MMS)**Context:**

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

What is it?

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

What's so special about the new discovery?

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

Why understand reconnection?

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

Science Goals:

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

Significance of the mission:

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

Sources: et.

6. NASA Mars Helicopter

Context:

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

The mission:

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

Mars 2020:

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

Sources: et.

7. New sheep insemination technique

Context:

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



About Laparoscope technique:

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

Significance of the new technique:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

8. Artificial intelligence (AI)

Context:

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

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

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

Background:

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

Concerns associated:

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

New opportunities:

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

Need for a policy on AI:

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

Artificial intelligence (AI)

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

Policy on AI:

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

Seven-point strategy:

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

Way ahead:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

9. Intellectual Property mascot – IP Nani

Context:

- The government has launched the Intellectual Property (IP) mascot – IP Nani.

About IP Nani:

- Mascot IP Nani is a tech-savvy grandmother who helps the government and enforcement agencies in combating IP crimes with the help of her grandson "Chhotu" aka Aditya.
- The IP mascot will spread awareness about the importance of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) among people, especially children, in an interesting manner.
- This character is also in line with the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) campaign for the World IP Day which celebrates the brilliance, ingenuity, curiosity and courage of the women who are driving change in our world and shaping our common future.

About WIPO:

- The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is one of the 17 specialized agencies of the United Nations.
- It was created in 1967 "to encourage creative activity, to promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world."
- It has currently 188 member states, administers 26 international treaties, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Non-members are the states of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, South Sudan and Timor-Leste. Palestine has observer status.
- India is a member of WIPO and party to several treaties administered by WIPO.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** IP Nani and WIPO.

Sources: pib.

10. Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM)

Context:

- The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) recently organized a conference on successful completion of two years of the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy adopted by the Government of India in May 2016.

Highlights of the new IPR policy:

- The new policy seeks to encourage innovation and improve access to healthcare, food security and environmental protection.
- The Policy will allow compulsory licensing with restrictions in case of a public health emergency such as epidemics and it is compliant with the World Trade Organization's guidelines.
- The policy seeks to put in place a legal framework that will encourage the IPR regime and reduce the time taken by the government to approve a trademark to a month by 2017. Currently, the process takes more than a year.
- The policy makes the department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP) the nodal agency for regulating IP rights in the country.
- The Policy states "India shall remain committed to the (World Trade Organisation's) Doha Declaration on Trade Related IPR Agreement (TRIPS) and Public Health."
- It also says "India will continue to utilise the legislative space and flexibilities available in international treaties and the TRIPS Agreement." These flexibilities include the sovereign right of countries to use provisions such as Section 3(d) and CLs for ensuring the availability of essential and life-saving drugs at affordable prices.
- To ensure strong and effective IPR laws, the Policy states India will engage constructively in the negotiation of international treaties and agreements in consultation with stakeholders.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** CIPAM and the new IPR policy.
- For Mains:** IPR Policy related issues.

About the IPR Policy:

- The National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy, which was approved by the Union Cabinet in May 2016, is a significant move forward to encourage creativity and stimulate innovation in the country.
- Outreach and Promotion is the first and foremost objective of the National IPR Policy and is critical to shaping an IP environment that is conducive to fostering creativity & innovation in the country.

About CIPAM:

- Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) has been created as a professional body under the aegis of DIPP to take forward the implementation of the National IPR Policy that was approved by the Government in May 2016, with the slogan – "Creative India; Innovative India".
- Functions:** CIPAM is working towards creating public awareness about IPRs in the country, promoting the filing of IPRs through facilitation, providing inventors with a platform to commercialize their IP assets and coordinating the implementation of the National IPR Policy in collaboration with Government Ministries/Departments and other stakeholders.

Sources: pib.

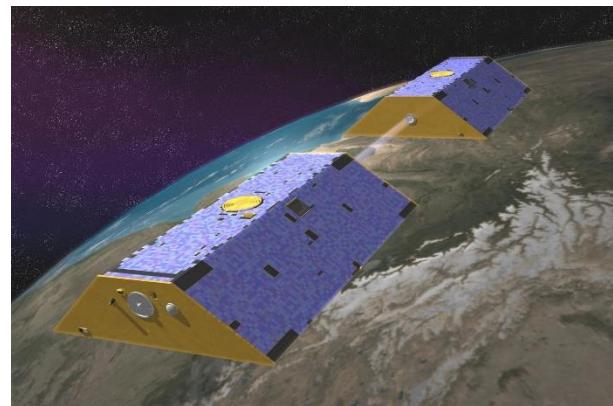
11. GRACE mission

Context:

- NASA's GRACE mission has confirmed that a massive redistribution of freshwater is occurring across the Earth, with middle-latitude belts drying and the tropics and higher latitudes gaining water supplies.

What's causing this?

- A combination of the effects of climate change, vast human withdrawals of groundwater and simple natural changes are behind this.



Concern:

- If this continues, it could have profound consequences leading to a situation in which some highly populous regions could struggle to find enough water in the future.

Other findings:

- The resulting map of the findings shows an overall pattern, in which ice sheets and glaciers lose by far the most mass at the poles, but at the same time, middle latitudes show multiple areas of growing dryness even as higher latitudes and the tropical belt tend to see increases in water.
- The study emphasizes that the 34 separate changes that it detects do not all have the same cause – not even close.
- There's very strong suspicion that the melting of glaciers and ice sheets is tied to climate change. On land, it's possible that some droughts and rainfall increases may be also, though the study is cautious about that, noting that natural variability can also be a major factor here.
- There are also some major cases of humans increasing water storage in the landscape, particularly in China, where massive dam construction has created enormous reservoirs.
- Mainly, though, what's striking about the map is the way that a combination of human-driven water withdrawals and droughts seem to be punishing the central latitudes of the northern hemisphere in particular, but also the southern hemisphere to a significant extent.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** GRACE Mission, redistribution of freshwater on earth- concerns and impact by human.

Sources: et.

12. Radar in a CubeSat (RainCube)**Context:**

- NASA is planning to deliver RainCube to the ISS on the OA-9 resupply mission.

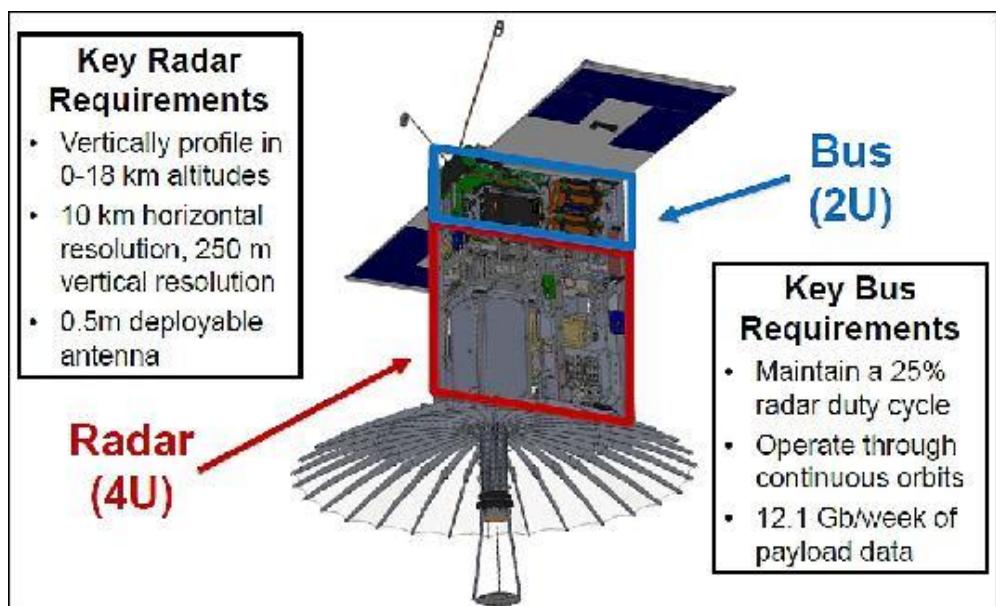
About RainCube:

- RainCube (Radar in a CubeSat) is a technology demonstration mission to enable Ka-band precipitation radar technologies on a low-cost, quick-turnaround platform. RainCube will demonstrate the feasibility of a radar payload on a CubeSat platform.

- Sponsored by NASA's Earth Science Technology Office (ESTO) through the InVEST-15 program, RainCube developed a 35.75 GHz radar payload to operate within the 6U CubeSat form factor.

GRACE mission:

- The GRACE mission was selected as the second mission under the NASA Earth System Science Pathfinder (ESSP) Program in May 1997. Launched in March of 2002, the GRACE mission mapped variations in Earth's gravity field. Designed for a nominal mission lifetime of five years, GRACE operated in an extended mission phase till 2017.
- GRACE is a joint partnership between the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States and Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Luft und Raumfahrt (DLR) in Germany.
- GRACE consists of two identical spacecraft that fly about 220 kilometers (137 miles) apart in a polar orbit 500 kilometers (310 miles) above Earth. GRACE maps Earth's gravity field by making accurate measurements of the distance between the two satellites, using GPS and a microwave ranging system.



RainCube has three main objectives:

- Develop, launch, and operate the first radar instrument on a CubeSat (6U).
- Demonstrate new technologies and provide space validation for a Ka-band (35.75 GHz) precipitation profiling radar.
- Enable future precipitation profiling Earth science missions on a low-cost, quick-turnaround platform.

Way ahead:

- If successful, RainCube could open the door for lower-cost, quick-turnaround constellation missions, in which multiple CubeSats work together to provide more frequent observations than a single satellite.

Sources: et.

13. ToneTag**Context:**

- ToneTag, a Bengaluru-based financial technology company, is set to introduce sound-based data transfer technology named Tonetag.

Significance of the technology:

- ToneTag sound-wave communication platform enables highly secure proximity payments, customer engagement services and on-the-go mobility solutions. The approach in this technology makes the entire process device agnostic and completely frictionless, making the user experience intuitive and highly adaptable.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Key features of ToneTag technology.

Sources: the hindu.

Tonetag technology

- ToneTag is a technology which is a communication protocol that will enable data transfer using sound waves. It is not hardware dependent and works with the devices that do not have a microphone or speaker.

14. An air cleaner with potential**Context:**

- Scientists have developed a nanocomposite material that can selectively convert environmental carbon monoxide into less toxic carbon dioxide.

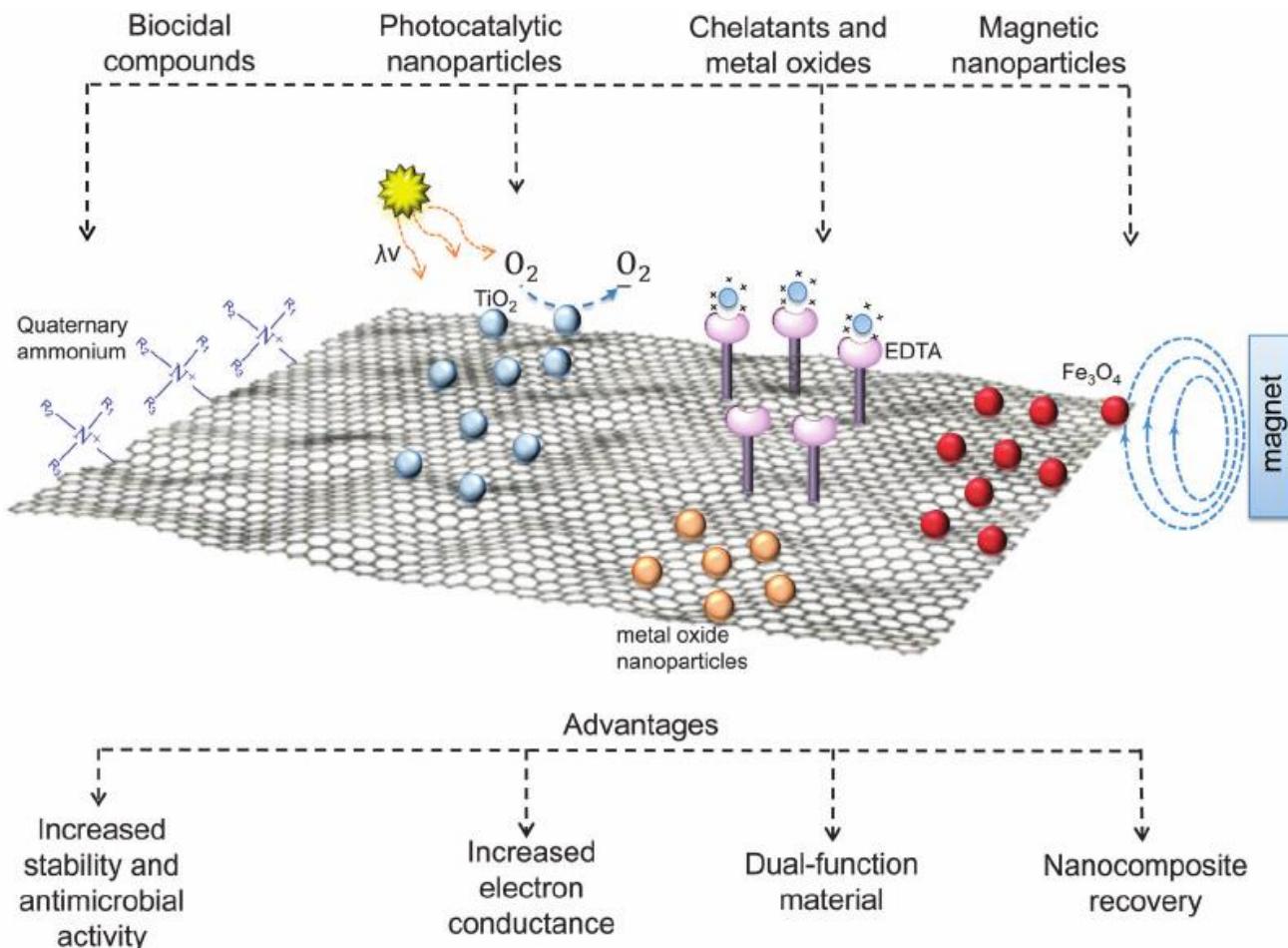
About the new material:

- The new composite material is made of graphene and an alloy of platinum and palladium in the form of nanoparticles. Graphene was used as a substrate and then “decorated” with alloy nanoparticles made of platinum and palladium. The material was then used for selective oxidation of CO into CO₂.
- The catalytic behaviour of the nanocomposite was studied using different morphologies for the oxidation of CO. The conversion rate varied along with the flow rate of CO as well as temperature, showing full conversion at temperatures ranging from 75° to 125°.
- The new material could find potential use in chemical industries as well as environmental cleaning.

About Graphene:

- Graphene has been touted in the global electronics industry as a “miracle material” given its strength, electrical conductivity and elasticity, and has been seen as an alternative to lithium-ion batteries since its discovery in 2004. It is a form of carbon that can be used to develop smaller, slimmer batteries but with higher capacity.
- Graphene is a carbon material that is one atom thick. Its thin composition and high conductivity means it is used in applications ranging from miniaturised electronics to biomedical devices. These properties also enable thinner wire connections; providing extensive benefits for computers, solar panels, batteries, sensors and other devices.

- The potential applications of graphene include water filtration and purification, renewable energy, sensors, personalised healthcare and medicine, to name a few.
- Graphene has excellent electronic, mechanical, thermal and optical properties as well. Its uses range from improving battery performance in energy devices, to cheaper solar panels.



What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Graphene- features and applications, use of nanotechnology in controlling pollution.

Sources: the hindu.

15. TRAI proposes use of Blockchain Technology

Context:

- Telecom regulator Trai has issued new draft norms to curb pesky calls and SMSes by using blockchain technology. When implemented, Trai will become first organisation to implement this kind of regulation.

Key facts:

- The new technology aims to ensure that telemarketing messages are sent only to those who have subscribed to them, and that too by authorized entities. The draft proposes to check misuse of repeated unsolicited calls being made even to those subscribers who have given consent.
- The new technology based norms will record all communication between subscribers and entities, capturing customer consent for information and authorised telemarketing agencies.

Blockchain

- Blockchain is the digital and decentralized ledger that records transactions without the need for a financial intermediary, which in most cases is a bank. A blockchain is an anonymous online ledger that uses data structure to simplify the way we transact. Blockchain allows users to manipulate the ledger in a secure way without the help of a third party.

- A subscriber may have given consent for a service but that consent is liable to be misused. Under the proposed regulation. The subscriber will be able to revoke consent given to entities whenever he or she desires through Trai app and other mechanism that will be provided under the regulation.

How it works?

- Blockchain enables two entities that do not know each other to agree that something is true without the need of a third party. As opposed to writing entries into a single sheet of paper, a blockchain is a distributed database that takes a number of inputs and places them into a block. Each block is then ‘chained’ to the next block using a cryptographic signature. This allows blockchains to be used as a ledger which is accessible by anyone with permission to do so. If everyone in the process is pre-selected, the ledger is termed ‘permissioned’. If the process is open to the whole world, the ledger is called unpermissioned.

Benefits of blockchain technology:

- A blockchain is anonymous, protecting the identities of the users. This makes blockchain a more secure way to carry out transactions. The algorithm used in blockchain reduces the dependence on people to verify the transactions.

Concerns associated:

- Blockchain is still a (relatively) new technology and is not without its problems. For a start, there are ongoing concerns about privacy in the settlement and storage of securities – blockchain providers are working hard to address.
- Banks are also at threat with blockchain, since more and more firms (using their IT service providers from India and elsewhere) will build systems that can create and exchange ‘blocks’ with one another completely legally, without ever having to use the banks as a financial intermediary.

Way ahead:

- Blockchain is not a panacea for all issues facing the banking system today. However, blockchain is an ideal technology to ensure proof of integrity to the data and reduce incidents of fraud.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Blockchain- how it works.
- **For Mains:** Prevention of fraud, use of technology in this regard.

Sources: the hindu.

16. GI tag for rural crafts

Context:

- The Chau mask of Purulia, the wooden mask of Kushmandi, the Patachitra, the Dokras of Bengal, and Madhurkathi (a kind of mat) have been presented with the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indication Registry and Intellectual Property India.

Significance of this recognition:

- GI tags for these five rural crafts would not only help the artisans create their own brand but would also provide legal protection to artisans practising the crafts against attempts to duplicate them in other regions. It will also have a direct impact on the occupation of 5,000-6,000 families in the State.

About GI tag:

What is it?

- 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.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. WHO global air pollution database

Context:

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

Why should India be worried?

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

Level of threat from air pollution worldwide:

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

Ujjwala:

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

Various efforts by the government:

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

Way ahead:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. Algae Noctiluca scintillans

What is it?

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

**Why in news?**

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

Concerns:

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

3. Bhupathy's shieldtail

What is it?

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

Key facts:

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



4. Namami Gange Programme

Context:

- National Mission for Clean Ganga has brought on board Survey of India to facilitate the Ganga rejuvenation task by using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology.

- Through the project, NMCG aims to strengthen planning and implementation at national/state/local levels.

Implementation:

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

About Survey of India:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

DEM technology:

- The project includes use of Digital Elevation Model (DEM) technology which ensures accurate data collection, an important aspect for river basin management planning.
- DEM technology enables identification of entire topography of an area making it easy for policy makers to analyse the available data thereby supporting the decision-making process.
- Critical hotspots are also easily identified through this technology.

About Namami Gange Programme:

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

5. National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC)

Context:

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

About NWIC:

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

Background:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

6. First organised census for Indus dolphins**Context:**

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

**About Indus Dolphins:**

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

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Indus Dolphins.

Sources: the hindu.

7. Brown peach aphid

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

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

**About Brown peach aphid:**

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

Concerns:

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

Sources: the hindu.

8. World Migratory Bird Day (May 12) 2018

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

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

About World Migratory Bird Day:

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

Concerns:

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

Conservation of migratory species:

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

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

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

What's important?

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

Sources: toi.

9. South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN)

Context:

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



**South Asia Wildlife
Enforcement Network**

Significance of SAWEN:

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

How will it help India?

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

Background:

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

Sources: the hindu.

10. Ivory is ‘government property’

Context:

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



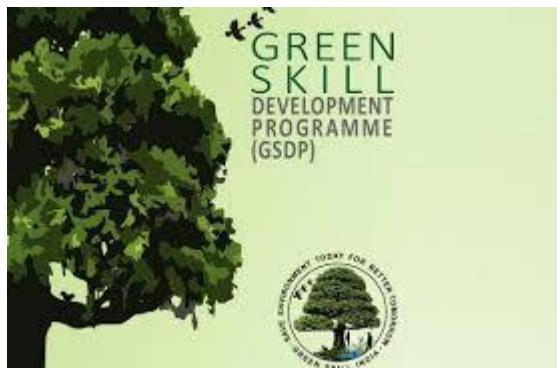
11. Green Skill Development Programme (GSPD)

Context:

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

Green Skill Development Programme (GSPD):

- GSPD is a recent initiative under the ENVIS scheme for skilling the youth in the country. It is an initiative for skill development in the environment and forest region by the



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

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

What are Green Skills?

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

Why Green Skills?

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

What's important?

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

Sources: the hindu.

12. Mangaluru narrow-mouthed frog

Context:

- It is the newest frog discovered from Karnataka.

Key facts:

- It is christened Microhyla kodial after the city of Mangaluru (called kodial in the Konkani language).
- The Mangaluru narrow-mouthed frog is found only in a small industrial space in Mangaluru.
- Physical features: The greyish-brown frog is just 2 cm long. It has a thick olive-green band on its head, less-prominent dark green bands on the rest of its body.
- The Mangaluru narrow-mouthed frog is the 42nd species belonging to the genus Microhyla recorded from south Asia. More than 650 microhylids – or frogs belonging to the family Microhylidae – are found across the world's tropics.



13. Arsenic contamination

Context:

- The Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) in collaboration with a private company has developed a new device- 'Arsenic Sensor and Removal Media- which can be used to detect and remove arsenic content from water and make it safe and usable by households.

Permissible limit:

- According to the WHO's guidelines for drinking water quality (2011), the permissible limit of Arsenic in groundwater is .01 mg per litre. However, in India the permissible limit in drinking water has recently been revised from .05 mg per litre to .01 mg per litre.

Arsenic in groundwater:

- Arsenic in ground water is a geogenic contaminant i.e. caused by natural geologic processes. Incidence of high arsenic in groundwater reported from various parts of the country, particularly in the Ganga- plains is a serious threat to the health of human being.
- Over the last three decades numerous measures have been initiated which includes alternate arrangement for supply of arsenic free water to the affected populace and providing arsenic removal plants. Arsenic occurrences in ground water in these areas is highly sporadic in nature and all the sources in these areas are not necessarily contaminated.
- Technological options to combat arsenic menace, in groundwater, to ensure supply of arsenic free water, in the affected areas can be in-situ remediation of arsenic from aquifer system, ex-situ remediation of arsenic from tapped groundwater by arsenic removal technologies, use of surface water source as an alternative to the contaminated groundwater source, tapping alternate safe aquifers for supply of arsenic free groundwater or combination of above techniques.

What has the government done in this regard?

- The government is tapping alternate safe aquifers, for supply of arsenic free groundwater in many areas on a local scale; however, this approach would require extensive studies and analysis for mapping of groundwater availability, freshwater reserves and to examine mobilization of arsenic in the aquifer, both on spatial and temporal scale, due to forcing perturbation.
- Under the National Aquifer mapping programme (NAQUM) of CGWB special attention has been given to this aspect and water wells have been constructed tapping arsenic free aquifers using state of the art technology in parts of Ballia and Ghazipur districts of Uttar Pradesh".
- However, the growing arsenic occurrences demands a systematic translation of success stories of one place/region to another and formulating a comprehensive plan to mitigate the arsenic problem through a wider consultation process.

Way ahead:

- Technological options to combat arsenic menace, in groundwater, to ensure supply of arsenic free water, in the affected areas can be in-situ remediation of arsenic from aquifer system, ex-situ remediation of arsenic from tapped groundwater by arsenic removal technologies, use of surface water source as an alternative to the contaminated groundwater source, tapping alternate safe aquifers for supply of arsenic free groundwater or combination of above techniques.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Arsenic contamination- effects, causes and solutions.

Sources: the hindu.

14. 'Green Good Deeds'

Context:

- The BRICS Ministerial on Environment has agreed to include "Green Good Deeds" in its official agenda in the next Ministerial in Brazil and another meeting in Russia.

"Green Good Deeds" campaign:

- The campaign has been launched by the Environment Ministry to sensitise the people and students, in particular, about climate change and global warming. The objective of the campaign is to restore and return the clean and green environment to the next generation.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change had drawn up a list of over 500 Green Good Deeds and asked people to alter their behaviour to Green Good Behaviour to fulfil their Green Social Responsibility.

- These small positive actions to be performed by individuals or organisations to strengthen the cause of environmental protection, were put on a mobile application named “Dr Harsh Vardhan App”.

Significance of this move:

- International conferences on Environment have been deliberating and adopting declarations. However, these declarations are hardly put to practice at the ground level, involving every section of the society. “Green Good Deeds” is an idea to take it to the people and get them involved.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Green Good Deeds campaign, Dr Harsh Vardhan App.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for such campaigns in creating awareness, Environment protection campaigns as people's movement.

Sources: pib.

15. Global action to protect bees

Context:

- On the occasion of World Bee Day celebrated on May 20th, the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization and the European Union have called for global action to protect pollinators, and bees in particular, which are crucial for ensuring food security.



World Bee Day:

- To underline the importance of the issue, and following a Slovenian proposal, the UN has named May 20 as World Bee Day, as it marked the birthday of Anton Jansa (1734-1773), a Slovenian pioneer in modern beekeeping.

Concerns:

- Pollinators, such as bees, birds, bats, butterflies and beetles are responsible for most of the crops and food that we eat. However, the UN has warned that 40% of invertebrate pollinators—particularly bees and butterflies—risk global extinction.
- The absence of an appropriate habitat for bees could lead to a continuous decline in pollination. Mono-cropping, pesticides and higher temperatures associated with climate change all pose problems for bee populations and, by extension, the quality of food we grow.
- Declining pollination also poses an immediate threat to nutrition. If this trend continues, nutritious crops such as fruits, nuts, and many vegetable crops will be substituted increasingly by staple crops like rice, corn, and potatoes, eventually resulting in an imbalanced diet.

Importance of Pollinators:

- Most of our staple food crops such as wheat, rice, sorghum, barley and maize do not require animals for their pollination. However, wild pollinators play a very important role in the production of other crops such as some pulses, sunflower seeds, cardamom, coffee, cashew nuts, oranges, mangoes and apples.
- Pollinators also provide a key ecosystem service vital to the maintenance of both wild and agricultural plant communities.
- Besides, the annual economic value of the crops pollinated by animals worldwide is estimated to be between \$235 billion and \$577 billion (in 2015).
- Declines in the health and population of pollinators pose what could be a significant threat to the integrity of biodiversity, to global food webs, and to human health. At least 80% of our world's crop species require pollination to set seed.

Protection measures for farmers and governments:

Recommended practices for farmers to create a good habitat for bees to ensure pollination include:

- Leaving some areas under natural habitat.
- Creating hedgerows.
- Reducing or changing the usage of pesticides.
- Leaving nesting sites.
- Planting attractive crops around the field.
- On a policy level, a more diverse agriculture and less dependency on toxic chemicals to facilitate an increase in pollination, leading to improved food quality and a surge in food quantity are encouraged.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** World Honey Bee day.
- **For Mains:** Pollinators- significance, threats and various efforts for their conservation.

Sources: the hindu.

16. Asita project

Context:

- National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has asked DDA to expedite “Asita”, its Yamuna River Front Development Project.

About Asita:

- Asita, also known as Yamuna River Front Development (RFD) project, aims to restore, revive and rejuvenate the river’s floodplains and make them accessible to the people of Delhi. “Asita” is another name of river Yamuna.

Key features of the project:

- A special focus of the project is on reviving the river’s bio-diversity in the National Capital.
- River Front “walks”, a major component of the project, will enable people to develop a relationship with river Yamuna.
- The project envisages creating a green buffer area approx. 300mts wide along the river edge with species of riverine ecology. Besides, a wide belt of 150mts along the peripheral roads will be developed as greenways for public amenities that will include a continuous trail of pathways and cycle tracks.
- To revive the ecosystem of the floodplains, wetlands will be created to store the flood waters and also to improve the groundwater recharge which will eventually result in flourishing of biodiversity in the floodplains.
- An environmentally conscious approach for integration of the river into the urban fabric of the city has been adopted. A people-friendly bio-diversity zone will be created for people to interact freely with the river’s ecosystem.

Concerns:

- The Yamuna was declared a dead river. The dissolved oxygen level, which are crucial to life in the water, is negligible. The river usually flows with heavy toxic foam on its surface and often parts of the river actually catch fire. Ostensibly, in the last 22 years, over Rs. 2,000 crore has been spent on the clean-up of the Yamuna.

Yamuna River:

- The Yamuna is the tributary of river Ganga. It originates from the Yamunotri Glacier at a height of 6,387 metres on the south western slopes of Banderpooch peaks in the uppermost region of the Lower Himalayas in Uttarakhand. It merges with the Ganges at Triveni Sangam, Allahabad, the site for the Kumbha Mela.

Yamuna Action Plan:

- Government of India has sanctioned Yamuna Action Plant (YAP)-I and YAP-II schemes for river Yamuna in Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and YAP-III in Delhi under financial assistance from Japan International

Cooperation Agency (JICA) for taking up works for sewerage/interception and diversion of drains, Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), low cost sanitation/community toilet complexes, electric/ improved wood crematoria, etc.

Sources: pib.

17. International Day for Biological Diversity 2018

Context:

- Every year May 22 is observed as The International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) to increase awareness on various biodiversity issues such as habitat destruction, marine pollution and climate change.

The theme for 2018 is “Celebrating 25 Years of Action for Biodiversity.”

Historical background:

- It was first observed in 1993 by the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly.
- In 2000, May 22 was chosen as the International Day for Biological Diversity to commemorate the Adoption of the Agreed Text of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

About CBD:

- At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders agreed on a comprehensive strategy for “sustainable development” — meeting our needs while ensuring that we leave a healthy and viable world for future generations. One of the key agreements adopted at Rio was the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- The Convention on Biological Diversity is the international legal instrument for “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources” that has been ratified by 196 nations.



Facts for Prelims:

- The objectives of halting biodiversity loss and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems are included in Sustainable Development Goal N°15.

Sources: pib.

18. Clean Air India Initiative' launched

Context:

- Clean Air India initiative was recently launched by Prime Minister of Netherlands Mark Rutte, who is in India on a two-day visit.

About Clean Air India initiative:

- The Clean Air India Initiative is a collaborative project between Get In The Ring, a platform for start-ups, the government of the Netherlands, Start-up India, and INDUS Forum, an online matchmaking platform of Indian and Dutch businesses.
- The campaign aims to curb air pollution in Indian cities by promoting partnerships between Indian start-ups and Dutch companies and build a network of entrepreneurs working on business solutions for cleaner air.

Way ahead:

- Governments need to be articulate about the problems they want to solve, bring together the right partners, and channelise entrepreneurs in the right direction to find solutions to global problems.”
- “Sustainable businesses present an opportunity to do social good, as they represent a for-profit orientation in the right framework. They advance the U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] in a smartly profitable way.

Sources: the hindu.

19. Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI)

- The Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI) works to secure real improvements in fuel economy, and the maximum deployment of vehicle efficiency technologies across the world. This includes light and heavy duty vehicles, and the full range of technologies, including hybrid and fully electric vehicles. The Initiative promotes these objectives through shared analysis, advocacy, and through in country policy support, and tools.
- GFEI is a partnership of the International Energy Agency (IEA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Transport Forum of the OECD (ITF), International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), Institute for Transportation Studies at UC Davis, and the FIA Foundation – which hosts the secretariat.
- The GFEI works with countries to develop an appropriate national approach and supporting target for improved car fleet fuel economy, while working toward a global stabilization of emissions from the road transport sector by 2050.
- GFEI also work in global policy processes - such as the UNFCCC, G20 and Post 2015 framework – to promote fuel economy as part of energy efficiency, whilst backing-up this advocacy and capacity building with cutting edge research.
- The Initiative also promotes fuel economy by engaging in global processes such as the UN Climate Convention and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



20. Biodiversity award for Arunachal reserve

Context:

- Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh has been awarded the India Biodiversity Award for its effort to conserve the critically endangered bird – Bugun liocichla.

About Bugun liocichla:

- Bugun Liocichla (Liocichla bugunorum) was discovered in 2006 in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. The bird has been named in honour of the efforts of the Bugun community of Singchung village in West Kameng district in conserving the wildlife and forest of the area.
- The known population of this species is between 14 and 20 individual birds and occupies an extremely small (3 to 4 square kilometre) area in the temperate forest around 2,200m which is entirely within the traditional lands of Singchung village.
- The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has classified this species as critically endangered.

About SBVCR:

- The Singchung Bugun village community reserve was formally created on February 6 last year following intensive conservation efforts by the Arunachal forest department. The SBVCR, 17 square kilometre in size, is the core area of a larger conservation area on traditional Bugun lands.

What are community reserves?

- Conservation reserves and community reserves in India are terms denoting protected areas of India which typically act as buffer zones to or connectors and migration corridors between established national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and reserved and protected forests of India.
- Such areas are designated as conservation areas if they are uninhabited and completely owned by the Government of India but used for subsistence by communities, and community areas if part of the lands are privately owned. Administration of such reserves would be through local people and local agencies like the gram panchayat, as in the case of communal forests.
- The 2002 Amendment to the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972) calls for a new category of protected areas, a 'Community Reserve' (CR).

Facts for Prelims:

- India Biodiversity award is conferred annually by the National Biodiversity Authority.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Community Reserves and other protected areas, Bugun liocichla.
- **For Mains:** WPA Act and its key features.

Sources: the hindu.

21. Green Cricket in India

Context:

- The main aim of the partnership is to spread greater awareness about key environmental challenges that are facing the country and highlight alternate and more sustainable solutions.



Key facts:

- Through the agreement, the BCCI will endeavor to reduce its environmental impact by greening its operations and engaging cricketers and fans in green initiatives.
- The partnership will help make cricket green and sensitise spectators towards minimising waste generation during matches.
- The partnership will also focus on phasing out single-use plastic across stadiums and cricket events in the country.

Background:

- As global host of World Environment Day in 2018, India is leading the global charge to #BeatPlasticPollution in the country, and around the world. It is estimated that the world uses 10 million plastic bags every minute, and much of ends up in our oceans and landfills and is ingested by marine animals and wildlife.

About the Board of Control for Cricket in India:

- The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is the national governing body for cricket in India. Today, the BCCI has 30 full-time members. It organizes – among others – the Indian Premier League.

About World Environment Day:

- World Environment Day is the single largest celebration of our environment each year. Since it began in 1974, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated across the globe.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** World Environment Day, BCCI and UNEP.

About UN Environment:

- UN Environment is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.
- UN Environment works with governments, the private sector, civil society and with other UN entities and international organizations across the world.

22. NGT issues notices on plea to halt road through Corbett

Context:

- A plea seeking a stay on the construction of a link road linking Kotdwar to Ramnagar through the Corbett Tiger Reserve has led the National Green Tribunal to seek responses from the Uttarakhand government and the Centre.

What's the issue?

- The petition alleges that the construction of the road through the park was in violation of previous Supreme Court orders that prohibited the construction of any road through the Corbett Tiger Reserve.

About Corbett tiger reserve:

- Corbett National Park is situated in the foothills of the Sub- Himalayan belt in Nainital districts of Uttarakhand state in India.
- Established in the year 1936 as Hailey National Park, Corbett has the glory of being India's oldest and most prestigious National Park. It is also being honored as the place where Project Tiger was first launched in 1973. This unique tiger territory is best known as the father who gave birth of the Project Tiger in India to protect the most endangered species and the Royal of India called Tigers.
- Corbett National Park covers an area of 521 sq. km and together with the neighboring Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary and Reserve Forest areas, forms the Corbett Tiger Reserve.
- Corbett is one of the richest bird regions of the Country and has been declared as an 'Important Bird Area' (IBA) by Birdlife International.

Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management.

National Institute of Disaster Management

Context:

- Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu recently laid the foundation-stone for the southern campus of the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) at Kondapavuluru village of Gannavaram mandal in Andhra Pradesh.

About NIDM:

- NIDM is a premier institute of the Government of India under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It was constituted under an Act of Parliament with a vision to play the role of a premier institute for capacity development in India and the region.
- Under the Disaster Management Act 2005, NIDM has been assigned nodal responsibilities for human resource development, capacity building, training, research, documentation and policy advocacy in the field of disaster management.
- NIDM also serves as international SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) and works as focus for its operation and planning.

Paper 3 Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

1. Universal Service Obligation Fund [USOF]

Context:

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the "Universal Service Obligation Fund [USOF]" supported scheme to provide mobile services at 4072 tower locations identified by

MHA in inhabited uncovered areas affected by Left Wing Extremism [LWE] of 96 districts in 10 States for Phase-II project.

Significance of this move:

- This network would be used by the security personnel deployed in LWE affected areas.
- Project will also provide the mobile services to help the residents in unconnected inhabited villages which would improve the economic activities in the region.
- It will give impetus to the e-Governance activities in the backward and LWE affected area with the availability of digital mobile connectivity.

What are LWE affected states?

- Districts which span 10 States — Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — are described as those affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and constitute the ‘Red Corridor.’

The considerations on which the government has examined the districts with LWE features are:

- Their violence profile.
- An assessment of the kind of logistical and other support provided to armed Maoist cadres by their sympathisers and over ground workers.
- The kind of positive changes brought about by development work that these districts have seen.

Universal Service Obligation Fund:

- USOF, established in 2002, provides effective subsidies to ensure telegraph services are provided to everyone across India, especially in the rural and remote areas. It is headed by the USOF Administrator who reports to the Secretary, Department of Telecommunications (DoT).
- Funds come from the Universal Service Levy (USL) of 5% charged from all the telecom operators on their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) which are then deposited into the Consolidated Fund of India, and require prior parliamentary approval to be dispatched.
- The USOF works through a bidding process, where funds are given to the enterprise quoting the lowest bid. However, the funds for NOFN were made an exception to this process since BBNL was the sole party involved in the implementation having been specifically created for it.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** USOF.
- **For Mains:** LWE affected states related issues.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Inner Line Permit

Context:

- The Manipur government is all set to introduce the Inner Line Permit bill in the forthcoming monsoon session of the assembly.

Background:

- The Manipur Assembly had passed three bills in this connection in 2015 but the President did not give assent to one bill while the two others were rejected even as most tribals in the state had objected to the bills terming them as “anti-tribal”.

Local concerns:

- The influx of foreign tourists has increased exponentially in Manipur, thus creating a demographic imbalance in the region. If this was not enough, illegal immigration from Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar has also contributed to the crisis. This has created fear among the locals over employment and availability of resources. At a time where there already exists stiff competition between the locals and outsiders over jobs, the outsiders mostly settle for low paid work. Hence, locals feel ILP fails to safeguard the interests of the indigenous people.

WHAT IS THE INNER LINE PERMIT?

- The Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document issued by the Government of India to grant inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period. It is obligatory for Indians residing outside those states to obtain permission prior to entering the protected areas.
- Currently, the Inner Line Permit is operational in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.
- The document has been issued under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 and the conditions and restrictions vary from state to state.
- It can be issued for travel purposes solely. Visitors are not allowed to purchase property in these regions. However, there might be a different set of rules for long term visitors, though they are not valid for central government employees and security forces.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** All about ILP.
- For Mains:** Significance and Challenges posed by ILP.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Narcotics Control Bureau

Context:

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

About NCB:

- The Narcotics Control Bureau is the apex coordinating agency. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 which came into effect from the 14th November, 1985 made an express provision for constituting a Central Authority for the purpose of exercising the powers and functions of the Central Government under the Act.
- The Bureau, subject to the supervision and control of the Central Government, is to exercise the powers and functions of the Central Government for taking measures with respect to:
 - Co-ordination of actions by various offices, State Governments and other authorities under the N.D.P.S. Act, Customs Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act and any other law for the time being in force in connection with the enforcement provisions of the NDPS Act, 1985.
 - Implementation of the obligation in respect of counter measures against illicit traffic under the various international conventions and protocols that are in force at present or which may be ratified or acceded to by India in future.
 - Assistance to concerned authorities in foreign countries and concerned international organisations to facilitate coordination and universal action for prevention and suppression of illicit traffic in these drugs and substances.
 - Coordination of actions taken by the other concerned Ministries, Departments and Organizations in respect of matters relating to drug abuse.

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

2. Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

Context:

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

Background:

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

About BRO:

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

Significance of BRO:

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

Recent reforms:

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

Challenges:

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

What's important?

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

Sources: pib.

3. Network For Spectrum (NFS) project

Context:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for enhancement of budget by Rs.11,330 crore for the Network For Spectrum (NFS) project.

About the Network For Spectrum (NFS) Project:

- Network For Spectrum (NFS) project is for laying of alternate communication network for Defence Services.
- The project is being implemented by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL).
- The project will also have forward linkages to other related industries such as telecom equipment manufacturing and other telecommunication related services.
- The NFS project will boost the communication capabilities of the Defence Forces in a major way leading to enhanced national operational preparedness.
- The project is crucial since the armed forces will migrate all their communication needs to this optic-fibre network and free more bandwidth for commercial telephony services.

Sources: pib.

Facts for Prelims

1. 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Context:

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

About Pravasi Bharatiya Divas:

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

2. Exercise Vijay Prahar

Context:

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

Aim:

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

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

Context:

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



Key facts:

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

4. Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)

Context:

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

About ICAI:

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

5. APStar-6C

Context:

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

Key facts:

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

6. GravityRAT

What is it?

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

Why in news?

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

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

7. Operation Insaniyat

Context:

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

8. In news- Mount Merapi

What is it?



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

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

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

10. First all-woman Post Office Passport Seva Kendra

Context:

- The 192nd Post Office Passport Seva Kendra, opened recently in Phagwara in Punjab, will be the first in the country to have all-women staff.

11. Mt. Bhagirathi 2

Context:

- Indian Army Women Officers' Mountaineering Expedition to Mt. Bhagirathi-II (6512 metres) consisting of nine women officers, was recently flagged off.



Key facts:

- Mt. Bhagirathi-II is located in the Garhwal Himalayas in Gangotri National Park.
- The peak rises right above the Gangotri glacier which sets new challenges for the climbers.
- The summit is challenging owing to its technical requirements, vertical ascents, inclement and unpredictable weather conditions.

12. National Dengue Day 2018

National Dengue Day is observed on May 16 in order to create awareness regarding the viral disease.

 NATIONAL DENGUE DAY (16th May)

Observed to control the spread of Dengue by creating awareness, initiate preventive actions and continue till transmission season is over.

Precautions			
			
Use mosquito nets or repellents	Prevent exposure of arms or legs	Ensure regular cleaning of water stagnant containers	Use pesticide spraying in your surroundings

- Spread of the disease:** It is contagious and can easily be spread from one person to another. The disease is mainly caused by 1 of the 4 closely related dengue viruses. The fever is transmitted when *Aedes mosquito* infected with dengue virus bites a person.
- Symptoms:** High fever, severe headaches, nausea, joint and muscle pain are some of the symptoms of the disease, which typically starts after 6 days of being infected with it. Those with weak immune system are at the higher risk of dengue.
- Prevention:** The best way to prevent the disease is to try the best not to get bit by mosquitoes. Keep your surrounding clean and increase the usage of mosquito repellents. Avoid roaming in grassy areas in night. Don't forget to close door and windows of your house. To prevent breeding of mosquitoes, avoid still water near your surroundings.

13. Cyclone Sagar

Context:

- Cyclone 'Sagar' is a tropical cyclone in Arabian Sea. It is the first cyclonic storm of the season to develop in the Indian waters. Presently in Gulf of Aden, Cyclone Sagar is also expected to affect Somalia; Ethiopia, Djibouti.

Background:

- Tropical cyclones are most common in the Arabian Sea in spring and autumn, during the transition periods between the strong southwest flow of the summer monsoon and the strong northeast flow that predominates in winter. On average, the Arabian Peninsula is affected by a tropical cyclone every year or two.

14. Banihal-Qazigund tunnel

Context:

- NHAI has said that the Banihal-Qazigund tunnel will be operational by next year.



About the tunnel:

- It is a 8.45 km road tunnel in the Pir Panjal range in Jammu and Kashmir connecting Banihal and Qazigund.
- It is a double tube tunnel consisting of two parallel tunnels – one for each direction of travel.
- It is 400 m lower than the existing Jawahar tunnel's elevation, which would make it less prone to avalanches.

15. India to host World Environment Day 2018

Context:

- India is the global host of 2018 World Environment Day which will take place on June 5, 2018.

Theme: “Beat Plastic Pollution”.

Background:

- World Environment Day is a **UN Environment**-led global event, the single largest celebration of our environment each year, which takes place on June 5 and is celebrated by thousands of communities worldwide. Since it began in 1972, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated across the globe.

16. Sherpa

Context:

- The Everest industry is suffering from a dangerous shortage of its most important resource: experienced Sherpa guides.

**Who are Sherpas?**

- Sherpas are the people living in the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas who support climbing teams as porters, guides, rope-fixers, cooks and cleaners.

- Sherpas have been helping Everest climbers since the first British teams set their sights on the summit in the 1920s.
- Their unique physiology, adapted over thousands of years of living at high altitudes, has made them essential since. A recent British study found that Sherpas use oxygen more efficiently than lowlanders.
- Regions with significant Sherpa populations: Nepal, China (Tibet), Bhutan and India.

17. First Commercial Flight Lands In Arunachal Pradesh



- Arunachal Pradesh has been put on the aviation map of the country with the state's first commercial flight landing at Pasighat in the north-east state's East Siang district, 305 kilometres from state capital Itanagar.

18. 'Nidaan'

What is it?

- It is a new software launched in Rajasthan for presumptive diagnosis and monitoring of seasonal and non-communicable diseases as well as the trends of ailments found in specific areas. It is expected to help in formulation of specific action plans for control of diseases.
- It will facilitate online entries of as many as 46 diseases and healthcare services available for their treatment in different institutions.

19. 'Black Panther'

What is it?

- It is a new specialised anti-Naxal combat for Chhattisgarh.
- It is on the lines of the Greyhounds unit. The Greyhounds is a special force in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh that specialises in anti-insurgency operations against Naxals and Maoists.

20. Man Booker Prize



- An English translation of Olga Tokarczuk's Polish novel Flights, which combines tales about travel with explorations of the human body, has been named as the winner of the prestigious Man Booker International Prize 2018.

About Man Booker Prize:

- Considered one of the most celebrated literary awards in the British culture, the Man Booker Prize for Fiction is awarded every year to the best original novel written in English language and published in the UK. From 2018, it has opened to Irish publishers as well. It started in 1969 and PH Newby was the first winner of Booker Prize in 1969 for 'Something to Answer For'.

21. Nari Shakti Puraskar

Context:

- Nari Shakti Puraskar 2017 was recently presented to the INSV Tarini Team. The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, had conferred the Nari Shakti Puraskars on International Women's Day (08th March 2018) in Rashtrapati Bhavan. As the INSV Tarini team was sailing then, the award could not be presented to the team.

About Nari Shakti Puraskars:

- To acknowledge Women's achievements, the Government of India confers Nari Shakti Puraskars on eminent women and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of women empowerment. The Nari Shakti Awards were initiated in the year 1999.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development announces these national level awards for eminent women, organisations and institutions.
- The Nari Shakti Puraskar carries a cash award of Rs.1 Lakh and a certificate for individuals and institutions.

22. SURYA KIRAN-XIII

What is it?

- It is a joint Military Exercise between India and Nepal that will be conducted at Pithoragarh.

About Surya Kiran:

- The Surya Kiran series of Exercises are being conducted annually, alternatively in Nepal and India. Notably in the series of military training exercises undertaken by India with various countries, Surya Kiran series with Nepal is the largest in terms of troop's participation.
- The aim of this exercise is to conduct battalion level joint training with emphasis on Counter Terrorism in mountainous terrain. Aspects of Disaster Management have also been included in the exercise.
- The Joint Battalion Level Exercise will enhance defence co-operation and relations between the two nations. It is an ideal platform for the contingent of both nations to share their experience and gain mutually. The Exercise will be yet another step towards taking traditional friendship between the two nations to greater heights.

23. S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems

Context:

- India has concluded price negotiations with Russia for a nearly Rs 40,000 crore deal to procure S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems for the Indian Air Force.



Key facts:

- In 2016, India and Russia had signed an agreement on the 'Triumf' interceptor-based missile system which can destroy incoming hostile aircraft, missiles and even drones at ranges of up to 400 km.
- S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system.

24. Braille-enabled signboards to be used during Maheshtala bypoll

Context:

- Election Commission of India for the *first time* will start the use of **Braille-enabled signboards** for visually challenged voters in the upcoming **Maheshtala Assembly by-election** in **West Bengal**.
- The initiative of Braille-enabled signboards was part of the drive to **make elections more accessible** to persons with disabilities (PWD).
- The decision to use Braille-enabled signboards is a State-specific measure to ensure hassle-free polling experience for visually impaired voters.

25. Andhra Pradesh gets new state bird, state flower

Four years after the bifurcation of **Andhra Pradesh**, the government of the residual state has announced its state symbols.



- **State bird:** Rama Chiluka (*psittacula krameri*) or rose ringed parakeet.
- **State animal:** Blackbuck (*antilope cervicapra*) or Krishna Jinka.
- **State tree:** Neem (*azadirachta indica*) or Vepa Chettu.
- **State flower:** Jasmine (*Jasminum*)

State symbols of Telangana:

- **State bird:** Palapitta.
- **State animal:** Jinka or spotted deer.
- **State tree:** Jammi Chettu (*prosopis cineraria*).
- **State flower:** Tangidi Puvvu (*senna auriculata*).