



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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GENERAL STUDIES - I

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

1. PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF MAITHILI LANGUAGE AND ITS SCRIPTS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on Maithili language and scripts, their significance and the need for protection and preservation.

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

Important recommendations of the committee are as follows:

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

Background:

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

Need for protection:

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

2. BHARAT RANG MAHOTSAV (BRM)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: BRM and its significance.

Context: 20th edition of Bharat Rang Mahotsav is being held in New Delhi.

It is being **organized by National School of Drama (NSD).**

Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM):

- It is the **annual international theatre festival of India** organized by the National School of Drama (NSD).
- It was established two decades ago to stimulate the growth and development of theatre across India.
- Originally a national festival showcasing the work of the most creative theatre workers in India, BRM has evolved to international scope, hosting theatre groups from around the world, and is now the largest theatre festival of Asia.

3. SENTINELESE TRIBE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Who are Sentinelese? Geographical location of North Sentinel Island.
- For Mains: Why are they vulnerable, what needs to be done and how recent moves by the government is affecting their fundamental and moral rights?

Context: The Government has promulgated various laws/regulations from time to time to ensure that the rights and well-being of the Sentinelese are safeguarded.

Steps taken to ensure the protection of Sentinelese:

1. The entire North Sentinel Island along with 5 km coastal sea from high water mark is notified as ***tribal reserve***.
2. The Government respects their way of life style, therefore, has adopted ***an 'eyes-on and hands-off' practice to protect and safeguard the Sentinelese tribe.***
3. ***A protocol of circumnavigation of the North Sentinel Island has been notified.*** The ships and aircrafts of Coast Guard and boats of Marine Police make sorties around North Sentinel to keep surveillance.

They have been protected under:

1. A & N Islands (PAT) Regulation 1956.
2. Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
3. Restrictions under Foreigner (Restricted Area) Orders, 1963.
4. Visa Manual Conditions/Passport Act 1920, Indian Forest Act, 1927 and Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Conclusion:

- Currently, there is a one-size-fits-all policy. For instance, the Sentinelese should be left alone.
- The rights and the desires of the Sentinelese need to be respected and nothing is to be achieved by escalating the conflict and tension.

Who are the Sentinelese?

- The Sentinelese are a negrito tribe who live on the North Sentinel Island of the Andamans. The inhabitants are connected to the Jarawa on the basis of physical, as well as linguistic similarities. Their numbers are believed to be less than 150 and as low as 40.
- Based on carbon dating of kitchen middens by the Anthropological Survey of India, Sentinelese presence was confirmed in the islands to 2,000 years ago. Genome studies indicate that the Andaman tribes could have been on the islands even 30,000 years ago.

Why are they said to be vulnerable?

- It is said they have made little to no advancement in the over 60,000 years and still live very primitive lives, surviving mainly on fish and coconuts.
- They are very vulnerable to germs since they have not had contact with the outside world. Even a common flu virus carried by a visitor could wipe out the entire tribe.
- Since the 1960s, there have been a handful of efforts to reach out to the tribe but all have largely failed. They have repeatedly, aggressively made it clear that they want to be isolated.

4. SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI

Context: President of India to confer Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards (Akademi Puraskar) for the Year 2017.

About Sangeet Natak Akademi:

- The Sangeet Natak Akademi – India's national academy for music, dance and drama – is the first National Academy of the arts set-up by the Republic of India. It was created by a resolution of Government of India.
- It was set up in 1952.
- The academy functions as the apex body of the performing arts in the country to preserve and promote the vast cultural heritage of India expressed in music, dance and drama.
- It also works with governments and art academies in states and territories of the country.
- The academy Renders advice and assistance to the government of India in the task of formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the field. It carries a part of the responsibilities of the state for fostering cultural contacts between regions in the country, as well as between India and the world.

- **The Akademi Awards** are the highest national recognition conferred on eminent artistes.
- Each year the Academy awards Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowships, Ratna Sadsya, to distinguished individuals for their contribution to the field of arts, music, dance and theatre.
- **Ustad Bismillah Khan award is given to young artists** for their talent in the fields of music, dance and drama.

5. GHUMOT TO BE DECLARED GOA'S HERITAGE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

Context: Ghumot, an indigenous earthen drum will soon be notified as a heritage instrument of Goa.

- Ghumot is an indigenous earthen drum fashioned as a designed clay pot, with the skin of the monitor lizard stretched taut across the pot's mouth, forming a drumhead. It is a percussion instrument widely played during Ganesh Chaturthi Aarties.
- **The instrument was banned due to the use of the skin of the endangered monitor lizard for the drum membrane.** In recent years, ghumot makers have started using goat skin instead.
- **The ban is applicable to the use of any animal listed in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972,** and that the goat is not one of them. Monitor lizard is listed under this.



6. ECO CIRCUIT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the scheme, various circuits covered under the scheme and their geographical locations.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme and the need for the scheme, implementational challenges.

Context: 'Development of Eco Circuit: Pathanamthitta – Gavi – Vagamon – Thekkady' under the Swadesh Darshan scheme of Ministry of Tourism was recently inaugurated.

- **Eco Circuit** is one of the fifteen thematic circuits identified for development under Swadesh Darshan Scheme- Integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits in the country.
- **Major works carried out under the project includes** Eco Adventure Tourism Park at Vagamon, Cultural Centre at Kadamanitta, Eco Log Huts at Peerumedu, Idukki, Approach Roads, Walking trails, Rain Shelters at Pine Valley Forest, Thekkady, Kumily, Moozhiyar Dam, Penstock and Kakki Dam.

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- The Tourism Ministry had launched '**Swadesh Darshan**' scheme with an objective to develop theme-based tourist circuits in the country.
- These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

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

7. GURU RAVIDAS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Guru Ravidas, teachings, important literary works and relevance today.

Context: *Sant Ravidas Jayanti* was celebrated on February 19th. This year is said to be the **642nd birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas**.

About Guru Ravidas:

- Guru Ravidas was a North Indian **mystic poet of the bhakti movement**.
- While the exact year of his birth is not known, it is believed that the saint was born in 1377 C.E.
- Guru Ravidas Jayanti is celebrated on **Magh Purnima**, which is the full moon day in the Hindu calendar month of Magha.
- The **Adi Granth of Sikhs, in addition to the Panchvani are the two of the oldest documented sources of the literary works of Guru Ravidas**.
- Notably, **he belonged to an untouchable caste and suffered a lot of atrocities as a result**. However, the saint chose to focus on spiritual pursuits and also penned several devotional songs which made a huge impact in the Bhakti movement during the 14th to 16th century CE.

Guru Ravidas Teachings:

- Guru Ravidas spoke against the caste divisions and spoke of removing them to promote unity. His teachings resonated with the people, leading to a religion being born called the **Ravidassia religion**, or **Ravidassia Dharam** based on his teachings.
- He taught about the omnipresence of God and said that a human soul is a particle of God and hence Ravidas rejected the idea that people considered lower caste cannot meet God. He said in his teachings that the only way to meet God was to free the mind from the duality.

Topic: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors /contributions from different parts of the country.

1. SALT SATYAGRAHA MEMORIAL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Salt Satyagraha- key facts, significance and outcomes.

Context: *National Salt Satyagraha Memorial* has been opened at Dandi in Navsari district, Gujarat. It was dedicated to the nation on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's 71st death anniversary (**30th January**).

- The memorial encapsulates the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi- Agra for Swadeshi, Swatchagrah and Satyagraha.

Significance:

- The memorial aims to **serve as a reminder of the great sacrifices made by the people of the nation for the cause of freedom**. It is a tribute to the Satyagrahis led by Gandhi Ji, who worked for India's freedom and is expected to be a major attraction for the tourists.

Historical Background:

- During that time, the British had prohibited Indians from collecting or selling salt. Indians were also forced to buy the staple diet ingredient from the British, who, not only exercised monopoly over its manufacture and sale but also levied a heavy salt tax. The Salt March was a collective beginning of a mass resistance movement against the British tyranny.

Sources: the hindu.

www.insightsonindia.com

About the Salt Satyagraha:

- On March 12, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi embarked a **historic Salt March from Sabarmati Ashram** in Gujarat's Ahmedabad to the village of Dandi in the state's coastal area **to protest against the steep tax the British levied on salt**. The Salt March began on March 12, 1930 and continued till April 6, 1930.
- It was a 24-day Salt March, which was non-violent in nature, is historically significant as it led to the **mass Civil Disobedience Movement**.
- Upon reaching the seashore in Dandi, Mahatma Gandhi broke the law by producing illegal salt. This later turned into a mass civil disobedience movement throughout India as millions broke salt laws by either making salt or buying illegal salt.

2. JALLIANWALA: PUNJAB ASSEMBLY SEEKS UK APOLOGY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Jallianwala Bagh incident-overview, impacts and outcomes.

Context: In the run-up to centenary year of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, **the Punjab assembly has sought a formal apology from the British government for the bloodbath in Amritsar on April 13, 1919**. The House unanimously passed a resolution for mounting pressure on the central government to pursue this issue with the UK government.

- The resolution seeks to pay a befitting tribute to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre martyrs during the centenary year of the massacre.

Outcomes:

- Considered the 'The Butcher of Amritsar' in the aftermath of the massacre, General Dyer was removed from command and exiled to Britain.
- Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, as a sign of condemnation, renounced their British Knighthood and Kaiser-i-Hind medal respectively. In 1922, the infamous Rowlett Act that allowed internment of suspects without trial was repealed by the British.

Sources: *toi*.

Mains Question: Jallianwala Bagh massacre was one of the worst acts of violence in the history of the world and a turning point in India's freedom struggle. Comment.

About the incident:

- April 13, 1919, marked a turning point in the Indian freedom struggle. It was Baisakhi that day, a harvest festival popular in Punjab and parts of north India. Local residents in Amritsar decided to hold a meeting that day to discuss and protest against the confinement of **Satya Pal and Saifuddin Kitchlew, two leaders fighting for Independence, and implementation of the Rowlett Act**, which armed the British government with powers to detain any person without trial.
- The crowd had a mix of men, women and children. They all gathered in a park called the Jallianwala Bagh, walled on all sides but for a few small gates, against the orders of the British. The protest was a peaceful one, and the gathering included pilgrims visiting the Golden Temple who were merely passing through the park, and some who had not come to protest.
- While the meeting was on, Brigadier-General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer, who had crept up to the scene wanting to teach the public assembled a lesson, ordered 90 soldiers he had brought with him to the venue to open fire on the crowd. Many tried in vain to scale the walls to escape. Many jumped into the well located inside the park.

Topics: History of the world will include events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization, political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.- their forms and effect on the society.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF IRAN REVOLUTION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Overview of Iran revolution, causes and effects.

Context: Iran marks 40th anniversary of Islamic revolution.

About the Iranian Revolution:

- Iranian Revolution, also known as Islamic Revolution or the 1979 Revolution, was **a series of events involving the overthrow of the monarch of Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and replacing his government with an Islamic republic under the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini**, a leader of one of the factions in the revolt.
- The reason for the revolution was **to stop the oppression under the western secular policies**.
- The **movement against the United States-backed monarchy** was supported by various leftist and Islamist organizations and student movements.
- Outcome:** A multiclass opposition overthrew an autocratic ruler, leading to the establishment of a theocratic state. This outcome contrasts sharply with other modern revolutionary movements, which have been fought in the name of nationalism or socialism and which have concluded with the transfer of power to a secular, modernizing intelligentsia.

Topics: Women related issues.

NIRBHAYA FUND

What to study?

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

Context: A parliamentary panel has taken strong exception to the utilisation of the **Nirbhaya Fund** in the construction of buildings, saying such allocations defeat the very purpose of the project — that of safety for women.

- The committee also observed that funds for the construction of buildings should come from other sources and not from the Nirbhaya Fund.

About Nirbhaya fund:

The Rs 1,000 crore Nirbhaya Fund was **announced in Union Budget 2013** by the then Finance Minister P Chidambaram.

- The corpus was **to be utilised for upholding safety and dignity of women**.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development** apart from several other concerned ministries were authorised to work out details of structure, scope and application of this fund.
- The Fund is **administered by Department of Economic Affairs of the finance ministry**.

Issues with Nirbhaya Fund:

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

Way ahead:

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

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. POLAR VORTEX

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: What is Polar Vortex and its effects on weather patterns.

Context: Meteorologists have blamed a phenomenon called **the polar vortex for the bitter cold that has descended on much of the central and eastern United States** this week, forcing residents to huddle indoors, closing schools and businesses and cancelling flights.

- The term 'polar vortex' has become more commonly used in the past couple of years but the phenomenon has been around forever. There is some debate among scientists about whether polar vortexes have become more frequent and, if so, what effect climate change might be having on them.

What exactly is a polar vortex?

- It is described as **a whirling cone of low pressure over the poles that is strongest in the winter months due to the increased temperature contrast between the polar regions and the mid-latitudes**, such as the US and Europe.

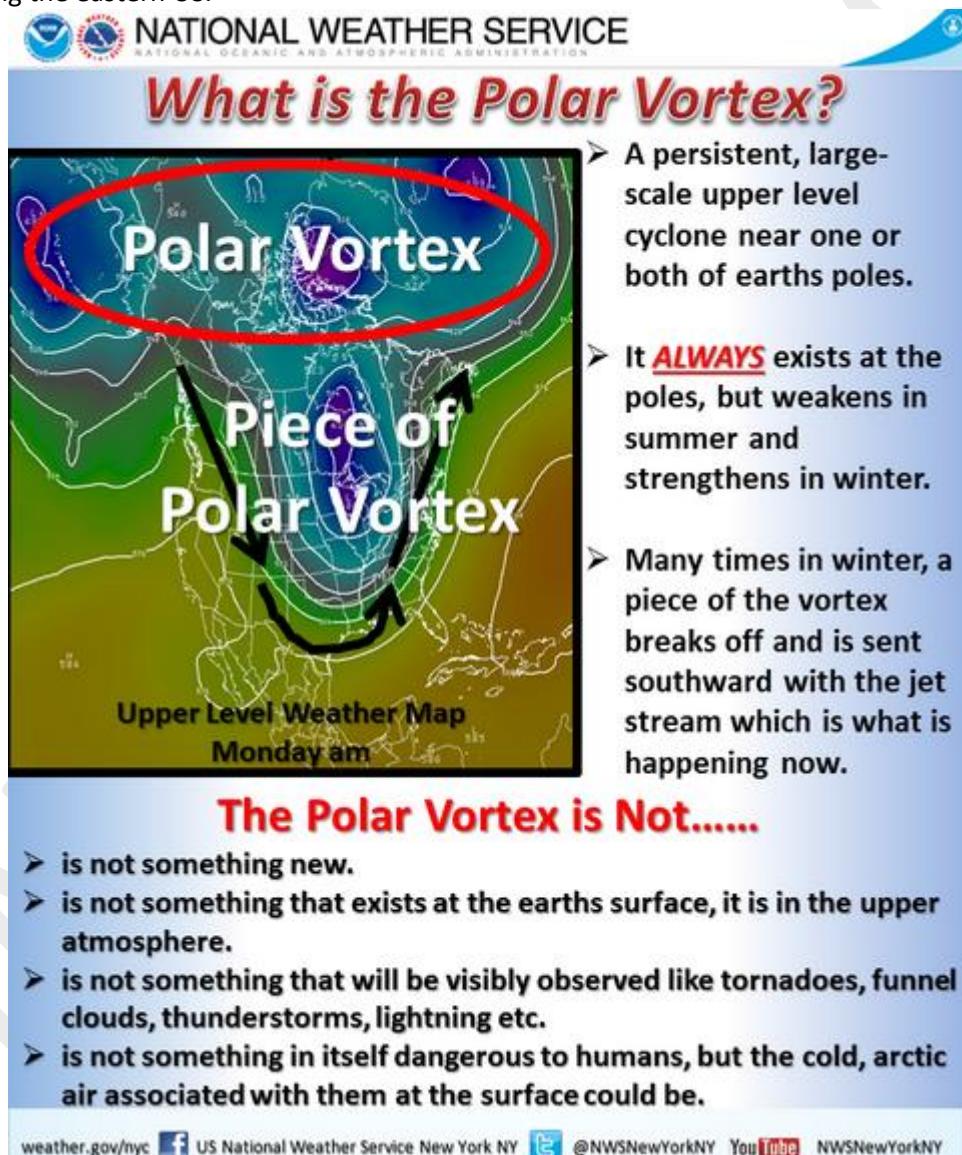
Features:

- The polar vortex **spins in the stratosphere**.
- Usually, when the vortex is strongest, **cold air is less-likely to plunge deep into North America or Europe**. In other words, it forms a wall that protects the mid-latitudes from cold Arctic air.

- But occasionally, ***the polar vortex is disrupted and weakens***, due to wave energy propagating upward from the lower atmosphere. When this happens, the stratosphere warms sharply in an event known as sudden stratospheric warming, in just a few days, miles above the Earth's surface.
- The warming weakens the polar vortex***, shifting its location somewhat south of the pole or, in some instances, 'splitting' the vortex up into '***sister vortices***'.

Effects of Polar Vortex:

- The split higher up in the atmosphere can give rise to both, ***sudden and delayed effects***, much of which involves declining temperatures and extreme winter weather in the eastern US along with northern and western Europe.
- A sudden stratospheric warming*** also leads to a warm Arctic not only in the stratosphere but also in the troposphere as well.
- A warmer Arctic***, in turn, favours more severe winter weather in the Northern Hemisphere mid-latitudes including the eastern US.



Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What do you understand by tropospheric and stratospheric polar vortex? How is it related to deep freeze in USA ?

2. MAGNETIC NORTH POLE DRIFTING FAST TOWARDS RUSSIA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Magnetic and geographical poles-differences, reasons for magnetic behaviour of earth, why is Magnetic north pole drifting and what are its implications?

Context: News publications across the world have been reporting that the **magnetic north pole is drifting fast from the Canadian Arctic and towards Russia.**

Origin of Earth's magnetism:

- The origin of Earth's magnetism lies in its outer core, a more than 2,000-km layer of liquid iron and some other metals like nickel, that surrounds the central core, or the innermost part.
- This liquid iron is in constant motion due to Earth's rotation and various other reasons, and this motion produces a magnetic field.

What's the issue now?

- Currently, the magnetic north pole is located somewhere over northern Canada, a fact discovered in 1831 by Sir James Clark Ross. Since then the magnetic north pole has been moving across the Canadian Arctic towards Russia, and has moved hundreds of miles over the last several decades. This phenomenon is known as the Polar Shift Theory.
- Scientists have now realised the pace of this movement has suddenly increased, quite significantly, from about 14-15 km per year till the 1990s to about 55 km per year in the last few years. This has led to scientists updating the World Magnetic Model (WMM) that tracks this movement. It was a year ahead of schedule.

Why it is moving faster?

- Scientists do not have full clarity on. The movement of liquid iron and other metals in the outer core of the Earth is known to influence the magnetic field, but this movement is chaotic and turbulent. Scientists do not fully understand how the movement happens or why.
- The study of the phenomena happening inside the earth can only be done indirectly or through computer modelling, because of the extremely hot temperatures prevailing there. Scientists hope that this acceleration in the shifting of magnetic north pole would throw some new insights into the phenomena happening deep inside the Earth's surface.

What is the World Magnetic Model?

- James Clark Ross first located magnetic north in 1831 in the scattered islands of Canada's Nunavut territory.** Since then, the pole has largely marched north, traversing hundreds of miles over the last several decades.
- To keep up with all these changes, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the British Geological Survey developed what eventually became known as the World Magnetic Model.
- The model is updated every five years, with the last update in 2015. Between each update, scientists check the model's accuracy against data from ground magnetic observatories and the European Space Agency's Swarm mission—a trio of magnetic-field mapping satellites that zip around Earth 15 to 16 times each day.

What is Magnetic North Pole? How is it different from Geographic North Pole?

- The Earth has **two north poles—magnetic and geographic.**
 - Geographic north pole**- It is northern axis around which the earth rotates and is fixed. The North Pole is located in the middle of the Arctic Ocean.
 - The Magnetic North Pole** (also known as the North Dip Pole) is a point on Ellesmere Island in Northern Canada where the northern lines of attraction enter the Earth.

A compass needle will point to the Magnetic North Pole – which is different from the geographic north.

Consequences:

- The entire transportation sector, especially aviation and shipping, depends on correctly knowing the position of magnetic north to chart out their navigation paths. Similarly, it is crucial for militaries, who need to know this for firing their missiles or for other purposes. **Knowing the magnetic north is vital for a number of civilian applications as well.**
- The compasses that are used in modern instrumentation are much more sophisticated, digital and more accurate.** This is the reason why they need to be recalibrated to reflect the change in the magnetic north pole. This is what the unscheduled release of the WMM has done.

3. SCIENTISTS DISCOVER MASSIVE MOUNTAINS UNDER EARTH'S CRUST

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Latest findings and their implications and significance, about earthquake waves.

Context: Scientists have discovered **massive mountains in the Earth's mantle**, an advance that may change our understanding of how the planet was formed.

About the discovery:

- These newly discovered mountains are located between upper and lower mantle. Scientists used data from **an enormous earthquake in Bolivia to find mountains and other topography on a layer located 660 km straight down**, which separates the upper and lower mantle.
- Data from earthquakes that are magnitude 7.0 or higher sends shockwaves in all directions that can travel through the core to the other side of the planet — and back again.
- Lacking a formal name for this layer, the researchers simply call it "**the 660-km boundary.**"

Implications:

- The presence of roughness on the 660-km boundary has significant implications for understanding how our planet formed and evolved.

What are earthquake waves?

Earthquake waves are basically of two types – **body waves and surface waves.**

- Body waves:** They are generated due to the release of energy at the focus and moves in all directions traveling through the body of the earth. Hence, the name – body waves. They travel only through the interior of the earth. Body waves are faster than surface waves and hence they are the first to be detected on a seismograph. There are **two types of body waves as primary waves and secondary waves.**
- Surface Waves:** When the body waves interact with surface rocks, a new set of waves is generated called as surface waves. These waves **move along the earth surface.** Surface waves are also transverse waves in which particle movement is perpendicular to the wave propagation. Hence, they create crests and troughs in the material through which they pass.
 - Surface waves are considered to be the most damaging waves. **Two common surface waves are Love waves and Rayleigh waves.**

Sources: the hindu.

4. HEAT WAVE

What to study?

- For Prelims: What are heat waves and how are they classified?
- For Mains: Why is India vulnerable, effects of heatwaves on health, environment and economy, how should India be prepared?

Context: The **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** is conducting a two-day national workshop on heat wave risk reduction on 27-28 February, 2019.

- This workshop **aims to sensitise the States to the need of preparing and implementing specific Heat Action Plans.** Some of the most vulnerable States, which have done a commendable job in mitigating the impact of heat waves, will share their experiences and best practices to help other stakeholders draw lessons.

India's concerns:

- The Lancet Countdown 2018 report** has asked the Indian policy makers to take a series of initiatives to mitigate the increased risks to health, and the loss of labour hours due to a surge in exposure to **heatwave events in the country over the 2012-2016 period.**

Why is India more vulnerable?

1. From 2014-2017, the **average length of heatwaves in India ranged from 3-4 days compared to the global average of 0.8-1.8 days, and Indians were exposed to almost 60 million heatwave exposure events in 2016**, a jump of about 40 million from 2012.
2. A recent report has placed India amongst the **countries who most experience high social and economic costs from climate change**. Overall, across sectors India lost almost 75,000 million hours of labour in 2017, from about 43,000 million hours in 2000.
3. **The agriculture sector was more vulnerable compared to the industrial and service sectors** because workers there were more likely to be exposed to heat.
4. **The India Meteorological Department had reported that from 1901 to 2007, there was an increase of more than 0.5°C in mean temperature**, with considerable geographic variation, and climate forecasts by research groups project a 2.2-5.5°C rise in temperatures in northern, central and western India by the end of the 21st century.

What is a heatwave?

- Heat wave is considered **if maximum temperature of a station reaches at least**
 - **40°C or more** for Plains,
 - **37°C or more** for coastal stations and
 - **at least 30°C or more** for Hilly regions.

Health Impacts of Heat Waves:

- The health impacts of Heat Waves typically involve dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and/or heat stroke.
- Children, the elderly and those with pre-existing morbidities are particularly vulnerable.
- Vegetable vendors, cab drivers, construction workers, police personnel, road side kiosk operators and mostly weaker sections of the society have to work in the extreme heat to make their ends meet and are extremely vulnerable to the adverse impacts of heat waves such as dehydration, heat and sun strokes.

Reasons why India is experiencing more heat waves are:

- Magnified effect of paved and concrete surfaces in urban areas and a lack of tree cover.
- Urban heat island effects can make ambient temperatures feel 3 to 4 degrees more than what they are.
- More heat waves were expected as globally temperatures had risen by an average 0.8 degrees in the past 100 years. Night-time temperatures are rising too.
- Higher daily peak temperatures and longer, more intense heat waves are becomingly increasingly frequent globally due to climate change.
- High intensity of UV rays in medium-high heat wave zone.
- Combination of exceptional heat stress and a predominantly rural population makes India vulnerable to heat waves.

Way ahead for India- How India should deal with heat waves?

- Identifying heat hot-spots through appropriate tracking of meteorological data and promoting timely development and implementation of local Heat Action Plans with strategic inter-agency co-ordination, and a response which targets the most vulnerable groups.
- Review of existing occupational health standards, labour laws and sectoral regulations for worker safety in relation to climatic conditions.
- Policy intervention and coordination across three sectors health, water and power is necessary.
- Expedite the rollout of the National Action Plan on Climate Change and Health.
- Preventing temperature-related morbidity and mortality could be a key programme under this mission.

Following criteria are used to declare heat wave:

1. Based on Departure from Normal:
 - Heat Wave: Departure from normal is 4.5°C to 6.4°C.
 - Severe Heat Wave: Departure from normal is >6.4°C.
2. Based on Actual Maximum Temperature (for plains only):
 - Heat Wave: When actual maximum temperature $\geq 45^{\circ}\text{C}$.
 - Severe Heat Wave: When actual maximum temperature $\geq 47^{\circ}\text{C}$.

To declare heat wave, the above criteria should be met at least in 2 stations in a Meteorological sub-division for at least two consecutive days and it will be declared on the second day.

- Ensure an adequate supply of water. Timely access to drinking water can help mitigate this escalation.
- Further research using sub-district level data to provide separate indices for urban and rural areas to enable more targeted geographical interventions.
- Provision of public messaging (radio, TV), mobile phone-based text messages, automated phone calls and alerts.
- Promotion of traditional adaptation practices, such as staying indoors and wearing comfortable clothes.
- Popularisation of simple design features such as shaded windows, underground water storage tanks and insulating housing materials.
- Advance implementation of local Heat Action Plans, plus effective inter-agency coordination is a vital response which the government can deploy in order to protect vulnerable groups.

(Q) Examine the adverse impacts caused by heat waves and how India should deal with it ?

5. WARMING IMPERILS CLOUDS THAT DETER 'HOTHOUSE' CONDITIONS

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Stratocumulus clouds, classification and key facts associated.
- For Mains: How CO₂ affects these clouds? Concerns associated, measures needed.

Context: A study by **California Institute of Technology** has found that Marine clouds that protect us from hothouse Earth conditions by reflecting sunlight back into space could break up and vanish if CO₂ in the atmosphere triples. Computer modeling shows that **marine stratus clouds could disappear if atmospheric CO₂ levels climb high enough, raising global temperatures.**

Concerns highlighted by the study:

- Stratocumulus clouds cover about 20% of subtropical oceans, mostly near western seabards such as the coasts of California, Mexico and Peru. **When they disappear, Earth warms dramatically, by about eight degrees Celsius — in addition to the global warming that comes from enhanced greenhouse concentrations alone.**
- A temperature increase of that magnitude would **melt polar ice and lift sea levels tens of metres**.
- The last time the planet was that hot, some 50 million years ago during the Eocene Epoch, crocodiles roamed the Arctic. Even half that much warming would overwhelm humanity's capacity to adapt.

What are stratocumulus clouds?

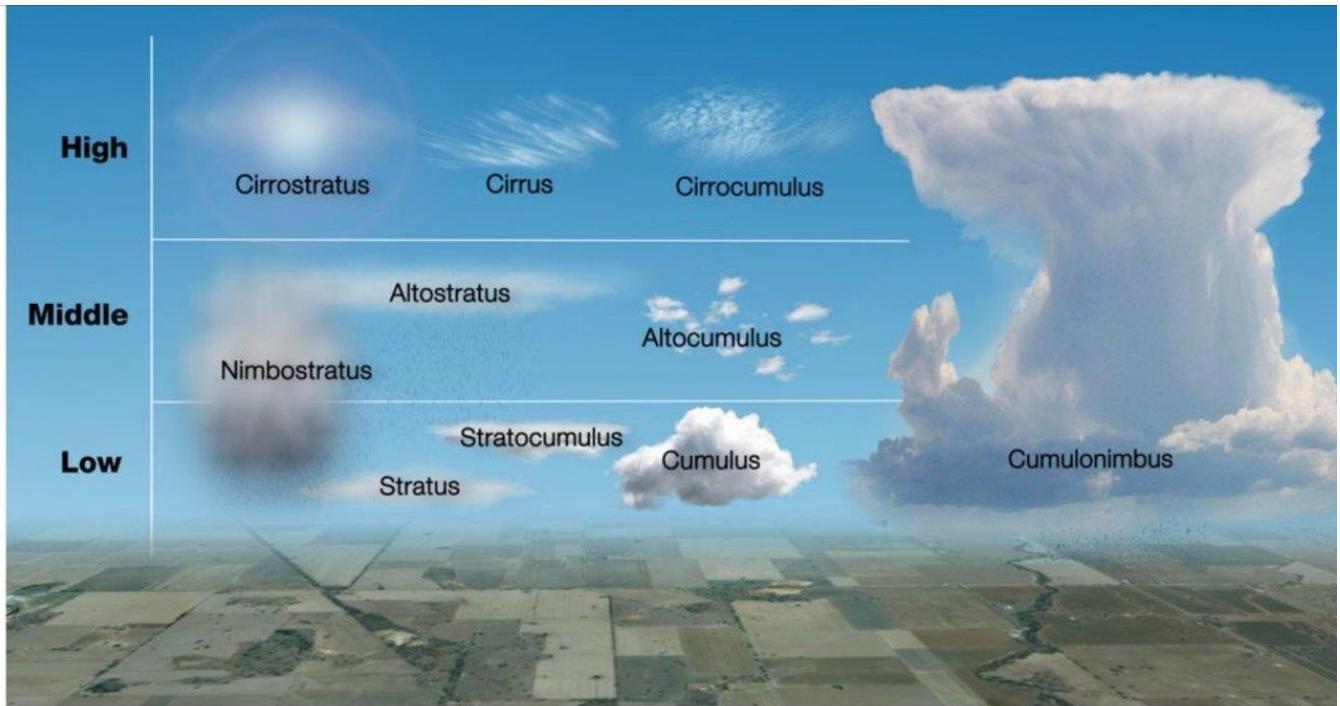
- Stratocumulus clouds are **low-level clumps or patches of cloud varying in colour from bright white to dark grey**.
- They are the most common clouds on earth recognised by their well-defined bases with some parts often darker than others. They usually have gaps between them, but they can also be joined together.

How do stratocumulus clouds form?

- Stratocumulus clouds usually form from a layer of stratus cloud breaking up.
- They are indicators of a change in the weather and are usually present near a warm, cold or occluded front.

What weather is associated with stratocumulus clouds?

- Stratocumulus clouds can be present in all types of weather conditions, from dry settled weather to more rainy conditions, but they themselves are often not the culprit.
- Stratocumulus are often mistaken for rain clouds, when in reality it is quite rare to get anything more than the lightest drizzle from them, if anything at all.



The ten main types of cloud

Sources: the hindu.

GENERAL STUDIES - II

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

1. LEGITIMACY OF THE BASIC STRUCTURE

Context: About the issues surrounding the basic structure, its applicability, relevance and credibility.

- **Origin:** Supreme Court ruled in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* that Parliament's power to amend the Constitution was not unlimited, that the Constitution's basic structure was infrangible.

Current issues:

- The common criticism is that the doctrine has **no basis in the Constitution's language. The phrase "basic structure", it's argued, finds no mention anywhere in the Constitution.** This has come to the fore in response to the recently introduced **103rd Constitutional Amendment**, which provides for reservations based on economic criteria in government jobs and education.
- Its detractors also believe **the doctrine accords the judiciary a power to impose its philosophy over a democratically formed government**, resulting in something akin to what Union Minister Arun Jaitley once termed as a "**tyranny of the unelected**".

The need for upholding basic structure ideals:

- Basic structure ideals cannot be ignored for not only is the basic structure canon legally legitimate, in that it is deeply rooted in the Constitution's text and history, but it also possesses substantial moral value, in that it strengthens democracy by limiting the power of a majoritarian government to undermine the Constitution's central ideals.

What happens if basic structure ideals are not protected?

- There is a danger of granting untrammelled power to the legislature. This meant that those laws, even when discriminatory, were immunised from challenge.
- Were Parliament's powers considered infinite, the parliamentary executive can be removed, fundamental rights can be abrogated, and, in effect, what is a sovereign democratic republic can be converted into a totalitarian regime.

Basis for the Basic Structure doctrine:

- Even if a legislature were bestowed with the widest of powers to amend the Constitution, its authority was always subject to a set of inherent constraints. Parliament was, after all, a creature of the Constitution. It could not, therefore, make changes that had the effect of overthrowing or obliterating the Constitution itself.
- **Article 368** grants Parliament the power to amend the Constitution, making it clear that on the exercise of that power "the Constitution shall stand amended". Therefore, **if what has to remain after an amendment is "the Constitution", naturally a change made under Article 368 cannot create a new constitution.**
- Hence, **for an amendment to be valid, the constitution that remains standing after such a change must be the Constitution of India; it must continue to possess, in its essence, those features that were foundational to it even at its conception.**

Conclusion:

- Therefore, the basic structure doctrine is grounded in the Constitution's text and history. It also performs an important democratic role in ensuring that majoritarian governments do not destroy the Constitution's essential character.
- It may well be the case that the basic structure doctrine is derived from the abstract. But that scarcely means it doesn't exist within the Constitution.

Link: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/legitimacy-of-the-basic-structure/article26168775.ece>.

2. RESERVATIONS TO ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTIONS AND THE BASIC STRUCTURE

What's the issue?

- A **10% reservation** in government jobs and educational institutions to the economically weaker sections (EWS) among the upper castes, or those who are not covered under any reservation plan has been announced.

What is basic structure doctrine?

- Starting from Sajjan Singh case in 1964, basic structure doctrine was evolved by the Supreme Court of India. It found a solid ground in Kesavananda Bharati case. As per the doctrine, the constitution of India has certain basic features which cannot be altered or abrogated.
- **The court did not define this, and only listed a few principles** — federalism, secularism, democracy — as being part of basic structure. Since then, the court has been adding new features to the concept of basic structure. In subsequent years, courts extended the doctrine even to ordinary legislation and executive actions.

How the latest reservation policy affects the basic structure of the constitution?

- It is said that the new law violates the basic structure of the constitution.

Following are the issues:

1. It violates the landmark **Mandal judgment capping reservations at 50%**.
2. The constitution talks about only **social backwardness** (Article 15(4) and Article 16(4)) and nothing about economic backwardness.
3. Moreover, the Constitution makes provisions for commissions to look into matters relating to implementation of constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes (Article 338), Scheduled Tribes (338A) and Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (339), but **has not created any commission for the economically backward classes**.

Govt's defence:

- The 124th Amendment mentions **Article 46** in its statement and objects. Article 46, which is a non-justiciable Directive Principle, says that the state shall promote educational and economic interests of "weaker sections", in particular SCs and STs, and protect them from "social injustices" and "all forms of exploitation".

What lies ahead for the govt?

To determine this, the Supreme Court has to examine the principles on which **affirmative action is based**. As per M Nagraj (2006), it would have to apply **two tests**.

- **One is the width test**, on the boundaries of the amending power. This would include examination of four issues — quantitative limitations such as violation of the 50% ceiling for all reservations taken together; (ii) exclusion of creamy layer or qualitative exclusion; (iii) compelling reasons such as backwardness of the economically weaker sections for whom this reservation has been made; (iv) that overall administrative efficiency is not obliterated by the new reservation.
- **The second test is called the identity test**, under which the Supreme Court will examine whether, after the amendment, there is any alteration in the identity of the Constitution. The amendment cannot change this.

Conclusion:

- It is clear from the Constitution that reservation can be for a caste or a class. In fact, caste is a social class and cannot be for individuals; the latest move has made it for the individual.

Who are weaker sections?

- As per the reform, EWS is defined as:
 1. Families with income (includes agricultural income as well as from profession) below Rs 8 lakh per annum.
 2. In rural areas, such families who own agricultural land below five acre and residential house below 1,000 square feet and in urban areas, those with residential plot below 100 yards in notified municipality or residential plot below 200 yards in the non-notified municipal area will be considered as part of this category.

How it seeks to amend the Constitution?

- It seeks to amend **Articles 15 and 16** to enable Parliament and all states to make "special provisions" for the advancement of "any economically weaker sections" of citizens (EWS).

- Similarly, the government has to justify “compelling reasons” of going beyond the 50% limit. In some states, upper castes number less than 10% and this scheme may be difficult to justify as for 52% backward classes there is just 27% OBC reservation.

(Q) Discuss the constitutional provisions related to reservation for Indian citizens.

Link: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/10-percent-quota-reservation-economically-weaker-section-supreme-court-5538470/>.

3. THE CONSTITUTION (125TH AMENDMENT) BILL

What to study?

- For Prelims: Overview and key features of 125th amendment bill, the need for financial autonomy.
- For Mains: Overview of autonomous councils constituted under 6th schedule of the constitution, measures announced for the strengthening of these institutions.

Context: The government has introduced **Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill** in Rajya Sabha to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeastern region. The amendment will impact one crore tribal people in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Key facts:

- The proposed amendments provide for **elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grassroots level**.
- The **village councils** will be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.
- The **Finance Commission** will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.
- The **Autonomous Councils** now depend on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects. At least one-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura after the amendment is approved.

6th Schedule:

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution deals with **the administration of the tribal areas in the four northeastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**.

Key provisions:

- The governor is empowered to organise and re-organise the autonomous districts.** Thus, he can increase or decrease their areas or change their names or define their boundaries and so on.
- If there are different tribes in an autonomous district, **the governor can divide the district into several autonomous regions**.
- Composition:** Each autonomous district has a district council consisting of 30 members, of whom four are nominated by the governor and the remaining 26 are elected on the basis of adult franchise. The elected members hold office for a term of five years (unless the council is dissolved earlier) and nominated members hold office during the pleasure of the governor. Each autonomous region also has a separate regional council.
- The district and regional councils** administer the areas under their jurisdiction. They can make laws on certain specified matters like land, forests, canal water, shifting cultivation, village administration, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs and so on. But all such laws require the assent of the governor.
- Village councils:** The district and regional councils within their territorial jurisdictions can constitute village councils or courts for trial of suits and cases between the tribes. They hear appeals from them. The jurisdiction of high court over these suits and cases is specified by the governor.
- Powers and functions:** The district council can establish, construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, ferries, fisheries, roads and so on in the district. It can also make regulations for the control of money lending and trading by non-tribals. But, such regulations require the assent of the governor. The district and regional councils are empowered to assess and collect land revenue and to impose certain specified taxes.

7. The acts of Parliament or the state legislature do not apply to autonomous districts and autonomous regions or apply with specified modifications and exceptions.
8. *The governor can appoint a commission to examine and report on any matter relating to the administration of the autonomous districts or regions.* He may dissolve a district or regional council on the recommendation of the commission.

Sources: the hindu.

4. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE MEASURES TO PROTECT AND SAFEGUARD LAND RIGHTS OF SCHEDULED TRIBES

What to study?

- For Prelims: Overview of Constitutional and Legislative Measures to Protect and Safeguard Land Rights of Scheduled Tribes.
- For Mains: Significance, need and performance of such measures.

Context: The Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been the most marginalized, isolated and deprived population.

To protect and safeguarding the land rights and other rights of Scheduled Tribes, following constitutional and legislative measure have been put in place:

- “*The Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006*” to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land to forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes.
- “*Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013*” (*RFCLARR Act, 2013*) safeguards against displacement of Scheduled Tribes.
- “*The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996*”, also provides that the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas or development projects and before resettling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas; the actual planning and implementation of the projects in the Scheduled Areas shall be coordinated at the State Level.
- **Constitutional provisions under Schedule – V** also provide for safeguards against displacement of tribal population because of land acquisitions etc. The Governor of the State, having scheduled Areas, is empowered to prohibit or restrict transfer of land from tribals and regulate the allotment of land to members of the Scheduled Tribes in such cases. Land being a State subject, various provisions of rehabilitation and resettlement as per the RFCLARR Act, 2013 are implemented by the concerned State Governments.
- “*The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987*” provides for legal services to members of Scheduled Tribes.
- “*The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989*” has been introduced to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, to provide for the trial of such offences and for the relief of rehabilitation of the victims of such offences and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- Apart from the above, this Ministry being the nodal Ministry for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes, implements several schemes and programmes for upliftment and development of Scheduled Tribes in the country.

(Q) The Indian state has had special programmes for the Scheduled Tribes since even before Independence. Have they been successful in addressing discrimination against ST communities in India? Critically evaluate.

5. MINORITY STATUS OF ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about minority status and constitutional provisions related.
- For Mains: Controversy over issuance of minority status to AMU- should it be given?

Context: The Supreme Court has referred the petition seeking **withdrawal of minority status of the Aligarh Muslim University to a seven-judge bench.**

- The matter has been referred to the larger bench to determine the correctness of minority status of AMU and to define the parameters for granting minority status to the institution.

What's the issue?

In 1981, an amendment was brought in to accord the university minority status, which was held as unconstitutional by the Allahabad High Court. The Attorney General had told the Supreme Court that the Aligarh Muslim University could not be categorised as a minority institution.

1. After the Allahabad High Court recognised the university as a non-minority institution in 2006, the Congress-led UPA government had filed a plea challenging the verdict.
2. The NDA government in 2016 told the Supreme Court that it was withdrawing the appeal filed by the previous government saying that the university was set up by a Central Act, a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court had held it as a "central university" and not a minority institution.

Background:

- AMU was founded as the Madrasatul Uloom in 1875 in Aligarh, and evolved into the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College. The seeds of Jamia Millia Islamia were sown in Aligarh by a group of nationalist students and members who formed a camp there as Jamia Millia Islamia, which later moved to Delhi. Leaders like M A Ansari, Zakir Husain and Mahatma Gandhi encouraged the university to push nationalist values and ideas.
- However, there was friction between JMI and AMU along political lines, as a significant section at AMU was said to be tilting towards the Muslim League, while the 'nationalist' JMI was wholeheartedly supported by the Congress.

Way ahead:

- Protection of minorities is the hallmark of a civilization. These guarantees are essential in a democratic and pluralistic country like India.
- The framers of the constitution showed utmost sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of the minorities.
- Accordingly, special safeguards were guaranteed to the minorities and were incorporated in the chapter on fundamental rights with a view to inculcate in them a sense of confidence and security.

Special rights enjoyed by religious minority institutions are:

1. **Under Art 30(1)(a)**, such institutions enjoy right to education as a Fundamental Right. In case the property is taken over by state, due compensation to be provided to establish institutions elsewhere.
2. **Under Article 15(5)**, they are not considered for reservation.
3. **Under Right to Education Act**, they are not required to provide admission to children in the age group of 6-14 years upto 25% of enrolment reserved for economically backward section of society.
4. **In St Stephens vs Delhi University case, 1992**, SC ruled that these institutions can have 50% seats reserved for minorities.
5. **In TMA Pai & others vs State of Karnataka & others 2002 case**, SC ruled that they can have separate admission process which is fair, transparent and merit based. They can also have separate fee structure but should not charge capitation fee.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) In the light of recent controversy over the status of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) as a minority institution, do you agree with the argument that setting up minority institution in a secular state is wrong? Critically comment.

What is the 'minority character' of an educational institution?

- **Article 30(1)** of the Constitution gives all religious and linguistic minorities the right to set up and run educational institutions, including schools, colleges and universities.
- The law guarantees that governments will not discriminate in giving aid on the basis of their being 'minority' institutions, thus sealing in a commitment by the Government of India to allow minorities to flourish.

Why this provision was included in the constitution?

- This was done to assure minorities of being able to maintain and propagate their unique and special educational aspects.

6. CITIZENSHIP, TRIPLE TALAQ BILLS LAPSE IN RAJYA SABHA AS HOUSE ADJOURNS SINE DIE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about Bills in the Parliament, how are they passed and how do they lapse?

Context: The **contentious Citizenship (amendment) Bill and the one on banning triple talaq** are set to lapse on June 3 when the term of the present Lok Sabha ends as they could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha which has adjourned sine die.

- The Budget session was the last Parliament session of the present government. The 17th Lok Sabha has to be constituted before June 3.

When Does a Bill Lapse in Indian Parliament?

- Articles 107 and 108** of the Indian Constitution deal with these provisions.
- When the **Lok Sabha is dissolved, all business including bills, motions, resolutions, notices, petitions and so on pending before it or its committees lapse**. They must be reintroduced in the newly-constituted Lok Sabha to be pursued further.

Cases when a bill lapse:

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

Cases when a bill does not lapse:

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

Key facts:

- Adjournment** (of a sitting) does not affect the bills or any other business pending before the House and the same can be resumed when the House meets again.
- Prorogation** (of a session) does not affect the bills or any other business pending before the House. However, all pending notices (other than those for introducing bills) lapse on prorogation and fresh notices have to be given for the next session.

Sources: the hindu.

7. US NATIONAL EMERGENCY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Overview of US National Emergency, key facts related and comparison with National Emergency in India.

Context: US President Trump has officially declared the **US-Mexico border a “national emergency,”** which will allow him to circumvent Congress's constitutional powers to control spending and divert federal funds toward his much-ballyhooed border wall.

- The president has argued that the emergency declaration is warranted because the migrants “invading” the United States across the Mexico border have caused epidemics of crime and drug use.

What is a national emergency?

- In 1976, Congress passed the **National Emergencies Act**, which permits the president to pronounce a national emergency when he considers it appropriate. The act offers no specific definition of “emergency” and allows a president to declare one entirely at his or her discretion.
- **By declaring a national emergency, the president avails himself or herself of dozens of specialized laws.** Some of these powers have funds the president otherwise could not access.
- **Under current law, emergency powers lapse within a year unless the president renews them.** A national emergency can be re-declared indefinitely, and, in practice, that is done frequently. There have been 58 pronounced under the National Emergencies Act, of which 31 are still in effect.

What happens once a national emergency is declared?

- Even though there aren't many limits on a president's ability to declare an emergency, it does not create complete freedom to act. **Anyone directly affected by the order can challenge it in court.**
- **Congress can also draft a concurrent resolution to terminate the state of emergency, leading to a somewhat novel act.** Ordinarily, congressional resolutions support a president's declaration of a national emergency.

Sources: Indian Express.

8. CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2016

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Bill, Citizenship Act 1955, Citizenship- acquisition and types available.
- For Mains: Issues over the Bill, why is Assam opposed to the passage of this bill?

Context: The **Nagaland Assembly** has passed a resolution rejecting the contentious **Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016**.

Objectives:

1. The resolution denounced the proposed Bill stating that **it cannot be implemented in Nagaland as it will impact the “unique history and status of the Nagas under the Constitution”**.
2. The resolution also expressed **solidarity with the States and communities of the Northeast in opposing the Bill, as it has the potential of “changing the demographic profile, which will be against the interest of indigenous tribes and can divest them of their constitutionally guaranteed political, cultural and economic rights”**.

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?

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

Critics Views of Citizenship (Amendment) Bill of 2016:

- Critics say it violates the basic tenets of the Constitution.
- Here, illegal immigrants are distinguished on the basis of religion.
- It goes against the fundamental right to equality under Article 14.
- Article 14 applies equally to both citizens and foreigners.

What is the Citizenship Act 1995?

- **Under Article 9 of the Indian Constitution**, a person who voluntarily acquires citizenship of any other country is no longer an Indian citizen.
- **Citizenship by descent:** Persons born outside India on or after January 26, 1950, but before December 10, 1992, are citizens of India by descent if their father was a citizen of India at the time of their birth.
 - From December 3, 2004, onwards, persons born outside of India shall not be considered citizens of India unless their birth is registered at an Indian consulate within one year of the date of birth.
 - In Section 8 of the Citizenship Act 1955, if an adult makes a declaration of renunciation of Indian citizenship, he loses Indian citizenship.

Who is an illegal immigrant?

- According to the Citizenship Act (1955), an illegal immigrant is defined as a person who enters India without a valid passport or stays in the country after the expiry of the visa permit. Also, the immigrant who uses false documents for the immigration process.

What are the guidelines to become an Indian citizenship?

- Citizenship is granted to an individual by the government of the country when he/she complies with the legal formalities, so it's like a judicial concept.
- In India, the Citizenship Act, 1995 prescribes five ways of acquiring citizenship:
 1. Birth
 2. Descent
 3. Registration
 4. Naturalization
 5. Incorporation of the territory.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Recently, the government introduced a Bill to amend certain provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955. What are the objectives of this Bill? Critics of the Bill are arguing that it is not inclusive enough. Examine why

Topics: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary.

1. SUPREME COURT MAY CURB ADVOCATES FROM SPEAKING ON CASES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Need for monitoring, should it be completely stopped and institutional and other measures necessary to uphold the dignity of the judiciary.

Context: The Supreme Court has agreed **to examine the possibility of imposing curbs on advocates airing their views in the media** about pending cases and the judges handling them.

Background:

- The issue came before the court during a hearing on contempt petitions filed by the government and the Attorney General of India against civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan.

Why impose curbs on advocates?

1. It is often alleged that some advocates do it to gain **media attention**. Some lawyers even used air time to attack judges, whose code of conduct did not allow them to go public.
2. Some lawyers rush to the media as soon as their petition was filed. While the petition may contain all manner of allegations, and was even likely to be later withdrawn in court, the damage, however, had been done by that time.

Murthukrishnan Vs Madras HC case:

1. In the above said case, the Supreme Court had criticised lawyers attributing "political colour" to judges in important cases. Such acts amounted to denigrating the judiciary.
2. Such acts amount to contempt of court but this power was a 'Brahmastra', only meant to be rarely used.

Conclusion:

- Freedom carries with it a responsibility. The judiciary and honest judges should be protected.

2. TIME TO RAISE THE BAR

What's the concern?

- Judges accepting a post offered by the government post their retirement.
- The practice of a judge looking forward to accepting employment under the government after retirement was ***undesirable as it could affect the independence of the judiciary.***
- If retired judges are appointed to head tribunals constituted by government, it may result ***in decisions being influenced if the Government itself is a litigant and appointment authority at the same time.***

Views of Law Commission:

- Law commission has categorically denounced the proclivity of judges accepting post-retirement jobs sponsored by governments and called for an end to it.

What the data say?

- In a study, the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy pointed out that as many as 70 out of 100 Supreme Court retired judges have taken up assignments in the National Human Rights Commission of India, National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Armed Forces Tribunal, and the Law Commission of India, etc.

What's the way out then?

- The valuable ***experience and insights that competent and honest judges acquire during their period of service cannot be wasted after retirement.***
- Unlike abroad, ***a judge of the higher judiciary in India retires at a comparatively young age and is capable of many more years of productive work.***
 1. The viable option is ***to expeditiously establish, through a properly enacted statute, a commission made up of a majority, if not exclusively, of retired judges to make appointments of competent retired judges to tribunals and judicial bodies.***
 2. Its time to put in place ***a process to regulate post-retirement appointments for judges.*** Such a process must sufficiently insulate the judiciary from the charge of being a recipient of government largesse.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/time-to-raise-the-bar/article26241014.ece>.

3. NATIONAL BOARD FOR WILDLIFE (NBWL)

What to study?

- For Prelims: NBWL- objectives, composition and functions.
- For Mains: Role and significance of NBWL in awarding environment clearances, need for reforms.

Context: India's apex ***National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)*** has cleared 682 of the 687 projects (99.82%) that came up for scrutiny. Only five projects were rejected since August 2014.

About National Board for Wildlife:

1. It is a ***"Statutory Organization" constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.***
2. Its roles is ***"advisory" in nature*** and advises the Central Government on framing policies and measures for conservation of wildlife in the country.
3. ***Primary function of the Board is to promote the conservation and development of wildlife and forests.***
4. It has ***power to review all wildlife-related matters and approve projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.***
5. ***No alteration of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL.***
6. ***Composition:*** The NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister. It has 47 members including the Prime Minister. Among these, 19 members are ex-officio members. Other members include three Members of Parliament

(two from Lok Sabha and one from Rajya Sabha), five NGOs and 10 eminent ecologists, conservationists and environmentalists.

Sources: the hindu.

4. SC VERDICT OVER TUSSLE BETWEEN DELHI AND CENTRE

Context: A Supreme Court Bench has given a *split opinion* on whether the Delhi government has control over the administration's services and decided to refer the question to a larger Bench.

- **Two judges-** While Justice Bhushan held that the *Delhi government has no power over services, observing that Entry 41 of the State List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution* — dealing with 'State Public Services' — was outside the purview of the Delhi Assembly, Justice Sikri, the lead judge on the Bench, took the middle path.

What the Court said?

The three areas over which the Delhi government will enjoy powers:

1. Appointment of special public prosecutors or law officers.
2. Fixing land revenue rate.
3. Power to appoint or deal with electricity commission or board.

Powers given to the Centre:

1. Delhi Anti- Corruption Branch cannot probe central government employees.
2. Centre has the power to appoint enquiry commission.

What has been referred to the larger bench?

- Control over service matters involving transfers and posting of officers.

What does the constitution say on this?

- **It is administered under Article 239 AA.** Article 239 AA was incorporated in the Constitution in 1992. It creates a "special" constitutional set up for Delhi.
 - It has provisions for popularly elected assembly, a council of ministers responsible to the assembly and a certain demarcation of responsibilities between the LG and the council of ministers.
 - As per Article 239 AA (3) (a), the Delhi assembly can legislate on all those matters listed in the State List and Concurrent List as are applicable to union territories. The public order, police and land are reserved for the LG.
 - This special set up worked well mainly because the same party held office at the Centre as well as in Delhi for much of the time. Things changed when different government ruled the city and the centre.

Brief history:

1. In 1911, Delhi became capital of India, headed by a Commissioner and then known as "Chief Commissioner's Province."
2. In key legislations of that era, in 1919 and 1935, Delhi was seen as a centrally-administered territory.
3. In 1950 Delhi became a Part C state but in 1951 this category was abolished. All C-states got their own Legislative Assembly.
4. Delhi did not have powers over public order, police, public utility authorities, lands and buildings and over offences and court jurisdictions related to these subjects.
5. In 1956 the States Reorganisation Act was passed along with the 7th Amendment to the Constitution. Now Delhi became a Union Territory. This means, it was headed by an Administrator appointed by the President.
6. In 1966 the Delhi Administration Act came into the picture, giving Delhi a Metropolitan Council with 56 elected and 5 nominated members.
7. In 1987 the Balakrishnan Committee held that Delhi has a "special status" within the Constitutional scheme.

If there are differences:

- Generally, the administrator is merely a figurehead. But Article 239 says that the President, through the administrator, was ultimately responsible for good administration.
- Hence, Balakrishnan Committee notes that the Administrator in Delhi's scheme of things had a "somewhat more active part" while the President would have the final say. This was the scheme provided for in 1951, 1963 and also in 1978.

Scenario after 1991:

- In 1991 the 69th Amendment introduced Articles 239AA and 239AB in the Constitution.
- This is also what was disputed in court: If Delhi has a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers does that imply a Westminster-style government since the 69th Amendment ? If the LG holds sway here, does that go against the basic structure of the Constitution ?

5. NOT WITHOUT AN EXPLANATION: WHEN JUDGES RECUSE THEMSELVES

Context: Recently 3 Judges Recused themselves from hearing the case challenging the appointment of M. Nageswara Rao as interim director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Similar such incidents:

- **Justice U.U. Lalit** recused himself from hearing the dispute over land in Ayodhya after senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan pointed out that the judge had appeared for former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh in a related contest.
- **Two judges of the Gujarat High Court withdrew from a set of controversial cases** by merely saying, “not before me.”

Concerns associated:

- Often, **judges don't record their reasons for recusal** in writing, allowing, in the process, leaving plenty of scope for conjecture and surmise.
- An unwarranted recusal, much like a failure to recuse when faced with genuine conflicts of interest, **damage the rule of law**.
- To withdraw from a case merely because a party suggests that a judge does so **impair judicial fairness**.
- **It allows parties to cherry-pick** a bench of their choice.
- **A mistaken case of recusal can prove just as destructive to rule of law** as those cases where a judge refuses a recusal despite the existence of bias.

Are there any rules in this regard?

- There are no definite rules on recusals by Judges.
- **Justice J. Chelameswar** in his opinion in **Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (2015)** held that “Where a judge has a pecuniary interest, no further inquiry as to whether there was a ‘real danger’ or ‘reasonable suspicion’ of bias is required to be undertaken,”

Need of the hour:

- Transparency in procedure is one of the major factors constituting the integrity of the office of a judge in conducting his duties and the functioning of the court, and so adopting a principle of disclosing reasons for recusal will augur well with it.
- This will also help curb the tendency of forum shopping when a mischievous litigant, wanting to avoid a judge because the judge is known to be very strong, could raise baseless submissions on the conflict of interest.

The basic principle of judicial conduct:

- A judge should not have an interest in the litigation before him which could give rise to an apprehension of his deciding a matter in favour of one of the parties. Bias by interest falls into two broad classes.
- First, where the judge has a pecuniary interest in the subject matter of litigation and, second, wherefrom his association with or interest in one of the parties the judge may be perceived to have a bias in favour of that party.

Way ahead:

- In taking the oath of office, judges, both of the Supreme Court and of the high courts, promise to perform their duties, to deliver justice, “without fear or favor, affection or ill-will”.
 - **Definite rules** need to be framed in this regard.
 - Judges should express their decisions **in writing**.

Conclusion:

- The nature of the judicial function involves the performance of difficult and at times unpleasant tasks, and to that end, judicial officers “must resist all manner of pressure, regardless of where it comes from.
- This is the constitutional duty common to all judicial officers. If they deviate, the independence of the judiciary would be undermined, and in turn, the Constitution itself.”

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/not-without-an-explanation/article26305917.ece>.

6. SUPREME COURT ORDERS EVICTION OF 1.1 MN FOREST FAMILIES

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of FRA.
- For Mains: Concerns over implementation of FRA, how tribes are being deprived of their rights under this law, **need for reforms**.

Context: The Supreme Court has asked the governments of 17 states to evict an estimated one million tribal and other households living in forests after their claims of the **right to live in forests were rejected under the Forest Rights Act**.

- The court has directed the Dehradun-based **Forest Survey of India** to submit a satellite-image based report on the encroachments removed.

What's the issue and what were the reasons for evacuation?

- About 11,72,931 (1.17 million) land ownership claims made by scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers under the Forest Rights Act have been rejected on various grounds, including absence of proof that the land was in their possession for at least three generations.
- **The law provides for giving land rights to those living on forest land for at least three generations before December 31, 2005.**

Criticisms:

- The Forest Rights Law itself has been criticised by both wildlife activists and those fighting for the rights of tribespeople and forest-dwellers, albeit for different reasons.
- The former believe **giving people rights to live in forests will eventually harm the forests themselves and also wildlife**.
- **The latter believe that the implementation of the law is far from perfect and that deficiencies in this have resulted in many valid claims being rejected by the states.** The latter also allege that the government didn't exactly put up an effective defence in the case, which was brought by wildlife NGOs and activists.

About Forest Rights Act (FRA):

- The act was passed in December 2006. **It deals with the rights of forest-dwelling communities over land and other resources.**
- The Act grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws.

Rights under the Act:

- **Title rights** – Ownership to land that is being farmed by tribals or forest dwellers subject to a maximum of 4 hectares; ownership is only for land that is actually being cultivated by the concerned family, meaning that no new lands are granted.
- **Use rights** – to minor forest produce (also including ownership), to grazing areas, to pastoralist routes, etc.
- **Relief and development rights** – to rehabilitation in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement; and to basic amenities, subject to restrictions for forest protection.
- **Forest management rights** – to protect forests and wildlife.

Eligibility:

- Eligibility to get rights under the Act is confined to those who “primarily reside in forests” and who depend on forests and forest land for a livelihood. Further, either the claimant must be a member of the Scheduled Tribes scheduled in that area or must have been residing in the forest for 75 years.

Process of recognition of rights:

1. The Act provides that the gram sabha, or village assembly, will initially pass a resolution recommending whose rights to which resources should be recognised.
2. This resolution is then screened and approved at the level of the sub-division (or taluka) and subsequently at the district level.
3. The screening committees consist of three government officials (Forest, Revenue and Tribal Welfare departments) and three elected members of the local body at that level. These committees also hear appeals.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Several wildlife groups have opposed the Forest Rights Act as being anti-conservation. Do you agree? Critically examine.

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

RAJASTHAN TO SCRAP EDUCATION CRITERION

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of 73rd and 74th
- For Mains: Minimum education criteria- issues, need, concerns and analysis.

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

What's the issue?

- The **education criteria was introduced by the previous government**, which stipulated that **for contesting the zila parishad or panchayat samiti polls, a contestant must have a minimum qualification of secondary education (Class X).**
- **To contest the sarpanch elections, an aspirant from the general category must have passed Class VIII and a SC/ST aspirant must have passed Class V.**

Why has it been scrapped?

- Few experts are of the opinion that **the requirement of minimum qualification for contesting elections is against the very spirit of 73rd and 74th amendments.**
- It also **violates the right of every citizen to vote and to contest elections**, which form the basic structure of the constitution.
- It may be noted here that due to these restrictions, many able candidates were debarred from contesting elections. In one way, it can be said that this law has prevented many people from coming to the mainstream.

What has the Supreme Court said in this regard?

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

Background:

- **Rajasthan Literacy Rate 2011:** Literacy rate in Rajasthan has seen upward trend and is 66.11 percent as per 2011 population census. Of that, male literacy stands at 79.19 percent while female literacy is at 52.12 percent. In 2001, literacy rate in Rajasthan stood at 60.41 percent.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) "Laws prescribing educational qualifications for contesting elections are undemocratic and incoherent." Comment.

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

1. THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: President's address- what, when and how? Significance and other key features.

Context: The President's address to the joint sitting of Parliament at the beginning of the Budget Session every year is a **Constitutional requirement**.

What does the Constitution say about this?

- **Article 87(1) says:** "At the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year the President shall address both Houses of Parliament assembled together and inform Parliament of the causes of its summons."
- **First Constitutional Amendment:** Originally, the Constitution required the President to address both Houses of Parliament at the commencement of "every session". This requirement was changed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

President's address:

- The President's speech essentially **highlights the government's policy priorities and plans for the upcoming year**. It is drafted by the Cabinet, and provides a broad framework of the government's agenda and direction.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. KERALA SETS UP DRUG PRICE MONITOR

What to study?

- For Prelims: Proposed unit, role, objectives and composition.
- For Mains: Need for such units, significance, issues involved and the need for drug price monitoring, relevance of DPCO.

Context: Kerala has become the first State to set up a price monitoring and research unit (PMRU) to track violation of prices of essential drugs and medical devices under the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO).

- **Background:** The move comes more than five years after the **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** proposed such a system for the States and the Union Territories.

Composition:

- The State Health Secretary would be the Chairman of the society and the Drugs Controller would be its member secretary.
- Its members include a State government representative, representatives of private pharmaceutical companies, and those from consumer rights protection fora.
- The society would also have an executive committee headed by the Drugs Controller.

Functions:

- The new watchdog will offer technical help to the State Drug Controllers and the NPPA to monitor notified prices of medicines, detect violation of the provisions of the DPCO, look at price compliance, collect test samples of medicines, and collect and compile market-based data of scheduled as well as non-scheduled formulations.

Need:

- The suggestion to set up PMRUs was made against the backdrop of the lack of a field-level link between the NPPA and the State Drugs Controllers and State Drug Inspectors to monitor drug prices.
- Pharma companies have been accused of overcharging prices of drugs in the scheduled category fixed by the DPCO and those outside its ambit too.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Discuss the effectiveness of price capping methods for pharmaceutical products as a tool to ensure affordable healthcare? Suggest alternatives as well.

3. MOTION OF THANKS TO PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: What is Motion of thanks, what it contains? Its significance and what happens if it is not passed.

What is “Motion of Thanks” and what it contains?

- The President makes *an address to a joint sitting of Parliament at the start of the Budget session*, which is prepared by the government and *lists its achievements*. It is essentially *a statement of the legislative and policy achievements of the government during the preceding year and gives a broad indication of the agenda for the year ahead*.
- *The address is followed by a motion of thanks moved in each House by ruling party MPs*. During the session, *political parties discuss the motion of thanks also suggesting amendments*.

Amendments to the “Motion of Thanks”:

- *Notices of amendments to Motion of Thanks* on the President's Address can be tabled after the President has delivered his Address. *Amendments may refer to matters contained in the Address as well as to matters, in the opinion of the member, the Address has failed to mention*. Amendments can be moved to the Motion of Thanks *in such form as may be considered appropriate by the Speaker*.
- *Limitations:*
- The only limitations are that *members cannot refer to matters which are not the direct responsibility of the Central Government and that the name of the President cannot be brought in during the debate* since the *Government and not the President is responsible for the contents of the Address*.
- *Provisions governing them:*
- *President's Address and Motion of Thanks are governed by Articles 86 (1) and 87 (1) of the Constitution and Rules 16 to 24 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha*.

Its passage:

- *Members of Parliament vote on this motion of thanks*. This motion *must be passed in both of the houses*.
- A failure to get motion of thanks passed *amounts to defeat of government and leads to collapse of government*. This is why, *the Motion of Thanks is deemed to be a no-confidence motion*.

Constitutional provisions on this:

- *Article 86(1)* of the Constitution provides that the President may address either House of Parliament or both Houses assembled together, and for that purpose require the attendance of members.
- *Article 87* provides for the special address by the President. Clause (1) of that article provides that at the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year, the President shall address both Houses of Parliament

assembled together and inform Parliament of the causes of its summons. No other business is transacted till the President has addressed both Houses of Parliament assembled together.

4. FOREST RIGHTS ACT, 2006

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: FRA- features, implementation challenges and reform measures needed.

Context: The Odisha State Food Commission has again asked the State government to expedite implementation of the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**, that would help ensure food and nutritional security to the vulnerable section of society.

About Forest Rights Act (FRA):

- The act was passed in December 2006. It deals with the rights of forest-dwelling communities over land and other resources.
- The Act **grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities**, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws.

Rights under the Act:

- Title rights** – Ownership to land that is being farmed by tribals or forest dwellers subject to a maximum of 4 hectares; ownership is only for land that is actually being cultivated by the concerned family, meaning that no new lands are granted.
- Use rights** – to minor forest produce (also including ownership), to grazing areas, to pastoralist routes, etc.
- Relief and development rights** – to rehabilitation in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement; and to basic amenities, subject to restrictions for forest protection.
- Forest management rights** – to protect forests and wildlife.

Eligibility:

- Eligibility to get rights under the Act is confined to those who “primarily reside in forests” and who depend on forests and forest land for a livelihood.
- Further, either the claimant must be a member of the Scheduled Tribes scheduled in that area or must have been residing in the forest for 75 years.

Process of recognition of rights:

- The Act provides that the gram sabha, or village assembly, will initially pass a resolution recommending whose rights to which resources should be recognised.
- This resolution is then screened and approved at the level of the sub-division (or taluka) and subsequently at the district level.
- The screening committees consist of three government officials (Forest, Revenue and Tribal Welfare departments) and three elected members of the local body at that level. These committees also hear appeals.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Critically evaluate the promise and performance of the forest rights act.

5. KANNADIGAS TO GET PRIORITY IN PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the new policy of Karnataka.
- For Mains: Significance, challenges and concerns associated, what is the need of the hour?

Context: Karnataka government has decided to amend the **Karnataka Industrial Employment (Standing Orders), Rules, 1961 to give primacy to Kannadigas in jobs under Group C and D category in the private sector**.

Sarojini Mahishi report had recommended granting primacy for the Kannadigas in the private sector jobs.

- The government would be incorporating the provisions to withdraw government concessions to the firms on non-compliance.

Sarojini Mahishi Report:

- The Karnataka government had formed a committee headed by former union minister Sarojini Mahishi in 1983 ***to recommend job opportunities for Kannadigas in Karnataka.***

The important recommendations of the committee included:

- 100 per cent reservation for Kannadigas in all state government departments and PSUs.
- 100 per cent reservation for Kannadigas for Group C and D jobs in Central government departments and PSUs.
- A minimum 80 per cent reservation for Kannadigas for Group B jobs in Central government departments and PSUs
- 65 per cent reservation for Kannadigas for Group A jobs in Central government departments and PSUs.
- All jobs in the private sector to be reserved for Kannadigas barring, if necessary, senior/skilled positions.

What's the basis for this move?

- ***Competition from outsiders:*** For at least over a decade, especially after Bangalore exploded on the national and global map as the most sought-after destination primarily for software development, it witnessed a huge population influx from all corners of India naturally upsetting the local and migrant balance and causing social friction primarily owing to economic reasons.
- ***With not enough jobs being created*** and the poor spread of those that are getting created, the pressure on, and in, relatively better-performing states is growing.

Issues associated with this policy:

1. By arm-twisting the private sector into forcibly hiring Kannadigas irrespective of merit or qualification, ***the indirect assumption seems to be that Kannadigas are incapable of finding jobs on their own merit or hard work.***
2. Even as the move will benefit the Kannadiga population, with 100% reservation, ***the private sector could suffer a setback as it would hinder choosing the best candidates, irrespective of the linguistic background or domicile of the person, to comply with the rule.***
3. Also, once it is enforced, ***there is no stopping other states from coming up with similar populist policies,*** even for white-collar jobs where merit is paramount for productivity. This could mean greater informalisation of labour, which in turn means greater insecurity for the same workers whose interests the Karnataka government is purportedly protecting with the move.
4. It would also violate the landmark ***Indra Sawhney judgment*** of the Supreme Court which caps reservation "of any manner" at 50%.
5. The end result of industry ***loss of confidence and business moving elsewhere*** would, of course, be a decline in the economic well-being of the Kannadiga blue-collar workers the policy is supposed to protect.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The Karnataka government has released draft amendments to the Karnataka Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Rules of 1961 that would implement 100% reservation for Kannadigas for blue-collar jobs in the private sector. Is it a good policy move? Critically analyse.

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

1. FINANCE COMMISSION OF INDIA

What to study?

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

Context: People representatives of Panchayat Raj institutions and urban local bodies in Hyderabad are planning to make a case with the visiting 15th **Central Finance Commission** to enhance the quantum of funds to the local bodies. **More so to release the share of funds that the zilla and mandal parishads used to get directly till the 14th Finance Commission discontinued the practice and diverted them to the gram panchayats.**

What is the Finance Commission?

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

What are the functions of the Finance Commission?

It is the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The recommendations of the Finance Commission are implemented as under:

Those to be implemented by an order of the President:

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

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

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

Why is there a need for a Finance Commission?

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

Formula used for distribution:

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

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

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

Grants-in-Aid:

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

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What are the important functions of Finance Commission? Do you think Finance Commission is functioning as an arbitrator between the Union and State governments? Critically examine.

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

1. NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY LAUNCHED MOBILE APP

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: NTA- functions, objectives and significance.

Context: National Testing Agency (NTA) has launched a ‘mobile app’ through which students can practice or take mock tests on their own computers or smart phones.

Benefits:

1. In order to ensure that no student is disadvantaged due to lack of resources, NTA has established a network of more than 4000 Test Practice Centres (TPCs) to acquaint the aspirants, especially those from rural areas with Computer Based Tests (CBTs).
2. Students across the country can register themselves online at NTA Website or 'NTA Students App' for visiting the TPCs.
3. All these services are provided to the students free of cost. So far, more than one lakh students have registered at these TPCs and more than one crore students have benefited from these 'App & Web' services.

About NTA:

- In pursuance of the Budget Announcement 2017-18, the Union Cabinet, in November 2017, approved creation of the National Testing Agency (NTA) as ***an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country.***
- **Composition:** It will be chaired by an educationist who will be appointed by the MHRD. The agency will have a board of governors who will represent the member institutions.

2. DEFENCE INNOVATION HUBS

What to study?

- For Prelims: About iDEX and DIHs.
- For Mains: Objectives and their significance.

Context: The **Defence Innovation Organisation set up under Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework** has announced setting up of two **Defence Innovation Hubs (DIHs) in Tamil Nadu (Coimbatore) and Maharashtra (Nashik).**

About Defence Innovation Hubs (DIHs):

1. The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework of the Government envisages setting up and managing independent Defence Innovation Hubs (DIHs).
2. These DIHs will serve as platforms where innovators can get information about needs and feedback from the Services directly and create solutions for India's major defence platforms. This structure is also geared towards attracting more innovators to work for the defence sector in India.

The Framework to Fund Defence Innovation Hubs under iDEX, approved by the Board of Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO) prescribes the following minimum criterion for setting up Defence Innovation Hubs:

Any Central Government recognized Incubator including but not limited to:

1. Department of Science and Technology (DST) recognized Incubators.
2. Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog created Atal Incubation Centers (AICs) and Established Incubation Centers (EICs).
3. Ministry of MSME recognized incubators.
4. Any other incubator recognized or funded through any Central government scheme.
5. The incubator located in districts mentioned in the list of SME clusters hosted by the Ministry of MSME in collaboration with UNIDO.
6. Incubator / Hub promoted by local industry associations.

3. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SAFAI KARMACHARIS

What to study?

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

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for **Extension of tenure of the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis (NCSK)** beyond 31.3.2019 for three years.

Background:

- The NCSK was established in the year 1993 as per the provisions of the NCSK Act 1993 initially for the period upto 1997.
- Later the validity of the Act was initially extended upto 2002 and thereafter upto 2004. The NCSK Act ceased to have effect from 2004.
- After that the tenure of the NCSK has been extended as a non-statutory body from time to time. The tenure of the present Commission is upto 31.3.2019.

Role of NCSK:

1. Recommend to the Government regarding specific programmes for welfare of Safai Karamcharis, study and evaluate the existing welfare programmes for SafaiKaramcharis, investigate cases of specific grievances etc.
2. Also as per the provisions of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, the NCSK has been assigned the work to monitor the implementation of the Act, tender advice for its effective implementation to the Centre and State Governments and enquire into complaints regarding contravention/non-implementation of the provisions of the Act.

Major impact:

- The major beneficiaries of the proposal would be the Safai Karamcharis and persons engaged in manual scavenging in the country since the NCSK will work for their welfare and upliftment.
- Though the Government has taken many steps for the upliftment of the SafaiKaramcharis, the deprivation suffered by them in socio-economic and educational terms is still far from being eliminated. Further the practice of manual scavenging is still prevalent in the country and its eradication continues to be an area of the highest priority for the Government.

4. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES (NCST)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About NCST, objectives, roles, functions and schemes.

Context: Foundation Day of **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** is being observed on 19th February, 2019. The Commission will be celebrating fifteen years on 19th February, 2019.

Background:

- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) was set up on 19th February, 2004 through Constitution (89th Amendment) Act.

NCST leadership award:

- On this occasion, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has also decided to institute a national award named as "**NCST Leadership Award**" which will be **conferred for significant and exemplary services towards Scheduled Tribes in the country**.
- **The awards will be given in 3 categories i.e.** (i) Educational Institutions/ Universities, (ii) Public Sector Undertakings/Banks and (iii) Public Service rendered by an Individual, NGO or Civil Society.

About NCST:

- ✓ NCST was established by amending **Article 338 and inserting a new Article 338A in the Constitution through the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003**.
- ✓ By this amendment, the erstwhile **National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely- (i) the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), and (ii) the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)**.
- **Composition:** The term of office of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and each member is three years from the date of assumption of charge. The Chairperson has been given the rank of Union Cabinet Minister and the Vice-Chairperson that of a Minister of State and other Members have the ranks of a Secretary to the Government of India.
- **Powers:** NCST is empowered to investigate and monitor matters relating to safeguards provided for STs under the Constitution or under other laws or under Govt. order. The Commission is also authorized to

inquire into specific complaints relating to rights and safeguards of STs and to participate and advise in the Planning Process relating to socio-economic development of STs and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and States.

- **Report:** The commission submits its report to the President annually on the working of safeguards and measures required for effective implementation of Programmers/ Schemes relating to welfare and socio-economic development of STs.

5. CENTRAL WAKF COUNCIL

What to study?

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

What is it?

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

Composition and appointments:

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

Topics: RPA, RTI, Elections etc.

1. VVPAT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: What are VVPATs, why are they being used now and issues related to EVM tampering, other measures announced by ECI to enhance transparency during elections.

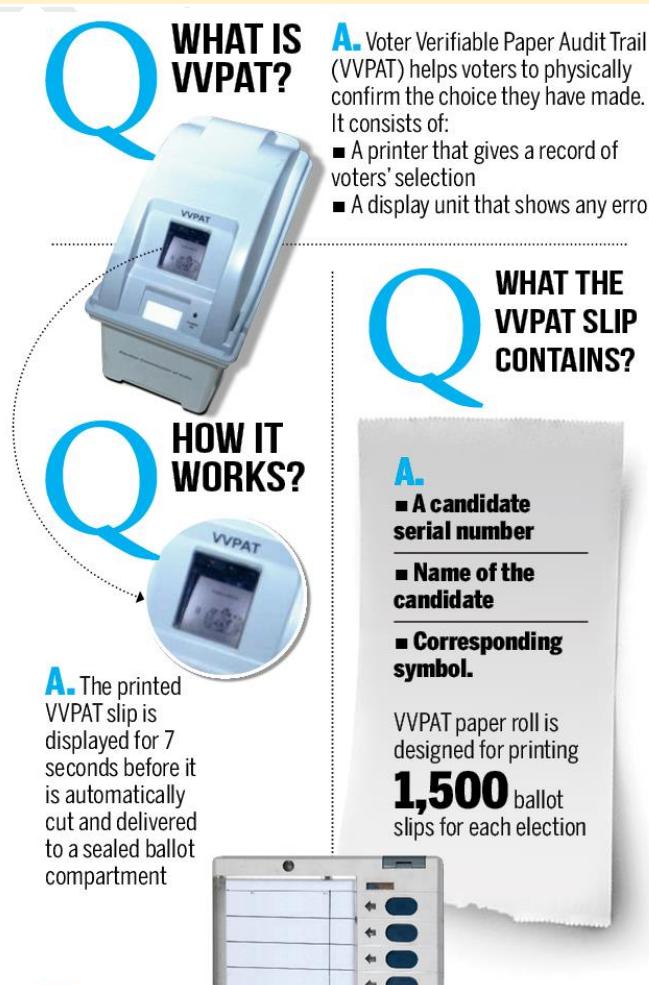
Context: The Election Commission recently informed the Madras High Court that it had made it clear way back in 2017 that there shall be 100% use of the **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system** during the Lok Sabha election this year to gain voter confidence.

What are VVPAT machines?

- The Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail is a method that provides feedback to voters.
- It is an independent verification printer machine and is attached to electronic voting machines.
- It allows voters to verify if their vote has gone to the intended candidate.

How do VVPAT machines work?

1. When a voter presses a button in the EVM, a paper slip is printed through the VVPAT.



2. The slip contains the poll symbol and name of the candidate.
3. It allows the voter to verify his/her choice. After being visible to the voter from a glass case in the VVPAT for seven seconds, the ballot slip will be cut and dropped into the drop box in the VVPAT machine and a beep will be heard.
4. VVPAT machines can be accessed by polling officers only.
5. VVPAT is a machine which dispenses a slip with the symbol of the party for which a person has voted for. The slip dropped in a box but the voter cannot take it home.

Advantages in VVPATs:

1. Enables to verify vote: Instant feedback to voter that vote polled has been allocated to the intended candidate.
2. Enables authorities to count the votes manually if there is a dispute in the electronically polled votes.
3. Operates under a Direct Recording Election system (DRE) which detects fraud and existent malfunctions.
4. Will ensure greater transparency in voting process.
5. Gives both the voters and political parties an assurance.

Sources: the hindu.

2. EVM IS ‘INFORMATION’ UNDER RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT

What to study?

- For Prelims: About CIC and ICs- appointment, eligibility and other related key facts.
- For Mains: Issues related to appointment of CIC and issues of transparency in appointment, significance of this ruling.

Context: An Electronic Voting Machine is “information” under the Right to Information Act and can be demanded by an applicant from the Election Commission of India on a payment of Rs 10, the Central Information Commission has ruled.

The ruling:

- The machine is covered under the definition of “information” and can be demanded from the ECI.
- As per Section 2(f) and 2(i) of the RTI Act, ***the definition of ‘information’ and ‘record’ also includes ‘any model or any sample’ held by a public authority.***
- ***Section 2(f) of the RTI Act defines ‘Information’*** as any material in any form, including records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force.

Implications of this ruling:

- This implies the Election Commission has to respond to an RTI application seeking the EVM either by providing it or refusing it under exemption clauses in the Act. But that also can be contested before the CIC, the highest adjudicating authority in RTI matters.

Background:

- An information can be denied by a public authority if it attracts any exemption clauses listed in the RTI Act which also exempts information pertaining to commercial confidence or intellectual property from disclosure.
- ***One of the clauses Section 8(1)(d) exempts information*** including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property, the disclosure of which would harm the competitive position of a third party, unless the competent authority is satisfied that larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information.

Basics about CIC:

What is the eligibility criteria and what is the process of appointment of CIC/IC?

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

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

Eligibility:

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

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

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

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the scheme, Important circuits and overview of their locations and geographical significance.

Context: First project in Sikkim under the Swadesh Darshan scheme has been inaugurated at the Zero Point, Gangtok.

- The project is officially named as "*Development of North East Circuit: Rangpo- Rorathang- Aitar- Phadamchen- Nathang-Sherathang- Tsongmo- Gangtok-Phodong- Mangan- Lachung-Yumthang- Lachen- Thangu-Gurudongmer- Mangan- Gangtok-Tuminlingee- Singtam*".
- Under this project, the Ministry has developed tourism infrastructure facilities like Tourist Information Centre, Meditation Centre, Organic Eco Tourism centre, Log Huts, Zip Line, Flower etc.

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

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

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

1. **100% centrally funded** for the project components undertaken for public funding.
2. To leverage the voluntary funding available for **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.
3. **Funding of individual project will vary** from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by PMC (Programme Management Consultant). PMC will be a national level consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.
4. A **National Steering Committee (NSC)** will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.
5. A **Mission Directorate** headed by the Member Secretary, NSC as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/ UTs governments and other stake holders.

Sources: pib.

2. PRADHAN MANTRI SHRAM-YOGI MAANDHAN YOJANA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Significance and features of the scheme.

Context: Announced in the budget.

Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan Yojana- key facts:

- It is a scheme for the **unorganised sector workers with monthly income upto Rs 15,000**. A sum of Rs 500 crore has been allocated for the Scheme.
- This scheme shall provide **an assured monthly pension of Rs 3,000 from the age of 60 years** on a monthly contribution of a small affordable amount during their working age.
- An **unorganised sector worker joining pension yojana at the age of 29 years will have to contribute only Rs 100 per month till the age of 60 years. A worker joining the pension yojana at 18 years, will have to contribute as little as Rs 55 per month only.**
- The **Government will deposit equal matching share in the pension account of the worker every month.**

Need and Significance of the scheme:

- It is expected that at least **10 crore labourers and workers in the unorganised sector** will avail the benefit of the scheme within next five years making it one of the largest pension schemes of the world.
- Half of India's GDP comes from the sweat and toil of 42 crore workers in the unorganised sector** working as street vendors, rickshaw pullers, construction workers, rag pickers, agricultural workers, beedi workers, handloom, leather and in numerous other similar occupations. The Government must provide them comprehensive social security coverage for their old age.

Sources: the hindu.

3. NEW PANEL FOR WELFARE OF NOMADIC COMMUNITIES

What to study?

- For Prelims: Who are nomadic and de- notified tribes as per the law?
- For Mains: Why they renewed attention and measures needed to bring them to the main stream.

Context: The Centre will form a **welfare panel for nomadic, semi-nomadic and de-notified communities**. Announced in Budget.

- A Welfare Development Board** will also be set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to design and implement programmes for these hard-to-reach communities.

Key facts:

- The committee will be set up **under NITI Aayog** to complete the task of identifying de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities.
- The committee will follow up on the work of the **Renke Commission and the Idate Commission**.

Denotified and Nomadic Tribes:

The Denotified Tribes are **communities that were listed or notified as 'born criminal' by the British under a number of laws**. The term, 'Denotified and Nomadic Tribes', can be traced to the **Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871**.

- The colonial government notified nearly 200 tribal communities to be hereditary criminals, cementing their societal identity as outcasts and subjecting them to constant harassment by the administration.
- Forest laws** that came into force from the mid-nineteenth century onwards deprived a large number of communities of their traditional rights of hunting and gathering. **The new laws criminalised their very source of livelihood when it practised.**
- When the forests were cleared by the British for commercial use and forest communities asked to contribute to labour, some communities resisted and were declared '**criminal**'.

- The British thought that communities had lost their legitimate means of livelihood, they must have been living by indulging in criminal activities due to arrival of road and railway networks. ***After India gained Independence, these tribes were ‘de-notified’ from the list of Criminal Tribes.***

Idate commission Recommendations:

- Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes are ***poorest of the poor, most marginalised and most downtrodden communities who are subject to social stigma, atrocity and exclusion.*** Therefore, the commission has recommended giving protection to Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes the communities under the ***Atrocities Act.***
- The government should ***provide strong legal protections and constitutional safeguards,*** including the extension of the Protection of Atrocities Act to the NT/ DNT/ SNT communities by creating ***a separate Third schedule as Scheduled De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes.***
- Noting that all that the Centre has done so far are “symbolic reparations”, the Idate Commission advocated for release of 2011 caste census, which is yet to be made public, at least on the DT/ NT/ SNT community, so that policies can be made specifically for these communities.

Renke Commission recommendations overview- <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=118570>.

Sources: the hindu.

4. NATIONAL SERVICE SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is NSS?
- For Mains: Significance and the need for NSS.

The broad objectives of NSS are to:

- Understand the community in which they work.
- Understand themselves in relation to their community.
- Identify the needs and problems of the community and involve them in problem solving process.
- Develop among themselves a sense of social and civic responsibility.
- Utilize their knowledge in finding practical solution to individual and community problems.
- Develop competence required for group living and sharing of responsibilities.
- Gain skills in mobilizing community participation.
- Acquire leadership qualities and democratic attitude.
- Develop capacity to meet emergencies and natural disasters.
- Practice national integration and social harmony.

About National Service Scheme (NSS):

- It is ***an Indian government-sponsored public service program conducted by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports*** of the Government of India.
- The scheme was ***launched in Gandhiji’s Centenary year in 1969.***
- Aim:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) headed by Dr. Radhakrishnan ***recommended*** introduction of national service in the academic institutions on a voluntary basis with a view to developing healthy contacts between the students and teachers on the one hand and establishing a constructive linkage between the campus and the community on the other hand.

(Q) Discuss the role of National Service Scheme (NSS) in developing the personality and leadership qualities of the youth and in engaging them in nation-building activities.

5. DRAFT NATIONAL RIVER GANGA BILL, 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key highlights of the Bill.
- For Mains: Conservation of Ganga- concerns, challenges and measures.

National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Conservation and Management) Bill, 2018- highlights:

- The bill propose to ***ban the construction of jetties, ports or “permanent hydraulic structures”*** in the Ganga, unless permitted by the National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority.
- It proposes to create ***a management structure*** that will supervise the health of the 2,500-kilometre long Ganga which, the draft Bill defines, as ‘India’s national river.’
- The Bill lays down ***a host of restrictions*** to ensure the “uninterrupted, ecological flow” of the river. Currently, a host of dams in the upper stretches of the river lead to the river’s flow being obstructed.

- The proposed legislation specifies that “**unauthorized**” activities that cause obstruction or discontinuity of water in the River Ganga due to engineered diversion of water or stoppage of water. Carrying out such activities are liable to a prison term of 3 years or fines upto ₹50 crore, or both.
- The Armed Ganga Protection Corps (GPC)** personnel will be provided by the ministry of home affairs and will be deployed by the National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority. The GPC personnel will have power to arrest those who pollute the river covering offences like obstructing the flow of the river to commercial fishing.

The Bill has listed out a list of offences marked as cognizable which includes:

- Construction activities causing obstruction in the river.
- Withdrawal of ground water for industrial or commercial consumption from the land fronting the river and its tributaries.
- Commercial fishing or aqua culture in the river and its tributaries.
- Discharging untreated or treated sewage into the river.

Need:

- According to a map of Ganga river water quality presented by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to National Green Tribunal (NGT) in August 2018, **only five out of 70-odd monitoring stations had water that was fit for drinking and seven for bathing.**
- After three decades of efforts to clean the national river, it is a sad state of affairs that the river is not even fit for bathing.

6. SAFE CITY PROJECT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features, significance and the need for safe city project.

Context: Empowered Committee of Officers for Nirbhaya funds scheme has approved **pilot Safe City projects in eight selected metropolitan cities**, namely, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Lucknow with a view to provide safety to women in public places.

- The project would be implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme** with Centre and State sharing the funding in **60:40 ratio**.

The major components of the Safe City project include, inter-alia:

- Setting up an Integrated Smart Control Room;
- Setting up Pink Out-posts (exclusively administered by Women police) for facilitating ease of filing complaint by women;
- Pink Patrols of Women police;
- Setting up Women Help Desks in all Police Stations with Counsellors;
- Augmentation of existing Asha Jyoti Kendra;
- Implementing Safety measures in buses, including Cameras;
- Improving Street Lighting in identified Hot Spot areas;
- Setting up Pink Toilets;
- Integration of Women power-help line with single Emergency number.

7. ‘DARWAZA BAND – PART 2’ CAMPAIGN

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of the campaign, about SBM.
- For Mains: Role of such campaigns in influencing behavioural changes.

Context: The **Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen** has launched the **‘Darwaza Band -Part 2’ campaign** starring Amitabh Bachchan.

About the campaign:

- The campaign, produced by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, and supported by the World Bank was launched in Mumbai.

2. The campaign talks about how a toilet must be used by all, always and under all circumstances (har koi, har roz, hamesha).
3. The focuses on sustaining the open defecation free status of villages across the country.
4. It focuses on ensuring that people's behaviour is changed for good and everyone always uses a toilet.

Background:

- 50 crore people stopped defecating in the open since the launch of the SBM and with over 5.5 lakh villages having already been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF), the national sanitation coverage is now in excess of 98%.

(Q) The success of Swacch Bharat mission hinges on strong municipals and efficient governance. Comment.

8. BILL TO COUNTER EXPLOITATION BY NRI SPOUSES

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the bill.
- For Mains: Concerns present and the need for a legislation on this.

Context: In a bid **to counter growing incidents of exploitation of Indian women by NRI (Non Resident Indian) spouses**, the government has introduced a Bill in the Rajya Sabha.

Highlights of the Bill:

- The Bill is **aimed at prevent victimisation of Indian nationals in fraudulent marriages**.
- The Bill will **create accountability and protect those who are trapped in fraudulent marriages and are abandoned by their spouses**.
- According to the new Bill, **a marriage between an NRI and an Indian citizen will have to be registered within 30 days from the date of marriage**.
- **Necessary legal provisions** have been created in the criminal code and the Passports Act, 1967, to initiate action against erring NRI spouses.

What necessitated this?

- The introduction of the Bill was necessitated by the Ministry of External Affairs due to numerous complaints received from Indian nationals, mostly women deserted or harassed by their Non-Resident Indian spouses.
- It is expected that the Bill will serve as a deterrent for NRI spouses, who use marriages as a tool of exploitation.

Sources: the hindu.

9. BILL TO AMEND CINEMATOGRAPH ACT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features, significance and the need for the Act.

Context: The union government has introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha **to amend the Cinematograph Act and impose strict penalty to combat the menace of film piracy**.

Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2019:

1. The Bill seeks **to amend provisions of Cinematograph Act, 1952, in order to tackle film piracy** by including penal provisions for unauthorized camcording and duplication of films.
2. It **aims to check piracy**, particularly the release of pirated versions of films on the internet that causes huge losses to the film industry and the exchequer.
3. The bill proposes **to make film piracy offences punishable with imprisonment** of up to three years and fines that may extend to ₹10 lakh or both.
4. The proposed amendment states that any person, who without the written authorisation of the copyright owner, uses any recording device to make or transmit a copy of a film, or attempts to do so, or abet the making or transmission of such a copy, will be liable for such a punishment.

Significance and Expected Outcomes:

- The film industry has been demanding for a long time that the government consider amendments to the law preventing camcording and piracy.
- The proposed amendments would increase industry revenues, boost job creation, fulfil important objectives of India's National Intellectual Property policy. It will give relief against piracy and infringing content online.

10. ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and overview of the measures taken.

Context: The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has released a publication titled "**India – Spearheading Climate Solutions**" on climate actions in India.

- The publication mentions the **key initiatives undertaken by India under various sectors towards combating and adapting to climate change**.

Major initiatives of the Government towards combating climate change:

- a) **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** The Action plan covers eight major missions on Solar, Enhanced Energy Efficiency, Sustainable Habitat, Water, Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, Green India, Sustainable Agriculture and Strategic Knowledge on Climate Change.
- b) **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** ISA was jointly launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the then President of France, Francois Hollande in Paris on the side-lines of CoP 21 in 2015. The vision and mission of the alliance is to provide a dedicated platform for cooperation among solar resource rich countries that lie completely or partial between the Tropics of Capricorn & Cancer.
- c) **State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC):** State governments have drafted climate strategies aligned with the eight National Missions under the NAPCC. The strategies focus on issues ranging from climate mitigation, energy efficiency, and resource conservation to climate adaptation.
- d) **FAME Scheme for E-mobility:** Union Government in April 2015 launched Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles (FAME) – India Scheme with an aim to boost sales of eco-friendly vehicles in the country. It is a part of the National Mission for Electric Mobility.
- e) **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation (AMRUT) for Smart Cities.**
- f) **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** The scheme provides LPG connections to five crore below-poverty-line beneficiaries. The connections are given in the name of women beneficiaries to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels and conventional fuel like cow dung for cooking food, thus reducing air pollution.
- g) **UJALA scheme:** The scheme was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015 with a target of replacing 77 crore incandescent lamps with LED bulbs. The usage of LED bulbs will not only result in reducing electricity bills but also help in environment protection.
- h) **Swachh Bharat Mission:** Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement) is a campaign that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2, 2014. The campaign seeks to clean the streets, roads and infrastructure of the country's 4041 statutory cities and towns.

11. CREDIT LINKED CAPITAL SUBSIDY SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features, need and significance of the scheme.

Context: The Central government will continue the "**Credit Linked Capital Subsidy and Technology Upgradation Scheme**" for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSEs) beyond the 12th Plan period for three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

- The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs** has approved the continuation of the scheme with a total outlay of Rs 2,900 crore.

Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme:

1. The objective of the Scheme is **to facilitate technology up-gradation in MSEs by providing an upfront capital subsidy** of 15 per cent (on institutional finance of up to Rs 1 crore availed by them) for induction of well-established and improved technology in the specified 51 sub-sectors/products approved.
2. The major objective is **to upgrade their plant & machinery with state-of-the-art technology, with or without expansion and also for new MSEs** which have set up their facilities with appropriate eligible and proven technology duly approved under scheme guidelines.
3. The Scheme is **a demand driven one without any upper limit on overall annual spending on the subsidy disbursal.**

Nature of assistance:

- The revised scheme aims at facilitating technology up-gradation by providing 15% up front capital subsidy to MSEs, including tiny, khadi, village and coir industrial units, on institutional finance availed by them for induction of well-established and improved technologies in specified sub-sectors/products approved under the scheme.

(Q) Analyze whether the slew of measures meant to aid the MSE sector to address their woes have come too little too late ?

12. E-AUSHADHI PORTAL

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

Key facts:

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

13. PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA – URBAN

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMAY- Urban- key features.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme, challenges ahead and measures needed to achieve the target.

Context: Government has launched a **Mobile App to Allow Beneficiaries to Capture & Upload Photographs of Completed Houses under PMAY- U.**

About PMAY- Urban:

- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Programme **launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA)**, in Mission mode envisions **provision of Housing for All by 2022**, when the Nation completes 75 years of its Independence.

The Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme verticals:

1. Slum rehabilitation of Slum Dwellers with participation of private developers using land as a resource.
2. Promotion of Affordable Housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy.
3. Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors.
4. Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction /enhancement.

Key facts:

1. The beneficiaries are poor and people living under EWS and LIG categories in the country.
2. The scheme is divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of 100 cities will be covered from April 2015 to March 2017. In phase two, 200 cities will be covered from April 2017 to March 2019. In the third phase, the leftover cities will be covered from April 2019 to March 2022.

- The government is providing an interest subsidy of 6.5% on housing loans which can be availed by beneficiaries for 15 years from start of loan date.
- The government will grant Rs 1 lakh to all the beneficiaries of the scheme. In addition, Rs 1.5 lakh will be given to all eligible urban poor who want to construct their houses in urban areas or plan to go for renovation in their existing houses. One can also avail loans under this scheme to build toilets in existing houses.

Challenges ahead:

- According to the findings by ratings agency Crisil, the ***central government has to mobilise Rs 1 lakh crore in the next three years for achieving its target*** of building 1 crore houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U).
- This is going to be a tall task given the current fiscal arithmetic.*** The scheme also faces headwinds such as unavailability of land in prime areas, low participation of private developers on account of brand dilution, bidding mechanism, stringent cost and time schedules resulting in low yields, increasing construction costs due to absence of bulk sourcing of materials, and lack of new technology that impacts productivity, cost efficiency and quality.

Significance of the scheme:

- PMAY-U does offer a ***huge opportunity for several sectors by setting off a virtuous cycle.***
- One crore houses would mean an opportunity for over ***Rs 2 lakh crore of home loans, and incremental consumption of 80-100 million tonne of cement and 10-15 million tonne of steel.***
- The construction opportunity is of about four billion square feet over the life of PMAY-U*** and all that would translate into 9-10 crore incremental jobs over the execution period.

(Q) Infrastructure development has witnessed significant impetus in India in the recent years. Discuss.

20. PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA- GRAMIN (PMAY-G)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme, challenges and measures to address these challenges.

Context: Cabinet approves continuation of Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin beyond March, 2019 (PMAY-G Phase-II).

About PMAY- G:

- The erstwhile rural housing scheme ***Indira Awaas yojana (IAY) has been restructured into Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana –Gramin (PMAY-G)*** from 01.04.2016.
- PMAY-G aims*** at providing a pucca house, with basic amenities, to all houseless householder and those households living in kutch and dilapidated house, by 2022.
- Cost sharing:*** The cost of unit assistance in this scheme is shared between Central and State Governments in the ratio 60:40 in plain areas and 90: 10 for North Eastern and Himalayan States.
- The scheme envisages training of Rural Masons*** with the objective of improving workmanship and quality of construction of houses while at the same time, increasing availability of skilled masons and enhancing employability of such masons.
- Selection of beneficiaries*** under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) is based on housing deprivation parameters of Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011, subject to 13 point exclusion criteria, followed by Gram Sabha verification.

14. TAGORE AWARD

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: The award, eligibility and key facts related.

Context: President Ram Nath Kovind would be presenting the ***Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony*** to Rajkumar Singhajit Singh, Bangladesh cultural organisation Chhayanaut and Ram Sutar Vanji for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively.

About the Tagore award:

1. The **annual award** was instituted by the Government of India during the commemoration of **150th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore**.
2. The **first Tagore Award was conferred on Pt. Ravi Shankar**, the Indian Sitar Maestro in 2012 and second was conferred on Shri Zubin Mehta in 2013.
3. The **award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation in a scroll, a plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/ handloom item**.
4. The **award is open to all persons** regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.
5. Awardees are **selected by a jury headed by the Prime Minister of India**.

15. GOVERNMENT LIBERALIZES THE E-VISA REGIME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features of e- Visa regime, recent modifications and its implications.

Context: The **e-tourist visa**, introduced in September 2014 with 46 countries, has now been **made applicable for 166 countries**. Recently, government made series of amendments in the e-visa regime, liberalising it further and making it more tourist friendly.

Important modifications made are highlighted as under:

1. Duration of stay in India of e-Tourist and e-Business Visas is maximum upto 1 Year with multiple entry subject to the stay stipulations.
2. Also, the existing restriction of allowing foreigner for a maximum of three times has also been removed.

Changes in e-Tourist Visa:

1. On e-Tourist Visa continuous stay during each visit shall not exceed 90 days in case of nationals of all countries who are eligible for grant of e-visa except nationals of USA, UK, Canada and Japan.
2. In case of nationals of USA, UK, Canada and Japan continuous stay during each visit shall not exceed 180 days.
3. In all cases no registration will be required.

Changes in e-Business Visa:

1. Continuous stay during each visit shall not exceed 180 days in case of nationals of all countries who are eligible for grant of e-visa.
2. No registration will be required if the stay is for a period of less than 180 days.

Other changes:

1. e-Visa is valid for entry through 2 (two) more designated Airports (Bhubaneswar and Port Blair) raising the total number of such airports to 28.
2. Attending Destination wedding under normal e-Tourist visa or Tourist visa- No separate category of Destination Wedding Visa
3. Foreign nationals who fall sick during their stay in India can now avail medical treatment without converting their visa into Medical Visa. This would take care of sudden medical emergencies.
4. Visa-on-Arrival facility extended to the nationals of the Republic of Korea.

16. JALLIANWALA BAGH NATIONAL MEMORIAL (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key provisions in the Bill and its significance.

Context: The **Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2018** was recently passed in Lok Sabha. The bill **aims to address various deficiencies in the management of the National Memorial and to ensure that the Trust is an apolitical entity**.

Background:

- Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Act, 1951 provided for the *erection of a National Memorial in memory of those killed or wounded on April 13, 1919, in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar.*
- The 1951 Act also provided for a *Trust to manage the National Memorial*. The Trust as per the 1951 Act included the Prime Minister, as Chairperson, (ii) the President of the Indian National Congress, (iii) the Minister in-charge of Culture, (iv) the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, (v) the Governor of Punjab, (vi) the Chief Minister of Punjab, and (vii) three eminent persons nominated by the central government.

Changes:

1. The 2018 amendment bill *removes the President of the Indian National Congress as a Trustee*.
2. It clarifies that *when there is no Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, the leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha will be the Trustee*.
3. The 1951 act provided that the three eminent persons nominated by the central government will have a term of five years and will be eligible for re-nomination. The 2018 bill added *a clause to allow the central government to terminate the term of a nominated trustee before the expiry of his term without assigning any reason.*

17. SC TURNS DOWN PETITION ON USE OF 'DALIT' BY MEDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Advisory issued by the I&B Ministry, rationale behind, is it justified?

Context: The Supreme Court has refused to entertain a petition challenging Centre's notification advising the media not to use the term "Dalit" to describe members of Scheduled Castes.

Background:

- In its August 7, 2018, circular, *the Information and Broadcasting Ministry had advised that the media should refrain from using the word "Dalit" for members belonging to Scheduled Castes and had directed that 'Scheduled Caste' should alone be used* for all official transaction, matters, dealings, certificates for denoting the persons belonging to the community. It was questioned in the Supreme Court.
- This advice had come *in compliance with a direction from the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court.*

What does the petition say?

- The plea said the word "Dalit" is a self-chosen name, used as a "positive self-identifier and as a political identity".
- The petitioner said the name represented the people who have been affected by the caste system and the practice of untouchability.

The debate over the use of word- Dalit:

- The debate over the appropriateness of using the term 'Dalit' to refer to members of the Scheduled Castes is far from new.
- A decade ago, the *National Commission for Scheduled Castes disfavoured the use of 'Dalit', which it felt was unconstitutional*. This is because belonging to a 'Scheduled Caste' is a legal status conferred on members of castes named in a list notified by the President under Article 341 of the Constitution.
- Therefore, arguably, '*Scheduled Caste* is the appropriate way to refer to this class of people in official communications and documents.

What's the issue with advisory issued?

- The I&B Ministry's advisory is confusing as it uses the words "for all official transactions, matters", though the media's references to the community are usually beyond official contexts.

Way ahead:

- It is inexplicable to oppose the use of the term 'Dalit' in the media and in non-official contexts — a nomenclature chosen and used by the community itself. Doing so lends itself to the charge that there is an attempt to deny the powerful and emotive meaning of the word Dalit.

- The term has evolved over a period of time and has come to symbolise different things in different contexts — self-respect, assertion, solidarity and opposition to caste oppression. In the past, Dalits were referred to as ‘untouchables’, but the official term during British rule was ‘depressed classes’.
- Mahatma Gandhi sought to remove the stigma of ‘pollution’ by using the term ‘Harijans’, or ‘children of god’. In course of time, the community rejected this appellation as patronising and sanctimonious. It was only some decades ago that they began to refer to themselves as Dalits.
- ‘Dalit’ literally means ‘downtrodden’ or ‘broken’, but it is a word pregnant with meaning, reflecting the struggle of a community to reassert its identity and lay claim to the rights that were denied to them for centuries.

Sources: the hindu.

18. NATIONAL POLICY ON ELECTRONICS 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features, targets and significance of the policy.

Context: The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the *National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019)*, proposed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

- The Policy envisions **positioning India as a global hub for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing – (ESDM)** by encouraging and driving capabilities in the country for developing core components, including chipsets, and creating an enabling environment for the industry to compete globally.

Salient Features of NPE 2019:

- Create eco-system for globally competitive ESDM sector: Promoting domestic manufacturing and export in the entire value-chain of ESDM.
- Provide incentives and support for manufacturing of core electronic components.
- Provide special package of incentives for mega projects which are extremely high-tech and entail huge investments, such as semiconductor facilities display fabrication, etc.
- Formulate suitable schemes and incentive mechanisms to encourage new units and expansion of existing units.
- Promote Industry-led R&D and innovation in all sub-sectors of electronics, including grass root level innovations and early stage Start-ups in emerging technology areas such as 5G, IoT/ Sensors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Virtual Reality (VR), Drones, Robotics, Additive Manufacturing, Photonics, Nano-based devices, etc.
- Provide incentives and support for significantly enhancing availability of skilled manpower, including reskilling.
- Special thrust on Fabless Chip Design Industry, Medical Electronic Devices Industry, Automotive Electronics Industry and Power Electronics for Mobility and Strategic Electronics Industry.
- Create Sovereign Patent Fund (SPF) to promote the development and acquisition of IPs in ESDM sector.
- Promote trusted electronics value chain initiatives to improve national cyber security profile.

Major Impact:

- The NPE 2019 when implemented will lead to formulation of several schemes, initiatives, projects, etc., in consultation with the concerned Ministries/ Departments, for the development of ESDM sector in the country.
- It will enable flow of investment and technology, leading to higher value addition in the domestically manufactured electronic products, increased electronics hardware manufacturing in the country and their export, while generating substantial employment opportunities.

(Q) A number of factors have been contributing towards the growth of the Electronics Sector in India. Discuss. Also highlight the efforts of the government to make India a global hub for electronics manufacturing.

19. MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON MARRIAGE), SECOND ORDINANCE, 2019

What to Study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the ordinance and the Bill proposed.
- For Mains: Need, significance and challenges in implementation.

Context: The Union Cabinet has promulgated an Ordinance, namely the ***Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Second Ordinance, 2019***.

Benefits:

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

Key provisions of the Bill:

The Bill makes all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void (i.e. not enforceable in law) and illegal.

- **Definition:** It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
- **Offence and penalty:** The Bill makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine. (A cognizable offence is one for which a police officer may arrest an accused person without warrant.) The offence will be cognizable only if information relating to the offence is given by: (i) the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared), or (ii) any person related to her by blood or marriage.
- **The Bill provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused.** The bail may be granted only after hearing the woman (against whom talaq has been pronounced), and if the Magistrate is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.
- **The offence may be compounded by the Magistrate upon the request of the woman** (against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.
- **Allowance:** A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children. The amount of the allowance will be determined by the Magistrate.
- **Custody:** A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children. The manner of custody will be determined by the Magistrate.

Significance:

- Time has come to put an end to the suffering of Muslim women who have been at the receiving end of instant talaq for several years. More than 20 Islamic countries have already banned the practice.

20. PERMANENT RESIDENCE CERTIFICATE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: PRC- meaning, why is it issued, concerns associated.

Context: Violence erupted in Arunachal Pradesh over the issue of **Permanent Residence Certificate** to six non-Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes (APSTs) living in the Namsai and Changlang districts and to the Gorkhas living in Vijaynagar.

- The protests spread despite a state government assurance that they had deferred the plan to give them PRC.

Background:

- Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis, Morans, Adivasis and Mishings were demanding Permanent Residence Certificate. Most of these communities are recognised as Scheduled Tribes in neighbouring Assam.
- According to reports, the demand by these communities for PRC, recognising them as residents of the state, is long-standing, but is opposed by powerful groups.

What is Permanent Residence Certificate?

- The State Government of Arunachal Pradesh issues ***the domicile certificate otherwise called as Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) to the residents of the state who stayed therein over a period***. Those citizens who are not currently residing in the state but are sure of permanently staying therein can also apply for it.
- ***Besides the permanent residence certificate, the State also offers Temporary Residence Certificate (TRC)*** for those who reside in the State on a temporary basis.

Purpose of the Certificate:

1. Permanent Residence Certificate is a legal document that serves as an evidence of residence and thus must be submitted wherever a residence proof is required.
2. Permanent Residence Certificate should be produced in many situations such as admission in educational organisations, job reservation under specific quotas especially for government jobs, etc. to get local preferences.
3. To apply for ration card permanent residence certificate is a vital and mandate document.
4. To avail the provisions of various schemes of the state or to claim scholarships of the State, permanent residence certificate is essential.

Sources: Indian express.

21. PARENTS RESPONSIBILITY AND NORMS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING (PRANAM) BILL

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Bill, PRANAM commission.
- For Mains: Significance, need and potential of the proposed legislation.

Context: Assam has launched the ***PRANAM Commission***, a panel set up to look after the issues concerning a Bill brought in for protection of parents of state government employees.

- The ***Parents Responsibility and Norms for Accountability and Monitoring (PRANAM) Bill***, stated to be the first-of its-kind Bill in the country, is an effort to protect elderly parents of government employees in their times of need.

Objective of the bill: To ensure that no state government employee ignores their elderly parents and unmarried differently-abled siblings.

Key Features:

- The PRANAM Bill makes it ***mandatory for the state government employees to look after their parents and unmarried differently-abled siblings who do not have their own sources of income***.
- Under the bill's provisions, ***if the PRANAM Commission gets a complaint that parents of a state government employee are being ignored, then 10 or 15 per cent of the employee's salary will be deducted by the government and paid to the parents or differently-abled siblings***.
- The ***employees of private companies and the central government working in the state would also be covered by the bill at a later stage***.

Sources: toi.

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

1. KNOW MY INDIA PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Know India Programme and its significance, about NFCH.

Why in News? The **National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH)** is organizing a special workshop for 42 Youth in the age group of 15 to 22 years, who have been victims of communal violence in the past, under the **Know My India Programme**.

Objectives of the workshop:

- To help the children deal with the post-traumatic stress, provide them life tools to manage their emotions and eliminate disturbing impressions of the past events.
- To have them experience deep relaxation and peace, give them a broader and more inclusive view of the world and how each individual is connected with the others beyond social identities.

Key facts:

- The programme is being organized in collaboration with **the Art of Living Foundation**.
- The Youth come from 6 states including Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Gujarat along with 10 official mentors.

NFCH:

- It is **an autonomous organization under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- The main objective of the Foundation is to provide assistance to the children / youth rendered orphan / destitute in communal, caste, ethnic or terrorist violence for their rehabilitation besides promoting communal harmony and national integration through various activities.
- The NFCH sponsors/conducts different activities for the promotion of communal harmony and strengthening of national integration.

2. TARGET OLYMPIC PODIUM SCHEME (TOPS)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About TOPS and NSDF.
- For Mains: Support to Indian athletes and teams for their participation in International sports events including forthcoming Tokyo Olympics 2020.

Context: The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports is implementing **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) within overall ambit of National Sports Development Fund (NSDF)** for providing financial assistance to elite athletes included in TOPS for their customized training in world class training institutes/academies within the country and abroad.

About the National Sports Development Fund:

- Established in 1998, under **Charitable Endowments Act 1890**, vide Government of India Notification dated 12th November 1998.

Functions:

- The NSDF supports sportspersons to excel in the field by providing opportunities to train under coaches of international repute with technical, scientific and psychological support and also in getting exposure to international competitions.

Know My India Programme:

- It is a unique programme initiated by the NFCH to bring together financially assisted children of the Foundation from different States/Regions of the country to promote oneness, fraternity and national integration.
- The programme is all about familiarization with the environment, family life, social customs, etc. of the people living in different parts of the country; developing understanding of the common historical and cultural heritage of the country.

- Financial assistance is also provided to specific projects for promotion of sports and games sponsored by reputed Organizations/Institutes, provided the facilities so created are made available to a sizeable population of the area/region.

The Council:

- The Fund is managed by a Council constituted by the Central Government.
- Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports is the Chairperson of the council.
- The Members of the Council include senior officers in the Department of Sports/Sports Authority of India.
- The representatives of the Apex industry organizations namely, FICCI, CII and ASSOCHAM have been included in the Council as members.
- The representatives of Sports Promotion Boards of reputed organizations are also members of the Council.
- Joint Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports is the ex-officio Member Secretary of the Council.

(Q) Do you think higher economic growth guarantees more medals in Olympic Games? In your opinion, what it takes for a country to do well at the Olympic Games? Discuss.

Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS):

- Launched by *Ministry of Sports within the ambit of National Sports Development Fund (NSDF)*.
- It *aims at identifying and supporting potential medal prospects* for upcoming Olympic Games.
- It will *provide selected sportspersons customized training at institutes having world class facilities and also other necessary support* is being provided to the elite athletes. It will also provide a benchmark for selection of athletes on par with international standards.
- Under it, *Sports Authority of India (SAI) and federations, which are members of Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), will be nodal agencies* for disbursal for fund. They will make payments directly to beneficiary person and institution concerned on behalf of athletes.

3. NATIONAL DEWORMING DAY (NDD)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: NDD- features and need, what is deworming and the need for it, and what are Intestinal parasitic worms?

Context: The *Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)* is conducting its eighth round of **National Deworming Day (NDD)**.

- NDD is observed bi-annually on 10th February and 10th August** in all states and UTs followed by mop-up activities. This year the NDD is being conducted on 8th February and mop up day on the 14th February.

About the National Deworming Day:

- The National Deworming Day is *a single fixed-day approach to treating intestinal worm infections in all children aged 1- 19 years*.
- It will *mobilize health personnel, state governments and other stakeholders* to prioritize investment in control of *Soil Transmitted Helminth (STH)* infections one of the most common infections.
- All the children are provided deworming tablet in schools and anganwadis. Besides the deworming tablet, various health promotion activities* related to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) are organised in schools and anganwadis.
- The NDD program is a cost-effective program at scale that continues to reach crores of children and adolescents with deworming benefits through a safe medicine **Albendazole**.

Background:

- India carries the highest burden of worm infestation and 64% of Indian population less than 14 years of age are at risk of Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) or worms' infestation (WHO).
- Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) interfere with nutrients uptake in children; can lead to anaemia, malnourishment and impaired mental and physical development.
- The situation of undernutrition and anaemia which is linked to STH ranges from 40% to 70% in different population groups across the country (WHO).
- They also pose a serious threat to children's education and productivity later in life.

About Intestinal parasitic worms:

- They are **large multicellular organisms**, which when mature can generally be seen with the naked eye. They are also known as Helminths.
- They are often referred to as intestinal worms even though not all helminths reside in the intestines.

Why this is a cause for concern?

1. Parasitic worms in children interfere with nutrient uptake, and can contribute to anaemia, malnourishment, and impaired mental and physical development. Parasitic worms have also debilitating consequences on the health and education of children, and on their long-term earning potential.
2. According to the 2012 report 'Children in India', published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 48% of children under the age of 5 years are stunted and 19.8% are wasted, indicating that half of the country's children are malnourished.

Significance of NDD:

- Anganwadi and school-based mass deworming program is safe, cost-effective, and can reach crores of children quickly. Deworming has been shown to reduce absenteeism in schools; improve health, nutritional, and learning outcomes; and increase the likelihood of higher-wage jobs later in life.
- Deworming with the safe and beneficial Albendazole tablet is an evidence-based, globally-accepted, and effective solution to controlling worm infections. National Deworming Day has, thus, been designed to reach all children, regardless of socio-economic background.

4. DRUGS TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD

What to study?

- For Prelims: About DTAB.
- For Mains: Why treat the below mentioned medical devices as drugs- need, concerns and significance.

Context: The Centre, in a notification, has said that **medical devices — all implantable devices, CT Scan, PET and MRI equipment, defibrillators, dialysis machines and bone marrow separators — will be treated as drugs for human beings** with effect from April 1, 2020.

- The decision was taken in consultation with the **Drugs Technical Advisory Board**.

What necessitates this move?

- Majority of medical devices are completely unregulated in India. With this move, all implantable devices and some diagnostic equipment will be brought into the regulatory framework which is important from a patient safety perspective.

Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB):

- DTAB is **highest statutory decision-making body on technical matters related to drugs** in the country. It is constituted as per the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- It is part of Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Sources: the hindu.

5. NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY WEEK

What to study?

- For Prelims: National Productivity Council (NPC) and National Productivity week.
- For Mains: Significance of National productivity week and objectives and role of NPC.

Context: **National Productivity Council (NPC), an autonomous registered society under Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce & Industry**, NPC is celebrating its 61st Foundation Day on 12th February with the theme "Circular Economy for Productivity & Sustainability".

- **NPC observes foundation day as Productivity Day and the National Productivity Week** from February 12-18, 2019.

Significance of the theme:

- This year theme represents a unique opportunity for **circular business model** for Make à Use à Return. It presents an opportunity for long term economic prospects and regeneration of materials.
- **Transitioning to an efficient circular economy will benefit industry and all stakeholders now and in future.**

What is circular economy and why is it important?

1. The circular economy follows the principle of **preservation and enhancement of natural capital by controlling finite stocks and balancing renewable resource flows**. The other principles suggest optimizing of resource yields by circulating products, components, and materials at their highest utility at all times, in both technical and biological cycles.
2. **Circular economy has the potential to increase productivity and create jobs, whilst reducing carbon emissions and preserving valuable raw materials.**
3. It **provides for a way of creating value**. It works by **extending product life span** through improved design and servicing and relocating waste from the end of the supply chain to the beginning – in effect, using resources more efficiently by using them over and over.

NPC:

- NPC is national level organization to **promote productivity culture in India**.
- **Established by the Ministry of Industry**, Government of India in 1958.
- It is an **autonomous, multipartite, non-profit organization** with equal representation from employers' & workers' organizations and Government, apart from technical & professional institutions and other interests.
- NPC is a **constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an Inter Governmental Body**, of which the Government of India is a founder member.
- **Functions:** NPC teams up with its clients to work out solutions towards accelerating productivity, enhancing competitiveness, increasing profits, augmenting safety and reliability and ensuring better quality. It provides reliable database for decision-making, improved systems and procedures, work culture as well as customer satisfaction both internal & external.

6. FORMALIN IN FISH

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Formalin in fish- why is used? Its effects, measures needed and the need for complete ban.

SOMETHING FISHY ABOUT IT

WHAT IS FORMALIN?

- Formalin (chemical formaldehyde in water), is a common adulterant used by traders and suppliers to extend the storage life of fish
- There is increasing use of formalin in freshwater fish sent from AP to northeastern states

ITS DANGERS

Ingesting large amounts of formaldehyde can cause abdominal pain, vomiting, coma, renal injury and possible death

HOW TO DEAL WITH IT?

- Wash fish thoroughly with running tap water
- Cook fish to a temperature of 75 degrees C
- Check fish for adulteration with a paper strip-based kit, 'CIFTTest'

SOME STATES AT SEA

Goa, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, TN, Kerala & Meghalaya

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

About Formalin:

- Formalin is a toxic, colourless solution that is derived by dissolving formaldehyde gas in water.
- It is a cancer-inducing chemical used to preserve fish and is used as a disinfectant. It is used in the manufacture of pesticides, fertilisers, glue, paper and paint, among other products.

- Formalin causes irritation in the eyes, throat, skin and stomach. In the long run continued exposure causes harm to the kidneys, liver and can even cause cancers.
- Formaldehyde is a highly reactive, flammable gas, which means it can become a fire hazard when exposed to flame or heat.

Why is fish laced with formalin?

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

Related facts- Operation Sagar Rani:

- In June 2018, Kerala food safety department officials seized nearly 9,600 kg of fish preserved in formalin at a border check post in Kollam district.
- The seized fish included 7,000 kg of prawns and 2,600 kg of other species. The seizure was part of 'Operation Sagar Rani' launched by the state.

Sources: the hindu.

7. TRANS FATTY ACIDS (TFA)

What to study?

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

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

- Various studies suggest that an unhealthy diet with a high TFA content is a significant factor that pushes up metabolic syndrome and the burden of its associated complications.
- The Health Department is being supported in this initiative by Vital Strategies, the nutrition wing of the World Bank; the WHO; the FSSAI; and the State Food Safety wing, which will be in charge of enforcement.

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.

What are 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.

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'. These are comparatively far lower in cost and thus add to profit/saving.

Permissible limit:

- ***WHO recommends that trans-fat intake be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake*** and has called for the total elimination of TFAs in global food supply by 2023. FSSAI has proposed to limit TFA limit in foods to 2% and eliminate trans fats from foods by 2022.

8. BLOOD-AVAILABILITY AND SAFETY

What's the issue now?

1. A ready supply of safe blood in sufficient quantities is a vital component of modern health care. However, in 2015-16, **India was 1.1 million units short of its blood requirements**.
2. There were considerable regional disparities, with **81 districts in the country not having a blood bank at all**.
3. Yet, in April 2017, **it was reported that blood banks in India had in the last five years discarded a total of 2.8 million units of expired, unused blood** (more than 6 lakh litres).

Concerns over safety and quality of the blood being received:

- Blood is received through **professional donation** (who accept remuneration) and **replacement donation** (which is not voluntary). Blood is **also donated voluntarily** and without remuneration and it is considered to be the safest.
- To prevent **transfusion-transmitted infections (TTIs)**, collected blood needs to be safe as well. Due to practical constraints, tests are only conducted post-collection. Thus blood donor selection relies on donors filling in health questionnaires truthfully.
- **In the case of professional donors there is a higher chance of there being TTIs** in their blood, as these donors may not provide full disclosure.
- In the case of replacement donation, there **could be a higher chance of TTI's because replacement donors**, being under pressure, may be less truthful about diseases.
- Even the conducted test may not be fool-proof. These tests may not be **fool proof as there is a window period after a person first becomes infected with a virus during which the infection may not be detectable**. This makes it crucial to minimise the risk in the first instance of collection. Collecting healthy blood will also result in less blood being discarded later.

How is it regulated?

- **Blood is considered to be a 'drug' under the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940**. Therefore, just like any other manufacturer or storer of drugs, blood banks need to be licensed by the Drug Controller-General of India (DCGI). For this, they need to meet a series of requirements with respect to the collection, storage, processing and distribution of blood, as specified under the Drugs & Cosmetics Rules, 1945.
- **Blood banks are inspected by drug inspectors who are expected to check not only the premises and equipment** but also various quality and medical aspects such as processing and testing facilities. Their findings lead to the issuance, suspension or cancellation of a licence.

Governance issues:

- The regulatory framework which governs the blood transfusion infrastructure in India is **scattered across different laws, policies, guidelines and authorities**.
- In 1996, the Supreme Court directed the government to establish the **National Blood Transfusion Council (NBTC) and State Blood Transfusion Councils (SBTCs)**. The NBTC functions as the apex policy-formulating and expert body for blood transfusion services and includes representation from blood banks. However, **it lacks statutory backing (unlike the DCGI), and as such, the standards and requirements recommended by it are only in the form of guidelines**.
- This gives rise to a peculiar situation — the expert blood transfusion body can **only issue non-binding guidelines**, whereas the general pharmaceutical regulator has the power to license blood banks. This regulatory dissonance exacerbates the serious issues on the ground and results in poor coordination and monitoring.

Need of the hour:

- The present scenario under the DCGI is far from desirable, especially given how regulating blood involves distinct considerations when compared to most commercial drugs.
- In order to ensure the involvement of technical experts who can complement the DCGI, **the rules should be amended to involve the NBTC and SBTCs in the licensing process**.

- Given the wide range of responsibilities the DCGI has to handle, ***its licensing role with respect to blood banks can even be delegated to the NBTC under the rules***. This would go a long way towards ensuring that the regulatory scheme is up to date and accommodates medical and technological advances.
- A collaborative regulator can, more effectively, take the lead in facilitating coordination, planning and management.*** This may reduce the regional disparities in blood supply as well as ensure that the quality of blood does not vary between private, corporate, international, hospital-based, non-governmental organisations and government blood banks.

Conclusion:

- The aim of the National Blood Policy formulated by the government back in 2002 was to “ensure easily accessible and adequate supply of safe and quality blood”. To achieve this goal, India should look to reforming its regulatory approach at the earliest.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/every-drop-matters/article26261466.ece>.

9. WHO ISSUES NEW INTERNATIONAL STANDARD FOR MUSIC DEVICES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key guidelines and significance of these guidelines.

Context: The ***World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)*** have issued a new ***international standard for the manufacture and use of musical devices***.

- The ***aim behind the move is to prevent young people from going deaf***.

Among other things, the standard recommends:

- Sound allowance” function:*** software that tracks the level and duration of the user’s exposure to sound as a percentage used of a reference exposure.
- Personalised profile:*** an individualized listening profile, based on the user’s listening practices, which informs the user of how safely (or not) he or she has been listening and gives cues for action based on this information.
- Volume limiting options:*** options to limit the volume, including automatic volume reduction and parental volume control.
- General information:*** information and guidance to users on safe listening practices, both through personal audio devices and for other leisure activities.
- The WHO has recommended that ***governments and manufacturers adopt the standard***. It has also called on civil society organisations, particularly professional associations that promote hearing care, to play a role in advocating for the standard.

What necessitated this?

- Nearly 50% of people aged 12-35 years — or 1.1 billion young people — are at risk of hearing loss due to prolonged and excessive exposure to loud sounds, including music they listen to through personal audio devices.
- Over five per cent of the world’s population — or 466 million people — has disabling hearing loss; impacting on their quality of life. The majority live in low- and middle-income countries.
- It is estimated that by 2050, over 900 million people — or 1 in every 10 people — will have disabling hearing loss. Hearing loss which is not addressed poses an annual global cost of \$750 billion. Overall, it is suggested that half of all cases of hearing loss can be prevented through public health measures.

Sources: down to earth.

10. ‘PREVALENCE AND EXTENT OF SUBSTANCE USE IN INDIA’- SURVEY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: The problem of drug and substance abuse in the country- concerns, challenges and need for a robust policy.

Context: A survey was conducted recently on consumption of substances in India. The survey was **conducted by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry in collaboration with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)**.

- The survey covered general population (10-75 years), in all the 36 states and union territories covering over 2 lakh households and 4.73 lakh people in 186 districts of the country.

Key findings and highlights of the survey:

1. **India is home to six crore alcohol addicts**, more than the population of 172 world nations including Italy.
2. Alcoholism is a condition that requires medical attention, but unfortunately only **less than 3% of the people with drinking problem get any treatment**.
3. **There is a large number of people in the country addicted to various drugs**. More than 3.1 crore Indians (2.8%) have reported using cannabis products, Bhang, Ganja, Charas, Heroin and Opium, in last one year. Unfortunately only one in 20 drug addicts gets treatment at a hospital.
4. **Country liquor accounts for 30% of the total liquor consumption**, and Indian made foreign liquor also account for the same amount.
5. In Punjab and Sikkim, the prevalence of cannabis use disorders is considerably higher (more than thrice) than the national average.
6. At the national level, **Heroin is most commonly used substance followed by pharmaceutical opioids**, followed by opium (Afeem).
7. **Less than 1% or nearly 1.18 crore people use sedatives, non medical or non prescription use**. However, what is more worrying that its prevalence is high among children and adolescents. This problem of addiction of children is more prevalent in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi and Haryana.
8. Cocaine (0.10%) Amphetamine Type Stimulants (0.18%) and Hallucinogens (0.12%) are the categories with lowest prevalence of current use in the country.

What has the government done in this regard?

- The Government has taken several policy and other initiatives to deal with drug trafficking problem.
- It constituted **Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD)** in November, 2016 and revived the scheme of "Financial Assistance to States for Narcotics Control".
- In 2017, the government approved new **Reward Guidelines with increased quantum of reward for interdiction or seizure of different illicit drugs**.
- For effective coordination with foreign countries, **India has signed 37 Bilateral Agreements/Memoranda of Understanding**.
- **Narcotics Control Bureau** has been provided funds for developing a new software i.e. Seizure Information Management System (SIMS) which will create a complete online database of drug offences and offenders.
- The government has constituted a fund called "**National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse**" to meet the expenditure incurred in connection with combating illicit traffic in Narcotic Drugs; rehabilitating addicts, and educating public against drug abuse, etc.
- The government is also conducting **National Drug Abuse Survey** to measure trends of drug abuse in India through Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment with the help of National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of AIIMS.
- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has drafted **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (2018-2023)** for addressing the problem of drug and substance abuse in the country, dumping a long-pending draft policy on the matter.

11. INDIA TO PARTICIPATE IN PISA 2021

What to study?

- For Prelims: PISA- Key facts.
- For Mains: Why India stayed away from PISA for years and issues associated.

Context: Cabinet has given ex-post facto approval to the **Agreement between India and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for participating in the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA)**, which will be conducted by the OECD in 2021. The Agreement was signed on 28th January 2019.

Significance:

- India's participation in PISA- 2021 would lead to recognition and acceptability of Indian students and prepare them for the global economy in the 21st century.

Background:

- India had taken part in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries. Then UPA government had boycotted PISA, blaming "out of context" questions for India's dismal performance.
- Later, the HRD Ministry, under the NDA-II government, revisited this decision in 2016 and the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) had set up a committee to review the matter and submitted its report in December 2016. The report recommended for participation in test in 2018. However, India missed the application deadline for the 2018 cycle.

About the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):

It is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years.

- First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle. PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving.
- By design, PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.
- PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries, and is conducted in the United States by NCES. Data collection for the most recent assessment was completed in Fall 2015.
- In 2012 PISA test, schools of Shanghai in China topped reading, mathematics and science test, followed closely by Singapore. In 2015, Singapore, Japan and Estonia were ranked as top three countries, in that order.

12. KISAN URJA SURAKSHA EVAM UTTHAAN MAHABHIYAN

What to study?

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

Context: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved launch of *Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan* with the objective of providing financial and water security to farmers.

The proposed scheme consists of three components:

1. Component-A: 10,000 MW of Decentralized Ground Mounted Grid Connected Renewable Power Plants.
2. Component-B: Installation of 17.50 lakh standalone Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.
3. Component-C: Solarisation of 10 Lakh Grid-connected Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.

All three components combined, the scheme aims to add a solar capacity of 25,750 MW by 2022. The total central financial support provided under the scheme would be Rs. 34,422 crore.

Key facts:

- Under Component A, Renewable power plants of capacity 500 KW to 2 MW will be setup by individual farmers/ cooperatives/panchayats /farmer producer organisations (FPO) on their barren or cultivable lands. The power generated will be purchased by the DISCOMs at Feed in tariffs determined by respective SERC. The scheme will open a stable and continuous source of income to the rural land owners.
- Under Component C of the scheme, individual farmers will be supported to solarise pumps of capacity up to 7.5 HP. The farmer will be able to use the generated energy to meet the irrigation needs and the excess available energy will be sold to DISCOM. This will help to create an avenue for extra income to the farmers, and for the States to meet their RPO targets.
- For both Component-B and Component-C, central financial assistance (CFA) of 30% of the benchmark cost or the tender cost, whichever is lower, will be provided. The State Government will give a subsidy of 30%; and the remaining 40% will be provided by the farmer. Bank finance may be made available for meeting 30%

of the cost. The remaining 10% will be provided by the farmer. Higher CFA of 50% will be provided for North Eastern States, Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Lakshadweep and A&N Islands.

Significance of the scheme:

- **The Scheme will have substantial environmental impact in terms of savings of CO₂ emissions.** All three components of the Scheme combined together are likely to result in saving of about 27 million tonnes of CO₂ emission per annum. Further, Component-B of the Scheme on standalone solar pumps may result in saving of 1.2 billion liters of diesel per annum and associated savings in the foreign exchange due to reduction of import of crude oil.
- **The scheme has direct employment potential.** Besides increasing self-employment the proposal is likely to generate employment opportunity equivalent to 6.31 lakh job years for skilled and unskilled workers.

13. OPERATION DIGITAL BOARD

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of ODB.
- For Mains: Significance and potential of the project.

Context: Union Human Resource Development Ministry has launched **Operation Digital Board** to leverage technology in order to boost quality education in the country.

Significance and benefits:

1. Operation Digital Board is a revolutionary step which will make the learning as well as the teaching process interactive and popularize flipped learning as a pedagogical approach.
2. It will also help in provisioning of personalised adaptive learning as well as Intelligent Tutoring by exploiting emerging technologies like Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics.

Operation Digital Board:

- ODB aims at converting a class room into a **digital class room** and provide e-resources at any time and at any place to students.
- The digital board will be introduced all over the country in government and government aided schools from class 9th onwards as well as in higher education institutions.
- The Operation Digital Board (ODB) will be implemented in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Need for such initiatives:

- The biggest challenge facing education sector in the country is maintaining acceptable quality standards across the country.
- Although we have good number of premier institutions, which compete with the best in the world, a large number of higher education institutions and schools needs improvements in quality teaching-learning, as the students coming out of these institutions find themselves unsuitable for the requirements of the society and market.
- The spread of educational technology and connectivity has given an opportunity to resolve this issue and aim at equity in educational standards.

14. SKILL SAATHI YOUTH CONCLAVE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Skill Saathi Youth initiative- Key features, implementation and significance.
- For Mains: Need for skilling, challenges and various initiatives in this regard.

Context: Nua Odisha, Dharmapada Samvaad-Skill Saathi Youth Conclave was recently held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

- The Skill Saathi initiative has so far mobilised and counselled over 1 lakh candidate in

Skill Saathi Scheme:

- The Skills Career Counselling Scheme aims to counsel 1 crore candidates from the age group of 15– 35 years focusing on School & College drop-outs, young adults from the community, college students, polytechnic students, ITI students, Diploma students, Graduates, Post-Graduates, NEET category (Not in Employment education or Training), etc. pan India from August 2018.
- **Counselling** will be conducted on a standardized module/content as defined by NSDC/MSDE.

Odisha and over 10 lakh youth across the country in the past three months.

Objectives of the Skill Saathi Scheme:

- Create Awareness about the Skill India Mission and inform the youth of India about vocational education and its opportunities.
- Sensitize prospective candidates about available Market Opportunities under the Skill India Mission.
- Facilitate Psychometric Testing and Face-To-Face Counselling Interventions to create an individual-level impact to guide aspirants to make the right choice of training and subsequent employment/entrepreneurship.
- Facilitate Understanding of the concepts of New India, the prospects of India becoming the Skill Capital of the World and how the new generation of youth can become drivers of change.

15. ATAL INNOVATION MISSION (AIM)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of Atal Innovation Mission, ATLs.
- For Mains: Promotion of innovation at global level and efforts by India in this regard.

Context: NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and Adobe have signed a Statement of Intent (SOI) to collectively drive the charter of developing creative skills and spreading digital literacy across all Atal Tinkering Labs in India.

Key facts:

- As per MoU, Adobe shall be adopting 100 schools under Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) initiative.
- Adobe shall be implementing its Digital Disha Program in ATLs, under which free licenses of Adobe Spark premium shall be offered to ATLs.
- **Launched in 2018, the Adobe Digital Disha Programme is aimed at driving synergies in creative thinking and technology-based learning.**

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.

About AIM:

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is the Government of India's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

- AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country and revolutionizing the innovation eco-system – touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.

The Atal Innovation Mission shall have two core functions:

1. Entrepreneurship promotion through ***Self-Employment and Talent Utilization***, wherein innovators would be supported and mentored to become successful entrepreneurs.
2. ***Innovation promotion***: to provide a platform where innovative ideas are generated.

(Q) The ASER report highlights that there is a need for innovation in education sector in India. Comment.

16. SCHEME FOR HIGHER EDUCATION YOUTH IN APPRENTICESHIP AND SKILLS (SHREYAS)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the scheme.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme and the need for skilling the youth.

Context: The Ministry of Human Resources Development has launched the ***Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS)*** for providing industry apprenticeship opportunities to the general graduates exiting in April 2019 through the National Apprenticeship Promotional Scheme (NAPS).

What is it?

- SHREYAS is a programme basket comprising the initiatives of three Central Ministries, namely the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and the Ministry of Labour & Employment viz the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS), the National Career Service (NCS) and introduction of BA/BSc/BCom (Professional) courses in the higher educational institutions.
- SHREYAS is a programme conceived for students in degree courses, primarily non-technical, with a view to introduce employable skills into their learning, promote apprenticeship as integral to education and also amalgamate employment facilitating efforts of the Government into the education system so that clear pathways towards employment opportunities are available to students during and after their graduation.

Aim: To enhance the employability of Indian youth by providing 'on the job work exposure' and earning of stipend.

Target: In all the tracks together, it is proposed to cover 50 lakh students by 2022.

Following are the objectives of SHREYAS:

- To improve employability of students by introducing employment relevance into the learning process of the higher education system.
- To forge a close functional link between education and industry/service sectors on a sustainable basis.
- To provide skills which are in demand, to the students in a dynamic manner.
- To establish an 'earn while you learn' system into higher education.
- To help business/industry in securing good quality manpower.
- To link student community with employment facilitating efforts of the Government.

Operation of the Scheme:

- The primary scheme will be operated in conjunction with National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) which provides for placing of apprentices upto 10% of the total work force in every business/industry.
- The scheme will be implemented by the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), initially the Banking Finance Insurance Services (BFSI), Retail, Health care, Telecom, Logistics, Media, Management services, ITeS and Apparel. More sectors would be added over time with emerging apprenticeship demand and curriculum adjustments.

Significance of the scheme:

- Education with skills is the need of the hour and the SHREYAS will be a major effort in this direction to make degree students more skilled, capable, employable and aligned to the needs of our economy so that they contribute to country's progress and also obtain gainful employment.

17. YUVA SAHAKAR-COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISE SUPPORT AND INNOVATION SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the scheme, NCDC.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme of the role of youth in cooperatives, hurdles and measures needed.

Context: To cater to the needs and aspirations of the youth, the **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) has launched a youth-friendly scheme ‘Yuva Sahakar-Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme’** for attracting them to cooperative business ventures.

Key features of the scheme:

- The scheme would encourage cooperatives to venture into new and innovative areas.
- NCDC has created a dedicated fund with liberal features enabling youth to avail the scheme. The scheme will be linked to Rs 1000 crore '**Cooperative Start-up and Innovation Fund (CSIF)**' created by the NCDC. It would have more incentives for cooperatives of North Eastern region, Aspirational Districts and cooperatives with women or SC or ST or PwD members.
- The funding for the project will be up to 80% of the project cost for these special categories as against 70% for others. The scheme envisages 2% less than the applicable rate of interest on term loan for the project cost up to Rs 3 crore including 2 years moratorium on payment of principal. All types of cooperatives in operation for at least one year are eligible.

About NCDC:

- National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) was established by an Act of Parliament in 1963 as **a statutory Corporation under Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**. It has many regional centres to provide the financial assistance to Cooperatives/Societies/Federations.

18. OXYTOCIN BAN

What to study?

- For Prelims: Oxytocin related facts.
- For Mains: Why was it banned? Concerns associated with the ban? What's the way out?

Context: Indian Medical Association has said **Karnataka Antibiotics and Pharmaceuticals Ltd (KAPL)** neither has the experience nor the capacity to handle Oxytocin production.

What's the issue?

- The Delhi high court had quashed the Centre's December 14, 2018 notification, which had banned its sale by private manufacturers and retail chemists, saying the sale was allowed.
- Essentially, this meant that only KAPL could produce the drug as there is no other public sector enterprise doing so. However, Delhi high court quashed the amended order too. The central government moved Supreme Court against the Delhi high court order.

Oxytocin:

1. Oxytocin has also been dubbed the hug hormone, cuddle chemical, moral molecule, and the bliss hormone due to its effects on behavior, including its role in love and in female reproductive biological functions in reproduction.
2. Oxytocin is a hormone that is made in the brain, in the hypothalamus. It is transported to, and secreted by, the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain.
3. It acts both as a hormone and as a brain neurotransmitter.
4. The release of oxytocin by the pituitary gland acts to regulate two female reproductive functions: Childbirth and Breast-feeding.

What's the concern now?

- KAPL has said bulk production of the drug would take three-four years. **This would put lives of many pregnant women at risk as it would lead to acute shortages.**
- With the ban, the government did not adequately weigh in the danger of its order to the users of oxytocin, nor consider the deleterious effect of possible restricted supply if manufacture is confined to one unit on pregnant women and young mothers.

What can be done?

- **Strict control on illegal imports of the drug:** Most of the veterinary use comes from illegal import of oxytocin from neighbouring countries.
- The misuse could be prevented through strict control in sale and end use of the drug especially prevention through clandestine channels.

Reasons behind the ban are:

1. Misuse in dairy industry: Oxytocin is a naturally-occurring hormone that causes uterine contractions during labour and helps new mothers lactate. However, the drug is misused in the dairy industry where livestock is injected with Oxytocin to make them release milk at a time convenient to farmers.
2. Oxytocin is also used to increase the size of vegetables such as pumpkins, watermelons, eggplants, gourds, and cucumbers.

Sources: down to earth.

Topics: 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. PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights, significance and the need for such programmes.

Context: Given the need to orient potential migrant workers with regard to language, culture, do's and don'ts in the destination country, the emigration process and welfare measures, a **Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) programme** has been launched.

Key facts:

- The **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in collaboration with Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is conducting the PDOT programme under the Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY).**
- The **National Skill Development Corporation is the implementing agency** for this programme.

About NSDC:

- National Skill Development Corporation India (NSDC), established in 2009, is **a not-for-profit company set up by the Ministry of Finance.**
- NSDC aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.

Functions:

- It provides funding to build scalable and profitable vocational training initiatives.
- Its mandate is also to enable support system which focuses on quality assurance, information systems and train the trainer academies either directly or through partnerships.
- It also develops appropriate models to enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives.

Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY):

1. The Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY) is aimed **at skilling Indians seeking employment abroad.**
2. The programme is also **aimed at boosting the confidence of the Indian youth** so that they don't feel like strangers when they land in a country of their choice for vocation.
3. PKVY will train and certify Indians, who are keen on overseas employment in select sectors, in line with international standards.
4. **It will be implemented by the National Skill Development Corporation** through its training partners and in consultation with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Skill Development Ministry.

2. RULES TO ALLOW EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN MINES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights, need and significance of these rules.

Context: In exercise of the power conferred under Mines Act, 1952, **the Central Government has exempted the women employed in any mine above ground and in any mine below ground from the provisions of section 46 of the Mines Act, 1952.**

However, it is subject to the following conditions, namely:

In the case of women employed in any mine above ground:

1. The owner of a mine may deploy women between the hours of 7 pm and 6 am in the mine above ground including opencast workings;
2. the deployment of women shall be after obtaining the written consent of the concerned woman employee;
3. the women so deployed shall be provided with adequate facilities and safeguards regarding occupational safety, security and health;
4. the deployment of women shall be subject to the framing and implementation of Standard Operating Procedures on the basis of the guidelines issued in this regard by the Chief Inspector of Mines from time to time;
5. the deployment of women shall be in a group of not less than three in a shift.

In the case of women employed in any mine below ground:

1. the owner of a mine may deploy women between the hours of 6 am and 7 pm in technical, supervisory and managerial work where continuous presence may not be required.
2. the deployment of women shall be after obtaining the written consent of the concerned woman employee;
3. the women so deployed shall be provided with adequate facilities and safeguards regarding occupational safety, security and health;
4. the deployment of women shall be subject to the framing and implementation of Standard Operating Procedures on the basis of the guidelines issued in this regard by the Chief Inspector of Mines from time to time;
5. the deployment of women shall be in a group of not less than three.

Background:

- The **Mines Act, 1952, restricted the employment of women in underground mines and also in opencast or aboveground workings of the mine during night hours** between 7PM and 6AM.
- Several women employees groups, industry and students enrolled with various institutions pursuing mining engineering courses at degree and diploma levels have been representing to the government at different forum that **women should be provided equal employment opportunity for working in mines**. Requests from Mining Companies were also received.

3. RASHTRIYA VAYOSHRI YOJANA (RVY)

What to study?

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

Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana:

- The Scheme aims at providing Senior Citizens, belonging to BPL category and suffering from any of the age related disability/infirmity Low vision, Hearing impairment, Loss of teeth and Locomotor disability, with such **assisted-living devices** which can restore near normalcy in their bodily functions, overcoming the disability/infirmity manifested.
 1. This is a **Central Sector Scheme**, fully funded by the Central Government. The expenditure for implementation of the scheme will be met from the "**Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund**".
 2. Under the scheme, **free of cost distribution of the devices**, commensurate with the extent of disability/infirmity that is manifested among the eligible senior citizens will take place.
 3. **In case of multiple disabilities/infirmities** manifested in the same person, the assistive devices will be given in respect of each disability/impairment.

4. Beneficiaries in each district will be *identified by the State Governments/UT Administrations through a Committee chaired by the Deputy Commissioner/District Collector.*
5. As far as possible, *30% of the beneficiaries in each district shall be women.*

Way ahead:

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

(Q) Discuss the features and prospects of recent policies meant to provide better social and economic security to India's growing population of senior citizens.

4. DELHI GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES 'ZERO FATALITY CORRIDOR'

What to study?

- For Prelims: 'zero fatality corridor'- features and significance, action plan proposed.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for such corridors.

Context: The Delhi government has kicked off its pilot project of creating Delhi's first '*zero fatality corridor*'. It has also issued *actionable points to all agencies to ensure a 10% reduction in road accidents by the end of the year.*

- As per the government's plan, a 3km stretch between Burari Chowk and Bhalswa chowk will be taken as a case study* for scientific assessment of accidents, road engineering, road-user engagement and for checking police enforcement and rapid emergency care.
- The aim is to reduce fatalities to near zero levels on this particular stretch.

Action plan for 2019:

- This is first-ever Annual Action Plan for 2019 to ensure greater road safety in the national capital.
- The plan includes conducting a host of audits such as studying and identifying unsafe roads, transportation of schoolchildren, road signage, emergency care service and enforcement activities of agencies.
- The plan, mandatory under Delhi's first 'road safety policy' released last year, is in line with the Delhi government's plan to reduce fatalities due to road crashes by 30% by 2020. It binds all agencies — transport, public works department, health, education and Delhi traffic police — to a year-round set of actions to reduce road fatalities in Delhi.
- All district magistrates will ensure footpaths are continuous and encroachment-free. An action taken report will have to be submitted by all DMs monthly. The road safety cell will also contribute in improving traffic engineering. The South Delhi Municipal Corporation has been made the nodal agency for this.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Should road accidents in India be called national crisis? What measures should be taken to address increasing number of deaths due to road accidents? Also critically comment on the steps taken by state and union governments in this regard.

5. UJJWALA UTSAV

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Ujjwala Utsav, PMUY, PMUY anthem.
- For Mains: PMUY- objectives, features, significance and measures needed to sustain the momentum.

Context: *Ujjwala Utsav* observed recently *to celebrate the stellar role played by various stakeholders in making PMUY a success.*

- The event was *organised under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas* to encourage, motivate as well as felicitate all frontline field force for their outstanding contribution to PMUY.
- The occasion also saw the launch of the *PMUY anthem – Ujjwala Bharat Ujjwala* – composed and developed by eminent singer and film industry personality Padma Shri Kailash Kher.

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

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

Way ahead:

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

(Q) It is said that the real test of the PMUY and its successor programmes will be in how they translate the provision of connections to sustained use of LPG or other clean fuels such as electricity or biogas. For this which issues need to be addressed? Also discuss the significance of PMUY.

6. ARUNDHATI SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the scheme, do we really need such schemes?

Context: The government of Assam has announced a new scheme called **Arundhati to provide gold at free of cost to the brides.**

Key features:

- Under the scheme, the government of Assam aims to provide **1 Tola Gold to brides belonging to all such communities of Assam where it is customary to provide gold at the time of the wedding.**
- **The scheme is named after Arundhati, wife of great sage Basistha.** The government has set aside **Rs 300 cr** has been for the implementation of the Arundhati Scheme.
- The benefit under Arundhati scheme can be availed upon **formal registration of marriages under Special Marriage (Assam) Rules, 1954.**
- **The scheme is limited for economically weaker sections, whose annual income is below Rs 5 lakh.**

Significance of the scheme:

- Gold forms an inherent part of Indian weddings. With the introduction of the Arundhati Scheme, the government wants to stand with those fathers who cannot afford to gift a set of gold ornaments to their daughters and would resort to borrowings and put themselves in the vicious cycle of debt.

Sources: the hindu.

About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

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

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

Key objectives of the scheme are:

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

7. 'GIVEITUP' CAMPAIGN

What to study?

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

Context: As on 06.02.2019, nearly 1.04 crore LPG consumers have voluntarily surrendered their LPG subsidy under '*'GiveItUp' campaign*'.

About the campaign:

- 'Give it Up' scheme encourages well-to-do households to voluntarily give up their liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) subsidy so that it could be targeted to the poor who remain reliant on polluting cooking fuels such as wood, dung, crop residues and coal.
- The money surrendered under this movement will be utilised for poor to get LPG connection in rural as well as in urban areas who are still using firewood for cooking.

8. REGISTRATION OF MARRIAGE OF NRI BILL, 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Bill.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for a legislation on this.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the introduction of *Registration of Marriage of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) Bill, 2019* to create more accountability to Indian citizens living abroad.

- Objective of the bill:** To offer more protection against the exploitation of Indian citizens, mostly Indian women by their NRI partners.

Key provisions:

- Amendment of the legal framework** to act as a deterrent to the erring NRI spouses and creating more accountability and offer protection against exploitation of Indian Citizens, especially women married to NRIs.
- Registration:** Under the new bill, a marriage between an NRI and an Indian citizen will have to be registered in India or Indian missions and posts abroad within 30 days from the date of marriage. If the marriage isn't registered within 30 days, the passport of the NRI will be revoked, summons and warrant be issued.
- Section 86A:** After the bill's passing, the *necessary changes would be carried out in the Passports Act, 1967 and Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 by insertion of Section 86A*.
- The bill would amend the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, solving a major problem of serving judicial summons for court proceedings in India.

Significance and impact of the legislation:

- The Bill would offer *great protection to Indian citizens married to NRIs and serve as a deterrent to NRIs against harassment of their spouses*.

Need for a legislation on this:

- The bill has been introduced with the hope of restricting NRI husbands from using marriage as a tool of exploitation and making money and providing better enforcement of rights for the deserted woman under the family laws.
- The introduction of the Bill was necessitated due to numerous complaints received from Indian nationals mostly women, who were deserted or harassed by their Non-Resident Indian Spouses.
- Since marriage takes place outside India, there are no records or legal documents for further procedures to be initiated against the offender.

9. PERSONAL LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Bill and about Leprosy.

- For Mains: Significance and the need for a legislation on this, social taboo associated with leprosy and the need for its elimination.

Context: The Parliament has passed the **Personal Laws (Amendment Bill), 2018** that seeks to remove leprosy as a ground for divorce. Leprosy is being removed as a ground for divorce as it is now a curable disease as against the earlier notion of it being incurable.

Objectives of the bill:

1. To uphold the rights of people with leprosy as the disease is curable.
2. To amend five personal laws- the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939, Divorce Act (for Christians) 1869, Special Marriage Act 1954 and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956- to remove leprosy as a ground for divorce.

Various efforts in this regard:

1. The first attempt towards eliminating the bias against people suffering from the disease was made in 2008 when the **National Human Rights Commission had underlined the need to make amendments in certain personal laws and other legislations**.
2. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Resolution on the '**Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members**', which was signed and ratified by India.
3. Subsequently, the **20th Law Commission of India in its 256th Report titled "Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons Affected by Leprosy"** had recommended repeal of laws and provisions that were discriminatory against leprosy-affected people.
4. In 2014, **the Supreme Court had also asked the Centre and the state governments to take the necessary steps for rehabilitation and integration of leprosy-affected people** into the mainstream including the steps to repeal the provisions where leprosy has been treated as a stigmatic disability.

Need for a legislation in this regard:

- **Over 110 Central and State laws discriminate against leprosy patients.** These laws stigmatise and isolate leprosy patients and, coupled with age-old beliefs about leprosy, cause the patients untold suffering.
- **The biased provisions in these statutes were introduced prior to medical advancements.** Now, modern medicine specifically, **multi-drug therapy (MDT)** completely cures the disease.

10. PRADHAN MANTRI SHRAM YOGI MAAN-DHAN YOJANA

What to study?

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

Context: The Union **Ministry of Labour and Employment has launched the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana (PM-SYM)**, a mega pension scheme for unorganised sector. The scheme was announced in the Interim Budget 2019.

Eligibility:

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

Leprosy:

- Leprosy is a **chronic infectious disease caused by Mycobacterium leprae**. It usually affects the skin and peripheral nerves, but has a wide range of clinical manifestations.
- The disease is characterized by long incubation period generally 5-7 years and is classified as paucibacillary or multibacillary, depending on the bacillary load. Leprosy is a leading cause of permanent physical disability.
- **Timely diagnosis and treatment of cases**, before nerve damage has occurred, is the most effective way of preventing disability due to leprosy.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana:

- PM-SYM is a **voluntary and contributory pension scheme** that will engage as many as 42 crore workers in the unorganised sector.

Benefits:

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

Contribution to the scheme:

- **Contribution by the Subscriber:** The subscriber is required to contribute the prescribed contribution amount from the age of joining the scheme till the age of 60 years.
- **Medium of contribution:** The subscriber can contribute to the PM-SYM through 'auto-debit' facility from his or her savings bank account or from his or her Jan-Dhan account.
- **Equal contribution by the Central Government:** Under the PM-SYM, the prescribed age-specific contribution by the beneficiary and the matching contribution by the Central Government will be made on a '50:50 basis'.

11. DEENDAYAL DISABLED REHABILITATION SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features and significance of the scheme.

Context: For the overall empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangajan), a "**Regional Conference on Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)**" is being organized by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India at Kolkata, West Bengal.

- **The stakeholders** i.e. the NGOs receiving grant under DDRS, State Government Officers & District level officers will be participating.

Objectives of the conference:

1. To disseminate the provisions of the revised scheme and to sensitize various stake holders about it.
2. To provide a unique opportunity for interactions amongst all stakeholders.
3. To ensure exchange of cross-sectoral views on the aspects of the efficacy of the scheme as well as the scope of improvements in it.

Approach and Strategy:

- The approach of this Scheme is **to provide financial assistance to voluntary organizations to make available the whole range of services necessary for rehabilitation of persons with disabilities** including early intervention, development of daily living skills, education, skill-development oriented towards employability, training and awareness generation.
- With a view to inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream of society and actualizing their potential, **the thrust would be on education and training programmes**.

(Q) Do you think governments have done complete justice to the country's estimated 2.68 crore disabled people? Critically comment on existing policies on disabled people and measures need to be taken to empower them, especially in providing employment.

Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS):

"Scheme to Promote Voluntary Action for Persons with Disabilities" was revised and renamed as the "**Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)**".

The objectives of the scheme are:

1. To create an enabling environment to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
2. To encourage voluntary action for ensuring effective implementation of the People with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and Protection of Rights) Act of 1995.
3. Opportunities and Protection of Rights) Act of 1995.

12. INITIATIVES ON WOMEN'S SAFETY CONCEPTUALIZED BY THE WCD MINISTRY

What to study?

- For Prelims: Overview of the initiatives launched.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for such initiatives, other measures necessary to ensure safety of women.

Context: The Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched three important initiatives on women's safety. They are:

1. Panic button.
2. SCIM portal under Safe City Project.
3. DNA Analysis Facilities in States.

1. Panic button:

- Conceived way back in 2015, mobile phone manufacturers and mobile telephony service providers were mandated by the Ministry of Telecom to include a physical panic button on all mobile phones in the country. Such a panic button must be backed by an emergency response mechanism through the local police when panic button message would alert the specified family members etc. of a woman in distress situation. The emergency response system can be triggered in the following manners:
 - On the smart phones, the power button when pressed three times quickly.
 - Dialing 112 from any phone.
 - In case of feature phones, long press of the touch key 5 or 9.
 - Using 112 India Mobile App.
- The emergency message coming out of the above modes, will trigger a response from the emergency response centre through a team of trained personnel who can handle emergency requests of various kinds and get the necessary relief services launched.

2. SCIM portal under Safe City Project:

- Being implemented in 8 cities, the project includes creation on ground assets & resources and mindset safety of women. Some of the key features of the safe city project include:
 - Identification of sensitive hot spots in each city.
 - Installation of CCTV surveillance covering the entire hot spot.
 - Automated number plate reading machines to be deployed in extremely sensitive areas.
 - Intensive patrolling in vulnerable areas beyond the identified hot spots.
 - Improving street lighting and public toilet facilities for women.
 - Others like setting up women help desks in police stations, augmentation of women support centres etc.
- All the above measures would be coordinated through an Integrated Smart Control Room in the city. In order to facilitate States to monitor and manage the Safe City projects and avoid duplication on ground, an online Safe City Implementation Monitoring (SCIM) portal has been developed by MHA.
- SCIM will facilitate online tracking of deployment of assets and infrastructure created under the Safe City projects. SCIM facilitates an evidence based online monitoring system. SCIM also creates a digital repository of assets, infrastructure and social outreach programs, as well as best practices achieved in each City.

3. DNA Analysis Facilities in States:

- In view of the complaints of delay in cases of sexual assault investigations, it was proposed that dedicated DNA analysis facilities should be created in the forensic science laboratories on a mission mode.
- Timely testing of DNA samples from the crime scene is the quickest process of obtaining forensic evidence in cases of sexual assault on women.
- In the initial phase, dedicated DNA analysis facilities have been sanctioned for the forensic science laboratories located at Chennai, Madurai, Agra, Lucknow, Mumbai and Kolkata.

(Q) There is increasing concern about women's safety in cities over the past few years. How can technology be used to ensure safety of women in cities ? Examine.

13. 'VISION ZERO' CONCEPT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: What is Vision Zero concept? Its relevance for India and significance.

Context: '*International Vision Zero Conference*' to Promote Occupational Safety and Health is being held in Mumbai.

- The conference provides **a forum for promoting safety and health at work by exchanging knowledge, practices and experience.**
- The Conference has been organized by** Directorate General Factory Advice and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI), Ministry of Labour and Employment, German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV), Germany in association with Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and International Social Security Association – Manufacturing, Construction and Mining.

What is 'Vision Zero' concept?

- The concept of Vision Zero is based on **four fundamental principles viz. life is non-negotiable, humans are fallible, tolerable limits are defined by human physical resistance, and people are entitled to safe transport and safe workplaces.**
- The Vision is based on principles of Controlling Risks, Ensuring Safety and Health in Machines, Equipment and Workplaces and Skill Upgradation of Workforce.

Way ahead:

- The concept of 'Vision Zero' is fast gaining international acceptance and is expected to leverage the efforts of the Government of India to raise the occupational safety and health standards in the country so as to improve the occupational safety and health situation.

14. DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE BOARD FOR DE-NOTIFIED, NOMADIC AND SEMI-NOMADIC COMMUNITIES

What to Study?

- For Prelims: Who are nomadic and de- notified tribes as per the law?
- For Mains: Why they renewed attention and measures needed to bring them to the main stream.

Context: The Union Cabinet has given its approval for constitution of **Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Communities (DNCs).**

Who are they?

- Amongst the most disadvantage communities in the country are the Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities (DNCs). These communities are hard to reach, less visible, and therefore frequently left out.
- While most DNTs are spread across the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories, some DNTs are not covered in any of the SC, ST or OBC categories.

Need for protection:

- Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities are considered to be the most deprived sections of Indian society. The nomadic and semi-nomadic communities move from place to place in search of livelihood.
- As a result, they are frequently left out. Hence to address the issues related to these communities there is a need for special attention.

Challenges faced by them:

- The Denotified Tribes are communities that were listed or notified as '**born criminal 'by the British under a number of laws**. The term, 'Denotified and Nomadic Tribes', can be traced to the **Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871.**

- The colonial government notified nearly 200 tribal communities to be hereditary criminals, cementing their societal identity as outcasts and subjecting them to constant harassment by the administration.
- **Forest laws** that came into force from the mid-nineteenth century onwards deprived a large number of communities of their traditional rights of hunting and gathering. The new laws criminalised their very source of livelihood when it practiced.
- When the forests were cleared by the British for commercial use and forest communities asked to contribute to labour, **some communities resisted and were declared 'criminal'**.
- The British thought that communities had lost their legitimate means of livelihood, they must have been living by indulging in criminal activities due to arrival of road and railway networks. After India gained Independence, these tribes were 'de-notified' from the list of Criminal Tribes.

(Q) What are denotified tribes (DNTs)? A study on the socio-economic and educational status of denotified tribes (DNTs) reveals that members of these tribes are plagued by problems such as chronic poverty and illiteracy. Discuss why ?

15. NATIONAL RURAL ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

What to study?

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

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the Implementation of an Externally Aided Project namely **National Rural Economic Transformation Project (NRETP) under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)** through loan assistance (IBRD Credit) from World Bank.

Benefits:

- The technical assistance provided by NRETP and the higher level interventions facilitated by the project will enhance the livelihoods promotion and access to finance and scale-up initiatives on digital finance and livelihood interventions.

Salient features:

- DAY-NRLM lays special emphasis on **targeting the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable communities and their financial inclusion**.
- **Innovative projects will be undertaken under NRETP** to pilot alternate channels of financial inclusion, creating value chains around rural products, introduce innovative models in livelihoods promotion and access to finance and scale-up initiatives on digital finance and livelihoods interventions.

Significance of DAY- NRLM:

- DAY-NRLM provides for mutually beneficial working relationship and formal platforms for consultations between Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).
- NRLM has also developed activity map to facilitate convergence in different areas of interventions where NRLM institutions and PRIs could work together which has been disseminated to all state Rural Livelihood Missions.

16. PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA – URBAN

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMAY- Urban- key features.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme, challenges ahead and measures needed to achieve the target.

Context: The Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has approved the construction of another 5,60,695 more affordable houses for the benefit of urban poor under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

Challenges ahead:

- **The scheme faces headwinds such as** unavailability of land in prime areas, low participation of private developers on account of brand dilution, bidding mechanism, stringent cost and time schedules resulting in low yields, increasing construction costs due to absence of bulk sourcing of materials, and lack of new technology that impacts productivity, cost efficiency and quality.

Significance of the scheme:

- PMAY-U does offer a huge opportunity for several sectors by setting off a virtuous cycle.
- One crore houses would mean an opportunity for over Rs 2 lakh crore of home loans, and incremental consumption of 80-100 million tonne of cement and 10-15 million tonne of steel.
- The construction opportunity is of about four billion square feet over the life of PMAY-U. And all that would translate into 9-10 crore incremental jobs over the execution period.

Key facts:

1. The beneficiaries are poor and people living under EWS and LIG categories in the country.
2. The scheme is divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of 100 cities will be covered from April 2015 to March 2017. In phase two, 200 cities will be covered from April 2017 to March 2019. In the third phase, the leftover cities will be covered from April 2019 to March 2022.
3. The government is providing an interest subsidy of 6.5% on housing loans which can be availed by beneficiaries for 15 years from start of loan date.
4. The government will grant Rs 1 lakh to all the beneficiaries of the scheme. In addition, Rs 1.5 lakh will be given to all eligible urban poor who want to construct their houses in urban areas or plan to go for renovation in their existing houses. One can also avail loans under this scheme to build toilets in existing houses.

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

1. WHY ONLY BUREAUCRATS ON INFORMATION PANELS, ASKS SC

What to study?

- For Prelims: About CIC- key facts.
- For Mains: Issues associated, association of govt employees with the institution, the need for reforms.

Context: Supreme Court has observed that the **Central Information Commission (CIC) and State Information Commissions have been places of government employees and their retired counterparts.**

What's the issue?

1. There's "**official bias**" in favour of bureaucrats and government employees in the process of appointment.
2. In fact, **the selection committee, which shortlists candidates for appointment, is itself composed of government employees.**
3. This is **against the fundamental principles of the Right to Information Act of 2005** which itself requires people from varied domains to man the Commissions.

About PMAY- Urban:

- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Programme launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA), in Mission mode envisions provision of **Housing for All by 2022, when the Nation completes 75 years of its Independence.**

The Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme verticals:

1. Slum rehabilitation of Slum Dwellers with participation of private developers using land as a resource.
2. Promotion of Affordable Housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy.
3. Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors.
4. Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction /enhancement.

Central Information Commission (CIC):

- **Established in 2005** by Central Government under provisions of Right to Information (RTI) Act (2005).
- It acts upon complaints from those individuals who have not been able to submit information requests due to either the officer not having been appointed, or because the respective Officer refused to receive the application for information under the RTI Act.
- **Composition:** The Commission includes 1 Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC) who are appointed by the President of India.
- **Appointment:** CIC and members are appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a committee consisting of—Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha; a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

4. Besides, ***the entire RTI mechanism has been choked by rising pendency and growing number of vacancies*** of Information Commissioners.

What next?

- RTI law was enacted to ensure accountability in governance. The Commissions are meant to be the law's eyes and hands to provide information to ordinary people.
- Therefore, ***the apex court has directed the government to look beyond bureaucrats and appoint professionals from "all walks of life," including eminent persons*** with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism as Information Commissioners.

Sources: the hindu.

2. RAJASTHAN SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY BILL

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Bill.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for a legislation on social accountability, what is Social Accountability?

Context: In a first for India, Rajasthan government has prepared ***the draft of Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill*** and has invited suggestions from the general public.

Objectives of the Bill:

1. To seek the accountability of public functionaries and authorities for timely delivery of goods and services.
2. To create democratic, decentralized and participative approach to enable wider public participation.
3. To Initiate monitoring of programmes and policies through community score cards, citizens report card and social audits.

Key provisions:

1. ***The purview of bill*** includes any entity or body, which is under the control of the government, governor and the high court of Rajasthan. Entity or the body set up by Central Government to function within the State of Rajasthan and partially or wholly providing public goods and services provided there is consent of the Central Government.
2. ***It seeks to impose penalties and compensation and initiate departmental action*** against the Grievance Redressal Officer (GRO) of the service delivery department for non-compliance. For example: If the local police have failed to deliver its duties, the onus is on the GRO.
3. ***The Bill will also set up a grievance redressal mechanism*** starting from village panchayats. The Bill included provisions for citizens' charter, public hearing, social audit and information and facilitation centres.

Significance of this law:

- This law will compliment RTI which is becoming far more challenging.
- The citizen centric law will enable citizens to initiate enquiries rather than relying on the departmental enquiries in the existing system.

What is social accountability?

- “Social accountability” refers to actions initiated by citizen groups to hold public officials, politicians, and service providers to account for their conduct and performance in terms of delivering services, improving people’s welfare and protecting people’s rights.

Four pillars of social accountability?

- The four pillars are: (1) organized and capable citizens groups; (2) an enabling environment, with government champions who are willing to engage; (3) cultural appropriateness; and, (4) access to information.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What do you understand by the concept of accountability and why is accountability important for good governance. Discuss.

3. STATES' RANKING ON STARTUP INITIATIVES

What to study?

- For Prelims: About States' Start-up Ranking 2018- key facts.
- For Mains: Significance of the rankings and challenges ahead, significance of the startups, the need for a supportive ecosystem.

Context: Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has released second edition of **Startup Ranking for 2019**.

Startup Ranking framework:

- The Startup Ranking framework aims to rank the States/UTs for establishing a robust ecosystem for supporting Startups.
- The framework also encourages States and UTs to identify, learn and replicate good practices from each other.

The 2019 edition:

- The Ranking Framework 2019 comprises of 7 pillars and 30 action points. The pillars will assess States'/UTs efforts across institutional support, simplifying regulations, easing public procurement, incubation support, seed funding support, venture funding support and awareness and outreach related activities.
- The ranking exercise aims to evaluate measures taken by States/UTs during the assessment period from May 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

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.

(Q) Critically evaluate performance of the Start Up India initiative.

4. HOPE PORTAL

What to study?

- For Prelims: About NABH and HOPE Portal.
- For Mains: Need for and significance of accreditation.

Context: National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Organizations (NABH) has revamped Entry-Level Certification Process of hospitals to make it simpler, digital, faster and user-friendly.

- The revamped certification process is driven through a new portal called **HOPE – Healthcare Organizations' Platform for Entry-Level-Certification**.

About HOPE Portal:

1. It is an online platform for smooth and secure registration which provides a self-explanatory questionnaire to be filled by the HCO/SHCOS.
2. It ensures quality at nascent stages by enrolling a wide range of hospitals across the country including Healthcare Organizations (HCOs).
3. HOPE also enables them to comply with quality protocols, improve patient safety and the overall healthcare facility of the organization.

5. NATIONAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT FESTIVAL 2019 AWARDS

What to study?

- For Prelims: About National Youth Parliament festival, awards and NYD- its significance, about NSS and NYKS.

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi to confer the National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 Awards to the Winners.

Background:

- National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 was celebrated on 12th January, 2019**, on the occasion of **National Youth Day**.
- National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 Theme:** “Be The Voice of New India” and “Find solutions and contribute to policy”.
- Eligibility:** Youth in the age bracket of 18-25 years are invited to participate in the District Youth Parliaments.
- Significance:** The National Youth Parliament Festival will encourage the youth to engage with public issues, understand the common man’s point of view, form their opinion and express these in an articulate manner. Relevant and effective voices on the vision of New India would be captured and documented to make these available to policy makers and implementers to take it forward.
- National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 has been jointly organised by** National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) under the aegis of Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.

National Youth Day:

- The National Youth Day (also called as Yuva Diwas) is observed on January 12 every year to commemorate the birthday of Swami Vivekananda.**
 - The main objective is to propagate the philosophy and the ideals of Swami Vivekananda.
 - It became a mainstream celebration in India from 1985 onwards and observed on January 12 ever since.

Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan:

- Nehru Yuva Kendras was established in 1972.
- Later in 1987 under Rajiv Gandhi Government it became Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, an autonomous organization under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

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

1. AKSHAYA PATRA FOUNDATION

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Midday meals scheme and Akshaya Patra foundation.
- For Mains: Features, need and significance of the scheme, performance analysis of the scheme.

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently unveiled a ceremonial plaque to mark the serving of “**3rd billionth meal**” by **Akshaya Patra Foundation at Vrindavan Chandrodaya Mandir campus**.

About Akshaya Patra:

- Funded by International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)**, Akshaya Patra is a Bengaluru-based **not-for-profit organisation that works with the government on mid-day meal schemes**. It has a state-of-the-art kitchen in Vrindavan.
- Today, Akshaya Patra is the world’s largest (not-for-profit run) Mid-Day Meal Programme serving wholesome food every school day to over 1.76 million children from 14,702 schools across 12 states in India.

National Service Scheme (NSS):

- The National Service Scheme is an Indian government-sponsored public service program conducted by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of the Government of India.
- The scheme was launched in Gandhiji’s Centenary year in 1969.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) headed by Dr. Radhakrishnan recommended introduction of national service in the academic institutions on a voluntary basis with a view to developing healthy contacts between the students and teachers on the one hand and establishing a constructive linkage between the campus and the community on the other hand.

2. SWACHH SHAKTI 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Swachh Shakti awards and their significance.

Context: *Swachh Shakti 2019 Awards* were recently distributed by the PM on the occasion of *Swachh Shakti 2019 programme*.

Swachh Shakti Programme:

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

3. SHISHT BHARAT CAMPAIGN

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the campaign.

What is it?

- The *Shisht Bharat campaign*, launched by a NGO, aims *to strengthen the moral character of Indian citizens by sensitizing them* about values of morality, civic sense, politeness, decorum and dignity.
- Launched initially in Delhi NCR, the campaign brings together policy-makers, media personalities, parents, RWAs, Delhi traffic police, NGOs, corporate houses and multinationals together for the promotion of the cause.

The revolutionary campaign will execute under three pillars:

- Educate the masses by engaging with schoolchildren, parents, youth, media persons, ordinary citizens and advocacy with policy makers.
- Reach out to community members by engaging with RWAs, market clusters, clubs, associations and other relevant stakeholders.
- Inspire action through novel and encouraging methods like social media, competitions and awards, among others.

4. ALL INDIA CITIZENS SURVEY OF POLICE SERVICES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the survey, need for police reforms.

Context: Ministry of Home Affairs has commissioned the Bureau of Police Research and Development to conduct a pan-India survey called “ALL INDIA CITIZENS SURVEY OF POLICE SERVICES”.

- Aim:** The survey is aimed to understand public perceptions about Police, gauge the level of non-reporting of crimes or incidents to Police, the position on ground relating to crime reporting & recording, timeliness and quality of police response and action, and to assess citizens' perception and experience about women and children's safety.

Significance:

- The outcome of the survey is expected to bring out useful suggestions for stakeholders in formulating and implementing appropriate policy responses and changes in the functioning of police at the cutting edge and

for improving crime prevention and investigation, transformation in community policing, improvement in the access to the justice and increased appropriate resource allocation for police in a systematic manner.

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. MFN STATUS

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is MFN status?
- For Mains: How does it affect the bilateral trade between the countries? How does withdrawal of this affect Pakistan?

Context: India has revoked the **Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** status of Pakistan (bestowed in 1996) and warned of more measures in response to its support for terrorist groups targeting India.

What are the pros of MFN?

- **MFN status is extremely gainful to developing countries.** The clear upsides are access to a wider market for trade goods, reduced cost of export items owing to highly reduced tariffs and trade barriers. These essentially lead to more competitive trade.
- **MFN also cuts down bureaucratic hurdles and various kinds of tariffs** are set at par for all imports. It then increases demands for the goods and giving a boost to the economy and export sector.
- **It also heals the negative impact caused to the economy due to trade protectionism.** This irks the domestic industry.
- **A country that grants MFN on imports will have its imports provided by the most efficient supplier.** This may not be the case if tariffs differ by country.
- **Granting MFN has domestic benefits:** having one set of tariffs for all countries simplifies the rules and makes them more transparent. It also lessens the frustrating problem of having to establish rules of origin to determine which country's part of the product (that may contain parts from all over the world) must be attributed to for customs purpose.
- **As MFN clause promotes non-discrimination among countries,** they also tend to promote the objective of free trade in general.

What are the disadvantages of MFN?

- The main disadvantage is that the country has to give the same treatment to all other trade partners who are members of the WTO.
- This translates into a price war and vulnerability of the domestic industry as a result.
- The country is not able to protect domestic industry from the cheaper imports and in this price war, some domestic players have to face heavy losses or growth restrictions.

What does revoking MFN mean?

- Revoking it means India can levy whatever import tariffs it wants. India can now make it very expensive for Pakistan to export its goods or services to India.

Will this hurt Pakistan?

- So far, India has only revoked the MFN status. It has not altered the import duties on Pakistan. However, if it does hike them, then this will likely have an impact on that country.

Most Favoured Nation status?

- Most Favoured Nation is *a treatment accorded to a trade partner to ensure non-discriminatory trade between two countries vis-a-vis other trade partners.*
- The importance of MFN is shown in the fact that *it is the first clause in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).* Under WTO rules, a member country cannot discriminate between its trade partners. If a special status is granted to a trade partner, it must be extended to all members of the WTO.

MFN at the same time allows some exemptions as well:

- **Right to engage in Free Trade Agreements:** This means members can participate in regional trade agreements or free trade agreements where there is discrimination between member countries and non-member countries.
- **Members can give developing countries special and differential treatment like greater market access.** This special concession are in different forms like reduced tariff rates from developing country imports, concessions that allows developing countries to give subsidies to their production sectors etc.
- **All these exceptions are subjected to strict conditions.**

What is the State of MFN Status Between India and Pakistan?

- India had granted MFN status to Pakistan in 1996, a year after the formation of WTO. But Pakistan hasn't accorded MFN status to India till now.

Sources: the hindu.

2. INDUS WATER TREATY

What to study?

- For Prelims: Indus Water Treaty- key facts.
- For Mains: Issues associated with the implementation of the treaty and their resolution, how bilateral tensions affect the treaty.

Context: In response to Pulwama terror attack, ***the Centre has decided to stop India's share of water that used to flow to Pakistan.*** The government would divert water from eastern rivers to Jammu and Kashmir.

- The government's decision will not impact Pakistan's share of water under the Indus Water Treaty between the two nations.

River sharing between India and Pakistan:

- ***The sharing of water of the six rivers- Indus, Chenab, Jhelum, Beas, Ravi and Sutlej- between India and Pakistan is governed by a treaty the two countries signed in 1960.*** The deal was brokered by the World Bank after nine years of negotiation.
- Under the treaty, ***India has control over water flowing in the eastern rivers- Beas, Ravi and Sutlej. Pakistan has control over the western rivers- Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.***
- ***As per the treaty, the water commissioners of Pakistan and India are required to meet twice a year and arrange technical visits to projects' sites and critical river head works.*** Both the sides share details of the water flow and the quantum of water being used under the treaty.
- The treaty sets out ***a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two countries regarding their use of the rivers.***
- Of the total 168 million acre-feet, India's share of water from the three allotted rivers is 33 million acre-feet, which constitutes nearly 20 per cent. India uses nearly 93-94 per cent of its share under the Indus Waters Treaty. The rest of the water remains unutilised and goes to Pakistan.

Projects proposed to utilize the unutilised water:

- After the Uri attack in 2016, India has fast-tracked water projects to arrest the unutilised water.
- The three projects include the Shahpur-Kandi dam project, a second Sutlej-Beas link in Punjab and the UJH Dam project in Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan's water woes:

- An IMF study said that Pakistan is the third most affected country in the world in terms of acute water shortage. Closing the taps is likely to send a strong message that Pakistan cannot continue to perpetrate terrorism from its soil with impunity.

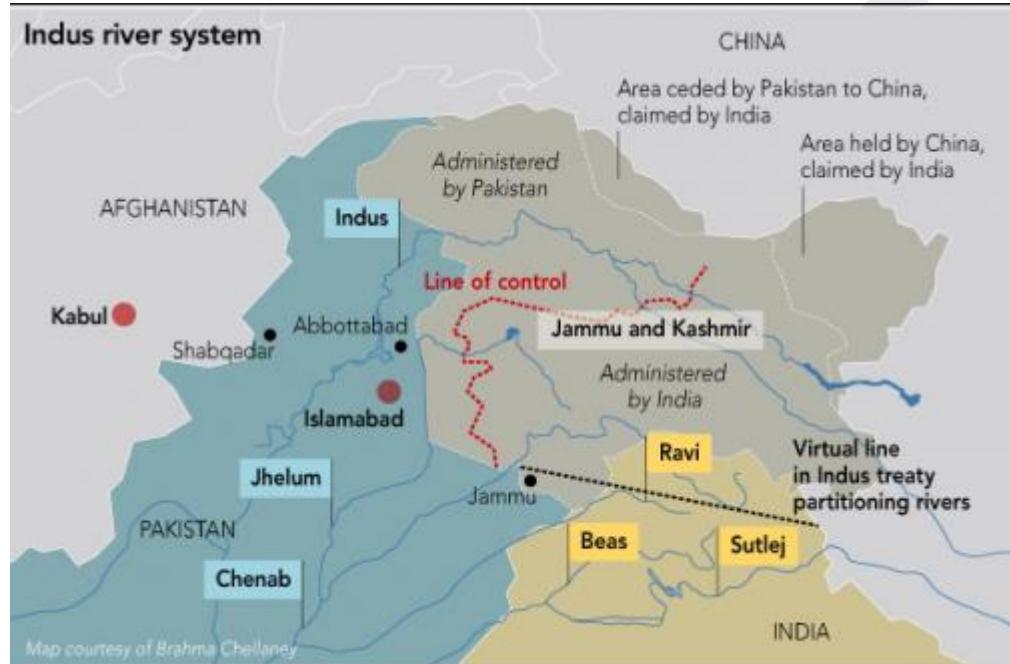
Why it may not be feasible to stop water-flow altogether?

- So far the treaty has survived wars and phases of frosty ties between India and Pakistan. India's any move affecting the treaty would be closely watched by the international community.
- India cannot abrogate the treaty on a short notice. It takes years to divert the flow of a river.
- The government of India will have to prepare a long-term strategy if it intends to threaten Pakistan by diverting or stopping the water.

Challenges and concerns:

- The IWT has survived various wars and other hostilities between the two countries, and as such it is largely considered a success. Today, however, the treaty is increasingly faced with challenges it wasn't designed to deal with.
 - For instance, India recently fast-tracked approval for several major dams along the Chenab, a 900km-long tributary of the Indus that was originally allotted to Pakistan under the IWT. This follows several other

- contentious dams already being built on shared rivers including Kishanganga, on the Jhelum River, which was also allotted to Pakistan.
- Under the IWT, India does indeed have a right to “limited hydropower generation” upstream on the western tributaries allotted to Pakistan, including the Chenab and the Jhelum. However, many in Pakistan worry that even though these proposed dams may individually abide by the technical letter of the treaty, their effects will add up downstream.
 - Because the treaty does not provide a definitive solution, the two countries have frequently sought time-consuming and expensive international arbitration. From time to time, Pakistan has raised concerns and asked for intervention on the storage capacity of Indian dams planned on shared rivers allotted to Pakistan under the IWT.
 - Basin countries have also not been forthcoming in sharing data and announcing planned hydropower projects ahead of time.



Sources: the hindu.

(Q) It is argued that a review of the Indus Water Treaty could prove to be a double-edged sword for India. Discuss why.

3. GENEVA CONVENTION

Context: An Indian pilot was captured by Pakistan after a major aerial confrontation and chase between Pakistan Air Force planes, which dropped bombs in four locations of Jammu and Kashmir, and Indian Air Force jets that countered them over the Line of Control (LoC).

- New Delhi has conveyed to Islamabad that “no harm” should come to the pilot. India has also cited the **Geneva Conventions** while demanding the release of Wing Commander in Pak custody.

Does the captured pilot count as a prisoner of war?

- The provisions of the conventions **apply in peacetime situations, in declared wars, and in conflicts that are not recognised as war by one or more of the parties.**
- India has said its **airstrikes were a “non-military intelligence-led operation** and therefore both sides are bound by the Geneva Conventions. **This means the IAF officer is a prisoner of war**, and his treatment has to be in accordance with the provisions for PoWs under the Geneva Conventions.

Geneva Convention:

- The 1949 Geneva Conventions are **a set of international treaties that ensure that warring parties conduct themselves in a humane way with non-combatants** such as civilians and medical personnel, as well as with combatants no longer actively engaged in fighting, such as prisoners of war, and wounded or sick soldiers.
- All countries are signatories to the Geneva Conventions. **There are four conventions, with three protocols added on since 1949.**

What are the provisions for PoWs?

- The **treatment of prisoners of war is dealt with by the Third Convention or treaty**. The **Third Convention is unambiguous about how prisoners must be treated**: "humanely". And the responsibility for this lies with the detaining power, not just the individuals who captured the PoW.
 1. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention.
 2. In particular, **no prisoner of war may be subjected to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are not justified by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of the prisoner concerned and carried out in his interest**.
 3. Likewise, **prisoners of war must at all times be protected**, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity. Measures of reprisal against prisoners of war are prohibited," says Article 13 of the Convention.

What rights is a PoW entitled to?

- Article 14 of the Convention lays down that PoWs are "entitled to in all circumstances to respect for their persons and their honour".
 1. In captivity, a PoW must not be forced to provide information of any kind under "physical or mental torture, nor any other form of coercion".
 2. Refusal to answer questions should not invite punishment.
 3. A PoW must be protected from exposure to fighting.
 4. Use of PoWs as hostages or human shields is prohibited, and a PoW has to be given the same access to safety and evacuation facilities as those affiliated to the detaining power.
 5. Access to health facilities, prayer, recreation and exercise are also written into the Convention.
 6. The detaining power has to facilitate correspondence between the PoW and his family, and must ensure that this is done without delays.
 7. A PoW is also entitled to receive books or care packages from the outside world.

What do the provisions say about the release of prisoners?

- Parties to the conflict "are bound to send back" or repatriate PoWs, regardless of rank, who are seriously wounded or sick, after having cared for them until they are fit to travel".
- The conflicting parties are expected to write into any agreement they may reach to end hostilities the expeditious return of PoWs.

Previous such instances:

- At the end of the 1971 war, India had more than 80,000 Pakistani troops who had surrendered to the Indian Army after the liberation of Dhaka. India agreed to release them under the Shimla Agreement of 1972. Pakistan can decide to send Wing Commander Abhinandan unilaterally, or negotiate his release with India.
- **In such situations, who monitors whether the Geneva Conventions are being followed?**
- The Geneva Conventions have a system of "Protecting Powers" who ensure that the provisions of the conventions are being followed by the parties in a conflict. In theory, **each side must designate states that are not party to the conflict as their "Protecting Powers"**. In practice, the International Committee of the Red Cross usually plays this role.

3. ROHINGYA ISSUE

Why in News?

- Based on allegations that India's repatriation of the Rohingya refugees contravenes international principles on refugee law as well as domestic constitutional rights, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has called for a report from India on the deportation of a group of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar in October 2018.

Does it not apply to India?

It is often argued that the principle **does not bind India** since it is a party to neither the 1951 Convention nor the Protocol.

- However, the prohibition of non-refoulement of refugees constitutes a norm of customary international law, which binds even non-parties to the Convention.
- **UN has clarified that it is binding on all States, including those which have not yet become party to the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol.**

Constitutional safeguards for refugees:

- **Article 51(c)** talks about promotion of respect for international law and treaty obligations. Therefore, India cannot deport Rohingyas disrespecting the international treaty.
- **There are few Fundamental Rights available to citizens, persons including foreign citizens**— the right to equality and the right to life, among others. Therefore, the Rohingya refugees, while under the jurisdiction of the national government, cannot be deprived of the right to life and personal liberty.
- In **National Human Rights Commission v. State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996)**, the Supreme Court has reiterated this.

What's missing?

- **India lacks a specific legislation to address the problem of refugees**, in spite of their increasing inflow.
- **The Foreigners Act, 1946**, fails to address the peculiar problems faced by refugees as a class. It also gives unbridled power to the Central government to deport any foreign citizen.
- **The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill of 2019** strikingly excludes Muslims from its purview and seeks to provide citizenship only to Hindu, Christian, Jain, Parsi, Sikh and Buddhist immigrants persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is important to note that the majority of the Rohingya are Muslims.
- **Some experts point out that this limitation on the basis of religion fails to stand the test of equality under Article 14 of the Constitution** and offends secularism, a basic feature of the Constitution.

Why Rohingyas need protection?

- The Rohingya are “among the world’s least wanted and most persecuted people.” In Myanmar, they are denied citizenship, the right to own land and travel, or to even marry without permission, says the report.
- According to the UN, the Rohingya issue is one of systematic and widespread ethnic cleansing by Myanmar. Therefore, the discrimination that the Rohingya face is unparalleled in contemporary world politics.

Conclusion:

- The deportation of refugees by India is not only unlawful but breaches a significant moral obligation. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. Therefore, India needs to reconsider its earlier decision.

(Q) “India’s internal security concerns must override humanitarian impulses.” Comment in the context of Rohingya crisis.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/wrong-on-the-rohingya/article26176985.ece>.

Global Framework on Refugees:

- In order to address the problem of mass inter-state influx of refugees, UN adopted the **Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951**. This was followed by the **Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1967**.
- Most notable features of the Convention is the principle of **non-refoulement**. The norm requires that “no contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

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

1. EXERCISE CUTLASS EXPRESS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Exercise Cutlass Express- features and significance.

Context: Multinational training exercise '**CUTLASS EXPRESS – 19**' was held recently.

About Exercise Cutlass Express 2019:

- **What is it?** It is an exercise designed to assess and improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity, promote national and regional security in East Africa as well as information sharing, planning and operating.
- Sponsored by **U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and is conducted by U.S. Naval Forces Africa.**
- **The aim of the exercise:** To improve law enforcement capacity, promote regional security and progress interoperability between the armed forces of the participating nations.

2. AFGHANISTAN OPENS NEW EXPORT ROUTE TO INDIA THROUGH IRAN'S CHABAHAR PORT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Location of Chabahar port.
- For Mains: Significance of the port for India, Challenges to its development.

Context: Afghanistan recently began exports to India through Chabahar port in Iran. Afghanistan, a landlocked, war-torn nation is turning to overseas markets to improve its economy.

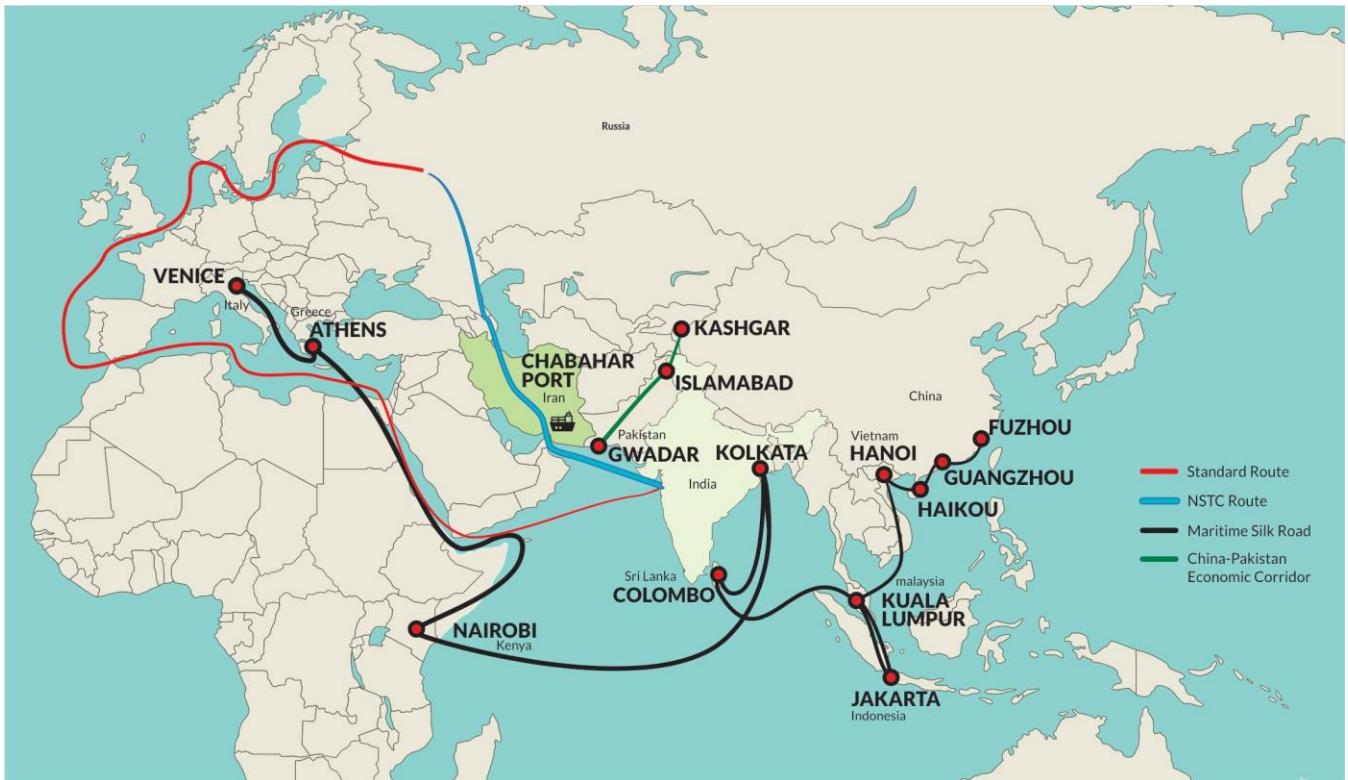
- Chabahar port is the result of healthy cooperation between India, Iran and Afghanistan this will ensure economic growth. The Iranian port provides easy access to the sea to Afghanistan and India has helped developed this route to allow both countries to engage in trade bypassing Pakistan.

Where is Chabahar port?

- Iran's Chabahar port is located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country. The port gives access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf nations' southern coast.

Why Chabahar port is crucial for India?

- **The first and foremost significance of the Chabahar port is the fact that India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan.** Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- **Chabahar port will be beneficial to India in countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea** which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- **With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, Iran also becomes a military ally to India.** Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- **With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India.** The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.
- **Chabahar port will ensure in the establishment of a politically sustainable connectivity between India and Afghanistan.** This will in turn, lead to better economic ties between the two countries.
- From a diplomatic perspective, **Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.**



Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Do you think India figures prominently in the West Asian countries' security and strategic plans? Does developing Chabahar port give India strategic advantage in Iran and the region? Critically examine.

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

1. INSTEX – INSTRUMENT IN SUPPORT OF TRADE EXCHANGES

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is INSTEX? Stakeholders involved.
- For Mains: Why is it being setup? Benefits for participants, implications on other countries? How would US react to this?

What is it? It is a **payment mechanism being setup by the European Union** to secure trade with Iran and skirt US sanctions after Washington pulled out of the landmark nuclear deal last May.

Key features of INSTEX:

1. INSTEX will **allow trade between the EU and Iran** without relying on direct financial transactions.
2. **INSTEX is registered at Paris** with an initial 3,000 Euros in the capital and a supervisory board with members from France and Germany and chaired by the UK.
3. **It is a project of the governments of France, Germany and Britain** and will receive the formal endorsement of all 28 EU members.
4. It will initially be **used for non-sanctionable trade**, including humanitarian goods such as medicine, food and medical devices.

Significance:

- This mechanism is the first concrete step by the EU to counter Trump's unilateral decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal.
- The launching of INSTEX is not only a matter of Iran-EU relations but also embodies a new approach by the bloc towards US policies. It "becomes an opportunity when it's understood as an experiment and as part of a bigger project to strengthen EU economic power."

How has the US reacted?

- It has warned EU that any attempt to evade its “maximum pressure” campaign on Iran would be subject to stiff penalties.

Sources: *toi*.

2. MACEDONIA SIGNS ACCORD TO JOIN NATO

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About NATO- formation, members, objectives, significance and issues associated, latest members.

Context: Macedonia has signed accession papers with NATO. The signing of accession papers allows Macedonia take part in NATO ministerial meetings as an invitee.

- **To acquire full membership**, all 29 current members must ratify the accession protocol.

Why is Russia worried about these developments?

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

Objectives:

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

Sources: *the hindu*.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (North Atlantic Alliance):

- It is an intergovernmental military alliance.
- Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949.
- Headquarters — Brussels, Belgium.
- Headquarters of Allied Command Operations — Mons, Belgium.

Significance:

- It constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.

3. GENERALISED SYSTEM OF PREFERENCES (GSP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of GSP.
- For Mains: How US withdrawal affects India and how should India be prepared for this?

Context: Vowing to reduce the U.S. deficit with large economies, President Trump is planning to withdraw the **Generalised System of Preferences (GSP)** from India, the world's largest beneficiary of a scheme that has been in force since the 1970s.

Background:

- The trigger for the latest downturn in trade ties was **India's new rules on e-commerce** that restrict the way Amazon.com Inc. and Walmart-backed Flipkart do business in a rapidly growing online market set to touch \$200 billion by 2027.
- That, coming on top of a drive to force **global card payments companies such as Mastercard and Visa to move their data to India** and the **imposition of higher tariffs on electronic products and smartphones**, left a broader trade package the two sides were working on through last year in tatters.

Implications:

- With this, India could lose a vital U.S. trade concession, under which it enjoys zero tariffs on \$5.6 billion of exports to the United States.

What is the difference between GSP and the usual trade arrangement under WTO?

- Under the normal trade laws, the WTO members must give equal preferences to trade partners. There should not be any discrimination between countries. This trade rule under the WTO is called the Most Favored Nation (MFN) clause.
- The MFN instructs non-discrimination that any favorable treatment to a particular country.** At the same time, the WTO allows members to give special and differential treatment to developing countries (like zero tariff imports). This is an exemption for MFN. The MSP given by developed countries including the US is an exception to MFN.

What is the impact of GSP withdrawal on India?

- India exports nearly 50 products of the 94 products on which GSP benefits are stopped. The GSP removal will leave a reasonable impact on India as the country enjoyed preferential tariff on exports worth of nearly \$ 5. 6 billion under the GSP route out of the total exports of \$48 bn in 2017-18. In total India exports nearly 1,937 products to the US under GSP.
- Removal of GSP indicate a tough trade position by the US; especially for countries like India who benefited much from the scheme.** India is the 11th largest trade surplus country for the US and India enjoyed an annual trade surplus of \$ 21 bn in 2017-18.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Write a note on the generalised system of preferences (GSP) system and its impact on India.

Generalised System of Preferences (GSP):

- The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for up to 4,800 products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.

What is the objective of GSP?

- The objective of GSP was to give development support to poor countries by promoting exports from them into the developed countries. GSP promotes sustainable development in beneficiary countries by helping these countries to increase and diversify their trade with the United States.
- GSP provide opportunities for many of the world's poorest countries to use trade to grow their economies and climb out of poverty.

Benefits of GSP:

- Indian exporters benefit indirectly** – through the benefit that accrues to the importer by way of reduced tariff or duty free entry of eligible Indian products.
- Reduction or removal of import duty on an Indian product makes it **more competitive to the importer** – other things (e.g. quality) being equal.
- This tariff preference helps new exporters to penetrate a market and established exporters to increase their market share** and to improve upon the profit margins, in the donor country.

4. MILITARY SPACE FORCE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Space force- composition and functions.
- For Mains: Space force- the idea, concerns, challenges and the need for free outer- space.

Context: President Trump has signed a directive- **Space Policy Directive-4 (SPD-4)- to create a Military Space Force.**

- Accordingly, the Pentagon will establish the **Space Force as the sixth branch of the United States military, to go along with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard.**
- However, the challenge ahead is that **the Congress must approve the creation of any new military branch.**

About US Military Space Force:

The main goal of the Space Force is **to secure and extend American dominance of the space domain.**

- The Space Force would **initially reside within the Department of the Air Force**, much as the Marine Corps is part of the U.S. Navy.

- **S. Space Force will organize, train, and equip military space forces.** Eventually, the aim is to push the Space Force out from under the Air Force's wings and make it a stand-alone organization.

Why it is not a “good idea”?

- Another military arm would only compound the organisational challenges facing the U.S. armed services.
- It could undercut ongoing missions.
- It could very well increase budgetary allocations in the future.
- A space corps could undermine American efforts in the domain of joint warfare.

Why it may not feasible to have a space force?

- The fundamental difficulty of a space corps is that the physical environment of space is not conducive to the conduct of military operations without incurring serious losses in the form of spacecraft and debris. And despite efforts to make spacecraft more fuel efficient, the energy requirements are enormous.
- The technical demands of defending assets in space make the possibility of dominance and space as a domain for war-fighting a sort of chimera.

Challenges ahead:

- A new space force is not merely a brand new service; it potentially increases greater organisational uncertainty within the U.S. military.
- Notwithstanding these concerns, Washington's headlong rush is the by-product of a strong commitment to preserving American advantages in space.

Why space has become so important?

- Space is a “war-fighting domain” and global powers like Russia and China are already treating it as such.
- Besides, the stakes are high. Much of our 21st-century economy and lifestyle — from bank transactions to weather forecasting to television service to the GPS directions — depends on satellites functioning round the clock and without interruption. The military depends on them too.
- In 2007, China shot down one of its own satellites — mission accomplished in its own right, it also littered orbit with potentially destructive space debris. Many saw the operation as a veiled display of military power.

Facts for Prelims:

- As its name suggests, SPD-4 is President Trump's fourth space policy directive. The first SPD directed NASA to get humans back to the moon as a stepping-stone to Mars.
- The second streamlined regulations for the commercial space sector, and the third dealt with management of space traffic.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Critically analyze the implications of space weaponization programme of US, especially in the context of India.

5. THE DISPUTE BETWEEN BRITAIN AND MAURITIUS OVER CHAGOS ISLANDS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About ICIJ, implications of its advisory opinion, Chagos islands and about the dispute.

Context: *The UK should end its control of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean “as rapidly as possible”,* the UN's highest court has said. The International Court of Justice said the islands were not lawfully separated from the former colony of Mauritius.

- The UK Foreign Office said: “***This is an advisory opinion, not a judgment.***”

What's the issue?

- Britain detached the Chagos Islands from Mauritius in 1965, three years before Mauritian independence. From 1967 to 1973, some 1,500 Chagos islanders were gradually forced to leave their homes so that the largest island, Diego Garcia, could be leased to the US for a strategic airbase. ***Today, Diego Garcia hosts a major US military base.***
- In 2016, after several judicial challenges, Britain extended Diego Garcia's lease until 2036 and declared that the expelled islanders would not be allowed to go back. In 2017, Mauritius successfully petitioned the United Nations to seek an ICIJ advisory opinion on the legality of the separation.

- Mauritius claims it was forced to give up the islands – now a British overseas territory – in 1965 in exchange for independence, which it gained in 1968.



Arguments by Mauritius:

- Mauritius argues it was illegal for Britain to break up its territory. It claims sovereignty over the archipelago and demands the right to resettle former residents.
- The crux of the Mauritian claim is ***the right of self-determination***. In its submission to the court, the Mauritian government claimed that the separation of the islands from Mauritius was in clear breach of **UN resolution 1514**, also known as the ***Colonial Declaration***. Passed in 1960, it ***enshrined the right of self-determination for colonial peoples and specifically banned the breakup of colonies prior to independence***. This was intended to keep borders stable, and to prevent colonial powers from simply absorbing colonial territory into their overseas territory so as to retain their sovereignty.
- Yet in spite of this resolution, a number of states (including France and the UK) kept possession of parts of their former colonies following the decolonisation process.

Implications of this judgment:

- While ICJ advisory opinions are not binding, the ramifications of the opinion will be highly significant; an opinion in favour of Mauritius may strengthen their position in any future negotiations, as well as putting significant international pressure on the UK over the status of the territory.
- But what could be particularly critical is the decision's impact on far broader issues of post-colonial sovereignty, and the legitimacy of colonial era independence arrangements.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. INTERMEDIATE-RANGE NUCLEAR FORCES (INF) TREATY

What to study?

- For Prelims: Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty- key features.
- For Mains: Significance of the treaty, recent issues, implications of withdrawal by the US and Russia.

Context: The U.S is suspending its obligations under the ***Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF)*** Treaty effective February 2 and will withdraw from the treaty in six months.

What's the issue?

- US in early December announced that it would suspend its obligations under the INF treaty by Feb. 2, citing Russian “cheating,” unless Moscow comes into compliance with the terms of the pact
- The U.S. government says the new Russian missile violates provisions of the pact that ban production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 310 to 3,400 miles.

What would happen in the absence of treaty?

- It is unclear what INF-prohibited systems the United States could deploy to Europe or Asia in the near term. **The U.S. military has not developed any land-based missiles within the prohibited ranges for decades and has only just started funding a new ground-launched cruise missile to match the 9M729.**
- **Moscow is in a very different position and could rapidly expand deployment.** The number of operational 9M729 missiles has been quite limited, but released from its official obligations under the treaty, Moscow could deploy more units rapidly.
- **Russia could also effectively reclassify the RS-26 Rubezh**, an experimental system that has been tested just above the INF Treaty's 5,500-kilometer limit. To avoid violating the INF, Russian officials previously described the RS-26 as an intercontinental ballistic missile. However, it could form the basis for a missile of a slightly shorter range if Moscow wished to boost its INF forces — without counting it under the U.S.-Russian New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START, governing longer-range systems.
- **This move is also likely to undermine the 2010 New START treaty governing U.S. and Russian long-range nuclear systems.** The INF Treaty's demise will undercut New START by reopening questions on the relationship between intermediate and strategic systems that have been resolved for 30 years by the elimination of ground-based, intermediate-range missiles.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty:

- The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty, formally Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles) is **a 1987 arms control agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union.**
 - Under the INF Treaty, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. agreed **to eliminate within three years all ground-launched-missiles of 500-5,500 km range and not to develop, produce or deploy these in future.**
 - The U.S. destroyed 846 Pershing IIs and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) and the U.S.S.R., 1,846 missiles (SS-4s, SS-5s and SS-20s), along with its support facilities.

Importance of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in U.S.-Russia relations:

- Under the Treaty, the two parties agreed that a whole important class of nuclear weapons would be removed from Europe, and only tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) or short-range missiles mostly deployed on the territory of Germany would remain.
- The INF Treaty for years served to mitigate fears of both parties in relation to possibility of military escalation, operational miscalculation, and helping to shift the logic of MAD [mutually assured destruction] to the higher “more sensitive” political level.

Sources: the hindu.

2. NUCLEAR SUPPLIERS GROUP

What to study?

- For Prelims: NSG- key facts.
- For Mains: Why India should be given NSG membership, challenges involved and what needs to be done.

Context: China has refused to dilute its stand on India's entry into the elite **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**, asserting that New Delhi must sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty to gain entry as there is no precedent for the inclusion of non-NPT countries.

What's the issue?

- India has been seeking entry into NSG, but **China has repeatedly stonewalled its bid.**

RACE TO JOIN ELITE N-CLUB

■ NSG is a 48-nation body that controls the global nuclear commerce

■ A number of NSG members are in favour of India's inclusion into the group

■ Pakistan, backed by China, is also lobbying to become an NSG member

■ Both India and Pakistan are



non-signatories to the NPT

■ Since Pak entry is unlikely, exercise seems aimed at sabotaging India's prospect

- **Why?** India is not a signatory to the NPT. China has stuck to its stand that new members should sign the ***Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)***, making India's entry difficult as the group is guided by the consensus principle.

Criteria for membership:

1. The ability to supply items (including items in transit) covered by the annexes to Parts 1 and 2 of the NSG Guidelines;
2. Adherence to the Guidelines and action in accordance with them;
3. Enforcement of a legally based domestic export control system which gives effect to the commitment to act in accordance with the Guidelines;
4. Full compliance with the obligations of one or more of nuclear non-proliferation agreement.
5. Support of international efforts towards non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of their delivery vehicle.

Why the membership is important for India?

- Membership will ***increase India's access to state-of-the-art technology from the other members of the Group.***
- Access to technology and being allowed to produce nuclear equipment will give a boost to the ***Make in India program.*** That will, in turn, boost the economic growth of our country.
- As per India's INDC under the Paris Climate agreement, we have committed to reducing dependence on fossil fuels and ensuring that 40% of its energy is sourced from renewable and clean sources. ***In order to achieve this target, we need to scale up nuclear power production. This can only happen if India gains access to the NSG.***
- ***Namibia is the fourth-largest producer of uranium and it agreed to sell the nuclear fuel to India in 2009.*** However, that hasn't happened, as Namibia has signed Pelindaba Treaty, which essentially controls the supply of uranium from Africa to the rest of the world. If India joins the NSG, such reservations from Namibia are expected to melt away.
- ***India will get an opportunity to voice its concern if in case of change in the provision of the NSG guidelines.***

Other Benefits associated with NSG membership- Once admitted, an NSG member state gets:

1. Timely information on nuclear matters.
2. Contributes by way of information.
3. Has confirmed credentials.
4. Can act as an instrument of harmonization and coordination.
5. Is part of a very transparent process.

Need of the hour:

- India should convince China that, its interest in NSG membership is not guided by any political or strategic considerations but only to facilitate the expansion of its clean and green nuclear energy programme.
- Besides, India should ***continue with a low-key building of partnership with other NSG members.*** Meanwhile, ***India should focus on developing the efficient green energy technologies to meet the massive energy requirement.***

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) In your opinion, why did China block India's NSG membership bid? Critically comment.

What is NSG?

1. Brought in ***1974 – in response to the Indian nuclear test (smiling Buddha).***
2. It is a ***Multilateral export control regime.***
3. It is a ***Group of nuclear supplier countries that seek to prevent nuclear proliferation*** by controlling the export of materials, equipment and technology that can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons.
4. The NSG first met in November 1975 in London, and is thus popularly referred to as the "***London Club***".
5. It is ***Not a formal organization, and its guidelines are not binding.*** Decisions, including on membership, are made by consensus.
6. ***Membership:*** 48 supplier states.

3. INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: IORA- composition, objectives, functions, significance and relevance.

Context: The Ministry of Home Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is organising a meeting of **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** Cluster Group on Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in New Delhi.

Significance of IORA:

- The existence of IORA is a reminder of the untapped potential of Indian Ocean regionalism.
- Nearly five decades ago, in the aftermath of decolonisation, the attempt to bring together the Indian Ocean states faltered amidst deep divisions within the littoral and due to the negative impact of the Cold War.
- Today, the IORA underlines the region's agency in shaping its own future.

Way ahead:

- IORA's success would depend, to a large extent, upon what the middle powers of the Indian Ocean littoral, like Indonesia, Australia and India, can do. Together the three countries have already breathed new life into an organisation that few had heard of.
- Also, India's growing sea-borne trade and a historic power shift in the Indian Ocean compel Delhi to pay greater attention to securing a sustainable regional order in the vast littoral.

IORA:

1. The Indian Ocean Rim Association was set up with **the objective of strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean Region**
2. The IORA is a **regional forum, tripartite in nature**, bringing together representatives of Government, Business and Academia, for promoting co-operation and closer interaction among them.
3. It is based on the principles of **Open Regionalism for strengthening Economic Cooperation** particularly on Trade Facilitation and Investment, Promotion as well as Social Development of the region.

Member Countries-

India, Australia, Iran, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius, Madagascar, UAE, Yemen, Seychelles, Somalia, Comoros and Oman are among the members of IORA.

4. ASIA LPG SUMMIT

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Asia LPG summit, WLPGA.
- For Mains: PMUY- features, significance and performance analysis.

Context: 2nd edition of the **Asia LPG Summit** is being held in New Delhi.

- **The summit is being organized by** the World LPG Association (WLPGA) in association with major Indian public-sector oil companies (OMCs) Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum, and Bharat Petroleum.

Objectives of the summit:

1. The summit will offer a unique opportunity to the global LPG industry to interact with development agencies, NGOs and non-profit organizations who have facilitated last-mile access to LPG for the beneficiaries.
2. The summit will also bring together academia and private sector to exchange their views on the use of LPG and how pathbreaking initiatives such as 'Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana' can bring remarkable socio-economic transformation.

About World LPG Association:

- The World LPG Association (WLPGA) is **the authoritative global voice for the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) industry and the worldwide industry association** which represents the interests of the LPG industry globally.
- The WLPGA **promotes the use of LPG to foster a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous world**.
- With over 200 members and presence in more than 125 countries, the WLPGA represents the interests of private and public companies from the entire LPG value chain under one umbrella.
- The WLPGA provides a platform for the exchange of best practices, facts and figures among its members.
- The Association regularly organises interactive meetings between technical experts, members and key stakeholders to demonstrate the benefits of LPG.
- **The WLPGA was officially granted Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1989.** Publications such as its Annual Statistical Review have become LPG industry references.

5. THE GLOBAL FUND TO FIGHT AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS AND MALARIA

What to study?

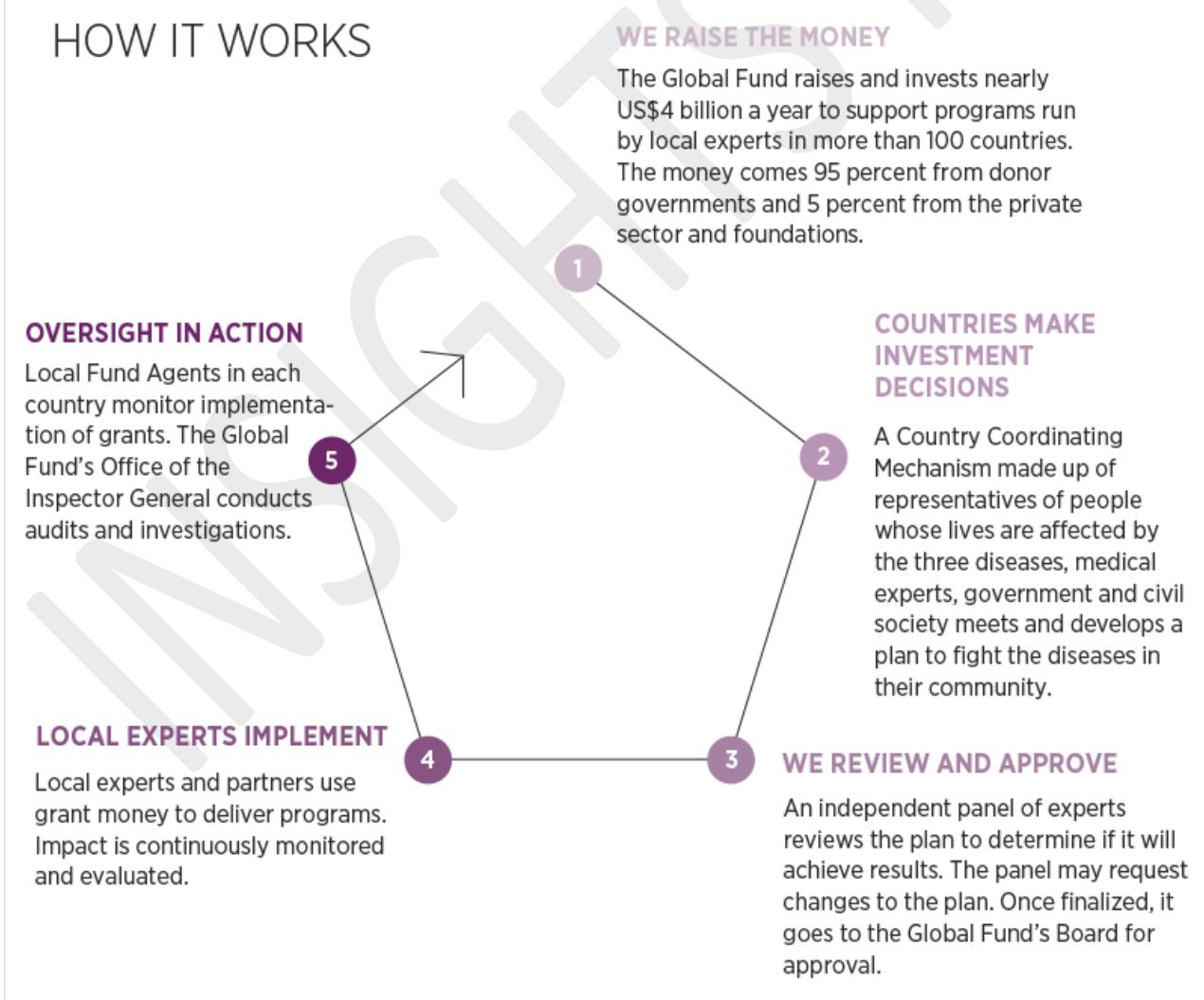
- For Prelims and Mains: The Fund, its objectives, need for funding, significance and challenges.

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria:

- The **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (or simply the Global Fund)** is an international financing organization that **aims to “attract, leverage and invest additional resources to end the epidemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria to support attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations.”**
- Founded in 2002, the Global Fund is **a partnership between governments, civil society, the private sector and people affected by the diseases.**
- The organization maintains its **secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland.**

Historical background:

- The Global Fund was formed as an independent, non-profit foundation under Swiss law and hosted by the World Health Organization in January 2002.
- In January 2009, the organization became an administratively autonomous organization, terminating its administrative services agreement with the World Health Organization.



6. LAWASIA HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: LAWASIA and Human Rights Conference organized by it- objectives, significance and challenges highlighted, measures to address them.

Context: The first **LAWASIA Human Rights Conference was organised by LAWASIA**, in association with the Bar Association of India recently.

- The conference **aims to provide a unique opportunity for lawyers and associated professional members to exchange insights and expertise on topics of significant importance to all.**
- Theme:** “State Power, Business and Human Rights: Contemporary Challenges”.
- The conference explored a wide range of human rights issues of relevance in the Asia Pacific region.**

About LAWASIA:

- It is a **regional association of lawyers, judges, jurists and legal organisations** and it advocates for the interests and concerns of the Asia Pacific legal profession.
- It provides **a platform to promote the cross-jurisdictional exchange of legal knowledge**; as a voice of the legal profession; and as a conduit for encouraging adherence to mutually-held principles of the rule of law, professional integrity and the protection of human rights.

Sources: toi.

7. AFRICAN UNION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: AU- objectives, composition, functions and significance.

Context: **Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has taken over as the chair of the African Union (AU)**. The post of AU's chair rotates annually between the five regions of the continent.

About AU:

- The African Union (AU) is **a continental union consisting of 55 countries of the continent of Africa, with exception of various territories of European possessions located in Africa.**
- The bloc was **founded on 26 May 2001 in Addis Ababa**, Ethiopia and launched on 9 July 2002 in South Africa.
- The intention of the AU is **to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)**, established on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa by 32 signatory governments.
- The most important decisions of the AU are made by the Assembly of the African Union, a semi-annual meeting of the heads of state and government of its member states.
- The **AU's secretariat, the African Union Commission, is based in Addis Ababa.**

Key objectives:

- To achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and Africans.
- To defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States.
- To accelerate the political and social-economic integration of the continent.

Sources: the hindu.

8. WORLD GOVERNMENT SUMMIT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About World Government Summit- objectives, composition and significance.

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

World Government Summit:

- The World Government Summit is **a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of government worldwide**. Each year, the Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments with a focus on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity.

- It is basically **a knowledge exchange center at the intersection between government, futurism, technology, and innovation**. It functions as a thought leadership platform and networking hub for policymakers, experts, and pioneers in human development.
- The Summit is **a gateway to the future as it functions as a stage for analysis of the future trends, issues, and opportunities facing humanity**. It is also an arena to showcase innovations, best practice, and smart solutions to inspire creativity to tackle these future challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

9. WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: WSDS- key facts and significance of the summit, about TERI.

Context: The **World Sustainable Development Summit 2019** is being held in New Delhi. It is **organized by The Energy and Resources Institute – TERI**.

World Sustainable Development Summit:

- The World Sustainable Development Summit is the annual flagship event of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).
- World Sustainable Development Summit is the sole Summit on global issues taking place in the developing world.
- It provides a platform for global leaders and practitioners to discuss and deliberate over climatic issues of universal importance.
- It strives to provide long-term solutions for the benefit of the global community by assembling the world's most enlightened leaders and thinkers on a single platform.
- It is continuing the legacy of Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS) which was initiated in 2001 with the aim of making 'sustainable development' a globally shared goal.

The Energy and Resources Institute – TERI:

- The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) is a leading think tank dedicated to conducting research for sustainable development of India and the Global South.
- TERI was established in 1974 as an information centre on energy issues.
- However, over the following decades, it made a mark as a research institute, whose policy and technology solutions transformed people's lives and the environment.

Sources: the hindu.

10. AZOV SEA

What to Study?

- For Prelims: Location of Azov Sea and Kerch strait.
- For Mains: Conflict on Azov sea between Russia and Ukraine, its political implications, impact on other countries, what needs to be done?

Context: The EU has decided to sanction eight Russian nationals for their responsibility in incidents in the Azov Sea last November.

- The **Ukraine-Russia conflict** flared up when Russian forces seized three Ukrainian vessels and captured two dozen sailors as they tried to pass from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov.

About the conflict in the Sea of Azov:

- Ukraine and Russia accuse each other of violating international maritime law. They refer to **the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea**, which both states joined in the 1990s.
- Ukraine insists on freedom of movement in the **Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov** in accordance with this agreement, while the Russian side is trying to draw territorial borders. The countries also have a bilateral

Sea of Azov:

- It is a sea in Eastern Europe. To the south it is linked by the narrow (about 4 km or 2.5 mi) Strait of Kerch to the Black Sea, and it is sometimes regarded as a northern extension of the Black Sea.
- The sea is bounded in the north and in the west by Ukraine, in the east by Russia.
- The Don and Kuban are the major rivers that flow into it.
- The Sea of Azov is the shallowest sea in the world, with the depth varying between 0.9 and 14 metres.

agreement on the free use of the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov, an accord that Russia has never called into question.

Why the Kerch Strait is important?

- The Kerch Strait is the only connection between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and the only way to reach two important Ukrainian ports, Mariupol and Berdiansk.
- Russia has controlled the strait since annexing Crimea in 2014, which has made traffic significantly more difficult for Ukrainian ships.

Sources: the hindu.

11. INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

What to study?

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

Context: The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** will begin hearing the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav at The Hague. Pakistan has sentenced Jadhav to death for spying while India claims he is not a spy and is challenging his death sentence.

About ICJ:

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

Members of the Court:

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

Who nominates the candidates?

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

What are the qualifications of ICJ judges?

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

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

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

Independence of the Judges:

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

Sources: the hindu.

12. INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: ISA- key facts, significance and India's solar power potential.

Context: Argentina has signed the Framework Agreement of the International Solar Alliance.

Argentina is the **72nd country to sign the Framework Agreement of the International Solar Alliance**.

Background:

- The agreement of the International Solar Alliance was opened for signature during the **COP22 at Marrakech on November 15, 2016**. The signatories of the agreement include India, France, Australia, UAE, UK, Japan amongst others.

About ISA:

- The **Paris Declaration** establishes ISA as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar energy among its member countries.
- Objectives:** The ISA's major objectives include global deployment of over 1,000GW of solar generation capacity and mobilisation of investment of over US\$ 1000 billion into solar energy by 2030.
- What it does?** As an action-oriented organisation, the ISA brings together countries with rich solar potential to aggregate global demand, thereby reducing prices through bulk purchase, facilitating the deployment of existing solar technologies at scale, and promoting collaborative solar R&D and capacity building.
- When it entered into force?** When the ISA Framework Agreement entered into force on December 6th, 2017, ISA formally became a de-jure treaty based International Intergovernmental Organization, headquartered at Gurugram, India.

Sources: the hindu.

13. FINANCIAL ACTION TASK FORCE (FATF)

What to study?

- For Prelims: FATF, Grey list, G7.
- For Mains: What is Grey list and Black list, how are countries in the list affected?

Context: The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has decided to keep Pakistan on its grey list at the end of its week-long plenary meeting in Paris. India had lobbied hard to get the global financial body to blacklist Pakistan for non-compliance in curbing terror financing.

Background:

- India wanted Pakistan to be put under "closer scrutiny immediately" and has demanded that "stronger implementation" be sought from Islamabad in curbing terror financing. India had even prepared a dossier for the watchdog nailing the culpability of Pakistan in the Pulwama terror strike, the worst such attack in J&K in decades.
- Pakistan was placed on the grey list by the FATF in June for failing to curb anti-terror financing. It has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations by the Paris-based FATF, a measure that officials here fear could further hurt its economy.

Implications of this move:

- Pakistani analysts say being put on the FATF watchlist could deal a blow to Pakistan's economy, making it harder for foreign investors and companies to do business in the country.
- It would be counterproductive to put Pakistan on the watch list as it would hurt its capability to fight terrorism. Also, being put back on the grey list would heighten Pakistan's risk profile and some financial institutions would be wary of transacting with Pakistani banks and counterparties.
- Being placed on the FATF watchlist carries no direct legal implications but brings extra scrutiny from regulators and financial institutions that can chill trade and investment and increase transaction costs.

What is blacklist and grey list?

- FATF maintains two different lists of countries: those that have deficiencies in their AML/CTF regimes, but they commit to an action plan to address these loopholes, and those that do not end up doing enough. The former is commonly known as grey list and latter as blacklist.
- Once a country is blacklisted, FATF calls on other countries to apply enhanced due diligence and counter measures, increasing the cost of doing business with the country and in some cases severing it altogether. As of now there are only two countries in the blacklist — Iran and North Korea — and seven on the grey list, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria and Yemen.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What is the mandate and objectives of Financial Action Task Force? Discuss its importance for India – Pakistan relations.

FATF:

- **What is it?** The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7. It is a "policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas. The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.
- **Objectives:** The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- **Functions:** The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally. In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

14. GLOBAL HEALTH EXPENDITURE DATABASE (GHED)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights of the report- concerns raised, significance of public spending and the need for enhanced public spending.

Context: The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has released a new report on **global health expenditure**. The **Global Health Expenditure Database (GHED)** provides internationally comparable data on health spending for close to 194 countries, since 2000.

- **Health spending consists of** government expenditure, out-of-pocket payments (people paying for their own care), and sources such as voluntary health insurance, employer-provided health programmes, as well as activities by non-profits.

Highlights of the report:

- **According to the report, global spending on health has increased in low- and middle-income countries** by 6% and in high income countries by 4%. However, worryingly, people are still paying too much out of their own pockets.
- **In low- and middle-income countries, health spending is undergoing a transformation.** The reliance of people on public funding has increased. In most regions, reliance on out-of-pocket spending is gradually going down and has also been associated with a reduction in the share of domestic government revenues allocated to health.
- **While the total amount of aid that middle-income countries receive has increased, aid per capita, has fallen.** In 2016, lower- and upper middle-income countries still received close to 57% of global aid, and certain

middle-income countries still received large amounts of aid in absolute terms. Therefore, there is an inverse relationship between a country's income levels and the share of external aid as a health funding source.

- **According to the report, the roles of external and domestic funding are evolving; however, external funding is declining in middle-income countries.** Governments account for less than 40 per cent of primary health care spending.
- **There are huge variations across countries in public spending on primary health care,** which is intended to give people access to quality care, including access to medicines, as needed. Governments would be expected to pay for these medicines from domestic sources.
- **The data indicates that nearly half of donor funds for health and about 20% of public spending on health went to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.** About one-third of domestic public spending went towards injuries and non-communicable diseases, which received comparatively little external funds.

Significance of public spending on health:

- Public spending on health is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for health through sustainably funding common goods and subsidising services to the poorest segments of society.
- A health system that relies mainly on high levels of government funding, as well as a high share of public sources in overall health spending, generally provides better and more equitable access to services and better financial protection.

Way ahead:

- Health is a human right and all countries need to prioritise efficient, cost-effective primary health care as the path to achieving universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Increased domestic spending is essential for achieving universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals. But health spending is not a cost, it's an investment in poverty reduction, jobs, productivity, inclusive economic growth, and healthier, safer, fairer societies.

Sources: down to earth.

(Q) India spends abysmally low on healthcare and there is a need to increase expenditure on the preventive healthcare front. Analyze.

15. GLOBAL DIGITAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP (GDHP)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: GDHP- composition, roles, objectives and significance.

Context: India is hosting 4th Summit of Global Digital Health Partnership.

About GDHP:

- Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP) is **an international collaboration of governments, government agencies and multinational organisations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of their citizens through the best use of evidence-based digital technologies.**
- Established in February 2018, the GDHP provides **an opportunity for transformational engagement between its participants**, who are striving to learn and share best practice and policy that can support their digital health systems.
- It has been created to provide an international platform to facilitate global collaboration and cooperation to share policy insights, best practices and evidence based implementation of safe, secure digital technologies to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of health systems.

GDHP Member Countries:

- Currently, 23 countries are the member of this group which include Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, Hong Kong SAR, India, Japan Republic of Indonesia, Italy, New Zealand, Netherlands Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the United States, Ukraine, Uruguay and the World Health Organization.

Five work streams of GDHP:

1. Cyber Security.
2. Evidence and Evaluation.
3. Policy Environments.
4. Interoperability
5. Clinical and Consumer Engagement.

Why is the GDHP important for populations globally?

- As countries around the world face the challenges of designing systems and delivering services that result in good health and well-being for their citizens, digital technologies can provide potential solutions. They can improve the safety, quality and effectiveness of healthcare, support earlier diagnosis of disease and the development of new medicines and treatments. They can empower patients, citizens and the care professionals who serve them.
- Governments are making significant investments to harness the power of technology and foster innovation and public-private partnerships that support high quality, sustainable health and care for all. The GDHP facilitates global collaboration and co-operation in the implementation of digital health services. There is currently no similar international forum to share best practice and enable co-working in digital health.

16. ISLAMIC COOPERATION COUNTRIES (OIC)

What to study?

- For Prelims: IOC- key facts.
- For Mains: India's involvement in the organization, need, significance and challenges.

Context: In a 1st, *India invited to OIC meet as 'guest of honour'*.

Background:

- India has never been invited to the OIC before and the latest development, coming at a time when the India-Pakistan tension is running high, is being seen as a diplomatic success.

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***.

Sources: toi.

17. UN WOMEN

What to study?

- For Prelims: About UN Women- composition, objectives, programmes and significance.
- For Mains: 33% reservation for women- need, significance, challenges in implementation and role in overall women empowerment.

Context: The government of Odisha has been applauded by ***The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*** for proposing 33% reservation for women in Parliament and the State Assemblies.

Background:

- The Odisha Assembly, in November 2018, passed a resolution by unanimous voice vote for providing 33% reservation for women in Legislative Assemblies and Parliament.
- Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had initiated discussion on the motion.

UN Women: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women:

- UN Women is the ***UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women***. UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.
- In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women***.
- It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:
 - Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).
 - International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).
 - Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).
 - United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The main roles of UN Women are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Sources: the hindu.

GENERAL STUDIES - III

Topics: Indian economy and issues related to planning, Employment issues

1. BEST PRACTICES IN BUDGET SURVEY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the survey and scope for development and reforms.

Context: The **Transparency International** conducted a survey to analyse the best practices followed by the states in the Budget Formulation.

- The survey was based on 4 parameters** which include public disclosure, budgetary process, post-budget fiscal management and efforts to make the budget more transparent and citizen-friendly.

Highlights of the Survey:

- The **top slot in the survey was occupied by Assam**. Assam was **followed by Andhra Pradesh and Odisha**.
- Meghalaya, Manipur and Punjab** figured in the bottom list.
- Assam is **the only state** out of the 29 states and 2 UTs, which has published **a Citizens Budget in the public domain**. Also, **the government of Assam is the only government that has conducted budget awareness campaigns across 17 districts**.

Transparency International:

- An international non-governmental organization based in Berlin, Germany**.
- Founded in 1993 by a group of individuals who decided to take up a stance against corruption.
- The **Corruption Perception Index** is the most widely used indicator of corruption worldwide.

Sources: the hindu.

2. PCA FRAMEWORK & BANK RECAPITALIZATION

What to study?

- For Prelims: About PCA- meaning, exemptions and norms.
- For Mains: Recapitalisation- concerns associated, need and the need for comprehensive solution.

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has lifted the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework operational curbs on Bank of India (BoI), Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) and Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC).

Three more banks — Allahabad Bank and Corporation Bank, from the public sector, and Dhanlaxmi Bank from the private sector — are now out of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) prompt and corrective action (PCA) framework.

- The PCA restrictions were lifted after these banks provided a written commitment that they would comply with the norms of minimum regulatory capital, net NPAs (Non-performing Assets) and leverage ratio on an ongoing basis.**
- These Banks have also apprised RBI of the structural and systemic improvements they have put in place.
- There are another six banks that are still under PCA framework.**

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 restrictions?

- ***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 renew 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:

1. 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.
2. 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.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What do you understand by Prompt corrective action framework? Critically analyze whether recapitalizing banks which are under PCA framework is a bad idea?

3. UNION BUDGET 2019-20- HIGHLIGHTS:

Context: Finance Minister Piyush Goyal presented the Interim Budget 2019-20 on February 1, 2019. It was the last Budget of the present Government before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

- An **interim budget** is usually passed by the Lok Sabha without discussion.

Tax proposals:

1. Individual tax payers with taxable income of up to Rs 5 lakh will get full tax rebate from now on.
2. Those earning Rs 6.5 lakh will not have to pay tax, if they invested in specified savings such as PF, PPF, etc.
3. However, the **tax slabs will remain unchanged.**
4. This move will benefit around 3 crore middle class tax payers.
5. For salaried persons, Standard Deduction is being raised from the current Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000.
6. The Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) on fixed deposits and postal deposits will be exempted for interest earned up to Rs 40,000 from Rs 10,000 currently.
7. The rent up to Rs 2.4 lakh will be exempted from TDS.
8. The benefit of capital gains of up to Rs 2 crore will be increased to investment on two residential houses. This benefit can be availed only once in a lifetime.
9. The benefit of the section 80IBA of Income Tax Act will be extended for one more year for availing of the affordable housing.

Interim Budget 2019 proposed a 10-point vision for 2030:

1. Physical and social infrastructure.
2. Digital India.
3. Pollution free nation with green Mother Earth.
4. Expanding rural industrialisation.
5. Clean Rivers with safe drinking water to all Indians.
6. Coastline and ocean waters powering India's development and growth.
7. Space programme – Gaganyaan.
8. Making India self-sufficient in food and organic farming.
9. Healthy India – Ayushman Bharat Scheme.
10. Minimum Government Maximum Governance.

Rastriya Kamdhenu Aayog: This aayog will undertake the development work for Cow welfare.

4. JOBS DATA

Context: Chairman and few members of NSC have quit their jobs.

Possible reasons:

1. Centre's refusal to release new data on employment that were due to be made public in December 2018.
2. Unease about the recently unveiled back-series data on the economy. They were released by the NITI Aayog bypassing convention and the commission's views.

What's the issue now?

1. A key role of the **National Statistical Commission (NSC)**, set up in 2006, is to verify whether data being put in the public domain are reliable and adequate. Information has been collected and disseminated by successive governments under laid-down schedules, earning Indian data greater global trust than most other emerging market peers, especially China. However, the present government has undermined the role of NSC. More often, the views and findings of NSC are not taken into consideration.
2. On the question of job-creation for the youth, credible data are missing. The government's approach to jobs-related data may be due to its disastrous demonetisation gambit which hurt supply chains and informal jobs in the economy and whose effects have lingered.

State of unemployment in India:

- As per the new Periodic Labour Force Survey, for July 2017-December 2018, unemployment in the country has registered a five-decade high.
- The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy has pegged job losses in 2018 at 11 million based on its regular employment surveys.

Conclusion:

- Delay often undermines the credibility of data being released. Therefore, the government should ensure that the data is withheld and India's statistical integrity is not invalidated.

Link: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/standard-deviations/article26168772.ece>.

About NSC:

The Government of India through a resolution dated 1st June, **2005** set up the National Statistical Commission (NSC).

- The setting up of the NSC followed the decision of the Cabinet to accept the recommendations of the **Rangarajan Commission**, which reviewed the Indian Statistical System in 2001. The NSC was constituted with effect from 12th July 2006 with a mandate to evolve policies, priorities and standards in statistical matters.
- **The Commission consists of** a part-time Chairperson, four part-time Members, an ex-officio Member and a secretary. The Chief Statistician of India who is the Head of the National Statistical Office is the Secretary of the Commission and the Chief Executive Officer of the NITI Aayog is the ex-officio Member of the commission.
- **The commission has also been entrusted with the functions** of the Governing Council of the National Sample Survey Office which include overseeing the conduct of National Sample Surveys (NSS) on various socioeconomic subjects through the NSSO and the State Directorate of Economics and Statistics.

5. BANNING OF UNREGULATED DEPOSIT SCHEMES BILL, 2018

What to study?

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

Context: Union Cabinet has given its approval to move official amendments to the **Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018**, pursuant to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF).

- The latest amendments **aim to strengthen the Bill in its objective to effectively tackle the menace of illicit deposit taking activities** in the country, and prevent such schemes from duping poor and gullible people of their hard earned savings.

Key provisions of the Bill:

1. **Substantive banning clause** which bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme. The Bill bans **unregulated deposit taking activities altogether**, by making them **an offence ex-ante** rather than the existing legislative-cum-regulatory framework which only comes into effect ex-post with considerable time lags.

2. ***Creation of three different types of offences***, namely, running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.
3. ***Severe punishment and heavy pecuniary fines*** to act as deterrent.
4. ***Provisions for disgorgement or repayment of deposits*** in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.
5. ***Attachment of properties / assets by the Competent Authority***, and subsequent realization of assets for repayment to depositors.
6. ***Clear-cut time lines*** have been provided for attachment of property and restitution to depositors.
7. ***Creation of an online central database***, for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country.

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

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

Why do we need a comprehensive law on this?

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

Background:

- As per information provided by RBI, during the period between July, 2014 and May, 2018, 978 cases of unauthorized schemes were discussed in State Level Coordination Committee (SLCC) meetings in various States/UTs and were given to the respective regulators/law enforcement agencies in the states. A large number of such instances have been reported from the eastern part of the country.

6. A UNIFIED AUTHORITY FOR REGULATING ALL FINANCIAL SERVICES IN IFSCS

What to study?

- For Prelims: What are IFSCs. Their functions and how are they regulated?
- For Mains: Challenges in their management and the need for a unified authority.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved establishment of ***a unified authority for regulating all financial services in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs)*** in India through ***International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019***.

- ***Facts:*** The first IFSC in India has been set up at GIFT City, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Need for and the benefits of a unified authority:

- Currently, the banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in IFSC are ***regulated by multiple regulators***, i.e. RBI, SEBI and IRDAI.
- The ***dynamic nature of business in the IFSCs necessitates a high degree of inter-regulatory coordination***. It also ***requires regular clarifications and frequent amendments in the existing regulations*** governing financial activities in IFSCs.
- The development of financial services and products in IFSCs would require ***focussed and dedicated regulatory interventions***.
- Therefore, a unified financial regulator for IFSCs in India would ***provide world class regulatory environment to financial market participants***. This also be essential from ***an ease of doing business perspective***.
- The unified authority would also provide the much needed impetus to ***further development of IFSC in India in-sync with the global best practices***.

A draft Bill has been prepared to set up a separate unified regulator for IFSCs. Following are the main features of the Bill:

- **Management of the Authority:** The Authority shall consist of a Chairperson, one Member each to be nominated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), two members to be dominated by the Central Government and two other whole-time or full-time or part-time members.

Functions of the Authority:

1. regulate all such financial services, financial products and FIs in an IFSC which has already been permitted by the Financial Sector Regulators for IFSCs.
2. regulate such other financial products, financial services or FIs as may be notified by the Central Government from time to time.
3. recommend to the Central Government such other financial products, financial services and financial institutions which may be permitted in the IFSCs.

Powers of the Authority:

- All powers exercisable by the respective financial sector regulatory (viz. RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, and PFRDA etc.) under the respective Acts shall be solely exercised by the Authority in the IFSCs in so far as the regulation of financial products, financial services and FIs that are permitted in the IFSC are concerned.

What is an IFSC?

- An IFSC enables bringing back the financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centers by Indian corporate entities and overseas branches / subsidiaries of financial institutions (FIs) to India by offering business and regulatory environment that is comparable to other leading international financial centers in the world like London and Singapore.
- It would **provide Indian corporates easier access to global financial markets**. IFSC would also compliment and promote further development of financial markets in India.

What are the services an IFSC can provide?

1. Fund-raising services for individuals, corporations and governments.
2. Asset management and global portfolio diversification undertaken by pension funds, insurance companies and mutual funds.
3. Wealth management.
4. Global tax management and cross-border tax liability optimization, which provides a business opportunity for financial intermediaries, accountants and law firms.
5. Global and regional corporate treasury management operations that involve fund-raising, liquidity investment and management and asset-liability matching.
6. Risk management operations such as insurance and reinsurance.
7. Merger and acquisition activities among trans-national corporations.

7. INCOME-TAX OMBUDSMAN

What to study?

- For Prelims: Income-Tax Ombudsman- key features.
- For Mains: Why is it being abolished? Issues associated.

Context: The Union Cabinet chaired has approved the proposal for **Abolition of Institution of Income-Tax Ombudsman and Indirect Tax Ombudsman**.

What necessitated this?

- The approval comes in the wake of **alternative complaint redressal mechanisms chosen by public** and the institution of Ombudsman **could not prove to be more effective than regular existing parallel channels of grievance redressal**.

- The Institution of Income-Tax Ombudsman was *created in the year 2003 to deal with grievances of public related to settlement of complaints relating to Income Tax*. However, the Institution of Ombudsman failed to achieve its objectives.
- It was observed that institution of new complaints have in turn fallen to single digits. Also, tax payers started preferring alternate methods of grievance redressal like CPGRAMS (Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System), AaykarSevaKendras etc. further, it was also decided in 2011 to close vacant offices of Indirect Tax Ombudsman.

About the Ombudsman:

- It was established for resolution of complaints relating to the Income Tax Department like an overdue refund.
- It was *autonomous* and hence independent of the jurisdiction of the Income tax department.

8. RBI RESTRUCTURING PACKAGE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the MSME restructuring policy announced by the RBI.
- For Mains: Need for and significance of the policy, challenges persistent and measures to address them.

Context: The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) restructuring package for small businesses announced last month will help recast Rs 1 lakh crore of loans for 7 lakh eligible micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

The scheme:

- The scheme announced by RBI is *a one-time scheme wherein a loan tenor and interest rate can be revised without classifying the asset as a NPA*.
- The facility is *available for standard advances of up to Rs 25 crore only*.
- The scheme will *help free up additional resources which will fuel demand and create further opportunities in the industry*.
- The restructuring must be *implemented by March 31, 2020*. Banks will need to make a provision of 5% towards these restructured loans. Each bank/NBFC should formulate a policy for this scheme with board approval. Those MSMEs that are not exempt from GST will need to be registered on the GSTN on the date of restructuring.

What was the issue with MSMEs?

- SMEs were the worst hit among various industry segments following demonetisation and implementation of the Goods and Services Tax. Availability of credit to MSMEs declined further after the IL&FS default crisis which led to bank credit to non-banking finance companies drying up. This in turn reduced the ability of NBFCs to lend to MSMEs.
- The sector was facing a liquidity problem because of lack of confidence of banks who had turned risk-averse in the wake of rising bad loans.

Significance of MSMEs and the need for creating an enabling environment:

- MSMEs form an important component of the Indian economy and contribute significantly to the country's gross domestic product, exports, industrial output and employment generation.
- Considering the importance of MSMEs in the Indian economy, it is considered necessary at this juncture to take certain measures for creating an enabling environment for the sector.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Analyze whether the slew of measures meant to aid the MSME sector to address their woes have come too little too late?

9. TECHNOLOGY, GLOBALIZATION AND THE GOOD JOBS CHALLENGE

Good job- definition:

The definition of a good job *depends on a country's level of economic development*.

- It is typically *a stable formal-sector position that comes with core labour protections* such as safe working conditions, collective bargaining rights, and regulations against arbitrary dismissal.

- It enables at least a middle-class lifestyle, by that country's standards, with enough income for housing, food, transportation, education and other family expenses, as well as some saving.

Why create good jobs?

1. To achieve inclusive economic prosperity.
2. To provide productive and dependable employment for the vast majority of a country's workforce.

Challenges to the creation of good jobs:

- **Low-skilled labour force:** Production is becoming increasingly skill-intensive while the bulk of the labour force remains low-skilled. This generates a gap between the types of jobs that are created and the types of workers the country has.
- **Technology and globalization have conspired to widen that gap,** with manufacturing and services becoming increasingly automated and digitized.
- **Intensification of economic dualism:** Every economy is divided between an advanced segment, typically globally integrated, employing a minority of the labour force, and a low-productivity segment that absorbs the bulk of the workforce, often at low wages and under poor conditions. The former one is often at the safer side.

What needs to be done?

1. Need to improve employment conditions.
2. Invest in skills and training.
3. For time being, convince successful firms to employ more unskilled workers.
4. Boosting an intermediate range of labour-intensive, low-skilled economic activities. Tourism and non-traditional agriculture are the prime examples of such labour-absorbing sectors.

Way ahead:

- Government policy in developed and developing countries alike is too often preoccupied with boosting the most advanced technologies and promoting the most productive firms.
- But failure to generate good, middle-class jobs has very high social and political costs. Reducing those costs requires a different focus, geared specifically toward the kind of jobs that are aligned with an economy's prevailing skill composition.

(Q) As one of the youngest countries in the world, going forward employment is going to be a major problem for the state. Analyze the issue and suggest how can we create employment opportunities for so many additions to the Labour Force?

Link: <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/opinion-technology-globalization-and-the-good-jobs-challenge-1549563638399.html>

10. BANNING OF UNREGULATED DEPOSIT SCHEMES ORDINANCE, 2019

What to study?

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

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved promulgating an ordinance with regard to the **Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill**, to protect gullible investors from Ponzi schemes.

Background:

- The lower House, or the Lok Sabha, had passed the Bill on the last day of the budget session by a voice-vote, but could not get the approval of the Rajya Sabha.

Significance and impact:

- The proposed Ordinance will immediately tackle the menace of illicit deposit-taking activities in the country launched by rapacious operators, which at present are exploiting regulatory gaps and lack of strict administrative measures to dupe poor and gullible people of their hard-earned savings, an official statement said.

- It will altogether ban unregulated deposit taking schemes, and the law has adequate provisions for punishment and disgorgement or repayment of deposits in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.

Key provisions of the Bill:

- Substantive banning clause** which bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme.
- Creation of three different types of offences**, namely, running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.
- Severe punishment and heavy pecuniary fines** to act as deterrent.
- Provisions for disgorgement or repayment of deposits** in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.
- Attachment of properties / assets by the Competent Authority**, and subsequent realization of assets for repayment to depositors.
- Clear-cut time lines** have been provided for attachment of property and restitution to depositors.
- Creation of an online central database**, for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country.

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

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

Why do we need a comprehensive law on this?

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

(Q) What are Ponzi schemes? Examine why they are considered as such a big menace? Discuss the provisions of Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018?

11. GOVT APPROVES CAPITAL INFUSION IN 12 PSBS

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is bank recapitalization? About PCA- meaning, exemptions and norms.
- For Mains: Recapitalisation- concerns associated, need and the need for comprehensive solution.

Context: The Central Govt has approved the capital infusion of Rs. 48,239 Crore into 12 public sector banks (PSBs).

Background:

- The latest round of capital infusion is aimed at equipping better-performing PSBs under prompt corrective action (PCA) framework of RBI to be above regulatory PCA triggers such as CET-1 ratio of 7.375%, Tier I ratio of 8.875%, CRAR of 10.875% and NNPA below 6%.
- With the latest funding, the total amount of capital infusion would increase to Rs 100958 crore of the planned recapitalization of Rs 1.06 lakh crore for PSBs in FY2019.

Concerns associated with frequent capital infusions:

- The government as the major owner is free to recapitalise but the issue is, **at what cost, for how long, and whether recapitalisation alone is enough.**
- The government is finding it increasingly difficult to recapitalize public sector banks due to **the compulsion to adhere to the stringent budgetary deficit benchmarks.**
- Bankers become **lackadaisical toward debt recovery and tend to escalate provisions and contingencies to be adjusted against the fresh capital.**

- In different-banks-same-pay situations, employees in the loss-making, but **recapitalized, banks become unenthusiastic while those in profit-making, but not recapitalized are demotivated.**
- **It also implies cross-subsidization:** dividend-paying PSU banks subsidizing the non-dividend paying. Ultimately, systemic efficiency suffers.

Way ahead:

- PSBs are in very real danger of losing not only their market share but also their identity unless the government intervenes with surgical precision and alacrity.
- Hence, policymakers and bankers need to put their heads together and come up with a smart option to resolve an issue that can no longer be put on the backburner.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) In the light of NPA problems being faced by the Indian banking sector, suggest ways to strengthen the banking sector.

12. RBI'S PAYOUTS TO THE GOVT — WHY, AND HOW MUCH

Context: This is the second year running that the RBI has paid an interim dividend to the government; it had approved an interim payout of Rs 10,000 crore last year.

How does a central bank like the RBI generate profits (or surplus)?

- **RBI earns largely from** the returns on its foreign currency assets, which could be in the form of bonds and treasury bills of other central banks or top-rated securities, deposits with other central banks, the interest it earns on its holdings of local rupee-denominated government bonds or securities; when lending to banks for very short tenures (such as overnight); and management commission on handling the borrowings of state governments and the central government. **The RBI buys these financial assets against its fixed liabilities such as currency held by the public, and deposits issued to commercial banks on which it does not pay interest.**
- **RBI's expenditure is mainly** on the printing of currency notes and on staff; on commissions to banks for undertaking transactions on behalf of the government across the country, and to primary dealers, including banks, for underwriting some of these borrowings.
- The central bank's total costs, including expenditure on printing and commissions, is only about a seventh of its total net interest income — which implies that **it generates a large surplus.**

Does the government have a claim on the RBI's profits/surplus?

- Government of India is **the sole owner of the RBI.** Therefore, the government can make a legitimate claim to surplus generated by RBI.
- RBI transfers its "surplus" — the excess of income over expenditure — to the government under the provisions **Section 47 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934:** "After making provision for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, contributions to staff and superannuation funds and for all other matters for which provision is to be made by or under this Act or which are usually provided for by bankers, the balance of the profits shall be paid to the Central Government."

Is there a problem in giving extra dividends?

- Much of the surplus that the RBI generates comes from the interest on government assets, or from the capital gains it makes off other market participants. When this is paid to the government as dividend, the RBI is putting back into the system the money it has made from it — and there is **no additional money-printing or reserve-creation involved.**
- But when the RBI pays an additional dividend to the government, **it has to create additional permanent reserves — that is, it has to print money.** To accomodate the special dividend, the RBI would have to withdraw an equivalent amount of money from the public by selling government bonds in its portfolio.

Why are central banks reluctant to transfer large amounts to the sovereign?

- Large payouts can **limit their ability to create buffers that would cushion the impact of a crisis.**

What is the global practice on payment of surplus by central banks?

- Almost all central banks, the US Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, Germany's Bundesbank, or the Reserve Bank of Australia, are owned by their respective governments, and have to transfer their surplus or profits to the Treasury, or the equivalent of India's Finance Ministry.
- The UK has a formal Memorandum of Understanding on the financial relationship between the Treasury and the Bank of England, which lays down a clear framework for passing on 100% of net profits to the government. The US Fed too, transfers all its net earnings to the Treasury.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-rbis-payouts-to-the-govt-why-and-how-much-5593471/>.

13. HALF-MEASURES: NEW ANGEL TAX RULES FOR START-UPS

Context: The Centre recently eased the norms under which investments in start-ups will be taxed by the government.

Recent changes:

1. Investments up to ₹25 crore in companies that are less than 10 years old and with a total turnover of less than ₹100 crore will be exempted from the new angel tax.
2. Investments made by listed companies with a net worth of at least ₹100 crore or a total turnover of at least ₹250 crore will be fully exempt from the tax; so will investments made by non-resident Indians.

What necessitated this? Problems with the old ones:

- In 2012, the angel tax was introduced and was justified as an emergency measure to prevent the laundering of illegal wealth by means of investments in the shares of unlisted private companies at extraordinary valuations.
- But the adverse effect that it has had on investor confidence has forced the government to ease the stringent rules.

Benefits of new rules:

1. The easing of the outdated angel tax rules will definitely make life easier for start-ups, which are in desperate need for capital to fund their growth and other business requirements.
2. Since the new rules are set to be applied retrospectively, many young companies that have received notices from the Income Tax Department in the last few years will be relieved by the latest tweak in the rules.

There are, however, a few other issues with the new rules that could still cause unnecessary headaches to young start-ups:

- Companies wishing to make use of the latest exemption, for instance, will first **need to be registered with the government as start-ups**.
- To be classified as one, **a company needs to attest to conditions such as that it has not invested in any land unrelated to the business, vehicles worth over ₹10 lakh, or jewellery**.
- **These requirements, while probably aimed to prevent money-laundering, can lead to considerable bureaucratic delays and rent-seeking.**
- **Also, the new rules for the angel tax can cause the same old problem of arbitrary tax demands for companies** that do not fall under the defined category of start-ups.
- **The taxes to be paid are still supposed to be calculated by the authorities based on how much the sale price of a company's unlisted share exceeds its fair market value.** It is impossible to know the market value, let alone the fair market value, of shares that are not openly traded in the marketplace. So tax authorities with ulterior motives will still possess enough leeway to harass start-ups with unreasonable tax demands.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/half-measures/article26333408.ece>.

14. WHY INDIA NEEDS TO SET UP A PUBLIC CREDIT REGISTRY ?

Problems with the current credit information system: At present, the credit information market in India, though mature, is highly **fragmented**.

What is Public Credit Registry?

1. The PCR will be an extensive database of credit information for India that is accessible to all stakeholders. The idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower and, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.
2. The proposed PCR will also include data from entities like market regulator Sebi, the corporate affairs ministry, Goods and Service Tax Network (GSTN) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) to enable banks and financial institutions to get a 360-degree profile of the existing as well as prospective borrowers on a real-time basis.

Need for a PCR:

1. A central repository, which captures and certifies the details of collaterals, can enable the writing of contracts that prevent over-pledging of collateral by a borrower. In absence of the repository, the lender may not trust its first right on the collateral and either charge a high cost on the loan or ask for more collateral than necessary to prevent being diluted by other lenders. This leads to, what in economics is termed as, pecuniary externality – in this case, a spillover of one loan contract onto outcomes and terms of other loan contracts.
2. Furthermore, absent a public credit registry, the ‘good’ borrowers are disadvantaged in not being able to distinguish themselves from the rest in opaque credit markets; they could potentially be subjected to a rent being extracted from their existing lenders who enjoy an information monopoly over them. The lenders may also end up picking up fresh clients who have a history of delinquency that is unknown to all lenders and this way face greater overall credit risk.

Benefits of having a PCR:

1. A PCR can potentially help banks in credit assessment and pricing of credit as well as in making risk-based, dynamic and counter-cyclical provisioning.
2. The PCR can also help the RBI in understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working, and if not, where are the bottlenecks.
3. Further, it can help supervisors, regulators and banks in early intervention and effective restructuring of stressed bank credits.
4. A PCR will also help banks and regulators as credit information is a ‘public good’ and its utility is to the credit market at large and to society in general.

Task force on PCR:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had formed a high-level task force on public credit registry (PCR) for India. The task force was chaired by Y M Deosthalee.
- The task force has suggested the registry should capture all loan information and borrowers be able to access their own history. Data is to be made available to stakeholders such as banks, on a need-to-know basis. Data privacy will be protected.

Source: <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/opinion-why-india-needs-to-set-up-a-public-credit-registry-1550773274423.html>.

15. PREPAID PAYMENT INSTRUMENTS

What to study?

- For Prelims: What are PPIs and how are they regulated?
- For Mains: Significance and role of PPIs, regulatory challenges faced by them.

Context: In a much needed respite to e-wallet companies, the Reserve Bank of India has extended deadline for completion of Know Your Customer (KYC) norms for prepaid payment instrument (PPI) issuers by six months.

Background:

- As per RBI directions, PPI issuers were required to complete the KYC process by February 28, 2019.
- PPIs or mobile wallets were mandated by the banking regulator in October 2017 to capture all information required under the know-your-customer (KYC) guidelines by end February.

What are PPIs?

- Prepaid payment instruments are those which **facilitate purchase of goods and services against the value stored on such instruments**. Value stored on them is paid by the holder using a medium (cash, debit card, credit card etc).
- These are generally issued in the form of smart cards, mobile wallets, paper vouchers, internet accounts/wallets.
- Prepaid payment instruments (PPIs) come with a pre-loaded value and in some cases a pre-defined purpose of payment. They facilitate the purchase of goods and services as well as inter-personal remittance transactions such as sending money to a friend or a family member.
- These payment instruments are licensed and regulated by the Reserve Bank of India.** There are three types of PPIs—closed system PPIs, semi-closed system PPIs and open system PPIs.
- The most common example of a closed system PPI is a brand-specific gift card. Such cards, physical or otherwise, can be used only at specific locations, and cannot be used to transfer funds from one account to another.

Sources: the hindu.

16. BANKS MAY SET REPO RATE AS BENCHMARK FOR LENDING

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is repo rate?
- For Mains: Why set repo rate as benchmark for lending? Challenges associated, significance and implications.

Context: Most commercial banks in India are likely to select **RBI's repo rate as the external benchmark to decide their lending rates, from April 1**. The repo rate is the key policy rate of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Current scenario:

- The marginal cost of fund based lending rate (MCLR) is currently the benchmark for all loan rates. Banks typically add a spread to the MCLR while pricing loans for homes and automobiles.

Why repo?

- The RBI has mandated that the spread over the benchmark rate to be decided by banks at the inception of the loan should remain unchanged through the life of the loan. It should remain unchanged unless the borrower's credit assessment undergoes a substantial change and as agreed upon in the loan contract.
- If the lending rates are linked to the repo rate, any change in the repo rate will immediately impact the home and auto loan rates, since RBI has mandated the spread to remain fixed over the life of the loan.**

Benefits of setting Repo Rate as benchmark for lending:

- It will make the system more transparent since every borrower will know the fixed interest rate and the spread value decided by the bank.
- It will help borrowers compare loans in a better way from different banks.
- There shall be standardisation and ease of understanding for the borrowers. This would mean that same bank cannot adopt multiple benchmarks within a loan category.

What is Repo Rate?

- Repo stands for 'Repurchasing Option'. It refers to **the rate at which commercial banks borrow money from the RBI in case of shortage of funds**.
- It is one of the main **tools of RBI to keep inflation under control**.

What is MCLR?

- The Marginal Cost of Funds based Lending Rate (MCLR) system was introduced by the Reserve Bank to provide loans on minimal rates as well as market rate fluctuation benefit to customers. This system has modified the existing base rate system of providing home loans. In this system, banks have to set various benchmark rates for specific time periods starting from an overnight to one month, quarterly, semi-annually and annually.
- MCLR replaced the earlier base rate system to determine the lending rates for commercial banks. RBI implemented it on 1 April 2016 to determine rates of interests for loans.

MCLR aims:

- To improve the transmission of policy rates into the lending rates of banks.
- To bring transparency in the methodology followed by banks for determining interest rates on advances.
- To ensure availability of bank credit at interest rates which are fair to borrowers as well as banks.
- To enable banks to become more competitive and enhance their long run value and contribution to economic growth.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. NEW E-COMMERCE POLICY COMES INTO EFFECT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: New e-commerce policy- facts, significance, concerns and the way ahead.

Context: India's new e-commerce policy came into effect on February 1, 2019. A new set of policy rules had been formed for the e-commerce companies. DIPP gave them a 60-day window period for aligning themselves to the government's modified foreign direct investment (FDI) rules.

Key Highlights of the new policy:

1. Bar online retailers from **selling products through vendors in which they have an equity interest**.
2. Also bars them from **entering into exclusive deals with brands for selling products only on their platforms**.
3. **All online retailers will be required to maintain a level playing field** for all the vendors selling their products on the platform, and it shall not affect the sale prices of goods in any manner.
4. **Disallow e-commerce players to control the inventory of the vendors**. Any such ownership over the inventory will convert it into inventory based model from marketplace based model, which is not entitled to FDI.
5. Under the new rules, **the e-commerce retailer shall be deemed to own the inventory of a vendor if over 25 per cent of the purchases of such a vendor are through it**.
6. **Restricts marketplaces from influencing prices** in a bid to curb deep discounting. With this, special offers like cashback, extended warranties, faster deliveries to some brands will be prohibited, with the view to provide a level playing field.

Significance:

- The key objective behind the revising the FDI rules for the e-commerce giants is to level the playing field in the retail space, as heavy discounting on online retail sites was causing heavy losses to the small and medium brick and mortar stores.

Expected impacts and outcomes:

1. The policy will impact global e-commerce players like Walmart-owned Flipkart and Amazon, who would have to change their business structures to comply with the new policy, which was announced late in December.
2. The new norms could take a massive toll on the earnings of Amazon and Flipkart. Earlier this month, both the e-commerce companies had asked that the deadline be extended by 4 and 6 months respectively, leading to traders' opposition.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The recent updates to the regulations governing FDI in e-commerce does well to close out the transgressions and violations in the existing policy wrt FDI in e-commerce. Critically Analyze.

2. ANGEL TAX

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about Angel tax, issues relevant, need for relaxation of norms and measures announced.

Context: The government has decided to set up **a five-member working committee to look into the angel tax issue** and come up with guidelines in one week. It also agreed to implement some key changes requested by startups regarding the issue.

What is Angel Tax?

- **Angel Tax is a 30% tax that is levied on the funding received by startups from an external investor.** However, this 30% tax is levied when startups receive angel funding at a valuation higher than its 'fair market value'. It is counted as income to the company and is taxed.
- **The tax, under section 56(2)(viib), was introduced by in 2012 to fight money laundering.** The stated rationale was that bribes and commissions could be disguised as angel investments to escape taxes. But given the possibility of this section being used to harass genuine startups, it was rarely invoked.

Why is Angel tax problematic?

- There is no definitive or objective way to measure the 'fair market value' of a startup. Investors pay a premium for the idea and the business potential at the angel funding stage. However, tax officials seem to be assessing the value of the startups based on their net asset value at one point. Several startups say that they find it difficult to justify the higher valuation to tax officials.
- In a notification dated May 24, 2018, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) had exempted angel investors from the Angel Tax clause subject to fulfilment of certain terms and conditions, as specified by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) now renamed as the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. However, despite the exemption notification, there are a host of challenges that startups are still faced with, in order to get this exemption.

Proposed reforms:

1. Earlier, start-ups whose aggregate amount of paid-up share capital and share premium after the proposed issue of share does not exceed ₹10 crore are eligible for exemption from the tax. **The government is planning to raise this limit to ₹25 crore.**
2. **It is also planning to amend the definition of a start-up** to include companies that have been in operation for up to 10 years rather than the previous limit of seven years.

Is Scrapping Angel Tax possible?

- The angel tax could not be scrapped as money laundering is a major problem. There is a network of 200 shell companies and they have been under control since 2012, so it cannot be scrapped.
- However, concessions are under consideration with the size of the start-up, the duration of its operation, and the income of the angel investor.

Sources: the hindu.

3. NORMS RELAXED FOR START- UPS

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is Angel tax, recently relaxed norms- overview.
- For Mains: Significance of start- ups and the need for policies to support them.

Context: The government has relaxed the norms under the definition of Start-Ups. The relaxations are in line with the government's vision to promote the culture of entrepreneurship and ease of doing business in India.

- The new norms aim **to catalyse entrepreneurship by enabling angel investments by innovators across all sections of society and all sectors of economy.**

The changes brought in are:

- The investment limit of angel investors to seek exemption under the Income Tax Act, 1961 has been increased to Rs 25 crore from 10 Crore.
- An entity shall be considered a start-up up to 10 years from its date of incorporation/registration instead of the previous period of 7 years.
- An entity would be considered as a startup up to a turnover of Rs 100 crore as against the earlier limit of Rs 25 crore.

Exemptions Proposed:

1. A start-up cannot invest in a building or land unless it is for its business or used by it for purposes of renting or held by it as stock-in-trade.
2. A start-up cannot offer loans or advances, other than those where lending money is part of its business.
3. A start-up cannot make any capital contribution to any other entity or invest in shares, car, any vehicle or mode of transport that costs more than Rs 10 lakh.

Sources: the hindu.

4. DRAFT E-COMMERCE POLICY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the policy, challenges faced by the e-commerce industry in the country and measures needed to support their growth.

Context: The Department of Industry and Internal Trade has released the draft **National ecommerce Policy** that sends a clear message that **India and its citizens have a sovereign right to their data.**

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED:

1. Data
2. Infrastructure development.
3. Ecommerce marketplaces.
4. Regulatory issues.
5. Stimulating domestic digital economy.
6. Export promotion.

Key features of the draft:

1. **INDIAN CONTROL OVER DATA:** Govt to be given access to source code, algorithms of AI systems. Impose custom duties on electronic transmissions to reduce revenue loss. It bars sharing of sensitive data of Indian users with third party entities, even with consent.
2. A '**data authority**' to look at community data.
3. **LOCAL PRESENCE FOR APPS & WEBSITES:** All ecommerce websites, apps available for downloading in India to have a registered business entity here. Non-compliant ecommerce app/website to be denied access here.
4. **INCENTIVES FOR DATA LOCALISATION:** Location of the computing facilities like data centres, server farms within India. Firms to get 3 years to comply with local data storage requirements.
5. Data storage facilities to get '**infrastructure status**'.
6. **FDI IN ECOMM:** FDI only in marketplace model. No FDI in inventory model.
7. **ECOMMERCE TRADE:** Curbs on Chinese ecommerce exports. Gifting route, often used by Chinese apps, websites, banned for all parcels except life-saving drugs. Integrating Customs, RBI and India Post to improve tracking of imports through ecommerce.
8. **Incentives & e-commerce export promotions.**
9. **Ecommerce startups may get 'infant industry' status** raising limit for courier shipments from Rs 25,000 to boost ecommerce export.
10. **REGUALTION:** No separate regulator for ecommerce sector.
11. **E-consumer courts** to be developed.

Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

1. NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Highlights of the recommendations and criteria used to determine the National Minimum Wage.
- For Mains: National Minimum wage-need, significance, challenges and benefits.

Context: Expert Committee Submits its Report on Determining Methodology for Fixing National Minimum Wage.

Background:

- There have been several developments since the norms for the fixation of the minimum wages were recommended by the **15th ILC in 1957** and subsequently strengthened by the judgement of the Supreme Court in the judgement of **Workmen v Reptakos Brett & Co. case** in 1992.
- **The Ministry of Labour and Employment had constituted an expert committee in January 2017, under the Chairmanship Dr. Anoop Satpathy** to review and recommend methodology for fixation of National Minimum Wage (NMW).

Criteria on which the minimum wage has been proposed:

- Using the **nutritional requirement norms** as recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for Indian population, the report has recommended **a balanced diet approach** which is culturally palatable for fixation of national minimum wage.
- Accordingly, it has proposed that **food items amounting to the level of ± 10 per cent of 2,400 calories, along with proteins ≥ 50 gm and fats ≥ 30 gm per day per person** to constitute a national level balanced food basket.
- It also proposes **minimum wage should include reasonable expenditure on 'essential non-food items'**, such as clothing, fuel and light, house rent, education, medical expenses, footwear and transport, which must be equal to the median class and expenditure on any 'other non-food items' be equivalent to the **sixth fractile (25-30 per cent) of the household expenditure distribution** as per the NSSO-CES 2011/12 survey data.

What's the proposed National Minimum wage?

- On the basis of the aforesaid approach, the report has recommended to fix the **need based national minimum wage for India at INR 375 per day (or INR 9,750 per month)** as of July 2018, irrespective of sectors, skills, occupations and rural-urban locations for a family comprising of 3.6 consumption unit.
- It has also recommended to introduce an **additional house rent allowance** (city compensatory allowance), averaging up to INR 55 per day i.e., INR 1,430 per month for **urban workers** over and above the NMW.

Regional variations:

- Apart from proposing the level of a single national minimum wage at an all-India level, the report has also estimated and recommended **different national minimum wages for different geographical regions of the country to suit the local realities and as per socio-economic and labour market contexts**.
- For the purpose of estimating national minimum wages at regional levels it has grouped the states into five regions based on a composite index and have recommended region specific national minimum wages as follows:

REGION-SPECIFIC MINIMUM WAGES PROPOSED

REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	REGION 5
₹342/day or ₹ 8,892/month	₹380/day or ₹ 9,880/month	₹414/day or ₹ 11,622/month	₹447/day or ₹ 11,622/month	₹386/day or ₹ 10,036/month
Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, MP, Odisha, UP and West Bengal	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, J&K and Uttarakhand	Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu	Delhi, Goa, HP, Haryana and Punjab	Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura

Way ahead:

- The committee has also recommended reviewing the consumption basket every five years, subject to the availability of NSSO-CES data, and – within the period of 5 years – revising and updating the basic minimum wage at least in line with the consumer price index (CPI) every six months, to reflect changes in the cost of living.

(Q) Do you think there should be a law to ensure minimum wages applicable to all employees across that country including sector-specific minimum wages for industrial workers? Substantiate.

2. ROZGAR YUKTA GAON (RYG)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features and implementation of RYG.
- For Mains: Significance and potential of khadi sector.

Context: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has agreed to bring in a new component of '**Rozgar Yukta Gaon**' to introduce enterprise-based operation in the Khadi sector and to create employment opportunities for thousands of new artisans in the current and next financial year (2018-19 and 2019-20).

What is it?

- Rozgar Yukta Gaon (RYG) **aims at introducing an 'Enterprise-led Business Model' in place of 'Subsidy-led model' through partnership among 3 stakeholders- KRDP-assisted Khadi Institution, Artisans and Business Partner.**
- It will be rolled out in 50 Villages by providing 10,000 Charkhas, 2000 looms & 100 warping units to Khadi artisans, and would create direct employment for 250 Artisans per village. The total Capital Investment per village shall be Rs.72 Lakh as subsidy, and Rs.1.64 Crore in terms of Working Capital from the Business Partner.

3 GOOD JOBS, NOT UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME, ARE NEEDED FOR A GOOD SOCIETY

Why UBI cannot be a panacea for unemployment related problems?

- UBI and its many variants—quasi-UBI and income supplements for targeted groups—**treat only the symptoms of the disease**. The root cause of the disease is that **many people do not have work that provides adequate incomes**.
- UBI **leads to dependency, unfulfillment, depression and marginalization**.

What is a good Job?

- A good job implies **a contract between the worker and society**. The worker provides the economy with the services it needs. In return, society and government must create conditions whereby workers are treated with dignity and can earn adequate incomes.
- **Good jobs require good contracts between workers and their "employers"**. Employers are those who benefit from the services workers provide the enterprise, even if they are not legally classified as "employers".

Need of the hour:

Economists and policymakers must go to fundamental principles:

1. **"Fairness" for workers must be a stronger principle than "flexibility" for employers. Reduce the number of labour regulations but be very firm about the essential regulations to ensure good incomes and good working conditions.**
2. **Tax incentives should be directed towards hiring of less-skilled workers**, rather than attracting more capital investments that displace workers, so that people at the bottom of the pyramid can step on to the formal escalator for upward mobility in society.

Conclusion:

- Policymakers must focus on the reforms required in the economy to produce good jobs to provide good incomes by doing good work.

Source: <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/opinion-good-jobs-not-universal-basic-income-are-needed-for-a-good-society-1551203819140.html>.

4. INCLUSIVE INTERNET INDEX 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the Index, categories and performance of various countries.

Context: Inclusive Internet Index 2019 has been released.

About the Inclusive Internet Index:

- The **Inclusive Internet Index, commissioned by Facebook and conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit**, seeks to measure the extent to which the Internet is not only accessible and affordable, but also relevant to all, allowing usage that enables positive social and economic outcomes at individual and group level.
- The aim of the Inclusive Internet Index is to** provide researchers and policymakers with the information they need to enable the beneficial use of the Internet, irrespective of age, gender, location or background.
- The index assesses the performance of 100 countries in four categories of inclusion:** Accessibility, Affordability, Relevance and Readiness. Each category incorporates key indicators of internet inclusion, including quantitative measures such as network coverage and pricing, and qualitative measures such as the presence of e-inclusion policies and the availability of local-language content.

Key findings:

- The digital divide appears to be widening at the bottom of the income pyramid, risking a reversal of past progress.
- Gender gaps in Internet access continue to narrow globally, led by low and lower middle-income countries.
- Concerns about online privacy remain high, and trust in information from governments on the Internet has retreated in the West.
- Men have more Internet access than women globally but low and lower middle income countries narrowed the gender gap in 2018.
- Inclusion for women and those with disabilities have improved, with low income and lower-middle-income countries driving the progress.

Performance of various countries:

- Sweden has topped the rankings followed by Singapore and the US.
- India has been ranked 47th.
- The UK, Namibia, Ireland, Austria, Chile and South Africa are the top performers of the year in terms of gender equality. All these countries had female digital skills training plans.

Sources: [toi](#).

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

1. NINE NEW ITEMS ADDED TO MSP FOR MINOR FOREST PRODUCE SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims: MSP for MFP scheme, items covered.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme, MFP and its significance for tribes.

Context: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has added nine minor forest produce (MFP) items to its minimum support price (MSP) for MFP scheme. The total number of MFPs covered under the list is 49.

- The nine new items are:** Bakul (dried bark), Kutaj (dried bark), Noni/Aal (dried fruits), Sonapatha/Syonak pods, Chanothi seeds, Kalihari (dried tubers), Makoi (dried fruits), Apang plant and Sugandhrnantri roots/tubers.

About MSP for MFP scheme:

- The MSP for MFP scheme was started by the Centre in 2013 to ensure fair and remunerative prices to MFP gatherers. The total outlay for the scheme is Rs 967 crore as Centre's share for the planned period (2013-14 to 2016-17).

- **The scheme is designed as a social safety net for improvement of livelihood of MFP gatherers** by providing them fair price for the MFPs they collect.
- **The scheme has been started with the objective of providing fair price to MFP gatherers**, enhance their income level and ensure sustainable harvesting of MFPs. The MSP scheme seeks assurance of buying at a particular price, primary processing, storage, transportation etc while ensuring sustainability of the resource base.

Implementation of the scheme:

- **Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India is the Nodal Ministry for implementation of the scheme** which will announce Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the selected MFPs with the technical support from TRIFED.
- **TRIFED will act as the Central Nodal Agency for implementation and monitoring of the scheme through State level implementing agencies.**
- State designated agencies will undertake procurement of notified MFPs directly from MFP gatherers (individual or collectives) at haats notified procurement centers at grass root level at prefixed Minimum Support Price and ensure full & timely on the spot payment to MFP gatherers.

Significance of MFP:

1. Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals who belong to the poorest of the poor section of society. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that majority of 100 million tribals depend on MFPs for food, fodder, shelter, medicines and cash income.
2. 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.
3. 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 jobs annually in the country.

Sources: down to earth.

2. PRADHAN MANTRI KISAN SAMMAN NIDHI

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the scheme.

Context: To provide an **assured income support to the small and marginal farmers**, the Government is launching the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).

About Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:

- Under this programme, **vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land upto 2 hectares, will be provided direct income support at the rate of Rs. 6,000 per year.**
- This income support will be **transferred directly into the bank accounts of beneficiary farmers**, in three equal installments of Rs. 2,000 each.

Significance:

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. MILLET VILLAGE SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Millet Village scheme- objectives and significance, all about Millets and their significance.

Context: With ‘superfood’ and ‘eat smart’ strategies forming the main ingredients of the latest dietary mantras, Kerala State Agriculture Department is earmarking farm space in more districts for growing nutrient-rich millets.

- The state is also planning to expand its **Millet Village scheme** to various other districts.

What are Millets?

- Millet is a common term to categorize small-seeded grasses that are often termed nutri-cereals or dryland-cereals, and includes sorghum, pearl millet, ragi, small millet, foxtail millet, proso millet, barnyard millet, kodo millet and other millets.

Benefits of Millets:

- **An important staple cereal crop** for millions of small holder dryland farmers across sub-saharan Africa and Asia, millets offer nutrition, resilience, income and livelihood for farmers even in difficult times. They have multiple untapped uses such as food, feed, fodder, biofuels and brewing. Therefore, millets are Smart Food as they are Good for You, Good for the Farmer and Good for the Planet.
- **Nutritionally superior to wheat & rice** owing to their higher levels of protein with more balanced amino acid profile, crude fiber & minerals such as Iron, Zinc, and Phosphorous, millets can provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.
- **The anaemia (iron deficiency), B-complex vitamin deficiency, pellagra (niacin deficiency) can be effectively tackled** with intake of less expensive but nutritionally rich food grains like millets.
- **Millets can also help tackle health challenges** such as obesity, diabetes and lifestyle problems as they are gluten free, have a low glycemic index and are high in dietary fibre and antioxidants.
- **Adapted to low or no purchased inputs and to harsh environment** of the semi-arid tropics, they are the backbone for dry land agriculture.
- **Photo-insensitive & resilient to climate change**, millets are hardy, resilient crops that have a low carbon and water footprint, can withstand high temperatures and grow on poor soils with little or no external inputs. In times of climate change they are often the last crop standing and, thus, are a good risk management strategy for resource-poor marginal farmers.

Efforts by government to promote millets:

1. In order to promote ‘millets’, India had on its part notified these climate resilient crops as “Nutri-Cereals” and allowed its inclusion in the Public Distribution System (PDS) for improving nutritional support in April.
2. Recognising millets’ anti-diabetic properties, the notification called it a “powerhouse of nutrients” and identified several varieties of millets for promotion. The millets in the category of “Nutri-Cereals” include Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl Millet (Bajra), Finger Millet (Ragi), Foxtail Millet (Kangani/Kakun) and Buckwheat (Kuttu) among others.
3. Besides, the government had in July substantially hiked the minimum support price (MSP) of millets so that more and more farmers may opt for cultivation of these less water consuming crops.

Facts for Prelims:

- 160th session of the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Council, held in Rome in December 2018, approved India's proposal to observe an International Year of Millets in 2023.**

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What is the importance of growing millets for India. Discuss. Also discuss the initiatives taken by the government for promoting production and consumption of millets.

4. KISAN CREDIT CARD SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: KCC scheme- features and significance.

Context: The **Indian Banking Association (IBA)** has issued advisory guidelines requesting banks to waive off the processing, documentation, inspection, ledger folio charges and all other service charges for crop loans up to Rs

3 Lakhs or for the **Kisan Credit Card Scheme**. The move aims to provide direct benefit to farmers and ease the pressure on them.

Campaign:

- **The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare** has announced the launch of campaign with immediate effect to saturate farmers for financial inclusion under Kisan Credit Cards (KCC).
- **This campaign will be launched through the Financial Institutions** including Commercial Banks, Cooperative Banks and Regional Rural Banks in collaboration with the State Governments. The Department of Financial Services has already issued directives to these financial institutions under their purview. There are around 6.95 crore active KCCs.

Kisan Credit Card Scheme:

- The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme was announced in the Budget speech of 1998-99 to fulfil the financial requirements of the farmers at various stages of farming through institutional credit.
- The model scheme was prepared by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on the recommendation of **V Gupta committee**.
- **The KCC scheme is being implemented by the all Co-operative banks, Regional Rural Banks and Public Sector Banks throughout the country.**
- **Scheme covers risk of KCC holders against death or permanent disability resulting from accidents.**

Objectives:

1. To provide adequate and timely credit support from the banking system to the farmers at the cheap rate of interest.
2. To provide credit at the time of requirement.
3. To support post-harvest expenses.
4. To provide Working capital for maintenance of farm assets and activities allied to agriculture.
5. Investment credit requirement for agriculture and allied activities (land development, pump sets, plantation, drip irrigation etc.)
6. Consumption requirements of farmers.

Other Salient features of the Scheme:

- Revolving cash credit facility involving any number of drawals and repayments within the limit.
- Limit to be fixed on the basis of operational land holding, cropping pattern and scale of finance.
- Entire production credit needs for full year plus ancillary activities related to crop production to be considered while fixing limit.
- Card valid for 5 years subject to annual review. As incentive for good performance, credit limits could be enhanced to take care of increase in costs, change in cropping pattern, etc.
- Conversion/reschedule of loans also permissible in case of damage to crops due to natural calamities.
- Operations may be through issuing branch (and also PACS in the case of Cooperative Banks) through other designated branches at the discretion of bank.
- Crop loans disbursed under KCC Scheme for notified crops are covered under Crop Insurance Scheme, to protect the interest of the farmer against loss of crop yield caused by natural calamities, pest attacks etc.

Sources: the hindu.

5. NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF FOOD TECHNOLOGY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT BILL, 2019

What to study?

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

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the introduction of **National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019**.

- **The objective of the bill** is to confer the status of **Institutions of National Importance** to National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management (NIFTEM) at Kundli, Haryana, and the Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology (IIFPT) at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu.

Benefits:

- The legislation would provide for ***functional autonomy*** to the institutes to design and develop courses, undertake research activities and leverage enhanced status in their academic pursuits, so that ***they become world class institutes***.
- ***The institutes would implement the reservation policy of the Government*** and would also undertake special outreach activities for the benefits of concerned stakeholders.
- It would enable the ***institutes to provide world class teaching and research experience*** by adopting innovative practices.

6. AGRI-MARKET INFRASTRUCTURE FUND (AMIF)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF)- objectives, features and significance.

Context: The Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs has given its approval for the creation of a corpus of Rs. 2000 crore for ***Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF)***.

About Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF):

1. The fund will be ***created with NABARD for development and up-gradation of agricultural marketing infrastructure in Gramin Agricultural Markets and Regulated Wholesale Markets.***
2. AMIF will provide the State/UT Governments ***subsidized loan*** for their proposal for developing marketing infrastructure in 585 Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) and 10,000 Grameen Agricultural Markets (GrAMs).
3. ***States may also access AMIF for innovative integrated market infrastructure projects including Hub and Spoke mode and in Public Private Partnership mode.***

7. GEM AND CCI SIGN MOU

What to study?

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

Context: ***Government e Marketplace (GeM) and Competition Commission of India (CCI)*** entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to enable a fair and competitive environment in the e-Marketplace.

About GeM:

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

Competition Commission of India:

- It is a ***statutory body*** of the Government of India, responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition.

8. HIMACHAL'S FIRST MEGA FOOD PARK IN UNA

What to study?

- For Prelims: Mega food park scheme and mega food parks in the country.
- For Mains: Need for Mega food parks and other related agricultural issues.

Context: ***Cremica Food Park is the first mega food park of Himachal Pradesh.*** The Park is located at Village Singhain Una District of Himachal Pradesh. It is set up at a cost of Rs 107.34 crore.

Mega Food Park Scheme:

- To give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables, the **Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country**.
- The Mega Food Park Scheme is based on "**Cluster approach and envisages creation of state of art support infrastructure** in a well-defined agri/ horticultural zone for setting up of modern food processing units along with well-established supply chain.
- Common facilities and enabling infrastructure is created at **Central Processing Centre** and facilities for primary processing and storage is created near the farm in the form of **Primary Processing Centers (PPCs)** and **Collection Centers (CCs)**. Under the Scheme, the Centre provides financial assistance up to Rs 50 crore per mega food park project.

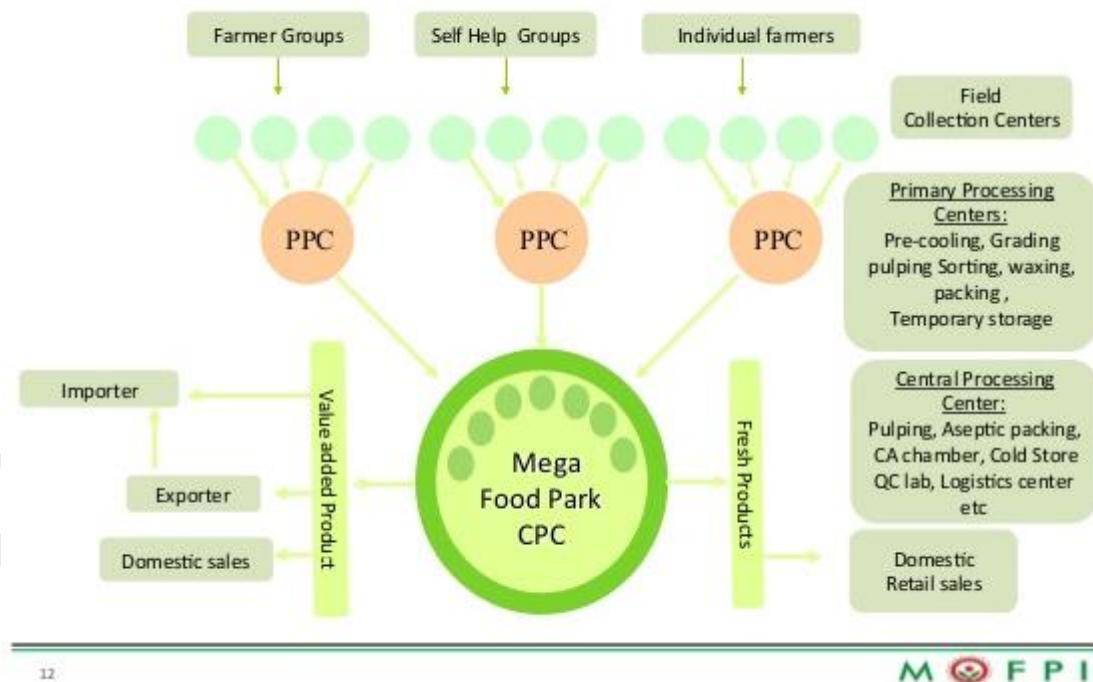
Problems with Indian food parks:

- Promoters have faced difficulties in selling the new concept to banks** and, as a result, have failed to secure loans to build the parks.
- Acquiring the 50 acres of land, which is mandatory under MFPS**, has been another challenge that most developers have failed to address.
- Convincing small enterprises to set up shop at these facilities has not been easy.**

Facts for Prelims:

- India's first mega food park 'Sri尼 Mega Food Park'**, sprawling 147-acre space, was opened in Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh in 2012.

Mega Food Park Model: An Illustration



(Q) Critically comment on the objectives of government's Mega Food Park scheme and the progress made so far in establishing them.

9. KISAN URJA SURAKSHA EVAM UTTHAAN MAHAABHIYAN OR KUSUM SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features and objectives of the scheme.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme, solar power potential of India, challenges therein and legislative measures needed.

Context: The Government is formulating a Scheme '*Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (KUSUM)*' which inter-alia aims **to promote use of solar energy among the farmers**.

About KUSUM scheme:

- **What is it?** It is a ₹1.4 lakh-crore scheme **for promoting decentralised solar power production** of up to 28,250 MW to help farmers.
- **Benefits:** It would provide extra income to farmers, by giving them an option to sell additional power to the grid through solar power projects set up on their barren lands. It would help in de-dieselising the sector as also the DISCOMS.
- **Components of the scheme:** The components of the scheme include building 10,000 MW solar plants on barren lands and providing sops to DISCOMS to purchase the electricity produced, 'solarising' existing pumps of 7250 MW as well as government tube wells with a capacity of 8250 MW and distributing 17.5 lakh solar pumps. The 60% subsidy on the solar pumps provided to farmers will be shared between the Centre and the States while 30% would be provided through bank loans. The balance cost has to be borne by the farmers.
- **Significance of the scheme:** Expected positive outcomes of the scheme include promotion of decentralised solar power production, reduction of transmission losses as well as providing support to the financial health of DISCOMS by reducing the subsidy burden to the agriculture sector. The scheme would also promote energy efficiency and water conservation and provide water security to farmers.

The proposed scheme provides for:

1. Setting up of grid-connected renewable power plants each of 500KW to 2 MW in the rural area.
2. Installation of standalone off-grid solar water pumps to fulfil irrigation needs of farmers not connected to grid.
3. Solarization of existing grid-connected agriculture pumps to make farmers independent of grid supply and also sell surplus solar power generated to Discom and get extra income.

(Q) Discuss the objectives and features of the Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (KUSUM) scheme.

10. MINIMUM SUPPORT FOR MINOR FOREST PRODUCE

What to study?

- For Prelims: About MFP and how are they protected, need for revision of MSP.
- For Mains: Significance of MSP and the need for ensuring rights of tribals on MFP.

Context: The Centre will frame **new guidelines and extend the coverage of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for minor forest produce (MFP) scheme**, which is aimed at benefiting a majority of 10 crore tribals. The government is also considering increasing the MSP for various MFPs by around 40%.

Background:

- The MSP for MFP scheme was started by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in 2013 to ensure fair and remunerative prices to MFP gatherers.

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.

Need of the hour:

- While it has been more than five years since the scheme was launched, it has not been implemented properly. Improving the implementation of the scheme is the need of the hour to benefit the forest-dwelling and forest-dependent communities.

- Moreover, despite the MFP rights being given to tribal communities under the Forest Rights Act, many states have nationalised MFPs like tendu, monopolising their trade, which is against the law.

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%.

Sources: down to earth.

(Q) Recognition of tribal rights over non-timber forest products (NTFPs) would accelerate empowerment of the poor and marginalised. Comment.

11. SIKARIA MEGA FOOD PARK

What to study?

- For Prelims: Mega food park scheme and mega food parks in the country.
- For Mains: Need for Mega food parks and other related agricultural issues.

Context: *Sikaria Mega Food Park is the 1st Mega Food Park of Tripura.* It was inaugurated recently.

About Mega Food Parks scheme:

- Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing** Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.
- The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at** providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastages, increasing farmers' income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.
- These food parks give a major boost to the food processing sector** by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables.
- Funding:** A maximum grant of Rs 50 crore is given for setting up a MFP, in minimum 50 acres of contiguous land with only 50% contribution to the total project cost.

Mode of operation:

- The Scheme has a cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model.** It includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure at Central Processing Centre (CPC).
- The PPCs are meant for functioning as a link between the producers and processors for supply of raw material to the Central Processing Centres.
- CPC has need based core processing facilities and basic enabling infrastructure to be used by the food processing units setup at the CPC. The minimum area required for a CPC is 50 acres.
- The scheme is demand-driven** and would facilitate food processing units to meet environmental, safety and social standards.

12. RASHTRIYA GOKUL MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Rashtriya Gokul Mission – features and significance, significance of the dairy sector.

Context: The Finance Minister Piyush Goyal announced the allotment of ₹750 crore to the **Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)**. The objective is to get native breeds to produce more milk, be more fecund, and to raise the quality of Indian cows and bulls to eventually outdo Jerseys and Holsteins.

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”.

1. **Gokul Grams will be established in:** i) the native breeding tracts and ii) near metropolitan cities for housing the urban cattle.
2. 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.
3. The Gokul Gram will be **self sustaining and will generate economic resources** from sale of A2 milk (**A2 milk** is cow's milk that mostly lacks a form of β -casein proteins called A1 and instead has mostly the A2 form), organic manure, vermi-composting, urine distillates, and production of electricity from bio gas for in house consumption and sale of animal products.
4. The Gokul Gram will also **function as state of the art in situ training centre** for Farmers, Breeders and MAITRI's.
5. 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.
6. 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.

Sources: the hindu.

13. RASHTRIYA KAMDHENU AAYOG

What to study?

- For Prelims: Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog, Rashtriya Gokul Mission- objectives and key features.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for Conservation protection and development of cows and their progeny, challenges therein and measures to address these challenges.

Context: Cabinet approved the proposal for establishment of **Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog** for Conservation protection and development of cows and their progeny.

Functions of the Aayog:

1. The Aayog will work in collaboration with Veterinary, Animal Sciences or Agriculture University or departments or organizations of the Central/State Government engaged in the task of research in the field of breeding and rearing of cow, organic manure, biogas etc.
2. It will take up scientific activities for genetic upgradation and increasing productivity of cows.
3. It will provide the policy framework and direction to the cow conservation and development programmes in the country and for ensuring proper implementation of laws with respect to the welfare of cows.

Background:

- Union Minister, in interim budget, announced that Rs 750 crore would be allocated for the **Rashtriya Gokul Mission. Under the scheme, a ‘Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog’ would be set up.**

Need and significance:

- The setting up of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog will **lead to conservation, protection and development of cattle population in the country including development and conservation of indigenous breeds.**
- It will result in **increased growth of livestock sector** which is more inclusive, benefitting women, and small and marginal farmers.

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

1. POLICY BIAS AGAINST RAINFED AGRICULTURE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Various schemes for the support of rainfed agriculture in the country, challenges faced by them and the need for urgent reforms.

Context: A new **rainfed agriculture atlas** has been released recently. It has been **released by Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture (RRA) Network.**

- The atlas not only maps the agro biodiversity and socio-economic conditions prevailing in such areas, but also attempts to document the policy biases that are making farming unviable for many in these areas.

Challenges present:

1. Three out of five farmers in India grow their crops using rainwater, instead of irrigation. However, **per hectare government investment into their lands may be 20 times lower, government procurement of their crops is a fraction of major irrigated land crops**, and many of the government's flagship agriculture schemes are not tailored to benefit them.
2. **There has been "negligence" toward rainfed areas** which is leading to lower incomes for farmers in these areas. Farmers in rainfed areas are receiving 40% less of their income from agriculture in comparison to those in irrigated areas.
3. Lands irrigated through big dams and canal networks get a per hectare investment of ₹5 lakh. Watershed management spending in rainfed lands is only ₹18,000-25,000.
4. **The difference in yield is not proportionate to the difference in investment.** When it comes to procurement, over the decade between 2001-02 and 2011-12, the government spent ₹5.4 lakh crore on wheat and rice. Coarse cereals, which are grown in rainfed areas, only had ₹3,200 crore worth of procurement in the same period.
5. Flagship government schemes, such as seed and fertiliser subsidies and soil health cards, **are designed for irrigated areas and simply extended to rainfed farmers without taking their needs into consideration.**

What needs to be done?

1. A more balanced approach is needed to give rainfed farmers the same research and technology focus, and production support that their counterparts in irrigation areas have received over the last few decades.
2. In the long run, cash incentives and income support like the PM-KISAN scheme announced in the budget are better than extensive procurement. While income support is important to help farmers through the current crisis, it is now the time to design better structured interventions for the future.

Sources: the hindu.

2. GROWING THREAT OF MONOCULTURE IN CROP PRODUCTION

Context: The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** has released its report- "**The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture 2019.**"

Concerns highlighted by the report:

- The report highlights the growing practice of **monoculture —cultivation of a single crop at a given area — in food production around the world.**
- **Only 9 plant species account for almost two-thirds of total crop production.**

- In many parts of the world, biodiverse agricultural landscapes have been, or are being, replaced by large areas of monoculture, farmed using large quantities of external inputs such as pesticides, mineral fertilizers and fossil fuels.

The report lists drivers of change affecting biodiversity for food and agriculture, including:

- Population growth and urbanization.
- Over-exploitation and over-harvesting.
- Changes in land and water use and management.
- Pests, diseases and invasive alien species.
- Climate change.
- Pollution and external inputs.
- Natural disasters.
- Markets, trade and the private sector.

Why Monoculture farming may not be good?

- If a single variety is widely grown, a pest or disease to which it lacks resistance can lead to a dramatic fall in production. If livelihoods are heavily dependent on the species in question, the effects can be disastrous. Examples:
 - The 1840 potato blight famine in Ireland.
 - The 20th century losses in cereals in the United States.
 - Losses of taro production in Samoa in the 1990s.

Why diversify?

- Diversifying crop cultivation reduces risk of economic shocks: “Integrating intercrops, hedgerows or cover crops, particularly legumes, into a system can reduce drought stress by helping to conserve water in the soil profile and help to replenish depleted soil fertility.”
- Also, “crop diversification, including rotation and intercropping and the use of diverse forage plants in pastureland, can reduce pest damage and weed invasions.”

The need of the hour:

- New supply systems.
- Improved public-private partnerships.

Source: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/report-flags-growing-threat-of-monoculture-in-crop-production-63332>.

3. PRADHAN MANTRI KISAN SAMMAN NIDHI

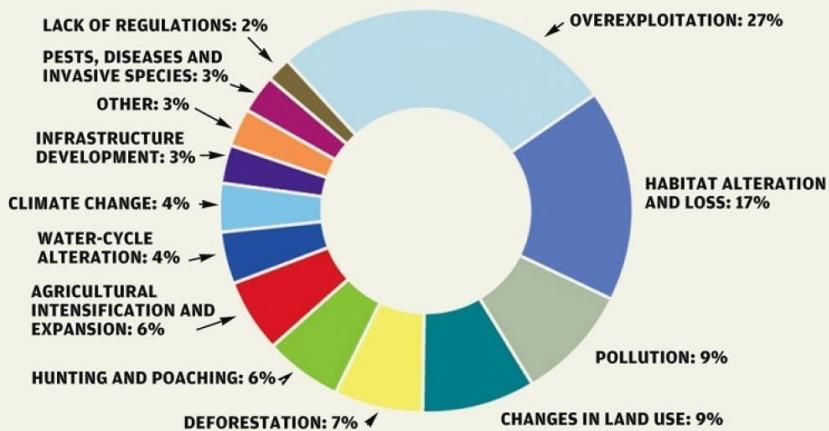
What to study?

- For Prelims: Key Features of the scheme.
- For Mains: Significance, relevance and need for the scheme, concerns and challenges over its implementation, is it sufficient?

DATA WISE

Of the **6,000 plant species** cultivated for food, just nine (sugar cane, maize, rice, wheat, potatoes, soybeans, oil-palm fruit, sugar beet and cassava) account for **66% of total crop production**. While **63% of plants, 11% of birds, and 5% of fish and fungi** were in decline. The wild food sources are becoming harder to find.

Reported threats to wild foods species



Data Source: The state of the world's biodiversity for food and agriculture, FAO commission on genetic resources for food and agriculture, 2019

Context: To provide an assured income support to the small and marginal farmers, the Government has unveiled the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).

Significance:

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

Similar programmes by states:

- **Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana** in Madhya Pradesh was sought to provide relief to farmers by providing the differential between MSPs and market prices.
- **The Rythu Bandhu scheme** of the Telangana government provides ₹4,000 per acre for every season to all the farmers of the state. Similar initiatives have also been framed in Jharkhand and Odisha.
- In December 2018, Odisha launched the **Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income augmentation (KALIA)**. KALIA is more complicated in design and implementation. It commits to give Rs 5,000 per SMF, twice a year, that is Rs 10,000 a year.

Benefits of direct cash transfers:

- It has immediate impact on **reducing hunger and rural poverty**.
- They can **help households to overcome credit constraints and manage risk**. This can increase productive investment, increase access to markets and stimulate local economies.
- Income support can be used to make a repayment or at least activate a bank account which can then receive a loan.
- It can **increase investment in agricultural inputs**, including farm implements and livestock.
- It can serve as an **important complement to a broader rural development agenda**, including a pro-poor growth strategy focusing on agriculture.

Challenges with cash transfers- criticisms:

- **Landless labourers are not being covered** under PM-KISAN.
- **Cash transfers are not greatly superior in terms of leakages** compared to other schemes of in-kind transfer such as the public distribution system (PDS).
- A targeted cash transfer scheme envisions the **role of the state to only providing cash income to the poor**. This kind of approach seeks to absolve the state of its responsibility in providing basic services such as health, education, nutrition and livelihood.
- **Cash transfer scheme such as PM-KISAN cannot be substituted for subsidies and other institutional support systems** such as the National Food Security Act-powered public distribution system. In fact, such cash transfer schemes could be counterproductive and may lead to more distress.
- Cash transfers do not solve the following problems which are **the reasons for the current agrarian crisis**. The Agrarian crisis is not just of low incomes in agriculture. The genesis of the current crisis lies in the faulty and ad hoc export-import policy, lack of infrastructure and cartelisation and collusion in agricultural markets, which have prevented farmers from realizing the market prices for agricultural produce.
- **Cash transfer is neither a substitute for the structural reforms needed in agriculture, nor does it adequately compensate the farmer** for the risks and uncertainty of crop cultivation.
- **In the absence of proper tenancy records**, it will also benefit the absentee landlords.
- **It is no substitute for the lack of investment in agriculture**, which has declined at 2.3% per annum in real terms.

Conclusion:

- PM-KISAN is an ambitious scheme that has the potential to deliver significant welfare outcomes. However, the current top-down, rushed approach of the government ignores governance constraints and is therefore likely to result in failure.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:

1. Under this programme, vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land **upto 2 hectares**, will be provided direct income support at the rate of **Rs. 6,000 per year**.
2. This **income support** will be transferred directly into the bank accounts of beneficiary farmers, in **three equal installments of Rs. 2,000 each**.
3. The complete expenditure of **Rs 75000 crore** for the scheme will be borne by the Union Government in **2019-20**.

- An alternative bottom-up strategy and well-planned implementation mechanism would allow weaknesses to be identified and rectified at the local level. The most effective modalities can then be scaled nationally and ensure success.

(Q) Implementation of PM-KISAN is riddled with challenges and learning from Rythu scheme and Kalia scheme will help going forward. Examine.

4. SUJALAM SUFALAM JAL SANCHAY ABHIYAN

What to study?

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

Context: The government of **Gujarat has launched the second edition of the water conservation scheme Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan.**

Background:

- During the first edition against its anticipated target of 16,616 works of deepening of ponds and lakes across the state, 18,220 works were accomplished. The first edition witnessed an increase in the water storage capacity of more than 11,000 lakh cubic feet rainwater through different sources like ponds, reservoirs, check dams, bori bandh and other.
- The desilting had also generated a huge amount of loose/soil or clay which can be used by farmers to increase agricultural productivity.

Sources: [toi](#).

Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan:

- The scheme aims to **deepen water bodies** in the state before monsoon to increase storage of rainwater to be used during times of scarcity.
- It involves cleaning and desilting of riverfronts, sprucing up of Irrigation canals.

5. PAHARI DAM MODERNIZATION PROJECT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Location, benefits and significance of the project.

Context: **Pahari Dam modernization project** was recently inaugurated by the PM.

About the project:

- Pahari Dam is a water storage dam situated on Dhasan River** in Jhansi district.
- The **Dhasan River is a right bank tributary of the Betwa River**. The river **originates in Madhya Pradesh**.

Significance:

- The project will benefit farmers by reducing the water leakage from the dam and make more water available for the farmers.

Topics: Infrastructure; Investment models;

1. NATIONAL GRID

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is National Grid? UTs out of it, capacity and cross border transmissions.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for National Grid, India's energy demands and the role of National Grid in fulfilling these demands.

Why in News? PM Modi recently dedicated the 220 kV Srinagar- Alusteng – Drass- Kargil – Leh Transmission Line to the Nation. With this, Ladakh is now connected to the **National Grid**.

- The project has been completed by** the Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (**POWERGRID, a Navratna Company** of Government of India, under Ministry of Power).
- Benefits of this project: It will result in minimizing the massive use of diesel generating sets during winters, and thus will help in protection of beautiful environment, of pristine Ladakh region. This would also give huge boost to the tourism sector and enhance socio-economic development of Ladakh.

What is National Grid?

- It is **the high-voltage electric power transmission network in mainland India, connecting power stations and major substations** and ensuring that electricity generated anywhere in mainland India can be used to satisfy demand elsewhere.
- The National Grid is owned, operated, and maintained by state-owned **Power Grid Corporation of India**.
- It is one of the largest operational synchronous grids in the world with 307.8 GW of installed power generation capacity.
- **The union territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep are not connected** to the National Grid.

Benefits of a National Grid:

- Better availability resulting in lesser power cuts.
- More stability in power.

Cross border transmission links:

- Presently, **India is importing electricity from Bhutan with synchronous transmission links while exporting power to Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar with asynchronous transmission links** between the National Grid, and the electricity grids of these countries.

2. NATIONAL GAS GRID

What to study?

- For Prelims: National Gas Grid- objectives, need and significance.

Context: The Union Government has envisaged the development of the **National Gas Grid**.

The objectives of the National Gas Grid are:

1. To remove regional imbalance within the country with regard to access for natural gas and provide clean and green fuel throughout the country.
2. To connect gas sources to major demand centres and ensure availability of gas to consumers in various sectors.
3. Development of City Gas Distribution Networks in various cities for the supply of CNG and PNG.

Significance:

- The National Gas Grid together with providing gas connections to households will provide better infrastructure for automobiles using gas.
- The National Gas Grid will also aid in renewing of the fertilizer sector and also give a boost to the Power and Automotive sector.

3. RIVER INFORMATION SYSTEM

What to study?

- For Prelims: About IWAI, RIS.
- For Mains: Significance, objectives and the need for RIS.

Context: To boost cargo movement on Ganga, the second phase of **river information system (RIS)** was recently inaugurated between Farakka and Patna.

RIS enables achievement of safe and efficient inland water transport by avoiding the following risks:

- Ship- to – Ship collisions.
- Ship – Bridge collisions.
- Groundings

About RIS:

What is it? It is a **combination of modern tracking equipment related hardware and software designed to optimize traffic and transport processes in inland navigation**.

- RIS is being implemented under the overall responsibility of **Inland Waterway Authority of India**, a statutory body administered by the Ministry of Shipping.
- The system enhances swift electronic data transfer between mobile vessels and shore (Base stations) through advance and real-time exchange of information. This would facilitate:
 1. Enhancement of inland navigation safety in ports and rivers.
 2. Better use of the inland waterways.
 3. Environmental protection.

4. STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE (SPR) FACILITY

What to study?

- For Prelims: ISPRL, Strategic petroleum reserves.
- For Mains: Significance of these reserves, need and potential.

Context: In a boost to energy security of the country, PM recently dedicated to the nation, 1.33 MMT **Visakhapatnam Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) facility of Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited (ISPRL)**. The cost of the Project is Rs. 1125 crore. The Facility has the largest underground storage compartment in the country.

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:

1. 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.
 2. 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.
 3. 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.
- (Q) To address energy insecurity, the government of India had mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. At present the demand for the same is growing stronger with each passing day. Discuss why such reserve is needed.

5. OPEN ACREAGE LICENSING POLICY

What to study?

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

Context: The ministry of petroleum and natural gas has launched the third bidding round under the **Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)**, offering 23 hydrocarbon blocks covering over 31,000 sq km for exploration.

- With the launch of the third bidding round, more than 1,20,000 sq km has now been made available for exploration in last one year under the OALP.
- The 23 blocks offered now are spread across states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Assam, West Bengal, Nagaland, Tripura, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. Some blocks are also in eastern and western offshore.

What is Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)?

1. The OALP, a critical **part of the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy**, provides **uniform licences** for exploration and production of all forms of hydrocarbons, enabling contractors to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources.
2. Fields are offered under **a revenue-sharing model** and throw up marketing and pricing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced.

- Under the OALP, once an explorer selects areas after evaluating the National Data Repository (NDR) and submits the EoI, it is to be put up for competitive bidding and the entity offering the maximum share of oil and gas to the government is awarded the block.
- NDR has been created to provide explorers' data on the country's repositories, allowing them to choose fields according to their capabilities. Data received through the National Seismic Programme, an in-depth study of 26 sedimentary basins, are continuously being added to the NDR.

Background:

- The Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) replacing the erstwhile New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) was approved in March 2016 and the Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) along with the National Data Repository (NDR) were launched in June 2017 as the key drivers to accelerate the Exploration and Production (E&P) activities in India.
- The main features of HELP are Revenue Sharing Contract, single Licence for exploration and production of conventional as well as unconventional Hydrocarbon resources, marketing & pricing freedom, etc.

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

- 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.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The Hydrocarbon Exploration Licensing Policy, or HELP, is said to signal one of the most important market-oriented sectoral reforms of the past two decades. Examine why.

6. LIGHT HOUSE PROJECTS CHALLENGE

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Light House Projects challenge and GHTC- India- key facts.
- For Mains: Significance and rationale behind these challenges.

Context: The Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has instituted a challenge for States/ UTs to select six sites across the country for constructing the Lighthouse projects under GHTC-India.

Key facts:

- The winning six States/ UTs that score the highest marks across the prescribed criteria will be awarded lighthouse projects.
- The States/ UTs will receive Central Assistance to construct these projects as per PMAY (U) guidelines.
- In addition to this, a Technology Innovation Grant (TIG) for the States/ UTs is provisioned to offset the impact of any additional cost implication due to the use of new technology and to absorb the issues related to economies of scale and other related factors.
- The selected sites for lighthouse projects will be used as an 'open laboratory' for live demonstration and will receive due attention from academia (Civil Engineering, Planning, Architecture), practitioners (Public/ Private), policy makers (Central/ State) and media apart from felicitation/ recognition in Grand Expo-cum-Conference.

"Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC- India)":

- The Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has already launched a "Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC- India)".
- The challenge has three components viz. i) Conduct of Grand Expo-cum-Conference, ii) Identifying Proven Demonstrable Technologies from across the globe and iii) Promoting Potential Technologies through the establishment of Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators- India (ASHA-I) for incubation and accelerator support.

7. LADIS – LEAST AVAILABLE DEPTH INFORMATION SYSTEM

What to study?

- For Prelims: About LADIS and IWAI.
- For Mains: Significance and potential of Inland waterways, challenges involved therein.

Context: Moving a step ahead towards ensuring optimum use of National Waterways, the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has launched a new portal **LADIS – Least Available Depth Information System**.

LADIS and its significance:

- Initially LAD information will be available for NW-1, NW-2, Indo-Bangladesh Protocol route and NW-3, along with the date of survey. The facility will be expanded to other NWs also.
- **LADIS will ensure that real-time data on least available depths** is disseminated for ship/barge and cargo owners so that they can undertake transportation on NWs in a more planned way.
- Details of LAD will be **fed into the portal by respective surveyors and regional incharge deputed with IWAI survey vessels** which constantly move on NWs.

Significance:

1. IWAI has designed LADIS to facilitate the day to day operations of inland vessels plying on National Waterways and to avoid any hindrance in service and operation.
2. An assured depth of waterway is required for seamless movement of vessels. If real time information is made available regarding LADs in stretches of various NWs, it will help transporters by guiding them on the suitability of time of movement.
3. It will enhance credibility and efficiency of information sharing to achieve seamless operations on National Waterways, besides pre-empting problems that may occur during movement of vessels.

8. GUIDELINES ON ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key Guidelines on Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure.
- For Mains: Policy and schemes related to e- vehicles and their significance, challenges in the sector and reforms needed.

Context: Government has issued **guidelines to upgrade the charging infrastructure in the country to boost the electric vehicles**.

- In this regard, **the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has made amendments to the Model Building Byelaws (MBBL) 2016 and Urban Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) Guidelines 2014**, making provisions for establishing EV charging infrastructure.

Key Features of the Guidelines:

- A public charging station should be on both sides of the highways or roads on every 25 km.
- For long range and heavy-duty electric vehicles, there should be at least one station on each side of the highway every 100 kilometres.
- Charging facilities will also be available at bus depots and transport hubs within three years. In the first phase, to be completed by 2021, mega cities — with a population of over 4 million as per the 2011 census — will be covered.
- The government has also permitted private charging at residences and offices.

Significance of these guidelines:

- The centre estimates that 25% of the total vehicles on roads will be electric vehicles by 2030. This necessitates the erection of robust electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure across the country. The guidelines are a step forward in this direction.
- Besides, India is committed to United Nations' goal to take urgent action to combat climate change. Government has initiated several steps to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. One of such steps is to encourage environment-friendly electric cars.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The recent guidelines with respect to charging stations for electric vehicles will finally boost electric vehicles in the country. Critically examine.

9. GRID CONNECTED ROOFTOP SOLAR PROGRAMME

What to Study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, significance and potential of roof to solar energy, challenges therein.

Context: Cabinet approves Phase-II of Grid Connected Rooftop Solar Programme for achieving cumulative capacity of 40,000 MW from Rooftop Solar Projects by the year 2022.

Impact:

- The Programmes will have substantial environmental impact in terms of savings of CO₂ emission.** Considering average energy generation of 1.5 million units per MW, it is expected that addition of 38 GW solar rooftop plants under Phase-II by year 2022 will result in CO₂ emission reduction of about 45.6 tonnes per year.
- The programme has directed employment potential.** Besides increasing self-employment the approval is likely to generate employment opportunity equivalent to 9.39 lakh job years for skilled and unskilled workers.

What is the potential for rooftop solar in India?

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has pegged the market potential for rooftop solar at 124 GW. However, only 1,247 MW of capacity had been installed as of December 31, 2016.
- That is a little more than 3% of the target for 2022, and 1% of the potential.

Why is it not being adopted widely?

- One of the major problems with rooftop solar — and what affects solar energy generation in general — is the variability in supply.** Not only can the efficiency of the solar panels vary on any given day depending on how bright the sunlight is, but the solar panels also produce no electricity during the night. Arguably, night is when off-grid locations most need alternative sources of electricity.
- Storage is one solution.** Storage technology for electricity, however, is still underdeveloped and storage solutions are expensive. Most residential customers will find the cost of installing both rooftop solar panels and storage facilities prohibitive. Residential areas also come with the associated issues of use restrictions of the roof — if the roof is being used for solar generation, then it cannot be used for anything else.
- Another major reason why rooftop solar is not becoming popular is that the current electricity tariff structure renders it an unviable option.** Many states have adopted a net metering policy, which allows disaggregated power producers to sell excess electricity to the grid. However, the subsidised tariffs charged to residential customers undermine the economic viability of installing rooftop solar panels. The potential profit simply does not outweigh the costs.

What is rooftop solar?

- Rooftop solar installations — as opposed to large-scale solar power generation plants — can be installed on the roofs of buildings. As such, they fall under two brackets: commercial and residential.
- This simply has to do with whether the solar panels are being installed on top of commercial buildings or residential complexes.

What are the benefits?

- Rooftop solar provides companies and residential areas the option of an alternative source of electricity to that provided by the grid. While the main benefit of this is to the environment, since it reduces the dependence on fossil-fuel generated electricity, solar power can also augment the grid supply in places where it is erratic.
- Rooftop solar also has the great benefit of being able to provide electricity to those areas that are not yet connected to the grid — remote locations and areas where the terrain makes it difficult to set up power stations and lay power lines.

10. SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE TOWARDS AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION (SATAT) INITIATIVE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: SATAT initiative- key objectives, significance and brief overview on CNG and CBG.

Context: The government recently handed over the 100th Letter of Intent (LOI) to the Compressed Bio-Gas(CBG) Entrepreneur (producer) under the SATAT scheme.

About the initiative:

- The initiative is aimed at providing a Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) as a developmental effort that would benefit both vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs.
- Compressed Bio-Gas plants are proposed to be set up mainly through independent entrepreneurs. CBG produced at these plants will be transported through cascades of cylinders to the fuel station networks of OMCs for marketing as a green transport fuel alternative.
- The entrepreneurs would be able to separately market the other by-products from these plants, including bio-manure, carbon-dioxide, etc., to enhance returns on investment.
- It is planned to roll out 5,000 Compressed Bio-Gas plants across India in a phased manner.
- This initiative is expected to generate direct employment for 75,000 people and produce 50 million tonnes of bio-manure for crops.

There are multiple benefits from converting agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste into CBG on a commercial scale:

- Responsible waste management, reduction in carbon emissions and pollution.
- Additional revenue source for farmers.
- Boost to entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment.
- Support to national commitments in achieving climate change goals.
- Reduction in import of natural gas and crude oil.
- Buffer against crude oil/gas price fluctuations.

Background:

- Bio-gas is produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste / bio-mass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc. After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has pure methane content of over 95%.

Way ahead:

- The potential for Compressed Bio-Gas production from various sources in India is estimated at about 62 million tonnes per annum.
- Going forward, Compressed Bio-Gas networks can be integrated with city gas distribution (CGD) networks to boost supplies to domestic and retail users in existing and upcoming markets.
- Besides retailing from OMC fuel stations, Compressed Bio-Gas can at a later date be injected into CGD pipelines too for efficient distribution and optimised access of a cleaner and more affordable fuel.

Topics: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology.

NATIONAL SCIENCE DAY 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: National science day, Raman effect.
- For Mains: Achievements of Indians in the field of science and technology.

Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG):

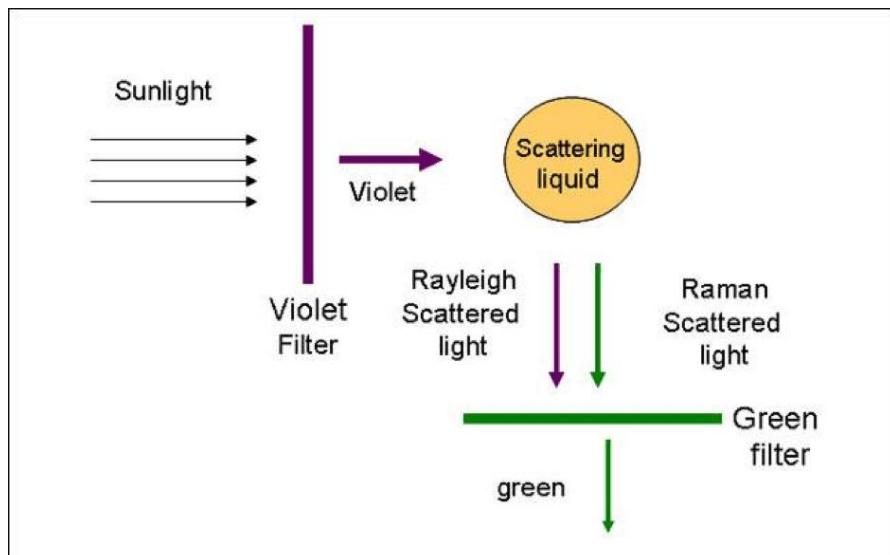
- Compressed Bio-Gas is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential. With calorific value (~52,000 KJ/kg) and other properties similar to CNG, Compressed Bio-Gas can be used as an alternative, **renewable automotive fuel**.
- Given the abundance of biomass in the country, Compressed Bio-Gas has the potential to replace CNG in automotive, industrial and commercial uses in the coming years.
- Compressed Bio-Gas can be produced from various **bio-mass/waste sources**, including agricultural residue, municipal solid waste, sugarcane press mud, distillery spent wash, cattle dung and sewage treatment plant waste. The other waste streams, i.e., rotten potatoes from cold storages, rotten vegetables, dairy plants, chicken/poultry litter, food waste, horticulture waste, forestry residues and treated organic waste from industrial **effluent treatment plants (ETPs)** can be used to generate biogas.

Context: National Science Day is celebrated on 28th of February every year in order to commemorate the invention of the Raman Effect in India by the Indian physicist, Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman on the same day in the year 1928.

- For his great success in the field of science in India, Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman was awarded and honored with the **Nobel Prize in the Physics in the year 1930**.
- Theme:** "Science for the People and the People for Science."

What is Raman effect?

- The Raman Effect is a change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules. When a beam of light traverses a dust-free, transparent sample of a chemical compound, a small fraction of the light emerges in directions other than that of the incident (incoming) beam.
- Most of this scattered light is of unchanged wavelength. A small part, however, has wavelengths different from that of the incident light; its presence is a result of the Raman effect.



Raman's experiment:

- The violet light of the solar spectrum is isolated with a violet filter and passed through the liquid sample. Most of the light emerging from the liquid sample is the same color as the incident violet beam: the so-called Rayleigh scattered light (the scattering of light by particles in a medium, without change in wavelength. It accounts, for example, for the blue colour of the sky, since blue light is scattered slightly more efficiently than red).
- However, Raman, along with K S Krishnan was able to show that **some of the scattered light was a different color, which they could isolate by using a green filter placed between the observer and the sample.**

Sources: the hindu.

Topics: Awareness in space.

1. NASA'S HUBBLE TELESCOPE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Hubble telescope- objectives and findings.

Context: Using the Hubble Space Telescope, astronomers have discovered a dwarf galaxy in a globular cluster which is only 30 million light-years away.

- The researchers determined that this galaxy — nicknamed **Bedin 1**, after discovery team leader L. R. Bedin of the INAF-Osservatorio Astronomico di Padova in Italy — is a “spheroidal dwarf” just 3,000 light-years wide.

About the Hubble Space Telescope:

- The Hubble Space Telescope is a large telescope in space. NASA launched Hubble in 1990.
- It was built by the United States space agency NASA, with contributions from the European Space Agency.
- Hubble is the only telescope designed to be serviced in space by astronauts.
- Expanding the frontiers of the visible Universe, the Hubble Space Telescope looks deep into space with cameras that can see across the entire optical spectrum from infrared to ultraviolet.

Sources: the hindu.

2. INDIA'S COMMUNICATION SATELLITE GSAT-31 LAUNCHED FROM FRENCH GUIANA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: GSAT- 31- features, objectives and significance.

Context: Indian Space Research Organisation's latest communication satellite, **GSAT-31 was successfully launched by Arianespace aboard its launch vehicle Ariane 5** from the spaceport in French Guiana recently.

Ariane 5 carried two communication satellites:

1. Saudi Geostationary Satellite 1/Hellas Sat 4 and Hellas Sat.
2. ISRO's GSAT-31.

About GSAT- 31:

- **A telecommunications satellite designed and manufactured by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).**
- **India's 40th communication satellite** and derives its heritage from ISRO's earlier INSAT/GSAT satellite series.
- It will be placed in **Geostationary Orbit (36,000 km above the equator) using its onboard propulsion system.**
- It has a unique configuration of providing flexible frequency segments and flexible coverage. Hence, **it will provide communication services to Indian mainland and islands.**
- It will also provide DTH Television Services, connectivity to VSATs for ATM, Stock-exchange, Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) and e-governance applications. The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.

Key Objectives:

1. Augment the Ku-band transponder capacity in Geostationary Orbit for at least 15 years.
2. Provide continuity to operational services on some of the in-orbit satellites.
3. Help bridge the digital divide in the Indian subcontinent as part of an ambitious Indian space program, whose objectives are to develop India while pursuing scientific research and planetary exploration.

Sources: the hindu.

3. HERA MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Hera mission- objectives and significance, about Didymos.

Context: The European Space Agency's (ESA's) Hera mission is set for a new record by becoming the **first spacecraft to explore a binary asteroid — the Didymos pair.**

- The moon orbiting Didymos, called '**Didymoon**' — **almost the size of the Giza Pyramid in Egypt, measuring just 160 metres in diameter — will be the smallest asteroid ever explored.**

Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART):

- On the sidelines, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in USA will also launch the **Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART)** between 2020 and 2021, which will target **Didymoon as part of its planetary defence programme.**
- The programme, **designed to protect Earth from dangerous comets and asteroids, aims to crash DART into Didymoon in 2022 to alter its orbit around Didymos.**
- **DART will deliberately crash itself into the moonlet** at a speed of approximately 6 km per second, using an onboard camera and autonomous navigation software.
- **The collision will change the speed of the moonlet in its orbit around the main body.** Following the collision, Hera would explore the asteroid in 2026 and check the impact and deflection created by DART.

Why Didymoon?

- Didymoon was chosen because of its close proximity to Earth and its size. Didymoon is small and in a tight enough 12-hour orbit around its parent, that its orbital period can indeed be shifted in a measurable way.

- **Didymos is a binary asteroid**; the primary body has a diameter of around 780 m and a rotation period of 2.26 hours, whereas the Didymoon secondary body has a diameter of around 160 m and rotates around the primary at a distance of around 1.2 km from the primary surface in around 12 hours.

Sources: down to earth.

4. LOFAR TELESCOPE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: LOFAR telescope- objectives, features and significance of the latest discovery.

Context: A new map of the night sky published recently charts hundreds of thousands of previously unknown galaxies discovered using **LOFAR telescope** that can detect light sources optical instruments cannot see.

- The discovery literally shed new light on some of the Universe's deepest secrets, including the physics of black holes and how clusters of galaxies evolve.

About LOFAR Telescope:

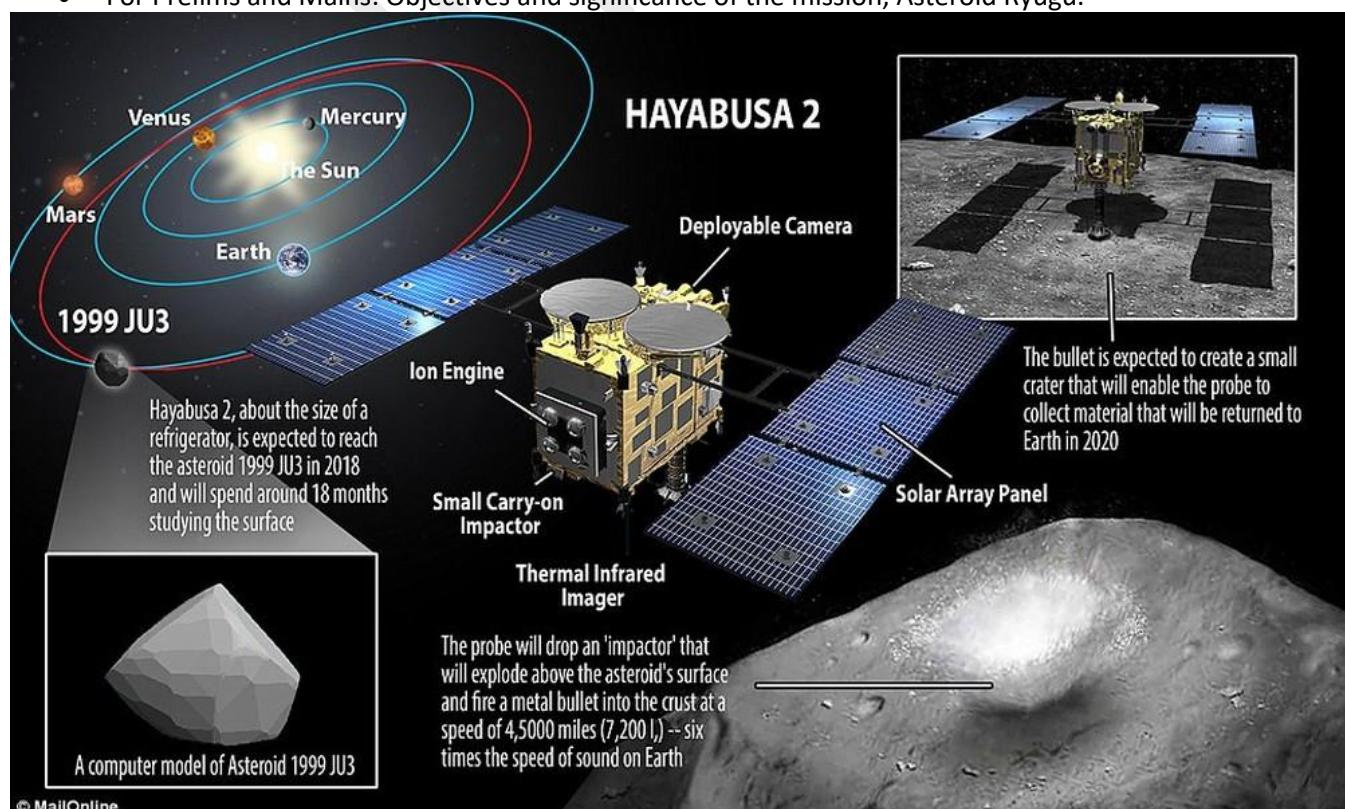
- The Low-Frequency Array or LOFAR, is **a large radio telescope network located mainly in the Netherlands**, completed in 2012 by ASTRON, the Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy and its international partners.
- **How it works?** LOFAR consists of a vast array of omnidirectional antennas using a new concept in which the signals from the separate antennas are not combined in real time as they are in most array antennas. The electronic signals from the antennas are digitized, transported to a central digital processor, and combined in software to emulate a conventional antenna.
- **The project is based on an interferometric array of radio telescopes** using about 20,000 small antennas concentrated in at least 48 stations.
- **The mission of LOFAR is to** map the Universe at radio frequencies from ~10–240 MHz with greater resolution and greater sensitivity than previous surveys, such as the 7C and 8C surveys, and surveys by the Very Large Array (VLA) and Giant Meterwave Radio Telescope (GMRT).

Sources: the hindu.

5. HAYABUSA2

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Objectives and significance of the mission, Asteroid Ryugu.



Context: Japan Space Exploration Agency (JAXA) has announced that a probe, **Hayabusa2**, had successfully landed on an asteroid- **Ryugu**— 300 million km from Earth.

- Notably, **Hayabusa2 is the second Japanese spacecraft to land on an asteroid**, after Hayabusa achieved a similar feat back in 2005.

Hayabusa:

- In mid-September 2005, Hayabusa landed on the asteroid Itokawa, and managed to collect samples in the form of grains of asteroidal material. It returned to Earth with the samples in June 2010, thereby becoming the first spacecraft to return asteroid samples to Earth for analysis.

Hayabusa2:

- It is an asteroid sample-return mission operated by the Japanese space agency, JAXA.
- It was launched on 3 December 2014 and rendezvoused with near-Earth asteroid 162173 Ryugu on 27 June 2018.
- It is in the process of surveying the asteroid for a year and a half, departing in December 2019, and returning to Earth in December 2020.
- Hayabusa2 carries multiple science payloads for remote sensing, sampling, and four small rovers that will investigate the asteroid surface to inform the environmental and geological context of the samples collected.

The Hayabusa2 payload incorporates multiple scientific instruments:

1. **Remote sensing:** Optical Navigation Camera (ONC-T, ONC-W1, ONC-W2), Near-Infrared Camera (NIR3), Thermal-Infrared Camera (TIR), Light Detection And Ranging (LIDAR).
2. **Sampling:** Sampling device (SMP), Small Carry-on Impactor (SCI), Deployable Camera (DCAM3).
3. **Four rovers:** Mobile Asteroid Surface Scout (MASCOT), Rover-1A, Rover-1B, Rover-2.

The scientific objectives of Hayabusa2 mission are twofold:

1. To characterize the asteroid from remote sensing observations (with multispectral cameras, near-infrared spectrometer, thermal infrared imager, laser altimeter) on a macroscopic scale
2. To analyse the samples returned from the asteroid on a microscopic scale.

What is the significance of the mission?

- Ryugu is a C-type asteroid – a relic from the early days of the Solar System. Scientists think that C-type asteroids contain both organic matter, and trapped water, and might have been responsible for bringing both to Earth, thereby providing the planet with the materials necessary for life to originate.

Sources: et.

6. NASA NEW HORIZONS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Ultima Thule and New Horizons- Key facts.

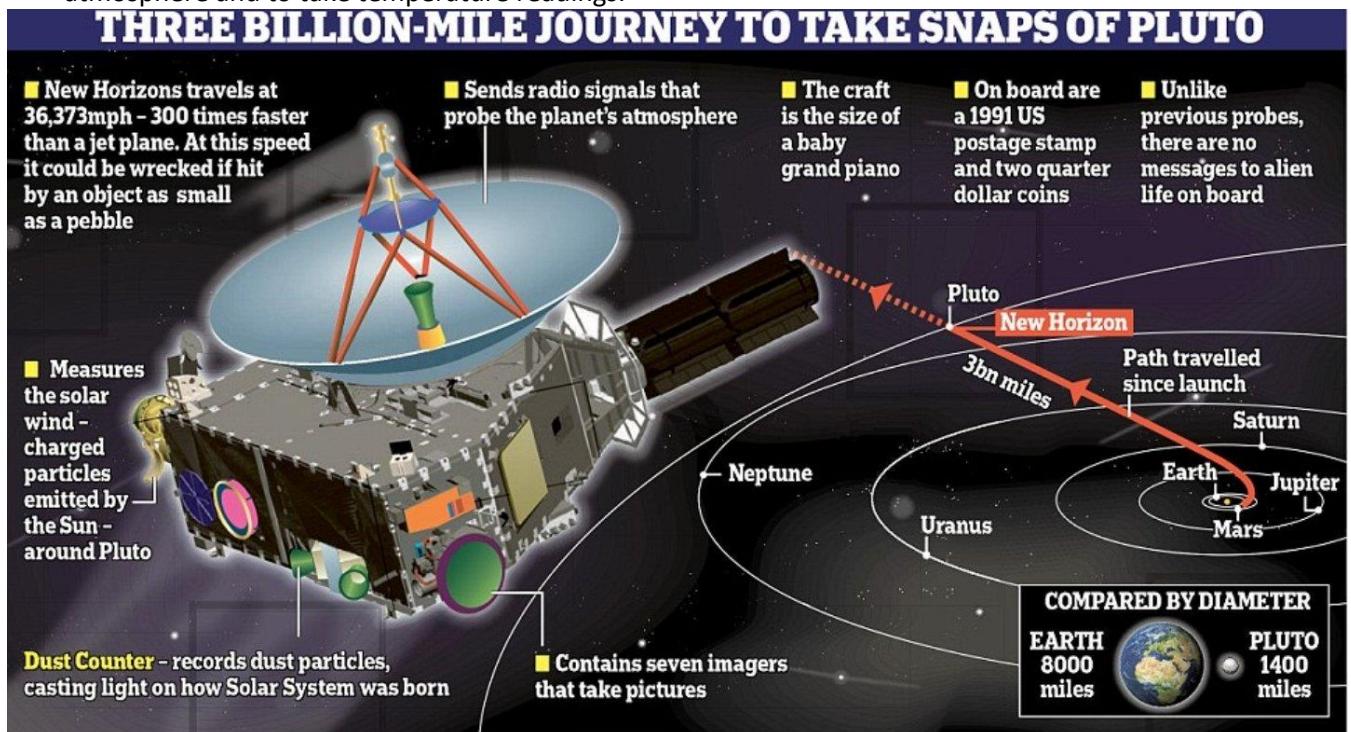
Context: NASA has captured the sharpest-ever image of Ultima Thule. The new image shows circular pieces of terrain, deep pits and other details that were previously elusive.

Key facts- Ultima Thule:

- Ultima Thule is located in the Kuiper belt in the outermost regions of the Solar System, beyond the orbit of Neptune.
- It measures approximately 30 km in diameter, and is irregularly shaped.
- Ultima Thule has a reddish color, probably caused by exposure of hydrocarbons to sunlight over billions of years.
- Ultima Thule belongs to a class of Kuiper belt objects called the “cold classicals”, which have nearly circular orbits with low inclinations to the solar plane.

Background:

- New Horizons was launched on 19 January 2006, and has been travelling through space for the past nine years. New Horizon's core science mission is to map the surfaces of Pluto and Charon, to study Pluto's atmosphere and to take temperature readings.



Sources: the hindu.

7. WIDE FIELD INFRARED SURVEY TELESCOPE (WFIRST)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: WFIRST- objectives, significance and operation, what is gravitational microlensing?

Context: WFIRST telescope will give humans the largest, deepest, clearest picture of the universe since the Hubble Space Telescope could find as many as 1,400 new planets outside Earth's solar system. The new telescope paves the way for a more accurate, more focused search for extraterrestrial life, with about 100 of the not-yet-discovered planets having the same or lower mass as Earth.

About WFIRST:

- **WFIRST, the Wide Field InfraRed Survey Telescope**, is a NASA observatory designed to settle essential questions in the areas of dark energy, exoplanets, and infrared astrophysics.
- **WFIRST will have two instruments, the Wide Field Instrument, and the Coronagraph Instrument.**
- The Wide Field Instrument will have a field of view that is 100 times greater than the Hubble infrared instrument, capturing more of the sky with less observing time. As the primary instrument, the Wide Field Instrument will measure light from a billion galaxies over the course of the mission lifetime.
- **WFIRST will use gravitational microlensing in its search for new planets.** Gravitational microlensing is a technique that relies on the gravity of stars and planets to bend and magnify the light coming from stars that pass behind them from the telescope's viewpoint.

Why WFIRST?

- With the 2.4 meter telescope, single WFIRST images will uncover millions of galaxies. For example, where Hubble has found only a few galaxies within 500 million years of the Big Bang, WFIRST will find hundreds of these rare objects.
- In addition, the WFIRST coronagraph instrument will directly image ice and gas giant exoplanets.

Sources: toI.

Topic: Indigenization of technology, Development of new technology and their significance.

1. SOLID FUEL DUCTED RAMJET (SFDR)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About SFDR and ramjet, India's technological missions and significance of such missions.

Context: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight tested the second *indigenously developed 'Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)' propulsion based missile system*.

- Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR):** It is a *missile propulsion technology jointly developed by India and Russia*.

Significance:

- It will help both India's surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles to perform better and enhance their strike range, making them more lethal.
- With it, *India can have fastest long-range missiles in two categories*, providing full-fledged and multi-layered aerial protection from hostile attacks.
- Its successful use in missiles will mark India's entry into select club of nations that use next-generation missile technology against manoeuvring targets*, compromising effectiveness of conventional missiles.

What is ramjet?

- Ramjet is a *form of air-breathing jet engine* that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor.
- Fuel is injected in the combustion chamber where it mixes with the hot compressed air and ignites.
- A ramjet-powered vehicle requires an assisted take-off like a rocket assist to accelerate it to a speed where it begins to produce thrust.

2. VANDE BHARAT EXPRESS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About the train, key facts related and significance of this development.

Context: *Vande Bharat Express* was recently flagged off by PM.

Vande Bharat Express:

- It is India's first indigenously built engineless semi-high speed train.* Earlier, it was known by the name Train 18.
- It runs between Delhi and Varanasi* at a maximum speed of 160 kmph.
- It has been built by the *Integral Coach Factory*, Chennai, in a record time of 20 months.
- The train is a 100% 'Make in India' project* and is claimed to be built at half the cost of a similar train set that is imported.
- It is *energy-efficient* as its coaches will be fitted with LED lights. Coaches will have automatic doors and retractable footsteps.
- It will be inter-connected with fully sealed gangways along with a GPS-based Passenger Information System. It is provided with Bio toilets.

(Q) "The Future of Rail Opportunities for energy" report, released by the International Energy Agency, has painted a bright future for Indian railways. Discuss the report and the efforts made by the government in recent years to modernize Indian railways.

3. COMPANY UNDER DEPARTMENT OF SPACE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Functions of the committee.
- For Mains: Need for and significance of the committee.

Context: The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the Setting up of **a new company under Department of Space (DoS), to commercially exploit the research and development work carried out by Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) Centers and constituent units of DOS.**

The following areas/avenues provide opportunities for commercial exploitation of ISRO programmes:

1. Small satellite technology transfer to industry, wherein the new company shall take license from DoS/ISRO and sub-license to industries;
2. Manufacture of small satellite launch vehicle (SLV) in collaboration with the Private Sector;
3. Productionisation of Polar SLV through industry;
4. Productionisation and marketing of Space-based products and services, including launch and applications;
5. Transfer of Technology developed by ISRO Centers and constituent units of DoS;
6. Marketing of some spin-off technologies and products, both in India and abroad; and
7. Any other subject which Government of India deems fit.

Significance:

- The cabinet decision will definitely encourage the private sector to indulge more in production of launchers and satellites. In recent years, ISRO has been engaging the private sector in the manufacturing of satellite launchers so that it can focus more on R&D work.

4. ATMOSPHERIC WATER GENERATOR (AWG)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: AWG- features, significance and how it works?

Context: Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) has unveiled its new product, the **Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG)**, an innovative solution to meet the ever-increasing need for drinking water worldwide, today at Aero India 2019.

- The Atmospheric Water Generator is being **manufactured by BEL in collaboration with CSIR-IICT and MAITHRI**, a start-up company based in Hyderabad.

How it works?

- BEL's Atmospheric Water Generator employs a novel technology to extract water from the humidity present in the atmosphere and purify it.
- **It uses heat exchange for condensing the atmospheric moisture to produce pure, safe and clean potable water.**
- The AWG comes with **a Mineralisation Unit**, which is used to add minerals which are required to make the water potable.
- The AWG is configurable in static and mobile (vehicular) versions and is available in 30 litres/day, 100 litres/day, 500 litres/day and 1,000 litres/day capacities.

Significance and benefits:

- The Atmospheric Water Generator can be used to provide drinking water in community centres and public places like health care centres, schools, colleges, offices, railway stations, bus stands, airports, sea ports, off-shore oil rigs, military establishments, remote field areas and remote establishments and residential complexes.

5. SUPER-EFFICIENT AIR CONDITIONING PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Super-Efficient Air Conditioning Programme- key facts, about EESL, significance of the programme.

Context: Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) has launched its Super-Efficient Air Conditioning Programme for residential and institutional consumers in the BSES area.

Super-Efficient Air Conditioning Programme- key facts:

- Under the programme, Super-Efficient Air Conditioners are distributed. They are 40% more efficient than, but priced comparably with, the 3-star ACs currently available in the market (ISEER 3.8).
- EESL is working towards making this programme and its benefits available to all consumers across the nation with the other DISCOMs likely to partner with EESL in future.

Significance and benefits of the programme:

- Besides promoting energy efficiency, the Super-Efficient AC programme will also help to reduce the peak power demand in South and West Delhi by 22MW, enabling the two organisations to harness synergies to promote energy security and sustainability.
- The programme directly addresses the prospect of the nearly four-fold increase in energy consumption from buildings and cooling appliances in India by 2032, while also addressing goals of India's Cooling Action Plan and Hydrochlorofluorocarbon Phase Out Management Plan, enabling achievement of India's targets under the Kigali and Paris Agreements.

Funding:

- EESL's investment in the programme is partially supported by a grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- Further, Asian Development Bank (ADB) is providing necessary grant support and loan while United Nations Environment (UNEP) is providing technical assistance support to the Super-Efficient AC programme.

About GEF:

- GEF is an independent financing mechanism that was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to address global environmental issues. The GEF is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector.
- The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.
- ***It is a FINANCIAL MECHANISM for five major international environmental conventions:*** the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

6. RUCO (REPURPOSE USED COOKING OIL) INITIATIVE

What to study?

- For Prelims: RUCO- features.
- For Mains: Need for regulation of used cooking oil and uses of used cooking oil.

Context: Dehradun-based Indian Institute of Petroleum has successfully finished a pilot test to convert used cooking oil into bio-aviation turbine fuel (Bio-ATF), which can be blended with conventional ATF and used as aircraft fuel.

- The test assumes importance as the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has launched the Repurpose Cooking Oil (RUCO) initiative to collect and convert used cooking oil into bio-fuel.

About RUCO:

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) had launched RUCO (Repurpose Used Cooking Oil), an initiative that will enable collection and conversion of used cooking oil to bio-diesel.
- Under this initiative, 64 companies at 101 locations have been identified to enable collection of used cooking oil. For instance: McDonald's has already started converting used cooking oil to biodiesel from 100 outlets in Mumbai and Pune.
- FSSAI wants businesses using more than 100 litres of oil for frying, to maintain a stock register and ensure that UCO is handed over to only registered collecting agencies.

Significance of the initiative:

- FSSAI believes India has the potential to recover 220 crore litres of used cooking oil for the production of biodiesel by 2022 through a co-ordinated action.

- While biodiesel produced from used cooking oil is currently very small, but a robust ecosystem for conversion and collection is rapidly growing in India and will soon reach a sizable scale.

Background:

- The initiative has been launched nearly a month after the food safety regulator notified standards for used cooking oil.
- According to FSSAI regulations, the maximum permissible limits for Total Polar Compounds (TPC) have been set at 25%, beyond which the cooking oil is unsafe for consumption.

Need for regulation:

- Currently, used cooking oil is either not discarded or disposed of in such a manner that it chokes drains and sewerage systems. Apart from setting quality standards, the new regulation addresses the way this oil is discarded.
- As used cooking oil is considered the most reasonable feedstock for biodiesel production, the FSSAI is planning to redirect the used cooking oil from the food business operators. It has already started collecting used oil in small quantities either through a barter arrangement or at cost.

About FSSAI:

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.
- It was created for laying down science-based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the Administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI.

Composition: The Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) are appointed by Government of India. The Chairperson is in the rank of Secretary to Government of India.

Sources: the hindu.

What are Total Polar Compounds (TPC)?

- In many countries, TPC is used to measure the quality of oil. The level of TPC increases every time oil is re-heated. Some of the studies show that TPC accumulation in oil without food is slower than that in oil frying with food.
- Higher level of TPC in cooking oil leads to health issues like hypertension, atherosclerosis, Alzheimer's disease and liver disease. One of the studies also noticed high levels of glucose, creatinine and cholesterol with declined levels of protein and albumin in cooking oil.

7. INDIA TO LAUNCH A PUBLIC DNS SERVER

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is DNS and how it operates?
- For Mains: The significance and the need for a secure DNS server.

Context: The government will soon launch a public domain name system (DNS) server that could protect users from any malware or phishing with enhanced security features as well as faster response time.

Key features:

- The new platform is an upgraded version with enhanced in-built security features compared to the earlier created by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) and has a capability to host as many as 5 million users that can be scaled up further if needed.
- If a user inadvertently accesses a malicious or phishing site, the new public system would immediately open up a page or popup to alert the user of such potential threat so that the suspicious resource could be avoided, the official who is aware of the initiative.
- The new DNS will be placed across the country to minimise outage and would be available round the clock. Users can simply use it by typing the IP number into the Internet browser.

Domain name system (DNS):

- DNS is a system that translates domain names to Internet Protocol or IP addresses that allows browsers to load websites sought.
- It is a database that stores all of the domain names and corresponding IP numbers for a particular top-level domain (TLD) such as .com or .net. The DNS identifies and locates computer systems and resources on the Internet.

Need:

- DNS is an important tool that requires to be fool-proof and has a major role in browsing the Internet.
- The Centre is eyeing a new and robust platform in the wake of critical digital services being delivered online requiring enhanced security to discourage cyber-attacks and a quicker site loading time.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Effective cyber security measures need adaptive technology and policies as opposed to compliant ones.
Comment.

8. QUICK REACTION SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES (QRSAM)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: QRSAM- key features, significance and potential.

Context: India has successfully test-fired two indigenously developed **Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air missiles (QRSAM)** from a test range off the Odisha coast.

About QRSAM:

- It has been developed to replace the 'Akash' missile defence system, and has 360-degree coverage.
- It uses solid fuel propellant and has a strike range of 25-30 km with capability of hitting multiple targets.
- It is capable of hitting the low flying objects.

Topics: IP related issues, Bio- technology.

1. INTERNATIONAL IP INDEX 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the IIP Index and performance of India and its neighbours.
- For Mains: Performance analysis of India and challenges ahead, measures needed to ensure transparency and enhance protection.

Context: The *International IP Index 2019 has been released by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Innovation Policy Center (GIPC).*

What is IIP index?

- Released by GIPC, the Index evaluates **the IP infrastructure in each economy based on 45 unique indicators**, which are critical to the growth of effective IP systems.
- **The indicators encompass 8 categories of IP protection:** patents, copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets, commercialization of IP assets, enforcement, systemic efficiency, and membership and ratification of international treaties.
- The 2019 Index demonstrates the close **correlation between effective IP protection and economic growth, global competitiveness, and the creation of 21st century knowledge-based economies.**

Performance of India and the factors responsible:

- **India is placed at rank 36th this year.** In 2018, India was ranked 44 out of 50 countries. In the first edition of the report in 2014, India had ranked last in the ranking of 25 countries.
- Among major global economies, **most substantial movement can be seen from India**, which has surged almost 20% and climbed eight places in the IP Index rankings from 44th to 36th.
- **The increase in India's ranking is a result of specific reforms** that better align India's IP environment with the international IP system, including its accession to the WIPO Internet Treaties, the agreement to initiate a Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) with Japan, a dedicated set of IP incentives for small business, and administrative reforms to address the patent backlog.

Challenges ahead for India:

The improvement is a "real accomplishment" but substantial challenges persist, particularly regarding the country's patenting and IP enforcement environments.

- **The weakness of India as highlighted in the report are** barriers to licensing and technology transfer, including strict registration norms, limited framework for the protection of biopharmaceutical IP rights, patentability rules outside international standards, lengthy pre-grant opposition proceedings and previously used compulsory licensing for commercial and non-emergency situations as key hurdles.

The need for protection of IP rights:

1. Intellectual Property Creates and Supports High-Paying Jobs.
2. Intellectual Property Drives Economic Growth and Competitiveness.
3. Strong and Enforced Intellectual Property Rights Protect Consumers and Families.
4. Intellectual Property Helps Generate Breakthrough Solutions to Global Challenges.
5. Intellectual Property Rights Encourage Innovation and Reward Entrepreneurs.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) “To realise the twin dreams of ‘Innovate in India’ and ‘Make in India’, the government needs to build a competitive, thriving environment by prioritising scientific research with a strong intellectual property (IP) system.” In the light of the statement critically analyse nature of India’s present IP regime, the changes it requires and its importance to India’s economy.

2. INDUCED PLURIPOTENT STEM CELLS (iPSC)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Stem cells, iPSC- meaning, functions, significance and potential.

Context: Japan approves stem cells trial to treat spinal cord injuries. A team of Japanese researchers will carry out an unprecedented trial using human-induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS) to treat spinal cord injuries.

What are induced pluripotent stem cells?

- Induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) are **adult cells that have been genetically reprogrammed to an embryonic stem cell-like state** by being forced to express genes and factors important for maintaining the defining properties of embryonic stem cells.
- Although additional research is needed, iPSCs are already useful tools for drug development and modeling of diseases, and scientists hope to use them in transplantation medicine.

What are stem cells, and why are they important?

- **Stem cells have the remarkable potential to develop into many different cell types in the body during early life and growth.**
- In addition, in many tissues they serve as a sort of internal repair system, dividing essentially without limit to replenish other cells as long as the person or animal is still alive. When a stem cell divides, each new cell has the potential either to remain a stem cell or become another type of cell with a more specialized function, such as a muscle cell, a red blood cell, or a brain cell.

Stem cells are distinguished from other cell types by two important characteristics:

1. First, **they are unspecialized cells** capable of renewing themselves through cell division, sometimes after long periods of inactivity.
2. Second, **under certain physiologic or experimental conditions, they can be induced to become tissue- or organ-specific cells with special functions.** In some organs, such as the gut and bone marrow, stem cells regularly divide to repair and replace worn out or damaged tissues. In other organs, however, such as the pancreas and the heart, stem cells only divide under special conditions.

What are the similarities and differences between embryonic and adult stem cells?

- **One major difference between adult and embryonic stem cells is their different abilities in the number and type of differentiated cell types they can become.** Embryonic stem cells can become all cell types of the body because they are pluripotent. Adult stem cells are thought to be limited to differentiating into different cell types of their tissue of origin.
- **Embryonic stem cells can be grown relatively easily in culture. Adult stem cells are rare in mature tissues, so isolating these cells from an adult tissue is challenging,** and methods to expand their numbers in cell

culture have not yet been worked out. This is an important distinction, as large numbers of cells are needed for stem cell replacement therapies.

Sources: the hindu.

3. WHY BANGLADESH SEES GOLDEN RICE AS A THREAT ?

What to study?

- For Prelims: About GM crops, their production and other Genetic engineering related key facts, golden rice.
- For Mains: Concerns raised over the introduction of GM crops, arguments in favour and against.

Context: Bangladesh farmers and environment groups are angry over the government's decision to allow commercial cultivation of the controversial genetically modified (GM) rice, popularly called as the golden rice.

What's the issue?

- Bangladesh completed the confined field testing of golden rice at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Gazipur, in early 2017. It has already allowed commercial production of BT Brinjal in the country.
- Locals fear that the introduction of golden rice will impact their traditional agriculture system.
- It is alleged that field trials were marred with controversy over the lack of transparency and credible independent safety studies. Even claims made after field trial concerns remain as on the lack of credible and independent safety studies, transparency and public participation.
- Activists fear that commercial cultivation would lead to the loss of Bangladesh's rich bio-diversity. This could further push for public acceptance of genetically-modified crops and erode our food diversity and our local and traditional seeds, as well as increase corporate control on our agriculture system.

What is a GM crop?

- A GM or transgenic crop is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.
- For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination. The resulting plant is said to be "genetically modified" although in reality all crops have been "genetically modified" from their original wild state by domestication, selection, and controlled breeding over long periods of time.

GM is a solution to hunger problem:

- Data from a large number of peer-reviewed publications have shown that, on average, GM technology adoption has reduced pesticide use by 37%, increased crop yield by 22%, and increased farmer profits by 68%.
- Data from a billion animals fed on GM corn have not indicated any health hazards. Those in the Americas and elsewhere consuming Bt corn or soybean for over 15 years have not reported any health issues.
- Genetically modified (GM) crops can withstand pests and droughts. Genetic modification in crops involves altering a seed's DNA in order to increase its resistance to pests and insects. These changes can mean a huge boost to productivity and overall food supply.
- Adopting technology that will lead to higher crop productivity is essential to feeding the growing Indian population.
- Higher crop yields, reduced farm costs, increased farm profit and improvement in health and the environment are some of the benefits of introducing GM crops.

What is Golden rice?

- In 1999, a group of European scientists led by Dr Ingo Potrykus tried to change traditional rice by developing genetically-engineered rice that contains **beta-carotene** — by inserting bacteria and daffodil and maize genes into it. This is the golden rice, called so because of the golden colour of its grains.
- The golden rice was introduced in 2000 and argued to be the panacea for world's malnutrition problem. It was claimed that the rice is bio-fortified, and is supposedly high in Vitamin A, Iron and Zinc.
- It was considered as a significant breakthrough in biotechnology, with its first field trials conducted by the agriculture centre of Louisiana State University in 2004. Later, it has been claimed that field trials were conducted in the Philippines, Taiwan and Bangladesh.

There are some concerns as well:

GM food involves taking genes (DNA) from different organisms and inserting them in food crops.

- There are concerns that this ‘foreign’ DNA through Genetically Modified products may lead to risks such as toxicity, allergic reactions, and nutritional and unintended impact.
- It costs people’s health and our national food and health sovereignty.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India [FSSAI], the apex food regulator, has failed to curb the illegal sales of GM food.
- Its draft regulations on GM food labelling are weak and impractical to implement.
- Lack of clarity: It is clear that the technology of genetic engineering is an evolving one and there is much, especially on its impact on human health and environment that is yet to be understood properly. The scientific community itself seems uncertain about this.
- There is also a potential for pests to evolve resistance to the toxins produced by GM crops and the risk of these toxins affecting nontarget organisms. There is also the danger of unintentionally introducing allergens and other anti-nutrition factors in foods.

Sources: [downtoearth](#).

(Q) Critically analyze whether it is prudent to go the GM way for solution to the hunger problem?

4. IPRISM

What to study?

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

Context: The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, in collaboration with ASSOCHAM and ERICSSON India, has launched the second edition of '**IPRISM**', *an Intellectual Property (IP) competition for students of schools, polytechnic institutes, colleges and universities*.

- Aiming to foster a culture of innovation and creativity in the younger generation, the competition will **provide young creators an opportunity to see their creations recognized on a national platform**.

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.

5. CHINA DRAFTS NEW RULES TO SUPERVISE BIOTECHNOLOGY RESEARCH

What to study?

- For Prelims: Draft rules, gene- editing technology- overview.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for these rules, concerns associated with latest developments in gene- editing.

Context: China has drafted new rules to supervise biotechnology research.

Highlights of the draft:

1. It proposes fines and bans against rogue scientists.
2. It proposes to classify technology used for extracting genetic materials, gene editing, gene transfer and stem cell research as “high risk”.
3. Scientists can be fined 10 to 20 times the amount of “illegal income” earned from unauthorised research and be banned from their field of work for six months to one year.
4. If the circumstances are serious, their medical practice licence shall be revoked and the individual shall not engage in clinical research for life.

What necessitated this?

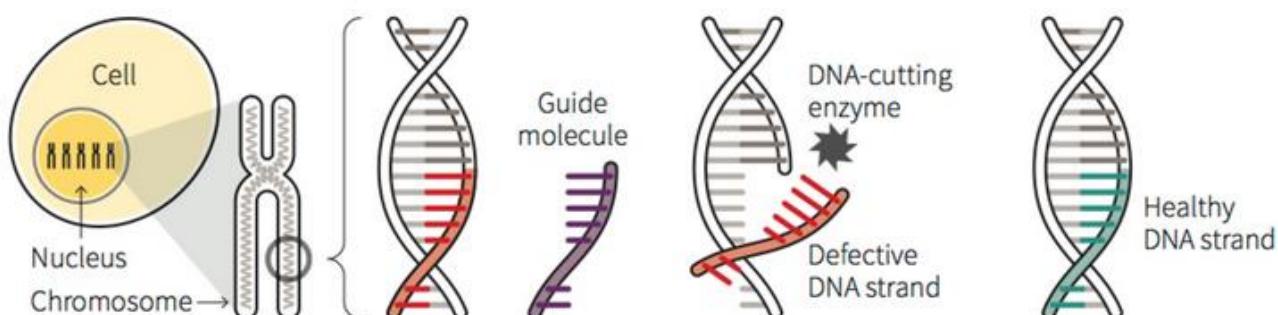
Recently a Chinese researcher caused a global outcry by claiming that he gene-edited babies.

- He announced in November that the world's first gene-edited babies — twin girls — were born that same month after he altered their DNA to prevent them from contracting HIV by deleting a certain gene under a technique known as CRISPR.
- The claim shocked scientists worldwide, raising questions about bioethics and putting a spotlight on China's lax oversight of scientific research.

DNA editing

A DNA editing technique, called CRISPR/Cas9, works like a biological version of a word-processing programme's "find and replace" function.

HOW THE TECHNIQUE WORKS



A cell is transfected with an enzyme complex containing:
■ Guide molecule
■ Healthy DNA copy
★ DNA-cutting enzyme

A specially designed synthetic guide molecule finds the target DNA strand.

An enzyme cuts off the target DNA strand.

The defective DNA strand is replaced with a healthy copy.

Sources: Reuters; Nature; Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Discuss about the CRISPR gene editing technology and the concerns raised by it.

Topics: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. UN GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Findings of the assessment, need of the hour and way ahead for India.

Context: United Nations (UN) has released its **first ever global assessment of environmental laws**.

Key findings:

1. The world **fares poorly on implementation of environmental laws and regulations despite the fact that 38 times more green laws have been framed and approved in the last four decades**.
2. As many as **88 countries** have adopted the **constitutional right to a healthy environment** and more than 350 environmental courts and tribunals exist in around 50 countries. But, failure to fully implement and enforce

- the environmental laws is one of the greatest challenges towards mitigating climate change, reducing pollution and preventing widespread species and habitat loss.
3. **Other problems:** Poor coordination across government agencies, weak institutional capacity, lack of access to information, corruption and stifled civic engagement are the key factors behind the poor effectiveness and implementation of environmental regulations.
 4. Underlining the growing resistance to environmental laws, the report also advocated on behalf of the environmental activists and whistle blowers. It said 908 people, including forest rangers, government inspectors, and local activists, were killed in 35 countries between 2002 and 2013 and 197 were killed in 2017 alone.

Indian scenario:

- India serves as a perfect example to this issue. ***India's people and the environment have been paying the price for its lethargic and poor state of environmental governance.*** This is reiterated by a high-level committee set up the environment ministry in 2014. Like the Water Act, which was implemented in 1974, a number of laws and regulations have been existing for more than four decades now, but are proving to be ineffective.
- ***India ranked 177th out of 180 countries in the 2018 Global Environment Performance Index (EPI) rankings*** of the Yale University for being unable to improve its air quality, protect its biodiversity, and cut its greenhouse gas emissions. It also slipped by 36 points in 2018 from 141 in 2016.
- ***India has several rules and guidelines to control air pollution, but they aren't put to good use.*** Coal-based power plants continue to be the major source of air pollution in the country as more than 300 coal thermal power plants still violate emission standards.
- ***Judiciary ignored:*** More than two-thirds of the states/union territories in the country have neither bothered to comply with the orders passed by the Supreme Court, nor complied with the directions given by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The judiciary's order failed to even curb illegal rat hole mining and miners in Meghalaya paid the price for that.

Need of the hour:

- Unless implementation and enforcement is strengthened, even rules that appear to be rigorous are destined to fail and the fundamental human right to a healthy environment will go unfulfilled.
- The world needs to shift its focus from development of policies and institutions to implementation and enforcement.

Sources: down to earth.

2. WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2019

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Significance of the day, wetlands conservation related issues.

Context: World Wetlands Day is celebrated on February 2 each year to mark the Day the Convention on Wetlands was adopted in the Iranian City of Ramsar in 1971.

India is a party to the Convention since 1982 and committed to the Ramsar approach of wise use of wetlands.

- **Theme:** "Wetlands and Climate Change".

About Ramsar convention:

- The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is named after the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the Caspian Sea, where the treaty was signed on 2 February 1971.
- Known officially as 'the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat' (or, more recently, just 'the Convention on Wetlands'), it came into force in 1975.

Montreux Record:

- Montreux Record under the Convention is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.

- ***It is maintained as part of the Ramsar List.*** The Montreux Record was established by Recommendation of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1990). Sites may be added to and removed from the Record only with the approval of the Contracting Parties in which they lie.

Significance of urban wetlands:

- In focusing on the theme “wetlands for a sustainable urban future”, this year’s World Wetlands Day sheds light on the importance of wetlands for cities.
- Today, 50% of the world’s population live in urban areas. Forecasts expect the urban population to rise to 6.3 billion by 2050 – a more than eightfold increase since 1950.
- While the urban proportion of the world’s population will more than double from 1950 to 2050, the number of the world’s wetlands has already more than halved over the past 100 years.
- However, wetlands play a vital role for cities and for the whole of humanity. For instance, they serve as a source of drinking water; they reduce flooding and the vegetation of wetlands filters domestic and industrial waste and improves water quality.

Way ahead:

- Wetlands are at risk, from 1900 64% of wetlands around the world have disappeared with severe consequences for those who are living in close proximity with them, mostly Farmers.
- The International Community should make greater efforts to preserve these wetlands and put Farmers in the best conditions to take advantage of wetlands while respecting them.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Why wetlands are considered as the kidneys of the cities? Critically examine how and why wetlands in Indian cities are adversely affected.

3. ELEPHANT CORRIDORS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Project Elephant, Important Elephant Corridors.
- For Mains: Issues associated over Elephant Corridor maintenance, man- animal conflicts- measures necessary.

Context: *Asian Elephant Alliance*, an umbrella initiative by five NGOs, has come together to secure 96 out of the 101 existing corridors used by elephants across 12 States in India.

Key facts:

1. The joint venture aims to secure the 96 remaining elephant corridors, old and new, in the next ten years.
2. The alliance joined hands to raise the mammoth sum as money was the main constraint in securing the land.
3. NGOs Elephant Family, International Fund for Animal Welfare, IUCN Netherlands and World Land Trust have teamed up with Wildlife Trust of India’s (WTI) in the alliance.

What are Elephant Corridors?

- Elephant corridors are narrow strips of land that connect two large habitats of elephants. Elephant corridors are crucial to reduce animal fatalities due to accidents and other reasons.

MIKE:

- Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (**MIKE**) programme is established by the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (**CITES**).
- At the core of the MIKE Programme is the site based monitoring of **elephant mortality**.
- MIKE aims to help Elephant range States improve their ability to monitor elephant populations, detect changes in levels of **illegal killing**, and use this information to provide more effective law enforcement and strengthen any regulatory measures required to support such enforcement.

Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS):

- ETIS is a comprehensive information system to track illegal trade in ivory and other elephant products.
- It shares the same objectives as those set out for MIKE, with the difference that its aim is to record and analyse levels and trends in illegal trade, rather than the illegal killing of elephants.

TRAFFIC:

- TRAFFIC is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

- So fragmentation of forests makes it all the more important to preserve migratory corridors.

Why protect elephant corridors?

1. The movement of elephants is essential to ensure that their populations are genetically viable. It also helps to regenerate forests on which other species, including tigers, depend.
2. Nearly 40% of elephant reserves are vulnerable, as they are not within protected parks and sanctuaries. Also, the migration corridors have no specific legal protection.
3. Forests that have turned into farms and unchecked tourism are blocking animals' paths. Animals are thus forced to seek alternative routes resulting in increased elephant-human conflict.
4. Weak regulation of ecotourism is severely impacting important habitats. It particularly affects animals that have large home ranges, like elephants.

Need of the hour:

- Efforts should be to expand elephant corridors, using the successful models within the country. This includes acquisition of lands using private funds and their transfer to the government.
- Ending human interference in the pathways of elephants is more a conservation imperative.

Related- About Gaj Yatra:

1. **'Gaj Yatra', a nationwide campaign to protect elephants, was launched on the occasion of World Elephant Day in 2017. The campaign is planned to cover 12 elephant range states.** The elephant is part of India's animal heritage and the Government celebrates this day to spread awareness about the conservation of the species.
2. **The 15 months campaign will be led by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). The campaign aims to create awareness about elephant corridors** to encourage free movement in their habitat.

Sources: the hindu.

4. SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME (SGP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is SGP, overview of GFE and UNDP.
- For Mains: Significance of SGP and its role in environmental conservation, its approach and the need for such kind of approach.

Context: A workshop on **Small Grants Programme (SGP)** was recently held in New Delhi.

About Small Grants Programme (SGP):

- Global Environment Facility GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) provides financial and technical support to communities and Civil Society Organizations to meet the overall objective of global environmental benefits secured through community-based initiatives and actions.
- It was **launched in 1992 with 33 participating countries**.
- The Program is specifically designed to **mobilize bottom-up actions by empowering local civil society organizations**, and poor and vulnerable communities, including women and Indigenous Peoples.

How it functions?

- Through a decentralized, national-level delivery mechanism, SGP finances community-led initiatives to address global environmental issues.
- It is currently **implemented by UNDP on behalf of the GEF partnership**.
- The Programme funds **grants up to a maximum of \$50,000**. In practice, the average grant has been around \$25,000. **In addition, the SGP provides a maximum of \$150,000 for strategic projects**. These larger projects allow for scaling up and cover a large number of communities within a critical landscape or seascape.

Significance:

- Community-driven and civil society-led initiatives can generate environmental benefits, while supporting sustainable livelihoods, gender equality and civil society empowerment.
- These are actions needed at the **local and regional level to address global environmental challenges** and complement other areas where the GEF works.

Need for SGP:

- Environment degradation such as the destruction of ecosystems and the species that depends upon them, increasing level of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, pollution of international waters, land degradation and the spread of persistent organic pollutants **are life – threatening challenges that endanger us all.**
- However, **it is the poor and vulnerable communities that are most at risk as they are directly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and subsistence.** SGP aims to support these vulnerable communities through community led approaches towards environmental conservation and livelihoods enhancement.

5. CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS (CMS)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: CMS- features and its significance, the need for conservation of migratory species.

Context: The **13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals (CMS)** is going to be **hosted by India** during 15th to 22nd February, 2020 at Gandhinagar in Gujarat. **India has been a Party to the CMS since 1983.**

- The **Conference of Parties (COP) is the decision-making organ of this convention.**

About CMS:

- In order to protect the migratory species throughout their range countries, a Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), has been in force, **under the aegis of United Nations Environment Programme.**
- Also referred to as the **Bonn Convention**, it provides **a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats** and brings together the States through which migratory animals pass, the Range States, and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.
- **Classification of species:** Under this convention, migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on Appendix I and Parties strive towards strictly protecting these animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them. Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in Appendix II of the Convention.
- **CMS is only global and UN-based intergovernmental organization established exclusively for conservation and management of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.**

What are migratory species? Why protect them?

1. Migratory species are those animals that move from one habitat to another during different times of the year, due to various factors such as food, sunlight, temperature, climate, etc.
2. The movement between habitats, can sometimes exceed thousands of miles/kilometres for some migratory birds and mammals. A migratory route can involve nesting and also requires the availability of habitats before and after each migration.

6. ASIATIC LION CONSERVATION PROJECT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Asiatic Lion, the proposed lion introduction project in MP and Asiatic lion conservation project.

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

Key features of the project:

- **Key aspects of the conservation project include** undertaking “habitat improvement” measures, making more sources of water available, creating a wildlife crime cell, and a task force for the Greater Gir region. ‘*Greater Gir*’ that includes, other than the existing Gir National Park, sanctuaries in Girnar, Pania and Mitiyala.

- It would also **involve having in place a GPS-based tracking system**, which would look at surveillance tracking, animal and vehicle tracking. There would also be an automated sensor grid that would have magnetic sensors, movement sensors and infra-red heat sensors.
- **A key outcome of the project is to have a dedicated veterinary institute, lion ambulances and back-up stocks of vaccines** that may be required.

Relocation of lions:

- The **Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh was identified to be the most suitable for reintroducing the species**, according to a Supreme Court-appointed technical expert committee, but there has been no progress on the proposal.
- There is a committee of experts from both States examining the suitability of Madhya Pradesh as a potential lion reserve.
- **The SC in April 2013 had ordered the translocation of some lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh within six months**, but this hasn't happened. This was ordered after several recommendations by expert groups, including the Wildlife Institute of India.
- It emphasised that the long-term survival of the lion as a species was best served if they could be present outside Gujarat, too, so that they are protected against, say, a forest fire, a disease, or calamities.

Facts for Prelims:

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

Sources: the hindu.

7. INDIA-NORWAY MARINE POLLUTION INITIATIVE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Highlights of the initiative.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for such initiatives, challenges ahead and measures necessary to curb marine pollution.

Context: The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to launch the '**India-Norway Marine Pollution Initiative**'.

India-Norway Marine Pollution Initiative:

1. The Initiative will **combat marine pollution**, which is one of the fastest growing environmental concerns.
2. Both countries will **share experiences, competence and collaborate** on efforts to develop clean and healthy oceans.
3. Both the sides will **jointly collaborate for sustainable use of ocean resources** and growth in the blue economy.
4. Through a range of implementing partners, this initiative will seek to **support local governments in implementing sustainable waste management practices**, develop systems for collecting and analysing information about sources and scope of marine pollution.
5. They will also work towards **beach clean-up efforts, awareness raising campaigns and pilot project using plastic waste as fuel substitution** for coal in cement production.

Bilateral efforts in this regard:

- In January, 2019, the Indian and Norwegian governments agreed to work more closely on oceans by signing a MoU and establishing the **India-Norway Ocean Dialogue** during the Norwegian Prime Minister's visit to India in January.
- **A joint Task Force on Blue Economy** with government officials, researchers and experts as well as private sector was established to develop sustainable solutions within strategic areas of the blue economy, such as maritime and marine sector in addition to energy sector.

Causes of marine pollution:

- Major sources of marine pollution are the inflow of chemicals, solid waste, discharge of radioactive elements, industrial and agricultural effluents, man-made sedimentation, oil spills, and many such factors.
- The majority portion of the marine pollution comes from the land that contributes to 80% of the marine pollution, air pollution also carries pesticides from farms and dust into the marine waters.

Types of marine pollution:

1. Eutrophication
2. Acidification
3. Toxins
4. Plastics

Effects of Marine Pollution:

1. The contamination of water by excessive nutrients is known as ***nutrient pollution***, a type of water pollution that affects the life under water. When excess nutrients like nitrates or phosphates get dissolved with the water it causes the ***eutrophication of surface waters***, as it stimulates the growth of algae due to excess nutrients.
2. Most of Benthic animals and plankton are either filter feeders or deposit feeders take up the tiny particles that adhere to potentially toxic chemicals. In the ocean food chains, such toxins get concentrated upward. ***This makes estuaries anoxic as many particles combine chemically deplete oxygen.***
3. When the marine ecosystem absorbs the pesticides, they are ***incorporated into the food webs of the marine ecosystem***. After getting dissolved in the marine food webs, these harmful pesticides causes mutations, and also results in diseases, which can damage the entire food web and cause harm to the humans.
4. When toxic metals are dumped or flown into the oceans through drains, it engulfs within the marine food webs. ***These can cause a change to tissue matter, biochemistry, behavior, reproduction, and suppress and alter the marine life's growth.***
5. Marine toxins can be transferred to several animals feeding on the fish or fish hydrolysate as a meal, toxins are then transferred to dairy products and meat of these affected land animals.

(Q) Oceans are claimed to be ‘last frontiers’ of growth and development, however, this potential needs to be utilised in a balanced manner. In this backdrop, examine whether creation of Marine protected areas is in sync with India’s Blue economy strategy?

8. PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

Background- principle of ‘Commons’:

- For thousands of years, humans have considered ***natural resources and the environment as a global public good***, with communities having diligently managed these resources using the ***principle of ‘Commons’***.
- In simple terms, ***these are a set of resources such as air, land, water and biodiversity that do not belong to one community or individual, but to humanity***. All developments we see in the establishment of civilisations across the world as well as agricultural development feeding the world today are a result of such ‘Commons’ being managed by communities for centuries.

Significance of Commons:

1. According to estimates, a third of the global population depends on ‘Commons’ for their survival; 65% of global land area is under ‘Commons’, in different forms.
2. At least 293,061 million metric tonnes of carbon (MtC) are stored in the collective forestlands of indigenous peoples and local communities. This is 33 times the global energy emissions in 2017.
3. The significance of ‘Commons’ in supporting pollination (the cost estimated to be worth \$224 billion annually at global levels) cannot be overlooked.
4. In India, the extent of ‘Common’ land ranges between 48.69 million and 84.2 million hectares, constituting 15-25% of its total geographical area.
5. ‘Common’-pool resources contribute \$5 billion a year to the incomes of poor Indian households.
6. Around 77% of India’s livestock is kept in grazing-based or extensive systems and dependent on ‘Commons’ pool resources. And 53% of India’s milk and 74% of its meat requirements are met from livestock kept in extensive ‘Common’ systems.

7. ‘Commons’ are now a major provider of livelihood options for both urban and peri-urban populations. The relevance of ‘Commons’ impacting urban dwellers cannot be overlooked with more urbanisation happening.

What are the main concerns now?

- With money and power to privatise these natural resources for individual prosperity in the form of property management principles, intellectual property rights and others, the benefits of these natural resources are not being shared equally.
- In one form the **CBD** — a multi-lateral environmental agreement that has provided legal certainty to countries through the principle of sovereign rights over biodiversity — **also contributed to states now owning the resources, including their rights on use and management.**
- The **intent of the CBD and having sovereign rights was to manage resources better.** But the results of such management have been questionable. A key reason cited is that ‘Commons’ and common property resource management principles and approaches are ignored and compromised.

India’s case:

Despite their significance, **‘Commons’ in India have suffered continued decline and degradation.**

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

Why worry about this?

- ‘Commons’ becoming uncommon is a major socio-political, economic and environmental problem.** While the state can have oversight over resource management, keeping people away from using and managing ‘Commons’ is against effective governance of ‘Commons’.
- The sovereign rights provided for, legally, under the CBD should not be misunderstood by the state as a handle to do away with ‘Commons’-based approaches to managing biodiversity, land, water and other resources.**

Need of the hour:

- Current discussions under the United Nations should focus on how and why ‘Commons’ have been negatively impacted by progressive pronouncements to save the earth and people. There needs to be a review of current governance of biodiversity and natural resources.

In addition to seeking more money, time and capacities to deal with biodiversity and natural resource management, we need to focus on three specific approaches:

- To re-introduce more strongly, the management and governance principles of ‘Commons’ approaches into decision-making and implementation of conservation, use and benefit sharing action.
- To use Joseph Schumpeter’s approach of creative destruction to put resource management in the hands of the people.
- To re-look at Elinor Ostrom’s Nobel Prize winning principles of dealing with ‘Commons’.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-case-for-commons-sense/article26252368.ece>.

9. DOLPHIN CENSUS

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Dolphins in India- types and IUCN status, highlights of the census, need for protection.

Context: Annual Dolphin census was recently carried out in Odisha by the state’s forest and environment department.

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

Important findings:

- **Population declined from 469 in 2018 to 259 this year.** The reduction in the number of dolphins compared to last year could be due to the migration of species from the Chilika Lake and other water bodies to the deep sea.
- **Gahirmatha is the home of the state's largest dolphin population,** having 126 animals. More dolphins were found in Gahirmatha than Chilika due to its bigger areas.
- **After Gahirmatha, Chilika had the next largest population** at 113, followed by the Rushukulya River in Ganjam district, with 15 dolphins and finally, Balasore, with 5 individuals.
- The dolphin species sighted during the state-wide census included the **Irrawaddy, the Bottle Nose and the Humpback.**

Key facts:

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

Sources: down to earth.

10. WASTED EFFORT: HALF OF INDIA'S WASTE-TO-ENERGY PLANTS DEFUNCT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Waste- to- energy- India's potential, challenges present and measures to address these challenges.

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

Key findings:

1. Since 1987, 15 WTE plants have been set up across the country. However, seven of these plants have since shut down. Apart from Delhi, these include plants at Kanpur, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Vijayawada and Karimnagar.
2. The key reasons for closure are the plants' inability to handle mixed solid waste and the high cost of electricity generated by them that renders it unattractive to power companies.
3. This track record, however, has not stopped the government from betting big on WTE. The NITI Aayog, as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, envisages 800 megawatt from WTE plants by 2018-19, which is 10 times the capacity of all the existing WTE plants put together.
4. It also proposes setting up a Waste-to-Energy Corporation of India, which would construct incineration plants through PPP models. Currently, there are 40-odd WTE plants at various stages of construction.

Reasons for the inefficiency:

- **The fundamental reason (for the inefficiency of these plants) is the quality and composition of waste.** MSW (municipal solid waste) in India has low calorific value and high moisture content.
- As most wastes sent to the WTE plants are unsegregated, they also have high inert content. These wastes are just not suitable for burning in these plants.
- To burn them, additional fuel is required which makes these plants expensive to run.

Why Waste to Energy?

- Most wastes that are generated find their way into land and water bodies without proper treatment, causing severe water and air pollution. The problems caused by solid and liquid wastes can be significantly mitigated through the adoption of environment-friendly waste to energy technologies that will allow treatment and processing of wastes before their disposal.
- **The environmental benefits of waste to energy, as an alternative to disposing of waste in landfills, are clear and compelling.** Waste to energy generates clean, reliable energy from a renewable fuel source, thus reducing dependence on fossil fuels, the combustion of which is a major contributor to GHG emissions.

- **These measures would reduce the quantity of wastes, generate a substantial quantity of energy from them, and greatly reduce pollution** of water and air, thereby offering a number of social and economic benefits that cannot easily be quantified.

Some of the strategic and financial benefits from waste-to-energy business are:

- **Profitability** – If the right technology is employed with optimal processes and all components of waste are used to derive value, waste to energy could be a profitable business. When government incentives are factored in, the attractiveness of the business increases further.
- **Government Incentives** – The government of India already provides significant incentives for waste to energy projects, in the form of capital subsidies and feed in tariffs. With concerns on climate change, waste management and sanitation on the increase, the government incentives for this sector is only set to increase in future.
- **Related Opportunities** – Success in municipal solid waste management could lead to opportunities in other waste such as sewage waste, industrial waste and hazardous waste. Depending on the technology/route used for energy recovery, eco-friendly and “green” co-products such as charcoal, compost, nutrient rich digestate (a fertilizer) or bio-oil can be obtained. These co-product opportunities will enable the enterprise to expand into these related products, demand for which are increasing all the time.
- **Emerging Opportunities** – With distributed waste management and waste to energy becoming important priorities, opportunities exist for companies to provide support services like turnkey solutions. In addition, waste to energy opportunities exist not just in India but all over the world. Thus, there could be significant international expansion possibilities for Indian companies, especially expansion into other Asian countries.

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

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

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) As per a medium term proposal of Niti Ayog, the only viable solution to dealing with the massive waste problem in India is to incinerate the waste of go from waste to energy. Do you agree with such a view? Discuss

11. GREEN INDIA MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims: GIM- Key features, NAPCC.
- For Mains: Performance analysis of GIM, challenges and concerns highlighted, need for reforms.

Context: According to a Parliamentary committee report, Green India Mission, aimed at “protecting, restoring and enhancing India’s diminishing forest cover and responding to climate change”, is grossly underfunded.

Concerns highlighted by the report:

- **Underfunded:** The scheme is proposed for 10 years with an outlay of Rs 60,000 crore. During 2017-18, Rs 47.8 crore has been allocated for the scheme which is grossly insufficient as the committed liability for 2015-16 and 2016-17 is Rs 89.53 crore which is much more than the budget allocated.
- **Concerns over INDC targets:** The panel also raises concerns about the targets set by GIM on India’s Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. According to the NDC, India has a target to sequester 2.523 billion tonnes of carbon by 2020-30. Our current forest cover is 75 million hectare and to meet our target of carbon sequestration, 30 million hectares of additional land would be required for forests. The mission document does not mention from where will this land be arranged.

- The report also found that in 2015-16 and 2016-17, the **GIM missed its targets by 34%. Instead of the targeted 67,956 hectares**, only 44,749 hectares of land got green cover.
- **The committee also points out that the afforestation done under the mission was only aimed at increasing tree count without considering the soil and weather conditions.** Trees like eucalyptus were planted which make environmental problems worse rather than solving it. Planting of unsuitable trees may cause drought, and prevent biodiversity in the regions.

About Green India Mission:

- GIM is **one of the eight missions launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**.
- GIM's launch was supposed to coincide with the starting of the 12th five-year plan in 2012. But, owing to financial delays the mission was finally launched in 2015.
- **The objective of the mission is** to increase green cover to the extent of 5 million hectares (mha) and improve quality of existing green cover on another 5 mha, improve eco-system services like carbon sequestration, hydrological services and biodiversity and provisioning services like fuel, fodder, and timber and non-timber forest produces (NTFPs). It also has to increase forest-based livelihood income for about 3 million households.

Sources: down to earth.

12. MONKEY DECLARED VERMIN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

What to study?

- For Prelims: How is an animal declared Vermin? Provisions in this regard.
- For Mains: Issues and concerns associated, need for alternative measures.

Context: Monkeys have again been declared vermin for the next one year in 11 districts' 91 tehsils and sub-tehsils of Himachal Pradesh.

- The state government had urged the centre to declare Monkeys as vermin because the animals have been adversely affecting crops and causing harm to humans.

Declaring animals as vermin:

1. **Wildlife laws divide species into 'schedules' ranked from I to V.** Schedule I members are the best protected, in theory, with severe punishments meted out to those who hunt them. Wild boars, nilgai and rhesus monkeys are Schedule II and III members — also protected, but can be hunted under specific conditions. Crows and fruit bat fall in Schedule 5, the vermin category.
2. **Section 11(1)a of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA)** authorizes chief wildlife warden to permit hunting of any problem wild animal only if it cannot be captured, tranquillized or translocated.
3. **For wild animals in Schedule II, III or IV, chief wildlife warden or authorized officers can permit their hunting** in a specified area if they have become dangerous to humans or property (including standing crops on any land).
4. **Section 62 of Act empowers Centre to declare wild animals other than Schedule I & II to be vermin for specified area and period.**

Concerns:

- Not many are happy with these decisions. These decisions raise questions about whether it is right to kill wildlife that damage crops. More pertinent is whether the problem has been framed and assessed correctly, and culling the appropriate solution in the first place.

Why culling is not a good idea?

- **Removal through capture or killing may not prevent recurrence of conflicts and may even exacerbate them.** Himachal Pradesh, for instance, killed hundreds of rhesus macaques in 2007 with conflicts recurring within two years, sterilised over 96,000 macaques since 2007 while conflicts continued to increase.
- When animals are hunted, some will be shot several times causing tremendous pain, but many others escape with one gunshot or flesh wound, and die later slowly and in unimaginable agony from blood loss, gangrene, starvation or dehydration. When mother animals are killed, orphaned babies are left behind to starve.

- **Provisions to allow wild animals to be killed can also be easily misused and contribute to the illegal wildlife trade.** There is already a huge black market for nilgai body parts such as skin, teeth, nails and meat in Uttar Pradesh and wild boar are often used for meat.
- In parts of India, wildlife species such as wild pig, elephants, macaques, and nilgai occasionally damage crops or property. However, **no reliable estimates of economic loss nationwide are available.**

Following list of reasons that scientists' show us why the animal isn't the problem:

- **Habitat loss:** Deforestation and lowered green cover in cities has been driving animals into crop fields and human dwellings in search of food.
- **Fall in predator population:** Fall in population of predators such as tigers and leopards leads to a consequential rise in population of herbivores such as nilgai and deer.
- **Drought:** If natural calamities such as drought affect human beings, so is the case with animals in the forest. Drought dries up availability of food for foraging driving wild animals into nearby crop fields and human dwellings in search of food.
- **Humans feeding animals:** this is one of the major problems these days. Tourists often offer foods to animals roadside. This habit makes them chase tourists expecting the same from all tourists.

What are the alternatives available?

- Crop damage by wildlife may occur when animals enter crop fields because of habitat alteration and fragmentation, because crops are edible, or because the fields lie along movement routes to forest patches or water sources. For this, **site-specific scientific information is needed which helps design targeted mitigation with participation of affected people.** This includes supporting local communities to install — and, more important, maintain on a sustained basis — bio-fencing and power fencing around vulnerable areas.
- **Crop insurance for wildlife damage, which the Environment Ministry recently recommended can be included in the National Crop/Agricultural Insurance Programme.** An insurance approach recognises wildlife as a part of the shared countryside and as a risk to be offset rather than viewing wildlife as antagonists belonging to the State that one wishes away.
- **Solutions such as adequate fencing, noisemakers, and repelling animals naturally from farms through the use of chili plants or other such means can be tried.** In Africa, for example, the planting of chili plants around crops was found to be successful in addressing conflict with elephants.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Do you support the Environment Ministry's decision to allow some States to cull wildlife? Should such wildlife be called vermins? Critically discuss the ethical issues involved in this decision.

13. CHEETAH REINTRODUCTION PROJECT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Cheetah reintroduction project and its significance, why Nauradehi sanctuary has been chosen for reintroduction.

Context: The **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** recently told a bench of the Supreme Court that **African cheetahs would be translocated in India from Namibia and would be kept at Nauradehi wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.**

- **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has given a 'no objection'** for the translocation.

Facts:

1. The cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus*, is one of the oldest of the big cat species, with ancestors that can be traced back more than five million years to the Miocene era.
2. The cheetah is also the world's fastest land mammal, an icon of nature. With great speed and dexterity, the cheetah is known for being an excellent hunter, its kills feeding many other animals in its ecosystem—ensuring that multiple species survive.
3. The country's last spotted feline died in Chhattisgarh in 1947. Later, the cheetah — which is the fastest land animal — was declared extinct in India in 1952.

Cheetah reintroduction programme in India:

- The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun had prepared a ₹260-crore cheetah re-introduction project six years ago. It was estimated that an amount of ₹25 crore to ₹30 crore would be needed to build an enclosure in an area of 150 sq km for the cheetahs in Nauradehi. The proposal was to put the felines in the enclosure with huge boundary walls before being released in the wild, he said.
- **Nauradehi was found to be the most suitable area for the cheetahs as its forests are not very dense to restrict the fast movement of the spotted cat.** Besides, the prey base for cheetahs is also in abundance at the sanctuary.
- According to the earlier action plan, around 20 cheetahs were to be translocated to Nauradehi from Namibia in Africa. The Namibia Cheetah Conservation Fund had then showed its willingness to donate the felines to India. However, the State was not ready to finance the plan contending that it was the Centre's project.

Background:

- The reasons for extinction can all be traced to man's interference. Problems like human-wildlife conflict, loss of habitat and loss of prey, and illegal trafficking, have decimated their numbers.
- The advent of climate change and growing human populations have only made these problems worse. With less available land for wildlife, species that require vast home range like the cheetah are placed in competition with other animals and humans, all fighting over less space.

Sources: down to earth.

Topics: Disaster and disaster management.

DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DRIP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of DRIP and states covered.
- For Mains: Need for and significance of DRIP, why safety of dams is important?

Context: The 5th *International Dam Safety Conference–2019 is being held in Bhubaneswar* as a joint initiative of the Government of India, Government of Odisha and the World Bank under aegis of the ongoing World Bank assisted **Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP)** as a part of institutional strengthening.

Background:

- **Objectives:** Dam Safety Conferences are being organized as an annual event in different DRIP States in collaboration with the Implementing Agencies and leading academic institutes to provide a common platform for all stakeholders including non-DRIP States.
- Dam professionals, academicians, scientists, as well as industries both from within the country and from around the world gather to deliberate on all aspects related to dam safety and the solutions that worked best in addressing dam safety concerns.

Why ensure safety of dams in the country?

- About 80% of our large dams are over twenty-five years old. About 209 dams are over 100 years old and were built in an era when design practices and safety considerations were much below the current design and safety norms. Several of these dams may be experiencing distress and are in need of attention for ensuring their structural safety and operational efficiency.

About DRIP:

- The **Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR)**, Government of India, with **assistance from the World Bank**, is implementing the DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DRIP), which would be a six-year project.
- The **Central Dam Safety Organisation of Central Water Commission**, assisted by a Consulting firm, is coordinating and supervising the Project implementation.
- **Goals:** The project originally envisaged the rehabilitation and improvement of about 223 dams within four states namely, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu and later Karnataka, Uttarakhand (UNVNL) and Jharkhand (DVC) joined DRIP and total number of dams covered under DRIP increased to 250. The project will also promote new technologies and improve Institutional capacities for dam safety evaluation and

implementation at the Central and State levels and in some identified premier academic and research institutes of the country.

- **The project development objectives of DRIP are:** (i) to improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner, and (ii) to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at central level.

Background:

- Globally India ranks third after China and the USA in terms of the number of large dams with 5264 large dams in operation and 437 large dams under construction. The total storage capacity of the impounded water by these dams is about 283 billion cubic meters (BCM).

Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security; Money laundering related issues.

1. SELA TUNNEL

What to study?

- For Prelims: Geographical location of Sela tunnel and overview of its neighbourhood.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for tunnel.

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

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



Significance of the project:

1. Once the 12.04-km tunnel is complete it will give a fillip to the overall development of the area as it will provide **all-weather connectivity to Tawang and other areas**.
2. **It will also reduce the travelling time from Tezpur to Tawang** by more than an hour and boost tourism and related economic activities in the region.

3. **Need:** Till now, the entry to the area was only through the 13,700-feet Sela Pass, which is covered in snow in the winters making the movement of vehicles difficult.

Background:

- The development is a part of the Union Government's effort to develop connectivity infrastructure in border areas to secure India's defence. The proposal to build the Sela Pass comes amid concerns in the defence establishment over China's growing assertiveness along the nearly 4,000 km-long Sino-India border.

2. NGOS AND REGULATION OF THEIR FOREIGN FUNDING

What to study?

- For Prelims: FCRA guidelines on foreign funding to NGOs, eligibility.
- For Mains: Misuse of foreign funds, issues and the need for stringent measures to prevent the misuse of foreign funds.

Context: Greenpeace has been forced to close two of its regional offices and "considerably" reduce its staff in India because of a government crackdown on allegedly unlawful foreign funding of NGOs.

- Greenpeace India had its foreign funding blocked in 2015 as part of a nationwide crackdown on charities.

Significance of NGOs:

- NGOs play an important role in the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society and their overall development. This is especially true in the case of India, where a vast majority of its population continues to remain under the poverty line and have little or no access to even basic facilities provided by the government.

Regulation of Foreign Funding:

- The **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010** and rules framed under it (the "FCRA" or "Act") regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") in India.

Scope and objective of FCRA:

- The intent of the Act is to prevent use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activity detrimental to the national interest.
- It has a very wide scope and is applicable to a natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities (whether incorporated or not) as well as NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India.
- It is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

In order to achieve the above objective, the Act:

- Prohibits acceptance and use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by a certain specified category of persons such as a candidate for election, judge, journalist, columnist, newspaper publication, cartoonist and others.
- Regulates the inflow to and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs by prescribing a mechanism to accept, use and report usage of the same.

Definition:

- It defines the term 'foreign contribution' to include currency, article other than gift for personal use and securities received from foreign source. While foreign hospitality refers to any offer from a foreign source to provide foreign travel, boarding, lodging, transportation or medical treatment cost.

Acceptance of foreign funds:

- The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.

Registration and prior approval under FCRA:

- In order to be registered under the FCRA, an NGO must be in existence for at least three years and must have undertaken reasonable activity in its field for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be utilised.

- Further, it must have spent at least INR 1,000,000 over three years preceding the date of its application on its activities.
2. The registration certificate is valid for a period of five years and must be thereafter renewed in the prescribed manner.
 3. NGOs not eligible for registration can seek prior approval from FCRA for receiving foreign funding. This permission is granted only for a specific amount of foreign funding from a specified foreign source for a specific purpose. It remains valid till receipt and full utilisation of such amount.

The Act imposes various conditions on the use of foreign funds and some of them are as follows:

1. All funds received by a NGO must be used only for the purpose for which they were received.
2. Such funds must not be used in speculative activities identified under the Act.
3. Except with the prior approval of the Authority, such funds must not be given or transferred to any entity not registered under the Act or having prior approval under the Act.
4. Every asset purchased with such fund must be in the name of the NGO and not its office bearers or members.

Reporting requirement:

- Every NGO registered or having prior approval under the Act must file an annual report with the Authority in the prescribed form.
- This report must be accompanied by an income and expenditure statement, receipt and payment account, and balance sheet for the relevant financial year. For financial years where no foreign contribution is received, a 'NIL' report must be furnished with the Authority.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The Central government has acted against a number of NGOs in India in the past two years for allegedly violating the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act. Critically comment on its implications

3. UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES (PREVENTION) ACT (UAPA)

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

About the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA):

1. This law is *aimed at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India*.
2. Its main objective is *to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India*.
3. The Act makes it *a crime to support any secessionist movement or to support claims by a foreign power to what India claims as its territory*.
4. The UAPA, framed in 1967, *has been amended twice since: first in 2008 and then in 2012*.

The law is contested for few draconian provisions:

1. The Act introduces *a vague definition of terrorism* to encompass a wide range of non-violent political activity, including political protest.
2. It *empowers the government to declare an organisation as 'terrorist' and ban it*. Mere membership of such a proscribed organisation itself becomes a criminal offence.
3. It allows *detention without a chargesheet for up to 180 days and police custody can be up to 30 days*.
4. It *creates a strong presumption against bail and anticipatory bail is out of the question*. It creates a presumption of guilt for terrorism offences merely based on the evidence allegedly seized.
5. It *authorises the creation of special courts*, with wide discretion to hold in-camera proceedings (closed-door hearings) and use secret witnesses but contains no sunset clause and provisions for mandatory periodic review.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The ambiguous nature of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 (UAPA) gives unreasonable power to authorities. Examine.

FACTS for PRELIMS

DIPP AS DEPARTMENT FOR PROMOTION OF INDUSTRY AND INTERNAL TRADE

Context: The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has been renamed as the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

- **Mandate:** To deal with matters related to start-ups, facilitating ease of doing business among others.

Key facts:

- It functions under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- It will look into matters related to promotion of internal trade, including retail trade, welfare of traders and their employees, facilitating ease of doing business and start-ups.
- **The matters related to internal trade were earlier under the domain of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.**

CATEGORISATION OF FARMERS

Context: In agriculture Census, the operational holdings are categorised in five size classes as follows:

1. Marginal: Below 1.00 hectare.
2. Small: 1.00-2.00 hectare.
3. Semi-Medium: 2.00-4.00 hectare.
4. Medium: 4.00-10.00 hectare.
5. Large: 10.00 hectare and above.

DAKSHINA BHARAT HINDI PRACHAR SABHA

- **Context:** The President of India recently unveiled a statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the **Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha** in Chennai.

About Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha:

- Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha was established in the year 1918 by Mahatma Gandhi with the sole aim of propagating Hindi in southern states.
- The first Pracharak was Devadoss Gandhi son of Mahatma Gandhi.

ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED (ANIIDCL)

Why in News?

- An expert committee of the Union Environment Ministry has “deferred” clearance to a ₹100 crore proposal by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCL) to develop an island resort, as well as put up “premium tents” and “tree houses”, on the grounds that it doesn’t account for the biodiversity of the islands’ coast.

About ANIIDCL:

- Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCO) was incorporated on 28th June 1988 under the

Companies Act 1956 for rapid economic growth of the Islands.

- The main objective of the Corporation is to develop and commercially exploit the natural resources for the balanced and environment friendly development of the territory.
- The Chief Secretary, A&N Administration is the chairman of the Corporation.

Activities:

- Trading of iron and steel, petroleum products, liquor and milk.
- Megapode Resort, Megapode Camping Resort, and air-ticketing agency
- Financial assistance to industrial concerns.
- Infrastructure Development: Tourism and fisheries.

INDIA'S FIRST "CAREER PORTAL"

- **Context:** India's first “career portal” has been launched in Rajasthan.

Key facts:

- It is aimed at addressing **the needs of secondary and higher secondary students for information on scholarships and career choices**.
- It was **launched with the support of United Nations Children's Fund**.
- The portal is expected to help the students take “informed decisions” about their academic and professional pursuits.

'DELHI DECLARATION' ON DIGITAL HEALTH

- **Delhi Declaration on digital health** was adopted at the concluding session of the ‘4th Global Digital Health Partnership Summit.
- It calls for WHO’s leadership in digital health and for it to establish a specific mechanism to centrally coordinate digital health to assist its Member States.

2ND EDITION OF ISL DICTIONARY

Context:

- ‘2nd Edition of ISL Dictionary’ for Hearing Impaired Persons has been launched.
- The Dictionary Includes 6000 Words Under Categories of Academic, Legal, Medical, Technical & Everyday Terms.

Key facts:

- The dictionary has been developed by **Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre (ISLR&TC)** under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), M/o Social Justice & Empowerment.
- Its aim is to give Deaf people the constitutional right to speech and opportunity of freedom of expression and also bringing them into the main stream of the society.

"SOUTH COAST RAILWAY (SCOR)"- A NEW ZONE OF INDIAN RAILWAYS

Context: Creation of a new zone with headquarter at Visakhapatnam.

Key facts:

- The new zone named "South Coast Railway (SCoR)", will comprise of existing Guntakal, Guntur and Vijayawada divisions.
- South Central Railway will comprise of Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Nanded divisions.

PARMANU TECH 2019

- The 'Parmanu Tech 2019' conference was recently **organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)**.
- The conference discussed issues related to Nuclear Energy and Radiation Technologies.

KERALA TO GET COUNTRY'S 2ND LONGEST RAIL TUNNEL

What is it?

- A 10.7-km railway line, including a 9.02-km tunnel, has been proposed to connect the upcoming **Vizhinjam International Multipurpose Deepwater Seaport to the railway network**.
- The 9.02-km tunnel, mooted by **Konkan Railway Corporation Ltd (KRCL)**, will be the second longest railway tunnel in the country. The 11.26-km **Pir Panjal rail tunnel, connecting Banihal and Hillar Shahabad, is the longest**.

INDIA'S FIRST INDIGENOUS SEMICONDUCTOR CHIPS FOR 4G/LTE AND 5G NR MODEMS

- India's first Indigenous Semiconductor Chips by Bengaluru based semiconductor company "SIGNALCHIP" for 4G/LTE and 5G NR MODEMs** was recently unveiled.
- Significance:** With this, India has entered into the elite club of the world and this will have huge implications for India's data security and data sovereignty, besides the positive economic implications. At present only 8 companies and a few countries can design and build semiconductor chips.

DARD ARYANS

Why in News?

- A seminar was held recently in New Delhi that extensively discussed the need to preserve the legacy of Dard Aryans.

Who are they?

- Some 200 km from Leh are the villages of Dha, Hanu, Garkone and Darchik on both sides of the Indus River, inhabited by the Buddhist Dard Tribes. The villages are together called the "Aryan valley". The word 'Dard' is derived from a Sanskrit word, 'Daradas', which **means people who live on hillsides**.
- They might have descended from soldiers in Alexander's army** who had come to the region over

2,000 years ago. The Dard Aryans, however, do not document their history. These tribals are **mainly dependent on agriculture**.

Threats and the need for their protection:

- There is a threat to the heritage of the community owing to modernisation, migration and religious conversion.
- The community now numbers about 4,000. Over the last few decades, many of them have embraced Islam or Buddhism.
- The community prohibits marriage with outsiders to keep the gene pool intact. Of late, the Dard men have been migrating to other parts of the region (in search of livelihood) and marrying outside the tribe.
- The tribe is struggling to find a balance between modernity and traditional values.

GOVT. GRANTS DIVISIONAL STATUS TO LADAKH

- Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik has granted Ladakh a divisional status. It will comprise Leh and Kargil districts, with headquarters at Leh. Earlier, Ladakh was a part of the Kashmir division.

Implications:

- With this, **there shall be three administrative units** of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh in the State.
- The move leaves the Kashmir valley geographically the smallest division at 15,948 sq. km, Jammu division at 26,293 sq. km and Ladakh, the biggest division, at 86,909 sq. km.
- Ladakh will now get its own Divisional Commissioner and Inspector General of Police.

What necessitated this?

- During the winter months, the entire Ladakh region remains cut-off from the rest of the country for almost six months. The remoteness and inaccessibility of the area makes it eligible for establishing a separate division.

DD ARUNPRABHA

What is it?

- It is a dedicated 24x7 Satellite channel for Arunachal Pradesh launched recently. It is the 24th satellite channel operated by Doordarshan.
- DD Arunprabha is the Doordarshan's second channel for the northeastern region; DD Northeast was the first one. The channel will familiarise people across India with the beauty and the culture of the State.

FILM AND TELEVISION INSTITUTE (FTI)

- The **permanent campus of Film and Television Institute will come up at Jollang-Rakap (Jote), Papum Pare, Arunachal Pradesh**. It will be the first Film and Television Institute of entire North-East.
- This will be the third Film and Television Institute of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting**, the first two being FTII Pune and SRFTI Kolkata.
- It will provide a boost to the talented youngsters of the North-East in film and television sector.

E-COCOON

- It is a mobile application launched by the Ministry of Textiles for quality certification in silkworm seed sector.
- E app will help quality certification in silk worm sector. It will be used by the Seed Analysts and Seed Officers nominated under Central Seed Act for system and product certification through real time reporting.

Background:

- India is the **second largest producer of silk** after China and the **largest consumer of silk**.
- India's silk production capacity is expected to reach about 38,500 tonnes by 2020 from the current level of 32,000 tonnes.

SWAYATT

- It is an initiative to promote Start-ups, Women and Youth Advantage Through eTransactions on Government e Marketplace (GeM).
- This will bring together the key stakeholders within the Indian entrepreneurial ecosystem to Government e-Marketplace, the national procurement portal.

VIVID- 2019

Context:

- VIVID-Vision Insight and Voices as India goes Digital"- the District Informatics Officer (DIO) meet, is being organised by National Informatics Centre (NIC).

What is it?

- The meet is held as an initiative to interact with the DIO's and to share their experiences as well as contribution, as digital change-makers at the grass-root level in the States.
- VIVID started in 2017, as an annual event, with the objective to empower NIC officials in the field of technology.
- The National meet will cover a wide range of relevant topics in various technical sessions including Emerging Technologies (Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning & Big Data Analytics), Cyber Threats & Counter Measures (Changing Digitisation Paradigm & its impact on Security), Enterprise Level Applications, and many other relevant topics.

AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE CONGRESS

- 14th Agricultural Science Congress is being held at New Delhi.
- **Organized by:** The NAAS in collaboration with the ICAR and Indian Agricultural Research Institute.
- **Theme:** "Innovations for Agricultural Transformation".

REGIONAL RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM (RRTS)

Context: The Union Cabinet approved construction of Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Corridor of Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) covering a distance of 82.15 kms.

- The RRTS is a first-of-its-kind, rail-based, high-speed regional transit system to be implemented in India.

- Once operational, it will be the fastest, most comfortable and safest mode of commuter transport in the National Capital Region (NCR).
- The RRTS aims to streamline the urban transportation system, which is stressed due to intensive developments, and increase in the number of private vehicles.
- The project is meant to ensure 'Universal Access' by being sensitive to the needs of women, children and vulnerable sections of the society.

ABOUT THE ISLAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (IDA)

What is it? The IDA was set up on June 1 this year following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's review meeting for the development of islands. The meetings of the agency are chaired by the Union Home Minister.

Composition: Members of the IDA include cabinet secretary, home secretary, secretary (environment, forests and climate change), secretary (tourism) and secretary (tribal welfare).

SARTHI SANDESH VAHINI

Context: Uttar Pradesh has launched 'Sarthi Sandesh Vahini' mission.

- The 'Sarthi Sandesh Vahini' is a mission started by the state family welfare department with an aim to spread awareness regarding family planning in urban and rural areas.
- Under this campaign, vehicles will provide family planning information to the viewers through various documentaries and films.

1ST AQUA MEGA FOOD PARK IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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

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

FIRST DISTRICT COOLING SYSTEM OF INDIA TO COME UP IN AMARAVATI

Context: India's First District cooling system will come up in Amaravati, capital of the Andhra Pradesh.



What is District cooling system?

- District cooling systems produce chilled water, steam or hot water at a central plant and then pipe that energy out (either underground or over

rooftops) to buildings for air conditioning, space heating and water heating. As a result, these buildings don't require their own chillers, air conditioners, boilers or furnaces.

- They are considered to be highly efficient to address each of the challenges like high Capital and operating costs, reliability, flexibility and environmental sustainability while meeting their comfort and process cooling and heating needs.
- District cooling uses only 50% of primary energy consumption for cooling urban building n compared to other cooling systems. This also reduces carbon emissions.

MOHAR RESERVOIR PROJECT

Context:

- The Chhattisgarh Water Resources Department (CWRD) commenced the work on Mohar Reservoir Project in Balod district without ensuring the land required was acquired and obtaining environment and forest clearances, says the latest Comptroller and Auditor General report on Chhattisgarh.

Key facts:

- The Mohar reservoir project is proposed across the confluence of river Dangarh and Dalekasa with a catchment of 143 square km. The gross command area of the project is 1100 hectares. The proposed project is expected to irrigate 800 hectares of Kharif paddy and supply 1000 million cubic (1 TMC) water by feeder canal to Kharkhara reservoir for 500MW power plant of NSPCL in Bhilai.

HOVEIZEH LONG-RANGE CRUISE MISSILE

1. Iran has announced the successful test flight of Hoveizeh long-range cruise missile.
2. The Hoveizeh Cruise Missile is part of the Soumar family of cruise missile and has a range of over 1,350 km (840 miles).
3. It is designed to use against ground targets.
4. The Hoveizeh missile needs a very short time for its preparedness and can fly at a low altitude and is manufactured by the Aerospace Industries Organization of Israel.

FATEH SUBMARINE

- It is a "state-of-the-art" domestically produced Iranian submarine capable of firing cruise missiles. It was unveiled recently in Bandar Abbas.
- It is **Iran's first submarine in the semi-heavy category**.
- The underwater-vessel weighs nearly 600 tonnes and is equipped with torpedoes and naval mines in addition to cruise missiles.
- The submarine can operate more than 200 metres below sea level for up to 35 days.
- It has subsurface-to-surface missiles with a range of about 2,000 kilometres (1,250 miles), making it capable in reaching Israel and U.S. military bases in the region.

LAIRCM SELF-PROTECTION SUITES

- US has approved a foreign military sale to India — **two 777 Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) Self-Protection Suites (SPS)**, for an estimated \$190 million.

Significance:

1. LAIRCM is **a programme meant to protect large aircraft from man-portable missiles**. It increases crew-warning time, decreases false alarm rates and automatically counters advanced infrared missile systems.
2. These systems will **protect two Boeing-777 Head-of-State aircraft**. This would bring **the security of Air India One at par with that of Air Force One**, the aircraft used by the American President.
3. **It consists** of missile warning sensors (MWS), a laser transmitter assembly, control interface unit (CIU) and processors to detect, track, jam and counter incoming infrared missiles.

HELINA-ANTI TANK MISSILE

Context: The Helicopter-launched anti-tank missile Helina was successfully test fired from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur in Balasore district of Odisha.

Key features:

- Indigenously designed and built, Helina is the air-launched variant of the Nag, a fire-and-forget ATGM with an estimated range of 4 kilometers.
- Range is estimated at between 7 to 8 kilometres.
- It is guided by an infrared imaging seeker (IIR) operating in the lock-on before-launch mode and helps in further strengthening the defence capabilities of the country.

EXERCISE TOPCHI

- It is an annual exercise held by Indian Army to showcase its artillery firepower, aviation and surveillance capabilities. The latest edition was held at Deolali Camp near Nashik.

COBRA GOLD MILITARY EXERCISE

Context: The United States and Thailand are hosting the multi-nation Cobra military exercise this year. The exercise is taking place in the northern Thai province of Phitsanulok. This is the 38th edition of this exercise.

About the exercise:

- This is a Thai-American initiative with an aim to improve coordination between the armed forces. It is one of the Asia-Pacific region's largest multinational military exercises that is held in Thailand every year. It was first held in 1982 and its headquarters is in Bangkok, Thailand.
- India joined this exercise for the first time in 2016 while China was admitted for the first time in 2015 but was only allowed to participate in humanitarian assistance training.

VELAYAT 97

- It is a navy drill being conducted by Iran. It aims to evaluate the navy's equipment, practice launching weapons and enable the troops to gain readiness for a real battle.

EXERCISE VAYU SHAKTI-2019

Context: EXERCISE VAYU SHAKTI-2019 was held recently in Rajasthan.

- Vayu Shakti is held by Indian Airforce.
- It demonstrates the IAF's ability to strike targets on the ground such as enemy convoys and tanks, radar stations, railway yards and military headquarters.

EXERCISE SAMPRITI - 2019

- Context:** As part of the ongoing India Bangladesh defence cooperation, a joint military exercise Sampriti-2019 will be conducted at Tangail, Bangladesh.
- Exercise Sampriti-2019 is an important bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and Bangladesh** and this will be the eighth edition of the exercise which is hosted alternately by both countries.
- The exercise is **aimed to strengthen and broaden the aspects of interoperability and cooperation between the Indian and Bangladesh Armies**. The exercise will involve tactical level operations in a counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment under the UN mandate.

DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)

- What is it?** To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- Objective:** The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- Functions:** The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans. It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

DRDO'S 'DARE TO DREAM' CONTEST

- Context:** The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has launched 'Dare to Dream', a contest to encourage startups and individuals to come up with innovative defence and aerospace technologies.
- Applicants are invited to send innovative, workable proposals that can impact various related domains. The winning entries, which should specify the plan of executing it into a prototype, stand to get one of five

prizes ranging from ₹3 lakh to ₹10 lakh in two categories.

- The military R&D organisation has asked for solutions in the areas of Artificial Intelligence, Autonomous Systems, Cybersecurity, Hypersonic Technologies, Smart Materials, Quantum Computing, and Soldier as a System.

MAIDEN 'REGIONAL MARITIME-SAFETY CONFERENCE'

- Context:** Maiden 'Regional Maritime-Safety Conference' is being held in Mumbai. The Conference is being organized by India for the first time.
- Theme:** 'Regional Maritime-Safety Conference'.
- The objective of the conference is** to deliberate on issues related to assuring maritime safety in the India-ASEAN sub region, safeguarding our shores and promoting trade along the sea routes. The conference will address a wide range of issues that affect regional maritime safety, including transport safety, maritime law, ship building, transportation of hazardous goods, marine oil spill, pollution and environmental safety.
- The inaugural edition is being organised** by the National Maritime Foundation (NMF) in coordination with the Ministry of Shipping and the Ministry of External Affairs.

DRONE OLYMPICS COMPETITION

- Context:** First ever 'Drone Olympics' competition for UAV's was held recently at Air Force Station, Bengaluru alongside the Aero India exhibition(Theme – 'The Runway to a Billion Opportunities')
- It was **organized by Ministry of Defence**.
- Aim:** to encourage the UAV industry to connect with potential buyers and business partners in the country and also provide an opportunity to the Armed Forces to assess the capabilities of UAVs.
- Significance of drones:** The role of drones is ever-increasing in the defence sectors, making them the ideal platform for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, electronic warfare and strike missions.

CARNOT PRIZE

- Context:** The Union Minister of Railways and Coal, Piyush Goyal has been awarded the Carnot Prize 2018 for the transformational changes brought by him during his tenure as Union Minister of Power.

About Carnot prize:

- Annual recognition by **the US-based Kleinman Center for Energy Policy for distinguished contributions to energy policy** through scholarship or practice.
- The prize has been **named after French scientist Sadi Carnot**, who in 1824 published Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire, which became the basis for the second law of thermodynamics.

'FREEDOM OF THE CITY OF LONDON' AWARD

- Context:** The State Bank of India's UK head Sanjiv Chadha has been honoured with the 'Freedom of the

City of London' award in recognition of his contribution to promoting the bilateral relations.

Freedom of the City:

- Freedom of the City is an honour bestowed by a City of London Corporation upon a valued member of the community, or upon a visiting celebrity or dignitary.
- The genesis of the 'Freedom of the City of London' is traced to the medieval time of around 1237. The honour enabled recipients to carry out their trade. The previous Indian recipient of the honour is Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India.

SEOUL PEACE PRIZE

- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi has received the prestigious Seoul Peace Prize for 2018 for his contribution to international cooperation and fostering global economic growth.
- **Modi is the 14th recipient of the award** and the past laureates included former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and renowned international relief organizations like Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam.

About Seoul Peace Prize:

1. Established in 1990 to commemorate success of the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul, South Korea.
2. Established to crystallize Korean people's yearning for peace on Korean Peninsula and in the rest of the world.
3. Awarded biennially to those individuals who have made their mark through contributions to harmony of mankind, reconciliation between nations and world peace.

AAROHAN SOCIAL INNOVATION AWARDS

- **Context:** The Infosys Foundation has constituted Aarohan Social Innovation Awards to reward individuals, teams or NGOs developing solutions for the social sector.

About Aarohan Social Innovation Awards:

- **Aim:** To nurture the culture of innovation in the social sector to scale positive change across the country and thereby provide a platform to help the solutions scale.
- **The awards would be given away in six categories** spanning healthcare, destitute care, rural development, women's safety and empowerment, education and sport and sustainability.

GOA INTRODUCES TAGS TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY ZONES

- **Context:** Goa State Biodiversity Board (GSBB) recently came up with a tagging system to ensure communities residing within the biodiversity zone get Access Benefit Share (ABS) from their profits.

Features of the project:

- The tag will show that the ingredients used are sourced from the nature.

- Under this, **the sellers are supposed to pay 0.01% of their annual profit** to the GSBB and the board will then **use this amount to protect the habitat from where the ingredients are**.

"WASTE TO WONDER" PARK

- "Waste to Wonder" Park was recently inaugurated in South Delhi. The park sets an example of creation of 'Wealth from waste'.

CRYING KEELBACK

- Researchers find new snake in Arunachal- Crying Keelback (named for the mark below its eyes, that gives the illusion that it is crying) snake or the Hebius lacrima.
- The Crying Keelback has a set of characteristics that together make it different from other species in the Habeas genus: the mark under its eyes, the interrupted pale head stripe, among others.

BLACKBUCK

Key facts:

- The blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra*) is an antelope **indigenous to the India plains**. Also found in India, Nepal and Pakistan.
- The **Females are generally hornless**.
- It is **considered to be the fastest animal next to Cheetah**.
- It is of **Least Concern according to the IUCN red list**.

BRAMBLE CAY MELOMYS IS FIRST MAMMAL TO GO EXTINCT DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

- **Context:** Climate change induced by human beings has claimed its first victim in 'Class Mammalia' of the 'Animal Kingdom': the Bramble Cay melomys — a 'little brown rat' found in Australia.
- The government of Australia's Queensland province reported the species to be extinct in June 2016.
- It was placed in the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species.

WORLD'S LARGEST BEE SPOTTED FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1981

- **Context:** The world's largest bee — a giant insect roughly the size of a human thumb — has been rediscovered in a remote part of Indonesia in its first sighting in nearly 40 years.
- The Wallace's giant bee (*Megachile pluto*), which lives in the Indonesian island region of North Moluccas, makes its nest in termite mounds, using its large fang-like mandibles to collect sticky resin to protect its home from the termites.
- **The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists the bee as "vulnerable"**, meaning that while its numbers are relatively solid, the remoteness of its population makes it hard to study.

FLAMINGO SANCTUARY

- **Context:** A committee, chaired by Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan, has accorded wildlife clearance to the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed train corridor that encroaches upon a flamingo sanctuary and the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, the home to leopards, in Mumbai.
- **About Sanjay Gandhi National Park:** Sanjay Gandhi National Park is spread over three districts – Palgar, Thane and Mumbai Suburb. The National Park is home to a number of endangered species of flora and fauna and harbours approximately 800 species of flowering plants, 45 species of mammals, 43 species of reptiles among others.
- **Flamingo sanctuary:** Western side of the Thane creek is a dedicated flamingo sanctuary. Thane Creek is home to flamingos as well as other migratory and residential bird species. It is Maharashtra's second marine sanctuary after the one at Malvan.

THAILAND MAKES SIAMESE FIGHTING FISH NATIONAL AQUATIC ANIMAL

- **Context:** Siamese fighting fish is named Thailand's national aquatic animal.
- **Known in the West as a betta fish,** the underwater brawler is popular in home aquariums for its iridescent body and many-hued tail.
- **IUCN status:** Vulnerable.

WOMEN'S GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY INITIATIVE

- **What is it?** Launched by the US, it is **an effort aimed at helping 50 million women in the developing world get ahead economically over the next six years.**
- It is a **government wide project** led by the senior adviser and daughter to President Donald Trump- Ivanka Trump. The initiative will involve the State Department, the National Security Council and other agencies.
- It aims to coordinate current programs and develop new ones to assist women in areas such as job training, financial support, and legal or regulatory reforms.
- It seeks to reach 50 million women in the developing world by 2025 through U.S. government activities, private-public partnerships, and a new, innovative fund at USAID.

VAT CAU FESTIVAL

- **What is it?** Vat Cau is a centuries-old sport which began as a training exercise for soldiers in Vietnam and contains elements of wrestling and rugby.
- **Vat Cau** is the main draw of a three-day annual festival held during Vietnam's much celebrated Tet Lunar New Year. Dating back to the 11th century, the game was invented by a revered general to teach his recruits about the importance of teamwork, intelligence and strength when fighting against foreign invaders.

- A single match has four separate teams of eight men wearing waist straps of different colours. They tussle over a 17kg (37-pound) ball made from the wood of a jackfruit tree, laboriously inching it towards one of the holes dug in each team's corner.

ABU DHABI INCLUDES HINDI AS THIRD OFFICIAL COURT LANGUAGE

- **Context:** Abu Dhabi has included Hindi as the third official language used in its courts, alongside Arabic and English, as part of a move designed to improve access to justice.
- **This is aimed at** helping Hindi speakers to learn about litigation procedures, their rights and duties without a language barrier.
- **The Indian community in the UAE**, numbering 2.6 million, constitutes 30% of the total population and is the largest expatriate community.

WOMEN LIVELIHOOD BOND

- **Context:** The World Bank, the Small Industries Development Bank (Sidbi) and the UN Women, along with 10 wealth management firms and leading corporates has announced the launch of Women Livelihood Bond- a new social impact bond to offer credit to rural women entrepreneurs.

Women Livelihood Bond:

- The bonds, which will have a tenure of five years, will be launched by SIDBI with the support of World Bank and UN Women.
- The proposed bond will enable individual women entrepreneurs in sectors like food processing, agriculture, services and small units to borrow around Rs 50,000 to Rs 3 lakh at an annual interest rate of around 13-14 per cent or less.
- SIDBI will act as the financial intermediary and channel funds raised to women entrepreneurs through participating financial intermediaries like banks, NBFCs or microfinance institutions.

WORLD'S LARGEST BHAGAVAD GITA

- **Context:** The Prime Minister recently inaugurated **the world's largest and heaviest Bhagavad Gita at the Delhi ISKCON temple.**

Key facts:

- The book measures 2.8 meters by 2 meters and has 670 pages and weights at 800 kg.
- It is also the world's largest sacred book.
- The book has been printed in Milan, Italy, on YUPO synthetic paper so as to make it untearable and waterproof.
- The **International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)**, known colloquially as the Hare Krishna movement, is a worldwide confederation of more than 400 temples and runs 100 vegetarian restaurants and a wide variety of community-serving projects.

GURU PADMASAMBHAVA

Context: An international conference and exhibition of rare artefacts about the life and legacy of 8th century Buddhist sage Guru Padmasambhava is being held in New Delhi.

- The conference is titled "***Life and Legacy of Guru Padmasambhava***".
- The conference also ***celebrates the 50 years of diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan***.

Key facts on Guru Padmasambhava:

- Guru Padmasambhava is known as the Second Buddha because he played a seminal role in spreading Buddhism and Buddhist teachings across the Himalayan region including Northeast India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.
- In Tibetan, Guru Padmasambhava is generally referred to as Guru Rinpoche, which means "precious master."
- He undertook many travels across India, Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal.
- ***Thangka paintings***, sculptures and photographs portray the life and teachings of the Guru.

OPERATION SMILE

- **Context:** The 'Operation Smile-V' initiative launched by Hyderabad Police has helped in rescuing 325 children, who were either working as labourers or begging on the streets, since January 1 this year.
- **Objective:** To trace the missing children and rescue child labourers, Operation Smile-V was launched on January 1 across Telangana.
- ***Operation Smile also called as Operation Muskaan*** is an initiative of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to rescue/rehabilitate missing children.

NILAVEMBU KUDINEER

- **Context:** The Tamil Nadu government has distributed nilavembu kudineer (a Siddha medicine) concoction to treat people infected with dengue during the outbreak.

Nilavembu kudineer:

- Under in vitro conditions, nilavembu kudineer (a Siddha medicine) was found to provide protection against chikungunya virus while it was effective as a treatment during acute phase of dengue infection.

SELENIUM

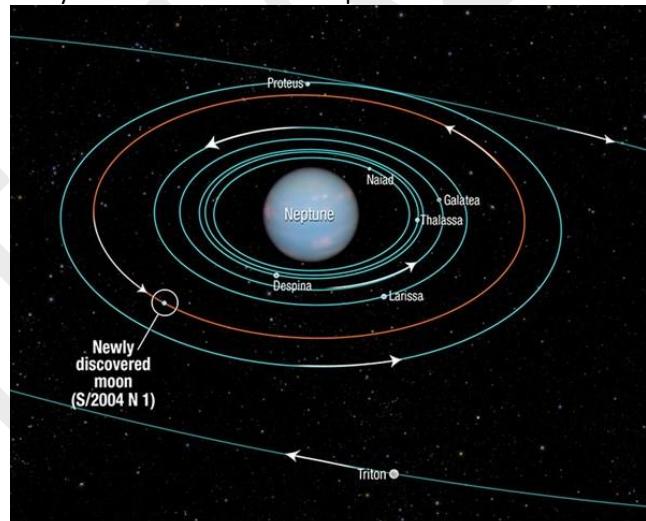
- **Context:** Scientists have found that nanoparticles of ***selenium, an essential micronutrient***, can be used as an antibacterial agent. Scientists found that selenium nanoparticles, owing to their unique structure and properties, may be more effective than antibiotics as they have a larger surface area and therefore can be more in contact with the external environment.
- **Key facts:**
- Selenium is found naturally in wheat, eggs, cheese, nuts and sea food. It is an antioxidant and immunity booster.

RICEEXPERT

- The ICAR-NRRI 'ricexpert' App provides information to farmers in real time on insect pests, nutrients, weeds, nematodes and disease-related problems, rice varieties for different ecologies, farm implements for different field and post-harvest operations.
- It is a web-based application systems which facilitates flow of information from the farmer to the farm scientist and get their instant solution. Farmers can use this App as a diagnostic tool in their rice fields and make customize queries for quick solution of their problems by sending text, photo and recorded voice and solution received through SMS.

HIPPOCAMP- NEW NEPTUNE MOON

Context: With help from NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, astronomers have confirmed the existence of Hippocamp—a tiny moon in orbit around Neptune.



- With a diameter of only 20 miles, the newly characterized moon — named after a mythical half-horse, half-fish sea creature — is the smallest moon yet discovered in orbit around the outermost planet.
- ***The discovery of Hippocamp brings to 14 the number of moons discovered in orbit around Neptune.*** There are seven inner moons, including Hippocamp, along with six outer moons and Neptune's largest moon, Triton.

BERESHEET- ISRAEL'S FIRST LUNAR LANDER LAUNCHED

- ***Israel's First Lunar Lander- Beresheet-*** was recently launched on board Falcon 9.
- Beresheet will attempt to become the ***first Israeli spacecraft, and the first privately-operated mission, to land on the Moon.***
- ***If successful, it will make the Jewish state only the fourth nation to ever to achieve a controlled touchdown on the moon's surface.*** So far, only three other nations have carried out controlled "soft" landings on the moon – the United States, the former Soviet Union and China. Spacecraft from several countries, including India's Moon Impact Probe,

- Japan's SELENE orbiter and a European Space Agency orbital probe called SMART 1, have intentionally crashed on the lunar surface.
- **Beresheet would mark the first non-government lunar landing.** The 1,290-pound (585-kg) spacecraft was built by Israeli nonprofit space venture SpaceIL and state-owned defense contractor Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) with \$100 million furnished almost entirely by private donors.
 - Beresheet is designed to spend just two to three days using on-board instruments to photograph its landing site and measure the moon's magnetic field. Data will be relayed via the US space agency NASA's Deep Space Network to SpaceIL's Israel-based ground station Yehud.

INSIGHTSIAS