



# INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**JANUARY 2019**

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# GENERAL STUDIES -I

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

## 1. MONUMENTS OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** What are ancient monuments? ASI and monuments of national importance.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for preservation of ancient monuments.

**Context:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recently declared that it has added six structures to the list of **monuments of national importance**, taking the total number to 3,693.

- **With 506 monuments under its belt, Karnataka continues to top the list in South India, followed by Tamil Nadu (413).** Nationally too, **Karnataka is in the second place after Uttar Pradesh, which has 745 such monuments.**

**The six monuments declared as Monuments of national importance in 2018 are:**

1. Old High Court Building in Nagpur, Maharashtra.
2. Haveli of Agha Khan in Agra.
3. Haveli of Hathi Khana in Agra.
4. Neemrana Baori in Rajasthan's Alwar district.
5. Group of Temples at Ranipur Jharail in Odisha's Bolangir district.
6. Vishnu Temple in Kotali, Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand.

**What is an Ancient Monument?**

- According to the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958**, any structure, sculpture, inscription, etc., which is in existence for not less than 100 years is termed ancient.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Discuss the mandate, organizational structure and functioning of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

**About ASI:**

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, is the premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- **Functions:** Maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance is the prime concern of the ASI. Besides it regulates all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. It also regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.
- **The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was formed in 1861 by a statute** passed into law by Canning, with Alexander Cunningham as its first Archaeological Surveyor, to excavate and conserve India's ancient built heritage.

## 2. PANJ TIRATH HINDU RELIGIOUS SITE DECLARED AS NATIONAL HERITAGE

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** About Panj Tirath, its location and its significance.
- **For Mains:** Religious sites in Pakistan that are linked to Indian beliefs.

**Context:** The provincial **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government** in northwest Pakistan has declared the ancient Hindu religious site of **Panj Tirath in Peshawar as national heritage**.

- The government also announced a fine of up to Rs 2 million and five years' imprisonment for anyone found guilty of damaging the historic site.

**About Panj Tirath:**

- Panj Tirath, which got its **name from the five pools of water present there**, also contains a temple and a lawn with date palm trees.
- It is believed that **Pandu, a mythical king in the Mahabharata, belonged to this area** and Hindus used



to come to these pools for bathing during the month of Karteek and worship for two days under the trees.

- The site was damaged during the reign of ***the Afghan Durrani dynasty in 1747***, however it was restored by local Hindus during the period of Sikh rule in 1834 and worship started again.

Sources: the hindu.

### 3. INDIAN HARVEST FESTIVALS

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Harvest festivals celebrated across various parts of the country and their significance.

**Context:** The Harvest season is on and festivities have gripped the nation from the north to down south.

#### **Various festivals being celebrated across the Nations:**

- **Makar Sankranti:** The festival of Makar Sankranti (Andhra, Telangana and Maharashtra) is being celebrated when the Sun enters the Makar zodiac and the days begin to lengthen compared to nights.
- **Pongal:** In South India and particularly in Tamil Nadu, it's the festival of Pongal which is being celebrated over 4 days at harvest time.
- **Magha Bihu:** In Assam and many parts of the North East, the festival of Magha Bihu is celebrated. It sees the first harvest of the season being offered to the gods along with prayers for peace and prosperity.
- **Uttarayan:** Gujarat celebrates it in the form of the convivial kite festival of Uttarayan.
- **Maghi:** In Punjab, Makar Sankranti is celebrated as Maghi. Bathing in a river in the early hours on Maghi is important.
- **Saaji:** In Shimla District of Himachal Pradesh, Makara Sankranti is known as Magha Saaji. Saaji is the Pahari word for Sankranti, start of the new month. Hence this day marks the start of the month of Magha.
- **Kicheri:** The festival is known as Kicheri in Uttar Pradesh and involves ritual bathing.

#### **Outside India:**

- **Shakrain** is an annual celebration of winter in Bangladesh, observed with the flying of kites.
- **Maghe Sankranti** is a Nepalese festival observed on the first of Magh in the Bikram Samvat Hindu Solar Nepali calendar (about 14 January).

Sources: the Hindu, Wiki.

### 4. SPIRITUAL CIRCUIT IN KERALA

#### **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:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated a project for the development of **spiritual circuit comprising three important pilgrimage centres of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, Aranmula and Sabarimala in Kerala.**

- **The Sree Padmanabaswamy Temple is one of the 108 divyadesams of Lord Vishnu.**
- The project is being **implemented under the Swadesh Darshan scheme** of the tourism ministry.

#### **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:**

- The scheme is **100% centrally funded** for the project components undertaken for public funding.
- It leverages the **voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.

- **Funding of individual project will vary** from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by PMC (Programme Management Consultant).
- **A National Steering Committee (NSC)** will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.
- **A Mission Directorate** headed by the Member Secretary, NSC as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/ UTs governments and other stake holders.
- **PMC will be a national level** consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.

Sources: the hindu.

## 5. KUMBH MELA 2019

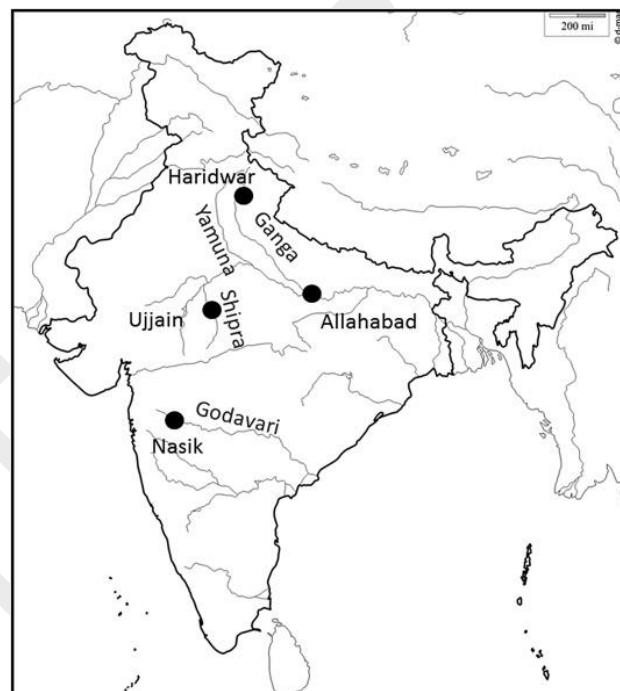
### What to study?

- **For Prelims:** About Kumbh Mela- places where it is held, mythological significance and Astrological significance.
- **For Mains:** Crowd Management during such huge gatherings- challenges and solutions.

**Context:** The world's largest religious and cultural human congregation, 'Kumbh 2019' began at Prayagraj (erstwhile Allahabad), Uttar Pradesh on January 15, 2019.

### About Kumbh Mela:

- The Kumbh Mela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is **anchored in Hindu mythology**.
- It is **the largest public gathering and collective act of faith, anywhere in the world**.
- Crowds gather at the sacred **confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mystical Sarasvati**. Primarily, this congregation includes Ascetics, Saints, Sadhus, Sadhvvis, Kalpvasis, and Pilgrims from all walks of life.
- The Mela was **included in the list of "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO in 2017**.



### Celebration:

- Kumbh Mela is celebrated **four times over a course of 12 years**.
- The **geographical location of Kumbh Mela spans over four locations** in India and the Mela site keeps rotating between one of the four pilgrimage places on four sacred rivers as listed below:
  1. **Haridwar** on the Ganges in Uttarakhand.
  2. **Ujjain** on the Shipra in Madhya Pradesh.
  3. **Nashik** on the Godavari in Maharashtra.
  4. **Prayagraj** at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Uttar Pradesh.

### Selection of site:

- Each site's **celebration is based on a distinct set of astrological positions of the Sun, the Moon, and the Jupiter**. The celebrations occur at the exact moment when these positions are fully occupied, as it is considered to be the holiest time in Hinduism.

Sources: the hindu.

## 6. SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI LAUNCHES SECOND PHASE OF THE WEB CAMPAIGN 'SANJHI – MUJH MEIN KALAKAR'

- Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama will launch the second phase of the Web Campaign '**SANJHI-MUJH MEIN KALAKAR**'.
- It is an initiative to document and promote the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and diverse cultural traditions of the country by direct public-participation.

- The literal meaning of the term SANJHI is “to share” and “to partner”.

#### **The Second Phase:**

- The second phase of this campaign has its main focus area like the folk, traditional, customary, socially events and ritualistic art forms – woven as a cultural fabric around the harvest festival season of January.
- It is widely celebrated as various nomenclatures like **Makar Sankranti, Pongal, Lohri, Bhogali Bihu, Torgya, Uttarayan, Attukkal Pongal**, etc.

#### **The Intention:**

It intends to bring forth such forms that are aligned with the domains of intangible cultural heritage as per the Convention of Safeguarding the ICH under UNESCO:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- Performing arts;
- Social practices, rituals and festival events;
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- Traditional craftsmanship.

#### **About The Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) –**

##### **Founded in 31<sup>st</sup> May 1952 [HQ: New Delhi]**

- 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 is presently an Autonomous Body of the Ministry of Culture, and is fully funded by the Government for implementation of its schemes and programmes.
- It is the nodal agency of the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India to coordinate the matters related to Intangible Cultural Heritage and various UNESCO Conventions addressing Cultural Diversity and promotion and dissemination of multifarious cultural traditions and expressions of the country.

#### **What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?**

- The term ‘cultural heritage’ has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO.
- Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects.
- It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

Source: PIB

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

## BHIMA KOREGAON ANNIVERSARY

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Battle of Koregaon- reasons, key facts and outcomes of the battle.**

**Context:** January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 marks the 201st anniversary of the Bhima Koregaon battle.

#### **About the Bhima- Koregaon battle:**

- A battle was fought in Bhima Koregaon, a district in Pune with a strong historical Dalit connection, **between the Peshwa forces and the British on January 1, 1818**.
- The British army, which comprised mainly of Dalit soldiers, fought the upper caste-dominated Peshwa army. The British troops defeated the Peshwa army.

#### **Outcomes of the battle:**

- **The victory was seen as a win against caste-based discrimination and oppression.** Peshwas were notorious for their oppression and persecution of Mahar dalits. The victory in the battle over Peshwas gave dalits a moral victory a victory against caste-based discrimination and oppression and sense of identity.

- However, **the divide and rule policy of the British created multiple fissures in Indian society** which is even visible today in the way of excessive caste and religious discrimination which needs to be checked keeping in mind the tenets of the Constitution.

#### **Why Bhima Koregaon is seen as a Dalit symbol?**

- The battle has come to be seen as a symbol of Dalit pride because a large number of soldiers in the Company force were the Mahar Dalits. Since the Peshwas, who were Brahmins, were seen as oppressors of Dalits, the victory of the Mahar soldiers over the Peshwa force is seen as Dalit assertion.
- On 1 January 1927, B.R. Ambedkar visited the memorial obelisk erected on the spot which bears the names of the dead including nearly two dozen Maher soldiers. **The men who fought in the battle of Koregaon were the Mahars, and the Mahars are Untouchables.**

(Q) The celebration of Bhima Koregaon Battle Victory not only challenges the conventional narrative of anti-colonialism, it also tells the story of the making of an autonomous culture of Dalits against the inferior culture of caste. Discuss critically.

**Topic:** Post-independence history

## GOA'S 'OPINION POLL DAY'

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Opinion Poll Day- historical background and significance.**

**Context:** Goa celebrated its 52nd 'Asmitai Dis' (Identity Day) or Opinion Poll Day on January 16.

#### **Significance of the day:**

- **It was on this date in 1967 that Goans voted against merging with Maharashtra and chose to remain a Union Territory.** Though referred to as an 'opinion poll', the vote was in fact a plebiscite.

#### **Background:**

- **Soon after Goa's liberation from colonial Portuguese rule in 1961**, murmurs began of a merger with Maharashtra on grounds of cultural similarity and the argument that Konkani was a dialect of Marathi and not an independent language. With several Indian states having been demarcated on a linguistic basis, the demand split the people of Goa into those who backed Konkani and wanted to remain independent of Maharashtra, and those who were in favour of Marathi and wanted to merge.
- **In December 1966, Parliament passed the Goa, Daman and Diu (Opinion Poll Act), 1966**, "to provide for the taking of an opinion poll to ascertain the wishes of the electors of Goa, Daman and Diu with regard to the future status thereof and for matters connected therewith".
- **Majority of votes went against the merger.**
- Soon afterward began demands for statehood for Goa; however, **it was only on May 30, 1987, that Goa became India's 25th state**. Daman and Diu continue to be Union Territories. Konkani was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution on August 20, 1992 (71st Amendment).

Sources: Indian Express.

**Topic:** History of the World – 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.

## ARMED FORCES VETERAN DAY

- The Armed Forces are celebrating the Veterans Day on 14 Jan to honour the veterans the Army, Navy and Air Force.

#### **Background:**

- This special day started as a day to reflect upon the heroism of those who died in our country's service and was originally called **Armistice Day**.
- **It fell on Nov. 11 because that is the anniversary of the signing of the Armistice that ended World War I.**
- However, in 1954, the holiday was changed to 'Veterans Day' in order to account for all veterans in all wars.

### In India –

- For the first time the Indian Armed Forces celebrated the Veteran's Day on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2015, the day on which the first Field Marshall General KM Cariappa retired from service.

Source: PIB

**Topic:** Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India

## DEVADASI SYSTEM

### What to study?

- For Prelims: What is Devadasi system and where is it practiced?
- For Mains: Ban, implementational challenges, concerns and the need for reforms.

**Context:** Few recent studies have found that **the practice of Devadasi system** of dedicating young girls to temples as an offering to appease the gods persists not just in Karnataka, but has also spread to neighbouring Goa.

- More than thirty-six years after **the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982** was passed, the State government is yet to issue the rules for administering the law.

### Concerns- highlights of the study:

- **Vulnerable population:** Special children, with physical or mental disabilities, are more vulnerable to be dedicated as devadasis. Girls from socio-economically marginalised communities continued to be victims of the custom, and thereafter were forced into the commercial sex racket.
- **The devadasi system continues to receive customary sanction** from families and communities.
- **Reporting of cases pertaining to the custom under the Karnataka law is very low**, with only four cases filed between 2011 and 2017. The law is used sparingly, and focuses on prosecution (including of the victims themselves) with no framework for rehabilitation.
- **Loopholes:** Despite sufficient evidence of the prevalence of the practice and its link to sexual exploitation, recent legislations such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012, and Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act of 2015 have not made any reference to it as a form of sexual exploitation of children. Dedicated children are also not explicitly recognised as children in need of care and protection under JJ Act, despite the involvement of family and relatives in their sexual exploitation.
- **India's extant immoral trafficking prevention law or the proposed Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill 2018**, also do not recognise these dedicated girls as victims of trafficking for sexual purposes. The State's failure to enhance livelihood sources for weaker sections of society fuels the continuation of the practice.

### What is Devadasi system?

- Devadasi system is **a religious practice whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple**. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty.
- In recent decades, the practice has been used to push young girls into prostitution. While various state governments have enacted laws to stop such practices, the tradition remains entrenched in some parts of the country, especially some southern states.

### Laws prohibiting its practice:

- The practice of Devadasi system in any form is in total contravention of the provisions of **Section 370 and 370A as amended through Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013** as well as Section 372 of Indian Penal Code. It is also against Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act.

### Need of the hour:

- Enhance livelihood sources for weaker sections of society.
- More inclusive socio-economic development.
- A legislative overhaul and a more pro-active role from State agencies.

Sources: the hindu.

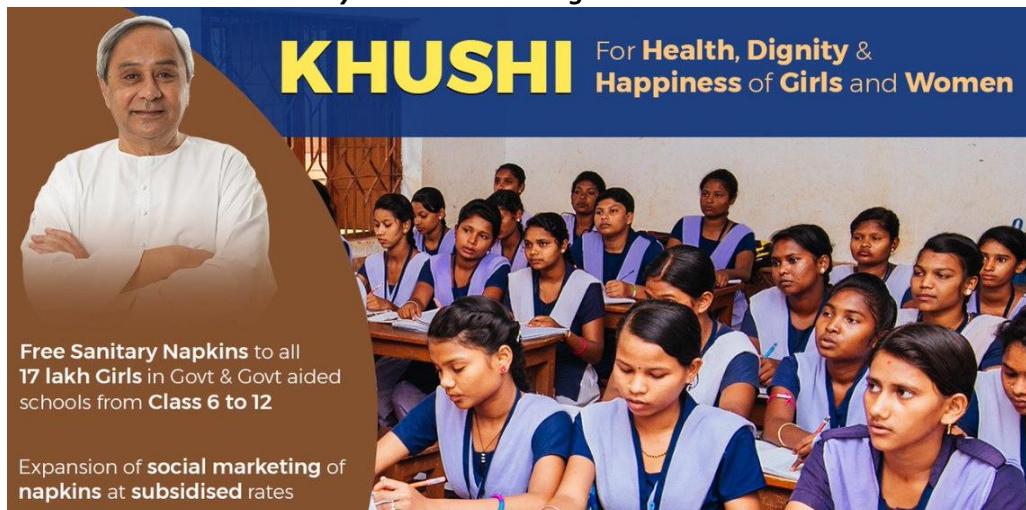
**Topic:** Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

## 1. KHUSHI SCHEME OF ODISHA

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Key features of Khushi and Ujjwala sanitary napkins initiative.
- **For Mains:** Significance of the scheme and the need for such schemes.

**Context:** The Centre's recently introduced '*Ujjwala Sanitary Napkins*' initiative is being seen as an attempt to counter the '*Khushi*' scheme launched by the Odisha State government.



**About Khushi Scheme:**

- As part of its initiatives to empower women, the Odisha government, last year, launched this scheme **to provide free sanitary napkins to school girls across the state**.
- The scheme will be **implemented by the health and family welfare department** of the state at a cost of 70 crore per year.
- Under this scheme, **the Health Department of Odisha Government aims to provide free sanitary pads to 1.7 million girl students from grade 6th to 12th in government and government-aided schools**. Also, it aims to promote health and hygiene among school going girls and higher retention of girls in school.

Sources: ie.

## 2. WEB- WONDER WOMEN CAMPAIGN

**What to study?**

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

**Context:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India has launched an **online campaign Web- Wonder Women to discover and celebrate the exceptional achievements of women, who have been driving positive agenda of social change via social media**.

**About the Campaign:**

- The Campaign has been **launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India in association with the NGO Breakthrough and Twitter India**.
- Through the campaign, the Ministry aims **to recognize the fortitude of Indian women stalwarts from across the globe who have used the power of social media to run positive & niche campaigns to steer a change in society**. The Campaign is aimed at encouraging, recognizing and acknowledging the efforts of these meritorious Women.
- **Selection:** Based on the nominations received from a large number of categories including Health, Media, Literature, Art, Sports, Environmental protection, fashion, the entries would be shortlisted. Then the shortlisted entries will be open for public voting on Twitter. The finalists would then be selected by the panel of judges.

Sources: toi.

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

## WORLD DYNAMIC CITY 2019

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: JLL's City Momentum Index- features and key facts.
- For Mains: Significance and findings of the survey, challenges for cities and measures to fulfil them.

**Context:** 6<sup>th</sup> City Momentum Index has been released by JLL.

**What is JLL's City Momentum Index?**

- It measures momentum for 131 of the world's most commercially active cities.
- This is done by tracking a range of socio-economic and commercial real estate indicators over a three-year period to identify the urban economies and real estate markets undergoing the most rapid expansion.
- Silicon Valley of India, Bengaluru has emerged as the world's most dynamic city.

**Analysis:**

- The absence of European and American cities demonstrates a marked East-West growth divide, reflecting Asia's continued rapid urbanization and economic growth, driven by globalization, innovation and demographic factors.
- Overall, Indian and Chinese cities dominate the rankings, accounting for three quarters of the top 20.
- Key drivers of growth: Asia continues to show strong momentum, in terms of attracting capital, companies and people. Tech sector is a key driver of both real estate and economic momentum—driven by large technology firms as well as dynamic start-ups.
- Challenges: Investing in infrastructure and greater transparency is essential. The cities need to address the environmental and social impacts of rapid growth such as social inequality, congestion and environmental degradation.

Sources: the hindu.

**Topic:** 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:** Weather experts are predicting an extremely cold January and February for the northeastern United States, much of northern Europe and parts of Asia. The reason being given is the polar vortex.

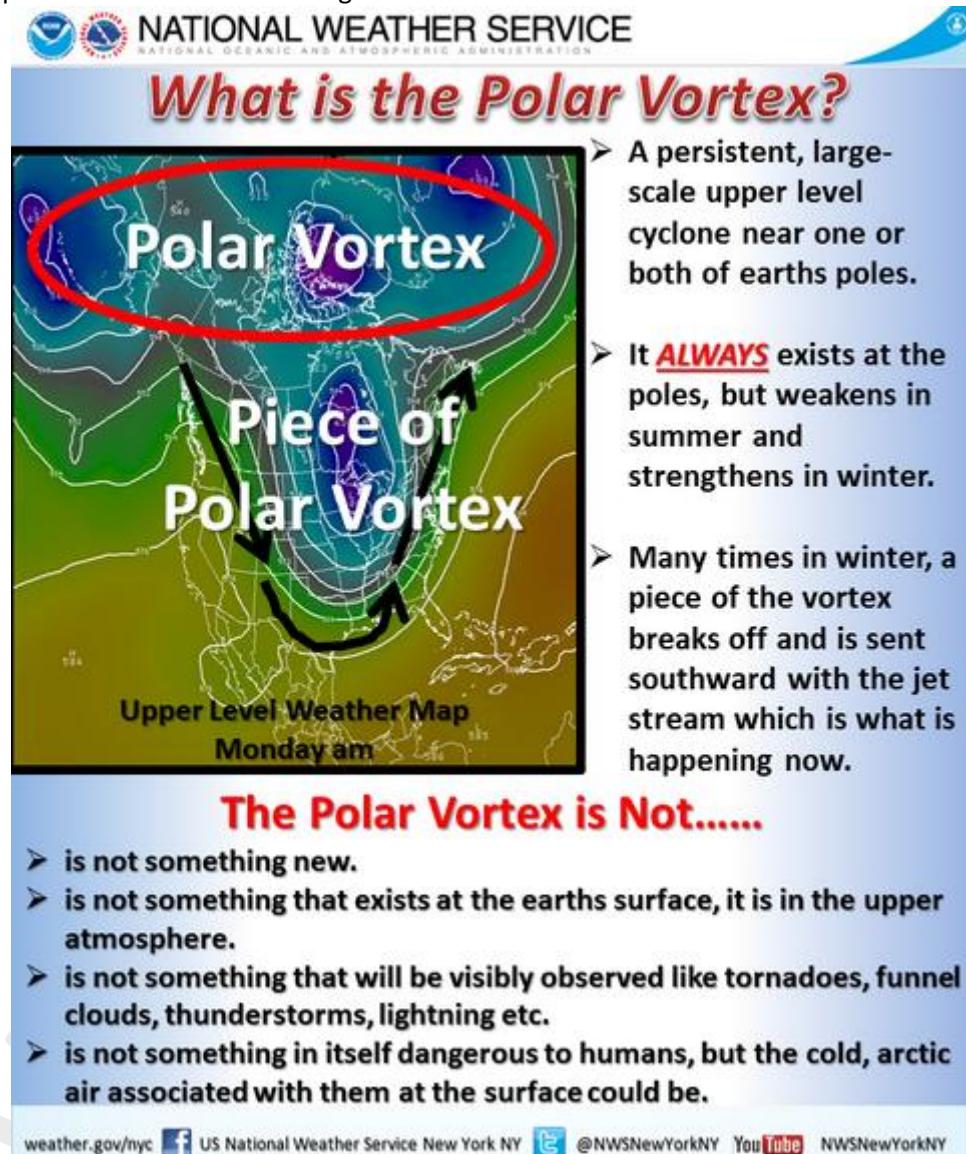
- In this decade, the polar vortex has also been blamed on extremely cold weather in the United States in 2014 and the infamous 'Beast from the East', the blast of cold weather that blew from Siberia towards western Europe and the UK in February and March of 2018.

**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.
- The polar vortex spins in the stratosphere, a layer of the atmosphere 10-48 km above the ground and above the troposphere, where most familiar weather patterns develop.
- 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:

- *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: Down to Earth.

## 2. EARTH'S MAGNETIC NORTH POLE IS MOVING

### What to study?

- *For Prelims and Mains: How magnetic field is generated around the Earth? Its effects and implications of shift in magnetic poles.*

**Context:** Researchers say Earth's **magnetic North Pole** is 'skittering' away from Canada, towards Siberia.

### Impact on World Magnetic Model:

- The problem has got so bad, researchers around the world are scrambling to update a global model of the fields. Called **the World Magnetic Model**, it underlies all modern navigation, from the systems that steer ships at sea to Google Maps on smartphones.

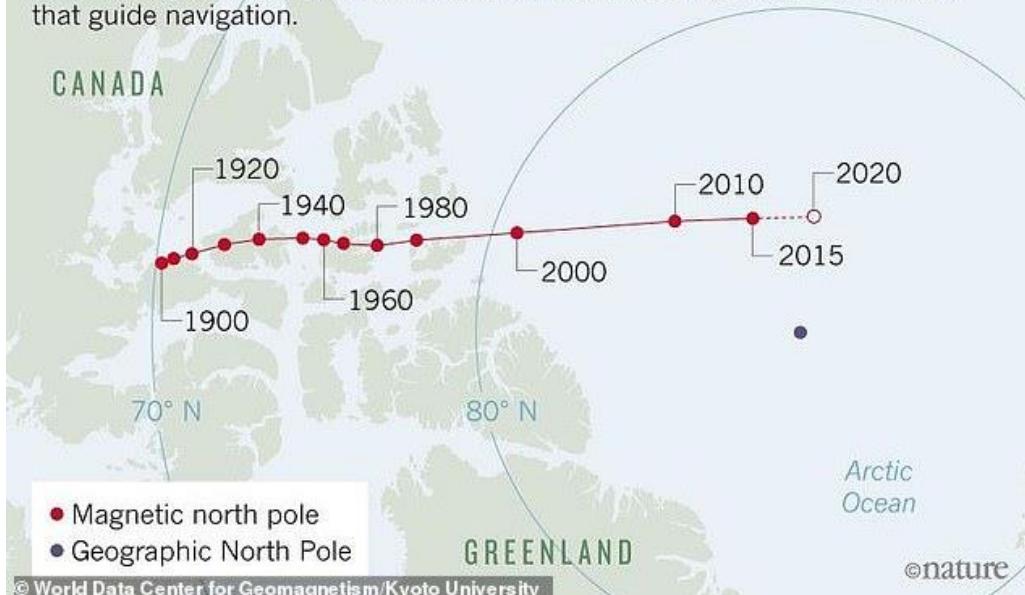
### WHY ARE THE EARTH'S MAGNETIC FIELDS MOVING?

- The problem lies partly with the **moving pole and partly with other shifts deep within the planet**.
- **Liquid churning in Earth's core generates most of the magnetic field**, which varies over time as the deep flows change.

- In 2016, for instance, part of the magnetic field temporarily accelerated deep under northern South America and the eastern Pacific Ocean. Satellites such as the European Space Agency's Swarm mission tracked the shift.

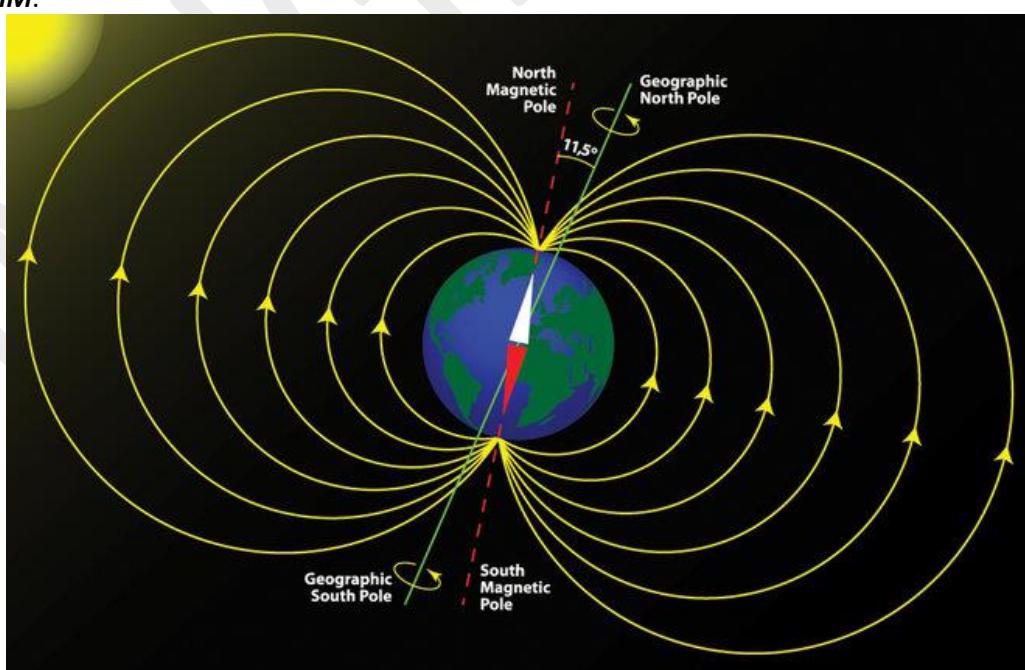
## MAGNETIC MOTION

The north magnetic pole is heading from Canada into Siberia, and recently crossed the International Date Line. Its rapid motion, plus other shifts in Earth's magnetic field, have forced scientists to revise the magnetic models that guide navigation.



### WHAT IS THE WORLD MAGNETIC MODEL?

- The charts, known as the World Magnetic Model (WMM), are *used to convert between compass measurements of magnetic north and true north and can be found in the navigation systems of ships and airplanes as well as geological applications* (such as drilling and mining).
- The WMM is also *part of map applications in smartphones, including the Google Maps App.*
- Researchers from the U.S.'s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) maintain the WMM.*



### WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO EARTH IF ITS POLES FLIPPED?

- Scientists in recent years have predicted that Earth's magnetic field could be gearing up to 'flip' – a shift in which the magnetic south pole would become magnetic north, and vice versa. Such an event could

have **catastrophic effects, wreaking havoc on the electric grid and leaving life at the surface exposed to higher amounts of solar radiation.**

- **Electric grid collapse from severe solar storms is a major risk.** As the magnetic field continues to weaken, scientists are highlighting the importance off-the-grid energy systems using renewable energy sources to protect the Earth against a black out.
- **Very highly charged particles can have a deleterious effect on the satellites and astronauts.**
- **The Earth's climate could also change.** A recent Danish study has found that the earth's weather has been significantly affected by the planet's magnetic field.

Sources: et.

# GENERAL STUDIES -II

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

## 1. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR NAGALAND TO REJECT THE CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2016

### What to study?

- **For Prelims:** Features of the Bill.
- **For Mains:** Why are NE states opposed to this bill, protection against such legislations for NE states.

**Context:** The Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), a coalition partner of the BJP in Nagaland, has said the State had the constitutional provision to reject the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

- **Background:** Nagaland, along with other north-eastern States, has witnessed several protests following the passage of the Bill in the Lok Sabha.

### Why Assam and other NE states are opposing this bill?

- The bill seeks to facilitate granting of Indian citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- In Assam, illegal migrants are not identified along religious lines and people want such migrants to be deported.
- Mizoram fears Buddhist Chakmas from Bangladesh may take advantage of the Act. Meghalaya and Nagaland are apprehensive of migrants of Bengali stock.
- Groups in Arunachal Pradesh fear the new rules may benefit Chakmas and Tibetans. Manipur wants the Inner-line Permit System to stop outsiders from entering the state.

### Why the provisions of the Citizenship Bill may NOT be applicable to Nagaland?

- Article 371(A) of the Constitution begins with the words “notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, no Act of Parliament in respect of...”. This means that despite what is in the Constitution, no Act of Parliament shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.
- Nagaland is also protected by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, whereby an Inner Line Permit is issued to outsiders for safeguarding the citizenship, rights and privileges of the Nagas.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Critically examine various concerns raised against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

## 2. 10<sup>TH</sup> SCHEDULE OF THE CONSTITUTION

### What to study?

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

**Context:** The Punjab Assembly has issued notice to Sukhpal Singh Khaira, Former rebel AAP leader and MLA from Bholath, for disqualification under **the 10th Schedule of the Constitution**.

### Background:

- Mr. Khaira had resigned from the party on January 6, but did not resign as legislator. Later, he floated a new political outfit.

### What is the anti-defection law?

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

### **Disqualification:**

If a member of a house belonging to a political party:

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

### **Exceptions under the law:**

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

### **Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review:**

- The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review.
- This condition was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992, thereby **allowing appeals against the Presiding Officer's decision in the High Court and Supreme Court.**
- However, it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.

Sources: the hindu.

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

## **3. ARTICLE 35A AND RELATED ISSUES**

### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** The Supreme Court has said that it would take an "**in-chamber**" **decision** on listing of a petition challenging the constitutional validity of **Article 35A**, which provides special rights and privileges to permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir.

- '**In-chamber**' **decision** refers to a process of decision making where the orders are issued from the Justice's chambers without a formal court proceeding.

### **Background:**

- In August last year, the top court adjourned hearing on a batch of petitions challenging Article 35A till January this year, after taking note of submissions of the Centre and the state government that there was a law and order problem in the state.

### **What's the issue?**

- A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court which says **Article 35A was against the "very spirit of oneness of India" as it created a "class within a class of Indian citizens".**
- It said restricting citizens from other States from getting employment or buying property within Jammu and Kashmir is a violation of **fundamental rights under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.**

### **What is Article 35A?**

- Article 35A is a provision incorporated in the Constitution giving the Jammu and Kashmir Legislature a carte blanche to decide who all are '**permanent residents' of the State and confer on them special rights**

## **WHAT IS ARTICLE 35A?**

**ARTICLE 35A (1954)** was incorporated in the Indian Constitution through a Constitutional amendment even much before the Constitution of J&K came into existence (1956).

The Article allows the state of Jammu and Kashmir to grant special privi-

leges and rights to permanent residents but denies rights to several others who too have genuine claims.

It debars non-residents of J&K from buying land or property getting a government job or voting in Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

**and privileges** in public sector jobs, acquisition of property in the State, scholarships and other public aid and welfare.

- The provision mandates that ***no act of the legislature coming under it can be challenged for violating the Constitution or any other law of the land.***

#### **How did it come about?**

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

#### **Critical side of Article 35A:**

How Article 35A is against the “very spirit of oneness of India” as it creates a “class within a class of Indian citizens”?

- It treats ***non-permanent residents of J&K as ‘second-class’ citizens.***
- Non-permanent residents of J&K are ***not eligible for employment under the State government and are also debarred from contesting elections.***
- ***Meritorious students are denied scholarships*** and they cannot even seek redress in any court of law.
- Further, the issues of refugees who migrated to J&K during Partition are still not treated as ***‘State subjects’ under the J&K Constitution.***
- ***It was inserted unconstitutionally***, bypassing Article 368 which empowers only Parliament to amend the Constitution.
- The laws enacted in pursuance of Article 35A are ***ultra vires of the fundamental rights conferred by Part III of the Constitution, especially, and not limited to, Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (protection of life).***

#### **Way ahead:**

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

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The view that Article 35 A is against the “very spirit of oneness of India” as it created a “class within a class of Indian citizens” requires a more nuanced debate. Examine.

## **4. 70<sup>TH</sup> REPUBLIC DAY**

**Context:** India is celebrating 70th Republic Day.

- ***Theme:*** ‘life of Gandhi’ which is a tribute to the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.
- ***Chief guest:*** President Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa. This is ***the second time a South African leader is Chief Guest at Republic Day*** — Nelson Mandela was the chief guest in 1995.
- ***Significance:*** Republic day in India is celebrated every year on 26th of January to honour the Constitution of India as it came into force on the same day in the year 1950.

#### **Highlights of the republic day- key facts relevant for Prelims and Mains:**

1. The 70th Republic Day parade will have ***the highest number of women officers participating*** in the celebrations with Lt. Bhavana Kasturi leading a contingent of 144 male personnel. This is ***the first time in the history of Indian Army that a woman will lead the Army services corps.***
2. ***An all-women contingent of Assam Rifles, India’s oldest paramilitary force,*** will be participating for the first time. The contingent was opened for women in 2012.

3. The weapons which will be showcased for the first time in a Republic day parade are **M777 and K-9 Vajra ultra light howitzers along with the Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) missile** of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
4. For the first time in the Republic Day parade, An-32 aircraft will be flying using a **mix of traditional and biofuel**.
5. Four former **Indian National Army (INA)** soldiers will participate for the first time in the parade. INA was an armed force formed by Indian nationalist **Rash Behari Bose in 1942** in Southeast Asia during World War II.
6. '**Sankhnaad**', a martial tune created for the Indian armed forces, will be played for the first time on the 70th Republic Day parade. Since Independence, the Indian defence forces have been playing 'martial tune' created by the Britishers. '**Sankhnaad is based on Indian classical music**'.

#### **Why January 26th?**

- The Constitution came into effect on January 26, 1950, a date specially chosen to coincide with the **anniversary of 'Purna Swaraj Diwas'**. January 26, 1930 was marked as 'Purna Swaraj Diwas', or the day the nation would attain complete freedom from its colonisers by the Congress.
- The members of the drafting committee felt that the birth of the constitution should be observed on a day that held some significance in their fight for independence. When India was ultimately granted freedom by the British in 1947, but on August 15 and not January 26, the date was instead assigned to celebrating India's Republic Day.
- This was the day the Indian Independence Act was consequently repealed and India was established as a democratic republic, no longer a dominion of the British Crown.

Sources: the hindu.

## **5. CURATIVE PETITION**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Meaning of curative petition, about methyl iso cyanide(MIC).**
- **For Mains: The tragedy- how it took place, the fight for fair compensation and what needs to be done?**

**Context:** The Supreme Court will hear in April a **curative petition** filed by the Centre seeking Rs 7,844 crore additional money from US-based Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), now owned by Dow Chemicals, to provide compensation to victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy.

#### **The tragedy:**

- More than 3,500 people were killed instantly when poisonous gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal on the night of December 2-3, 1984. Thousands more have died over the years.
- Many more thousands have been maimed or suffer from serious health issues due to their exposure to the gas.

#### **How did it happen?**

- There was a leakage in the water pipe and as result water entered into **methyl isocyanate (MIC)** tank. Also, refrigeration system was not working to cool MIC and prevent chemical reaction.
- Due to this, exothermic reaction took place releasing large amount of heat and the volume of gas increased and a cloud of gases phosgene, carbon monoxide and MIC started coming out.
- As it was very spontaneous and rapidly it spread and soon a very dense cloud was formed over the city of Bhopal exposing half a million people.

#### **What is curative petition?**

- It is **the last judicial resort available for redressal of grievances in court** which is normally decided by judges in-chamber. It is only **in rare cases** that such petitions are given an open-court hearing.
- The concept of curative petition was first evolved by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of **Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and Anr. (2002)** where the question was whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after dismissal of a review petition.
- The Supreme Court in the said case held that **in order to prevent abuse of its process and to cure gross miscarriage of justice, it may reconsider its judgements in exercise of its inherent powers**. For this purpose, the Court has devised what has been termed as a "curative" petition.

**To entertain the curative petitions, the Supreme Court has laid down certain specific conditions:**

1. The petitioner will have to establish that there was a genuine violation of principles of natural justice and fear of the bias of the judge and judgement that adversely affected him.
2. The petition shall state specifically that the grounds mentioned had been taken in the review petition and that it was dismissed by circulation.
3. The petition is to be sent to the three senior most judges and judges of the bench who passed the judgement affecting the petition, if available.
4. If the majority of the judges on the above bench agree that the matter needs hearing, then it would be sent to the same bench (as far as possible) and the court could impose “exemplary costs” to the petitioner if his plea lacks merit.

**Article- 137 of the Constitution** subjects to the provisions of the guidelines made under Article 145, by which it is clear that the Supreme Court has the ability to review any judgment declared by it.

Sources: the hindu.

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

## 1. SUSPENSION OF MPS

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Provisions with regard to suspension of MPs in both the houses of Parliament.
- **For Mains:** Concerns over frequent disruptions during proceedings of both the houses and ways to address them.

**Context:** Cracking the whip on unruly MPs, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan has suspended 45 Lok Sabha members belonging to the TDP and the AIADMK after they created ruckus in the House and continuously disrupted proceedings for days.

- **The action was taken under rule 374A of the Lok Sabha** which says they cannot attend the remaining days of the session.

**Provisions in this regard:**

- Among the tools available to the Speaker for ensuring discipline is **the power to force a member to withdraw from the House (for the remaining part of the day), or to place him under suspension.**
- **Rule Number 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business** states that *in case the Speaker is of the opinion that the conduct of any member is “grossly disorderly”, he or she may direct that member to “withdraw immediately from the House”. The member is required to “do so forthwith”, and stay away from the “remainder of the day’s sitting”.*
- **The Speaker may invoke Rule 374A** in case of “grave disorder occasioned by a member coming into the well of the House or abusing the Rules of the House, persistently and wilfully obstructing its business by shouting slogans or otherwise...”. The member concerned, “on being named by the Speaker, stands automatically suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less”.
- While the Speaker is empowered to place a member under suspension, **the authority for revocation of this order is not vested in her. It is for the House, if it so desires, to resolve on a motion to revoke the suspension.**

Sources: the hindu.

**Similar powers to the Chairman of Rajya Sabha:**

- **Chairman of the Rajya Sabha is empowered — under Rule Number 255 of its Rule Book — to “direct any member whose conduct is in his opinion grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately” from the House. “...Any member so ordered to withdraw shall do so forthwith and shall absent himself during the remainder of the day’s meeting.”**
- The Chairman may “name a member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the Council by persistently and wilfully obstructing” business. In such a situation, the **House may adopt a motion suspending the member** from the service of the House for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session. **The House may, however, by another motion, terminate the suspension. Unlike the Speaker, the Rajya Sabha Chairman does not have the power to suspend a member.**

## 2. NEW QUOTA AND BASIC STRUCTURE

### What to study?

- For Prelims: 103 amendment act, beneficiaries, criteria and key facts associated, FRs and DPSPs mentioned.
- For Mains: New reservation- significance, concerns, legal hurdles, conflict with basic structure of the constitution and way ahead.

**Context:** President Ram Nath Kovind has given his assent to **the bill providing 10% reservation in jobs and educational institutions to the economically weaker sections in the general category.**

- The legislation will be known as **the Constitution (103 Amendment) Act, 2019** and it shall come into force on such date as the Centre notifies.
- **The 10% reservation will be in addition to the existing cap of 50% reservation** for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes, taking the total reservation to 60%.

### 124<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment- This amended two fundamental rights:

- Article 15, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Article 16 which prohibits discrimination in employment in government office.
- It also makes a note of the Article 46, which asks the government to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society.

### It provides reservation for:

- People who have **an annual income of less than Rs.8 lakhs**.
- People who own **less than five acres of farm land**.
- People who have **a house lesser than 1,000 sq feet in a town (or 100 sq yard in a notified municipal area)**.

### Debatable problems:

- The major hurdle for the implementation of the recent Act is the legal scrutiny.
- The Supreme Court has ruled multiple times against exceeding its **1992 formula of a maximum of 50% reservation (Indira Sawhney v. Union of India)**.
- However, there are states like Tamil Nadu that go beyond this limit and the Supreme Court has upheld the state's policy many a time. Presently, the state has a '69 per cent quota system'.

### What is the basic structure?

- The idea of basic structure was originally suggested by **Justice M Hidayatullah & Justice J R Mudholkar in Sajjan Singh (1965)**. It has been borrowed from Germany.
- In **Kesavananda Bharati (1973)**, the Supreme Court held that Parliament can amend the Constitution but does not have power to destroy it — no amendment can change its "**basic structure**". The court said that under Article 368, something must remain of the original Constitution that the new amendment would amend.
- However, the court did not define what basic structure is, 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.

### Does it violate fundamental rights?

From the Poona Pact (1932) between M K Gandhi and Dr B R Ambedkar to the Constituent Assembly debates, **reservation was talked about in the context of social backwardness of classes**.

- The 124<sup>th</sup> Amendment makes a departure by extending reservation to the economically disadvantaged. **Article 15(4), inserted by the First Amendment in 1951, enables the state to make special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes**.

### Article 46 and the upper caste:

- 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"**.
- While the 124th Amendment mentions Article 46 in its statement and objects, it seems the government overlooked **the fact that upper castes neither face social injustice nor are subjected to any form of exploitation**.
- 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.

- Article 16(4) permits reservation for any backward class if it is not adequately represented in services under the state.
- Thus, reservation is not a right but, if granted, it will not be considered a violation of the right to equality.

**Way ahead:**

- Equality in India has been held to be the very essence of democracy and rule of law. While equality permits reasonable classifications, these are to be based on intelligible differentia, should have rational objects to achieve and should not be fanciful and arbitrary.
- In this case, the court has to examine the equality code of the Constitution and whether the state has considered and valued the circumstances justifying it, to make reservation. This would require that the state's decision is rational and non-arbitrary. The state has to show quantifiable data to satisfy the court as to inadequacy of representation of economically backward classes.

Sources: Indian Express.

(Q) The policy of reservation has transformed from an affirmative action policy to an anti-poverty measure. Critically examine.

**Topic:** Functioning of Judiciary

## 1. APPOINTMENT OF SUPREME COURT JUDGES

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Collegium system for the appointment of judges, selection and removal of SC judges, overview of NJAC.
- For Mains: Issues with Collegium system and why was NJAC struck down? Need for urgent reforms.

**Context:** In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution of India, the President has appointed Shri Justice Sanjiv Khanna, judge of the Delhi high court and Shri Justice Dinesh Maheshwari, chief justice of the Karnataka high court, to be a judge of the Supreme Court of India. Their names had been recommended by the collegium.

**What is the collegium system of appointment of judges?**

- The collegium system was commissioned by two judgments of the Supreme Court in 1990s. It has no mention in the original Constitution of India or its successive amendments.
- In the Third Judges case (1998), the Supreme Court opined that the chief justice of India should consult a collegium of four senior most judges of the Supreme Court and even if two judges give an adverse opinion, he should not send the recommendation to the government.

**Eligibility to become a Supreme Court judge:**

- To become a judge of the Supreme court, an individual should be an Indian citizen.
- The norms relating to the eligibility has been envisaged in the Article 124 of the Indian Constitution.
- In terms of age, a person should not exceed 65 years of age.
- The person should serve as a judge of one high court or more (continuously), for at least five years or the person should be an advocate in the High court for at least 10 years or a distinguished jurist.

**Is the collegium's recommendation final and binding?**

- The collegium sends its final recommendation to the President of India for approval.
- The President can either accept it or reject it.
- In the case it is rejected, the recommendation comes back to the collegium.
- If the collegium reiterates its recommendation to the President, then he/she is bound by that recommendation.

**NJAC and other efforts to reform:**

- The collegium system has come under a fair amount of criticism.
- In 2015, the parliament passed a law to replace the collegium with a National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC). This was struck down as unconstitutional by the supreme court, in the Fourth Judges' Case, as the new system would undermine the independence of the judiciary.
- Putting the old system of the collegium back, the court invited suggestions, even from the general public, on how to improve the collegium system, broadly along the lines of – setting up an eligibility criteria for appointments, a permanent secretariat to help the collegium sift through material on potential candidates, infusing more transparency into the selection process, grievance redressal and any

other suggestion not in these four categories, like transfer of judges. *This resulted in the court asking the government and the collegium to finalize the memorandum of procedure incorporating the above.*

#### **Need for reforms:**

- Collegium system has its concerns as ***absolute power is not desirable in any branch of the State.***
- Diversity in consideration such as geography, gender and ethnicity should all "***legitimately weigh in the balance***" when appointing judges from a pool of potentially meritorious candidates. The Collegium system is unable to cater to this need of diversity in the judicial system.
- ***It is seen as a closed-door affair without a formal and transparent system.*** Judges, hopeful of going higher, have to please the members of the collegium.
- This system ***overlooks several talented junior judges and advocates.***
- Sometimes, ***collegium gets obstructed***, when old rivalries between its members see each other's favourites getting vetoed.
- Sometimes ***collegium meetings become examples of bargaining within the collective, and consensus*** emerging from a division of the spoils.

#### **Reforms needed:**

- The need of the hour is to ***revisit the existing system through a transparent and participatory procedure, preferably by an independent broad-based constitutional body guaranteeing judicial primacy*** but not judicial exclusivity.
- ***The new system should ensure independence, reflect diversity, demonstrate professional competence and integrity.***
- The system needs to ***establish a body which is independent and objective in the selection process.***
- Setting up ***a constitutional body accommodating the federal concept of diversity and independence of judiciary for appointment of judges to the higher judiciary can also be thought of as an alternate measure.***
- As of now, instead of selecting the number of judges required against a certain number of vacancies, ***the collegium must provide a panel of possible names to the President to appointment in order of preference and other valid criteria.***

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) If you are asked to give suggestions to improve the collegium system, what would they be? Discuss.

## **2. SC DISMISSES PLEAS ON APPOINTMENT OF DGPS**

#### **What to study?**

- ***For Prelims: Appointment of DGPs- role of UPSC.***
- ***For Mains: Issues related and views of Supreme Court.***

**Context:** The Supreme Court has dismissed the pleas of the states of Punjab, Kerala, West Bengal, Haryana and Bihar which sought implementation of their local laws regarding the selection and appointment of DGPs.

- Supreme Court held that the directions of the court on selection and appointment of DGPs were issued in larger public interest and to protect the police officials from political interference.

#### **Directions issued by the Supreme Court in appointing DGPs:**

- States and Union Territories shall ***send names of senior police officers to the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)*** for being considered as probable candidates for the post of DGPs or police commissioners.
- The ***UPSC would then prepare a list of three most suitable candidates*** out of the list of names sent by states and Union Territories.
- ***The states are free to appoint any one of them*** as the police chief.

***It is mandatory for the states to send the list of senior police officers to the UPSC at least three months prior to the retirement*** of the incumbent. ***The UPSC would then form a committee*** and intimate the state concerned, which in turn will immediately appoint one of the persons from among that list.

Sources: the hindu.

### 3. INDIA'S SEDITION LAW

**Context:** A charge sheet was recently filed against 10 people, including student leaders Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid, and Anirban Bhattacharya, in a sedition case for allegedly raising “anti-national slogans” during an event on the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus in February 2016.

#### **Charges of sedition- recent concerns:**

- There have been many incidents in recent times where “*misguided*” people have been termed “*anti-national*”.
- *Law enforcement agencies forget the fact that the sentiment could have been demonstrated* through a slogan, a cheer, a statement, protest against a nuclear power project, or an innocuous post on social media. In all these cases, the state, across regimes, has filed charges of sedition.
- *Authorities often forget the fact that sedition can't be applied to instances of criticism of the government or a political functionary.* More importantly, words alone are not enough for such a charge to be slapped. Incitement to violence is the most crucial ingredient of the offence of sedition.
- Going through the numbers that the National Crime Records Bureau puts out every year, it is clear that despite the rise in sedition cases, convictions happen in barely a few. Even if these people are not convicted, *the slapping of these charges is a way the governments over the years have been sending a strong message to its own people—obey or be ready to face consequences.*

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

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

#### **Why should it be scrapped?**

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

#### **What has Supreme Court ruled?**

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

#### **Short term measures to be put up in place:**

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

Source: <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/IQ2o3mXhLJ8kIzIVrStpZK/Why-Indias-sedition-law-needs-to-be-buried.html>

(Q) What do you understand by sedition? Critically comment on the way the courts have interpreted the Section 124(A) of the penal code.

### 4. LOKPAL DEBATE

#### **What to study?**

- *For Prelims: Lokpal- powers, functions and appointment, features of Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, composition of selection and search committees.*
- *For Mains: Significance and issues associated.*

**Context:** Given the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act was passed in 2013, and no Lokpal has been appointed since, **the Supreme Court has pressed the search committee to recommend potentials to the selection committee** led by prime minister Narendra Modi by February 28.

**Concerns raised:**

- The fact that the government has delayed the appointment this long is surely problematic. Besides, a Supreme Court order to nudge the government to make any progress towards establishing the anti-graft institution is a poor commentary on its functioning.

**Background:**

- It has taken five years since the Lokpal Act, 2013, received the President's assent on January 1, 2014, for a Search Committee to even begin its work. It was formed only on September 27, 2018, after Common Cause, an NGO, filed a contempt petition against the government over the delay in constituting the authority despite a Supreme Court verdict in April 2017.

**Way ahead:**

- It is true that setting up the Search Committee requires some groundwork, as its composition should be drawn from diverse fields such as anti-corruption policy, public administration, law, banking and insurance; also, half its membership should consist of women, backward class, minority and SC/ST candidates. However, it is the government's duty to expedite this process and not cite it as a reason for delay.

**Related facts:**

- **As per Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, the appointments to Lokpal is made by high-level selection committee comprising** of Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India, Lok Sabha Speaker, the leader of the largest opposition party and an eminent jurist chosen by them.

Sources: the hindu.

## 5. NATIONAL BENCH OF THE GOODS AND SERVICES TAX APPELLATE TRIBUNAL (GSTAT)

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** About GSTAT- composition and provisions in this regard, about GST- key facts.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for GSTAT.

**Context:** Cabinet has approved creation of **National Bench of the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)**.

**Key facts:**

- It shall be **situated at New Delhi**.
- **Composition:** Presided over by its President and shall consist of one Technical Member (Centre) and one Technical Member (State).
- **It is the forum of second appeal in GST laws** and the first common forum of dispute resolution between Centre and States.
- **The appeals against the orders in first appeals issued by the Appellate Authorities under the Central and State GST Acts lie before the GST Appellate Tribunal**, which is common under the Central as well as State GST Acts.

**Legal provisions:**

- **CGST Act provides for the Appeal and Review Mechanism for dispute resolution under the GST Regime.** The Act empowers the Central Government to constitute, on the recommendation of Council, by notification, with effect from such date as may be specified therein, an Appellate Tribunal known as the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by the Appellate Authority or the Revisional Authority.

**Significance:**

- Being a common forum, GST Appellate Tribunal will ensure that there is uniformity in redressal of disputes arising under GST, and therefore, in implementation of GST across the country.

Sources: pib.

## 6. SC ISSUES CONTEMPT NOTICES TO RBI

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: What is Contempt of Court? Provisions in this regard, Criticisms and analysis.

**Context:** The Supreme Court has issued **contempt notices to the RBI** for failing to reveal under the Right to Information Act intelligence received on loan defaulters and details of action taken against banks in connection with fraud.

### What is contempt under the Indian law?

- In India, the **Contempt of Courts Act, 1971**, divides contempt into civil contempt and criminal contempt.
- **Civil contempt** is a ‘wilful disobedience to any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other processes of a Court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to the court’.
- ‘**Criminal contempt**’ is ‘the publication (whether by words, spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise) of any matter or the doing of any other act whatsoever which:
  1. Scandalises or tends to scandalise, or lowers or tends to lower the authority of, any court.
  2. Prejudices, or interferes or tends to interfere with the due course of any judicial proceeding.
  3. Interferes or tends to interfere with, or obstructs or tends to obstruct, the administration of justice in any other manner.’

### Significance:

- Judiciary ensures justice and equality to every individual and institutions, therefore, the makers of the constitution upheld the sanctity and prestige of the revered institution by placing provisions under **articles 129 and 215 of the constitution**, which enables the courts to hold individuals in contempt if they attempt to demean or belittle their authority.

### Is criticism allowed?

- Yes. The Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, very clearly states that fair criticism of any case which has been heard and decided is not contempt.

### 2016 Amendment:

- The statute of 1971 has recently been amended by the Contempt of Courts (Amendment) Act, 2006 to include **the defence of truth under Section 13 of the original legislation**.
- **Section 13** that already served to restrict the powers of the court in that they were not to hold anyone in contempt unless it would substantially interfere with the due process of justice, the amendment further states that the court must permit ‘justification by truth as a valid defence if it is satisfied that it is in public interest and the request for invoking the said defence is bona fide.’

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Contempt of court is one of the explicitly spelled out restrictions to the guaranteed right to freedom of speech under the Constitution. Do you think speech in criticism of the courts should be allowed without punishment in democracy like India? Critically comment.

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

## 1. ASSAM ACCORD

### What to study?

- For Prelims: What is Assam Accord? Overview of important clauses.
- For Mains: Significance of Assam record, Assam Accord Vs Citizenship amendment bill, key issues and analysis.

**Context:** The Union Home Ministry will set up a **high-level committee to look into the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord**. The composition and terms of reference of the committee, which will also look at issues related to the Bodo community, will be announced later.

### What does Clause 6 state?

- **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord** “envisaged that appropriate constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.”

#### **The Committee will:**

- Hold discussions with all stakeholders and assess the required quantum of reservation of seats in the Assam Assembly and local bodies for Assamese people.
- Look at measures to protect Assamese and other indigenous languages of Assam, reservation in state government jobs, and other steps to protect, preserve and promote cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people.
- Suggest constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards and examine the effectiveness of actions since 1985 to implement the clause.
- Look into issues of the Bodo people, especially the measures mentioned in the Memorandum of Settlement signed between the Government of India, Assam government and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force in 2003.

#### **Significance:**

- The setting up of the committee will pave the way for the implementation of the Assam Accord in letter and spirit and will help fulfill longstanding expectations of Assamese people.
- The Union Cabinet's announcement comes at a time when Centre is facing criticism in Assam over the **Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016**, which proposes to make minority (non-Muslim) immigrants from three neighbouring countries — Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan — eligible for Indian citizenship.
- But as per the **Assam Accord**, any person who came to the state after the midnight of March 24, 1971, will be identified as a foreigner. So the proposed Bill is seen to violate the Assam Accord by differentiating between migrants on the basis of religion.

Sources: the hindu.

#### **What is Assam Accord?**

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a **Memorandum of Settlement (MoS)** signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.
- The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.
- As per the Accord, **those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years**. The Accord also mentions that the **international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported**.
- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

## **2. ONE FAMILY ONE JOB SCHEME OF SIKKIM**

#### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** Sikkim has announced the **One family one job scheme** to provide employment to the youth of Sikkim.

#### **About the Scheme:**

- One family one job scheme entitles **one government job for every family in the state**.
- **Eligibility:** Only members of those families which do not have a government job at present are eligible for government employment under the scheme.
- The government has announced that **the nature of the job** is not temporary and would be regularised after five years.

#### **Significance:**

- **Sikkim is the first state in the country to launch an exclusive programme which entitles every family in the state with a government job** and Sikkim earmarks 70% of its revenues towards salaries for state government employees.

Sources: toi.

### 3. 'AMA GHARE LED' SCHEME

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Features and significance of the scheme, challenges in its implementation and ways to address them.

**Context:** Odisha has launched the '**Ama Ghare LED**' scheme, under which about 95 lakh families in the State will each get four LED bulbs free of cost.

**Key features of the scheme:**

- Under the scheme, **9-watt LED bulbs will be distributed to the beneficiaries registered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the State Food Security Scheme (SFSC).**
- **Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Ltd (OPTCL) will implement the scheme** and the bulbs will be distributed through camps and PDS outlets across the State.
- **Biometric authentication:** The beneficiaries will have to produce biometric authentication to get the benefits of the scheme.

Sources: the hindu.

### 4. CITIZENSHIP BILL AND CHAKMA AND HAJONG COMMUNITIES

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Key features of Citizenship Bill, who are Chakma and Hajong communities and where do they reside?
- **For Mains:** Issues associated with the Bill and why are locals protesting this bill?

**Context:** Locals in Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are protesting against the contentious **Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016** because it would serve as a legal basis for legitimising the claims of Chakma and Hajong refugees as the indigenous people of State.

**What's the issue?**

- The Citizenship Bill seeks to grant citizenship to six minority communities — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians — without valid documents from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan after six years of stay in India. Locals are concerned as this bill seeks to grant citizenship to Chakma and Hajong refugees.

**Who are they?**

- **Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the erstwhile East Pakistan.** They left their homeland when it was submerged by the **Kaptai dam project** in the 1960s.
- **The Chakmas, who are Buddhists, and the Hajongs, who are Hindus,** also allegedly faced religious persecution and entered India through the then Lushai Hills district of Assam (now Mizoram). The Centre moved the majority of them to the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which is now Arunachal Pradesh.
- Their numbers have gone up from about 5,000 in 1964-69 to one lakh. At present, they don't have citizenship and land rights but are provided basic amenities by the state government.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The proposed citizenship amendment Bill has polarised the Northeast. Critically examine.

### 5. KRUSHAK ASSISTANCE FOR LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME AUGMENTATION OR KALIA SCHEME

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Key features and significance of the scheme.
- **For Mains:** Why such schemes are good compared to loan waivers?

**Context:** **KALIA scheme, launched by Odisha state government**, has completed its first phase of registration.

**Key features of Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation or KALIA Scheme:**

- **Involves payments to encourage cultivation and associated activities.**
- **Primary targets** are small farmers, cultivators and landless agricultural labourers.
- **All farmers will be provided Rs 10,000 per family as assistance** for cultivation.
- Each family will get Rs 5,000 separately in the kharif and rabi seasons, for five cropping seasons between 2018-19 and 2021-22.

- **Targets 10 lakh landless households**, and specifically SC and ST families. They will be supported with **a unit cost of Rs 12,500** for activities like goat rearing, mushroom cultivation, beekeeping, poultry farming and fishery.
- **A critical trade, dairy production, has deliberately been kept out** because keeping a cow is more expensive, while milk production needs to have a collection route or agency that processes and refines this low shelf-life product.
- **It will assist the elderly, sick and differently-abled population** who are unable to take up cultivation, by providing Rs 10,000 per household per year.
- **The scheme includes a life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh and additional personal accident coverage** of the same amount for 57 lakh households. Crop loans up to Rs 50,000 are interest-free.
- **This is also going to be an area-specific scheme** in the sense that an input support for a particular trade, say mushroom cultivation, will be provided if it is prevalent throughout that locality so that there is aggregation of produce.

**How different will KALIA be from a loan waiver?**

- **Unlike a loan waiver, (through which) banks appease a few farmers, KALIA's main targets are rural activities as a whole.**
- It will support farming on a small scale, sharecropping, fishing, animal herding, which are not covered under bank loans, but are caught in debt traps set up by local moneylenders.
- Also, a farm loan waiver will reduce credit available to farmers in the long term, while income support can be used to make a repayment or at least activate a bank account which can then receive a loan."

Sources: Indian Express.

## 6. CABINET DECIDES TO STRENGTHEN NORTHEAST AUTONOMOUS COUNCILS

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Autonomous Councils- composition, objectives and functions.**
- **For Mains: Their significance, challenges being faced and scope for reforms.**

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved **a constitutional amendment to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 autonomous councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeast.**

**What do the new amendments seek to modify?**

- The amendment would **impact a population of about 1 crore tribals living in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**
- The Finance Commission would be **mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to the councils**. Till now, the autonomous councils have depended on grants from Central Ministries and the State governments for specific projects.
- As per the proposed amendment, **at least one third of the seats would be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils** in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
- The amendment also provides for **transfer of additional 30 subjects**, including the departments of Public Works, Forests, Public Health Engineering, Health and Family Welfare, Urban Development and Food and Civil Supply to **Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council in Assam**.
- The proposed amendments provide for **elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grass-roots level**.
- **The State Election Commissions would hold elections** to the autonomous councils, village and municipal councils in the areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.

**What are Autonomous District Council?**

- As per the Sixth Schedule, the four states viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram contain the Tribal Areas which are technically different from the Scheduled Areas.
- Though these areas fall within the executive authority of the state, provision has been made for the creation of the District Councils and regional councils for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers.
- Each district is an autonomous district and Governor can modify / divide the boundaries of the said Tribal areas by notification.

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

## 1. APPOINTMENT OF LOKPAL

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Lokpal- powers, functions and appointment, features of Lokpal and Lokayukta Act.
- For Mains: Significance and issues associated.

**Context:** The government recently informed the Supreme Court that a eight-member search committee has been constituted in September 2018 for zeroing in on eligible candidates for Lokpal and the anti-corruption authority will frame its own rules of functioning. **The panel is led by former Supreme Court judge, Justice Ranjan Prakash Desai.**

### Background:

- A contempt petition has been filed in the court against the government for not appointing Lokpal despite an April 2017 judgment by the Supreme Court. The court has for the past several months been constantly urging the government to complete the Lokpal appointment.

### Highlights of the Lokpal Act of 2013:

- The Act allows setting up of **anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.**
- The Lokpal will **consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.**
- The Lokpal will **cover all categories of public servants**, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
- The Act also **incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.**
- The States will have to institute **Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.**
- The Act also ensures that **public servants who act as whistleblowers are protected.**

### A long-drawn debate

A short history of the Lokpal Bill from the 1960s to the present

**1963:** The idea of an Ombudsman first came up in Parliament during a discussion on budget allocation for the Law Ministry

**1966:** The First Administrative Reforms Commission recommended two independent authorities — one at the Centre and one at the



State level – to probe complaints against public functionaries, including MPs

**1968:** Lokpal Bill introduced in Parliament, but was not passed. Eight attempts were made till 2011 to pass the Bill, but all in vain

**2002:** The Constitution review commission headed by M.N. Venkatachaliah recommended appointment of the Lokpal and the Lokayuktas. It also recommended that the Prime Minister be kept out of the Lokpal's ambit

**2005:** The second ARC recommended that a Lokpal be established without delay

**2013:** Lokpal Act, 2013, passed in Parliament

**2016:** Lok Sabha agreed to amend the 2013 Act

**2017:** The SC on April 27 clarified that the Lokpal appointment process need not be stalled merely due to the absence of the Leader of the Opposition, who is a member of the Lokpal selection committee as per the 2013 Act

### Powers:

- The Lokpal will have **the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency** including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, **the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant** if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.

- **An investigation must be completed within six months.** However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- **Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.**

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Comment on the changes made to Lokpal Act and its delay in operationalisation

## 2. INDIAN FOREST AND TRIBAL SERVICE

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Key facts on Indian Forest Service- historical background.
- **For Mains:** Need for renaming, issues, significance and related measures for the upliftment of tribals in the country.

**Context:** The Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions has initiated an inter-ministerial consultation note to rename the **Indian Forest Service as Indian Forest and Tribal Service**. The consultation note also contains the proposal to train the cadre to be more receptive towards tribals and forest dwellers.

**Background:**

- The renaming is based on **the recommendation made by the NCST** which highlights the close ties between tribals, the forest and forest ecosystem. Merging forest and tribal welfare administrations will further the participation of 'tribals' in forest management. Renaming will also engender greater sensitivity on the forest department's part towards the needs of 'tribal' communities.

**About the Indian Forest Service:**

- During the year **1864 the then British India Government started the Imperial Forest Department and appointed Dr. Dietrich Brandis, a German Forest officer Inspector General of Forests in 1866.**
- Having recognized the need to have a premier forest service to manage the varied natural resources of the vast country and to organize the affairs of the Imperial Forest Department, **Imperial Forest Service was constituted in 1867.**
- The subject of "**Forestry**" was transferred to the "**Provincial List**" by the **Government of India Act, 1935** and subsequently recruitment to the Imperial Forest Service was discontinued.
- **The Indian Forest Service, one of the three All India Services, was constituted in the year 1966 under the All India Services Act, 1951** by the Government of India.
- **The main mandate of the service** is the implementation of the National Forest Policy which envisages scientific management of forests and to exploit them on a sustained basis for primary timber products, among other things.

Sources: the hindu.

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

## 1. LEGAL STATUS FOR SSC

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Provisions related to SSC and UPSC.
- **For Mains:** Need for legal status for SSC, issues associated.

**Context:** A Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has recommended that the Centre accord **statutory status to the Staff Selection Commission (SSC)**, one of the largest recruitment agencies in the country.

**Background:**

- The SSC was **created to ease the burden of the UPSC by taking over the recruitment for posts below the Group 'A' level**. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and all State Public Service Commissions either have constitutional or legal status. **The SSC is the only such organisation that performs similar functions on a much larger scale, but does not enjoy statutory status.**
- At present, the SSC has a sanctioned staff strength of 481 officers but is functioning with 75% of its sanctioned strength.

### **Need for a statutory status:**

- There has been a **phenomenal increase in the workload of the SSC**, from 9.94 lakh candidates in 2008-09 to over 2 crore in 2016-17.
- While the workload and responsibilities of the SSC have increased exponentially over the years, it has remained **an “attached body” under the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), and has to depend entirely on the government for all its needs, with no autonomy**.
- **According statutory status to the SSC would contribute to greater functional autonomy, faster decision-making and efficiency in the overall performance and delivery of results by the SSC** in the recruitment process.

Sources: the hindu.

## **2. NATIONAL ANTI-PROFITEERING AUTHORITY (NAA)**

**Context:** The National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) has been constituted under Section 171 of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.

- It is to ensure the reduction in rate of tax or the benefit of input tax credit is passed on to the recipient by way of commensurate reduction in prices.

**NAA has taken the following steps for customers get the full benefit of tax cuts:**

- Holding regular meetings with the Zonal Screening Committees and the Chief Commissioners of Central Tax to stress upon consumer awareness programs.
  - Launching a helpline to resolve the queries of citizens regarding registration of complaints against profiteering.
  - Receiving complaints through email and NAA portal.
  - Working with consumer welfare organizations to facilitate outreach activities.
- A number of complaints regarding companies not passing on the full benefits of tax cuts to consumers have been received by the National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA).

Source : PIB

### **Vision and Mission of NAA –**

- The National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) is the institutional mechanism under GST law to check the unfair profit-making activities by the trading community.
- The Authority's core function is to ensure that the benefits of the reduction in GST rates on goods and services made by GST Council and proportional change in the Input tax credit passed on to the ultimate consumers and recipient respectively by way of reduction in the prices by the suppliers.

### **Institutional Mechanism:**

- This institutional framework comprises the NAA, a Standing Committee, Screening Committees in every State and the Directorate General of Safeguards in the Central Board of Excise & Customs (CBEC).

## **3. DISTRICT MINERAL FOUNDATIONS**

### **What to Study?**

- **For Prelims: About DMFs, composition, funds and jurisdiction, about PMKKKY.**
- **For Mains: Why they should be placed under respective planning departments of the state, significance, concerns and challenges.**

**Context:** The Odisha government is planning to move its **district mineral foundations (DMF)** to its steel and mines department from the planning and convergence department. The plan to move the DMFs aims to improve implementation and use of funds.

### **About DMFs:**

- **DMFs were instituted under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Amendment Act 2015** as non-profit trusts to work for the interest and benefit of persons and areas affected by mining-related operations.
- **The objective of District Mineral Foundation is to** work for the interest of the benefit of the persons and areas affected by mining related operations in such manner as may be prescribed by the State Government.
- **Jurisdiction:** Its manner of operation comes under the jurisdiction of the relevant State Government.

**The various state DMF rules and the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) guidelines stipulate some “high priority” issues for DMFs, including:**

- Drinking water.
- Health
- Women and child welfare.
- Education
- Livelihood and skill development.
- Welfare of aged and disabled.
- Sanitation

Sources: DowntoEarth.

(Q) Odisha has become the first State in the country to issue rules for the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) – a body created to bring far-reaching changes to India’s mining regulations. Critically discuss what role DMFs can play in curbing illegal mining.

#### **Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY):**

- The programme is meant to provide for the welfare of areas and people affected by mining related operations, using the funds generated by District Mineral Foundations (DMFs).

#### **Objectives of the scheme:**

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

## **4. APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF INFORMATION COMMISSIONER**

### **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.**

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

### **What's the issue?**

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

### **Need of the hour:**

- We need **transparency at every stage, and public scrutiny to prevent such an arbitrary process.**
- Centre and states to maintain transparency in appointments of Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners and upload the details of search committees and applicants on website.

### **Basics about CIC:**

#### **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?**

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

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Discuss the key issues and constraints faced by CIC in implementing the RTI act effectively.

## **5. NITI AAYOG 2.0**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** *NITI Aayog- objectives, composition and functions.*
- **For Mains:** *Need for reforms and challenges associated.*

**Context:** In a paper titled '**Towards India's New Fiscal Federalism**', former Finance Commission chairman Vijay Kelkar has pitched for setting up of a '**new NITI Aayog**' and giving it **responsibility for allocating capital and revenue grants to the states**.

#### **Need for setting up of 'NITI Aayog 2.0':**

- Replacing the Planning Commission, which was promoting regionally balanced growth in India, by the NITI Aayog, a think tank, **has reduced the government's policy reach**.
- Therefore, the need has arisen for an institution **to do the job at hand related to the structural issues including removal of regional imbalances in the economy**.

#### **Few suggestions related to composition and functions of the revamped NITI Aayog:**

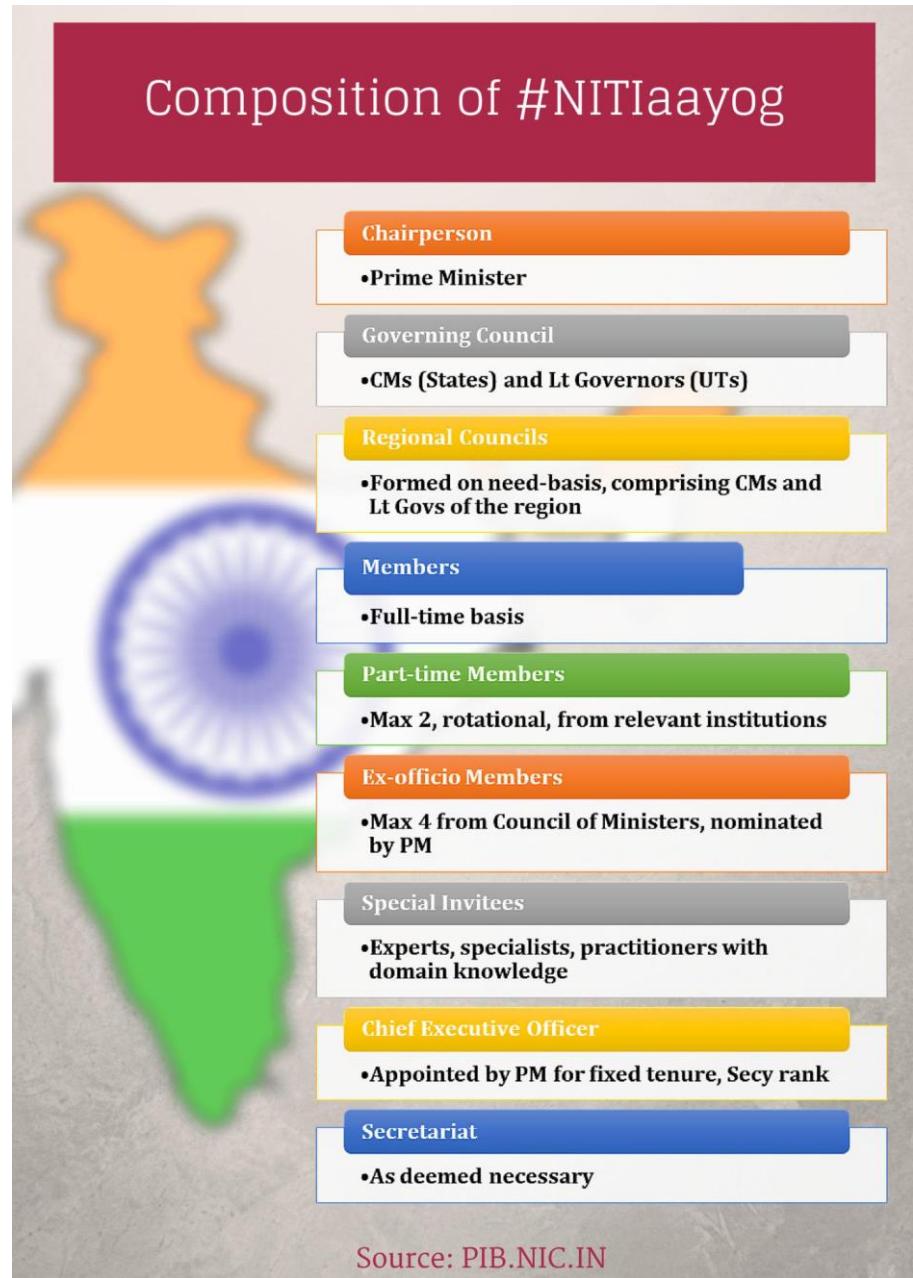
- **It will be responsible for allocating development or transformational capital or revenue grants to the states.**
- In order to make the new NITI Aayog more effective, it is essential to ensure that the institution is at the 'High Table' of decision making of the government. This means **the vice-chairman of the new NITI Aayog will need to be a permanent invitee of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)**.
- It need **not be involved with the approval of the state's annual expenditure programmes**. It should rather strive to be a think-tank with 'praxis' possessing considerable financial muscle and devote its energies to outline coherent medium and long term strategy and corresponding investment resources for transforming India.
- New **NITI Aayog will annually need the resources of around 1.5 to 2% of the GDP** to provide suitable grants to the states for mitigating the development imbalances.

#### **Other arguments supporting the revamp of NITI Aayog:**

- **NITI Aayog cannot transform a deeply unequal society into a modern economy** that ensures the welfare of all its citizens, irrespective of their social identity.
- **It has no role in influencing public or private investment.** It does not seem to have influence in policymaking with long-term consequences. For instance, demonetisation and the Goods and Services Tax.
- NITI Aayog is supposed to be a think tank. This implies that while generating new ideas, **it maintains a respectable intellectual distance from the government of the day**. Instead, we see uncritical praise of the Govt-sponsored schemes / programmes.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) 'NITI Ayog' is the missing pillar of India's good governance. Do you agree? Comment on the possible improvements in India's Good governance



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

## SECTION 126 OF THE RP ACT, 1951

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: About Section 126 of the RP Act and other key features of RP Act.
- For Mains: Need for reforms and measures suggested by the Panel.

**Context:** A Committee constituted to review and suggest modifications and changes in the provisions of the Section 126 and other sections of the RP Act 1951 and provisions of Model Code of Conduct has submitted its report. **The panel was headed by senior deputy election commissioner Umesh Sinha.**

**What Section 126 of RP Act, 1951 states?**

- Section 126 of the RP Act prohibits displaying any election matter by means, inter alia, of television or similar apparatus, during the period of 48 hours before the hour fixed for conclusion of poll in a constituency.
- "Election matter" has been defined in that Section as any matter intended or calculated to influence or affect the result of an election.

- **The provision prohibits** conduct of Exit poll and dissemination of their results during the period mentioned therein, in the hour fixed for commencement of polls in the first phase and half hour after the time fixed for close of poll for the last phase in all the States.
- **Violation of the provisions of Section 126 is** punishable with imprisonment upto a period of two years, or with fine or both.

#### **What has been suggested?**

- **Internet service providers and social media companies should take down content** violating the 48-hour ban on campaigning prior to polling, instantly and latest within 3 hours of EC issuing such a direction.
- **Amend Section 126(1) of R P Act** to impose the “**campaign silence period**” on print, electronic media and intermediaries. The definition of intermediaries, as per Section 2(w) of the Information Technology Act, includes telecom service providers, internet service providers, web-hosting service providers, search engines, etc.
- **Bring in changes in the model code of conduct** to ensure that parties release their manifesto at least 72 hours prior to polling (or 72 hours prior to polling for first phase in a multi-phase election).
- **Star campaigners should desist from addressing press conferences or giving interviews on election matters during silence period.** Also, in a multi-phased election, there should be no direct or indirect reference seeking support for parties/candidates in constituencies observing silence period.
- **Intermediaries should ensure that their platforms are not misused to vitiate free and fair polls.** This would include a notification mechanism by which EC may notify the platform of potential violations of Section 126 of R P Act.
- **While EC will appoint an officer to liaise with the intermediaries, the latter should open a special grievance redressal channel for EC** and have a dedicated team during election period to interface with and take quick action on receipt of EC order to take down or disable content in violation of R P Act.
- **Intermediaries should report to the Commission on measures taken** to prevent abuse of their platforms, including generating publicly-available action taken reports. All political advertisements may be clearly labelled as such and be pre-approved by a EC-appointed content monitoring committee.
- **The intermediaries would also need to maintain a repository of political advertisements** with information on their sponsors, expenditure and targeted reach.

#### **Significance and implications:**

- The recommendations made by the Committee, when implemented will help in minimizing the possible interference of activities which aim at indirectly influencing voters during the valuable silence period of 48 hours provided to them.

#### **Way ahead:**

- The task of maintaining campaign silence during last 48 hours before the conclusion of polling is becoming increasingly onerous in the light of the increasing influence of digital media.
- So, apart from the regulation by law and ECI instructions, the resolve, proactive support and sustained effort by all stakeholders is necessary to contain the evil impact.

Sources: toi.

(Q) Why is there a need for electoral reforms in India? Discuss measures already taken to bring reforms in electoral politics.

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

## **1. AADHAAR AND OTHER LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Key features of the bill, what is Aadhar and UIDAI?**
- **For Mains: Aadhar and issues of privacy, views of Supreme Court and the need for a fine balance.**

**Context:** The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018 has been introduced in the Lok Sabha. The Aadhaar Act provides targeted delivery of subsidies and benefits to individuals residing in India by assigning them unique identity numbers, called Aadhaar numbers.

- **The Bill amends** the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.

### **Key features of the Bill:**

- **Offline verification of Aadhaar number holder:** The Bill allows ‘offline verification’ of an individual’s identity, without authentication, through modes specified by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) by regulations.
- **During offline verification, the agency must** (i) obtain the consent of the individual, (ii) inform them of alternatives to sharing information, and (iii) not collect, use or store Aadhaar number or biometric information.
- **Voluntary use of Aadhaar to verify identity:** The Bill states that an individual may voluntarily use his Aadhaar number to establish his identity, by authentication or offline verification. Authentication of an individual’s identity via Aadhaar, for the provision of any service, may be made mandatory only by a law of Parliament.
- **Entities using Aadhaar:** An entity may be allowed to perform authentication through Aadhaar, if the UIDAI is satisfied that it is (i) compliant with certain standards of privacy and security, or (ii) permitted by law, or (iii) seeking authentication for a purpose specified by the central government in the interest of the State.
- **Aadhaar number of children:** The Bill specifies that at the time of enrolling a child to obtain an Aadhaar number, the enrolling agency shall seek the consent of his parent or guardian. The agency must inform the parent or guardian of (i) the manner in which the information will be used, (ii) the recipients with whom it will be shared, and (iii) their right to access the information. After attaining eighteen years of age, the child may apply for cancellation of his Aadhaar.
- **Disclosure of information in certain cases:** Under the Act, restrictions on security and confidentiality of Aadhaar related information do not apply in case the disclosure is pursuant to an order of a District Court (or above). The Bill amends this to allow such disclosure only for orders by High Courts (or above). The Bill also allows disclosure of information on directions of officers not below the rank of a Secretary.
- **UIDAI Fund:** Under the Act, all fees and revenue collected by the UIDAI shall be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India. The Bill removes this provision, and creates the Unique Identification Authority of India Fund. All fees, grants and charges received by the UIDAI shall be credited to this fund. The fund shall be used for expenses of the UIDAI, including salaries and allowances of its employees.
- **Complaints:** The Bill allows the individual to register complaints in certain cases, including impersonation or disclosure of their identity. The Bill defines the Aadhaar ecosystem to include enrolling agencies, requesting agencies, and offline verification-seeking entities. It allows the UIDAI to issue directions to them if necessary for the discharge of its functions under the Act.
- **Penalties:** Under the Bill, the UIDAI may initiate a complaint against an entity in the Aadhaar ecosystem for failure to (i) comply with the Act or the UIDAI’s directions, and (ii) furnish information required by the UIDAI. Adjudicating Officers appointed by the UIDAI shall decide such matters, and may impose penalties up to one crore rupees on such entities. The Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal shall be the appellate authority against decisions of the Adjudicating Officer.

### **Why the amendments are proposed?**

- While upholding the constitutional validity of Aadhaar, the Supreme Court had struck down Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 that permitted private entities like telecom companies or other corporate to avail of the biometric Aadhaar data.
- Hence to address the issues like recognising the authentication of those who provided Aadhaar as the identity proof, the amendments are brought in by the government.

Sources: the hindu.

**(Q)** Do you think linking of Aadhaar with most of the schemes would inevitably end up infringing rights of citizens? Critically comment.

## 2. CABINET APPROVES ‘THE CONSTITUTION (SCHEDULED TRIBES) ORDER (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018’ FOR REVISION IN LIST OF SCHEDULED TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The Union Cabinet (chaired by Prime Minister) has approved the introduction of **The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018** in the Parliament for certain amendments in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 so as to modify the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Arunachal Pradesh.

Changes made in list of Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are:

- 16. Deletion of ‘Abor’ in serial No. 1, as it is the same as ‘Adi’ in Serial No. 16.
- 17. Replace ‘**Tai Khamti**’ instead of ‘**Khampti**’ at serial No. 6.
- Inclusion of ‘**Mishmi-Kaman**’ (**Miju Mishmi**), **Idu (Mishmi)** and **Taraon (Digaru Mishmi)** in serial No. 8.
  1. Inclusion of **Monpa, Memba, Sartang, Sajolong (Miji)** in serial No. 9 in lieu of ‘**Momba**’.
  2. Inclusion of ‘**Nocte**’, ‘**Tangsa**’, ‘**Tutsa**’, ‘**Wancho**’ in lieu of ‘**Any Naga Tribes**’ in serial No. 10 in list of Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

After the Bill becomes an Act, member of the communities newly listed will also be able to derive benefits meant for STs under the existing schemes of the Government.

Source: PIB

## 3. 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:** A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) has adopted a report clearing the contentious **Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016**, which seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955.

**WHAT IS THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL 2016?**

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

**WHAT DOES IT WANT?**

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

**WHY ARE PEOPLE IN ASSAM NOT HAPPY ABOUT IT?**

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

**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:**

- Birth
- Descent
- Registration
- Naturalization
- Incorporation of the territory.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Critically analyse various criticisms made against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.s

## **4. SECTION 66A OF THE IT ACT**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Key facts on Section 66A of the IT Act.
- **For Mains:** Why the Court struck down this provision, issues associated and issues over implementation of Court's order.

**Context:** The Supreme Court has issued notice in an application filed by People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), on the continued use of **Section 66A of the Information Technology Act**.

- In its petition, PUCL had submitted that more than 22 people have been prosecuted under the provision, after it was scrapped by the Apex Court in 2015.

### **Background:**

- **Section 66A** had been dubbed as "draconian" for it allowed the arrest of several innocent persons, igniting a public outcry for its scrapping.
- This had led to the Supreme Court striking it down as unconstitutional in March, 2015 in **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India**.

### **Why SC struck down section 66A?**

- The SC had noted that **Section 66A arbitrarily, excessively and disproportionately invades the right of free speech, under article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution, and upsets the balance between such right and the reasonable restrictions** that may be imposed on such right and the definition of offences under the provision was open-ended and undefined.
- The court also said that the provision, introduced in 2009 to the original Act of 2000, used expressions "**completely open-ended and undefined**" and every expression used was "**nebulous**" in meaning. "What may be offensive to one may not be offensive to another. What may cause annoyance or inconvenience to one may not cause annoyance or inconvenience to another. Even the expression 'persistently' is completely imprecise."

### **What is Section 66A all about?**

- **Section 66A defines the punishment for sending "offensive" messages through a computer or any other communication device like a mobile phone or a tablet.**
- A conviction can fetch a maximum of three years in jail and a fine.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Critically discuss why the Supreme Court of India held the Section 66A of the Information Technology (IT) Act unconstitutional? Examine the constitutional and commercial implications of this judgement.

## **5. PERSONAL LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Key features of the Bill, what is leprosy?
- **For Mains:** Need for a legislation in this regard, significance of the Bill, need for awareness.

**Context:** The Lok Sabha has passed **the Personal Laws (Amendment Bill), 2018**, which 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.

#### **Personal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018:**

- Personal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018, seeks to end the discrimination against leprosy persons in various central laws: **the Divorce Act, 1869; the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939; the Special Marriage Act, 1954 etc.**
- The Bill **eliminates leprosy as a ground for dissolution of marriage or divorce.**
- The condition under **Section 18 (2) (c) of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act**, that a Hindu wife is entitled to live separately from her husband without forfeiting her claim to maintenance if the latter is suffering from a virulent form of leprosy has been omitted.
- **The amendments introduced in the Bill omit the provisions which stigmatise and discriminate against leprosy-affected persons.**

#### **Significance of the Bill:**

- The Bill is meant to **provide for the integration of leprosy patients into the mainstream**. It is in keeping with the **UN General Assembly Resolution of 2010 on the 'Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members'**.
- The proposed law follows a **National Human Rights Commission recommendation** a decade ago to introduce amendments in personal laws and other statutes.

#### **Background:**

- Leprosy is one of the world's oldest diseases with India accounting for over 60% of the annual new cases of leprosy.
- Official data says that the number of new Leprosy cases detected during 2016-17 is around 140000 and the prevalence Rate per 10000 population as on March 2017 for India is 0.66, it is established that the number underestimates the real Leprosy burden. In 2017, India along with Brazil and Indonesia are the only countries where more than 10000 new cases are reported per year.

#### **What is leprosy?**

- Leprosy is one of the oldest diseases in recorded history. Also, known as **Hansen's disease (HD)**, it is a **chronic, progressive bacterial infection caused by the bacterium Mycobacterium leprae**.
- **It primarily affects** the nerves of the extremities, the skin, the lining of the nose, the upper respiratory tract and the eyes. **The disease produces** skin ulcers, nerve damage, and muscle weakness. If it isn't treated, it can cause severe disfigurement and significant disability.
- **It is known to occur at all ages** ranging from early infancy to very old age. It is common in many countries, especially those with a tropical or subtropical climate.

#### **What necessitated this?**

- 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. So there is a need for a separate bill.

#### **Government Initiatives in Recently:**

- The Government has announced the **three-pronged strategy for early detection of leprosy cases** in the community. It was introduced in 2016 under the National Health Mission, especially in the hard-to-reach areas.
- A special **Leprosy Case Detection Campaign** was carried out in 2016. As a result, more than 32000 cases were confirmed and were put on treatment.

#### **Supreme Court Ruling:**

- The Supreme Court has asked the Centre, states and Union Territories to **undertake a campaign to spread awareness about the curability of leprosy so that those suffering from it are not discriminated**.
- It recommended for **repealing archaic provisions from 119 statutes that stigmatise leprosy patients**.
- **No government hospital shall decline treatment to leprosy patients**. People suffering from leprosy also have the right to live with human dignity.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Discuss how The Personal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018, seeks to end the discrimination against leprosy patients.

## 6. DNA TECHNOLOGY BILL

### What to study?

- For Prelims: DNA Bill- highlights, difference between DNA and RNA.
- For Mains: DNA profiling- uses, challenges and concerns.

**Context:** The Lok Sabha has passed the **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018** that allows regulated use of DNA technology to establish the identity of certain defined categories of persons, including offenders, suspects, and undertrials.

### Need for the legislation and its significance:

- The utility of DNA based technologies for solving crimes, and to identify missing persons, is well recognized across the world.
- Therefore, the new bill aims to expand the application of DNA-based forensic technologies to support and strengthen the justice delivery system of the country.

### Highlights of the Bill:

- As per the Bill, **national and regional DNA data banks** will be set up for maintaining a national database for identification of victims, suspects in cases, undertrials, missing persons and unidentified human remains.
- **Punishment:** According to it, those leaking the DNA profile information to people or entities who are not entitled to have it, will be punished with a jail term of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs. 1 lakh. Similar, punishment has also been provided for those who seek the information on DNA profiles illegally.
- **Usage:** As per the bill, all DNA data, including DNA profiles, DNA samples and records, will only be used for identification of the person and not for “any other purpose”.
- **The bill's provisions will enable the cross-matching** between persons who have been reported missing on the one hand and unidentified dead bodies found in various parts of the country on the other, and also for establishing the identity of victims in mass disasters.
- **The Bill establishes a DNA Regulatory Board** to accredit the DNA laboratories that analyse DNA samples to establish the identity of an individual.

### DNA technology- significance and concerns:

- DNA analysis is an extremely useful and accurate technology in ascertaining the identity of a person from his/her DNA sample, or establishing biological relationships between individuals.
- A hair sample, or even bloodstains from clothes, from a scene of crime, for example, can be matched with that of a suspect, and it can, in most cases, be conclusively established whether the DNA in the sample belongs to the suspected individual. As a result, DNA technology is being increasingly relied upon in investigations of crime, identification of unidentified bodies, or in determining parentage.
- **But information from DNA samples can reveal not just how a person looks, or what their eye colour or skin colour is, but also more intrusive information like their allergies, or susceptibility to diseases.** As a result, there is a greater risk of information from DNA analysis getting misused.
- It is expected that the expanded use of DNA technology would result not only in speedier justice delivery but also in increased conviction rates, which at present is only around 30% (NCRB Statistics for 2016).

### Benefits of the Bill:

- By providing for the mandatory accreditation and regulation of DNA laboratories, the Bill seeks to ensure that with the proposed expanded use of this technology in the country.
- There is also the assurance that the DNA test results are reliable and the data remain protected from misuse or abuse in terms of the privacy rights of our citizens.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018 is right in intent but bereft of safeguards, can be misutilized. Critically analyze. (250 words)

## 7. GREEN TECHNOLOGY IN PMGSY

**Context:** In order to encourage locally available materials and use of green technologies for construction of road under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), guidelines were issued by the Ministry.

### **States' Contribution:**

- The State Governments are required to propose minimum 15% of total length of annual proposals under new technologies like Cement stabilization, Lime stabilization, Cold mix, Waste plastics, Cell filled concrete, Paned cement concrete pavement, Fly ash etc.
- **Further Relaxation:**
- The Ministry of Rural Development specifications have also been relaxed in respect of grading of materials for Granular Sub Base layer in order to encourage the usage of locally available/naturally occurring material/marginal materials.

### **Current Scenario:**

- Andhra Pradesh Government had submitted proposal for converting 37 roads of 163.49 KM sanctioned under Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism Affected Areas with conventional method of construction to New Technology.
- There is no other proposal of the State on New Technology pending with the Government at present.
- The Ministry has so far sanctioned 35,922 KM length of roads using New Technologies and 22,983.96 KM have been completed.

### **Background:**

- Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) encourages the use of 'Green Technologies' and non-conventional materials like waste plastic, cold mix, geo-textiles, fly-ash, iron and copper slag etc in rural roads.

Source: PIB

### **Objective of PMGSY:**

- The primary objective of PMGSY is to provide connectivity by way of all-weather roads. The programme also has an Upgradation component with a target to upgrade existing rural roads in order to ensure full farm to market connectivity.
- With a view to bringing transparency and responsiveness in governance, plug leakages and to quickly address the citizen grievances; PMGSY has been encouraging use of information technology, mobile technology and space technology.
- **Meri Sadak –** A mobile application "Meri Sadak" was launched to enable citizens to register complaints regarding the quality and pace of construction of PMGSY roads.

## **8. JOB FAIRS**

**Context:** The Ministry of Labour & Employment is implementing the National Career Service (NCS) Project to provide a variety of employment related services like job matching, career counseling, vocational guidance, information on skill development courses, etc.

### **Highlights of NCS Project:**

- It includes establishment of Model Career Centers by the State Government/Institutions of repute to provide variety of employment related services using technology.
- The NCS project has also been enhanced to interlink the Employment Exchanges with NCS portal and organizing job fairs.

**Employment Exchanges/Model Career Centers** – functions under the administrative control of the State Governments/Institutions and they are organizing job fairs locally for the benefit of the job seekers from time to time.

### **Background:**

- A National ICT based portal is developed primarily to connect the opportunities with the aspirations of youth. The portal facilitates registration of job seekers, job providers, skill providers, career counselors, etc.

Source : PIB

## **9. RIGHT TO DISCONNECT BILL 2018**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Features and significance of the Bill, Private Member's bill- key facts.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for the bill, issues related and potential of private members' bills.

**Context:** To help employees strike a better work-life balance and reduce stress, NCP MP Supriya Sule has introduced **the Right to Disconnect Bill 2018**, a Private Member's Bill, in the Lok Sabha.

**Key features and highlights of the Bill:**

- **Aim:** The Right to Disconnect Bill aims at “reducing stress and ease tension between an employee’s personal and professional life.”
- The Bill gives employees **the right to not respond to calls or any kind of communications** from the employers after office hours.
- The Bill requires the setting up of **an Employee Welfare Authority**, which will publish reports related to the impact employees have from prolonged use of digital tools beyond office hours and it will also create a charter defining employee-employer negotiation.
- According to the Bill, “Companies with more than 10 employees would periodically negotiate specific terms with their workers, **publish their own charter, and create an Employee Welfare Committee** consisting of representatives of the company’s workforce.”

**Concerns and challenges faced by workers:**

- With dynamic business demands in an evolving corporate landscape, striking **a work-life balance has become difficult but also a priority**. The imbalance leads to stress, anxiety and sleep deprivation—notable trends in studies on employee health.
- **The traditional service sector has to often deal with unreasonable work hours, working overtime without extra compensation, or carrying their work home.**
- **The insidious impact of ‘always on’ organizational culture is often unaccounted for** or disguised as a benefit – increased convenience, for example, or higher autonomy and control over work-life boundaries.

## RIGHT TO DISCONNECT BILL, 2018

### Key Takeaways

- 1 Employees have the right to not answer calls/e-mails beyond work hours
- 2 Employees cannot face disciplinary action
- 3 Employers can negotiate out-of-work hours with employees
- 4 Employees to be entitled to overtime for out-of-work hours
- 5 Minimum penalty of 1% of employee's total remuneration

**Need and significance of the Bill:**

- After being in the workplace for eight hours or more, it might be very stressful for a person to respond to office-related calls after work.
- According to experts, work-related stress can often lead to a lot of physical and mental ailments including depression, which might go undiagnosed.
- As a result of which, a person might face a lot of problem in his professional and personal life as well. The Right to Disconnect Bill 2018, if passed, will help people strike work-life balance and lead a better life.

**Efforts in this regard:**

- **Countries like France and Germany have already adopted the right to disconnect laws**, with the French government setting the example first in 2004, when it clarified that an employee unreachable on a smartphone outside of work hours will not be tagged for misconduct.
- **The European Union had voted in 2015 to regard the time spent in commute (to and from work) as work. In India, a Kolkata-based firm became the third in the country to sanction menstruation leave (of two days per month) to its female employees** starting New Year's Day.

**Way ahead:**

- The bill is yet to be discussed in the Lok Sabha. The odds however are stacked against the bill’s discussion. Data reveals that fewer than 5% of private bills are even debated in Lok Sabha. According to research from PRS Legislative published in 2015, the 13th Lok Sabha discussed barely 5% of private bills, the 14th Lok Sabha discussed 3%, while the 16th Lok Sabha discussed only 2.85% of private bills.
- **According to Parliamentary rules, a private bill has an expectancy of 6 years to be discussed, before lapse.**

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) “The concept of private members’ bill is central to a deliberative democracy.” Discuss in the Indian context.

## 10. PRAVASI TEERTH DARSHAN YOJANA

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojana, who are Girmityas?

**Context:** Govt has launched the *Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojana*.

### Key Highlights:

- Under the scheme, *a group of Indian diaspora will be taken on a government-sponsored tour of religious places in India twice a year*.
- The group will be taken to the *religious places of all major religions in India*.
- The tour would be *completely government sponsored*.
- Under the eligibility criteria, *all people of Indian-origin, aged between 45 and 65 can apply and a group will be selected out of them*.
- *The first preference will be given to people from 'Girmitiya countries'* such as Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica.

### Who are Girmityas?

- Girmityas or Jahajis are *descendants of indentured Indian labourers brought to Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, East Africa, the Malay Peninsula, Caribbean and South America (Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname)* to work on sugarcane plantations for the prosperity of the European settlers and save the Fijians from having to work on these plantations and thus to preserve their culture.
- The term Girmitiya was *coined by Mahatma Gandhi* who referred to himself as first Girmitiya.
- The countries where these indentured Indian labourers settled are known as *Girmitiya countries*.

Sources: the hindu.

## 11. SC/ST ACT AMENDMENT

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of SC/AT act and amendments, A 338A.
- For Mains: SC's guidelines and rationale behind, need for amendment and need for a permanent solution over the issue.

**Context:** Supreme Court has refused to stay *amendments to SC/ST Act*.

### What's the issue?

1. In March 2018, Supreme Court diluted the stringent provisions of SC/ST Act (Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra).
2. The verdict saw a huge backlash across the country. The government filed a review petition in the Supreme Court and subsequently amended the 1989 Act back to its original form.
3. Following this, several petitions were filed challenging the amendments.

### Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court and rationale behind it:

- Supreme court gave the judgement on the pretext that Innocents cannot be terrorised by the provisions of the SC/ST Act and their fundamental rights need to be protected.
- The court said that *public servants could be arrested only with the written permission of their appointing authority, while in the case of private employees, the Senior Superintendent of Police concerned should allow it*.
- *A preliminary inquiry should be conducted before the FIR was registered* to check if the case fell within the ambit of the Act, and whether it was frivolous or motivated, the court ruled.

### Why this decision?

- The court referred to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for 2015, which said that closure reports had been filed in 15-16 percent of the complaints under the Act. *Over 75% of such cases taken up by the courts had resulted in acquittals/ withdrawal or compounding of the cases*.
- Therefore, there was a need to safeguard innocent citizens against false implication and unnecessary arrest for which there is no sanction under the law.

### What the Court missed?

- Article 338 stipulates that governments should consult the "National Commission for SC" on all major policy matters affecting Scheduled Castes.

- Similarly, **article 338** A mandates all major policy decision affecting STs to be taken in consultation with “National Commission for Scheduled Tribes”.
- Considering this, Supreme Court is also bound to hear these commissions before pronouncements that are likely to impact SC/STs on a whole. However, while issuing guidelines, the court has not taken views of these stakeholders.

**The government decided to retain original provisions because of the following reasons:**

- There had been no decrease in the atrocities committed on SC/ST people despite the laws meant to protect their civil rights.
- The sad state of affairs was despite the existence of 195 special courts across 14 States to exclusively try Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) cases.

**Figures and facts:**

- Cases registered:** As per National Crime Records Bureau statistics, there is no decrease in the crimes against SC/ST people. The number of cases registered under the PoA in 2014 was 47,124; 44839 in 2015 and 47,338 in 2016.
- Conviction rate:** In 2014, 28.8% of the cases were convicted. The acquittal was 71.2% and pendency of cases 85.3%. The next year saw 25.8% convictions, 74.2% acquittal and 87.3% pendency. In 2016, the convictions was 24.9%, acquittal 75.1% and pendency 89.3%.

**The Amendment Bill seeks to insert three new clauses after Section 18 of the original Act:**

- The first stipulates that for the purposes of the Act, “**preliminary enquiry shall not be required for registration of a First Information Report against any person.**”
- The second stipulates that **the arrest of a person accused of having committed an offence under the Act would not require any approval.**
- The third says that **the provisions of Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure — which deals with anticipatory bail — shall not apply to a case under this Act, “notwithstanding any judgment or order of any Court.”**

**Way ahead:**

- The amendments to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 2018 is a move in the right direction. However, no matter how strong a piece of legislation is, all will depend on how well it is implemented.
- If the implementing agency does not do its bit then the legislative effort would not be successful in the long run. The administrative set up, which includes police machinery, investigating agencies and judiciary, has to work together to effectively implement such a law.

Sources: the hindu.

## 12. NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECT (NAHEP)

**What to study?**

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

**Context:** The ICAR has recently launched Rs 1100 crore ambitious **National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP).**

**Key highlights:**

- Aim:** To attract talent and strengthen higher agricultural education in the country.
- Funded by** the World Bank and the Indian Government on a 50:50 basis.
- The objective of the NAHEP** for India is to support participating agricultural universities and ICAR in providing more relevant and higher quality education to Agricultural University students. In addition, a four year degree in Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and Forestry has been declared a professional degree.

Sources: pib.

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

## 1. MOHAN REDDY COMMITTEE

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Key recommendations made by the committee and their significance, the need for review of engineering education.

**Context:** A government committee headed by IIT-Hyderabad chairman B V R Mohan Reddy has submitted its report and that its suggestions are being considered by AICTE.

- The committee was appointed to come up with a medium and short-term perspective plan for expansion in engineering education.

**What necessitated this?**

- **More than half the engineering seats fall vacant every year.** There were no takers for 51% of the 15.5 lakh B.E/B.Tech seats in 3,291 engineering colleges in 2016-17.
- Besides, **current capacity utilisation in traditional disciplines is just 40%** as opposed to 60% seat occupancy in branches such as computer science and engineering, aerospace engineering and mechatronics.
- There were glaring gaps in regulation, including alleged corruption; a vicious circle of poor infrastructure, labs and faculty; non-existent linkages with industry; and the absence of a technical ecosystem to nurture the classroom. All this accounted for low employability of graduates.

Sources: ie.

(Q) Examine the challenges faced by higher education sector in India and discuss the impact of policy decisions taken to address these issues? (250 words)

**Important recommendations made by the committee:**

- Stop setting up new colleges from 2020 and review the creation of new capacity every two years after that.
- No additional seats should be approved in traditional engineering areas such as mechanical, electrical, civil and electronics and institutes should be encouraged to convert current capacity in traditional disciplines to emerging new technologies.
- For approving additional seats in existing institutions, the AICTE should only give approvals based on the capacity utilisation of concerned institute.
- Introduce undergraduate engineering programmes exclusively for artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics, quantum computing, data sciences, cybersecurity and 3D printing and design.

## 2. ISRO LAUNCHES SAMWAD

- As part of the enhanced outreach programme of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), a new platform named “Samwad with Students” (SwS) was launched in Bengaluru.

**About the SwS Initiative:**

- ISRO aims to engage youngsters across India to capture their scientific temperament.
- The new conversation mission will inspire students cutting across schools and colleges.

The first SwS event saw 40 wards and 10 teachers from select schools interact with ISRO Chairman Dr K Sivan at the Anthariksh Bhavan.

Source: PIB

## 3. LEAD AND MSG IN NOODLES

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** NCDRC, Consumer Protection Act- Key features, Lead and MSG- key facts and effects on health.
- **For Mains:** Dispute redressal mechanisms and their significance.

**Context:** The Supreme Court of India has lifted a stay on criminal proceedings against Nestle over the alleged presence of lead and MSG or monosodium glutamate in popular noodles.

- **National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC)** will now go-ahead with a class action suit brought against Maggi noodle makers Nestle.

### **What's the issue?**

- The apex court had allowed the case against Nestle to reopen after the Swiss food giant had admitted the presence of toxic ingredients in its noodles during a court hearing.
- Nestle's lawyers have admitted that toxic elements like lead and MSG are found in its sample tests conducted by CFTRI (Central Food Technological Research Institute), Mysuru. However, the company has argued that the lead was within the permissible limit.

### **Effects of lead and MSG on health:**

#### **Lead:**

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), lead is a cumulative toxicant that affects multiple body systems, including your liver and kidneys in particular.
- It is especially harmful to infant and pregnant women as it can cause damage to the central nervous system in children.
- Since lead is a heavy metal it can get stored in the teeth and bones, where it accumulates over time. In pregnant women, prolonged exposure to lead can result in miscarriage, prematurity, low birth weight, etc.

#### **Monosodium glutamate:**

- MSG, short for Monosodium glutamate, is an amino acid found in your body and most foods. It is a flavour enhancer commonly added to Chinese food, canned vegetables, soups, and processed meats.
- When consumed in excess, it can cause several health issues, including a headache, nausea, sweating, weakness, chest pain, tingling or burning in the face as well as neck and other areas. It is claimed that MSG can cause asthma and even brain damage.
- MSG may cause adverse symptoms in some people, including a condition called Chinese restaurant syndrome or MSG symptom complex. However, there is no definitive evidence that MSG is solely responsible for causing these symptoms.

#### **About NCDRC:**

- The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), India is a **quasi-judicial commission** in India which was set up in 1988 under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986.
- The commission is headed by a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court of India.

#### **Statutory provisions:**

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

Sources: et.

## **4. MENSTRUAL HYGIENE FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS SCHEMES**

- To address the need of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls residing primarily in rural areas, Government of India is supporting the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme.

#### **Under the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme –**

- **Funds are provided to States/UTs through National Health Mission for decentralized procurement of sanitary napkins packs** for provision primarily to rural adolescent girls at subsidized rates as per proposals received from the States and UTs in their Programme Implementation Plans.

This scheme is encompassing the following:

- Increasing awareness among adolescent girls on Menstrual Hygiene
- Improving access to and use of high quality sanitary napkins by adolescent girls in rural areas.

#### **About Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)**

- One of the key components of the National Rural Health Mission is to provide every village in the country with a trained female community health activist ASHA.
- Selected from the village itself and accountable to it, the ASHA will be trained to work as an interface between the community and the public health system.

#### **Other Information of Menstrual Hygiene Scheme –**

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been implementing this scheme for promotion of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls in the **age group of 10-19 years** primarily in rural areas as part of the **Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram**.

- Ensuring safe disposal of Sanitary Napkins in an environmentally friendly manner.
- Provision of funds to ASHAs to hold monthly meeting with adolescents to discuss issues related to menstrual hygiene.

#### **Information Education and Communication (IEC) Material Developed:**

- A range of IEC material has been developed, using a 360 degree approach to create awareness among adolescent girls about safe & hygienic menstrual health practices including audio, video and reading materials for adolescent girls and job-aids for ASHAs and other field level functionaries for communicating with adolescent girls.
- ASHAs across the country are trained and play a significant role in promotion of use and distribution of the sanitary napkins.
- **Department of Health Research, under the Ministry of Health, is involved in assessment of all newer, alternative, environment friendly menstrual hygiene products** to look into their safety and acceptability features.

Source: PIB

## **5. MISSION INDRADHANUSH**

- ‘Mission Indradhanush’ has been selected as one of the 12 best practices globally and has been featured in a special issue of the British Medical Journal titled ‘**Improving vaccination coverage in India: lessons from Intensified Mission Indradhanush, a cross-sectoral systems strengthening strategy**’.
- Mission Indradhanush was showcased during the ‘**Partner’s Forum**’ held at New Delhi on 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> December 2018 which was attended by around 1200 international and national delegates working on Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health.

#### **Background:**

##### **Mission Indradhanush –**

- To strengthen and re-energize the programme and achieve full immunization coverage for all children and pregnant women at a rapid pace, the Government of India launched “**Mission indradhanush**” in December 2014.

##### **Mission Indradhanush’s Goal –**

- The ultimate goal is to ensure full immunization with all available vaccines for children up to two years of age and pregnant women.
- The Government has identified 201 high focus districts across 28 states that have the highest number of partially immunized and unimmunized children.

##### **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) –**

- To further intensify the immunization programme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Intensified Mission (IMI) on October 8, 2017.
- Government of India aims to reach each and every child up to two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunization programme/UIP.

Source: PIB

## **6. GOVT DECLARES ‘ONE-TIME FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE’ FOR RARE DISEASES**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: What are rare diseases?**
- **For Mains: Need for awareness, international cooperation in this regard, need for a policy on this.**

**Context:** Government has announced a ‘one-time financial assistance’ for Rare diseases.

- The standing finance committee has approved a proposal for adding a sub-component under the umbrella scheme of **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN)** for provision of one-time financial assistance to those below threshold poverty line for specified rare diseases which require one-time treatment.

#### **What is a rare disease?**

- A rare disease, **also referred to as an orphan disease, is any disease that affects a small percentage of the population.**

- **Most rare diseases are genetic, and are present throughout a person's entire life**, even if symptoms do not immediately appear. In Europe a disease or disorder is defined as rare when it affects less than 1 in 2000 citizens.
- **Rare diseases are characterised** by a wide diversity of symptoms and signs that vary not only from disease to disease but also from patient to patient suffering from the same disease. Relatively common symptoms can hide underlying rare diseases, leading to misdiagnosis.
- **The most common rare diseases recorded in India** are Haemophilia, Thalassemia, sickle-cell anaemia and primary immuno deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease, Hirschsprung disease, Gaucher's disease, Cystic Fibrosis, Hemangiomas and certain forms of muscular dystrophies.

**Need of nationwide policy:**

- **State has responsibility for providing affordable, accessible and reliable health-care services to every citizen.** In fact constitution also mentions importance of health-care services under articles like 21, 38 and 47 and thus state cannot evade this responsibility under the pretext of non-justifiability of articles.
- **Given the low volumes at which the drugs needed to treat such diseases would be consumed, pharmaceutical companies have little commercial incentive to produce them.** Thus, a nationwide policy on orphan drugs could incentivize these players.
- Even if pharmaceutical companies are incentivized to develop drugs to treat rare diseases, pharmaceutical companies remain beholden to the laws of economics and, given **the low demand for orphan drugs, price these drugs as high as they choose to**. Hence there has to be regulation of the government in restricting the exorbitant prices of the drugs.
- **Although proportion of rare diseases is much less than the other diseases, it does not reduce the importance of the life of person affected by rare diseases.** Thus national policy would remove this adverse distinction and would make government committed equally to all people.

Sources: Down to earth.

(Q) What is an orphan drug? It is said that there is a need for a nationwide policy on the treatment of rare diseases that incentivizes the development of orphan drugs. Elaborate.

## 7. 70 POINT GRADING INDEX TO ASSESS STATES ON SCHOOLING SYSTEM

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: About the Point Grading Index and its key features.**
- **For Mains: Significance and the need for the Index, need for grading and ways and measures to improve the schooling system.**

**Context:** The government has launched a **70 point Performance Grading Index (PGI)** to assess areas of deficiency in each state's school education system so that targeted interventions can be made at every level from pedagogy to teacher training.

**About the Performance Grading Index (PGI):**

- **Aim:** The index is aimed at helping states understand where they may be lagging behind and prioritise areas for intervention to ensure that the school education system is robust at every level.
- **The union Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry is compiling this schooling index.**
- The Index will **assess states on a 1,000 point grading system with 10-20 points per parameter.**
- **Areas:** The 70 indicators will grade state schooling systems on areas like number of existing teacher vacancies, number of direct entry recruitments especially at leadership positions, school infrastructure and so on.
- The Niti Aayog which was earlier developing its own School Education Quality Index, will be using 33 of the 70 criteria under the PGI for their own assessments.

**Significance:**

- The move is in keeping with the government's overall thrust on quality improvement, teacher training and learning outputs. It will prioritize areas for intervention to ensure that the school education system is robust at every level.

Sources: et.

## 8. 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.

**Context:** Bihar's health department has imposed a blanket ban for 15 days on sale of fish from Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in capital Patna after samples were found to be contaminated with formalin. The ban includes storage and transportation of fish from Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

### 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.

### 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.

## 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, 'CIFTest'



### SOME STATES AT SEA

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

Sources: Down to Earth, the Hindu.

## 9. CONGENITAL CENTRAL HYPOVENTILATION SYNDROME (CCHS)

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Congenital Central Hypoventilation Syndrome (CCHS)- causes, symptoms and treatment.

**Context:** An infant in Delhi is suffering from a rare disease.

### What is Congenital Central Hypoventilation Syndrome (CCHS)?

- CCHS is a disorder of the nervous system in which the cue to breathe is lost when the patient goes to sleep. This results in a lack of oxygen and a build-up of carbon dioxide in the body, which can sometimes turn fatal. There are less than 1,000 known cases all over the world.
- Though the name describes the disorder as congenital, some forms of the disease may also be present in adults. In fact, adult onset is far more common than congenital presentation; there have been many adult cases reported in medical journals over the years.
- The disease is also known as Ondine's Curse. Ondine, a nymph in French mythology, had cursed her unfaithful husband that he would forget to breathe the moment he fell asleep.

#### **Causes:**

- The **mutation of a gene called PHOX2B**, which is crucial for the maturation of nerve cells in the body, can cause CCHS.
- It **can also be genetically acquired**, which is when it is congenital. However, sudden mutation is more common than a transmission of the mutated gene from parent to child.

#### **Treatment:**

- Treatment typically includes mechanical ventilation or use of a diaphragm pacemaker.
- People who have been diagnosed as newborns and adequately ventilated throughout childhood may reach the age of 20 to 30 years, and can live independently.

Sources: the hindu.

## **10. NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION (2018-2023)**

#### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** 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.

**The components of the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (2018-2023) are:**

- **Aim:** employ **a multi-pronged strategy** involving education, de-addiction and rehabilitation of affected individuals and their families to address the issue.
- **Focus on** preventive education, awareness generation, counselling, treatment and rehabilitation of drug-dependent people, besides training and capacity-building of service providers through the collaborative efforts of the Centre, state and NGOs.
- **Involvement of stakeholders:** Coordination with implementing agencies for controlling the sale of sedatives, painkillers and muscle relaxant drugs, holding awareness generation programmes and checking online sale of drugs by stringent monitoring by the cyber cell are proposed under the Action Plan.
- **Awareness generation** through social, print, digital and online media, and engagement of celebrities, besides strengthening the national toll-free helpline for drug prevention. **The Action Plan calls for persuading** principals, directors, vice chancellors of educational institutions to ensure that no drugs are sold within/nearby the campus.
- **Increase community participation and public cooperation** in the reduction of demand by involving Panchayati Raj institutions, Urban Local Bodies, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and other local groups like Mahila Mandals, self-help groups etc to tackle the menace of drugs.
- **A steering committee** would be constituted under the **chairmanship of the secretary, Social Justice Ministry**, and with representatives from several other Ministries to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan.

#### **Drug menace:**

- India is vulnerable to narcotic drug trafficking as it is located between two largest Opium producing regions of the world i.e. **Golden Crescent in the west and Golden Triangle in the east**. Drug trafficking and abuse also pose serious threat to our societies.
- Estimates suggest that there are 40 lakh drug addicts in the country. The most common drugs of abuse are 'ganja', 'hashish', 'opium' and 'heroin'. The abuse of pharmaceutical preparations like 'buprenorphine', codeine based cough syrups and painkillers like 'proxivon' has also assumed serious proportions. In certain regions of the country, drug abuse has already become a severe social-economic problem affecting the vulnerable age groups.

#### **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.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) India is vulnerable to narcotic drug trafficking. Critically examine its causes. Also comment on the role of Government in combating drug problem.

## 11. RIGHT OF CHILDREN TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019

### What to study?

- ***For Prelims: RTE Act- key features, no detention policy.***
- ***For Mains: Significance and the need for amendments.***

**Context:** The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2019 has received the assent of the President of India. The bill mainly seeks ***to do away with the no-detention policy in schools.***

- ***Significance:*** The legislation is significant as it brings accountability in the elementary education system. The proposal received the support of a majority of state governments.

### Right to Education (RTE) Act:

- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (the Act) provides ***for free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years.***

### What is no detention policy?

- According to this provision "no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class". This translates into automatic promotions to the next class every year until Class VII.
- Instead of exams, schools are supposed to hold Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluations (CCE) for every child.

### RTE amendment Bill- Key features:

- The Bill seeks to amend the Right to Education (RTE) Act ***to abolish the "no-detention" policy in schools.*** Under the current provisions of the Act, ***no student can be detained up to class VIII.***
- As per the amendment, ***it would be left to the states to decide whether to continue the no-detention policy.***
- ***The bill provides for regular examination*** in classes V and VIII, and if a child fails, the amendment bill grants a provision to give her or him additional opportunity to take a re-examination within two months. Such children will be ***provided with two-month remedial teaching to perform better in the re-examinations.*** If the students still do not pass the exam, ***the state government may decide to detain them.***

### Need for removal of this clause:

- The provision had attracted criticism with several states and schools complaining that it compromised on academic rigour and learning levels and quality at schools.
- ***The TSR Subramanian committee for formulation of the National Policy on Education has also suggested that 'no detention' policy should be discontinued after Class V.*** It had recommended restoration of detention provision, remedial coaching and two extra chances to each student such to move to a higher class.
- ***A sub-committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education also studied the issue closely and recommended a provisional detention clause at Classes V and VIII.*** In 2013, a parliamentary panel had also asked the ministry to 'rethink' on its "policy of automatic promotion up to Class VIII".

Sources: toi.

(Q) In the light of abolishing the “no-detention” policy, critically analyse success and failures of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or the Right to Education Act (RTE).

## 12. ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT (ASER) 2018

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Brief overview of stats.
- For Mains: Concerns, challenges highlighted by the survey and ways and measures needed to address them.

**Context:** The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018 has been published by education **non-profit Pratham**. The latest report collected data from 596 districts by surveying 546,527 students from 354,944 homes.

- The survey shows the prevalence of **learning deficit** and the poverty of basic reading and arithmetic skills among students in Indian schools.

### Highlights of the report:

- Indian students, especially those in elementary school (Classes I-VIII), are **not learning enough**. To cite a metric, **only half (50.3%) of all students in Class V can read texts meant for Class II students**.
- **There seems to have been some improvement in learning levels, especially among students of Class III and Class V**, in 2018 compared with those of the previous five years. However, the improvement is not visible at a higher level, for example among students of Class VIII.
- **The deficit is across government and private schools**. Traditionally, students in private schools have fared better than their government school counterparts, but that's a relative situation. For example, while 40% of Class VIII students in government schools can do simple division, the figure is 54.2% in private schools.
- However, **there is gradual improvement in some segments and in some states**. The reading ability among Class V students in Kerala jumped 10 percentage points in 2018 from that in 2016. In Himachal Pradesh, the growth is nearly 8 percentage points and in Chhattisgarh and Odisha it is around 7 percentage points between 2016 and 2018.
- While 30.9% of students in the 6-14 age group were in private schools in 2018, the figure was 30.6% in 2016 and 30.8% in 2014. This is less than a percentage point growth since 2014.

### Concerns over the poor quality of education and its effects on the workforce of the country:

- This poor learning outcome in India is despite **the Right to Education (RTE) Act** having been in force since April 2010 making eight years of education compulsory for children and the Centre floating schemes such as **“Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat”**, apart from states' efforts.
- **Access to elementary (classes I-VIII) schooling is almost universal** and the number of children out of schools is below 4%, but a quality deficit, that too for more than a decade, raises questions about the priorities of governments at the central and state levels.
- Last year, **the World Bank said Indians born today are likely to be just 44% productive as workers, way below their Asian peers**.

### Why be concerned about quality of education?

- India's demographic dividend depends on **the learning level of students**. The quality of education has a direct bearing on any economy.
- With some 240 million students or nearly 20% of the Indian population in school, their quality of learning or lack of it assumes significance for the competitiveness of the country.
- It has an impact on the quality of life, efficiency at the workplace, and labour productivity issues.

### Way ahead:

- It is a long time to have only awareness, and **a quantum jump in the education sector is the need of the hour**.
- As the problem has now been diagnosed and public advocacy has got the momentum, the governments and civil society need to **focus on three aspects—a bigger spending on education, maybe 6% of GDP instead of the present 2.7%, political willingness to improve education, and a drastic change in the quality of teacher education**.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Despite the RTE Act being more than a decade old, educational outcomes in India continue to remain poor. Examine. (250 words)

## 13. TRIPLE-DRUG THERAPY FOR LYMPHATIC FILARIASIS

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Triple-drug therapy, lymphatic filariasis- key facts, global concern on the disease.

**Context:** A pilot project to administer triple drug therapy with the long term aim of eradicating lymphatic filariasis was recently launched in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

- Nagpur is one of the five districts in the country and only one in Maharashtra where this triple drug therapy campaign is being launched.

### Triples drug therapy:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) is recommending three drug treatment to accelerate the global elimination of lymphatic filariasis.
- The treatment, known as IDA, involves a combination of ivermectin, diethylcarbamazine citrate and albendazole. It is being recommended annually in settings where its use is expected to have the greatest impact.
- The third drug being used in this therapy will help control adult worms of lymphatic filariasis. Micro filariasis, which is produced by adult worms, is the cause of swollen leg. Previously the adult worms were sterilized by drugs and remained inactive for a year. Now that period will increase to two years.
- The plan is to administer these drugs for two consecutive years. The life of the adult worm is hardly four years, so it would die a natural death without causing any harm to the person.

### Need for and significance of the therapy:

- Lymphatic filariasis poses a grave threat to India. Over 40% of worldwide cases are found in India. Since 2004, two drug therapy for lymphatic filariasis has been in place but the addition of the third drug now will give a boost to the overall campaign.
- India has missed earlier deadlines to eradicate the disease by 2015 and 2017. The global deadline now is 2020 and the three drug approach may help the country get there.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The Government had set elimination targets for some major communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, kala-azar (leishmaniasis), filariasis, leprosy and measles. Critically comment on viability and ambition of these targets.

## 14. WHO'S LIST OF 10 GLOBAL HEALTH THREATS

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Overview of health threats identified by WHO.
- For Mains: Concerns and challenges identified by WHO, need for coordinated efforts and measures proposed by WHO.

**Context:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) list of 10 global health threats which demand immediate attention from WHO and health partners in 2019 has been released. According to the WHO, unless steps are taken to address these threats millions of lives are at risk.

Here are the 10 health issues that demand urgent attention from WHO and partners in 2019.

- Air pollution and climate change.
- Non-communicable diseases.
- Global influenza pandemic.
- Fragile and vulnerable settings: More than 22% of the world population lives in places where protracted crisis (through a combination of challenges such as drought, famine, conflict and population displacement) and weak health services leave people without access to basic care.
- Antimicrobial resistance.
- Ebola and other high-threat pathogens.
- Weak primary health care.

### Lymphatic filariasis:

- Caused by infection with parasitic worms living in the lymphatic system. The larval stages of the parasite (microfilaria) circulate in the blood and are transmitted from person to person by mosquitoes.
- Manifestation of the disease after infection takes time and can result in an altered lymphatic system, causing abnormal enlargement of body parts, and leading to severe disability and social stigmatization of those affected.
- The parasites are transmitted by four main types of mosquitoes: Culex, Mansonia, Anopheles and Aedes.

8. Vaccine hesitancy: Vaccination is one of the most cost-effective ways of avoiding disease, however, the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines, threatens to reverse progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases.
9. Dengue
10. HIV

**Steps to address them:**

- WHO's new 5-year strategic plan, the 13th General Programme of Work, aims to address these and other threats.
- Its plan focuses on a triple billion target that includes ensuring 1 billion more people benefit from access to universal health coverage, 1 billion more people being protected from health emergencies and 1 billion more people enjoy better health and well-being.

Sources: the hindu.

## 15. NEGLECTED DISEASES

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** What are neglected tropical diseases?
- **For Mains:** Neglected diseases- spread, vulnerable sections, concerns, measures and the need for international cooperation.

**Context:** A new report has found that the *Indian government is the fourth largest funder for research and development into neglected tropical diseases*.

- The findings come from an analysis of global investment into research and development (R&D) on new products for neglected diseases in developing countries, as part of the eleventh annual G-Finder survey.
- The survey looks at funding for a number of diseases like trachoma, buruli ulcer, rheumatic fever, meningitis, leptospirosis and also for HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB, dengue, hepatitis C and leprosy.
- It examines funding from government sources, philanthropies, private sector funding and other types of organisations.

**Key findings of the report:**

1. With USD 1,595 million, *the US government is the largest funder*.
2. The Indian government, which contributes USD 72 million, comes 4<sup>th</sup>.
3. Among other low and middle income countries (LMICs), India is credited with being responsible for the "lion's share" of public funding.
4. India also records the strongest global growth in public funding for R&D on neglected diseases since 2009.

**Need for and significance of R&D into neglected tropical diseases:**

- The need for drugs for neglected diseases and also for drug R&D is high in India. The country tops the number of cases for 11 different neglected tropical diseases such as lymphatic filariasis, visceral leishmaniasis, trachoma, tapeworm, roundworm, hookworm, whipworm, dengue and leprosy.
- In 2017, there were around 2.8 million new cases of TB, which brought down the global decline of TB. One third of all TB deaths worldwide happen in India.

**Recent policies on neglected diseases research in India:**

- **The National Health Policy (2017)** sets an ambition to stimulate innovation to meet health needs and ensure that new drugs are affordable for those who need them most, but it does not specifically tackle neglected diseases.
- **The National Policy on Treatment of Rare Diseases (2018)** includes infectious tropical diseases and identifies a need to support research on treatments for rare diseases. It has not yet prioritised diseases and areas for research funding or how innovation would be supported.

**What's missing?**

- **A comprehensive policy** to foster research and innovation in drug discovery, diagnostics, and vaccine development in neglected tropical diseases is lacking.
- While political intent and will are expressed in a few, **clear operational plans and funding mechanisms are not specified**. Consequently, follow-up action is patchy or absent.
- **No institutional mechanism exists at a national level** to identify gaps in neglected diseases research, set priorities, liaise with research institutions, or monitor research output. There is often no

coordination between the various funding and research bodies to prioritise the research agenda and minimise duplication.

#### Way ahead:

- A unified programme on neglected diseases encompassing research and elimination measures is likely to have a greater impact in prioritising the matter in the health agenda and streamlining efforts towards disease elimination.
- Creating an enabling environment for research and innovation will be crucial if India is to achieve the target set in **sustainable development goal 3.3** to end epidemics of neglected tropical diseases by 2030.

#### Why are some tropical diseases called “neglected”?

- The people who are most affected by these diseases are often the poorest populations, living in remote, rural areas, urban slums or conflict zones.
- Neglected tropical diseases persist under conditions of poverty and are concentrated almost exclusively in impoverished populations in the developing world.

#### Challenges and concerns:

1. Lacking a strong political voice, people affected by these tropical diseases have a low profile and status in public health priorities.
2. Lack of reliable statistics and unpronounceable names of diseases have all hampered efforts to bring them out of the shadows.
3. Neglected tropical diseases affect more than 1 billion people, primarily poor populations living in tropical and subtropical climates.
4. They are frequently clustered together geographically and individuals are often afflicted with more than one parasite or infection. More than 70% of countries and territories that report the presence of neglected tropical diseases are low-income or lower middle-income economies.

#### Spread and control:

- Infections are caused by unsafe water, poor housing conditions and poor sanitation. Children are the most vulnerable to these diseases, which kill, impair or permanently disable millions of people every year, often resulting in life-long physical pain and social stigmatization.
- Many neglected tropical diseases can be prevented, eliminated or even eradicated with improved access to existing safe and cost-effective tools. Control relies on simple interventions that can be carried out by non-specialists — for example schoolteachers, village heads and local volunteers — in community-based preventive action.

Sources: the hindu.

## 16. ZEARALENONE IN CEREALS

#### What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains: Zearalenone- what is it? effects on health and measures needed to limit its usage.**

#### What is it?

- Zearalenone is a **fungal toxin** infesting cereals such as wheat, maize and barley. It attacks crops while they are growing, but can also develop when cereals are stored without being dried fully.

#### Why in News?

- While numerous studies document this toxin in cereals across the world, no data existed for India until now. This month, a Journal of Food Science study detected zearalenone in wheat, rice, corn and oats from markets in Uttar Pradesh.

#### Are there any guidelines on its usage?

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India does not impose maximum limits for zearalenone, though the European Union (EU) does.

#### Why worry about this?

- Fungal toxins are commonly found in food, and can be a public health concern. **India regulates the levels of some of these, including aflatoxin, deoxynivalenol, ergot and patulin.** The first three infest cereals, while patulin is found in apples. Each of these toxins has been associated with disease outbreaks.

- For example, in 1974, a hepatitis outbreak in Rajasthan and Gujarat, which made 398 people sick and killed 106, was linked to aflatoxin in maize. Meanwhile, chronic aflatoxin consumption has been shown to cause liver cancer.
- ***Given this, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies aflatoxin as a Group 1 carcinogen***, meaning there is enough evidence for its carcinogenicity.
- In zearalenone's case, there is no strong evidence of toxicity in humans so far, though several research groups are investigating. As a result, ***the IARC classifies it as a Group 3 carcinogen, which means evidence is not sufficient for an evaluation yet.***

#### **How Zearalenone affects?**

- Zearalenone behaves like oestrogen, the female sex hormone, and could cause endocrine disturbances in humans. Its nasty effects in animals, such as pigs, are documented.
- When fed with mouldy corn, pigs develop inflamed vaginas, infertility and other symptoms. This is why countries like Brazil regulate zearalenone levels in animal feed. In humans, the data are fuzzier.

#### **What next?**

- More data are needed from cereals in other States, and from other storage conditions, before India decides to set limits.
- Since zearalenone favours cool climates, such contamination could be limited to a few States.
- Also, strong epidemiological data linking human zearalenone levels with diseases such as breast cancer are important.
- The latest findings are an excellent starting point, since nothing was known about the chemical in India so far. It is time to build upon it.

Sources: the hindu.

## **17. WORLD MALARIA REPORT OF 2018**

#### **What to study?**

- ***For Prelims and Mains: Highlights of the report, efforts by India to control the spread of the disease and DAMaN initiative.***

**Context:** As per ***World Health Organisation's World Malaria Report of 2018***, India is the only country among the 11 highest-burden countries that saw substantial progress in reducing disease burden: it saw a 24% decrease in 2017 compared to 2016.

#### **Significance:**

- This shows that India has assumed a leadership role in advancing global efforts to end malaria.
- The country's success provides hope to the other highest-burden countries to tackle malaria head-on.

#### **India's efforts in this regard:**

- India's progress in fighting malaria is an outcome of concerted efforts to ensure that its malaria programme is country-owned and country-led, even as it is in alignment with globally accepted strategies.
- At the East Asia Summit in 2015, ***India pledged to eliminate the disease by 2030***. Following this public declaration, India launched ***the five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination***. This marked a shift in focus from malaria "control" to "elimination". The plan provides a roadmap to achieve the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.

#### **Way ahead:**

- The plan requires more than ₹10,000 crore. Adequate investment combined with coordinated action between governments, civil society and philanthropic donors is imperative to achieve this goal. Since health is a State subject, State governments across the country shoulder a special responsibility in tackling the disease.

#### **Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative:**

- Among states, ***Odisha's Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative*** is significant.
- ***The initiative aims to*** deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State. The initiative has in-built innovative strategies to combat asymptomatic malaria.
- ***The programme is jointly implemented by*** Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Malaria Research (ICMR-NIMR), National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), Odisha and Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV).

**(Q)** The World Malaria Report 2018 of the World Health Organisation notes that India's record offers great promise in the quest to cut the number of new cases and deaths globally. Critically Analyze.

## 18. JAN SHIKSHAN SANSTHANS (JSS)

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains:** About Jan Shikshan Sansthans (JSS)- objectives, functions and significance.

**Context:** The government has unveiled new **guidelines for Jan Shikshan Sansthans (JSS)** aligning them to the **National Skills Qualification Framework** with an aim to providing standardised training across sectors.

**New guidelines:**

- Alignment of JSS course and curriculum with National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) to standardize training.
- Decentralization of powers for JSSs by providing accountability and independence to district administration.
- To identify and promote traditional skills in the district through skilling / upskilling.
- Evidence-based assessment system.
- Easy Online certification.
- Linking JSS to Public Finance Management system to maintain transparency and accountability of the ecosystem.
- Creating livelihood linkages.
- Training of Trainers to develop the capacity through National Skills Training Institutes.

**About Jan Shikshan Sansthans (JSS):**

- Formerly under the Ministry of Human Resources Development, **Jan Shikshan Santhan was transferred to the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship in 2018.**
- **Jan Shikshan Sansthans (JSS) were established to provide vocational training** to non-literate, neo-literate, as well as school dropouts by identifying skills as would have a market in the region of their establishment.

Sources: pib.

**(Q)** Discuss the recently released guidelines to re-energize and reinvigorate the Jan Shikshan Sansthans.

## 19. 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:** The Union Human Resources Development Ministry has signed an agreement with **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** for India's Participation in Programme for International Student Assessment- PISA 2021.

- The students will be selected by PISA through random sampling. **The schools run by Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and schools in the UT of Chandigarh would be participating.**

**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.**

Sources: pib.

## **20. NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES**

### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) — mainly cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer — **continue to be the top killers in the South-East Asia Region**, claiming 8.5 million lives each year, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

### **Background:**

- Containing the NCDs has been listed by the WHO as **its health goal for this year along** with reducing mortality related to air pollution and climate change, global influenza pandemic etc.

### **Key observations:**

1. Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease, are collectively responsible for over 70% of all deaths worldwide, or 41 million people. These include 15 million people dying prematurely, aged between 30 and 69.
2. One third of these deaths are premature and occur before the age of 70, affecting economically productive individuals.
3. The four 'major' NCDs are caused, to a large extent, by four modifiable behavioural risk factors: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity and harmful use of alcohol.
4. The NCDs disproportionately affect the poor, impoverish families, and place a growing burden on health care systems.

### **What needs to be done?**

- Consuming fibre and whole grains can reduce health risks from non-communicable diseases such as heart disease. Eating fibre-rich foods reduces the incidence of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and colorectal cancer by 16% to 24%.
- A higher fibre intake is also associated with lower bodyweight, systolic blood pressure and total cholesterol when compared with lower intake.
- Doctors also recommend — eat less and enjoy your food by eating slowly, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, avoid oversized portions which causes weight gain, at least half of your grains should be whole grains, limit consumption of food high in trans fats.

### **What are NCDs?**

- Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), also known as **chronic diseases**, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors.
- **The main types of NCDs** are cardiovascular diseases (like heart attacks and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes.

### **What are the socioeconomic impacts of NCDs?**

- NCDs threaten progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes **a target of reducing premature deaths from NCDs by one-third by 2030.**

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

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) India is in the midst of an epidemiological transition, whereby poverty-linked infectious, maternal and nutritional diseases exist in conjunction with non-communicable chronic illnesses. Analyse the causes and trends in spread of non-communicable diseases and their risk factors.

## 21. NEW DELHI SUPERBUG GENE REACHES THE ARCTIC

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** What are superbugs, brief overview of known superbugs.
- **For Mains:** MDR- causes, concerns and solutions.

**Context:** In a significant find in the global spread of multi-drug resistant (MDR) bacteria, scientists have found a “superbug” gene — first detected in over a decade back — in one of the last “pristine” places on Earth that is some 12,870 km away.

- **Soil samples taken in Svalbard** — a Norwegian archipelago between mainland Norway and the North Pole — have now confirmed the spread of blaNDM-1 (called New Delhi Metallo-beta-lactamase-1) into the High Arctic.
- Carried in the gut of animals and people, **blaNDM-1 and other ARGs were found in Arctic soils** that were likely spread through the faecal matter of birds, other wildlife and human visitors to the area.

### **What is a superbug?**

- A superbug, also called **multi-resistant**, is a bacterium that carries several resistance genes. These are resistant to multiple antibiotics and are able to survive even after exposure to one or more antibiotics.

### **What causes them to mutate like that?**

- Like any living organism, bacteria can mutate as they multiply. Also like any living organism, bacteria have a strong evolutionary drive to survive.
- So, over time, a select few will mutate in particular ways that make them resistant to antibiotics.
- Then, when antibiotics are introduced, only the bacteria that can resist that treatment can survive to multiply further, proliferating the line of drug-resistant bugs.

### **Why is Antibiotic Resistance a Big Deal?**

- The discovery of antibiotics less than a century ago was a turning point in public health that has saved countless lives. Although antibiotic resistance develops naturally with normal bacterial mutation, humans are speeding it up by using antibiotics improperly.
- According to a research, now, 2 million people a year in the US develop antibiotic-resistant infections, and 23,000 of them die of those infections.

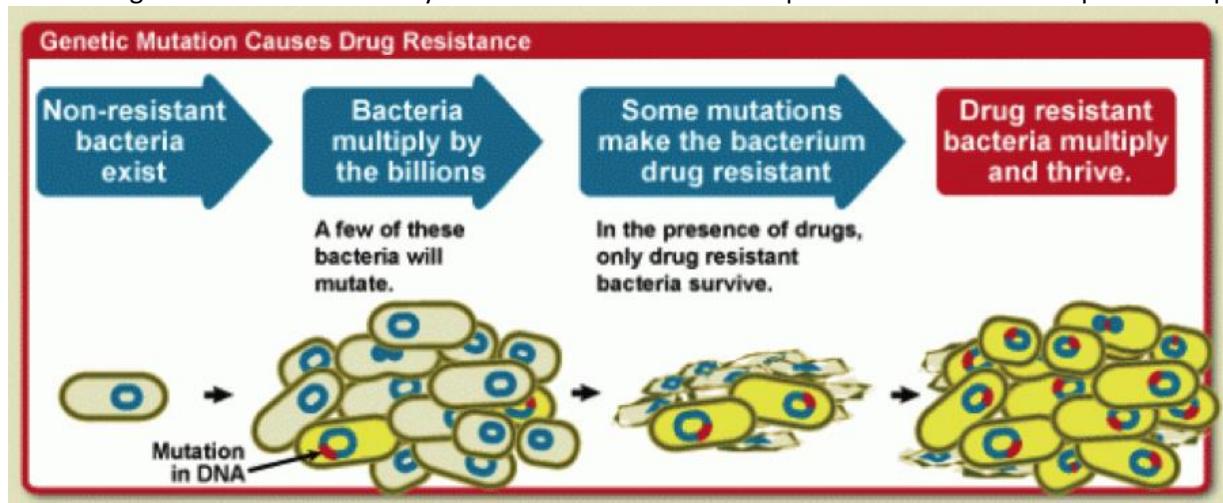
### **Why is the medical community worried?**

- Basically, superbugs are becoming more powerful and widespread than ever. Medical experts are afraid that we’re one step away from deadly, untreatable infections, since the mcr-1 E.coli is resistant to that last-resort antibiotic Colistin. Antibiotic-resistance is passed relatively easily from one bacteria to the next, since it is transmitted by way of loose genetic material that most bacteria have in common.
- **The World Health Organization (WHO) is afraid of a post-antibiotic world, where loads of bacteria are superbugs.** Already, infections like tuberculosis, gonorrhea, and pneumonia are becoming harder to treat with typical antibiotics.

### **What Can We Do?**

- First step would be to limit antibiotic use. If a patient has a virus, for instance, an antibiotic won’t work, so doctors shouldn’t prescribe antibiotics even if the patient insists.

- And when patients do need antibiotics, it's important to make sure they take the full course to kill off every last infection-causing germ. Otherwise the strong survive, mutate, and spread. As a society, curbing antibiotic use in healthy animals used in human food production is another important step.



Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest health challenges of 21st century. Examine why. Also discuss the threat posed in this regard by gut bacteria?

## 22. INSTITUTES OF EMINENCE SCHEME

### What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains: Institutes of Eminence Scheme- features and significance.**

**Context:** The University Grants Commission has deferred a decision on which institutions should be granted the prestigious **Institutes of Eminence** tag as an expert committee has recommended more names than the government scheme allowed for.

### Background:

- The empowered expert committee headed by former Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalswami had initially recommended 11 institutions for the tag in July 2018. In December, the committee recommended 19 more names, taking the total list to 30.

### Institutions of Eminence scheme:

1. The institutes of eminence scheme **under the Union human resource development (HRD) ministry** aims to project Indian institutes to global recognition.
2. The selected institutes will enjoy **complete academic and administrative autonomy**.
3. **The government will run 10 of these** and they will receive special funding.
4. **The selection shall be made** through challenge method mode by the Empowered Expert Committee constituted for the purpose.
5. **Eligibility:** Only higher education institutions currently placed in the top 500 of global rankings or top 50 of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) are eligible to apply for the eminence tag.
6. **The private Institutions of Eminence can also come up as greenfield ventures** provided the sponsoring organisation submits a convincing perspective plan for 15 years.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The union government is seeking to change the bad situation in higher education sector by establishing world-class “institutions of eminence” around the country. How can India build such institutions? What should be the nature of these institutions? Examine.

## 23. RAJASTHAN ZIKA STRAIN IS ENDEMIC TO ASIA

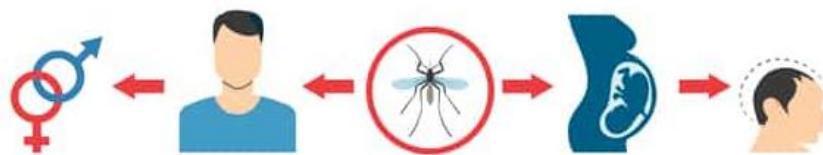
### What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains: Zika- virus, symptoms and spread, Is India prepared to face such outbreaks?**

**Context:** According to a recent study by **National Institute of Virology**, Zika virus that infected 159 people in an outbreak in Rajasthan last year, could have been circulating in India for several years and is endemic to Asia.

# THE ZIKA VIRUS

Virus is transmitted by Aedes aegypti mosquito, the same mosquito that transmits dengue and chikungunya. Its name comes from the Zika forest of Uganda, where the virus was first isolated in 1947.



It can be transmitted through sexual interactions as well.

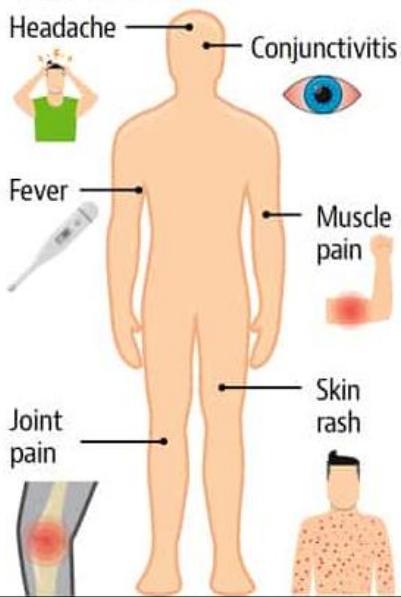
In pregnant women, Zika can cause birth defects such as microcephaly - unusually small heads - and other brain abnormalities in babies. The infection can also cause Guillain-Barre syndrome, a rare neurological disorder that causes paralysis.



## THE ZIKA VIRUS

There is no treatment or vaccine for the Zika infection.

## SYMPTOMS



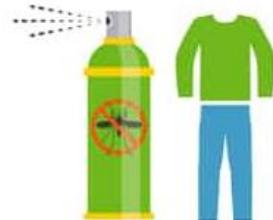
## TREATMENT

- Call a doctor
- Take medications
- Take rest
- Drink water



## PREVENTION

- Use insect repellent
- Cover bed
- Use mosquito net
- Wear long sleeve shirts



**WHO called for a public health emergency in January 2016, when the infection spread to many countries. The virus is now threatening India.**

### What's the concern now?

- The finding that the outbreak was caused by an **endemic virus is quite important**. It suggests that people in the region may have been previously exposed to the virus, building herd immunity that may limit future outbreaks. It also states that the strain of virus found in India is different from that found in Brazil.
- While this is good news, because it implies that a portion of the population could be immune, it could also mean that **Zika-related birth defects such as microcephaly were occurring even before the virus was first detected in India**.

### Why India should be worried about Zika outbreak?

- Limited knowledge about epidemiological characteristics of virus and its interaction with other arboviruses, such as dengue.
- Limited lab capacity and cross reactivity of diagnostic flavivirus antibody assays.
- Absence of population immunity. High mobility of population and cross-border movement of travellers with infections.
- Favourable breeding conditions for Aedes mosquitoes and our inability to control mosquito breeding in the past for dengue.
- Poor surveillance system.
- Underfunded and inadequate infrastructure in healthcare system in India resulting in inadequate outbreak control response.

### Need of the hour:

1. Enhanced and strengthened surveillance.
2. Establish rapid response teams.
3. Enhanced risk communications.
4. Establish access to a qualified diagnostic laboratory.

5. Regular vector surveillance and integrated vector management (IVM).
6. Travel measures.
7. Health education for community mobilization.
8. Inter-sector convergence and Co-ordination with International agencies.

**Is India prepared for disease outbreaks?**

- Over the last decade, the Indian government has strengthened the surveillance and response system for catching disease outbreaks early.
- India may have improved its disease surveillance network, but reducing and limiting disease outbreaks requires several other measures, many lying outside the scope of the healthcare system.

**Challenges ahead for India:**

- Can the country bring the large number of private practitioners into the disease surveillance network?
- Will the government increase its investment on healthcare, and bring them on a par with countries that have a good healthcare system?
- Will India improve its ability to quickly develop vaccines from scratch?
- Will research institutions and public health officials improve their health risk communication?

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Write a note on the Zika virus outbreak, its causes, consequences and the role of the government in dealing with this outbreak.

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

## 1. 10% RESERVATION FOR ECONOMICALLY WEAK AMONG UPPER CASTE

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Proposed amendments and the population covered.
- For Mains: Issues and controversy over reservation, need, concerns, challenges and views of Supreme Court.

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved a proposal for introduction of the **Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty- Fourth Amendment) Bill, extending 10% quota to “the economically weaker sections in the general category who are not covered by any of the existing schemes of reservation”.**

- The bill is designed to **amend the Constitution to extend 10% reservation in direct recruitment in government jobs and for admission in higher educational institutions to “economically weaker” sections** among all castes and communities, Christians and Muslims included, who are not eligible under the existing quotas.

**The proposed amendment Bill will define Economically Weaker Section (EWS) as one having:**

- Annual household income below Rs 8 lakh.
- Agriculture land below 5 acres.
- Residential house below 1000 sqft.
- Residential plot below 100 yards in notified municipality.
- Residential plot below 200 yards in non-notified municipality area.

**What would it take for the quota to become reality?**

- It will need an amendment of **Articles 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth) and 16 (equality of opportunity in matters of public employment)** of the Constitution.
- The amendment will have to be **ratified in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, by at least two thirds of members present and voting, and by the legislatures of not less than half the states.**

**Implications:**

- The 10% reservation will be in addition to the existing cap of 50% reservation for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes, taking total reservation to 60%. The quota targets the poor among the upper castes.
- This will be over and above 50% mandated by Constitution and hence the need for Constitution amendment Bill.

### **Supreme Court in Indira Sawhney case:**

- The proposed law would face roadblocks if challenged in the Supreme Court.
- A nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in the **Indira Sawhney case of 1992** specifically answered the question “whether backward classes can be identified only and exclusively with reference to the economic criterion.”
- The constitution bench had categorically ruled that **a backward class cannot be determined only and exclusively with reference to economic criterion**. The bench had held that economic criterion may be a consideration or basis along with, and in addition to, social backwardness, but it can never be the sole criterion.
- The bench in its judgement declared **50% quota as the rule unless extraordinary situations “inherent in the great diversity of this country and the people” happen**. Even then, the court stated that extreme caution is to be exercised and a special case should be made out.

Sources: the hindu.

## **2. NATIONAL POLICY ON DOMESTIC WORKERS**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Key features of the proposed National Policy on Domestic Workers, International Labour Organisation's Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.**
- **For Mains: Need for a policy and guidelines on this, vulnerability and challenges faced by domestic workers, international experience.**

**Context:** In a bid to give recognition to domestic workers besides making them eligible for minimum wages, social security and safe working conditions, **labour ministry is drafting the national policy**.

### **There is a need for the policy due to the following reasons:**

- Employer-dominated, domestic work industry is characterised by low, stagnant wage rates. Wages are particularly low for Bengali and Adivasi workers.
- Irregular payment of wages by employer.
- Extraction of more work than agreed upon at the start of employment.
- Practice of arbitrarily reducing wages.
- Private power of regulation enjoyed by the employer.
- Private nature of regulation has allowed the employer to exercise quasi-magisterial powers over the domestic worker in India.
- Workers' attempts to renegotiate their terms of work or to leave such employment are outbid by verbal, and often, physical assaults by employers.
- Domestic workers are on an almost absolute risk of unemployment or criminalisation when they try to obtain their dues.

### **Proposed national policy for domestic workers:**

- **Its aim** is to protect the domestic workers from abuse, harassment, violence and guarantee them rights in the matter of social security and minimum wages. The policy also includes social security cover and provisions against sexual harassment and bonded labour.
- **It is a national policy for** all kinds of household helps, under which payment of wages will be made to the board under fixed slab rates and the central board/trust will be managed by all stakeholders.
- The policy intends to set up **an institutional mechanism** to social security cover, fair terms of employment, grievance redressal and dispute resolution. **It provides for recognising domestic workers as a worker with the right to register themselves with state labour department or any other suitable mechanism.**
- **The policy will also promote the rights** for them to organise and form their own unions/associations and affiliate with other unions/associations. It will also provide for **model contract of employment with well-defined period of work and rest**.
- **It also aims to regulate the recruitment and placement agencies** by respective governments through formulation of a policy. It will also have **a tripartite implementation committee at centre, state and district levels**.
- It will also **clearly define various terms** such as part time workers, full time workers, live in workers, employers and private placement agencies.

Sources: et.

**(Q)** The proposed national policy for domestic workers fails to achieve the purpose it is designed for. Critically examine.

### 3. HUNAR HAATS

#### What to study?

- **For Prelims:** Key facts related to Hunar Haats.
- **For Mains:** Significance and potential of Hunar Haats.

**Context:** Hunar Haat is organised by Minority Affairs Ministry

#### Hunar Haats:

- Hunar Haats are **organised by Ministry of Minority Affairs under USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills & Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme.**
- The **USTTAD scheme** aims at preserving & promoting the rich heritage of the traditional arts & crafts of the Minority communities. This is one of the flagship programmes of the Ministry.

#### Significance of Hunar Haats:

- Hunar Haats have become a successful mission to provide employment and income generation opportunities with platforms for marketing the products of master artisans, craftsmen and culinary experts belonging to the minority communities.
- It envisages at boosting the skill of craftsmen, weavers and artisans who are already engaged in the traditional ancestral work.

Sources: [toi](#).

### 4. WOMEN OF INDIA FESTIVAL 2016

#### What to study?

- **For Prelims:** Key facts related to the festival.
- **For Mains:** Significance and potential of the festival, organic farming- significance, challenges and potential.

**Context:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development is organising the three-day 6th 'Women of India Organic Festival' in Chandigarh, to celebrate and promote women farmers and entrepreneurs in the organic sector from the remotest parts of India.

#### Key facts:

- The Festival will offer on sale the biggest selection of organic products ranging from food, fabrics and furniture to wellness, personal care and solar products.
- It is being **organised and sponsored by the Union Ministry of Women & Child Development.**

#### Significance:

- This initiative is a move to benefit women entrepreneurs, and also actively promote organic food and products.
- The Women of India Festival is also intended to highlight the health and environmental advantages of organic goods, provide a platform for women engaged in this economy and encourage the development of sustainable and easily accessible sales outlets for organic producers from remote areas.

On 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019, Smt. Maneka Sanjay Gandhi, Union Minister for Women and Child Development will inaugurate National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) Mohali Regional Centre.

#### National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) –

- It is a premier organization devoted to promotion of voluntary action research, training and documentation in the overall domain of women and child development.
- It was established in New Delhi in 1966 under Societies Registration Act of 1860.
- It functions under the aegis of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- Regional Centres at Guwahati (1978), Bangalore (1980), Lucknow (1982) and Indore (2001)
- Institute's expertise and performance was recognized by UNICEF in 1985 when it awarded the Maurice Pate Award for its outstanding contribution in the field of Child Development.

Sources: [the hindu](#) and [PIB](#).

## 5. PROJECT REWEAVE

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Project ReWeave- features, significance and potential.

**Context:** Microsoft India has launched a new e-commerce platform 're-weave.in' under project ReWeave to help handloom weavers.

### Significance of the e-commerce platform:

- Connect artisans to the buyers directly enabling them to expand to newer customers and markets.
- Provide a platform to showcase signature collections created by the weaver communities, showcase traditional designs and products created from natural dyes to a broad set of customers.
- Aid in weavers in increasing their income and earning a sustainable livelihood while also reviving traditional forgotten Indian art.

### About Project ReWeave:

- Initiated by Microsoft India (R&D) Pvt. Limited in 2016 as part of its Philanthropies efforts.
- Aim: To revive the handloom weaving ecosystem in India.
- Features: Under the initiative, Microsoft is working closely with NGO partner, Chaitanya Bharathi to provide infrastructure, financing and marketing support to help weaver families keep their weaving traditions alive by sustaining livelihoods.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) E-commerce has opened new vistas of opportunity for micro and small enterprises and women entrepreneurs in India. Comment.

## 6. NATIONAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME (NSAP)

### What to study?

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

**Context:** The Rural Development Ministry has proposed to bring in the following changes in monthly pensions under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP):

1. For the elderly poor, disabled and widows pensions are to be increased from the current ₹200 to ₹800.
2. For those above the age of 80, the proposal is to increase the pension from ₹500 to ₹1,200 a month.

### What next?

- The Ministry has submitted the proposal, which would have an additional annual cost implication of ₹18,000 crore, to the Finance Ministry to be considered for inclusion in the interim Budget to be presented on February 1.

### About National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP):

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

### Presently NSAP comprises of five schemes, namely:

1. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS).
2. Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS).
3. Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS).
4. National Family Benefit Scheme NFBS).
5. Annapurna

Sources: pib.

## 7. NATIONAL GIRL CHILD DAY (NGCD)

### What to study?

- For Prelims: About NGCD- objectives, theme and significance, BBBP-key features.
- For Mains: BBBP significance, challenges to the development of girl child in the country, measures needed.

**What?** National Girl Child Day (NGCD) was observed on 24<sup>th</sup> January with objectives of generating awareness on the issue of declining **Child Sex Ratio (CSR)** and create a positive environment around valuing the girl child.

- The programme also observed **anniversary of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme**. National Girl Child Day was first initiated in 2008.

**Theme:** "Empowering Girls for a Brighter Tomorrow".

### Objectives:

1. To increase the consciousness of the people and offer new opportunities to the girl child in the society.
2. To remove all the inequalities faced by the girl child.
3. To ensure that the girl child should get all their human rights, respect and value in the country.
4. To work regarding gender discrimination, to educate people.

### About BBBP:

- **Launch and expansion:** Launched in January, 2015 at Panipat in Haryana. All India Expansion of BBBP covering all 640 districts (as per Census 2011) was launched at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan on 8th March 2018.
- **It is a tri-ministerial effort** of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.
- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** with 100% financial assistance for District level component and the fund are directly released to the DC/DM's account for smooth operation of the Scheme.
- **Main Objective of the scheme** is to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of empowerment of women over a life-cycle continuum. The specific objectives of the scheme include preventing gender biased sex selective elimination; ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.

### Implementation:

1. At the Central level, Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal ministry for the programme and National Task Force headed by Secretary, MWCD with the representation of Partner Ministry and other nominated members.
2. At the State level, Chief Secretaries heads the State Task Force (STF) with representation of Department of WCD, Health and Education to monitor the implementation of the scheme.
3. The District Collectors/Deputy Commissioners (DCs) lead and coordinate action of all departments for implementation of BBBP at the District level.

Sources: pib.

**(Q)** According to data from the 2011 Census, the number of children born every year is declining rapidly in India, but the slowdown is faster for baby girls as against baby boys. Examine the reasons and implications of this disturbing trend.

## 8. JIBAN SAMPARK PROJECT OF ODISHA

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the scheme, about PVTGs.

**Context:** Odisha has launched Jiban Sampark project for the welfare of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.

### Key features:

- The Project is being undertaken in association with UNICEF.
- It aims to generate awareness among Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Odisha on various development and welfare initiatives of State Government, especially on women and child welfare.
- The focus areas of the Project are skill development, empowering communities, cooperation and innovation among the groups.

### **About 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)'**

1. PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups. In 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs and declared 52 such groups, while in 1993 an additional 23 groups were added to the category, making it a total of 75 PVTGs out of 705 Scheduled Tribes, spread over 17 states and one Union Territory(UT), in the country (2011 census).
2. **Among the 75 listed PVTG's the highest number are found in Odisha (13)**, followed by Andhra Pradesh (12).

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Who are the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in India? Examine why they are classified as such and discuss their characteristics and social conditions.

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

## **1. NATIONAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT FESTIVAL 2019**

**Context:** National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 has begun, thereby beginning the celebration of the **National Youth Day 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.

The National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 will be conducted at three levels:

1. District Youth Parliament (DYP) at the district level.
2. State Youth Parliament (SYP) at the State Level.
3. National Youth Parliament (NYP) at the National Level.

The National Service Scheme and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan organizations will remain involved at different levels in its conduct and management.

### **Background:**

Source: PIB

#### **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.

#### **About 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.

#### **About Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan –**

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

## **2. NMCG OFFICIALS AND PARTNERS COME TOGETHER TO CONTRIBUTE TO CLEAN GANGA FUND**

- The officials and partners of National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) came together on one platform, to make personal donations to the Clean Ganga Fund on a voluntary basis.

### About Clean Ganga Fund –

- “Clean Ganga Fund (CGF)” is set up with voluntary contributions from residents of the country and Non-Resident Indian (NRIs) / Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and others.
- The Fund will have the objective of contributing to the national effort of cleaning of the river Ganga.
- Domestic donors to the Fund shall be eligible for tax benefits as applicable in the case of the Swachh Bharat Kosh.
- The Fund would be managed by a Trust to be headed by Finance Minister.
- The secretariat of the Trust will be set up in Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation under the Mission Director, Clean Ganga.

### Features of CGF:

- CGF will explore the possibility of setting up daughter funds in other jurisdictions/countries of high donor interest such as USA, UK, Singapore, UAE, etc. to enable tax benefits to donors in their respective jurisdictions.
- CGF will identify and fund specific projects which could be pilot projects, R&D projects, innovative projects or other focused projects.
- CGF will be subject to such audit as required by law as well as audit by any agency determined by Government.

The following broad activities will be financed from the Fund:

- a) Activities outlined under the ‘Namami Gange’ programme for cleaning of river Ganga.
- b) Control of non-point pollution from agricultural runoff, human defecation, cattle wallowing, etc.
- c) Setting up of waste treatment and disposal plants along the river around the cities.
- d) Conservation of the biotic diversity of the river.
- e) Community based activities to reduce polluting human interface with the river.
- f) Development of public amenities including activities such as Ghat redevelopment.
- g) Research and Development projects and innovative projects for new technology and processes for cleaning the river.
- h) Independent oversight through intensive monitoring and real time reporting.
- i) Any other activity as approved by the Trust.

### National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) –

- It was registered as a society on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011 under the Societies Registration Act 1860.
- It acted as implementation arm of National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), constituted under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986.
- NGRBA has since been dissolved with effect from the 7th October 2016, consequent to constitution of National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection and Management of River Ganga (referred as National Ganga Council).
- The Act envisages five-tier structure at national, state and district level to take measures for prevention, control and abatement of environmental pollution in river Ganga and to ensure continuous adequate flow of water so as to rejuvenate the river Ganga as below:
  1. National Ganga Council under the chairmanship of Hon’ble Prime Minister of India.
  2. Empowered Task Force (ETF) on river Ganga under chairmanship of Hon’ble Union Minister of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
  3. National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).
  4. State Ganga Committees, and
  5. District Ganga Committees in every specified district abutting river Ganga and its tributaries in the states.

Source: PIB

## 3. ‘SIZE INDIA’ PROJECT

### What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains: The project, objectives and significance, need for a standard size.**

**Context:** The Clothing Manufacturers Association of India (CMAI) will work with the Union Ministry of Textiles in the “Size India” project, which is expected to be launched next month.

- CMAI will conduct **a study across India to arrive at standard sizes.**

#### About 'Size India' project:

- The 'Size India' project will **help create a India-specific size chart for the textiles and garment industry.**
- **Aim:** To arrive at standard Indian sizes for apparels.
- **Significance:** The project will reduce overall prices and the consumers will stand to benefit from it.

#### Details of the project:

- Under the project, anthropometric data will be collected from 25,000 sample (with men and women in equal numbers) population in age group 15 to 65 years across six major cities.
- It will create database of measurements that will result in standardized size chart which is representative of Indian population and can be adopted by apparel industry.

#### Why have standard size?

Apparel retail is one of the important drivers of modern retail in India, with its total size estimated to be \$72 billion.

- Developed countries such as the U.S. and U.K. have standard sizes for apparels. Having standard sizes will reassure customers when they purchase a product, both online and at outlets, and will reduce wastages for the apparel manufacturers.
- **At present, large percentage of population face difficulty in finding clothes that fit them perfectly according to their body measurements.** This is mainly due to differences in anthropometric built of people in different geographical regions across the country.

Sources: the hindu.

**Topic:** Important aspects of governance, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

## 1. PARIVESH (PRO-ACTIVE AND RESPONSIVE FACILITATION BY INTERACTIVE, VIRTUOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SINGLE-WINDOW HUB)

#### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: **PARIVESH- key features and significance.**



**Context:** An ambitious web-based single-window system 'Parivesh' will be rolled-out at state levels by January 15, bringing an end to the clearance nightmare for entrepreneurs.

- The automated system for submission, clearance and monitoring has already been implemented at the Central level.

#### What is it?

- It is an environmental single window hub for Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ clearances.
- This Single-Window Integrated Environmental Management System has been developed in pursuance of the spirit of 'Digital India' initiated by the Prime Minister and capturing the essence of Minimum Government and Maximum Governance.

#### Key features:

- "PARIVESH" is a workflow based application, based on the concept of web architecture. **It has been rolled out for online submission, monitoring and management of proposals submitted by Project**

**Proponents to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC), as well as to the State Level Environmental Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAA).**

- It seeks **to give various types of clearances** (e.g. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and Coastal Regulation Zone Clearances) from Central, State and district-level authorities.
- **The system has been designed, developed and hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, with technical support from National Informatics Centre, (NIC).**
- **It provides** single registration and single sign-in for all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ), unique-ID for all types of clearances required for a particular project and a single Window interface for the proponent to submit applications for getting all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forests, Wildlife and CRZ clearances).

**Significance and benefits of the platform:**

- PARIVESH offers a framework to generate economic growth and strengthens Sustainable Development through e-Governance. With automatic highlighting of non-compliance by the system, PARIVESH helps in improving the overall performance and efficiency of the whole appraisal process.
- It also helps the processing authorities, as it has a Single Window System for Central, State and District level clearances.
- The facility of Geographic Information System (GIS) interface for the Appraisal Committee will help them in analyzing the proposal efficiently, automatic alerts (via SMS and emails) at important stages to the concerned officers, committee members and higher authorities to check the delays, if any.
- It also enables project proponents, citizens to view, track and interact with scrutiny officers, generates online clearance letters, online mailers and alerts to state functionaries in case of delays beyond stipulated time for processing of applications.

Sources: the hindu.

## 2. DEMOCRACY INDEX 2018

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Democracy Index 2018- features and performance of various countries, what is a flawed democracy?**
- **For Mains: Concerns expressed over India and measures needed to improve.**

**Context:** Democracy Index 2018 has been released. It is **released annually by The Economist**.

- **The EIU Democracy Index** provides a snapshot of the state of world democracy for 165 independent states and two territories.
- **The Democracy Index is based on five categories:** electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture.
- Based on their scores on 60 indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regime: full democracy; flawed democracy; hybrid regime; and authoritarian regime.

**Performance of India:**

- **India is ranked at 41 – a notch above last year.** It is still classified as a ‘flawed democracy’ according to the index. India achieved a score of 7.23 on the index to maintain its position – the same it did last year. This is the lowest ever score attributed to India in the index ever since its publication.
- **India ranks below the US (ranked 25th in the index) and other so called ‘flawed democracies’** like Italy, France, Botswana and South Africa.

**Flawed democracy:**

- The report defines a flawed democracy as nations that “have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected.”
- However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.”

Sources: BS.

### 3. WOMANIYA ON GEM



## Key Features



**End-to-end System**  
From vendor/buyer Registration to payment



**Registration authentication**  
through Aadhar, PAN, MCA 21.



**Highly Secure**  
Contract documents generated online and e-signed.



**Multiple procurement options**  
• Direct purchase  
• L1  
• Bidding  
• Reverse Auction



**Complete audit trail**  
From supply order to bill generation & payment in one place



**Multiple payment Options** like Banking, PFMS etc.



**Quick payment**  
within 10 days



**Market Page**  
view, search, filters, compare & add to cart



**Price comparison**  
with major e-commerce sites.



**Notifications**  
through emails and SMS.



**Training and call centre support**

#### What to study?

- **For Prelims:** About Womaniya, GeM- key facts related.
- **For Mains:** Significance of the initiative and GeM, need for such initiatives, how it helps in economic empowerment of women?

**What is it?** It is **an initiative launched by the Government eMarketplace (GeM)** to enable women entrepreneurs and self-help groups to sell different products at the platform.

#### Key features of the initiative:

- The initiative – Womaniya on GeM – seeks to **develop women entrepreneurship on the margins of society to achieve gender-inclusive economic growth**.
- The initiative would enable women entrepreneurs and women self-help groups to **sell handicrafts and handloom, jute and coir products, home décor and office furnishings, directly to various government ministries, departments and institutions**.

#### Significance and the need for such initiatives:

- Nearly 80% women-owned establishments in India are self-financed and **more than 60 percent of 8 million units are owned and led by women entrepreneurs from socially-challenged sections**.
- Since women tend to invest up to 90% of their earnings back in their families to provide better nutrition, health care and education to their children, **their economic empowerment is essential for poverty alleviation which would be made possible through Womaniya initiative**.
- Womaniya on GeM will address goals and objectives under **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**.

#### About GeM:

- It is **an online marketplace to facilitate procurement of goods and services by various Ministries and agencies of the Government**.
- **The platform offers online, end to end solution for procurement of commonly used goods and services** for all central government departments and state governments, public sector units and affiliated bodies.
- It aims to **enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement of goods and services and eliminate corruption**.

- Government e Marketplace is a **100% government owned company setup under the aegis of Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry** for procurement of common use goods and services by Government ministries, departments and CPSEs.

Sources: toi.

## 4. CHARTER OF PATIENTS' RIGHTS

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Highlights of the draft and the need for Charter of Patients' Rights.**

**Context:** The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA), a national platform working on health and healthcare services, urged the Ministry of Health to immediately implement **the Charter of Patients' Rights** and ensure the inclusion of the entire range of patients' rights without any dilution.

### **Background:**

- In August 2018, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare announced its plans to implement this Charter, which was placed in the public domain for inviting comments up to 30th September, 2018.
- Although nearly 4 months have elapsed since this declaration of intent, there seems to have been no further progress on finalisation and adoption of the charter.

### **Need of Charter of Patients' Rights:**

1. **Right to non-discrimination is an important right.** Every patient has the right to receive treatment without any discrimination based on his or her illnesses or conditions, including HIV status or other health condition, religion, caste, ethnicity or sexual orientation.
2. The charter assumes significance as **India does not have a dedicated regulator like other countries.** Existing regulations in the interest of patients and governing healthcare delivery systems are still on the anvil.

### **The draft Charter of Patients' Rights:**

It has been prepared by the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**.

- **The draft charter includes 17 rights** with description, inspired by international charters and guided by national level provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document.
- The proposed Charter draws upon all the existing relevant provisions, **thereby making them publicly known in a coherent manner.**

### **The charter also prescribes certain responsibilities that the patient must adhere to. These include:**

- Providing all required information to their doctor, without concealing relevant facts, so as to ensure a correct diagnosis and treatment.
- Patients are also expected to follow all instructions regarding appointment time, co-operate with hospital staff and fellow patients, avoid creating disturbance to other patients, and maintain cleanliness in the hospital.
- Patients should respect the dignity of the doctor and other hospital staff. Whatever the grievance may be, patient or caregivers should not resort to violence in any form.
- The patients should also take responsibility for their actions based on choices made regarding treatment options and in case they refuse treatment.

Sources: the hindu.

## 5. CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX 2018

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Performance of various countries in the corruption perception index.**
- **For Mains: Need for transparency, efforts by government.**

**Context:** Corruption Perception Index 2018 has been released.

- The index **ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople.**
- It uses a **scale of 0 to 100**, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

### **What is Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)?**

- It is a **composite index that draws from 12 surveys to rank nations around the globe.** It has become a benchmark gauge of perceptions of corruption and is used by analysts and investors.

- The index is also based on ***expert opinions of public sector corruption and takes note of range of factors*** like whether governmental leaders are held to account or go unpunished for corruption, the perceived prevalence of bribery, and whether public institutions respond to citizens' needs.

***The Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index make the following observations:***

- Denmark is the world least corrupt country*** scoring 88 out of 100 points. Denmark is followed by New Zealand and Finland.
- Somalia has been ranked last*** with a score of 10 behind South Sudan and Syria.
- More than two-thirds of evaluated countries scored below 50 points, while the average score remained at last year's level of only 43 points.
- For the first time the United States dropped out of the top 20 and it was ranked at 22nd rank.
- Along with Brazil, US was placed in the watch list by Transparency International.

***Corruption and the crisis of democracy:***

Cross analysis with global democracy data reveals ***a link between corruption and the health of democracies***.

- Full democracies score an average of 75 on the CPI; flawed democracies score an average of 49; hybrid regimes – which show elements of autocratic tendencies – score 35; autocratic regimes perform worst, with an average score of just 30 on the CPI.
- More generally, ***countries with high levels of corruption can be dangerous places for political opponents***. Practically all of the countries where political killings are ordered or condoned by the government are rated as highly corrupt on the CPI.

***Performance of India:***

- India's ranking increased from 81st in 2017 to 78 in 2018. India had slid from 79th rank in 2016.
- Since India gears up for general elections, there was a little significant movement in its CPI score, which moved from 40 in 2017 to 41 in 2018.
- In spite of spectacular public mobilisation in 2011, where citizens demanded the government to take action against corruption and advocated for the passage of the comprehensive Jan Lokpal bill, the efforts ultimately fizzled and fell flat, with little to no movement on the ground to build the specialist anti-corruption infrastructure required.

***To make real progress against corruption and strengthen democracy around the world, Transparency International calls on all governments to:***

- Strengthen the institutions responsible for maintaining checks and balances over political power, and ensure their ability to operate without intimidation.
- Close the implementation gap between anti-corruption legislation, practice and enforcement.
- Support civil society organisations which enhance political engagement and public oversight over government spending, particularly at the local level.
- Support a free and independent media, and ensure the safety of journalists and their ability to work without intimidation or harassment.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Corruption is a multi-faceted problem and requires a comprehensive strategy to deal with. Discuss the ways in which corruption can be reduced.

**Topic:** India and its neighbourhood- relations.

## 1. AGREEMENT ON PROHIBITION OF ATTACKS AGAINST NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS AND FACILITIES

***What to study?***

- For Prelims and Mains: The agreement, its significance and the need.***

***Context:*** Both India and Pakistan have exchanged their list of nuclear installations. The exchange was in accordance with the ***Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India***.

***Background:***

- The exchange is done each year on January 1***, under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities, also referred to as the ***Non-Nuclear Aggression Agreement***.

#### **About the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations:**

- The agreement, which was signed on December 31, 1988, and entered into force on January 27, 1991, provides that the two countries inform each other of nuclear installations and facilities to be covered under the pact on the first of January of every calendar year.

#### **Significance of the agreement:**

- The need for the agreement had been felt against the backdrop of Israel's 1981 bombing of Iraq's Osirak reactor near Baghdad. The strike, carried out by Israeli fighter jets over hostile airspace, had set Iraq's nuclear weapons programme significantly.
- The agreement had also come at a time of deep anxiety for Pakistan. Islamabad had been rattled by the memory of the 1972 defeat which dismembered the country, and military developments in India, such as Operation Brasstacks in 1987, which was a wargame exercise to prepare for deep strike offensive capabilities. Pakistan had at the time responded by putting at its nuclear installations and assets on 'high alert'.

Sources: the hindu.

## **2. INDIA – MYANMAR – THAILAND TRILATERAL HIGHWAY**

- The 1360 kms long India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is an initiative pertaining to India, Myanmar and Thailand. India is undertaking construction of two sections of the Trilateral Highway in Myanmar namely,
- Construction of 120.74 KM Kalewa-Yagyi road section, and
- Construction of 69 bridges along with the approach road on the 149.70 KM Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa (TKK) road section.
- Both these sections were awarded on Engineering, Procurement and Construction mode in May 2018 for Kalewa-Yagyi section and November 2017 for the TKK section. The scheduled time for completion of both the projects is three years from the date of commencement at the project site by the executing agency.
- The above mentioned projects are **funded by Government of India under Grant Assistance to the Government of Myanmar.**

#### **Other Information:**

- A **Motor Vehicles Agreement** along with protocols for regulating and facilitating movement of cargo and passenger vehicular traffic is **under inter-governmental negotiations between India, Myanmar and Thailand.**
- **Background:**
- The **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway** is a highway under construction under **India's Look East Policy** that will connect Moreh, India with Mae Sot, Thailand via Myanmar.
- The road will boost the trade and commerce in the **ASEAN-India Free Trade Area**, and with the rest of Southeast Asia. India has also proposed extending the highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

#### **Look-East Policy:**

- **India's Look East Policy** is an effort being made by the Indian government to **cultivate and strengthen economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia** in order to solidify its standing as a regional power.
- This policy also serves to position India as a **counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China** in the region.

#### **Look-East Connectivity:**

- **Commerce with South and East Asian nations accounts for almost 45% of India's foreign trade.** Myanmar and ASEAN nations are part of India's Look East Policy.

Source: PIB

## **3. GILGIT-BALTISTAN**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Location of Gilgit- Baltistan, eighth thousanders.**
- **For Mains: Controversy over the administration of the region, India's concerns, viable solution.**

**Context:** India has lodged a strong protest on recent *order by Supreme Court of Pakistan on the so-called "Gilgit-Baltistan" which is an interference in India's internal affairs.*

#### **What's the issue?**

- The Supreme Court of Pakistan has **extended its powers to Gilgit-Baltistan** regarding the area's constitutional status. The order states that changes to the **constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan will be determined through a referendum** which will be held within 14 days.
- It further read that until then, people living in the area and in Kashmir will be given fundamental human rights.

#### **What has India said?**

- Entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, which also includes the so-called 'Gilgit-Baltistan' has been, is and shall remain **an integral part of India**.
- Pakistan government or judiciary **have no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it**. Any action to alter the status of these occupied territories by Pakistan has no legal basis whatsoever.

#### **Where is Gilgit Baltistan located?**

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

#### **Recent developments:**

- Pakistan, in 2017, proposed to declare the strategic Gilgit-Baltistan region as its fifth Province, a move that may raise concerns in India as it borders the disputed Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

#### **Why it wants to declare as fifth province?**

- With a \$50 billion investment in the CPEC, **China would hardly want the territory through which the route passes to have a dubious status**.
- Pakistan wants to give the impression of freezing its territorial ambitions in J&K in order to concentrate on the CPEC and remove any misgivings that the Chinese may have on the status of GB.
- Declaration will also help Pakistan to **tap the fresh water resources in the region and to make use of it for agriculture, hydroelectricity generation etc.**
- Such move can also help **China to get increased access in region and counter India jointly with Pakistan**.

#### **Impediments ahead:**

- Gilgit- Baltistan is part of J&K and any such move would seriously damage Pakistan's Kashmir case. **Two UN resolutions** of August 13, 1948 and January 5, 1949 clearly established a link between GB and the Kashmir issue.
- Making the region its fifth province would thus **violate the Karachi Agreement — perhaps the only instrument that provides doubtful legal authority to Pakistan's administration of GB** — as well as the UN resolutions that would damage its position on the Kashmir issue.
- Any such move would also be **violative of the 1963 Pak-China Boundary Agreement** that calls for the sovereign authority to reopen negotiations with China "after the settlement of the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India" and of the 1972 **Simla Agreement** that mentions that "neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation"
- Pakistan would also have **to overcome the adverse reaction of Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC**. While it can manage the reaction of people in "AJK", its constituency in J&K would be seriously damaged. Hurriyat leaders have already made this known.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Why does Pakistan want to declare Gilgit-Baltistan as their fifth province? Examine the impediments that Pakistan faces in making Gilgit-Baltistan its fifth province.

## 4. INDUS WATERS TREATY

### What to study?

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

**Context:** Pak delegation has arrived in Delhi for Chenab under **Indus Waters Treaty project** inspection.

### Need:

- This tour is an obligation imposed on both the countries by the Indus Waters Treaty 1960 between India and Pakistan.
- Under the treaty, both the commissioners are mandated to inspect sites and works on both the sides of Indus basin in a block of five years.

### Is it the first time?

- No. Since signing of the treaty, a total of 118 such tours on both the sides have been undertaken by the commission.

### Indus Water treaty:

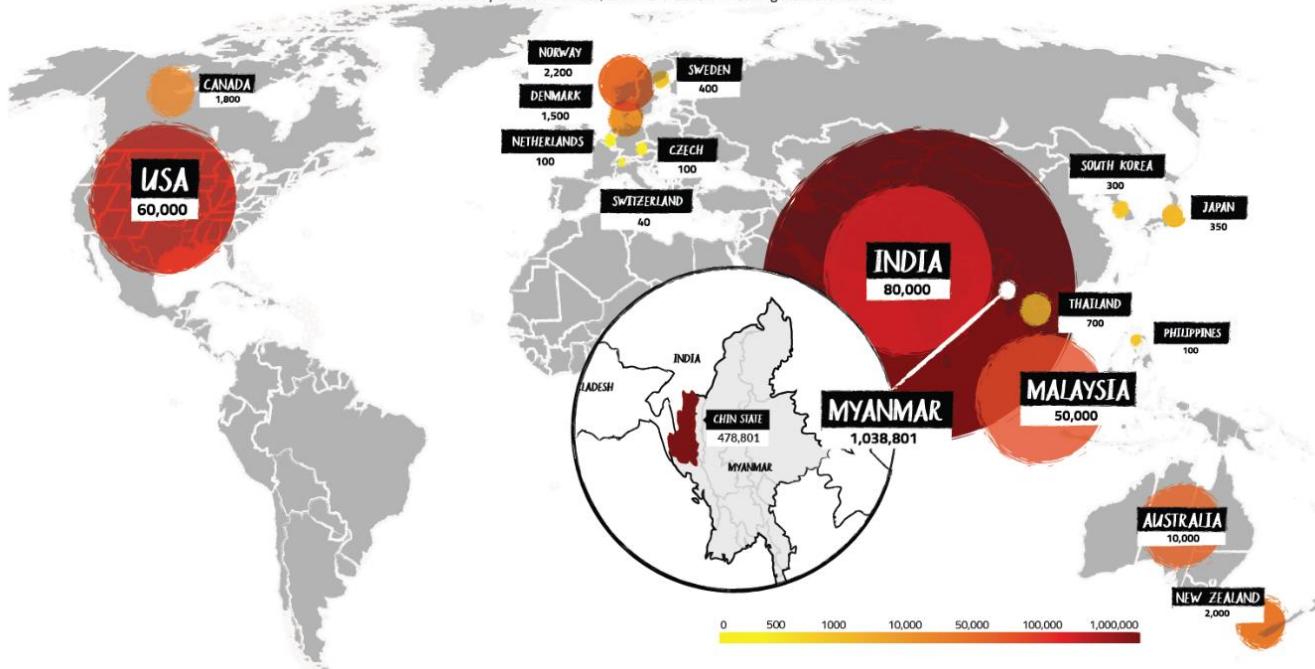
2. Signed in 1960 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and then Pakistan President Ayub Khan, the treaty allocates 80% of water from the six-river Indus water system to Pakistan.
3. Under the treaty, control over six north Indian rivers were divided between the two countries. **India got control over the rivers Beas, Ravi and Sutlej whereas Pakistan got control over Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.**
4. This is a unique treaty **involving a third party. It was brokered by the World Bank.**
5. **A Permanent Indus Commission** was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty. The Commission solves disputes arising over water sharing.
6. **The Treaty also provides arbitration mechanism** to solve disputes amicably.

Sources: the hindu.

## 5. CHIN REFUGEES

### ETHNIC CHIN PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

\*Data of estimated Chin migrants provided by the Alliance of Chin Refugees, sourced by Chin communities, church and leaders in residing areas and countries



- **Why in News?** Eight organisations of the Chakma community have submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Home Affairs seeking the inclusion of Chin refugees in India by further amending the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

### **Overview:**

- The Chins are one of the major ethnic groups in Myanmar, and are mostly Christians.
- The number of Chin refugees in India is at least 1.2 lakh. There are an estimated 100,000 Chins in Mizoram, which is 20% of the total Chin population in Myanmar. Manipur too has an unspecified number of Chins, who are ethnically related to the majority Mizo of Mizoram and the Kuki-Zomi groups in Manipur.

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

## **1. INDO – US 2+2 DIALOGUE**

**Content:** Recognizing their two countries are strategic partners, major and independent stakeholders in world affairs, the Ministers committed to work together on regional and global issues, including in bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral formats.

- The two sides further decided to establish secure communication between the Minister of External Affairs of India and the U.S. Secretary of State, and between the Minister of Defence of India and the U.S. Secretary of Defense, to help maintain regular high-level communication on emerging developments.

### **Strengthening the Defense and Security Partnership:**

- The Ministers welcomed the inclusion of India by the United States among the top tier of countries entitled to license-free exports, re-exports, and transfers under **License Exception Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1)** and committed to explore other means to support further expansion in two-way trade in defense manufacturing supply chain linkages.
- They welcomed the signing of a **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)**, facilitate access to advanced defense systems and enable India to optimally utilize its existing U.S. origin platforms.
- The Ministers announced their readiness to begin negotiations on an **Industrial Security Annex (ISA)** that would support closer defense industry cooperation and collaboration.
- After recognizing the recent bilateral engagements, the Ministers committed to start exchanges between the **S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT)** and the Indian Navy, underscoring the importance of deepening their maritime cooperation in the western Indian Ocean.
- Through the **Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTI)**, the ministers committed to prioritize co-production and co-development projects to pursue other avenues of defense innovation cooperation. Further they welcomed the conclusion of a Memorandum of Intent between the **S. Defense Innovation Unit (DIU)** and the **Indian Defense Innovation Organization – Innovation for Defence Excellence (DIO-iDEX)**.
- The Ministers announced to increase information-sharing efforts on known or suspected terrorists and to implement **UN Security Council Resolution 2396** on returning foreign terrorist fighters.

### **Partners in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond:**

- The Ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to a united, sovereign, democratic, inclusive, stable, prosperous, and peaceful Afghanistan. The two sides expressed their support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process.
- India welcomed the recent U.S. – North Korea summit. The two sides pledged to work together to counter North Korea's weapons of mass destruction programs and to hold accountable those countries that have supported them.
- The United States welcomed India's accession to the Australia Group, the Wassenaar Arrangement, and the **Missile Technology Control Regime** and reiterated its full support for India's immediate accession to the **Nuclear Suppliers Group**.

### **Promoting Prosperity and People-to People Ties:**

- Both countries committed to further expanding and balancing the trade and economic partnership consistent with their leaders' 2017 joint statement, including by facilitating trade, improving market access, and addressing issues of interest to both sides.
- Thus, both sides welcomed the ongoing exchanges between the Ministry of Commerce of India and the Office of the United States Trade Representative and hoped for mutually acceptable outcomes.

- Both sides looked forward to full implementation of the civil nuclear energy partnership and collaboration between **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** and **Westinghouse Electric Company** for the establishment of six nuclear power plants in India.
- Observing the strong ties of family, education, and business, and the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation that unite their people, the Ministers highlighted the unmatched people-to-people ties between their countries and recognized the benefits to both nations and the world from these ties, including the free flow of ideas and collaboration in health, space, oceans, and other areas of science and technology.
- The next 2+2 meeting is to be held in the United States in 2019.

Source: PIB

## 2. SINO-INDIAN DIGITAL COLLABORATION PLAZA

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of SIDCOP, about NASSCOM.**

**Context:** The Sino-Indian Digital Collaboration Plaza (SIDCOP) has been launched by the **National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM)** in association with Municipal Governments of Guiyang and Dalian.

**About the SIDCOP:**

- The initiative aims **to bring Indian IT companies and Chinese enterprises closer to each other on a single AI enabled platform**. This platform will be managed by a joint venture comprising of one Indian and Chinese company.
- The initiative aims **to encash the expertise of Indian IT enterprises in business transformation and operational optimization by using IT tools in complex business environments**.
- It offers **a boundary-less marketplace for Chinese enterprises in order to assist them in operational optimization and adopting industry best practices** in business solutions by connecting with Indian enterprises.

**National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM):**

- NASSCOM is **a not-for-profit industry association and is the apex body for the Indian IT-BPM industry**.
- The **membership of the NASSCOM is open for Companies registered in India** and are focused on providing IT-BPM products and services.
- NASSCOM aims to make sure that service quality and enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights have been properly implemented in the Indian software and BPM industry.

Sources: the hindu.

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

## 1. ASIA REASSURANCE INITIATIVE ACT OF 2018

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018- features, significance, concerns and implications and possible outcomes.**

**Context:** U.S. President Donald J. Trump has signed into law the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), which has already been passed by the U.S. Senate.

- **The ARIA Act, specifically, calls for America's increased engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and strengthened support**, including arms sales, for U.S. allies in the region.
- The act develops a long-term strategic vision and a comprehensive, multifaceted, and principled United States policy for the Indo-Pacific region.

**Key highlights of the Act:**

**Security Interests:**

- Authorizes US\$ 1.5 billion annually for 5 years to enhance U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific.
- Reaffirms U.S. security commitments to our allies in the Indo-Pacific, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia and builds security partnerships with nations in Southeast Asia.

- Establishes a policy goal to peacefully denuclearize North Korea through the campaign of maximum pressure and engagement.
- Enhances the U.S. diplomatic, economic, and security relationship with India.
- Enforces U.S. freedom of navigation and overflight rights in the Indo-Pacific.
- Expresses support for regular arms sales to Taiwan and to enhance the economic, political, and security relationship between Taiwan and the United States.
- Promotes robust cybersecurity cooperation with our allies in the region.
- Sets U.S. policy to pursue effective arms control and nuclear nonproliferation policies in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Economic Engagement:**

- Promotes economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region as essential for the growth of the U.S. economy and success of American businesses.
- Authorizes bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations with Indo-Pacific nations.
- Provides for robust U.S. commercial presence throughout the Indo-Pacific region to promote U.S. exports and additional trade facilitation efforts.
- Authorizes the imposition of penalties on entities and governments engaged in the theft of United States intellectual property.
- Requires a new comprehensive U.S. policy to promote energy exports.

**Promoting Values:**

- Provides US\$ 150 million annually for 5 years for democracy, rule of law, and civil society support, including \$10 million annually for freedom of information efforts in North Korea.
- Call for additional U.S. efforts against trafficking-in-persons and human slavery; and Authorizes U.S. sanctions against human rights abusers.

Sources: the hindu.

## 2. PARTNERSHIP SUMMIT

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: The summit- objectives, features and significance.**

**Context:** The 25th edition of the **Partnership Summit** will be held in Mumbai.

It is being **organized by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion**, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India, State Government of Maharashtra and Confederation of Indian Industry.

**What is it?**

- The Partnership Summit provides for a global platform to dialogue, debate, deliberate and engage Indian and global leaders on economic policy and growth trends in India.
- It is expected to build new partnerships and explore investment opportunities through high level exchanges and B2B meetings.
- It will showcase India in the present landscape of an emerging “**New India**”, the “**New Global Economic Address**”.

**Confederation of Indian Industry –**

- CII is a **non-government, not-for-profit, industry led and industry-managed organization**, playing a proactive role in India’s development process.
- **Founded in 1895**, India’s premier business association has around 9000 members, from the private as well as public sectors, including SMEs and MNCs.
- CII works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.

Sources: the hindu, PIB.

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

## 1. PERSIAN GULF REGIONAL DIALOGUE FORUM

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: The proposed regional forum, need, concerns and significance.**

**Context:** In a diplomatic initiative to address the lingering conflicts and mistrust in the Gulf region, Iran has proposed a new platform for regional peace building.

#### **About the proposed Persian Gulf Regional Dialogue Forum:**

- The announcement of Persian Gulf Regional Dialogue Forum is significant as it comes in the wake of continued erosion of the **Gulf Cooperation Council**, which in the recent years has been divided between the Iranian and the Saudi spheres.
- The new forum could focus on** promotion of peace and prosperity in the region. Such a forum should offer membership to countries based on a set of general principles to address real issues that affect people of the region and the world.
- Admission to such a forum** should be based on accepting generally-recognised principles and shared objectives, notably respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and the political independence of all states. The forum should render international boundaries inviolable and use of force impermissible.
- Agenda of the forum:** It could connect people of various member countries cutting across all traditional boundaries.
- Effectiveness:** Such a forum shall be helpful in dealing with threats like terrorism and extremism that has left the countries of the region in a state of continuous state of insecurity.
- The member countries will have to** follow a set of confidence building measures. These measures could include freedom of navigation, assurance of free flow of energy and other resources and protection of the fragile marine ecology of the Gulf.



#### **About GCC:**

- Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is **a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries**—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.
- The GCC was established in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 1981. The purpose of the GCC is to achieve unity among its members based on their common objectives and their similar political and cultural identities, which are rooted in Arab and Islamic cultures. Presidency of the council rotates annually.
- All current member states are monarchies, including three constitutional monarchies (Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain), two absolute monarchies (Saudi Arabia and Oman), and one federal monarchy (the United Arab Emirates, which is composed of seven member states, each of which is an absolute monarchy with its own emir).

Sources: the hindu.

## 2. HENLEY PASSPORT INDEX

#### **What to study?**

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

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

#### **Background:**

- The Henley Passport Index (HPI) is a global ranking of countries according to the travel freedom for their citizens. It started in 2006 as Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index (HVRI) and was modified and renamed in January 2018.

#### **Definition:**

- The HPI consists of a ranking of passports according to how many other territories can be reached ‘visa-free’ (defined below). All distinct destination countries and territories in the IATA database are considered.

#### **Rankings of various countries:**

- India jumped two positions from 81st in 2018 to 79th this year.
- Japan retained its top spot as the world’s most travel-friendly passport due to the document’s access to 190 countries.
- Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal ranked further low at 104, 102 and 94 respectively.
- South Korea edged up the ranking from October’s index to join Singapore, offering access to 189 jurisdictions.
- China jumped almost 20 places in just two years, from 85th in 2017 to 69th this year.
- European countries also performed favourably, with European Union member states along with Norway and the US filling in the places behind the top three nations although the UK continues to drop down the rankings, along with the US.

Sources: the hindu.

## **3. WORLD GOLD COUNCIL (WGC)**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: WGC- composition, functions and significance, demand for gold- concerns and demands.**

**Context:** WGC has released a report on gold demand in 2019.

#### **Important observations made:**

- Performance of financial markets, monetary policy in key economies including India, and the dollar movement will determine gold demand in 2019.
- Since gold is considered a safe haven, during choppy markets, the demand for gold improves, normally. Emerging markets, led by India and China—the biggest consuming markets—make up 70% of consumer demand for the metal.

#### **About World Gold Council:**

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

Sources: the hindu.

## **4. RAISINA DIALOGUE**

#### **What to Study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Raisina Dialogue- key facts, India's role and opportunities, “Fair Value for Innovation”.**

**Context:** The **fourth edition of the Raisina Dialogue**, India’s flagship annual conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, **titled ‘World Reorder’**, was recently held in New Delhi.

#### **“Fair Value for Innovation”:**

- The United States Chamber of Commerce’s Global Innovation Policy Center (GIPC) launched **a new innovation initiative** at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi.

- The initiative, titled “Fair Value for Innovation”, would enable breakthrough innovation, and explore how policymakers can harness innovation capital in India and around the globe through research, advocacy, partnerships, and programs.

#### About the Raisina Dialogue:

- This is an annual geo-political event, organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and Observer Research Foundation (ORF).
- It is designed to explore prospects and opportunities for Asian integration as well as Asia's integration with the larger world. It is predicated on India's vital role in the Indian Ocean Region and how India along with its partners can build a stable regional and world order.
- Participants: The conference is a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral meeting involving policy and decision-makers, including but not limited to Foreign, Defence and Finance Ministers of different countries, high-level government officials and policy practitioners, leading personalities from business and industry, and members of the strategic community, media and academia.
- Significance of the event: The Raisina Dialogue was born in 2016, in the belief that the Asian century that the world was talking about was not about any exclusive geographical region. It was rather about the engagement of global actors with Asia and of Asia with the world. So this dialogue took birth as a platform, where the old and the new could work together, to discover their connections, their inter-dependence.

Sources: the hindu.

## 5. BREXIT DEAL

**Context:** The British Parliament has rejected **the Brexit deal proposed by the Prime Minister Theresa May.**

#### What and why did parliament reject?

- The House of Commons has comprehensively rejected the 585-page draft **withdrawal treaty** that Mrs May agreed with the EU in November as well as on **a non-binding political declaration** that seeks to lay out the option for talks on longer term ties.
- The most contentious provision is a so-called **backstop provision** that would come into effect at the end of the transition period if no other solution was found to prevent a hard border in the island of Ireland. This would keep Northern Ireland in the bloc's single market for goods — and so retain much of the EU's authority over the province — while including the whole of the UK in a customs union with the bloc.
- To minimise any divergence with Northern Ireland, the British government has announced that if the backstop came into force, the rest of the UK would “**track” Brussels' rulebook for goods regulation, keeping pace with new EU legislation.**
- Many Brexiters denounce **the backstop as a “trap” that would keep the UK yoked to EU rules**. While Mrs May argues that neither London nor Brussels wants the measure to enter into force, some see it as a default scenario, since **it could take until the mid-2020s to negotiate, ratify and implement any trade deal that could obviate the need for a backstop.**

#### What's next?

The UK has **now three options** to choose from since UK is bound to leave EU by March. The options are:

1. **Reach to EU to further modify the agreement.**
2. **Exit without any deal.** This would be a doomsday scenario which would trigger a massive recession in Britain and markedly slow the European Union's economic growth.
3. **Hold another referendum on Brexit deal in Britain.**

#### What does Brexit mean?

- It is a word that is used as a shorthand way of saying the **UK leaving the EU** – merging the words Britain and exit to get Brexit, in the same way as a possible Greek exit from the euro was dubbed Grexit in the past.

#### Why is Britain leaving the European Union?

- A referendum – a vote in which everyone (or nearly everyone) of voting age can take part – was held on Thursday 23 June, 2016, to decide whether the UK should leave or remain in the European Union.
- Leave won by 51.9% to 48.1%. The referendum turnout was 71.8%, with more than 30 million people voting.

#### **When is the UK due to leave the EU?**

- For the UK to leave the EU it had to invoke **Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty which gives the two sides two years to agree the terms of the split**. Theresa May triggered this process on 29 March, 2017, meaning the UK is scheduled to leave at 11pm UK time on Friday, 29 March 2019.
- A European court has ruled that **the UK can decide to stop the process**. Alternatively it can be extended if all 28 EU members agree.

#### **What caused Brexit to happen?**

- So far, there seem to be **three theories for what drove so many people to vote Brexit**:
- **Immigrants:** Faced with rising immigration locals worried about their jobs and the erosion of the English way of life wanted their government to clamp down on immigration. This was a revolt against unrestricted immigration from poorer Eastern European states, Syrian refugees residing in the EU and millions of Turks about to join the EU.
- **Elites:** Faced with decades of economic malaise, stagnant real wages and economic destitution in former industrial heartlands ever since the rise of “Thatcherism” and the embrace of Neoliberal policies by Tony Blair’s New Labour the **non-Londoners have decided to revolt against the elite**. This isn’t just about being against the EU as it stands, and its free market and free movement of peoples.
- **Bureaucracy:** Faced with Brussels’ asphyxiating amount of **red tape the English people decide to “take back control” of their country’s bureaucracy**.
- The three theories are obviously intertwined at times and contradictory at others, that’s why it matters who is going to be negotiating the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU.

## **6. INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: ISA- key facts, overview of the proposed new bank for funding.**
- **For Mains: Need for a bank for financing energy access- need, challenges and potential.**

**Context:** The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is going to propose **a new bank exclusively for financing energy access to billions**.

**The proposal-** The bank is still at the ideation stage:

- **ISA has asked the Asian Development Bank to prepare a concept note.**
- **A public-private partnership** is being thought of for the proposed, which will work for 1.2 billion people who lack access to energy as well as the 2.4 billion who lack access to clean energy.

#### **Need:**

- **Existing banks do not focus on universal energy access—those still deprived are the poorest of the poor;** thus, out of the ambit of these banks.
- Therefore, we need special finance mechanism which can target these people.

#### **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: down to earth.

(Q) Examine the key objectives of the International Solar Alliance and the challenges it faces?

## 7. SMART FOOD EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Smart Food Executive Council- features, composition, objectives and significance, about Smart Food Initiative.

**Context:** Associations including the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) together have formed **the Smart Food Executive Council**.

### About Smart Food Executive Council:

- **Formed under the aegis of the Smart Food Initiative** that was launched in 2013.
- **Need:** Stemmed from the strategic thinking around the **need for food that fulfils the criteria of being good for the consumer, good for the planet and good for the farmer**.
- **Objective:** To diversify staples which can have the strongest impact on nutrition, the environment and farmer welfare.
- **Significance:** Given that staples may typically constitute 70% of a meal and are often eaten three times a day, diversifying them can have a pronounced impact on overcoming malnutrition and poverty and coping with climate change and environmental degradation.
- **This would contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** for overcoming poverty and hunger (SDG 1 and 2), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), along with adaptation to climate change (Goal 13). The approach taken will include gender equality (SDG 5) and action through partnerships (SDG 17).
- **Future potential:**
- This new partnership strengthens collaborations between Asia and Africa and can open up opportunities to join forces at any point along the value chain, from consumers through to processors, chefs through to farmers, researchers and others.

### Facts for Prelims:

- **The Smart Food initiative** is founded by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid-Tropics (ICRISAT) and aims to build food systems where the food is good for you (highly nutritious), good for the planet and good for the smallholder farmer.
- It is an initiative which will initially focus on popularizing millets and sorghum.

Sources: down to earth.

### Smart Foods?

#### What are smart foods?

Smart foods are those that have been developed through the invention of new or improved processes, for example, as a result of man-made materials/ingredients or human intervention; in other words, not naturally occurring changes.

Smart foods may:

- have a function, other than that of providing energy and nutrients;
- perform a particular function never achieved by conventional foods;
- have been developed for specialised applications, but some eventually become available for general use.

## 8. ALLIANCE TO END PLASTIC WASTE (AEPW)



### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: the alliance- rationale behind, significance, the menace of plastic waste.

**Context:** An alliance of global companies has launched a new organisation- AEPW- to help eliminate plastic waste, especially in the ocean.

### Significance:

- Plastic waste management is a complex and serious global challenge that calls for swift action and strong leadership. The issue of plastic waste is seen and felt all over the world. It must be addressed.
- This new alliance is the most comprehensive effort to date to end plastic waste in the environment.

### Way ahead:

- Success will require collaboration and coordinated efforts across many sectors – some that create near-term progress and others that require major investments with longer timelines.
- Addressing plastic waste in the environment and developing a circular economy of plastics requires the participation of everyone across the entire value chain and the long term commitment of businesses, governments, and communities.

Sources: down to earth.

(Q) Discuss the magnitude and implications of plastic pollution in oceans.

### About the Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW):

- The Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW), comprising about 30 companies, pledged over \$1 billion to eliminate plastic waste across the world. They aim to invest \$1.5 billion over the next five years for the same.
- The alliance is designed as a non-profit organization. It includes companies from across North and South America, Europe, Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa as well as the Middle East are part of the Alliance.
- The aim is to develop solutions to mitigate plastic pollution and promote a circular economy by utilising used plastics.
- Member companies include those that make, use, sell, process, collect and recycle plastics, as well as chemical and plastic manufacturers, consumer goods companies, retailers, converters, and waste management companies, also called the plastics value chain. From India, Reliance Industries will advance efforts towards a sustainable future.

## 9. ARAB ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, Arab League and Beirut declaration, brief overview of Syrian refugee crisis- causes, concerns and measures in place.

**Context:** Arab leaders and officials have urged the international community to support nations hosting Syrian refugees and take steps to minimise the impact of the refugee crisis. The call was made in *the Beirut Declaration at the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit that concluded in the Lebanese capital recently*.

**Significance of the declaration:**

- This is *the first time Arab countries have reached a consensus on encouraging Syrian refugees to return to their country*.
- The declaration said, the refugee crisis in Arab countries is the worst humanitarian problem since World War II. *It points out that the crisis leads to an economic slowdown, increases the expenditure and deficit, imposes burdens on public sectors and infrastructure and poses risks to the society*.

**Arab Economic and Social Development summits:**

- They are *summits of the Arab League*, held at the head of state level to address issues of economic and social development among member-states.

**What is Arab League?**

- The Arab League is *a regional organization of Arab countries in and around North Africa, the Horn of Africa and Arabia*.
- It was *formed in Cairo on 22 March 1945 with six members*: Kingdom of Egypt, Kingdom of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Currently, the League has 22 members, but Syria's participation has been suspended since November 2011, as a consequence of government repression during the Syrian Civil War.
- *The League's main goal is to* “draw closer the relations between member States and co-ordinate collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries”.

Sources: AIR.

(Q) Discuss the aims of the establishment of the Arab League and assess its role in safeguarding the interests of the Arab nations.

## 10. ILO COMMISSION'S FUTURE OF WORK REPORT

**What to study?**

- *For Prelims: About Global Commission on the Future of Work and ILO.*
- *For Mains: Highlights of the report, concerns raised, challenges and recommendations made.*

**Context:** The *Global Commission on the Future of Work* released its report on Jan 22. The document calls on governments to take steps to address the challenges caused by unprecedented transformations going on in the world of work.

**Concerns and challenges highlighted by the report:**

- Due to the unprecedented transformational change in the world of work, there are several *transformational challenges that are bound to occur*.
- Artificial intelligence, automation and robotics will lead to job losses, as skills become obsolete.

**Among the 10 recommendations are:**

- A universal labour guarantee that protects fundamental workers' rights, an adequate living wage, limits on hours of work and safe and healthy workplaces.
- Guaranteed social protection from birth to old age that supports people's needs over the life cycle.
- A universal entitlement to lifelong learning that enables people to skill, reskill and upskill.
- Managing technological change to boost decent work, including an international governance system for digital labour platforms.
- Greater investments in the care, green and rural economies.
- A transformative and measurable agenda for gender equality.
- Reshaping business incentives to encourage long-term investments.

**About Global Commission on Future of Work:**

- The formation of a ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work marks the second stage in the *ILO Future of Work Initiative*.
- Its job is to *undertake an in-depth examination of the future of work that can provide the analytical basis for the delivery of social justice in the 21st century*.
- Its job also includes *identifying the key challenges facing the world of work and making practical recommendations about how these may be addressed in the future*.

### **Need of the hour:**

- It is time for a vision for a human-centred agenda that is based on investing in people's capabilities, institutions of work and in decent and sustainable work.
- Countless opportunities lie ahead to improve the quality of working lives, expand choice, close the gender gap, reverse the damages wreaked by global inequality. Yet none of this will happen by itself.
- **Governments, trade unions and employers need to work together**, to make economies and labour markets more inclusive. Such a social dialogue can help make globalization work for everyone.

Sources: the hindu.

## **11. 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 Russian military has released the specifications of its new **missile- SSC-8 ground-fired cruise missile (also known as the Novator 9M729)**, seeking to dispel the U.S. claim that the weapons violates the 1987 **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty**.

### **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.

## 12. "THE FUTURE OF RAIL" REPORT

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and findings of the report, India's potential and measures needed to take this growth forward.

**Context:** "The Future of Rail" Report has been released by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

It examines how the role of rail in global transport might be elevated as a means to reduce the energy use and environmental impacts associated with transport.

### Key findings from The Future of Rail:

1. Rail is among the most energy efficient modes of transport for freight and passengers – while the rail sector carries 8% of the world's passengers and 7% of global freight transport, it represents only 2% of total transport energy demand.
2. Today, three-quarters of passenger rail transport activity takes place on electric trains, which is an increase from 60% in 2000 – the rail sector is the only mode of transport that is widely electrified today. This reliance on electricity means that the rail sector is the most energy diverse mode of transport.
3. The regions with the highest share of electric train activity are Europe, Japan and Russia, while North and South America still rely heavily on diesel.
4. Passenger rail is significantly more electrified than freight in almost all regions, and regions with higher reliance on urban rail and high-speed rail are those with the largest share of passenger-kilometres served by electricity.
5. Most conventional rail networks today are located in North America, Europe, China, Russia, India, and Japan. These regions make up about 90% of global passenger movements on conventional rail with India leading at 39%, followed by China at 27%.
6. In contrast, significant investments have been made in high-speed rail and metros. High-speed rail provides an important alternative to aviation while urban rail provides a solution to cities impacted by congestion and air pollution. Growth has been most notable in China, which has overtaken all other countries in terms of network length of both types within a single decade.

### Focus on India:

1. India's railway system has played a fundamental role in the country's development, transporting people and goods throughout its vast territory, integrating markets and connecting communities.
2. Rail passenger traffic in India has increased by almost 200% since 2000 and freight traffic by 150%, yet latent demand for mobility in India remains huge. In fact, rail activity in India is set to grow more than any other country.
3. Today, the conventional rail system in India comprises a total route length of almost 68000 km. Metro systems exist in 10 Indian cities. A further 600 km of metro lines are planned for the next few years.
4. For now, India does not have any high-speed rail. However, in 2015 India and Japan signed an agreement to develop a high-speed rail line connecting the cities of Ahmedabad and Mumbai, to come into operation in 2023.
5. Seven other high-speed lines are currently under consideration. Once completed, they would connect the four cities that constitute the Golden Quadrilateral (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai) plus other intermediate cities.

### About IEA:

- Established **in 1974 as per framework of the OECD**.
- **MISSION** – The IEA works to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy for its 30 member countries and beyond. Our mission is guided by four main areas of focus: energy security, economic development, environmental awareness and engagement worldwide
- **Headquarters (Secretariat):** Paris, France
- **A candidate country must be a member country of the OECD.** But all OECD members are not IEA members (Ex: Chile, Iceland, Israel, Latvia and Slovenia).

To become member a candidate country must demonstrate that it has:

- crude oil and/or product reserves equivalent to 90 days of the previous year's net imports, to which the government has immediate access (even if it does not own them directly) and could be used to address disruptions to global oil supply

- a demand restraint programme to reduce national oil consumption by up to 10%
- legislation and organisation to operate the Co-ordinated Emergency Response Measures (CERM) on a national basis
- legislation and measures to ensure that all oil companies under its jurisdiction report information upon request;
- measures in place to ensure the capability of contributing its share of an IEA collective action.

**IEA mandate:**

To focus on the “3Es” of effectual energy policy:

1. Energy security
2. Economic development
3. Environmental protection

**Reports:**

1. Global Energy & CO2 Status Report 2017.
2. World Energy Outlook.
3. World Energy Statistics 2017.
4. World Energy Balances 2017.
5. Energy Technology Perspectives.

Sources: pib.

(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.

## 13. AFRICA CENTRE FOR CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**What to study?**

- *For Prelims and Mains: Africa Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development- objectives, mandate and significance.*

**Context:** The Africa Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development was inaugurated by the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte at Rome.

- The centre has been opened by the Italian government in association with the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the **Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)**.

**About the Centre:**

- The centre would **facilitate coordination among the G7 and African countries on common initiatives in Africa** to achieve the **goals set by the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda**.
- **The Centre would contribute towards addressing the needs of Africa by providing a platform for G7 countries to steer their cooperation** to contrast environmental degradation and promote sustainable economic growth in the region.
- The centre will **provide a fast-track, demand-driven mechanism for African countries to access grant resources that support policies, initiatives, and best practices** on climate change, food security, access to water, clean energy, and accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa.
- **The centre would be hosted by UNDP** which would utilise its extensive country office network and programmatic hubs, and global expertise and knowledge, to enable the African countries to access the resources available through it.

Sources: down to earth.

# GENERAL STUDIES -III

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

## 1. FUGITIVE ECONOMIC OFFENDER

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Definition of Economic Offender, features of Fugitive Economic Offenders Act.
- For Mains: Significance of the law and issues that need to be addressed.

**Context:** Vijay Mallya has become the first person to be declared a fugitive offender under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. The order was passed under Section 2F of FEOA against Mallya by the PMLA court.

**Implications:**

- The investigative agency can now confiscate properties of Mallya which are not directly related to the cases against him.

**Background:**

- The decision comes against an application by the Enforcement Directorate before the special **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)** court to classify Mallya as a fugitive economic offender.

**Definition- Fugitive Economic Offender:**

- The fugitive economic offenders' law came into force in August last year.
- A person can be named an offender under this law if there is an arrest warrant against him or her for involvement in economic offences involving at least Rs. 100 crore or more and has fled from India to escape legal action.

**The procedure:**

- The investigating agencies have to file **an application in a Special Court under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002** containing details of the properties to be confiscated, and any information about the person's whereabouts.
- The Special Court will issue **a notice for the person to appear at a specified place and date** at least six weeks from the issue of notice.
- **Proceedings will be terminated if the person appears.** If not the person would be declared as a Fugitive Economic Offender based on the evidence filed by the investigating agencies.
- **The person who is declared as a Fugitive Economic Offender can challenge the proclamation in the High Court within 30 days** of such declaration according to the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

Sources: the hindu.

## 2. NILEKANI PANEL TO STRENGTHEN THE DIGITAL PAYMENTS ECOSYSTEM

**Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted a high-level committee under Nandan Nilekani to suggest measures to strengthen the safety and security of digital payments in the country.

RBI has provided the following terms of reference for the committee:

- To encourage digitisation of payments and enhance financial inclusion through digitization.
- Reviewing the existing status of digitisation of payments in the country, identifying the current gaps in the ecosystem and suggesting ways to bridge them.
- Assessing the current levels of digital payments in financial inclusion.
- Suggest measures to strengthen the safety and security of digital payments.
- Suggest a road map for increasing customer confidence and trust while accessing financial services through digital modes.
- Undertake cross-country analysis to identify best practices to accelerate digitisation of the economy and financial inclusion through greater use of digital payments.
- Suggest a medium-term strategy for deepening of digital payments.

### 3. RBI ALLOWS TOKENIZATION OF CARD TRANSACTIONS

#### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Tokenization- meaning, significance, key facts and concerns associated.

**Context:** The Reserve Bank of India has allowed **tokenization of debit, credit and prepaid card transactions** to enhance the safety of the digital payments ecosystem in the country.

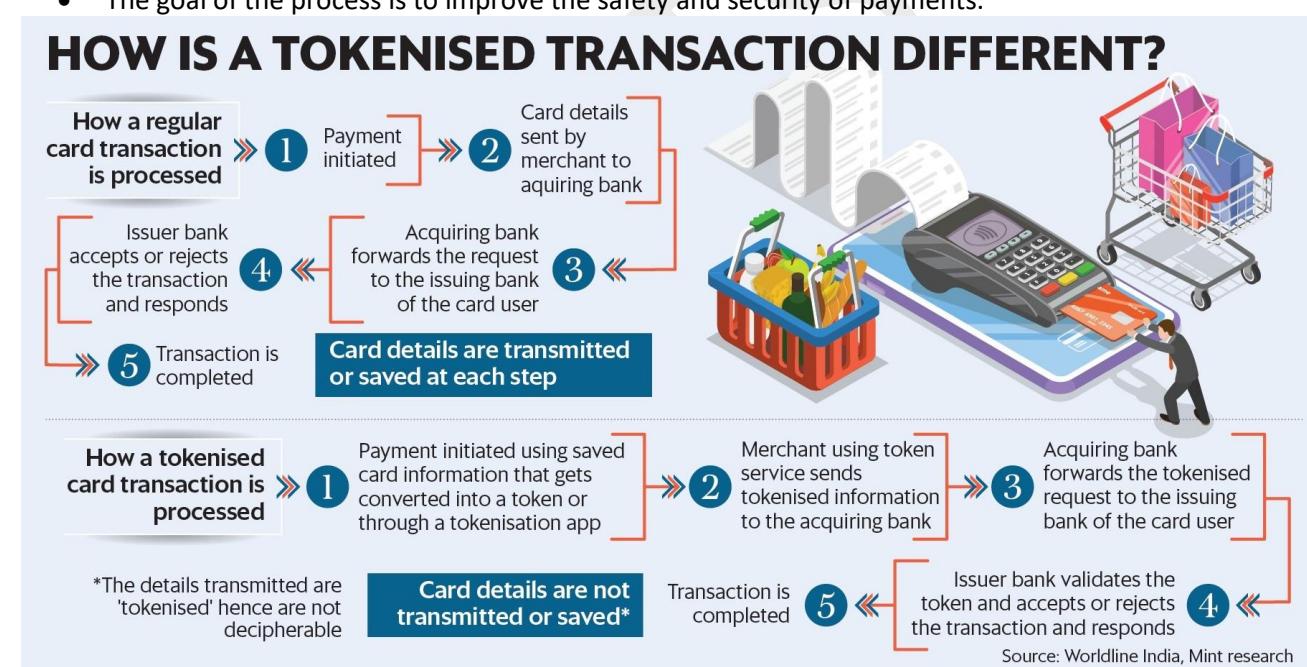
- The bank has offered permission for the process using all types of payment services and methods, including near-field communication (NFC), magnetic secure transmission (MST), in-app payment methods and cloud services.



#### What is Tokenization?

- Tokenization will replace card details with a code, called a “token,” which will be specifically for the card, the token requestor and the device being used to pay.
- Instead of the card’s details, the token will act as the card at point of sale (POS) terminals and quick response (QR) code payment systems.
- The goal of the process is to improve the safety and security of payments.

### HOW IS A TOKENISED TRANSACTION DIFFERENT?



Sources: the hindu.

### 4. UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

#### What to study?

- For Prelims: UBI- key facts, achievements of Sikkim.
- For Mains: UBI in India- need, concerns, challenges and alternatives.

**Context:** Sikkim’s ruling party, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), recently declared to include the Universal Basic Income scheme in its manifesto ahead of the Assembly election in 2019 and aims to implement it by 2022.

- If everything goes according to the plan, **it will be the first state to implement UBI in India.**

**Sikkim has set up examples in the country in different areas in the past also, some of them being:**

- Sikkim is **the best state for women in the workplace**, thanks to its high rates of female workforce participation, there's less crime against women.

- Sikkim's **literacy rate increased to 82.2% from 68.8% in 2001**, among the country's highest.
- Sikkim is **the least populated state in India, has its per capita GDP growing in double digits since 2004-05**.
- Sikkim also decreased its poverty ratio by 22% to 51,000 (8.2%) in 2011-12 from 1.7 lakh (30.9%) in 2004-05.
- Sikkim also became **the first fully organic state**.

#### **What is Universal Basic Income?**

- Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a programme for providing all citizens of a country or other geographic area/state with a given sum of money, regardless of their income, resources or employment status.
- The main idea behind UBI is **to prevent or reduce poverty and increase equality among citizens**. The essential principle behind Universal basic income is the idea that all citizens are entitled to a livable income, irrespective of the circumstances they're born in.

Sources: *toi*.

(Q) Examine the arguments in favour and against introduction of universal basic income.

## **5. GOLD MONETIZATION PROGRAM**

#### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** Reserve Bank of India has allowed central and state governments and entities owned by them to deposit gold under its **Gold Monetization Scheme**. Furthermore, charitable institutions have also been made eligible to deposit gold with banks to earn interest under the program.

#### **About the Gold Monetization Scheme:**

- Gold Monetization Scheme was launched in 2015. The basic **aim of this scheme is to monetise all the gold which is lying idle with individuals or institutions like banks**.

#### **The key features of Gold Monetization scheme are as follows:**

- The persons can open Gold Saving Account in designated banks and anyone can deposit physical gold via BIS certified collection, purity testing centres (CPTCs). The minimum amount of gold thus deposited is 30 gms, no upper limit.
- The gold is deposited for short term (1-3 years), medium term (5-7 years) and long term (12-15 years).
- The gold thus collected is sent to refineries and banks have tripartite / bipartite agreements with refineries and CPTCs.
- On maturity, one can get back the cash / physical gold for short term deposits and cash only for long term deposits.
- The scheme allows banks' customers to deposit their idle gold holdings for a fixed period in return for interest in the range of 2.25 per cent to 2.50 per cent.

Sources: *the hindu*.

(Q) "The recent gold bond scheme and gold monetization scheme can help deepen the financial sector." Discuss.

## **6. GST COUNCIL**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: About GST Council- composition, functions and related key facts, overview of GST.**
- **For Mains: Issues associated with GST, need for reforms and various measures announced in this regard.**

**Context:** The **GST Council** in its recently held 32nd meeting took a slew of decisions aimed at reducing the tax and compliance burden on small and medium enterprises.

#### **Measures announced:**

- **The annual turnover limit** under which companies would be exempt from GST has been raised to ₹40 lakh for most States and ₹20 lakh for the North Eastern and hill states, from the earlier limit of ₹20 lakh and ₹10 lakh, respectively.
- **The limit for eligibility for the Composition Scheme** is raised to an annual turnover of ₹1.5 crore from April 1, 2019. So far, only manufacturers and traders were eligible for this scheme. The Scheme now has been extended to small service providers with an annual turnover of up to ₹50 lakh, at a tax rate of 6%.

- Kerala can levy a cess of up to 1% for up to two years on intra-State supplies to help finance the disaster relief efforts following the recent floods in the state.

#### **Implications and outcomes of these measures:**

- A very large part of GST revenue comes from the formal sector and large companies. **These measures have been taken to help the small and medium companies.** The revenue impact due to these will be minimal.
- Allowing disaster cess of 1% to be introduced in the State of Kerala on local supplies may be an administrative issue for both businesses and government and this **may set a precedence for other States to demand additional levy.**
- **Increasing the GST threshold limit would allow about 10 lakh traders to be exempt from the compliance burden of GST, and increasing the Composition Scheme limit would benefit about 20 lakh small businesses** that fall between the annual turnover brackets of ₹1 crore and ₹1.5 crore.

#### **Facts for Prelims:**

- **The Composition Scheme** currently allows companies with an annual turnover of up to ₹1 crore to opt for it, and file returns on a quarterly basis at a nominal rate of 1%

#### **Why do we need a GST Council?**

- The GST council is the key decision-making body that will take all important decisions regarding the GST.
- The GST Council dictates tax rate, tax exemption, the due date of forms, tax laws, and tax deadlines, keeping in mind special rates and provisions for some states.
- The predominant responsibility of the GST Council is to ensure to have one uniform tax rate for goods and services across the nation.

#### **How is the GST Council structured?**

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is governed by the GST Council. **Article 279 (1) of the amended Indian Constitution** states that the GST Council has to be constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of the Article 279A.

**According to the article, GST Council will be a joint forum for the Centre and the States. It consists of the following members:**

1. The Union Finance Minister will be the Chairperson
2. As a member, the Union Minister of State will be in charge of Revenue of Finance
3. The Minister in charge of finance or taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State government, as members.

#### **GST Council recommendations:**

- Article 279A (4) specifies that the Council will make recommendations to the Union and the States on the important issues related to GST, such as, the goods and services will be subject or exempted from the Goods and Services Tax.

Sources: the hindu.

VOTING STRENGTH	GST COUNCIL
Centre <b>1/3 VOTE IN COUNCIL</b>	Chairperson <b>Union finance minister</b>
States <b>2/3 WEIGHT IN COUNCIL</b>	Other Member From Centre <b>Minister of state for finance</b>
<b>DECISIONS NEED 75% VOTE SUPPORT</b>	Vice-chairperson <b>One of the state finance ministers</b>
	Members <b>State finance ministers</b>

## 7. BANKS TO REVIEW MUDRA LOAN BOOK

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: PMMY- key features.**
- **For Mains: Significance of the scheme and concerns raised over loans disbursed under the scheme, how can these loans be prevented from turning into NPAs.**

**Context:** The finance ministry has asked the banks to review all loans sanctioned under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY or Mudra loan scheme), as the non-performing assets (NPA) have crossed Rs 11,000 crore within three years of the launch of the scheme.

### **Background:**

- The rising NPAs under the scheme are a matter of concern. It is already three years and there is a need to review how the banks are sanctioning the loans.
- The RBI has already flagged its concerns regarding the bad loans to the government.

### **What went wrong?**

- In order to push the scheme, ***there had been an overemphasis on banks to meet loan disbursal targets.***
- In the race to meet the target, the credentials of loan-seekers were not being properly verified and in many instances, loans were being given without any collateral or security, making it difficult for the banks to go after defaulters.

### **About the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) scheme:**

- The PMMY Scheme was launched in April, 2015. The scheme's objective is ***to refinance collateral-free loans given by the lenders to small borrowers.***
- The scheme, which has a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore, can lend between Rs 50,000 and Rs 10 lakh to small entrepreneurs.
- Banks and MFIs can draw ***refinance under the MUDRA Scheme*** after becoming member-lending institutions of MUDRA.
- ***Mudra Loans are available for non-agricultural activities upto Rs. 10 lakh and activities allied to agriculture*** such as Dairy, Poultry, Bee Keeping etc, are also covered.
- ***Mudra's unique features include a Mudra Card*** which permits access to Working Capital through ATMs and Card Machines.

### **There are three types of loans under PMMY:**

1. Shishu (up to Rs.50,000).
2. Kishore (from Rs.50,001 to Rs.5 lakh).
3. Tarun (from Rs.500,001 to Rs.10,00,000).

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) It has been cautioned that the next crisis in India's banking sector could come from MUDRA loans, and credit extended through the Kisan credit card scheme. Critically examine.

### **Objectives of the scheme:**

1. ***Fund the unfunded:*** Those who have a business plan to generate income from a non-farm activity like manufacturing, processing, trading or service sector but don't have enough capital to invest can take loans up to Rs 10 lakh.
2. ***Micro finance institutions (MFI) monitoring and regulation:*** With the help of MUDRA bank, the network of microfinance institutions will be monitored. New registration will also be done.
3. ***Promote financial inclusion:*** With the aim to reach Last mile credit delivery to micro businesses taking help of technology solutions, it further adds to the vision of financial inclusion.
4. ***Reduce jobless economic growth:*** Providing micro enterprises with credit facility will help generate employment sources and an overall increase in GDP.
5. ***Integration of Informal economy into Formal sector:*** It will help India also grow its tax base as incomes from the informal sector are non-taxed.

## **8. KNOW YOUR BUDGET SERIES**

### **What to study?**

- ***For Prelims and Mains: What is Budget, procedure involved, appropriation bill, finance bill, guillotine and vote- on- account? Cut motions.***

**What is it?** It is a fortnight series started by the union Finance Ministry on Twitter which explains the importance of Union Budget and its making. It aims to educate the general public about the budgetary process.

- The government on February 1 would unveil the interim Budget for 2019-20 as the general elections are due in the next couple of months. The final Budget for the next fiscal would be presented by the new government.
- The first series of tweets explained what is Union Budget and Vote on Account.

### **What is Budget?**

- Budget is ***the most comprehensive report of the government's finances in which revenues from all sources and outlays for all activities are consolidated.***
- The Budget also contains estimates of the government's accounts for the next fiscal year called Budget estimates.

## KNOW YOUR BUDGET



### What is Outcome Budget?

*"From the Fiscal year 2006-07, every Ministry presents a preliminary Outcome Budget to the Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for compiling them. The Outcome Budget is a progress card on what various Ministries and Departments have done with the outlays in the previous annual budget. It measures the development outcomes of all Government programs and whether the money has been spent for the purpose it was sanctioned including the outcome of the fund usage."*



### What is Vote on Account?

*"The Vote on Account is a grant made in advance by the parliament, in respect of the estimated expenditure for a part of new Financial year, pending the completion of procedure relating to the voting on the Demand for Grants and the passing of the Appropriation Act."*

Sources: Toi.

## 9. ANGEL TAX

### What to Study?

- **For Prelims:** Angel Tax- meaning, when was it introduced?
- **For Mains:** Issues related to it and concerns raised by startups over it.

**Context:** The government has notified changes to **Section 56 of the Income Tax Act**, in a move that brings relief to start-up founders and investors dealing with the issue of "Angel Tax".

### Major Changes introduced:

- As per the changes, **all DIPP-recognised start-ups can apply to the department for approvals requesting exemption from Angel Tax, or Section 56 2 (viib) of the Income Tax Act**, which will then be sent to the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) for approval.
- The changes are **applicable to start-ups, recognised by DIPP**, where the amount of paid-up share capital, and share premium of the capital after the proposed issue of share does **not exceed Rs. 10 crore**.
- The notification specifies **a list of documents that start-ups will have to submit to the DIPP while seeking approval**. The CBDT is mandated to either approve or reject the applications within 45 days.

### WHAT IS THE LATEST ISSUE?

- At least 80 startups have received notices to pay angel tax since last year. Many founders have said they have been asked to pay up as much as 30% of their funding as tax.
- Angels have also received multiple notices asking them to furnish details on their source of income, their bank account statements and other financial data.

### Way ahead:

- The changes proposed do not ensure that start-ups will no longer receive notices on angel tax from the tax department.
- The start-up community views this as a step in the right direction, but insists that the issues facing founders and investors due to angel tax remain unaddressed through the notification.

Sources: the hindu.

## 10. PRADHAN MANTRI ROZGAR PROTSAHAN YOJANA (PMR PY)

### What to study?

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

**Context:** The **Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana (PMR PY)**, the flagship scheme of the Union Government for employment generation, crossed the milestone of one crore beneficiaries on January 14, 2019.

### About Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana:

- The scheme "Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana" (PMR PY) was announced in the Budget for 2016-17.
- The objective of the scheme is **to promote employment generation**.
- The scheme is being **implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment**.

- Under the scheme **employers would be provided an incentive for enhancing employment by reimbursement of the 8.33% EPS contribution made by the employer in respect of new employment.**
- The PMRKY scheme is **targeted for workers earning wages upto Rs. 15,000/- per month.**

**Significance of the scheme:**

**PMRKY has a dual benefit –**

1. **The employer is incentivised** for increasing the employee base in the establishment through payment of EPF contribution of 12% of wage, which otherwise would have been borne by the employer.
2. **A large number of workers find jobs in such establishments.**

A direct benefit of the scheme is that **these workers have access to social security benefit** through Provident Fund, Pension and Death Linked Insurance.

Sources: the hindu.

## 11. DEBT-TO-GDP RATIO OF CENTRE AND STATES

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Meaning of Debt- to- GDP ratio- related key facts for Prelims.**
- **For Mains: Increasing Debt- concerns, challenges and measures to address them, recommendations by FRBM Committee.**

**Context:** The centre has released a Status Paper on Government Debt for 2017-18.

**Key findings:**

- **The Centre's total debt as a percentage of GDP reduced** to 46.5% in 2017-18 from 47.5% as of March 31, 2014.
- **The total debt of the States has risen** to 24% in 2017-18, and is estimated to be 24.3% in 2018-19.
- In absolute terms, the Centre's total debt increased from ₹56,69,429 crore at the end of March 2014 to ₹82,35,178 crore in 2017-18, representing a 45% increase. The total debt of the States increased from ₹24,71,270 crore to ₹40,22,090 crore over the same period, an increase of almost 63%.

**Key takeaways:**

- While the Centre is moving in the right direction in terms of meeting the N.K. Singh Committee recommendations on public debt, the States are moving in the opposite direction.
- Outstanding liabilities of States have increased sharply during 2015-16 and 2016-17, **following the issuance of UDAY bonds in these two years.**
- The increase in the debt stock at the State level is worrying because they don't have the wherewithal to service the debt if it goes beyond a certain point. They could then start getting into a debt trap situation.

**Recommendations by N.K. Singh committee:**

- The N.K. Singh-headed FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Review Committee report had recommended **the ratio to be 40% for the Centre and 20% for the States, respectively, by 2023.**
- It said that **the 60% consolidated Central and State debt limit was consistent with international best practices**, and was an essential parameter to attract a better rating from the credit ratings agencies.

**Way ahead for states:**

- The States do have some **fiscal space to reduce their borrowing in the coming years due to the large cash surpluses they hold.** This indicates scope for reducing the quantum of market borrowings by State governments in case they bring down their cash surpluses (parked as investment in treasury bills of the Central government).
- State governments as a group have exhibited a tendency to hold large cash surpluses/investments in Cash Balance Investment Account on a consistent basis while at the same time resorting to market borrowings to finance their GFD (Gross Fiscal Deficit).

Sources: the hindu.

## 12. CENTRAL BANK AUTONOMY

**Why in News?**

- The debate over **Central Bank's autonomy has also come up in the US.** President Donald Trump has been engaging in a Twitter war with the Federal Reserve against its policy of raising interest rates. India is not new to this issue.

### **Relationship between central banks and governments around the world is debated:**

- Central banks everywhere, from Turkey to the US, are under increasing pressure from the governments.
- **While central bankers say that they need to be free from pressures from the governments and lobby groups to focus on their job of containing inflation and maintaining financial stability, their critics say that they are too secretive and have leaned in favour of big financial institutions over the interests of common citizens.**

### **In News:**

1. The mandate of the **Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ)**, which first put in place an inflation targeting regime was changed from its sole objective of price stability to also include fostering sustainable employment.
2. In the UK, **the Bank of England and Her Majesty's Treasury** signed a memorandum of agreement on the financial relationship between the two outlining the framework for determining its capital, payment in lieu of its dividend, issue of notes and the information sharing arrangements between the Bank and the Treasury.

### **Why the government should have a say in Central Bank's roles?**

- In a democracy, **the elected representatives should have the last word on how the country should be run**. The government should decide on **the amount of emphasis on job creation versus inflation targeting**.
- Given the immense power the central bank has in influencing the economy, **a fully autonomous central bank can easily design policies to thwart the will of the people**. For example, voters elect a government to create more jobs, but the central bank can keep interest rates high to stifle investment and, consequently, job creation.

### **Concerns and challenges associated?**

- Although the government is elected by the people and is supposed to act in the interest of the electorate, **politicians whose chief concern is winning re-elections run it**. Therefore, Politicians will have **a natural tendency to engage in deficit spending** (free handouts, higher support prices, and investment projects by state-owned enterprises) just before or just after elections to boost their chances. Politicians can also **use the state-owned banking system to benefit their constituents by granting loan waivers**.
- These policies are **not only inflationary but will also adversely affect the health of the banking system**. The costs of these policies in the long run far outweigh their short-term benefits to a subsection of the population.

### **Why Central Banks should have autonomy?**

- Take the example of India. Successive governments, both at the States and Centre, have implemented farm loan waivers to win elections.
- **Controlling the harm from such actions is the case for an independent and autonomous central bank**. Such a central bank can **fight the inflationary pressures resulting from deficit spending and also potentially reduce the benefits of such government handouts in terms of economic growth**.
- This, in turn, will **reduce the government's incentives to engage in such handouts in the first place**.
- **An independent Central Bank may have more credibility**. If people have more confidence in the Central Bank, this helps to reduce inflationary expectations. In turn, this makes inflation easier to keep low.

### **What's the issue with India?**

- In India, **RBI does not have formal autonomy**. While RBI's mandate is to ensure price stability keeping in mind the objective of growth, **its board is dominated by government nominees**. In effect, **the government has formal control over RBI**.

### **Current point of contention between RBI and the government:**

- **Section 7 (1) of The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**, became a contentious issue after the tension between the central bank and government turned into a public spat over the last few months.

### **What is Section 7 of RBI act and how it empowers centre to intervene in the functioning of RBI?**

- **Section 7 says:** The Central Government may from time to time give such directions to the Bank as it may, after consultation with the Governor of the Bank, consider necessary in the public interest.
- Subject to any such directions, the general superintendence and direction of the affairs and business of the Bank shall be entrusted to a **Central Board of Directors** which may exercise all powers and do all acts and things which may be exercised or done by the Bank.

- Save as otherwise provided in regulations made by the Central Board, the Governor and in his absence the Deputy Governor nominated by him in this behalf, shall also have **powers of general superintendence and direction of the affairs and the business of the Bank, and may exercise all powers and do all acts and things which may be exercised or done by the Bank.**
- Clearly, **the section empowers the government to issue directions in public interest to the central bank**, which otherwise does not take orders from the government.

#### **What needs to be done?**

##### **Fine balance:**

- There has to be **a forum within the democratic structure where the RBI is obligated to explain and defend its position on its policy decisions.**
- The **governor should be responsible and accountable to Parliament and not to a particular government or the ministry of finance, or minister. He can testify to Parliament twice a year**. In separate testimony in both houses of Parliament, **the lawmakers can ask questions of the RBI Governor and the latter can respond.**
- A better way to sort out these differences and to come to a conclusion is to **have a larger debate with technical experts weighing in.**
- On issues of **operational autonomy**, the central government needs to lay off its pressure on the RBI. **On macro issues** such as exchange rate management and RBI's dividend policy, written agreements that clearly demarcate roles and responsibilities can be thrashed out.

##### **Way ahead:**

- RBI is autonomous but within the framework of the RBI Act. It is thus clear that **the central bank cannot claim absolute autonomy**. It is autonomy within the limits set by the government and its extent depends on the subject and the context.
- Ultimately, **it is the elected representative ruling the country who is answerable to the citizen every five years**. The representative while explaining the economy's performance to own up for everything, including the RBI's actions, as his own.
- Therefore, the time is ripe for bringing in a fine line between RBI and the government which does not undermine the Central Bank's autonomy on one hand and limits absolute autonomy on the other.

Link: <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/opinion-the-whys-and-what-ifs-of-central-bank-autonomy-1548345640047.html>

**(Q)** In the light of the controversy over relations between RBI and the finance Ministry, it is argued that the regulators of important sectors of economy that enjoy autonomy should be made accountable. In this regard, how can Parliament ensure fine balance between autonomy and accountability for these regulators? Discuss.

## **13. INPUT CREDIT UNDER GST**

#### **What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: What is ITC- meaning, need, significance and concerns over its misuse.**

**Why in News?** Concerned over a decline in GST revenues, tax officials are likely to examine the high usage of **input tax credit (ITC)** to set off tax liability by businesses.

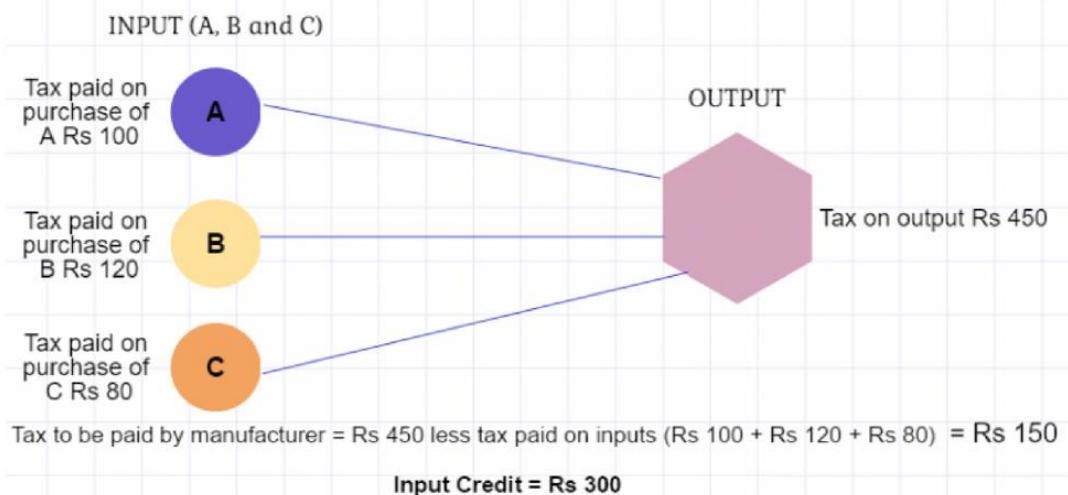
#### **Significance of ITC:**

- One of the positive features of GST is that it helps to avoid the undesirable cost cascading effect (or tax on tax) that existed previously. Now, in the case of GST, there is the mechanism of **Input Tax Credit (ITC) which helps to eliminate the cost cascading effect of the pre-GST tax regime.**
- Under GST, there is no cost cascading effect because of two facts. First, most of the taxes are merged under a single tax, and second, the input tax credit.

#### **What is Input Tax Credit (ITC)?**

- It is **the tax that a business pays on a purchase and that it can use to reduce its tax liability when it makes a sale**. In other words, businesses can reduce their tax liability by claiming credit to the extent of GST paid on purchases.
- A business under composition scheme cannot avail of input tax credit. ITC cannot be claimed for personal use or for goods that are exempt.**

## Understanding Input Credit



### **Concerns over its misuse:**

- There could be possibility of misuse of the provision by unscrupulous businesses by generating fake invoices just to claim tax credit.
- As much as 80% of the total GST liability is being settled by ITC and only 20% is deposited as cash.
- Under the present dispensation, there is no provision for real time matching of ITC claims with the taxes already paid by suppliers of inputs.
- The matching is done on the basis of system generated GSTR-2A, after the credit has been claimed. Based on the mismatch highlighted by GSTR-2A and ITC claims, the revenue department sends notices to businesses.
- Currently there is a time gap between ITC claim and matching them with the taxes paid by suppliers. Hence there is a possibility of ITC being claimed on the basis of fake invoices.

### **Need of the hour- real time updates:**

- To fill the gap, a new return filing system has been proposed. Once it becomes operational, it would become possible for the department to match the ITC claims and taxes paid on a real time basis.
- The revenue department would then analyse the large number of ITC claims to find out if they are genuine or based on fake invoices and take corrective action.

Source: the hindu.

(Q) Assess the performance of GST regime so far and discuss challenges going forward ?

## 14. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FULL BUDGET AND AN INTERIM BUDGET

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** *Vote- on- account and Full budget- features and differences.*
- **For Mains:** *Why can't's an outgoing present a full budget- issues involved and need for clear guidelines on this.*

**Context:** On February 1, the government is set to present its last Budget ahead of the elections. **Conventionally, a government at the end of its term has gone in for a vote on account rather than a full Budget.**

- Therefore, experts are divided over the issue. While few are in favour of a full budget, others oppose it on the ground that this is an election year and the government has already presented 5 full budgets.

### **Know about:**

- **Article 266** of the Constitution of India mandates that Parliamentary approval is required to draw money from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Besides, **Article 114 (3)** of the Constitution stipulates that no amount can be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund without the enactment of a law (appropriation bill).

### **What is a vote on account?**

- A vote on account essentially means that **the government seeks the approval of Parliament for meeting expenditure** — paying salaries, ongoing programmes in various sectors etc — with no changes in the taxation structure, until a new government takes over and presents a full Budget that is revised for the full fiscal.

### Why present a vote on account?

- The reasoning is that there is **little time** to get approvals from Parliament for various grants to ministries and departments, and to debate these as well as any provisions for changes in taxation.
- More importantly, the reasoning is that **it would be the prerogative of the new government to signal its policy direction, which is often reflected in the Budget.**

### Difference between Full Budget and Vote on Account:

- Full Budget deals with both expenditure and revenue side but Vote-on-account deals only with the expenditure side of the government's budget.
- The vote-on-account is normally valid for two months but full budget is valid for 12 months (a financial year).
- As a convention, a vote-on-account is treated as a formal matter and passed by Lok Sabha without discussion. But passing for budget happens only after discussions and voting on demand for grants.

Sources: Indian Express.

### What's an Interim Budget?

- An **Interim Budget is not the same as a 'Vote on Account'**.
- While a 'Vote on Account' deals only with the expenditure side of the government's budget, an Interim Budget is a complete set of accounts, including both expenditure and receipts.
- An Interim Budget gives the complete financial statement, very similar to a full Budget.

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

## 1. CHALLENGES FOR START-UPS IN INDIA

### What to study?

- For Prelims:** What is Angel tax?
- For Mains:** Challenges faced by start-ups in India and measures to address them.

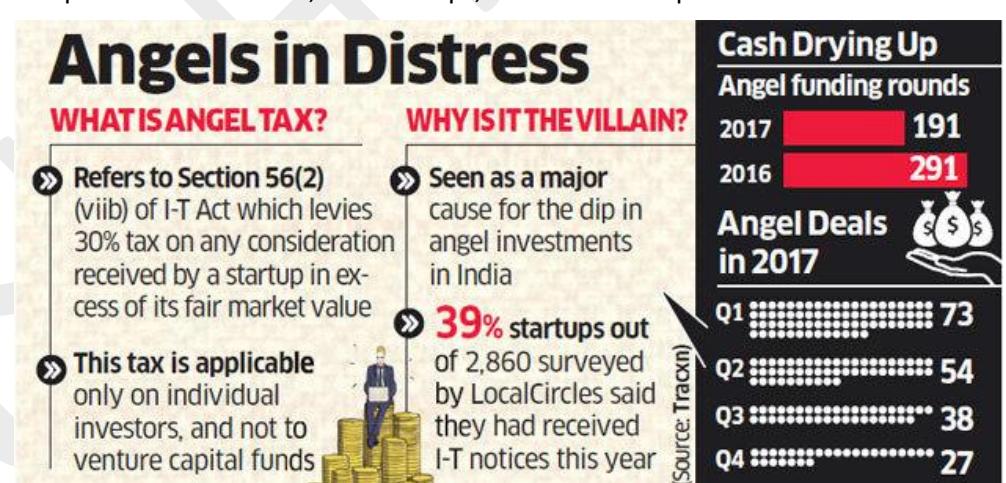
**Context:** Citizens' engagement forum LocalCircles has released a report on challenges faced by start-ups in India. The report is based on responses from over 15,000 start-ups, SMEs and entrepreneurs.

### Challenge for start-ups:

- Corruption
- Bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- Securing loans.
- Funding

### Angel tax:

- Angel tax is one area that falls under corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies as it takes the focus of entrepreneurs



away from building a product or service to responding to tax notices and filing appeals, something that start-ups can clearly do without.

- Angel tax continued to be a key pain point for start-ups, where the assessing officers in many cases reject the valuation method used by the start-up and instead treat the capital raised as income from other sources, thereby, raising a tax demand and penalty on the start-up.
- Several start-ups and angel investors have raised concerns over notices received from the authorities related to taxation of angel funds. The Centre has set up a panel to look into the taxation issues faced by start-ups and angel investors.

### 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).** However, despite the exemption notification, there are a host of challenges that startups are still faced with, in order to get this exemption.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) In view of some of the recent steps taken by the government, critically examine whether the government is micromanaging startups and e-commerce players?

## **2. NATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARDS 2018**

- National Entrepreneurship Awards 2018, aimed at recognizing and honoring outstanding young first-generation entrepreneurs and those who have contributed immensely in building the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

#### **About this third edition of National Entrepreneurship Awards:**

- A total of 43 awards were given, including 39 awards for Young Entrepreneurs in different sectors and 4 awards for Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Builders.

#### **About National Entrepreneurship Award –**

- To catalyze a cultural shift in youth for entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has instituted the National Entrepreneurship Awards (NEA) to recognize and honour outstanding young first generation Entrepreneurs and their Ecosystem Builders for their outstanding contribution in entrepreneurship development.

Source: PIB

(Q) India produces too few entrepreneurs for its stage of development. Why promoting entrepreneurship is important for India? What are the strategies it can adopt? Discuss.

## **3. THE NEW DELHI INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION CENTRE BILL, 2018**

#### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** The Lok Sabha has passed the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill to set up a revamped International Arbitration Centre at New Delhi with an aim to make India the hub of arbitration.

#### **Key features of the Bill include:**

- **New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC):** The Bill seeks to provide for the establishment of the NDIAC to conduct arbitration, mediation, and conciliation proceedings. The Bill declares the NDIAC as an institution of national importance.
- **International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ICADR):** The ICADR is a registered society to promote the resolution of disputes through alternative dispute resolution methods (such as arbitration and mediation). The Bill seeks to transfer the existing ICADR to the central government.
- **Composition:** Under the Bill, the NDIAC will consist of seven members including: (i) a Chairperson who may be a Judge of the Supreme Court or a High Court, or an eminent person with special knowledge and experience in the conduct or administration of arbitration; (ii) two eminent persons having substantial knowledge and experience in institutional arbitration; (iii) three ex-officio members, including a nominee from the Ministry of Finance and a Chief Executive Officer (responsible for the day-to-day administration of the NDIAC); and (iv) a representative from a recognised body of commerce and industry, appointed as a part-time member, on a rotational basis.

- **Term and superannuation:** The members of NDIAC will hold office for three years and will be eligible for re-appointment. The retirement age for the Chairperson is 70 years and other members is 67 years.
- **Objectives and functions of the NDIAC:** The key objectives of the NDIAC include (i) promoting research, providing training and organising conferences and seminars in alternative dispute resolution matters; (ii) providing facilities and administrative assistance for the conduct of arbitration, mediation and conciliation proceedings; (iii) maintaining a panel of accredited professionals to conduct arbitration, mediation and conciliation proceedings. Key functions of the NDIAC will include: (i) facilitating conduct of arbitration and conciliation in a professional, timely and cost-effective manner; and (ii) promoting studies in the field of alternative dispute resolution.
- **Finance and audit:** The NDIAC will be required to maintain a fund which will be credited with grants received from the central government, fees collected for its activities, and other sources. The accounts of the NDIAC will be audited and certified by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India.
- **Institutional support:** The Bill specifies that the NDIAC will establish a Chamber of Arbitration which will maintain a permanent panel of arbitrators. Further, the NDIAC may also establish an Arbitration Academy for training arbitrators and conducting research in the area of alternative dispute resolution. The NDIAC may also constitute other committees to administer its functions.

#### **What is Arbitration?**

- Arbitration is a **settlement of dispute between two parties to a contract by a neutral third party i.e. the arbitrator without resorting to court action**. The process can be tailored to suit parties' particular needs.
- Arbitrators can be chosen for their expertise. It is confidential and can be speedier and cheaper than court. There are limited grounds of appeal. Arbitral awards are binding and enforceable through courts.

#### **Significance of ADR:**

- It is felt that a reliable and responsive alternative dispute resolution system is essential for rapidly developing countries like India. While business disputes need speedy resolution, litigation is the least favoured method for that.
- The Indian judicial system is marred by delays because of which businesses suffer as disputes are not resolved in a reasonable time period.
- Therefore, need for alternative dispute resolution processes like negotiation, mediation conciliation and arbitration is felt from time to time.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) It is said that to improve ease of doing business in India, there is a need to provide viable alternatives to litigation and implement effective means for enforcement of contracts. Examine in detail why and what kind of institutional arbitration mechanism is required in India.

## **4. TRANSPORT SUBSIDY SCHEME**

**Context:** To facilitate the process of industrialization in hilly, remote and inaccessible areas, transport incentive is provided to the states of:

- North Eastern Region (including Sikkim) under North Eastern Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) – 2017
- Jammu & Kashmir under Industrial Development Scheme – 2017
- Lakshadweep and A&N Islands under Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Island Development Scheme – 2018

#### **Industrial Units can avail Incentives:**

- Under the above mentioned schemes, all eligible industrial units can avail incentive on transportation of only finished goods through Railways or the Railway Public Sector Undertakings, Inland Waterways or scheduled airline (shipping for Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands also) for five years from the date of commencement of commercial production/operation.

#### **Freight Subsidy Scheme (FSS):**

- The FSS (2013) replaced the Transport Subsidy Scheme, 1971.
- It was in operation in all 8 North Eastern States, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, J&K, Darjeeling District of West Bengal, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep islands.

- The FSS has been discontinued since 22.11.2016. But, the industrial units under these schemes during their currency are eligible for the benefits of the scheme.
- While the inland transport incentive is available for certain landlocked states, there is no proposal to provide the same to the **state of Chhattisgarh**.

#### **Background:**

##### **About Transport Subsidy Scheme –**

- Government of India had introduced Transport Subsidy Scheme (TSS) on 23.7.1971 to develop industrialization in the remote, hilly and inaccessible areas.

##### **Scheme Objectives:**

- The objective is to develop industrialization in the remote, hilly and inaccessible areas in 8 North Eastern Region.

##### **Implementing Agency:**

- **DIPP (Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion)** is the implementing agency of TSS/FSS.

##### **Monitoring and Review Mechanism:**

In order to check any misuse, **Directorates of Industries** in each beneficiary State/UT are required to:

- Carry out periodical checks to ensure that the raw materials/finished goods for which transport subsidy is given in actually used for the intended purpose,
- To draw up procedures and arrangements for scrutinizing the claims and for promote payment of the claims,
- To lay down a system of pre-registration and to fix and indicate the capacity of the units during registration,
- To lay down procedure to ensure regular inflow of information regarding the movement of raw material and finished goods,
- To lay down that statistics of production and utilization or raw material should be maintained and kept open for inspection.

Source: PIB

## **5. GLOBAL ECONOMY WATCH BY PWC**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: About Global Economy Watch report.**
- **For Mains: Highlights of the report- significance, challenges, potential and measures needed.**

**Context:** *Global Economy Watch report* has been released by London based multinational professional services network- **PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)**.

- **PwC's Global Economy Watch** is a short publication that looks at the trends and issues affecting the global economy and details its latest projections for the world's leading economies.

#### **A look at India's economy in 2019 as per the report:**

- **India is likely to surpass the United Kingdom in the world's largest economy rankings in 2019.**
- As per the report, while the UK and France have regularly switched places owing to similar levels of development and roughly equal populations, India's climb up the rankings is likely to be permanent.
- The report projects real GDP growth of 1.6% for the UK, 1.7% for France and 7.6% for India in 2019.
- As per the report, **India should return to a healthy growth rate of 7.6% in 2019-20, if there are no major headwinds in the global economy** such as enhanced trade tensions or supply side shocks in oil.
- The **growth will be supported through** further realisation of efficiency gains from the newly adopted GST and policy impetus expected in the first year of a new government.

#### **Global Scenario:**

- The report notes that global economy as a whole is expected to slow in 2019 as G7 countries return to long-run average growth rates.
- PwC expects that the pick-up in growth of most major economies seen between the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2018 is now over.
- The report also notes that workers and wages will come to the fore and trade conflicts will deepen. The main focus of tensions is likely to remain US-China trade, but there will always be the risk of this escalating into a wider trade conflict and businesses accordingly need to plan for different scenarios.

Sources: the hindu.

## 6. SC UPHOLDS INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY CODE

Link: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/shot-in-the-arm/article26114457.ece>.

**Context:** Supreme Court has upheld the ***Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code's constitutional validity in its 'entirety'***, and rejected petitions challenging the bankruptcy laws, in a major setback to defaulting promoters hoping for a chance to remain in control of their firms.

**The Code creates various institutions to facilitate resolution of insolvency. These are as follows:**

- **Insolvency Professionals:** A specialised cadre of licensed professionals is proposed to be created. These professionals will administer the resolution process, manage the assets of the debtor, and provide information for creditors to assist them in decision making.
- **Insolvency Professional Agencies:** The insolvency professionals will be registered with insolvency professional agencies. The agencies conduct examinations to certify the insolvency professionals and enforce a code of conduct for their performance.
- **Information Utilities:** Creditors will report financial information of the debt owed to them by the debtor. Such information will include records of debt, liabilities and defaults.
- **Adjudicating authorities:** The proceedings of the resolution process will be adjudicated by the National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT), for companies; and the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), for individuals. The duties of the authorities will include approval to initiate the resolution process, appoint the insolvency professional, and approve the final decision of creditors.
- **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board:** The Board will regulate insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities set up under the Code. The Board will consist of representatives of Reserve Bank of India, and the Ministries of Finance, Corporate Affairs and Law.

### **Know about the IBC:**

- The IBC was enacted in 2016, replacing a host of laws, with the aim to streamline and speed up the resolution process of failed businesses.
- ***The code applies to companies and individuals.*** It provides for a time-bound process to resolve insolvency. When a default in repayment occurs, creditors gain control over debtor's assets and must take decisions to resolve insolvency within a 180-day period.
- The Code also consolidates provisions of the current legislative framework to form ***a common forum for debtors and creditors of all classes to resolve insolvency.***

### **Salient features of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code- how it work?**

1. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 is a comprehensive law and covers all individuals, companies, Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) and partnership firms.
2. The adjudicating authority is National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for companies and LLPs and Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) for individuals and partnership firms.
3. The insolvency resolution process can be initiated by any of the stakeholders of the firm: firm/ debtors/ creditors/ employees.
4. If the adjudicating authority accepts, an Insolvency resolution professional or IP is appointed.
5. The power of the management and the board of the firm is transferred to the committee of creditors (CoC). They act through the IP.
6. The IP has to decide whether to revive the company (insolvency resolution) or liquidate it (liquidation).
7. If they decide to revive, they have to find someone willing to buy the firm.
8. The creditors also have to accept a significant reduction in debt. The reduction is known as a haircut.
9. They invite open bids from the interested parties to buy the firm.
10. They choose the party with the best resolution plan, that is acceptable to the majority of the creditors (75 % in CoC), to take over the management of the firm.

### **Significance of the SC's latest judgment:**

- The endorsement of the law and its provisions by the Supreme Court would come as a boost to the government which pushed for a modern bankruptcy law in the first half of its term and managed to get an exit mechanism which would help the reallocation of capital and ease the huge debt burden of banks in India.
- In the working of the code, ***the flow of resources to the commercial sector in India has increased exponentially as a result of financial debts being repaid,*** the Supreme Court said.
- Crucially, ***the judgement upheld Section 29A of the code.*** The section specifies a broad range of criteria that would disqualify potential bidders from bidding for assets undergoing the corporate insolvency

resolution process and, among other things, bars promoters of a company facing insolvency proceedings from bidding to regain its control.

#### **Performance of IBC:**

- It has been an effective tool for creditors, with a threat to refer a case under the insolvency law helping force many debtors to come to the negotiating table and reinforcing what former RBI Governor, Raghuram Rajan, had famously said about promoters having no divine right.
- A measure of the success of this law will be a rising graph of cases of corporate debtors being resolved.

#### **Challenges present and measures to address them:**

- The major worry of the law now is the **failure in many cases to stick to the prescribed timeline of 180 to 270 days to firm up a resolution plan with elaborate hearings at NCLT benches**. Such delay goes against the very raison d'être of the law which is to ensure a swift resolution or closure and thus lower the risk for banks and the government arising from a rising pile of bad debts and the subsequent need to recapitalise state-owned lenders.
- **It is important that these timelines are adhered to.** Over time, the NCLT may be better tuned to these kind of summary proceedings with capacity building and training of professionals.

#### **Way ahead:**

- With the Supreme Court now upholding the law barring promoters of defaulting companies from buying back the stressed assets, we can perhaps **look to quicker resolutions of bad debts**.
- This is no small matter given that Indian banks have among the world's lost ratios when it comes to non-performing assets or bad loans, and the twin balance sheet problem—where there is stress on both the lenders' and borrowers' books—is one of the biggest elephants in the room.
- The Supreme Court's ruling, then, is a **welcome one that should circumvent efforts by vested interests to try and stymie the revival of debt-laden companies**, and will go a long way in enhancing India's stature as a good place to do business in.

## 7. FMCG SECTOR

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: FMCG sector- overview, key facts and schemes related.**

**Context:** The fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is expected to clock double digit growth in the current year, though the growth is likely to be lower than that of the previous year, which saw the sector benefit from the overall health of the economy and lower inflation.

- **Consumption growth in 2018 was led by** favourable macros like growth in GDP, lower inflation and manufacturers passing on the benefits of margin expansion from the GST regime.



#### **Overview of FMCG sector:**

- **Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is the 4th largest sector in the Indian economy** with Household and Personal Care accounting for 50% of FMCG sales in India.

- Growing awareness, easier access and changing lifestyles have been the key growth drivers for the sector.

**Investments/ Developments:**

- The government has allowed 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in food processing and single-brand retail and 51% in multi-brand retail.
- This would bolster employment and supply chains, and also provide high visibility for FMCG brands in organised retail markets, bolstering consumer spending and encouraging more product launches.

**Some of the major initiatives taken by the government to promote the FMCG sector in India are as follows:**

1. Consumer Protection Bill with special emphasis on setting up an extensive mechanism to ensure simple, speedy, accessible, affordable and timely delivery of justice to consumers.
2. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is beneficial for the FMCG industry as many of the FMCG products such as Soap, Toothpaste and Hair oil now come under 18 per cent tax bracket against the previous 23-24 per cent rate.
3. The GST is expected to transform logistics in the FMCG sector into a modern and efficient model as all major corporations are remodeling their operations into larger logistics and warehousing.

Sources: the hindu.

**Topic:** Inclusive growth and issues arising from it, Sustainable development

## 1. PRIVATE CONSUMPTION, A \$6 TN OPPORTUNITY

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: About WEF.
- For Mains: Private Consumption in India- potential, challenges and measures to address them.

**Context:** WEF has released a report titled *Future of Consumption in Fast-Growth Consumer Market – India*.

**Highlights of the report:**

- As per the report, domestic private consumption, that accounts for a major portion of India's gross domestic product (GDP), is expected **to develop into a \$6 trillion growth opportunity** that would make India the world's third-largest economy by 2030. Currently it is at \$1.5 trillion.
- The potential, however, offers both challenges and opportunities as India would have to address critical societal issues, including skill development and employment of the future workforce, socio-economic inclusion of rural India and creating a healthy and sustainable future for its citizens.
- If realised, **this would make India's consumer market, the third-largest in the world**, behind the U.S. and China.

**Major driving factors:**

- **The future of consumption in India in 2030 is anchored in rising incomes and a broad-based pattern of growth and benefit sharing.**
- **The growth of the middle class** would lift nearly 25 million households out of poverty and further, India would have 700 million millennials and Gen Z consumers, who have grown up in a more open and confident country.

**Challenges ahead:**

- The potential would only materialise if business and policy-makers pursue an inclusive approach towards the economic and consumption growth. The study identified three critical societal challenges that need to be addressed.
- **Skill gaps:** With nearly 10-12 million working-age people expected to emerge in India over the next decade, the country faces a huge challenge in providing the workforce with the right skills. More than one-half of Indian workers will require reskilling by 2022 to meet the talent demands of the future, stated the report.
- **Access-barriers:** India will have to manage socio-economic inclusion of rural India as, by 2030, 40% of Indians will be urban residents. Physical connectivity, digital connectivity and financial inclusion income is constraining the spending and well-being of rural dwellers, and these 'access-barriers' need to be addressed to ensure social and economic inclusion in India over the next decade.
- **Business and policy-makers will have to take the initiative on improving health and liveability** for India's citizens by providing them with access to affordable healthcare, promoting sustainable development, and seeking solutions to urban congestion.

## 2. UNIVERSAL BASIC CAPITAL

Link: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/think-universal-basic-capital/article26122852.ece>.

### **Highlights:**

- Though economy is doing well, human development as a whole is not up to the expected levels in the country. Here, the country continues to be compared with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Need of the hour:** India's economic growth must trickle down much faster to people at the bottom of the pyramid: to poorer farmers, landless rural labour, and hundreds of millions of workers living on the edge in low-paying, 'flexible' forms of employment with no social security.
- **Solution:** Economists seem to be offering three solutions to the economy's structural problems. One, that there is no problem. Two, more privatisation. And, three, a universal basic income (UBI) to be provided by the state.

### **UBI:**

1. UBI has appeared as a silver bullet solution to all the problems that the country is facing on the economy side. It will be an income provided to everybody by the very state that the capitalists say should get out of their way, and to whom they are unwilling to pay more taxes.
2. The beauty of a 'universal' basic income, its proponents say, is that it avoids messy political questions about who deserves assistance. It also side-steps the challenge of actually providing the services required: education, health, food, etc. Just give the people cash: let them buy what they need.
3. However, if the cash will not provide citizens with good quality and affordable education and health, because neither the government nor the private sector is able or willing to, this will not solve the basic human development problems that must be solved.

### **What about QUBRI (quasi-universal basic rural income)?**

To make UBI financially and politically feasible, few economists have suggested a QUBRI (quasi-universal basic rural income), targeted only at poorer people in the rural areas. Their scheme is no longer universal.

1. First, it will exclude the not-so-poor in rural areas as morally it should. Political questions about who should be included will have to be addressed.
2. Second, it will not cover the masses of urban poor working for low and uncertain wages.

Therefore, a simplistic UBI will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy.

### **Universal basic capital:**

- A better solution to structural inequality than UBI is universal basic capital, or UBC, which has begun to pop up in international policy circles.
- In this alternative approach, people own the wealth they generate as shareholders of their collective enterprises. Amul, SEWA, Grameen, and others have shown a way.
- Some economists go further and also propose a 'dividend' for all citizens, by providing them a share of initial public offerings on the stock market, especially from companies that use 'public assets', such as publicly funded research, or environmental resources.

### **Overall measures concluded:**

- One, focus on building state capacity beginning with implementation of the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission.
- Two, strengthen the missing middle-level institutions for aggregation of tiny enterprises and representation of workers. Three, the creativity of economists could be better applied to developing ideas for UBC than UBI.

## 3. THE CASE FOR MINIMUM BASIC INCOME

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-case-for-minimum-basic-income/article26131268.ece>.

**Context:** The editorial discusses about the need for minimum basic income, its feasibility, success models and the need.

### **What are income transfers?**

- They are unconditional income supplements to compensate for policy failures and ease the economic anxieties of the less advantaged.

### **Why provide income support?**

- **The benefits of reforms since 1991 are not equally shared.** The disproportionate share of gains from the reforms have gone to middle-class and rich Indians. Agriculture and other segments of the economy that engage poor and rural Indians are often left out. This unevenness in development calls for a superior economic growth model. Until that happens, redistributive policy interventions such as income transfers can improve equity.
- **The advantage of a minimum income guarantee is that it will also cover the urban poor.** While job guarantee programmes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, lock up beneficiaries in low-productivity work, income supplements allow them to continue to look for better employment options.

### **Success models:**

- Telangana and Odisha are already experimenting in a limited way with income support schemes, focused on the farm sector.
- **Rythu Bandhu:** In Telangana, the government is providing farmers income support payment at the rate of ₹10,000/ha (₹4,000/acre). However, this model benefits the biggest landowners the most, including those who lease out their land. Tenants, sharecroppers and landless labourers, the most vulnerable, are out of its coverage. Its success depends on reliable land records.
- **Odisha's recently notified KALIA (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Assistance)** irons out these creases. It proposes to transfer ₹5,000 in cash per season (₹10,000 per year for double-cropped land) to the State's 30 lakh marginal farmers, leaving out the two lakh large farmers. It promises cash grants of ₹12,500 each to the State's 10 lakh landless households. The hope is that they will use this money to rear goats or poultry and farm mushrooms or honey. Fisherfolk are covered too, and will receive the investment support for buying fishing nets and allied equipment.
- **Significance:** Rythu Bandhu and KALIA are superior policy interventions. Plus, they do not suffer from the moral hazard and limited reach of farm loan waivers. Waivers penalise farmers who repay loans on time and benefit only borrowers from banks.

### **Will it work?- Results of pilot project:**

- A pilot project conducted between 2010 and 2013, covering 6,000 beneficiaries in Delhi and Madhya Pradesh, yielded encouraging results. It confirmed that at high levels of impoverishment, even the smallest income supplement can improve nutrient intake, school enrolment and attendance of female students, and reduce incidence of indebtedness.
- This evidence challenges the commonly held views that welfare payments are an affront to the dignity of the beneficiaries and that they are used for questionable purposes, such as for buying alcohol.

### **How to raise funds for this?**

The government cannot risk widening the fiscal deficit. Increasing the fiscal deficit hurts the poor, for it sparks off inflation and cannot be the way to fund income transfers.

1. For this, the Centre and the States may utilize funds collected through various taxes, royalty payments and dividends from producers and consumers of petroleum products.
2. They can also consider streamlining distortionary and demerit subsidies, such as on urea (₹70,000 crore annually). It can open up significant fiscal space.
3. Healthcare, education, water conservation, environment and other merit subsidies need to be preserved and improved and should not be reduced to fund income transfers.
4. If the wealth tax that the government had abolished in 2015 is reintroduced as a fair and easy-to-collect levy on the super-rich, selling politically to the middle class an income support scheme for the poor will be easier.

### **Is income support sufficient?**

- Providing income support should be a short- term measure.
- In the long run, **there is need to address rural distress, which is largely a consequence of policy failures such as ineffective procurement and perverse trade and pricing policies** that have in times of bumper harvests led to gluts, depressed market prices, and aggravated farmer losses.

(Q) Direct income support has been cast as a panacea for ending mass poverty. Critically examine in this context the idea presented by Arvind Subramaniam and others regarding direct income support.

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

## 1. ATAL SOLAR KRISHI PUMP YOJANA

### What to study?

- **For Prelims:** Key features of the scheme.
- **For Mains:** Significance and the need for Government's support for in renewable energy sector.

**Context:** To reduce losses due to non-payment of electricity bills and also promote solar energy, **Maharashtra state government has launched Atal Solar Krishi Pump Yojana.**

### Atal Solar Krishi Pump Yojana:

- Under the scheme, the government of Maharashtra has decided **to give two LED bulbs, a DC fan and a mobile charging socket as freebies to farmers.**
- The scheme provides **a subsidy of up to 95% on solar pumpsets.** The State plans to install one lakh solar pumps.
- **Eligibility:** Under the Scheme, farmers with less than five acres will have to pay 5% of the cost of a 3 HP solar pump while farmers with more than five acres will get a 5 HP solar pump for Rs 30000.
- The Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Co Ltd (Msedcl) is **the implementing agency.**

### Significance:

- The scheme would be beneficial to farmers who reside in remote areas where the agricultural feeder is not possible.

Sources: toi.

## 2. AGRI-VISION 2019

**Context** – Agri-Vision 2019, a two-day conference on ‘Envisioning Agro Solutions for Smart and Sustainable Agriculture’ was held at Hyderabad.

### Indian Agriculture

- Agriculture sector accounts for 18 per cent of India's GDP and provides employment to 50 per cent of the workforce of the country.
- The Gross Value Added by agriculture, forestry and fishing is estimated at Rs 17.67 trillion (US\$ 274.23 billion) in FY18.
- During 2017-18 crop year, food grain production is estimated at record 284.83 million tonnes.
- The introduction of high yielding varieties, irrigation facilities, increased input flow through fertilizers and pesticides, farm mechanization, credit facilities, price support, and other rural infrastructure facilities ushered the green revolution over the past few decades.
- Growth of Agricultural sector is important for inclusive growth and poverty alleviation.
- Need for concerted efforts from all stake holders to find long term solution to various challenges faced by Agricultural sector, Loan waiver is only a temporary relief but proves futile in long run in addressing Farmers concerns
- India today is not only self-sufficient in respect of demand for food, but is also a net exporter of agri-products occupying seventh position globally. It is one of the top producers of cereals (wheat & rice), pulses, fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and marine fish. However, we are still facing deficit of pulses and oilseeds. Although, the availability of fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and fish has increased, the most important aspect is to ensure access and affordability to a vast majority of Indians, including farmers.

### Food processing industry

- Plays a critical role in improving agrarian economy, raising farm incomes, reducing wastages, ensuring value addition, promoting crop diversification and generating employment opportunities as well as export earnings.
- Vital link between agriculture and industry.
- The Indian food and grocery market is the world's sixth largest.
- The Indian food processing industry accounts for 32 per cent of the country's total food market, one of the largest industries in India.

## **Organic Farming**

- India holds a unique position among 172 countries practicing organic agriculture.
- India is home to 30 per cent of the total organic producers in the world, but accounts for just 2.59 per cent (1.5 million hectares) of the total organic cultivation area of 57.8 million hectares.

## **Horticulture**

- leading horticultural country of the world with a total annual fruits and vegetable production of 306.82 million tonnes during 2017-18
- India is the second largest fruit producer in the world.

## **Livestock**

- Has been growing faster than crop sector.
- The contribution of livestock output to the total output of the agriculture sector has significantly increased from 15 per cent in 1981-82 to 29 per cent in 2015-16
- acts as cushion and engine for agricultural growth.

## **Dairy industry**

- India is also the world's second largest milk producer and is emerging as a major exporter now.
- It is contributing around 26 per cent to total agriculture GDP.

## **Challenges**

- Climate change, fragmented land holding, increase in demand for food, stagnating farm incomes, declining productivity, diminishing and declining natural resources etc.
- Lack of favourable terms of trade, vagaries of monsoon, technology not reaching farmers in time, absence of proper marketing strategies etc.
- 85 per cent farmers are small and marginal with land holding of less than 2 hectares.
- Linking these small farmers with market is another major challenge in our system.
- To enhance the farmers' income, it is necessary to link them with marketers, traders and exporters.
- Challenges for food security in the 21st century is not only improving productivity but also yield stability through the development of crops which are disease-resistant, pest-resistant and adaptable to climate change.

## **Solution to address the challenges**

- Some ways to address the issues – accord top priority to farmer-oriented marketing, providing adequate cold storage facilities and refrigerator vans, focusing on food processing through value addition, extending timely and affordable credit to farmers and ensuring that innovations and technologies reach the farmers, researchers and farm experts to come out with solutions to the multi-dimensional problems faced by the farming sector.
- United efforts by governments, scientific community, Krishi Vigyana Kendras and farmers to realize the ambitious goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022.
- Students pursuing agri courses must spend at least six months with farmers to have a first-hand understanding of the problems faced by the latter.
- Adopt the latest technologies from seeds to post harvest management to marketing and to improve productivity on par with the other leading nations.
- The use of Information Technology, Space Technology, Geo-Informatics, Internet of Things (IoT), Block Chain Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data Analytics and their first-mile connectivity to farmers is vital for enhancing farm incomes. Digital technologies can also help in countering vagaries in farming and optimising the resources.

## **Government initiatives**

- Improve soil fertility on a sustainable basis through the soil health card scheme.
- Provide improved access to irrigation and enhanced water efficiency through Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY).
- Support organic farming through Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY).
- Creation of a unified national agriculture market to boost the income of farmers.
- To mitigate risk in agriculture sector, "Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) has been launched for implementation from Kharif 2016.
- Focusing on irrigation with schemes like "Per Drop More Crop", provision of quality seeds and nutrients based on soil health, setting up warehouses and cold chains to prevent post-harvest crop losses, promoting value addition through food processing, creating a National Farm Market, removing distortions and e-platform across 585 Stations.

- To achieve the target of doubling farmer income by 2022 increasing investments in agricultural R&D and rolling out efficient institutional reforms are vital to tackle the emerging challenges in agriculture, including food and nutrition security both at national and regional levels.

#### Focus areas

- For Prelims – Agricultural Schemes
- For Mains – Facts, stats, India's ranking, challenges & solution

Source: PIB

### 3. SMALL FARMERS' AGRI-BUSINESS CONSORTIUM (SFAC)

- **Why in News?** Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC).

#### About SFAC:

- The Government established Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) as **a Society in January 1994 to facilitate agri-business ventures by catalysing private investment through Venture Capital Assistance (VCA) Scheme** in close association with financial institutions. The role of State SFACs is to aggressively promote agribusiness project development in their respective States.
- **Management:** The Society is governed by Board of Management which is chaired, ex-officio, by Hon'ble Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare as the President and the Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, is the ex-officio Vice-President.

#### The main functions of SFAC are:

- Promotion of development of small agribusiness through VCA scheme.
- Helping formation and growth of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) / Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs).
- Improving availability of working capital and development of business activities of FPOs/FPCs through Equity Grant and Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme.
- Implementation of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Electronic Trading platform.

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

### 1. PRADHAN MANTRI FASAL BIMA YOJANA (PMFBY)

#### What to study?

- **For Prelims:** PMFBY- key features.
- **For Mains:** PMFBY performance analysis, shortcomings and ways to address them.

**Context:** Parliament's committee on estimates has in its latest report called for re-formulation of the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)**, seeking transparency in its working and asking for more financial allocations to attract increasing participation from farmers.

- The committee has observed that **there are fundamental flaws in the design of the scheme that renders it rather ineffective.**

#### Background:

- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), the flagship programme launched with much fanfare in 2016, has run into rough weather. With both the area covered and the number of enrolled farmers declining, the country's premium crop insurance scheme is certainly in need of an overhaul.

#### Challenges at present:

- **Insufficient reach and the issue of penetration.**
- **Data constraints:** With just around 45% of the claims made by farmers over the last three crop seasons data for the last rabi season is not available paid by the insurance companies.
- **Low payout of claims:** The reason for the very low payout of claims is that only few state governments are paying their share of the premiums on time and till they do, the central government doesn't pay its share either. Till they get the premium, insurance companies simply sit on the claims.
- **Gaps in assessment of crop loss:** There is hardly any use of modern technology in assessing crop damages. There is lack of trained outsourced agencies, scope of corruption during implementation and the non-utilisation of technologies like smart phones and drones to improve reliability of such sampling

- **Less number of notified crops** than can avail insurance, Inadequate and delayed claim payment.
- **High actuarial premium rates:** Insurance companies charged high actuarial premium rates.
- **If states delay notifications, or payment of premiums,** or crop cutting data, companies cannot pay compensation to the farmers in time.
- **Poor capacity to deliver:** There has been no concerted effort by the state government and insurance companies to build awareness of farmers on PMFBY. Insurance companies have failed to set-up infrastructure for proper Implementation of PMFBY.
- **PMFBY is not beneficial for farmers in vulnerable regions** as factors like low indemnity levels, low threshold yields, low sum insured and default on loans make it a poor scheme to safeguard against extreme weather events.

**About PMFBY:**

- In April, 2016, the government of India had launched Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) **after rolling back the earlier insurance schemes viz. National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS), Weather-based Crop Insurance scheme and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).**
- **Premium:** It envisages a uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for Kharif crops, and 1.5% for Rabi crops. The premium for annual commercial and horticultural crops will be 5%.
- **The scheme is mandatory for farmers who have taken institutional loans from banks.** It's optional for farmers who have not taken institutional credit.

**Objectives:**

- Providing financial support to farmers suffering crop loss/damage arising out of unforeseen events.
- Stabilizing the income of farmers to ensure their continuance in farming.
- Encouraging farmers to adopt innovative and modern agricultural practices.
- Ensuring flow of credit to the agriculture sector which contributes to food security, crop diversification and enhancing growth and competitiveness of agriculture sector besides protecting farmers from production risks.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Examine the issues in Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and discuss ways through which the coverage under this scheme can be enhanced?(250 words)

## 2. DELHI TO INTRODUCE MSP BASED ON SWAMINATHAN COMMISSION REPORT

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: What is MSP, need for revision and MS Swaminathan Committee recommendations and their significance.**

**Context:** The Delhi government has decided to introduce **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** for farmers based on the report of the **MS Swaminathan Commission**.

**Background:**

- A three-member committee was formed in December to study the MS Swaminathan Commission's report. The committee has submitted its report.
- The report will be put before experts for suggestions. Once the MSP is finalised, the government will hold meetings with farmers, seeking their views and thereafter it will be sent to the Cabinet.

**The Swaminathan Commission- Inception:**

- The National Commission on Farmers (NCF), with MS Swaminathan as its chairman, was formed in 2004.
- **Aim:** To come up with a system for sustainability in farming system and make it more profitable and cost competitive in farm commodities. To also recommend measures for credit and other marketing steps.
- **The commission submitted five reports** between December 2004 and October 2006. The fifth and final report is considered the most crucial as it contains suggestions for the agriculture sector as a whole.

**The Commission's observations:**

- **Farmers need an assured access to and control over basic resources of farming.** These include land, water, fertilizers and pesticides, credit and crop insurance. Knowledge of farming technology and markets is also key.

- **Farmers' concerns and other agriculture-related issues must be implemented in the concurrent list**, to make it a high priority for both state and central governments.

**Key recommendations of the Commission:**

- **Distribute ceiling-surplus and wasteland among farmers**, prevent the non-agricultural use of farmland, secure grazing rights and seasonal forest access to forest tribals.
- **Establish a National Land Use Advisory Service**, which would link land use decisions with ecological and marketing factors of season and geography-specific basis.
- **Reform irrigation resources and its distribution among farmers**. Use rainwater harvesting, water level recharging to increase water supply.
- **Spread outreach of institutional credit** by reducing crop loan interest rates, provide a moratorium on debt recovery, agricultural risk fund and a separate Kisan Credit Card for women farmers.
- To address the growing farmer suicides, **provide affordable health insurance at primary health centres in rural areas**. The recommendations included an extension of national rural health mission to suicide-prone areas. Restructuring of microfinance policies, covering all crops by insurance and social security net for support were also sought.
- **Give farmers a minimum support price at 50% profit** above the cost of production classified as C2 by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).

For further reading on MS Swaminathan report: <http://www.prsonindia.org/report-summaries/swaminathan-report-national-commission-farmers>.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Examine the key findings, recommendations and relevance of the National Commission on Farmers.

**Topic:** Types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage.

## 1. MEKEDATU PROJECT

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Key facts and location of Mekedatu dam and about the Cauvery river and its tributaries, about CWC.**
- **For Mains: Controversy over the project, what's the way out, need for a uniform mechanism to solve river water disputes.**

**Context:** The Karnataka Government has submitted a detailed project report (DPR) of the **Mekedatu project** to the Central Water Commission (CWC). As per the DPR, the total project cost will be the Rs 5,900 crore.

**What next?**

1. Now, the DPR will be **placed before the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)** and after its approval, will be brought before the **Advisory Committee of the Union Ministry of Water Resources**.
2. The DPR will be examined in specialised directorates of CWC including the Inter-State Matters Directorate, and if found acceptable, will be submitted to the **Advisory Committee of Irrigation and Multipurpose Projects of the Ministry of Water Resources, for acceptance**.
3. On the basis of the note prepared by CWC and deliberations during the meeting of the Advisory Committee, a decision on acceptance of the project will be taken.

**Why is Tamil Nadu opposing?**

- Tamil Nadu has been vehemently opposing the project and the CWC's decision to grant permission for Karnataka to prepare the DPR.

**Arguments of TN:**

1. **Proposed reservoir violates the decisions of the Supreme Court and the Cauvery Tribunal.** The Supreme Court had noted that the existing storage in the Cauvery basin of Karnataka should be taken into account for ensuring water releases to Tamil Nadu during the period of June to January.

**WHAT IS C2 ?**

**The CACP defines production costs of crops under three categories — A2, A2+FL** (standing for family labour) and C2.

- A2 is the actual paid-out expenses incurred by farmers — in cash and kind — on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired labour, fuel, irrigation and other inputs from outside.
- A2+FL includes A2 cost plus an imputed value of unpaid family labour.
- C2 is the most comprehensive definition of production cost of crops as it also accounts for the rentals or interest loans, owned land and fixed capital assets over and above A2+FL.

2. The centre says that the DPR submitted by Karnataka was subject to the amicable resolution of connected inter-State matters. However, Kerala, referring to the ***Guidelines of Submission, Appraisal and Acceptance of Irrigation and Multipurpose Project of 2017***, argued that inter-State aspects had to be dealt with even at the stage of preparing the pre-feasibility report on the project.

**About Mekedatu dam project:**

- Being **set up by the Karnataka government**, the project is near Mekedatu, in Ramanagaram district, across the river Cauvery from Tamil Nadu.
- Its primary objective is **to supply drinking water to Bengaluru and recharge the groundwater table in the region**.

**About CWC:**

- Presently functioning as **an attached office of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India**.
- Entrusted with the **general responsibilities of initiating, coordinating and furthering in consultation of the State Governments** concerned, schemes for control, conservation and utilization of water resources throughout the country, for purpose of Flood Control, Irrigation, Navigation, Drinking Water Supply and Water Power Development.
- **Headed by a Chairman, with the status of Ex-Officio Secretary to the Government of India.**

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What are the key contestations of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the Cauvery dispute? Are there any alternative solutions to resolve this dispute? Examine.

**Facts for Prelims- Cauvery River:**

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

## 2. POLAVARAM PROJECT

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Key facts on Polavaram project.**
- **For Mains: Significance and issues associated with the project.**

**Context:** The Andhra Pradesh government has bagged the **Central Board of Irrigation and Power (CBIP) award for speedy execution of Polavaram multipurpose project** on the Godavari river.

- Andhra Pradesh received the award in the category of “Best Implementation of Water Resources Project” for better planning, implementation and monitoring.

**About the Polavaram project:**

- Polavaram Project is a **multi-purpose irrigation project**. The dam across the **Godavari River** is under construction located in West Godavari District and East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh state and its reservoir spreads in parts of Chhattisgarh and Orissa States also.
- The project is multipurpose major terminal reservoir project on river Godavari for development of Irrigation, Hydropower and drinking water facilities to East Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, West Godavari and Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The Polavaram project was **accorded national status** in 2014 in the Andhra Pradesh Bifurcation Act and its design was changed.

**About CBIP:**

- The **Central Board of Irrigation and Power (CBIP)**, is a Premier Institution set up by the Government of India in the 1927.
- CBIP has been rendering dedicated services to the professional organizations, engineers and individuals in the country related to Power, Water Resources and Renewable Energy Sectors for more than eight decades.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- Dissemination of technical knowledge and information through various modes, e.g., publication of journals, manuals, technical reports, guidelines, organizing seminars and conferences and recognition of technical excellence through bestowing awards.
- To provide training to the engineers/professionals.
- To provide consultancy services.
- To provide research and professional excellence.
- To provide linkages to Indian Engineers, Managers and Scientists with their counterparts in other countries and with international organizations.
- To establish a Technical database, technological developments and to provide information services to the professionals.
- Introduction of Latest Technologies.

Sources: the hindu.

### **3. RENUKA DAM**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Features, benefits, location and significance of the dam.**

**Context:** The Centre has signed an agreement with Chief Ministers of five States — Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh — to restart construction of the Renuka multipurpose dam project in the Upper Yamuna Basin.

#### **About the Renuka dam project:**

- The Renuka dam project has been conceived as **a storage project on the Giri river (a tributary of the Yamuna)** in Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh.
- The project envisages making a 148-metre-high dam for supplying water to Delhi and other basin States. It will also generate 40 MW of power.
- **Funding:** Around 90% of the cost of irrigation/drinking water component of the project i.e. ₹3,892.83 crore will be provided by the Central government and the remaining ₹432.54 crore by the rest of the basin States.

#### **Significance and impacts:**

- After the construction of the dam, the flow of the Giri river will increase by about 110%, which will help meet the drinking water needs of Delhi and other basin States.
- Water from the Renuka dam will be used by U.P., Haryana and National Capital Territory of Delhi from Hathnikund barrage, by the NCT of Delhi from Wazirabad barrage and by U.P., Haryana and Rajasthan from the Okhla barrage.

**Topic:** Infrastructure, Investment Models;

### **1. ESTABLISHING GAS TRADING HUB/EXCHANGE IN THE COUNTRY**

- It has been agreed to establish the gas trading hub(s)/exchange(s) in the country wherein the natural gas can be freely traded and supplied through a market mechanism.

#### **Development of Natural Gas Grid:**

- To develop the natural gas grid, Government has taken a decision to provide a capital grant of Rs. 5176 crore (i.e. 40% of the estimated capital cost of Rs. 12,940 Crore) to GAIL for development of a 2655 Km long Jaddishpur-Haldia/Bokaro-Dhamra Gas Pipeline (JHBDPL) project.
- **This pipeline will transport Natural Gas** to the industrial, commercial, domestic and transport sectors in the States of **Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.**

#### **An Integrated Refinery-cum-Petrochemical Complex:**

- **Oil Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)** namely **Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL)** have decided to set up an integrated refinery-cum-petrochemical complex with a refining capacity of **60 MMTPA (Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum)** at Babulwadi, Taluka Rajapur in Ratnagiri District in the state of Maharashtra.

### **Background:**

- The establishment of a hub is an attempt to meet operators' demands for the adoption of a market-based gas-pricing regime. But India faces challenges in making the dream a reality, amid concerns over third-party access and competition.
- The gas hub plan ties in with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to boost the share of natural gas in India's energy mix to 15% by 2030, from just over 6% now.
- Domestic supply is also increasing. ONGC, India's largest producer, supplied 23.5bn cubic meters of gas in the 2017-18 financial year and plans to almost double this within the next four years.
- The Indian authorities, are considering overhauling the policy of fixed domestic gas prices, currently based on a formula derived from prices in the US, Canada, UK and Russia. **Delhi sees itself as a potential candidate for Asia's largest LNG trading hub, in a region that lacks accurate benchmarks reflecting Asian gas fundamentals.**

Source: PIB

## **2. SAUBHAGYA SCHEME**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Key features, objectives and targets of the scheme.**
- **For Mains: Significance of the scheme.**

**Context:** Maharashtra has completed the 100% electrification under the **central scheme of 'Saubhagya'** and has illuminated 10,93,614 homes before the stipulated deadline of December 31.

- Under the Saubhagya scheme, the target of 100% electrification of the state was to be achieved by December 31, 2018. However, the State Power Utility (SPU) achieved the target on December 27, 2018 itself.

### **About SAUBHAGYA Scheme:**

- **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana – 'Saubhagya'** was launched in September, 2017.
- Under Saubhagya **free electricity connections to all households (both APL and poor families) in rural areas and poor families in urban areas will be provided.**
- **Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) has been designated as nodal agency** for the Saubhagya scheme.
- The scheme aims to **achieve universal household electrification in all parts of the country.**
- **All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance** under the scheme in line with Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY).
- **Eligibility:** The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 instalments through electricity bill.

### **Scope of the Scheme:**

- Providing last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all un-electrified households in rural areas.
- Providing Solar Photovoltaic (SPV) based standalone system for un-electrified households located in remote and inaccessible villages / habitations, where grid extension is not feasible or cost effective.
- Providing last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all remaining economically poor un-electrified households in urban areas. Non-poor urban households are excluded from this scheme.

**(Q)** Electrification, in contemporary times, is a basic human necessity. With reference to the scheme Saubhagya, examine the feasibility of a national universal electrification program.

Sources: toi.

## **3. BHARATMALA PARIYOJANA**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Bharatmala, NHAI.**
- **For Mains: Infrastructure development- need, challenges and solutions.**

# BharatMala: Connecting India Like Never Before



- Economic Corridors (9000 km): To unlock full economic potential
- Inter Corridor and Feeder Route (6000 km): Ensuring holistic connectivity
- National Corridors Efficiency Improvement (5000 km): Enhancing efficiency
- Border Roads and International Connectivity (2000 km): Boosting Border Connectivity
- Coastal Roads and Port Connectivity (2000 km): Leveraging Ports for Progress
- Green field Expressways (800 km): Express speeds for Express gains
- Balance NHDP works (10,000 km): Boosting all round connectivity

**Context:** The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) plans to raise Rs10,000 crore through Bharatmala Taxable Bonds in the ongoing financial year.

- As per the internal and extra budgetary resources approved for 2018-19 by the government, a sum of Rs62,000 crore is to be raised by NHAI through various instruments/sources including Bharatmala bonds.

**What is Bharatmala project?**

- Bharatmala Project is the second **largest highways construction project in the country since NHDP**, under which almost 50,000 km of highway roads were targeted across the country. Bharatmala will look to improve connectivity particularly on economic corridors, border areas and far flung areas with an aim of quicker movement of cargo and boosting exports.

**About NHAI:**

- The **National Highways Authority of India was constituted by an act of Parliament**, the National Highways Authority of India Act,1988.
- It is responsible for the development, maintenance and management of National Highways entrusted to it and for matters connected or incidental thereto. The Authority was operationalised in Feb, 1995.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Critically examine the features of Bharatmala Pariyojana (BMP) initiative and its likely impact on economic growth of India.

## 4. STREET LIGHT NATIONAL PROGRAMME (SLNP)

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Key features and targets of the programme.**
- **For Mains: Significance of the programme, challenges ahead and ways to address them.**

**Context:** The Centre is likely to miss the goals it had set under the **Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP)** when it was launched on January 5, 2015.

- **Energy Efficiency Services Limited** has installed over 76.77 lakh LED street lights in 28 States or Union Territories till January 3, 2019.

**About Street Light National Programme (SLNP):**

- Under the SLNP, **the Government aims to replace 3.5 crore conventional street lights with energy efficient LED lights.**
- The **target under SLNP is to replace 1.34 crore conventional street lights with energy efficient LED street lights by March 2019.**
- The project has been implemented across 28 states and union territories. Energy Efficiency Services Limited, a Public Energy Services Company under the administration of Ministry of Power, Government of India (GoI) is the implementing agency for SLNP.

- **EESL also undertakes social audits in all states post the completion of the project.**

**Significance:**

- The installation of LED-based street lighting system is essential, since LED lighting offer higher efficiency, better illumination and life expectancy apart from being environmentally sustainable.

**EESL:**

- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is **a joint venture of NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation, Rural Electrification Corporation and POWERGRID.**
- It was set up under **Ministry of Power** (India) to facilitate implementation of energy efficiency projects.

Sources: the hindu.

**Objectives:**

- Mitigate climate change by implementing energy efficient LED based street lighting.
- Reduce energy consumption in lighting which helps DISCOMs to manage peak demand.
- Provide a sustainable service model that obviates the need for upfront capital investment as well as additional revenue expenditure to pay for procurement of LED lights.
- Enhance municipal services at no upfront capital cost of municipalities.

## 5. GANGAJAL PROJECT

**Context:** Giving a major push to develop and enhance Tourism infrastructure in Agra, the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched a series of development projects worth Rs. 2900 Crores for the Agra city and the adjoining areas.

**About Gangajal Project:**

- It aims to bring 140 cusecs of Ganga Water to Agra which will help meet the drinking water demands in the city.
- It will provide Agra with better and more assured water supply, at an estimated cost of Rs. 2880 crores.
- The project was launched in 2005 in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency and was scheduled to be completed by March 2012 but the project has missed several deadlines.
- Under the Gangajal project, Agra will get 140 cusec water supply per day from Palra headworks in Bulandshahr's Upper Ganga canal.

Source: PIB

## 6. ECO NIWAS SAMHITA 2018

**Context:** Bureau of Energy Efficiency and CPWD sign MoU on promoting energy efficiency in buildings

- According to the MoU, BEE and CPWD will cooperate on promoting designs and construction of Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) compliant new buildings, star rating of CPWD managed buildings across the country with no registration or renewal fee, awareness on energy efficiency in building sector and support for capacity building of CPWD officials in ECBC.
- **ECO Niwas Samhita 2018** an Energy Conservation Building Code for residential buildings, to push for energy efficiency in residential sector was launched on December 14, 2018.
- It aims to promote design and construction of homes including apartments and townships to give benefits of energy efficiency to the occupants. Ministry of Power launched the ECO Niwas Samhita 2018.

**Aim of ECO Niwas Samhita 2018:**

- To benefit the occupants and the environment by promoting energy efficiency in design and construction of homes, apartments and townships.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

**Role of BEE –**

- Processing of application for star rating of buildings
- Preliminary scrutiny of application
- Data verification of CPWD maintained buildings
- Installation of smart meters
- Award of certificate & label
- Support for Energy Efficiency in Buildings
- Support for construction of ECBC compliant buildings
- Efficient coordination with CPWD
- Capacity building of CPWD officials

**Role of CPWD –**

- Completely filled application for star rating
- Support and facilitation to data verification and monitoring
- Construction of ECBC Complaint buildings
- Support for Energy Efficiency in Buildings
- Efficient coordination with BEE

- It is anticipated that this initiative will result in energy saving of more than 260 million units in the first stage with operational savings of about Rs. 100 crore.

#### **Star Rating for Commercial Buildings:**

- It is based on the actual performance of a building in terms of its specific energy usage in kwh/sqm/year.
- It rates office buildings on a 1-5 Star scale, with 5 star labelled buildings being the most efficient.
- It is on a voluntary basis and label provided under it is applicable for a period of 5 years from the date of issue.
- It provides public recognition to energy efficient buildings, and creates a “demand side” pull.
- Various categories of buildings like Day Use Office Buildings, BPOs, Shopping Malls and Hospitals in the five climatic zones have been identified under the scheme.

#### **Background:**

##### **About Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) –**

- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) is a **statutory body**, set up by the Government of India on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2002 **under the provision of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001**.
- The mission is to **assist in developing policies and strategies with a thrust on self-regulation and market principles** with the primary objective of reducing energy intensity of the Indian economy within the overall framework of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
- This will be achieved with active participation of all stakeholders, resulting into accelerated and sustained adoption of energy efficiency in all sectors.

##### **About Central Public Works Department (CPWD) –**

- CPWD came into existence in July, 1854 when **Lord Dalhousie established a central agency for execution of public works** and set up Ajmer Provincial Division.
- It is headed by DG who is also the **Principal Technical Advisor** to the Government of India.
- It has PAN India presence and has ability to undertake construction of complex projects.
- It has been involved construction of stadiums and other infrastructure requirements for Asian Games 1982 and Commonwealth Games 2010.
- CPWD is now engaged in construction of Afghan Parliament Building (beyond national boundaries).

Source: PIB

## **7. GLOBAL HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGE**

#### **What to study?**

- For Prelims: GHTC- key facts, PMAY- U- Key features.**
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme and its role in achieving the “Housing for All” target, implementational challenges and measures necessary.**

**Context:** Government has launched the *Global Housing Technology Challenge*. The challenge is **undertaken under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban (PMAY-U)**.

**Key features of the Global Housing Technology Challenge (GHTC) are:**

- GHTC aims to fast-track the construction of affordable housing and meet the target of constructing 1.2 crore houses by 2022.
- GHTC focuses on identifying and mainstreaming proven demonstrable technologies for lighthouse projects and spotting potential future technologies for incubation and acceleration support through ASHA (Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators) — India.

#### **Home solution**

The Global Housing Technology Challenge is aimed at introducing best technologies to construct houses quickly and at a lower cost



• 6 winners will design and build projects of 1,000 housing units each

• The State and the Centre each will provide assistance of ₹1.5 lakh

• The Centre will give an additional technology grant of ₹2.5 lakh for each house

• Incubation facilities will be provided to develop building technologies with support from four IITs

• The approved technologies will be displayed by Central Public Works Department along with the rates

### **Objectives:**

- To enable **adoption** of construction techniques for housing that are **affordable** and takes **minimum time** as less as three months instead of the conventional three years for construction.
- Bring a paradigm shift in **technology transition** using large-scale construction under the **PMAY-U** as an opportunity to get the **best available construction technologies across the globe**.

### **Why is it important?**

- Today, while developers in India's metropolitan cities are sitting on lakhs of unsold residences costing upwards of ₹50 lakh, the country is estimated to have a shortage of nearly 20 million housing units needed by the rural and urban poor, at far lower price points of ₹5-15 lakh.
- The PMAY aims to address this shortfall. With the increase in subsidised loan amount to ₹12 lakh, the scheme is expected to cover a higher proportion of the urban poor. The PMAY will hopefully incentivise India's construction and realty sector to reduce its traditional obsession with affluent home buyers in the cities.

Sources: livemint.

(Q) In your opinion, what needs to be done in order to make the 'Housing for All by 2022' programme successful? Discuss.

### **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban (PMAY-U):**

- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Mission is being implemented by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA)**.
- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme components:
  - In-situ Rehabilitation of existing slum dwellers using land as a resource through private participation.
  - Credit Linked Subsidy (Implemented as a Central Sector Scheme).
  - Affordable Housing in Partnership.
  - Subsidy for Beneficiary-led individual house construction/enhancement.

## **8. 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:** As per the latest study conducted by the Rural Development Ministry, the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)** is in doldrums with over 12 lakh pending houses and land being provided to only 12 per cent of the beneficiaries even as the March 1 deadline for 1 crore houses fast approaches.

### **Performance analysis of the scheme:**

- Of the total 4.72 lakh beneficiaries identified across the country, only 56,694 have been allotted land.
- Among the best performing states in terms of land allotment are Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- States like Goa, Kerala and West Bengal have drawn a blank in terms of allotment of land to beneficiaries.

**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.

### **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 kutchha 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.

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

## 1. SPACE ACTIVITIES BILL, 2017

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Key provisions and significance of the bill, the need for legislation on outer space.

**Context:** The government is likely to introduce **the Space Activities Bill, 2017**, which will allow commercial use of space, in the budget session of 2019.

**Features of Space activities bill 2017:**

- It is a proposed Bill **to promote and regulate the space activities of India**.
- The new Bill encourages **the participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities** in India under the guidance and authorisation of the government through the Department of Space.
- The provisions of this Act shall **apply to every citizen of India and to all sectors engaged in any space activity in India or outside India**.
- A **non-transferable licence** shall be provided by the Central Government to any person carrying out commercial space activity.
- The Central Government will **formulate the appropriate mechanism for licensing, eligibility criteria, and fees for licence**.
- The government will **Maintain a register of all space objects** (any object launched or intended to be launched around the earth) and develop more space activity plans for the country.
- It will provide **professional and technical support for commercial space activity and regulate the procedures for conduct and operation of space activity**.
- It will ensure **safety requirements and supervise the conduct of every space activity of India and investigate any incident or accident in connection with the operation of a space activity**.
- It will share details about the **pricing of products created by space activity and technology with any person or any agency in a prescribed manner**.
- If any person undertakes any commercial space activity without authorisation they shall be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years or fined more than ₹1 crore or both.

**Need for a legislation on outer space:**

- There is a need for national space legislation for supporting the overall growth of the space activities in India.
- This would encourage enhanced participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India, in compliance with international treaty obligations, which is becoming very relevant today.

Sources: [toi](#).

(Q) What are the salient features of the Space Activities Bill, 2017? Examine how the use of outer space by ISRO has helped common man in India.

## 2. PAPER SENSOR THAT CAN DETECT FRESHNESS OF MILK

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Alkaline Phosphatase and about the new methodology to test the freshness of milk.

**Context:** Scientists at Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, have developed a simple paper kit that can test freshness of milk and tell how well it has been pasteurized. Aided with a smart phone app, the kit can help ensure that milk is consumed before it turns too sour.

**Background:**

- Milk being widely consumed food, its safety is of prime concern to consumers. More so because it is highly perishable and prone to action of enzymes and microorganisms inherently present in it.
- Although pasteurization, freezing and preservation using additives are widely used to prevent spoilage, perishability of milk is still a concern.

### **The new method- how it works?**

- A milk enzyme, Alkaline Phosphatase or ALP, is considered an indicator of milk quality because its presence even after pasteurization indicates presence of microbes that may not have been rendered inactive with pasteurization.
- Researchers used ordinary filter paper to prepare the detector. The filter paper was cut into small discs and impregnated with chemical probes that preferentially react with ALP. The ‘probes’ used are antibodies that specifically bind to ALP. When ALP comes into contact with the probe, it turns white paper disc into a coloured one.
- The colour change on paper discs is then photographed by a smartphone camera and images processed to obtain corresponding colour values. These values are then compared with standard data stored in the phone. Thus not only the presence of ALP could be detected but the amount of it in milk could also be measured.

Sources: the hindu business line.

## **3. INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: Indian science congress- theme, features and significance of such platforms.

**Context:** 106<sup>th</sup> ‘Indian Science Congress (ISC)’ session is being held at Jalandhar, Punjab.

- **Theme** – Future India: Science and Technology.

### **Background:**

- Indian Science Congress is organised by the **Indian Science Congress Association** every year in the first week of January.

### **About Indian Science Congress Association:**

- The Indian Science Congress Association was started in the year 1914 in Kolkata and has a membership of more than 30,000 scientists.
- **Origin:** It owes its origin to the foresight and initiative of two British chemists, namely, Professor J. L. Simonsen and Professor P. S. MacMahon. It occurred to them that scientific research in India might be stimulated if an annual meeting of research workers somewhat on the lines of the British Association for the Advancement of Science could be arranged.

### **Objectives:**

- To advance and promote the cause of science in India.
- To hold an annual congress at a suitable place in India.
- To publish such proceedings, journals, transactions and other publications as may be considered desirable.
- To secure and manage funds and endowments for the promotion of Science including the rights of disposing of or selling all or any portion of the properties of the Association.
- To do and perform any or all other acts, matters and things as are conducive to, or incidental to, or necessary for, the above objects.

Sources: the hindu.

**(Q)** Write a brief note on the origin and contribution of the Indian Science Congress to development of science in India. Also critically comment on its effectiveness today as platform for science popularisation and an exercise in public engagement of science.

## **4. SAKSHAM 2019**

- **Saksham (Sanrakshan Kshamta Mahotsav)** is an annual flagship event of Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India.

Saksham actively involves the Oil & Gas PSUs along with other stakeholders like State Governments,

- To create focused attention on fuel conservation through people centric activities and
- To sensitize the masses about the conservation and efficient use of petroleum products leading to better health and environment.

### About PCRA (established in 1978)–

- Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) is a registered society set up under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India.
- As a non-profit organization, PCRA is a national government agency engaged in promoting energy efficiency in various sectors of economy.
- PCRA aims at making oil conservation a national movement. As part of its mandate, PCRA is entrusted with the task of creating awareness amongst the masses about the importance, methods and benefits of conserving petroleum products & emission reduction.
- It sponsors R&D activities for the development of fuel-efficient equipment / devices and organizes multi-media campaigns for creating mass awareness for the conservation of petroleum products.
- To take the message to the people, PCRA uses all possible and effective media for mass communication.
- To give impetus to the oil conservation movement, PCRA utilizes various platforms like the World environment day, World energy day, various festivals etc.
- It functions as a Think Tank to the Govt. of India for proposing policies and strategies on petroleum conservation and environment protection aimed at reducing excessive dependence on oil.
- For the benefit of various target groups of petroleum products, PCRA has developed literature containing simple ready to implement conservation tips and techniques.
- Special low cost green leaflets have also been developed to educate the masses on the ill effects of pollution caused due to incomplete combustion and its impact on health.

Source: PIB

## 5. UNNATI PROGRAMME

### What to study?

- For Prelims: UNISPACE + 50, UNNATI- key features of the programme.
- For Mains: Significance of UNNATI and Nano- satellites.

**Context:** National space agency, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has launched the **UNNATI (UNISPACE Nano-satellite Assembly and Training by ISRO)** programme at the U R Rao Satellite Centre, Bengaluru. **UNNATI is a capacity building programme on nanosatellite development.**

### UNNATI Programme:

- The UNNATI Programme is to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE+50).
- UNNATI programme is planned to be conducted by U R Rao Satellite Centre (URSC) of ISRO for 3 years in 3 batches and will target to benefit 90 officials from 45 countries.

### The primary objectives of the programme are:

- To offer a simplified and increased exposure to satellite fabrication technologies, as part of the UNISPACE initiative.
- To provide theoretical course on satellite technology.
- To provide hands-on training to assemble, integrate and test a low cost, modular nano satellite.

Sources: pib.

## 6. ISRO'S YOUNG SCIENTIST PROGRAMME

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of ISRO's Young Scientist programme.

**Context:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced **Young Scientist Programme**.

### About Young Scientist Programme:

- **Aim:** Inculcate and nurture space research fervour in young minds.
- It would be a one month programme. The students will be exposed to the practical experience of building small satellites.
- **Eligibility:** Mostly 8th standard passed out students will be given lectures and access to research laboratories. 3 students from each of the 29 States and 7 Union Territories will be selected for the Young Scientist program.

Sources: pib.

## 7. INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE PERIODIC TABLE

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: International Year Of The Periodic Table, about Periodic table- key facts, IUPAC.

**Context:** To celebrate the **150th anniversary of the organisation of the periodic table**, UNESCO has launched the **International Year Of The Periodic Table**.

### Key facts relevant for Prelims:

- Russian scientist Dmitry Mendeleev published the first periodic such table in 1869.
- The table **organizes all chemical elements by the number of protons** in a given atom and other properties.
- **There are seven rows, called periods, and 18 columns, called groups**, in the table.
- **Elements in the same group share similar properties**. Those in the same period have the same number of atomic orbitals.
- **Most elements on the table are metals divided into six broad categories** – alkali metals, alkaline earths, basic metals, transition metals, lanthanides and actinides. They are located on the left, separated from the non-metals on the right by a zig-zag line.
- **Lanthanides and actinides, often called “inner transition metals”**, are commonly hived off as a separate section under the main table as including all 30 – including Uranium – would make the table too wide.
- The table is a useful tool for people to derive relationships between the different properties of the elements. It can also help predict the properties of new elements that have yet to be discovered or created.

### Who maintains periodic table?

The **International Union of Pure Applied Chemistry (IUPAC)** is responsible for maintaining the periodic table.

- IUPAC is an **international federation of National Adhering Organizations** that represents chemists in individual countries. It is a member of the International Council for Science (ICSU).
- **Headquarters of IUPAC** is in Zürich, Switzerland.
- Established in 1919 as **the successor of the International Congress of Applied Chemistry for the advancement of chemistry**.
- **Its members**, the National Adhering Organizations, can be national chemistry societies, national academies of sciences, or other bodies representing chemists.
- The IUPAC's **Inter-divisional Committee on Nomenclature and Symbols (IUPAC nomenclature)** is the recognized world authority in developing standards for the naming of the chemical elements and compounds.

### 1001 Inventions:

- **UNESCO has also launched its educational initiative, 1001 Inventions: Journeys from Alchemy to Chemistry**.
- Consisting of educational material and science experiments to help young people improve their understanding of chemistry and its numerous uses, the initiative will be brought to schools around the world during 2019.

Sources: the hindu.

**Topic:** Awareness in space.

## 1. NASA NEW HORIZONS

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Ultima Thule and New Horizons- Key facts.

**Context:** On January 1, **NASA's New Horizons spacecraft became the first explorer to fly past the mysterious object- Ultima Thule**, located some 4 billion miles from Earth.

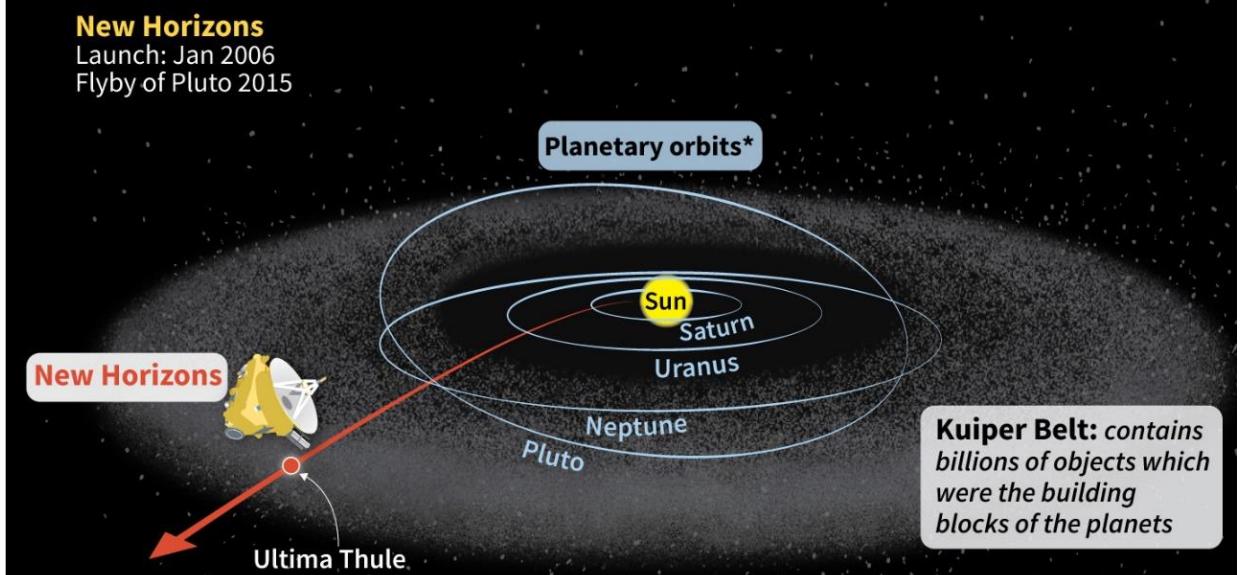
- This is a historic flyby of the farthest, and quite possibly the oldest, cosmic body ever explored by humankind.

### **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.

## **New Horizons set for most distant planetary encounter**

Jan 1 flyby of Ultima Thule, an icy body in the Kuiper Belt, a relic of the solar system's formation



### **Background:**

- New Horizons was launched on 19 January 2006, and has been travelling through space for the past nine years. New Horizons' core science mission is to map the surfaces of Pluto and Charon, to study Pluto's atmosphere and to take temperature readings.

(Q) Write a note on the significance of NASA's New Horizons Mission.

## **2. NASA'S OSIRIS-REX**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: OSIRIS-Rex mission and facts on asteroid bennu.**

**Context:** NASA's OSIRIS-Rex spacecraft has set a new milestone in cosmic exploration by entering orbit around an asteroid, **Bennu, the smallest object ever to be circled by a human-made spaceship.**

### **Significance:**

- **OSIRIS-Rex is the first-ever US mission designed to visit an asteroid and return a sample of its dust back to Earth.** The \$800 million (roughly Rs. 5,600 crores) unmanned spaceship launched two years ago from Cape Canaveral, Florida and arrived December 3 at its destination, some 70 million miles (110 million kilometres) away.

### **What next?**

- The plan is for OSIRIS-REx to orbit Bennu through mid-February, using a suite of five scientific instruments to map the asteroid in

## **WHAT WILL THE OSIRIS-REX MISSION DO?**

- Characterize and collect a sample from a near-Earth asteroid called Bennu, and return the sample to Earth for study.
- Help scientists better determine the orbit of the asteroid to provide more conclusive data on what kind of threat it represents and better predict the probability of it impacting Earth in the future.
- Help gain knowledge about the asteroid's composition, which could give clues about how planets formed and how life began.

high resolution to help scientists decide precisely where to sample from.

- Then, in 2020, it will reach out with its robotic arm and touch the asteroid in a maneuver Rich Kuhns, OSIRIS-REx program manager with Lockheed Martin Space Systems in Denver, described as a “gentle high-five.”
- Using a circular device much like a car’s air filter, and a reverse vacuum to stir up and collect dust, the device aims to grab about two ounces (60 grams) of material from the asteroid’s surface, and return it to Earth in 2023.

## SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVES



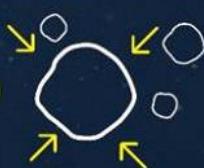
- Collect a sample and return it to Earth
- Map the asteroid
- Determine Bennu's physical and chemical properties
- Measure the orbit deviation caused by sunlight (the Yarkovsky effect)
- Compare observations with data from telescopes

## CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION



The OSIRIS-REx Laser Altimeter (OLA) is the Canadian contribution to the mission. OLA will make a 3D map of Bennu and help sleuth out the best site for a sample.

## WHY ASTEROID BENNU?



### ① PROXIMITY TO EARTH

Every six years, Bennu's orbit brings it near the Earth – less than 449,000 km away. Because of its orbit, Bennu has one of the highest probabilities of any known asteroid of impacting Earth.

### ② SIZE

The ideal asteroid has a diameter larger than 200 m so that a spacecraft can safely come into contact with it and collect a sufficient regolith sample comprised of fine gravel particles up to 2 cm in size.



### ③ COMPOSITION

Scientists will be able to analyze the asteroid's composition, chemistry, mineralogy and geology to learn more about it and other asteroids.



## MISSION TIMELINE



2016

LAUNCH



2018

**ENCOUNTER**  
19 months  
collecting data  
and preparing  
for sample  
collection



2020

**SAMPLE COLLECTION JULY 2020**  
3 CHANCES – 5 SECONDS EACH  
Bringing a sample to Earth will  
allow scientists to study Bennu  
for decades using highly sophis-  
ticated instruments and techniques.



2023

**RETURN  
TO EARTH**

### About the mission:

- OSIRIS-Rex stands for *Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer*.
- OSIRIS-REx is *the third mission in NASA's New Frontiers program*, which previously sent the New Horizons spacecraft zooming by Pluto and the Juno spacecraft into orbit around Jupiter.

### Why was Bennu chosen?

- Bennu was selected for the OSIRIS-REx mission from over 500,000 known asteroids, due to it fitting a number of key criteria. These include:
- Proximity to Earth:** In order for OSIRIS-REx to reach its destination in a reasonable timeframe, NASA needed to find an asteroid which had a similar orbit to Earth.

- **Size:** Small asteroids, those less than 200m in diameter, typically spin much faster than larger asteroids, meaning the regolith material can be ejected into space. Bennu is around 500m in diameter, so rotates slowly enough to ensure that the regolith stays on its surface.
- **Composition:** Bennu is a primitive asteroid, meaning it hasn't significantly changed since the beginning of the Solar System (over 4 billion years ago). It is also very carbon-rich, meaning it may contain organic molecules, which could have been precursors to life on Earth.
- Additionally, Bennu is of interest as it is a **Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA)**. Every 6 years, Bennu's orbit brings it within 200,000 miles of the Earth, which means it has a high probability of impacting Earth in the late 22nd Century.

Sources: et.

### 3. TRANSITING EXOPLANET SURVEY SATELLITE (TESS)

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** TESS- key features.
- **For Mains:** Scientific objectives and significance of the mission.

**Context:** Nasa which launched *Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (Tess)* for searching exoplanets in April, 2018 has discovered a third small planet outside our solar system.

#### **THE NEW PLANET:**

- The new planet is named HD 21749b. The newly discovered planet orbits a bright and nearby star which is about 53 light years away in the constellation Reticulum.
- HD 21749b appears to have the longest orbital period of the three planets so far identified by Tess. The surface of the new planet is hotter than 100 degrees Celsius.

#### **About TESS mission:**

- The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is a NASA mission that will **look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth's sky**. It was led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with seed funding from Google.
- **Mission:** The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets. TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure of solar systems outside of our Earth, and provide insights into how our own solar system formed.
- **Orbit:** TESS will occupy a never-before-used orbit high above Earth. The elliptical orbit, called P/2, is exactly half of the moon's orbital period; this means that TESS will orbit Earth every 13.7 days. Its closest point to Earth (67,000 miles or 108,000 kilometers) is about triple the distance of geosynchronous orbit, where most communications satellites operate.
- **How it works?** It will use transit method to detect exoplanets. It watches distant stars for small dips in brightness, which can indicate that planet has passed in front of them. Repeated dips will indicate planet passing in front of its star. This data has to be validated by repeated observations and verified by scientists.

#### **Significance of the mission:**

- TESS is designed to build on the work of its predecessor, the Kepler space telescope, which discovered the bulk of some 3,700 exoplanets documented during the past 20 years and is running out of fuel.
- Nasa expects to pinpoint thousands more previously unknown worlds, perhaps hundreds of them Earth-sized or "super-Earth" sized – no larger than twice as big as our home planet.
- Those are believed the most likely to feature rocky surfaces or oceans and are thus considered the best candidates for life to evolve. Scientists have said they hope TESS will ultimately help catalog at least 100 more rocky exoplanets for further study in what has become one of astronomy's newest fields of exploration.

Sources: the hindu.

## 4. YUTU 2

### What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains: All about Yutu 2- features and objectives.**

**Context:** China has named the *lunar rover*, successfully deployed to carry out a string of experiments on the far side of the moon, as '*Yutu-2*'. The rover's touchdown is **part of China Chang'e-4 lunar probe**.

### Key facts:

- It follows the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System — China's homegrown Global Positioning System that started worldwide service last month.
- The rover has been programmed to *launch ground penetration radar that would help map the moon's inner structures*.
- It would *also analyse soil and rock samples for minerals*, apart from *activating a radio telescope to search for possible signals from deep space*.

Sources: the hindu.

**Topic:** Computers, IT, Robotics, Biotechnology. etc

## KYASANUR FOREST DISEASE

### What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains: The disease- symptoms, causes, spread, treatment and prevention.**

**Context:** Karnataka is currently reeling under an outbreak of monkey fever or Kyasanur forest disease (KFD). Authorities are taking measures, including vaccination to combat the disease and spread of it in the state.

### About the Disease:

- **KFD is caused by the Kyasanur Forest Disease Virus (KFDV).** The virus was identified in 1957 when it was isolated from a sick monkey from the Kyasanur Forest. Since then, between 400-500 humans cases per year have been reported.
- **Hard ticks (*Hemaphysalis spinigera*) are the reservoir** of the KFD virus and once infected, remain so for life.
- **Rodents, shrews, and monkeys are common hosts** for KFDV after being bitten by an infected tick. KFDV can cause epizootics with high fatality in primates.

### Transmission:

- **Transmission to humans** may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal, most importantly a sick or recently dead monkey. No person-to-person transmission has been described.
- **The disease as of now is stated to be transmitted through monkeys.** Large animals such as goats, cows, and sheep may become infected with KFD but play a limited role in the transmission of the disease.
- **These animals provide the blood meals** for ticks and it is possible for infected animals with viremia to infect other ticks, but transmission of KFDV to humans from these larger animals is extremely rare. Furthermore, there is no evidence of disease transmission via the unpasteurised milk of any of these animals.

### Symptoms:

- After an incubation period of 3-8 days, the symptoms of KFD begin suddenly with chills, fever, and headache. Severe muscle pain with vomiting, gastrointestinal symptoms and bleeding problems may occur 3-4 days after initial symptom onset. Patients may experience abnormally low blood pressure, and low platelet, red blood cell, and white blood cell counts.
- After 1-2 weeks of symptoms, some patients recover without complication. However, the illness is biphasic for a subset of patients (10-20 %) who experience a second wave of symptoms at the beginning of the third week. These symptoms include fever and signs of neurological manifestations, such as severe headache, mental disturbances, tremors, and vision deficits.

### Vulnerable Group:

- People with recreational or occupational exposure to rural or outdoor settings (e.g., hunters, herders, forest workers, farmers) are potentially at risk for infection by contact with infected ticks.
- Seasonality is another important risk factor as more cases are reported during the dry season, from November through June.

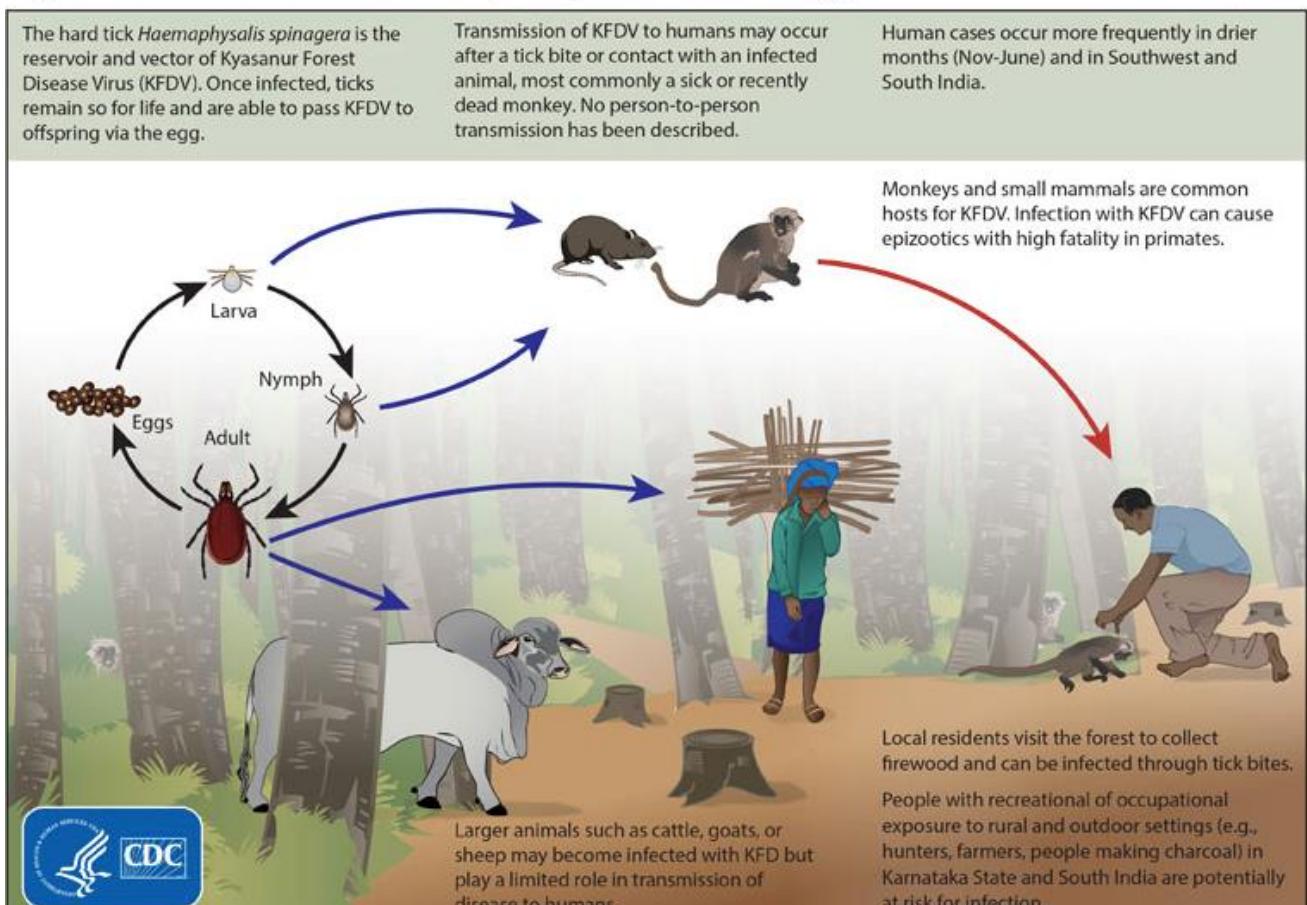
### **Diagnosis:**

- Diagnosis can be made in the early stage of illness by molecular detection by PCR or virus isolation from blood. Later, serologic testing using enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) can be performed.

### **Prevention:**

- Doctors say there is no specific treatment for KFD, but early hospitalisation and supportive therapy is important. Supportive therapy includes the maintenance of hydration and the usual precautions for patients with bleeding disorders.
- A vaccine does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India. Additional preventative measures include insect repellents and wearing protective clothing in areas where ticks are endemic.

## **Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) Virus Ecology**



Sources: the hindu.

**Topic:** Conservation, Environment related issues.

## **1. CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD)**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims: Key facts on CBD, National Biodiversity Targets, Aichi Targets.
- For Mains: India's efforts towards achievement of these targets, challenges ahead and the need for global cooperation.

**Context:** India recently submitted its *Sixth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*.

- India is among the first five countries in the world, the first in Asia and the first among the biodiversity-rich megadiverse countries to have submitted the report.

### **Background:**

- The submission of national reports is a mandatory obligation on parties to international treaties, including the CBD. As a responsible nation, India has never reneged on its international commitments and has earlier submitted on time five national reports to the CBD.

### **Highlights of the report:**

- The report provides *an update of progress in achievement of 12 National Biodiversity Targets (NBT)* developed under the convention process in line with the 20 global *Aichi biodiversity targets*.
- The report highlights that while India has exceeded/ overachieved two NBTs, it is on track to achieve eight NBTs and with respect to two remaining NBTs, the country is striving to meet the targets by the stipulated time of 2020.
- According to the report, India has exceeded the terrestrial component of 17% of Aichi target 11, and 20% of corresponding NBT relating to areas under biodiversity management.
- Also, India has been investing a huge amount on biodiversity directly or indirectly through several development schemes of the central and state governments, to the tune of Rs 70,000 crores per annum as against the estimated annual requirement of nearly Rs 1,09,000 crore.

### **The 12 National Biodiversity targets of India are:**

1. By 2020, a significant proportion of the country's population, especially the youth, is aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.
2. By 2020, values of biodiversity are integrated into national and state planning processes, development programmes and poverty alleviation strategies.
3. Strategies for reducing the rate of degradation, fragmentation and loss of all natural habitats are finalized and actions put in place by 2020 for environmental amelioration and human well-being.
4. By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and strategies to manage them developed so that populations of prioritized invasive alien species are managed.
5. By 2020, measures are adopted for sustainable management of agriculture, forestry and fisheries.
6. Ecologically representative areas under terrestrial and inland water, and also coastal and marine zones, especially those of particular importance for species, biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved effectively and equitably, based on protected area designation and management and other area-based conservation measures and are integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes, covering over 20% of the geographic area of the country, by 2020.
7. By 2020, genetic diversity of cultivated plants, farm livestock, and their wild relatives, including other socio-economically as well as culturally valuable species, is maintained, and strategies have been developed and implemented for minimizing genetic erosion and safeguarding their genetic diversity.
8. By 2020, ecosystem services, especially those relating to water, human health, livelihoods and well-being, are enumerated and measures to safeguard them are identified, taking into account the needs of women and local communities, particularly the poor and vulnerable sections.
9. By 2015, Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization as per the Nagoya Protocol are operational, consistent with national legislation.

### **About CBD:**

- At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders agreed on a comprehensive strategy for "sustainable development" — meeting our needs while ensuring that we leave a healthy and viable world for future generations. One of the key agreements adopted at Rio was the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- The Convention on Biological Diversity is the *international legal instrument for "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources"* that has been ratified by 196 nations.

### **Aichi Targets:**

- The 'Aichi Targets' were *adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at its Nagoya conference*. It is a short term plan provides a set of 20ambitious yet achievable targets, collectively known as the Aichi Targets. They can be divided into:
  1. **Strategic Goal A:** Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.
  2. **Strategic Goal B:** Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use.
  3. **Strategic Goal C:** To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity.
  4. **Strategic Goal D:** Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services.
  5. **Strategic Goal E:** Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building.

10. By 2020, an effective, participatory and updated national biodiversity action plan is made operational at different levels of governance.
11. By 2020, national initiatives using communities' traditional knowledge relating to biodiversity are strengthened, with the view to protecting this knowledge in accordance with national legislation and international obligations.
12. By 2020, opportunities to increase the availability of financial, human and technical resources to facilitate effective implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the national targets are identified and the Strategy for Resource Mobilization is adopted.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Critically evaluate the implementation of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 which is meant to fulfil the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

## 2. GEF ASSISTED GREEN – AG PROJECT TO TRANSFORM INDIAN AGRICULTURE

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the project, GEF.**

**Context:** The Government has launched the “**Green – Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for global environmental benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes**” in association with **Global Environment Facility (GEF)**.

**About GEF:**

- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of **the 1992 Rio Earth Summit** to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- It is an **international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector** that addresses global environmental issues.
- GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
- **The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.**

Sources: the hindu.

**Green-Ag Project:**

- The project would be implemented in **collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** in high-conservation-value landscapes of five States namely, (i) Madhya Pradesh: Chambal Landscape, (ii) Mizoram: Dampa Landscape, (iii) Odisha: Similipal Landscape, (iv) Rajasthan: Desert National Park Landscape and v) Uttarakhand: Corbett-Rajaji Landscape.
- The Green-Ag project seeks to **integrate biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management objectives and practices into Indian agriculture**.
- The project aims to catalyze a transformative change of India's agricultural sector to support the achievement of national and global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes.
- The project supports harmonization between India's agricultural and environmental sector priorities and investments to realise the national and global environmental benefits without compromising on India's ability to strengthen rural livelihoods and meet its food and nutrition security.

## 3. CITES — WASHINGTON CONVENTION

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: CITES- key facts.**
- **For Mains: Why India has proposed to remove rosewood from the CITES list? Need and implications of this move.**

**Context:** India has proposed to remove **rosewood (Dalbergia sissoo)** from **Appendix II of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**, a multilateral treaty to protect endangered plants and animals.

- **The species is currently part of Appendix II of CITES** that has species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival. But, India doesn't want that for rosewood.

**Why India wants rosewood removed from the list?**

- **The species grows at a very fast rate and has the capacity to become naturalised outside its native range**, even it is invasive in some parts of the world.

- The regulation of trade in the species is not necessary **to avoid it becoming eligible for inclusion in Appendix I** in the near future and the harvest of specimens from the wild is not reducing the wild population to a level at which its survival might be threatened by continued harvesting or other influences.

#### **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES):**

- It is **an International agreement to regulate worldwide commercial trade in wild animal and plant species. It also restricts trade in items made from such plants and animals**, such as food, clothing, medicine, and souvenirs
- It was signed on March 3, 1973 (**Hence world wildlife day is celebrated on march 3**).
- It is administered by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.
- Secretariat** — Geneva (Switzerland).
- CITES is legally binding** on state parties to the convention, which are obliged to adopt their own domestic legislation to implement its goals.

#### **Classifications:**

- It classifies plants and animals according to three categories, or appendices, based on how threatened. They are.
  - Appendix I:** It lists species that are in danger of extinction. It prohibits commercial trade of these plants and animals except in extraordinary situations for scientific or educational reasons.
  - Appendix II species:** They are those that are not threatened with extinction but that might suffer a serious decline in number if trade is not restricted. Their trade is regulated by permit.
  - Appendix III species:** They are protected in at least one country that is a CITES member states and that has petitioned others for help in controlling international trade in that species.

Sources: down to earth.

## **4. INTERNATIONAL STOCK TAKING CONFERENCE ON TIGER CONSERVATION:**

#### **What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: International Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation, project tiger, global tiger initiative and Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP).**

**Context:** With shrinking habitats, experts opine that India has almost neared its capacity to manage tigers. Therefore, **India must also prepare for a new challenge — of reaching the limits of its management capacity.**

#### **Notable points:**

- India's current capacity to host tigers ranges from 2,500-3,000 tigers. Officially, India had 2,226 tigers as of 2014. An ongoing census is expected to reveal an update to these numbers.
- 25-35% of India's tigers now live outside protected reserves.
- Recent attempts at translocating tigers to unpopulated reserves, such as Satkosia in Orissa, have ended badly, with one of the tigers dying.

#### **Main Challenges:**

- Dwindling core forest as well as the shrinking of tiger corridors.
- Poaching and man-animal conflict.

#### **Way ahead:**

- India has the **maximum number of wild tigers in the world** (70% of tigers in the world are in India). Therefore, it needs a fool-proof plan to manage the growing number of big cats.
- Given the low availability of prey in some reserves, the country should now concentrate on developing vast tracts of potential tiger habitat that can be used to improve prey density, develop tiger corridors and therefore support a much larger population.

#### **International Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation:**

- The **3rd Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation** was recently inaugurated in New Delhi. Third in a series of Stock Taking Conferences, this is the second to be held in India after 2012 and is expected to have wide-ranging discussions on the status of the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) by the 13 tiger range countries besides deliberations on combating wildlife trafficking.
- 13 Tiger range States**—Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

- **The conference is being hosted by** the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in close collaboration with the Global Tiger Forum which is an International, Intergovernmental Organization for conserving tigers in the world.

#### **Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP):**

- The Global Tiger Recovery Program (**GTRP**) seeks to empower **Tiger Range Countries (TRCs)** to address the entire spectrum of threats, domestic as well as those that are transboundary in nature, and work toward increased financial sustainability through the integration of conservation objectives into development.
- The GTRP was developed, with the goal of **doubling the number of wild tigers globally by 2022** through actions to: (i) effectively manage, preserve, protect, and enhance tiger habitats; (ii) eradicate poaching, smuggling, and illegal trade of tigers, their parts, and derivatives; (iii) cooperate in transboundary landscape management and in combating illegal trade; (iv) engage with indigenous and local communities; (v) increase the effectiveness of tiger and habitat management; and (vi) restore tigers to their former range.

**Additional facts:** During the St. Petersburg declaration in 2010, tiger range countries had resolved to double tiger numbers across their range by 2022.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) What conditions are necessary for tigers to live, breed and increase their population? Examine the role of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in conserving tiger population.

## **5. KASTURIRANGAN REPORT ON WESTERN GHATS**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Western Ghats- Key geographical and environmental facts.
- **For Mains:** Issues related to the conservation of the region, overview of Gadil and Kasturirangan committee reports.

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

#### **Important observations made by the committee:**

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

#### **Background:**

- The panel had examined issues regarding the categorisation of the Western Ghats as ESA as per the recommendations of two committees led by Madhav Gadgil and K. Kasturirangan.
- The panel examined 62 assurances during its deliberations with various State governments and other organisations, and had visited Pune, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru, before preparing its report.

#### **What next?**

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

#### **What did the Gadgil Committee say?**

- It defined the **boundaries of the Western Ghats** for the purposes of ecological management. It proposed that this entire area be designated as **ecologically sensitive area (ESA)**.
- Within this area, smaller regions were to be identified as **ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ) I, II or III based on their existing condition and nature of threat**.
- It proposed to divide the area into about 2,200 grids, of which 75 per cent would fall under ESZ I or II or under already existing protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries or natural parks.
- The committee proposed a Western Ghats Ecology Authority to regulate these activities in the area.

### **What was the need for the subsequent Kasturirangan Committee?**

- None of the six concerned states agreed with the recommendations of the Gadgil Committee, which submitted its report in August 2011.
- In August 2012, then Environment Minister constituted a High-Level Working Group on Western Ghats under Kasturirangan to “examine” the Gadgil Committee report in a “holistic and multidisciplinary fashion in the light of responses received” from states, central ministries and others.

### **Recommendations of Kasturirangan Committee:**

- A ban on mining, quarrying and sand mining.
- No new thermal power projects, but hydro power projects allowed with restrictions.
- A ban on new polluting industries.
- Building and construction projects up to 20,000 sq m was to be allowed but townships were to be banned.
- Forest diversion could be allowed with extra safeguards.

### **Eco-Sensitive Areas (ESAs):**

#### **DEFINITION:**

Eco sensitive areas are **ecologically and economically important**, but vulnerable even to mild disturbances, and hence demand careful management. These areas are critical to the maintenance of productive and diverse plant and wildlife populations.

#### **FEATURES OF ECO SENSITIVE AREAS:**



Biologically and ecologically rich, valuable or unique



Largely irreplaceable if destroyed



High value to human societies



Maintain the ecological stability of the area



Conserves biological diversity

#### **CONTENTS OF ESA:**

- **Sacred forests protecting origins of rivers** (e.g. Bhimashankar in Pune District)
- **Important breeding habitats** (e.g. Kokkre – Bellur Pelicanry in Mandy District, Karnataka)



Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Various committees have been formed to give recommendations on preservation of Western Ghats, but not a lot has happened on that front. Examine.

## **6. NATIONAL BAMBOO MISSION**

**Context:** The restructured **National Bamboo Mission (NBM)** was approved in April, 2018 for implementation till the end of 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission i.e. 2019-2020.

### **Aim of the Mission:**

- It aims to **inter-alia supplement farm income of farmers with focus on the development of complete value chain of bamboo sector** linking growers with industry.

### **Implementation:**

- The scheme is being implemented in non-forest Government land, farmers field in States where it has social, commercial and economical advantage, including the bamboo rich States of North Eastern region and Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

#### Till Now:

- 88 Bamboo Treatment Units, 464 Product Development/Processing Units, 135 Infrastructure Projects for Promotion and Development of Bamboo Markets, and an area of 15740 ha for plantation has been approved.

#### Financial Assistance:

- Financial Assistance to North Eastern States is provided in the **ratio of 90:10 between Central & State Government**.
- A number of consultations have been held with State Governments and Industry to invigorate the bamboo sector in the region.

#### National Bamboo Mission –

- The Mission envisages promoting holistic growth of bamboo sector by adopting area-based, regionally differentiated strategy and to increase the area under bamboo cultivation and marketing.

#### Key Outputs:

1. Coverage of 1,05,000 ha area under bamboo in two years by ensuring adequate stocks of selected genetically superior quality planting material.
2. Promotion and diversification of bamboo products through establishment of micro, small, medium & large processing units and development of value chain in bamboo.
- Setting up and strengthening of bamboo mandi/bazaars/rural haats, including promoting online trade.
1. Enhanced cooperation within the country related to research, technology, product development, machinery, trade information and knowledge sharing platform particularly for NE States to give a boost to the low key bamboo based industry in the country.

#### Mission Structure:

- The NBM will be a **sub-scheme of National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)** under the umbrella scheme Krishonnati Yojana.

#### Funding Pattern:

- 60:40 between Centre and State Govt. for all States (excepting NE & Hilly states),
- 90:10 for the NE & Hilly States, and
- 100% for Union Territories/R&D Institutes/Bamboo Technology Support Groups (BTSGs) and National Level Agencies.

Source : PIB

## 7. NATIONAL CLEAN AIR PROGRAMME

#### What to study?

- **For Prelims: NCAP- features and targets.**
- **For Mains: Significance, challenges in its implementation and measures needed to improve its outcomes.**

**Context:** The government has announced the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). This is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target.

- **The programme will not be notified under the Environment Protection Act or any other Act** to create a firm mandate with a strong legal back up for cities and regions to implement NCAP in a time bound manner for effective reduction.

#### Key features of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

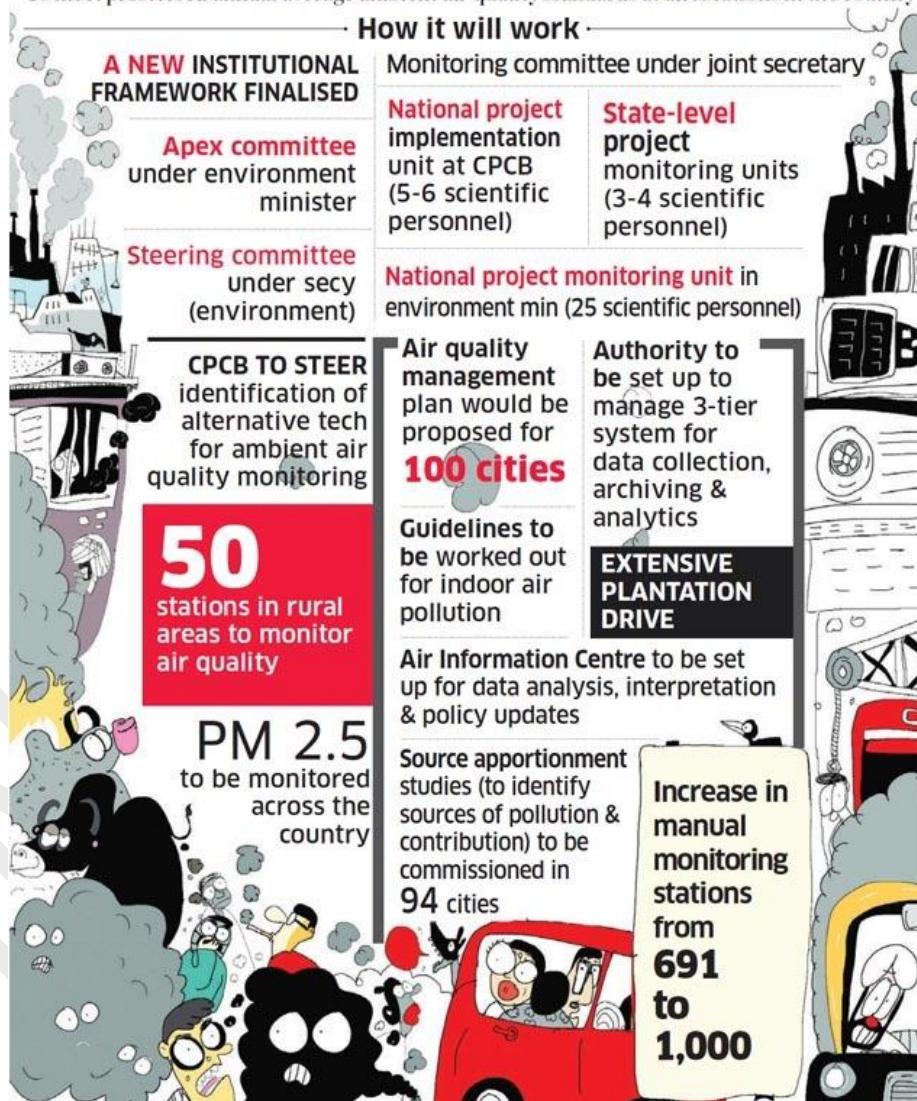
- **Achieve a national-level target** of 20-30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by between 2017 and 2024.
- **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will execute this nation-wide programme** in consonance with the section 162 (b) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1986.
- **The programme has been launched with an initial budget of ₹300 crore** for the first two years.
- **The plan includes 102 non-attainment cities**, across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.
- **Non-attainment cities are those** which have been consistently showing poorer air quality than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. These include Delhi, Varanasi, Bhopal, Kolkata, Noida, Muzaffarpur, and Mumbai.

- As part of the programme, **the Centre also plans to scale up the air quality monitoring network across India**. At least 4,000 monitors are needed across the country, instead of the existing 101 real-time air quality (AQ) monitors, according to an analysis.
- The plan proposes a three-tier system**, including real-time physical data collection, data archiving, and an action trigger system in all 102 cities, besides extensive plantation plans, research on clean-technologies, landscaping of major arterial roads, and stringent industrial standards.
- It also proposes state-level plans** of e-mobility in the two-wheeler sector, rapid augmentation of charging infrastructure, stringent implementation of BS-VI norms, boosting public transportation system, and adoption of third-party audits for polluting industries.
- Various committees:** The national plan has proposed setting up an apex committee under environment minister, a steering committee under-secretary (environment) and a monitoring committee under a joint secretary. There would be project monitoring committees at the state-level with scientists and trained personnel.

## CLEARING THE AIR

### AIM OF NATIONAL CLEAN AIR PROGRAMME

To meet prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in the country



#### Benefits of the programme:

- NCAP has certainly helped kick start the much-awaited good practice of setting air pollution reduction targets. The biggest advantage of such targets is that it helps decide the level of stringency of local and regional action needed for the plans to be effective enough to meet the reduction targets.

#### Need of the hour:

- The MoEF&CC, as a nodal central and apex agency, will have to **flex its authority to ensure all NCAP indicators are integrated with multi-sector and inter-ministerial programmes** to align with the air quality target and objectives.

- **NCAP should not become only a top-down prescriptive approach.** In fact, within the federal structure, NCAP, while ensuring compliance, will also have to create enough room for tighter action that can be even stronger than the common minimum national programme as defined by NCAP.
- **State governments and city authorities should be encouraged and enabled to take those extra steps to meet local targets.** City-wise air quality targets will clearly show where much deeper cuts will be needed for hotspot and stronger regional action.
- **NCAP will also have to join all critical dots with clarity.** For instance, in case of vehicular pollution, the main body of the plan has ignored mobility, transportation and urban planning strategies, though fortunately, the indicative broadsheet of action at the end has listed public transport, transit-oriented development policies, and non-motorised transport. But these will have to be detailed out with clear pathways and milestones and integrated well with the NCAP strategies.
- **NCAP will also have to be more nuanced and adopt appropriate approaches for small and big cities** according to their dominant pollution profile while several strategies may remain uniform.

#### **Airpocalypse III Report**

- There are 139 Indian cities that breach air pollution standards but are not included in the Centre's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), says a report by Greenpeace.
- **Airpocalypse III**, as the Greenpeace report is titled, analyses air pollution data of 313 cities and towns for the year 2017.

#### **Highlights of the Report:**

1. Of these 313 cities, 241 (77%) had PM10 levels beyond the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). These specify upper limits to a range of airborne chemicals and compounds.
2. While 102 of these cities were included in the NCAP, the remaining 139 cities were left out. That's because the government's list of 102 cities relied on average pollution data until 2015, whereas Airpocalypse III used data updated up to 2017.
3. Even if the NCAP were able to reduce pollution by 30% by 2024, 153 cities would still be left with pollution levels exceeding the NAAQS.
4. Of the 139 cities that have not been included in the non-attainment list under the NCAP, there are several cities that have a population of more than 1 million, and PM levels (recorded in 2017) above NAAQS.
5. These include: Ranchi, Dhanbad (Jharkhand); Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh); Chennai, Madurai (Tamil Nadu); Meerut (Uttar Pradesh); Pimpri-Chhindwar, Thane, (Maharashtra); Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara (Gujarat); and Howrah (West Bengal).

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) The results of Lancet Planetary Health study are disquieting, for they point to a looming public health emergency that necessitates a renewed focus on mitigating the hazards of air pollution in India. Discuss and critically analyze government policies for dealing with the crisis?

## **8. ACTION AGAINST INDUSTRIES POLLUTING GANGA RIVER**

- **Government of India has launched the Namami Gange Programme in May 2015**, with the total budgetary outlay of Rs. 20,000 crore for the period from 2014-2015 till 31 December 2020 to accomplish the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga and its tributaries.

**Namami Gange Programme** – is an umbrella programme which integrates previous and currently ongoing initiatives by enhancing efficiency, extracting synergies and supplementing them with more comprehensive & better coordinated interventions.

- Government of India is supplementing the efforts of the state governments in addressing the pollution of river Ganga by providing financial assistance to the states.
- **961 Grossly Polluting Industries (GPIs)** have been identified on main stem of river Ganga.
- Cleaning of the river is a continuous process and efforts are being made to complete the projects by the year 2020 for creating adequate **Sewage Treatment Capacity**.

#### **Background:**

- Each day, more than 500 million liters of wastewater from industrial sources are dumped directly into Ganga.
- In many places, this wastewater entering the rivers is completely raw, completely untreated.

**Main Pillars of the Namami Gange Programme are:**

- Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure
- River-Surface Cleaning
- Afforestation
- Industrial Effluent Monitoring
- River-Front Development
- Bio-Diversity
- Public Awareness
- Ganga Gram

Its implementation has been divided into:

- **Entry-Level Activities** (for immediate visible impact),
- **Medium-Term Activities** (to be implemented within 5 years of time frame) and
- **Long-Term Activities** (to be implemented within 10 years).

**National Mission for Clean Ganga**, endeavors to deploy best available knowledge and resources across the world for Ganga rejuvenation.

- Clean Ganga has been a perennial attraction for many international countries that have expertise in river rejuvenation.
- Countries like **Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Israel, etc.** have shown interest in collaborating with India for Ganga Rejuvenation.

Source: PIB

(Q) Critically evaluate the progress made under the Namami Gange programme.

## 9. CRZ REGULATIONS

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: CRZ Regulations- key features and significance.**

**Context:** The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the 2019 **Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms**, replacing the existing CRZ norms of 2011.

- The new CRZ norms have been issued under **Section 3 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
- The new CRZ norms aim to **promote sustainable development based on scientific principles**.

**Objective of CRZ Regulations 2019:**

- To promote sustainable development based on scientific principles taking into account the natural hazards such as increasing sea levels due to global warming.
- To conserve and protect the environment of coastal stretches and marine areas, besides livelihood security to the fisher communities and other local communities in the coastal area.

**Salient Features of CRZ Regulations 2019:**

**Two separate categories for CRZ-III (Rural) areas:**

1. CRZ-III A: The A category of CRZ-III areas are densely populated rural areas with a population density of 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas have a No Development Zone (NDZ) of 50 meters from the High Tide Line (HTL) as against 200 meters from the High Tide Line stipulated in the CRZ Notification, 2011.
2. CRZ-III B – The B category of CRZ-III rural areas have population density of below 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas have a No Development Zone of 200 meters from the HTL.

➤ **Floor Space Index Norms eased:** As per CRZ, 2011 Notification, the Floor Space Index (FSI) or the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) had been frozen. As per the latest notification, the government has decided to de-freeze the Floor Space Index and permit FSI for construction projects.

➤ **Tourism infrastructure permitted in coastal areas:** The new norms permit temporary tourism facilities such as shacks, toilet blocks, change rooms, drinking water facilities, etc. in Beaches.

➤ **Streamlining of CRZ Clearances:** The procedure for CRZ clearances has been streamlined. Now, the only such projects which are located in the CRZ-I (Ecologically Sensitive Areas) and CRZ IV (area covered between Low Tide Line and 12 Nautical Miles seaward) will be dealt with for CRZ clearance by the Ministry. The powers for clearances with respect to CRZ-II and III have been delegated at the State level.

- **No Development Zone of 20 meters for all Islands:** For islands close to the main land coast and for all Backwater Islands in the main land, No Development Zone of 20 meters has been stipulated in wake of space limitations and unique geography of such regions.
- **Pollution abatement:** To address pollution in Coastal areas, the treatment facilities have been made permissible in CRZ-I B area subject to necessary safeguards.
- **Critically Vulnerable Coastal Areas (CVCA):** Sundarban region of West Bengal and other ecologically sensitive areas identified as under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 such as Gulf of Khambat and Gulf of Kutchh in Gujarat, Achra-Ratnagiri in Maharashtra, Karwar and Coondapur in Karnataka, Vembanad in Kerala, Gulf of Mannar in Tamil Nadu, Bhaitarkanika in Odisha and Krishna in Andhra Pradesh are treated as Critical Vulnerable Coastal Areas. ***These Critical Vulnerable Coastal Areas will be managed with the involvement of coastal communities including fisher folk.***

Sources: the hindu.

## 10. SUSTAINABLE CATCHMENT FOREST MANAGEMENT LAUNCHED IN TRIPURA

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the project.**

**Context:** Tripura has launched the *Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM) project* which is **undertaken with the assistance of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency).**

**Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM) project:**

- The SCATFORM project aims **to address issues such as forest cover loss and forest degradation have been mainly caused by shifting cultivation**, which increases soil erosion risks on hill slopes especially in upper catchment areas.
- **Implementation:** It would be implemented mainly in upper catchments where forest degradation and soil erosion are severe and livelihood improvement needs are high. The project aims to improve quality of forest in the catchment area by sustainable forest management, soil and moisture conservation and livelihood development.
- **The activities undertaken** under the project involves promotion of bamboo plantation, agroforestry based livelihood, eco-tourism development, development of value addition for bamboo and other Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) in order to create alternate livelihood opportunities for local communities.
- **Cost sharing:** The 80 per cent of the cost is contributed by JICA and the rest would be funded by the state and central governments.

Sources: the Indian Express.

## 11. TRISHNA GAS PROJECT

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary- location, NBWL and issues related to Trishna Gas Project.**

**Context:** The *National Wildlife Board has given its approval for the Trishna Gas project of ONGC* which falls in the *Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary* in the Gomati district of Tripura.

- ONGC has discovered 10-12 gas bearing wells in the Trishna Wildlife sanctuary.

**About National Wildlife Board:**

- National Board for Wild Life is **a statutory organization constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.**
- It is **an apex body to review all wildlife-related matters and approves projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.**
- **Composition:** The National Board for Wild Life is chaired by the Prime Minister, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the vice-chairman of the Board and the members include 15 non-government members, 19 ex-officio members and 10 government officials such as secretaries.

#### Facts for Prelims:

- **Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary:** The Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1988. The **vegetation covers four broad categories** of tropical semi-evergreen forest, the east Himalayan lower Bhanar sal, Moist mixed deciduous forest and the Savanah woodland.

Sources: [toi](#).

## 12. ODISHA CELEBRATES 1ST TURTLE FESTIVAL IN PURI

#### What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** *Turtle festival, significance, types of turtles in India, their conservation status and programmes.*

**Context:** First Odisha Turtle Festival was held recently in Puri to create awareness and promote ideas on conservation of olive ridley turtles.

- **Organised by:** Cox & Kings Foundation in association with Humane Society International/India and Action for Protection of Wild Animals (APOWA).

#### Need of the hour:

- **Odisha has half of the world's Olive Ridley turtle population and 90% of India's turtle population lives in the state.** Despite that no actions have been taken for their conservation.
- Therefore, the government should develop some infrastructure near the turtle nesting sites at Devi and Rusikulya rivers, the two major nesting grounds.

#### Back to Basics:

- **There are five species in Indian waters** — Leatherback (Vulnerable), Loggerhead (Endangered), Hawksbill (Critically Endangered), Green (Endangered) and Olive Ridley.
- In India, sea turtles are protected under **the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**.
- **The Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant** of all sea turtles found in the world, inhabiting warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- The Olive ridley is the most numerous among the sea turtles found in India and is well **known for its arribadas, or annual mass nestings** when thousands of turtles migrate to the breeding ground to nest simultaneously.
- Recognized as **Vulnerable by the IUCN Red list**.
- International trade in these turtles and their products is banned **under CITES Appendix I**.

**'Operation Kachhapa':** Conservation of the Olive Ridley Sea Turtle was launched by the Wildlife Protection Society of India in collaboration with the Orissa State Forest Department and the Wildlife Society of Orissa and other local NGOs.

- **To reduce accidental killing in India, the Orissa government has made it mandatory for trawls to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)**, a net specially designed with an exit cover which allows the turtles to escape while retaining the catch.

Sources: [DownToEarth](#) and [IUCN](#).

## 13. HALF DONE: ON THE BAN ON PLASTIC

#### India's efforts to beat plastic pollution:

- So far, 22 States and Union Territories have joined the fight **to beat the plastic pollution, announcing a ban on single-use plastics** such as carry bags, cups, plates, cutlery, straws and thermocol products. Puducherry will implement a ban from March 1.
- India has also won global acclaim for its **"Beat Plastic Pollution" resolve declared on World Environment Day last year**, under which it pledged **to eliminate single-use plastic by 2022**.
- **All such efforts have yielded positive results:** Voluntary initiatives are having an impact in many States, as citizens reduce, reuse and sort their waste. A Bengaluru waste collective estimates that **the volume of plastic waste that they collect dropped from about two tonnes a day to less than 100 kg**.

#### Gaps existing:

- **Waste plastic from packaging** of everything from food, cosmetics and groceries to goods delivered by online platforms remains unaddressed.

- **Collect-back system:** The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 are clear that producers, importers and brand owners must adopt a collect-back system for the plastic they introduce into the environment. However, not much has been done to take the process forward.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility clause:** Small producers of plastics are facing the ban, while more organised entities covered by the Extended Producer Responsibility clause continue with business as usual.

**What is needed?**

- **Governments must start charging the producers for their waste,** and collect it diligently, which will lead to recovery and recycling.
- **State and local governments should upgrade their waste management systems,** which is necessary to even measure the true scale of packaging waste.
- **Role of local bodies:** Local bodies should consult manufacturers or importers to assess the problem. Cities and towns need competent municipal systems to achieve this.

**Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 aim to:**

- **Increase minimum thickness of plastic carry bags from 40 to 50 microns and stipulate minimum thickness of 50 micron for plastic sheets** also to facilitate collection and recycle of plastic waste,
- **Expand the jurisdiction of applicability** from the municipal area to rural areas, because plastic has reached rural areas also:
  - To bring in the responsibilities of producers and generators, to introduce collect back system of plastic waste by the producers/brand owners;
  - To introduce collection of plastic waste management fee;
  - To promote use of plastic waste for road construction for gainful utilization of waste and also address the waste disposal issue;

**Conclusion:**

- The indiscriminate disposal of plastic has become a major threat to the environment. An eco-friendly product, which is a complete substitute of the plastic in all uses, has not been found till date.
- In the absence of a suitable alternative, it is impractical and undesirable to impose a blanket ban on the use of plastic all over the country. The real challenge is to improve plastic waste management systems.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) India has made a lot of progress in reducing plastic waste but a lot more still needs to be done. Comment.

## 14. GROUNDWATER ‘TIME BOMB’ IS TICKING

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Groundwater crisis- causes, extent, concerns, challenges and measures by govt to save groundwater.**

**Context:** Future generations face an environmental “time bomb” as the world’s groundwater systems take decades to respond to the present day impact of climate change, scientists have warned.

**What’s the issue?**

- As per the findings by an international team of researchers, **groundwater reserves are already under pressure as the global population explodes and crop production rises in lockstep.**
- But the extreme weather events such as drought and record rainfall — both made worse by our heating planet — could have another long-lasting impact on how quickly reserves replenish.

**Why is the crisis described as a time bomb?**

- Researchers found that only half of all groundwater supplies are likely to fully replenish or re-balance within the next 100 years — potentially leading to shortages in drier areas. **This could be described as an environmental time bomb because any climate change impacts on recharge occurring now, will only fully impact the baseflow to rivers and wetlands a long time later.**
- The process through which rainwater is filtered through bedrock and accumulated underground can take centuries and varies greatly by region. As climate change delivers longer droughts and bigger superstorms, the extremes of rainfall become more pronounced, impacting groundwater reserves for generations to come. In arid areas took far longer — several thousand years in some cases — to respond to alterations in climate than reserves in more humid parts.

### **Situation of groundwater in India:**

- Today, India is the largest user of the groundwater in the world with almost 90% being used for drinking water and almost 60-70% for irrigation.
- Current statistics also show that nearly 50% of urban water supply comes from groundwater.
- India is on the threshold of a very serious groundwater crisis, which needs mitigation both in the fields and at the policy corridors of the country.

### **The groundwater crisis is embedded at two different levels:**

1. **Groundwater exploitation of aquifers** (where groundwater is stored) in different parts of the India and
2. **Groundwater contamination** that find origins, both in geogenic source such as Arsenic and Fluoride along with anthropogenic sources of contamination primarily due to poor disposal of waste and wastewater.

### **Concern:**

- Water scarcity, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation negatively impact food security, livelihood choices and educational opportunities for poor families across the world.
- Drought afflicts some of the world's poorest countries, worsening hunger and malnutrition.

### **Need of the hour:**

- There is a need to **modernise the regulatory framework** for accessing groundwater soon after massive expansion in mechanical pumping led to the realisation that recharge could not keep pace with use.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) India's overexploitation of groundwater is leading to the worst water crisis in its history. Examine and suggest measures for improvement.

## **15. METHANOL-BLENDING IN PETROL**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** What is methanol blending, how does it help protect the environment? Key facts on methanol and methanol blending programme.
- **For Mains:** Significance of Methanol blending, challenges present and ways to address them.

**Context:** A study, in which methanol (M-15) was blended with petrol and used in the existing BS-IV standard cars, found that the carbon dioxide emission had reduced substantially.

- The study, conducted by Pune-based **Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI)**, also found that hydrocarbon emission reduced marginally, with a slight increase in nitrogen oxides.

### **Background:**

- The objective of the study was to evaluate emissions in real-world conditions as well as check the performance of the vehicles. The agency used 15% M-15 blend in vehicles and tested them for 3,000km. In auto rickshaws, the performance was similar, except for a marginal reduction in nitrogen oxides.

### **Methanol as an alternative fuel:**

- Methanol is a promising fuel as it is clean, cheaper than fossil fuels and a good substitute for heavy fuels. India imports methanol from Saudi Arabia and Iran at present.
- Across the world, methanol is emerging as a clean, sustainable transportation fuel of the future.

### **Why Methanol?**

- Methanol can be used as **an energy producing fuel, transportation fuel and cooking fuel**, cutting down India's oil import bill by an estimated 20% over the next few years. Unlike CNG, using methanol as a transportation fuel would require minimal alteration in the vehicles.
- Methanol is **a clean-burning fuel** that produces fewer smog-causing emissions — such as sulphur oxides (SOx), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter — and can improve air quality and related human health issues.
- Methanol is **most commonly produced on a commercial scale from natural gas**. It can also be produced from renewable sources such as biomass and recycled carbon dioxide.
- As a high-octane vehicle fuel, **methanol offers excellent acceleration and power**. It also improves vehicle efficiency.

### **Methanol as an enduring solution to human energy needs?**

- Methanol has the potential to be an enduring solution to human energy needs because the belched out CO<sub>2</sub> (greenhouse gas emission) both from using Methanol and while producing Methanol can be tapped back to produce Methanol.
- Thereby a seamless loop of CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration cycle is created to perpetually burn fuels without polluting the environment at all. CO<sub>2</sub> from steel plants, Thermal Power plants, Cement Plants etc. can be tapped in large quantities to produce Methanol.

### **Way ahead:**

- The Concept of “Methanol Economy” is being actively pursued by China, Italy, Sweden, Israel, US, Australia, Japan and many other European countries. 10% of fuel in China in transport Sector is Methanol.
- Methanol Economy, if adopted by India can be one of the best ways to mitigate the Environmental hazards of a growing economy. NITI Aayog is preparing a road map for a full-scale implementation in the near future.

Sources: the hindu.

## **16. NITROGEN POLLUTION**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: Nitrogen- natural cycle, pollution and ways to prevent it, South Asian Nitrogen Hub.**

**Context:** A major *international research programme is being carried out to tackle the challenge that nitrogen pollution poses for environment, food security, human health and the economy in South Asia.*

- **The research programme will be carried out by South Asian Nitrogen Hub.**

### **Nitrogen as an essential nutrient:**

- Nitrogen, which is **a vital macronutrient for most plants**, is the most abundant element in the atmosphere.
- A little over 78% of dry air on Earth is nitrogen. But **atmospheric nitrogen, or dinitrogen, is unreactive and cannot be utilised by plants directly**.
- Until the beginning of the 20th century, farmers depended on a natural process called **nitrogen fixation** for the conversion of atmospheric nitrogen into reactive nitrogen in the soil: nitrogen-fixing bacteria like rhizobia live symbiotically with leguminous plants, providing nitrogen to the plant and soil in the form of reactive compounds like ammonia and nitrate.
- **But the natural nitrogen cycle was inadequate to feed the growing population.** Scientists Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch solved this problem by producing **ammonia by combining atmospheric nitrogen with hydrogen gas at high temperature and pressure—known as the Haber-Bosch process**. The Green Revolution, which was instrumental in establishing food security in the developing countries in the 1960s, was driven by artificial nitrogen-fixation. Today, about half of the world's population depends on this process for its nutrition.

### **South Asian Nitrogen Hub:**

- The South Asian Nitrogen Hub, a partnership led by the UK's Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and comprising around 50 organisations from across the UK and South Asia, will be established with funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under its Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).
- The Hub is one of 12 GCRF hubs announced by the UKRI to address intractable challenges in sustainable development. The interdisciplinary hubs will work across 85 countries with governments, international agencies, partners and NGOs.
- India is a major partner with 18 Indian institutions in this project. **India is the only country in South Asia that has completed its nitrogen assessment over a year ago and is already co-leading the South Asian nitrogen assessment with CEH, UK, for the UN Environment.**

### **How Nitrogen turned into pollutant from nutrient how it is affecting health and environment?**

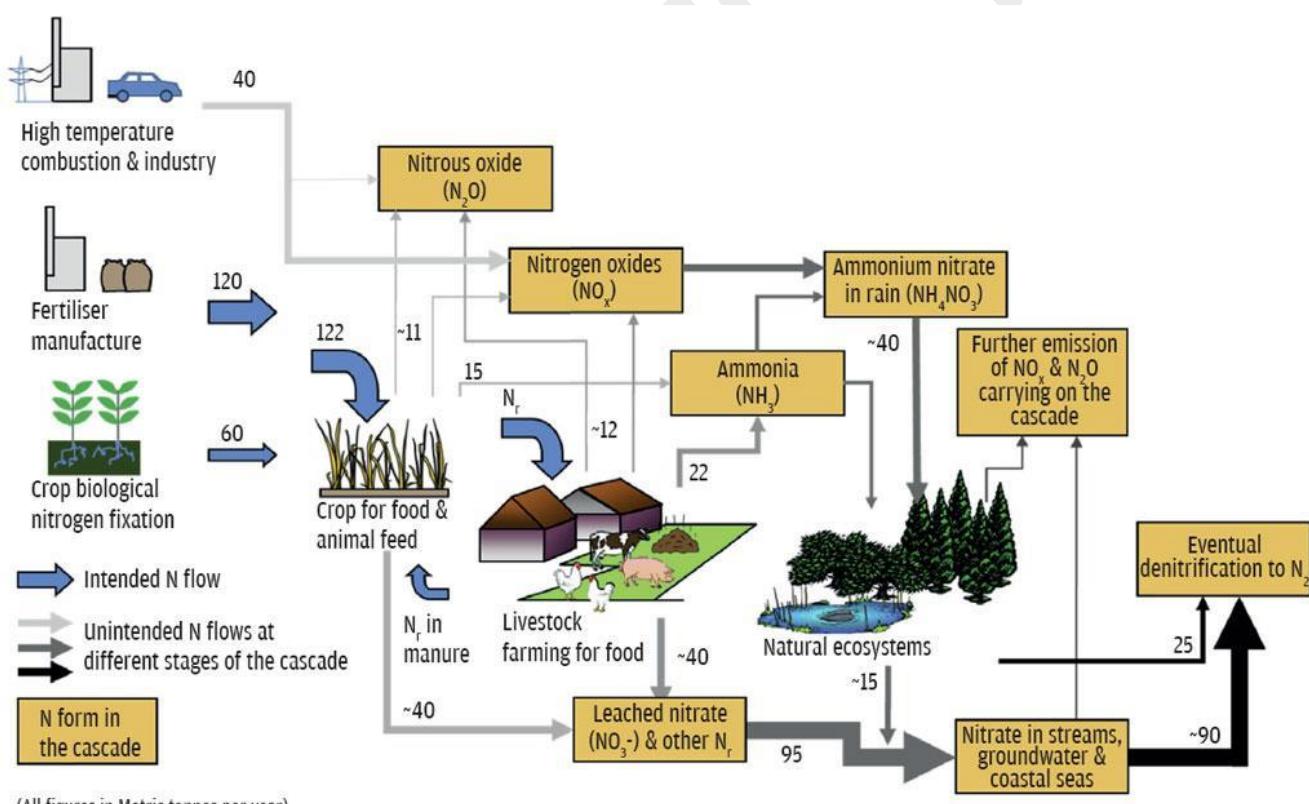
- Nitrogen is an inert gas that's necessary for life. But we're changing it into forms that are harmful, overloading the environment with it, and throwing the natural nitrogen cycle out of whack.
- **Nitrogen compounds running off farmland have led to water pollution** problems around the world, while **nitrogen emissions from industry, agriculture and vehicles make a big contribution to air pollution.**

- **Over 80% of the nitrogen in soil is not utilised by humans.** While over four-fifths of the nitrogen is used to feed livestock, only about six per cent reaches humans in case of non-vegetarian diet, as compared to the 20% that reaches the plate of a vegetarian.
- **Nitrogen becomes a pollutant when it escapes into the environment and reacts with other organic compounds.** It is either released into the atmosphere, gets dissolved in water sources such as rivers, lakes or groundwater, or remains in the soil. While it might lead to favourable growth of species that can utilise this nutrient, nitrogen as a pollutant is often detrimental to the environment and health.
- According to the World Health Organization, **nitrate-contaminated drinking water can cause reduced blood function, cancer and endemic goiters.** Surplus inputs of nitrogen compounds have been found to cause soil acidification. The lowering pH, as a result of the acidification, can lead to nutrient disorders and increased toxicity in plants. It may also affect natural soil decomposition.

#### **Nitrogen pollution has a significant impact on the environment:**

- **It creates of harmful algal blooms and dead zones** in our waterways and oceans; the algae produce toxins which are harmful to human and aquatic organisms (and indirectly affects fisheries and biodiversity in coastal areas).
- **Contamination of drinking water.** 10 million people in Europe are potentially exposed to drinking water with nitrate concentrations above recommended levels. This can have an adverse effect on human health.
- **Food Security:** Excessive nitrogen fertiliser application contributes to soil nutrient depletion. As the world needs to feed an ever growing population loss of arable land is major global problem.
- **The release of Nitrous Oxide is essentially a greenhouse gas** which is harmful to the environment.

Sources: the hindu.



N<sub>2</sub> - Un-reactive di-nitrogen; forms 78% of the air we breathe

N<sub>r</sub> - Reactive nitrogen; fixed in soil by microbes; reacts to form different compounds with various impacts

NH<sub>3</sub> - Ammonia; used for making fertilisers; can escape into the air as a pollutant

NH<sub>4</sub> NO<sub>3</sub> - Ammonium nitrate, acts as fertiliser; when synthesised in

the atmosphere, contributes to particulate matter, water pollution and results in eutrophication

N<sub>2</sub>O - Nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas; depletes ozone layer

NO<sub>x</sub> - Mixture of NO and NO<sub>2</sub>; a major air pollutant

NO<sub>3</sub> - Nitrate; the form in which nitrogen gets fixed in soil; can pollute water sources; forms ozone, which adds to particulate matter load

**(Q) Air Pollution in India can no longer be tackled with short term, reactive solutions. Critically analyze.**

## 17. TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE FROM A SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

### What to study?

- For Prelims: UNSC; key facts.
- For Mains: Declaring Climate Change as a security issue- need, concerns associated and alternatives available.

**Why in News?** As climate change is increasingly recognized as a “threat multiplier” by scientists, political representatives, and civil society across the world, the United Nations Security Council recently held an open debate to discuss its concrete impact on peace and security, and focus on tangible ways to diminish the effects of global warming.

- However, **India has questioned the rush at the UN to declare climate change an international security issue.**

**India has pointed out the following pitfalls arising from viewing actions to tackle climate change from a security perspective:**

1. Declaring so potentially give **the Security Council the right to take action on it**. A “mere decision of the Council” to take over enforcement of climate change action will disrupt the Paris Agreement and multilateral efforts to find solutions.
2. **UNSC may not also be suitable to lead a global response to a problem that requires collaboration of all countries and stakeholders**. A security approach to a critical challenge facing humanity may in fact hinder the global collective effort.
3. **A securitised approach could also end up pitting countries into a competition** when the most productive approach is cooperation.
4. Thinking in security terms **usually engenders overly militarised solutions to problems**, which inherently require non-military responses to resolve. It brings the wrong actors to the table.
5. Also, **climate-related disasters may not amenable to the processes and solutions** used to tackle threats to international peace and security. Mitigation and adaptation strategies may not be fulfilled through enforcement action.

### Positive sides:

- Since international peace and security considerations lead to increased focus on issues, defining climate change as a security challenge could lead to **an upgrade in attention and resources devoted to addressing it**.
- Securitising climate change may also help **heighten public awareness and help surmounting opposition to addressing the issue**.

### Why regard climate change as a national security threat?

1. Climate change has “**a multitude of security impacts**” with global warming records broken in 20 of the last 22 years.
2. Few say that there is no bigger security threat than climate change because it **endangers the very existence of countries like Maldives**.
3. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s report in October predicting more heat waves, heavier rain events, higher sea levels and severe damage to agriculture represents “**a security risk for the entire world**.”
4. Also, **the global average greenhouse gas concentrations of carbon dioxide – which causes global warming – continued rising to record levels in 2018-2019**. The last time the Earth experienced similar concentration of carbon dioxide was 3-5 million years ago, when the temperature was 2-3 degrees Celsius warmer and sea level was 10-20 metres higher than now.

### Way ahead:

- Climate change is not a threat to international peace and security and should only be discussed in specific cases where it is a risk factor.
- However, enough attention needs to be given as World Economic Forum has ranked extreme weather, natural disasters, climate change and water crises as the top four existential threats in its new Global Risks Report 2019.

### Key focus areas should be:

1. Developing stronger analytical capacity with integrated risk assessment frameworks.
2. Collecting stronger evidence base so good practices on climate risk prevention and management can be replicated in the field.

3. Building and reinforcing partnerships to leverage existing capacities within and outside the UN system.  
Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Declaring Climate Change as an international security issue is the best approach to handle the issue. Comment.

## 18. EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING ON EL NIÑO IN THE 21ST CENTURY

### What to study?

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

**Context:** A study, published in Journal nature, has thrown some light on the effects of global warming on El Niño in the 21st Century.

### Highlights of the study:

- **As per the study, though the theater of action for El Niño is the tropical Pacific Ocean, its global reach costs the global community tens of billion dollars each time.** El Niño may impact weather phenomenon across the world. For Eg: The eagerly-awaited winter rain and snow storms over California did not occur over California during the latest extreme El Niño.
- **The study notes that strong El Niño's and thus extreme weather events associated with such strong El Niño's will increase in the coming decades.** This should serve as a warning to the countries on all continents that suffer from these extreme weather events.
- **However, available data is not sufficient to say with confidence how the tropical Pacific has responded to global warming till now.** It is unclear if the impact of global warming on El Niño can easily be extracted considering its intrinsic tendencies and the fact that it depends on so many factors that are not easily predictable.
- **In this context, it is imperative that models be held to very stringent standards on their performance of El Niño behaviour during historic periods,** especially the 20th century, as a test of their reliability for future projections.
- **This would also be necessary for projecting other events such as droughts and floods.** For example, droughts over India are closely tied with El Niño and any projections of how droughts will respond to global warming will depend on how models perform in their historic depiction of El Niños as well as monsoons and how reliably they can project El Niño response to global warming in addition to how the models perform in reproducing floods to and droughts of 20th century.

### Need of the hour:

- Develop strong and accurate models to study El Niño and effects of global warming on it. This would also be necessary for projecting other events such as droughts and floods.

### What is ENSO?

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

### What is El Nino?

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

### What causes El Nino?

- El Nino sets in when there is anomaly in the pattern. The westward-blowing trade winds weaken along the Equator and due to changes in air pressure, the surface water moves eastwards to the coast of northern South America.

- The central and eastern Pacific regions warm up for over six months and result in an El Nino condition. The temperature of the water could rise up to 10 degrees Fahrenheit above normal.
- Warmer surface waters increase precipitation and bring above-normal rainfall in South America, and droughts to Indonesia and Australia.

#### **What are El Nino's effects?**

1. El Nino affects global weather. It favours eastern Pacific hurricanes and tropical storms. Record and unusual rainfall in Peru, Chile and Ecuador are linked to the climate pattern.
2. El Nino reduces upwelling of cold water, decreasing the uplift of nutrients from the bottom of the ocean. This affects marine life and sea birds. The fishing industry is also affected.
3. Drought caused by El Nino can be widespread, affecting southern Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. Countries dependent on agriculture are affected.
4. Australia and Southeast Asia get hotter.
5. A recent WHO report on the health consequences of El Nino forecasts a rise in vector-borne diseases, including those spread by mosquitoes, in Central and South America. Cycles of malaria in India are also linked to El Nino.

Sources: down to earth.

(Q) El Nino and La Nina are opposite phases of what is known as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle. Explain.

## **19. GLOBAL RISKS REPORT**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Highlights and key facts on the report, risks highlighted by the report.
- **For Mains:** Concerns and challenges exposed by the report, need for tactical measures and significance of multi-stakeholder approach.

**Context:** The Global Risks Report 2019 has been released by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

#### **Global Risks Report and its significance:**

- Based on the work of the Global Risk Network, the report describes changes occurring in the global risks landscape from year to year and identifies global catastrophic risks.
- The report explores the interconnectedness of risks, and is intended to raise awareness about the need for a multi-stakeholder approach to the mitigation of global risk.

#### **Top 10 risks by likelihood as per the latest report:**

1. Extreme weather events.
2. Failure of climate change mitigation and adaption.
3. Major natural disasters.
4. Massive incident of data fraud/theft.
5. Large scale cyberattacks.
6. Man-made environmental damage and disasters.
7. Large-scale involuntary migration.
8. Major biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse.
9. Water crises.
10. Asset bubbles in a major economy.

#### **Analysis of the report and key takeaways:**

- **Environmental risks dominate the global risks landscape in terms of impact and likelihood for the third year in a row.** This includes extreme weather events and failure of climate mitigation and adaptation. Only 12 years left to stay beneath 1.5C. However, there is a lack of political will to set more stretching targets to cut emissions. The report finds that business leaders are more concerned about climate in the long term. This disconnect will need to be tackled.
- **Global risks are intensifying, but our capacity to respond to them is declining.** Power is moving towards more nationalist, authoritarian states and they are becoming more inwards-looking. With greater geopolitical friction, our ability to cooperate to solve challenges such as cyber risks and climate change has become more challenging.
- **Geopolitics and geo-economic factors, such as uncertainty and nationalism are fuelling risks.** Innovation is also outpacing our ability to manage it and there are growing concerns around technology misuse.

- **Shorter-term fears are around geopolitical and cyber threats.** For top business leaders, cyber risk concern is rising globally and is the highest ranked threat. Other concerns also exist including fiscal crises, unemployment, energy price shocks, national governance failure, interstate conflict and natural disasters.
- **There is a significant financing gap (US\$18 trillion) in infrastructure capital** – with only US\$79 trillion currently planned between now and 2040. This means 20% more financing is needed than we are putting in today. Furthermore, infrastructure needs to be resilient to extreme weather events. Business, with its reliance on public sector infrastructure, will be impacted and need to work with government on solutions.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Time is running out to keep global warming below 1.5°C since pre-industrial era levels. Do you agree? Discuss.

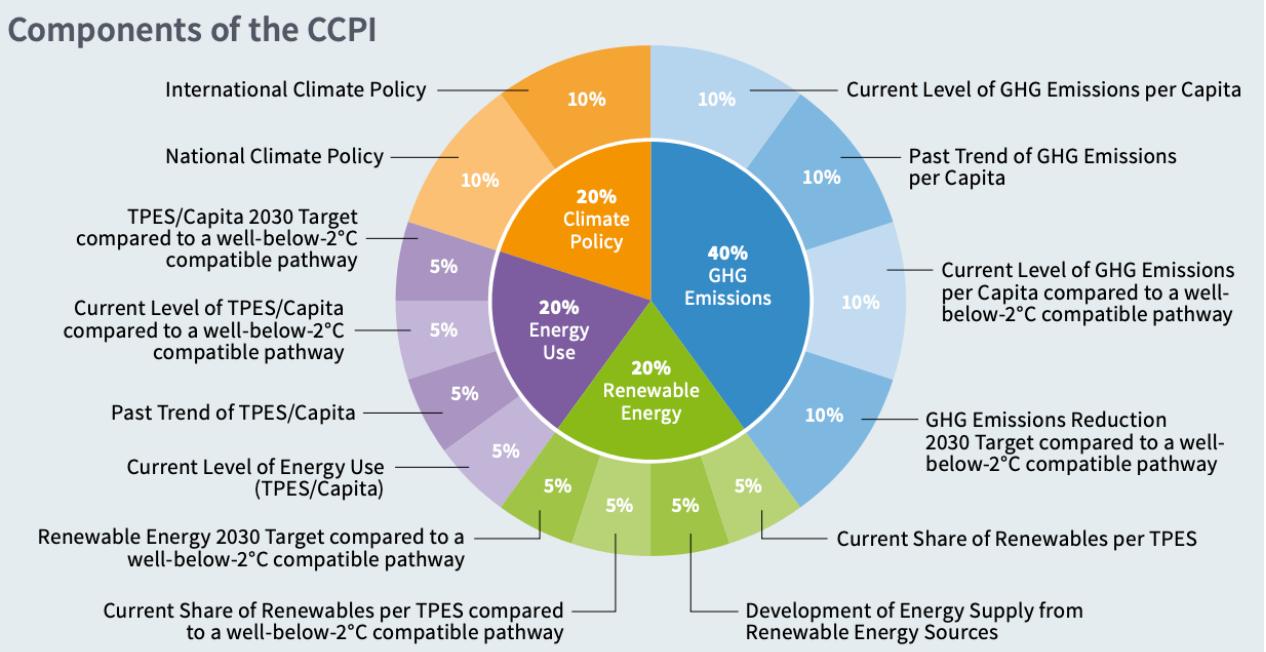
## 20. CLIMATE CHANGE PERFORMANCE INDEX (CCPI) 2019

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** About CCPI- features, criteria and performance of various countries.
- **For Mains:** Concerns for India, areas for improvement and the need for government's active involvement in controlling climate change.

**Context:** The 2019 edition of the *Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)* has been released.

### Components of the CCPI



**About CCPI:**

- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) is an instrument covering 58 countries and supposed to enhance transparency in international climate politics.
- Its aim is **to encourage political and social pressure on those countries which have, up to now, failed to take ambitious actions on climate protection as well as to highlight countries with best-practice climate policies.**
- **Evaluation:** On the basis of standardised criteria, the index evaluates and compares the climate protection performance of 58 countries that are, together, responsible for more than 90% of global energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. 80% of the evaluation is based on objective indicators of emissions trend and emissions level. 20% of the index results are built upon national and international climate policy assessments by more than 200 experts from the respective countries.

**Highlights of the report:**

- Only few countries have started working towards limiting global warming below 2°C or even at 1.5°C.
- Globally, Sweden is in top position, followed by Morocco and Lithuania in the CCPI 2019.
- The bottoms five in the list are Saudi Arabia, U.S., Iran, South Korea and Taiwan.

### **India's Performance:**

- India ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in this year's CCPI, improving its standing by three places compared to the previous edition.

Sources: the hindu.

## **21. REPORT ON 'E-WASTE' BY UN**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: 'e-waste'- concerns, challenges, issues, measures and the need for international collaboration.**

**Context:** To highlight the rising challenge posed by mountains of discarded electronics worldwide, **seven UN entities have come together to launch the report**- "A New Circular Vision for Electronics – Time for a Global Reboot"- **at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland**, in a bid to offer some solutions to a behemoth-sized problem that is making the world sicker and adding to environmental degradation.

- The joint report **calls for a new vision for e-waste based on the "circular economy" concept, whereby a regenerative system can minimize waste and energy leakage.**

### **International convention in this regard:**

- E-waste export, though, **is regulated under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes** and Their Disposal, which has been ratified by 188 nations.

### **So where is the crisis?**

- It lies in the fact that globally, only up to **20% of e-waste is recycled**. The rest is undocumented and experts predict that it gets buried under the ground in landfills for centuries as it is not biodegradable.
- **And how does it impact us?** "From lead-lined, cathode ray tubes to old TVs, to lead and chromium in circuit boards (of various devices), e-waste contains substances that are hazardous to human health, including, mercury, cadmium and lead. E-waste can pollute water sources and food-supply chains."

### **Solutions to the crisis- Highlights of the report by UN:**

- The report calls for **systematic collaboration with major brands, small and medium-sized enterprises, academia, trade unions, civil society and associations** in a deliberative process to reorient the system and reduce the waste of resources each year with a value greater than the GDP of most countries.
- To capture the global value of materials in e-waste and create global circular value chains, **use new technology to create service business models, better product tracking and manufacturer or retailer take-back programmes.**
- The report notes that **material efficiency, recycling infrastructure and scaling up the volume and quality of recycled materials** to meet the needs of electronics supply chains will all be essential for future production.
- **The producers should also have buy-back or return offers** for old equipment, and plans to incentivise the consumer financially. The report also advocates a system of 'urban mining' by strengthening the extended producer responsibility provision.
- **Job potential:** If the electronics sector is supported with the right policy mix and managed in the right way, it could lead to the creation of millions of decent jobs worldwide.

### **E-waste Coalition:**

- The report supports the work of the E-waste Coalition, which includes International Labour Organization (ILO); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR); United Nations University (UNU) and Secretariats of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions.

### **Why worry about e-waste?**

- Organic and easily recyclable metal, glass and plastic waste need not permanently remain in landfills. But hard-to-recover substances from e-waste like mercury make their home in landfills and keep leaching into ground water.
- In recent years, its e-waste has grown faster than earlier anticipated. The Greenpeace study found e-waste growing at 15% annually and projected it to go up to 800,000 tonnes by 2012. But it stood at 1.7 million tonnes in 2014, the fifth highest in the world, according to a UN study.

- In India, e waste accounts for 4% of global e-waste and 2.5% of global GDP (2014 figures) – so it has a higher share of e-waste than its share of gross domestic product (GDP). For China, the two ratios are about the same. The US, on the other hand, accounts for a lower share of global e-waste than its share of GDP.
- ***According to a 2011 Rajya Sabha secretariat study, e-waste accounts for 70% of Indian landfills.*** If penetration of electronics and electrical products in India by 2030 have to grow even to today's average world capita which leads to e waste of 6 kg per capita, the absolute e waste generation for India will grow five times the current level to 9 million tonnes in 2030.

#### **Why it is difficult to manage e waste in India?**

- The producers/manufacturers ***do not have adequate information*** on their website regarding e waste management.
- ***Customer care representatives do not have inkling about any take back or recycling programme*** and even if they have set up collection centres, they are simply not enough for a geographically vast country like India.
- ***India being a vast country, setting up collection mechanism is a big challenge.*** If any of the brands try individually to reach out to all corners of the country, it will economically not be sustainable or feasible.
- ***Improper enforcement of the existing laws is another hurdle.***

Sources: down to earth.

(Q) A strong political will is required to come out with strict regulations to manage e waste in India. Increased public awareness is the need of hour. Examine the issues surrounding e-waste management and suggest the steps that need to be taken?

## **22. ASIAN WATERBIRD CENSUS (AWC)**

**Context:** A waterbird survey conducted in the Upper Kuttanad region of Kerala has recorded 16,767 birds of 47 continental and local species.

- The survey, conducted as part of the annual Asian Waterbird Census, has spotted three new species — Greater flamingo, Grey-headed lapwing, and Blue-cheeked bee-eater.

#### **About AWC:**

- Asian Waterbird Census is an annual event in which thousands of volunteers across Asia and Australasia count waterbirds in the wetlands of their country. This event happens every January. This event is coordinated by wetlands International and forms part of global waterbird monitoring programme called the International Waterbird Census (IWC).
- Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) was started in the year 1987. Its main focus is to monitor the status of waterbirds and the wetlands. AWC also aims to create public awareness on various issues concerning wetlands and waterbird conservation. Each year the census is carried out as a voluntary activity.
- In India, the AWC is annually coordinated by the Bombay Natural history Society (BNHS) and Wetlands International.

#### **What are waterbirds?**

- According to Wetlands International (WI), waterbirds are defined as species of birds that are ecologically dependent on wetlands.
- These birds are considered to be an important health indicator of wetlands of a region.

## **23. CROCODILE CENSUS**

#### **What to study?**

- ***For Prelims and Mains: Types of crocodiles in India, their conservation status and conservation programmes.***

**Context:** Recent Crocodile Census by Odisha.

#### **Findings:**

- ***The population of the saltwater or estuarine crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) has increased*** in the water bodies of Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park and its nearby areas in Kendrapara district.
- ***1,742 individuals have been recorded*** in this year's annual reptile census.
- ***The increase in population was primarily due to the far-sighted measures of the government.***

### **Back to Basics:**

- There are **three species of crocodilians—saltwater, Mugger and Gharial.**

### **Mugger:**

- The mugger crocodile, also called the Indian crocodile, or marsh crocodile, is found throughout the Indian subcontinent.
- It is listed as **vulnerable by IUCN.**
- **The mugger is mainly a freshwater species**, and found in lakes, rivers and marshes.

### **Gharial:**

- The Gharial or **fish eating crocodile is native to the Indian subcontinent.**
- It is listed as **a Critically Endangered by IUCN.**
- Small released populations are present and increasing in the rivers of the National Chambal Sanctuary, Katarniaghata Wildlife Sanctuary, Son River Sanctuary and the rainforest biome of Mahanadi in Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary, Orissa.

### **Saltwater Crocodile:**

- It is the **largest of all living reptiles**. It is listed as **least concern by IUCN**. It is **found throughout the east coast of India**.

### **Crocodile conservation programmes in India:**

- **The Gharial and Saltwater crocodile conservation programme** was first implemented in Odisha in early 1975 and subsequently the Mugger conservation programme was initiated, since Odisha is having distinction for existence of all the three species of Indian crocodilians. The funds and technical support for the project came from UNDP/ FAO through the Government of India.
- **'BAULA' PROJECT AT DANGAMAL**: 'Baula' is the Oriya term for Saltwater Crocodile. Dangmal is in Bhitarkanika sanctuary.
- **MUGGER PROJECT AT RAMATIRTHA**: The Ramatirtha center, in Odisha, is meant for Mugger crocodiles.
- **GHARIAL PROJECT AT TIKARPADA**, Odisha.
- **CAPTIVE BREEDING OF CROCODILES AT NANDANKANAN**, Odisha.

Sources: Down to Earth, Wiki and IUCN.

**Topic:** Disaster and disaster management.

## **1. INDIAN BRIDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: IBMS- features, significance and the need.**

**Context:** The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has inventorized 1,72,517 bridges/structures under **Indian Bridge Management System (IBMS)**. These structures comprise 1,34,229 culverts, 32,806 minor bridges, 3,647 major and 1,835 extra-long bridges.

### **What is it?**

- IBMS creates **an inventory of all bridges in the country and rate their structural condition** so that timely repair and rehabilitation work can be carried out based on the criticality of the structure.
- **IBMS is the largest platform in the world owned by a single owner**, with database that could exceed 1,50,000 bridge structures. So far 1,15,000 bridges have been inventorized, of which 85,000 are culverts and the rest are bridges.

### **Why was it necessary?**

- Lack of any data base on bridges in the country has led to a situation where there is no clear idea about the exact number and location of bridges.
- Hence, it has become difficult to maintain bridges in proper working condition. Poor condition of bridges hampers efficient transport and has also led to accidents and loss of lives on several occasions.

### **How it operates?**

1. During inventory creation each bridge is assigned **a unique identification number** or National Identity Number based on the state, RTO zone and whether it is situated on a National Highway, State Highway or a district road.
2. Then **the precise location of the bridge in terms of latitude-longitude is collected through GPS and based on this, the bridge is assigned a Bridge Location Number.**

3. Thereafter, engineering characteristics like the design, materials, type of bridge, its age, loading, traffic lane, length, width of carriage way etc are collected and are used to assign a ***Bridge Classification Number to the structure***.
4. These are then used to do a structural rating of the structure on a scale of 0 to 9, and each bridge is assigned a ***Structural Rating Number***.
5. In addition to the structural rating, the bridges are also being assigned ***Socio-Economic Bridge Rating Number*** which will decide the importance of the structure in relation to its contribution to daily socio-economic activity of the area in its vicinity.
6. Based on this inventory IBMS will analyse data and identify bridges that need attention. Further inspection will be carried out wherever required to improve the operational availability of the structure, enhance its life and prioritize repair and rehabilitation work. The data will help to decide which bridge needs critical attention, or which needs to be rebuilt.

Sources: the hindu.

## 2. CYCLONE PABUK

### What to study?

- ***For Prelims: A brief overview of recent cyclones and their origins.***
- ***For Mains: Classification and naming of cyclones.***

**Context:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has sounded **a yellow alert for the cyclone Pabuk**. Cyclone Pabuk originated over the Gulf of Thailand and neighbourhood.

### Four Stage Warning:

The cyclone warnings are issued to state government officials in **four stages**.

- ***The First Stage warning known as "PRE CYCLONE WATCH"*** issued 72 hours in advance contains early warning about the development of a cyclonic disturbance in the north Indian Ocean, its likely intensification into a tropical cyclone and the coastal belt likely to experience adverse weather. This early warning bulletin is issued by the Director General of Meteorology himself and is addressed to the Cabinet Secretary and other senior officers of the Government of India including the Chief Secretaries of concerned maritime states.
- ***The Second Stage warning known as "CYCLONE ALERT"*** is issued at least 48 hrs. in advance of the expected commencement of adverse weather over the coastal areas. It contains information on the location and intensity of the storm likely direction of its movement, intensification, coastal districts likely to experience adverse weather and advice to fishermen, general public, media and disaster managers. This is issued by the concerned ACWCs/CWCs and CWD at HQ.
- ***The Third Stage warning known as "CYCLONE WARNING"*** issued at least 24 hours in advance of the expected commencement of adverse weather over the coastal areas. Landfall point is forecast at this stage. These warnings are issued by ACWCs/CWCs/and CWD at HQ at 3 hourly interval giving the latest position of cyclone and its intensity, likely point and time of landfall, associated heavy rainfall, strong wind and storm surge along with their impact and advice to general public, media, fishermen and disaster managers.
- ***The Fourth Stage of warning known as "POST LANDFALL OUTLOOK"*** is issued by the concerned ACWCs/CWCs/and CWD at HQ at least 12 hours in advance of expected time of landfall. It gives likely direction of movement of the cyclone after its landfall and adverse weather likely to be experienced in the interior areas.

**Different colour codes as mentioned below are being used since post monsoon season of 2006 the different stages of the cyclone warning bulletins as desired by the National Disaster Management.**

- Cyclone Alert- Yellow.
- Cyclone Warning- Orange.
- Post landfall outlook- Red.

Sources: the hindu.

**Topic:** Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

## 1. ORGANIZATIONS BANNED UNDER UAPA

In exercise of the powers vested in the Central Government under Section 3 of the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA)**, the Government on being satisfied that the organizations have become Unlawful, has declared the following Organizations as Unlawful Associates during the last three years:

1. Islamic Research Foundation (IRF)
2. National Liberation Front in Tripura (NLFT)
3. All Tripura Tiger Forum (ATTF)

Under Section 35 of UAPA, the Government on being satisfied that the organization is involved in terrorism had added the following organizations to the First Schedule of UAPA during the last three years:

1. Al-Qaida in Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) and all its manifestations.
2. Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP)/ISIS Wilayat Khorasan/Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham-Khorasan (ISIS-K) and all its manifestations.
3. Khalistan Liberation Force and all its manifestations.

### Current Scenario:

- The **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** has arrested 418 accused persons under UAPA during the last three years. But, the State Police also detain accused persons under UAPA, the details of which are not maintained by the Central Government.
- The Government has not removed any organization from the list of banned organizations under the UAPA during the last three years.
- The Government has not released any person detained under UAPA. However, the data of persons detained under UAPA and released on the order of the competent courts is not maintained by the Government.

### Background:

- **National Investigation Agency:** (HQ – New Delhi)
- The National Investigation Agency was established after the enactment of the NIA Act on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2008.
- Presently, NIA is functioning as the **Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India**.
- NIA comes under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.

### Vision of NIA –

- The National Investigation Agency aims to be a thoroughly professional investigative agency matching the best international standards.
- The NIA aims to set the standards of excellence in counter terrorism and other national security related investigations at the national level by developing into a highly trained, partnership oriented workforce.
- NIA aims at creating deterrence for existing and potential terrorist groups/individuals. It aims to develop as a storehouse of all terrorist related information.

Source: PIB

## 2. DATA LOCALIZATION

### What to study?

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

**Context:** Reliance Industries Ltd Chairman and Managing Director Mukesh Ambani has come out strongly in favour of storing data locally and not putting it “especially” in the hands of foreigners.

### What's the issue?

- Data localization is a sensitive issue the world over and more so in India, given that this is a country of 1.3 billion people with over 1 billion mobile users.
- **With technology developing rapidly, more and more devices becoming smarter and the Internet of Things taking over, a genuine concern around leakage of private data has gained ground.**

### **What does Data Localization mean?**

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

### **Why data localization is necessary for India?**

- **For securing citizen's** data, data privacy, data sovereignty, national security, and economic development of the country.
- **Recommendations by the RBI, the committee of experts led by Justice BN Srikrishna**, the draft ecommerce policy and the draft report of the cloud policy panel show signs of data localisation.
- The extensive data collection by technology companies, has allowed them to process and monetize Indian users' data outside the country. Therefore, **to curtail the perils of unregulated and arbitrary use of personal data, data localization is necessary.**
- Digital technologies like machine learning (ML), artificial intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) **can generate tremendous value out of various data**. It can turn disastrous if not contained within certain boundaries.
- With the advent of cloud computing, Indian users' data is outside the country's boundaries, **leading to a conflict of jurisdiction in case of any dispute.**
- Data localization is an opportunity for Indian technology companies **to evolve an outlook from services to products**. International companies will also be looking at the Indian market, and this will benefit the growth of the local ecosystem.
- More data centres in India could mean new, power-hungry customers for India's renewable energy market. That means **Data localisation could boost India's renewable energy.**

### **Policies that imply data localization:**

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

### **Concerns / Challenges:**

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

### **Need of the hour:**

- There is an urgent need to have **an integrated, long-term strategy for policy creation for data localisation.**
- Data localisation needs to **integrate a wide range of social, political and economic perspectives.**
- Creating **an opportunity for local data centres all over the country.**

- **Devising an optimal regulatory and legislative framework** for data processors and data centres operating in the country.
- **Adequate infrastructure** in terms of energy, real estate, and internet connectivity also needs to be made available for India to become a global hub for data centres.
- **Adequate attention needs to be given to the interests of India's Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries**, which are thriving on cross border data flow.

Sources: the hindu

(Q) What do you understand by data localisation? Discuss the importance of data localisation for India and analyze India's present and proposed policies related to data localisation with respect to their effectiveness?

**Topic:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

## 1. CHINA DEVELOPS ITS OWN 'MOTHER OF ALL BOMBS'

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains: MoAB and FoAB- features, concerns, threats and need of the hour.**

**Context:** China has developed a massive bomb, said to be the country's answer to the US-built 'Mother of All Bombs', the most powerful non-nuclear weapon.

- It is dubbed as the Chinese version of the "Mother of All Bombs" due to its huge destruction potential that is claimed to be only second to nuclear weapons.

**Background:**

- Last year, while waging war against militants in Afghanistan, the US military dropped a GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) weapon, more commonly known as the "Mother of All Bombs," on the Islamic State.
- Although China is using the same nickname for its bomb, said to weigh several tonnes, the Chinese weapon is smaller and lighter than its American counterpart.

**Mother of all Bombs:**

- The Moab or GBU-43/B is the world's largest non-nuclear weapon.
- It is designed to destroy heavily reinforced targets or to shatter ground forces and armour across a large area.
- Its blast is equivalent to 11 tons of TNT. By comparison, the nuclear weapon dropped on Hiroshima had a blast yield of 15 tons of TNT.
- While it has a blast radius that stretches a mile in each direction the bomb leaves no lasting radiation effect because it is non-nuclear.

**Father of all Bombs:**

- To match the U.S. weapon, Russia developed the "Father of All Bombs" which is both bigger and thermobaric, meaning it uses gas to create a huge fireball rather than a shockwave.

Sources: the hindu.

## 2. MANIPUR PEOPLE'S PROTECTION BILL

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims: Highlights of the bill, ILP- meaning and features.**
- **For Mains: Protests over the bill and concerns associated with ILP, opposition to Citizenship Amendment Bill.**

**Context:** Manipur state government has decided to oppose the **Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2018**, if there is no clause to protect the indigenous peoples of the North East (NE) region in general, and Manipur in particular.

**What's the demand?**

- The state has submitted a memorandum to Home Minister Rajnath Singh to give President's assent to the **Manipur Peoples (Protection) Bill, 2018**. It will protect the interests of people of the State.

**Manipur People's Protection Bill, 2018:**

- It seeks to regulate the entry and exit of "outsiders" on the lines of the British-era inner-line permit system prevalent in three other north-eastern states — Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.

- The bill sets **1951 as the base year** to identify locals and prevent an influx of outsiders.

#### **Who are Manipuris and non-Manipuris?**

- According to the bill, **Manipur people include Meitis, the Pangal Muslims, scheduled tribes as listed under the Constitution** in terms of Manipur and all those citizens of India who have been living in Manipur before 1951.
- **The rest have been put in the category of non-Manipuris and will have to register themselves within one month of the notification of the law.** They will be issued a pass extendable up to six months. While those who have trade licences can get a pass extendable up to five years, which will have to be renewed every year. Any outsider visiting Manipur would need a pass.

#### **Rationale behind the Bill:**

- **The influx of foreign tourists has increased exponentially in Manipur, thus creating a demographic imbalance in the region.** If this was not enough, illegal immigration from Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar has also contributed to the crisis. This has created fear among the locals over employment and availability of resources.
- **At a time where there already exists stiff competition between the locals and outsiders over jobs, the outsiders mostly settle for low paid work.** Hence, locals feel ILP fails to safeguard the interests of the indigenous people.

#### **WHAT IS THE INNER LINE PERMIT?**

- The Inner Line Permit (ILP) is **an official travel document issued by the Government of India to grant inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period.** It is obligatory for Indians residing outside those states to obtain permission prior to entering the protected areas.
- **Currently, the Inner Line Permit is operational in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.** The document has been issued under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 and the conditions and restrictions vary from state to state.
- **It can be issued for travel purposes solely.** Visitors are not allowed to purchase property in these regions. However, there might be a different set of rules for long term visitors, though they are not valid for central government employees and security forces.

Sources: the hindu.

### **3. ARROW 3 INTERCEPTOR SYSTEM**

- **What is it?** Arrow 3 interceptor system was recently successfully tested.

#### **Features:**

- Arrow 3 is intended to serve as Israel's highest-altitude missile interception system.
- It is **jointly funded, developed and produced by Israel and the United States.**
- The system is designed to shoot down missiles above the atmosphere.
- Israel's Arrow system, partly financed by the United States, was developed and produced by Israeli Aerospace Industries in partnership with Boeing.

**Concern:** Arrow 3 may serve as an anti-satellite weapon, which would make Israel one of the world's few countries capable of shooting down satellites.

### **4. BANDAR ABBAS TO HOST IONS NEXT MONTH**

#### **What to study?**

- **For Prelims: IONS- composition, objectives and meetings.**
- **For Mains: Significance of IONS and its role in securing the Indian Ocean region.**

**Context:** Navy commanders of the Indian Ocean littoral states will convene in **Bandar Abbas** (IRAN) next month for participating in Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).

#### **About IONS:**

- **What is it?** IONS, the 21st century's first significant international maritime security initiative launched in February 2008, provides **a forum for discussion of regional maritime issues and promotes friendly relationships among member nations.**
- **It is a voluntary initiative** that seeks **to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region** by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally

relevant maritime issues and, in the process, endeavors to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.

- **Under the charter of business adopted in 2014**, the grouping has working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Information Security and Interoperability (IS&I) and anti-piracy now renamed as maritime security.
- The 35 **member nations** of the IONS are grouped into four sub-regions- South Asian, West Asian, East African and South East Asian and Australian.
- There are **nine states with observer status**.

Sources: the hindu.

(Q) Indian Ocean has a great political and economic significance. Comment.

# Facts for Prelims

## 1. INDIA'S RANKING ON MAJOR GLOBAL INDICES IN 2018- A QUICK RECAP

- In World Bank's **Ease of Doing Business rankings**, we rank 77th on a list of 190 economies that are doing well for businesses. India improved its rank substantially on the Ease of Doing Business index from 132 in 2016, to 100 in 2017, and further to 77 in 2018.
- In the **Human Development Index (HDI)**, compiled by the United Nations Development Program, taking parameters like education, health and income into account, India has done slightly better than the previous year as it climbed up a spot from 131 to 130 out of 189 nations.
- In **Happiness Index**, India slipped 11 spots from 122nd rank of 2017 to become the 133rd happiest nation in the world. It is an annual publication carried out by United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network since 2012.
- In the **Global Peace Index**, India has performed poorly and has done just a shade better than its previous performance of 137 as we rank 136 this time. Iceland, New Zealand, Austria, Denmark and Canada are the most peaceful countries, according to GPI.
- **Global Hunger Index** has also shown a fall in India's ranking from the past year. While India ranked 100th in a list of 119 countries last year, the 2018 performance is worse as now it is on 103rd spot. According to the report, "a ranking below 100 shows that a country's undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting, and child mortality levels are at the highest level."

## 2. SURVEY ON RETAIL PAYMENT HABITS OF INDIVIDUALS (SRPHI)

- **What is it?** It is a survey launched by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The survey will capture payment habits of individuals in six cities, including four metropolitan towns.

### Key facts:

- The survey will cover a sample of 6,000 individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds across six cities — Delhi,

Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Guwahati.

- The survey seeks qualitative responses from individuals on their payment habits.
- The findings may provide some idea about awareness and usage habits of digital payment products.

## 3. ASIA COMPETITIVENESS INSTITUTE'S (ACI) EDB INDEX

- **Context:** Asia Competitiveness Institute's (ACI) has released its Ease of Doing Business Index on Attractiveness to Investors, Business Friendliness and Competitive Policies (EDB Index ABC).
- **Performance of Indian states:** Andhra Pradesh has topped the list. It is followed by Maharashtra and Delhi.
- **Asia Competitiveness Institute** at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore was established as a research centre in 2006 with an aim to build intellectual leadership and network for understanding and developing competitiveness in the Asia region.

## 4. GLOBAL TALENT COMPETITIVE INDEX 2019

**Context:** Global Talent Competitive Index (GTCI) for 2019 has been released.

- GTCI, launched in 2013, is *an annual benchmarking report that measures the ability of countries to compete for talent*.
- It is released by *INSEAD business school in partnership with Tata Communications and Adecco Group*.
- *The report measures* levels of Global Talent Competitiveness by looking at 68 variables such as ease of hiring, gender earnings gap, and prevalence of training in firms.

### India's performance:

- Ranked at 80.
- India's biggest challenge is to improve its ability to attract and retain talent.
- There is a need to address its poor level of Internal Openness in particular with respect to weak gender equality and low tolerances towards minorities and immigrants.

#### **Global performance:**

- Switzerland followed by Singapore, the US, Norway and Denmark were in the top five on the list.
- China emerged as the best performer among the BRICS countries, with an overall position of 45th.

#### **5. BRAND FINANCE GLOBAL 500, 2019**

- **Facts relevant for Prelims:** Brand Finance Global 500, 2019 report has placed the '**Tata**' brand at the **86th position** this year. Last year, it was placed at 104<sup>th</sup> position.
- **Italian supercar manufacturer, Ferrari, has claimed the title of the world's strongest brand** according to the report.
- **Brand Finance**, the world's leading independent brand valuation and strategy consultancy, determines the relative strength of brands through a balanced scorecard of metrics evaluating marketing investment, stakeholder equity, and business performance.

#### **6. EDELMAN TRUST BAROMETER REPORT**

- **Context:** The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer report has been released by the Edelman Intelligence.
- **The Edelman Trust Barometer report** is an international study based on the opinions of elites that focuses on the principles of trust in business, government, media and NGOs. Based on the findings the report calculates the Global Trust Index.

#### **The key findings from the report are:**

- The Global Trust Index witnessed a marginal increase of 3 points to 52.
- The index has been topped by China in both the informed public and the general population segments, with scores of 79 and 88 respectively.

#### **Trust in companies:**

- Companies headquartered in Switzerland, Germany and Canada were the most trusted ones.
- Companies headquartered in India, Mexico and Brazil are the least trusted, followed by China and South Korea.

#### **India's performance:**

- India is among the most trusted nations globally when it comes to government,

business, NGOs and media but the country's brands are among the least-trusted.

- India stood at the second place in the informed public category and third place in the general population category.

#### **7. MILITARY HONOURS- FREQUENTLY IN NEWS**

- Have a brief overview- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awards\\_and\\_decorations\\_of\\_the\\_Indian\\_Armed\\_Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awards_and_decorations_of_the_Indian_Armed_Forces).

#### **8. VARIOUS AWARDS**

##### **Bharat Ratna:**

- **Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian award of the Republic of India.** The provision of Bharat Ratna was introduced in 1954.
- **Eligibility:** Any person without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex is eligible for these awards.
- **There is no written provision that Bharat Ratna should be awarded to Indian citizens only.**
- **It is awarded in recognition of** exceptional service/performance of the highest order in any field of human endeavour. The award was originally limited to achievements in the arts, literature, science and public services but the government expanded the criteria to include "any field of human endeavour" in December 2011.
- **In terms of Article 18 (1) of the Constitution**, the award cannot be used as a prefix or suffix to the recipient's name. However, should an award winner consider it necessary, he/she may use the expression in their biodata/letterhead/visiting card etc. to indicate that he/she is a recipient of the award.

##### **About Padma Awards:**

- Padma Awards – one of the highest civilian Awards of the country, are **conferred in three categories, namely, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri**. They were instituted in the year 1954. The Awards are given in various disciplines/fields of activities, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.

**Categories:**

1. Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; (it is a second degree honour).
2. Padma Bhushan is awarded for distinguished service of high order. (it is a third degree honour).
3. Padma Shri is awarded for distinguished service in any field. (it is a fourth degree honour).

The awards are announced on the occasion of Republic Day every year. The award is normally not conferred posthumously. However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously if the demise of the person proposed to be honoured has been recent, say within a period of one year preceding the Republic Day on which it is proposed to announce the award.

## 9. PM NARENDRA MODI RECEIVES FIRST EVER PHILIP KOTLER PRESIDENTIAL AWARD

- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi was awarded first ever Philip Kotler Presidential Award. He was selected for his outstanding leadership for the nation.
- **The Philip Kotler Presidential Award** recognises and celebrates achievements of organisations, marketing teams, and individuals in different industries around the world.
- **Philip Kotler** is a world renowned Professor of Marketing at Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management.

## 10. GANDHI PEACE PRIZE ANNOUNCED FOR YEARS 2015, 2016, 2017 AND 2018

- **Context:** The Gandhi Peace Prize for the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 has been announced by the Union Ministry of Culture.
- The awardees were selected by the jury under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. **The 2018 Gandhi Peace Prize was conferred on Yohei Sasakawa.**

**About the Gandhi Peace Prize:**

- The Gandhi Peace Prize was instituted in the year 1995 on the occasion of the 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- This annual award is given to individuals and institutions for their contributions towards social, economic and political

transformation through non-violence and other Gandhian methods.

- The award carries a cash prize of Rs 1 crore, a citation and a Plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item.
- The Award for every year is selected by a Jury under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister.

## 11. OLOF PALME PRIZE

- **Context:** Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, a former US military analyst who exposed Washington's secret war plans for Vietnam in 1971, has won the 2018 Olof Palme human rights prize.

**About the Prize:**

- The Olof Palme Prize is an annual prize worth \$75,000 (65,500 euros) awarded by the Swedish labour movement. It commemorates the memory of Sweden's Social Democratic prime minister Olof Palme, an outspoken international human rights advocate — and vehement opponent of US involvement in the Vietnam War — who was assassinated in Stockholm in 1986.

## 12. SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AAPDA PRABANDHAN PURASKAR

- **What?** Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar, an annual award, has been instituted by the government. The award is to be announced every year on 23rd January on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.
- **Eligibility:** All Indian Citizens and organizations, who have excelled in areas of Disaster Management; like Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness, Rescue, Response, Relief, Rehabilitation, Research/ Innovations or Early Warning are eligible for the Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar.
- **2019 awardee:** For the year 2019, 8th Battalion of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) located at Ghaziabad has been selected for its commendable work in Disaster Management. The Award recipient will receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 51 lakh.

## 13. RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR

- **Context:** Rashtriya Bal Puraskar was recently awarded to 26 awardees by the President.

### About Rashtriya Bal Puraskar:

- The earlier national awards for children have been revamped as Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. An additional component of bravery has also been added.

### Categories:

1. **Bal Shakti Puraskar:** The Bal Shakti Puraskar is given in the fields of Innovation, Social Service, Scholastic, Sports, Art & Culture, and Bravery. The award carries a medal, a cash prize of Rs 100000, book vouchers worth Rs. 10,000, a certificate and a citation.
2. **Bal Kalyan Puraskar:** The Bal Kalyan Puraskar is given in the categories of Individual and Institution. The award for Individual category consists of a cash prize of Rs 100000, a medal, a citation and a certificate. The award for Institution category consists of a prize of Rs 500000 each, a medal, a citation and a certificate.

## 14. INDIA REPLACES JAPAN TO BE WORLD'S SECOND LARGEST STEEL PRODUCER

- *India has replaced Japan as the world's second-largest steel producing country*, only behind China, which is the largest producer of crude steel accounting for more than 51 per cent of production, *as per the latest report by World Steel Association*.

## 15. PRAYAGRAJ

- **Context:** The Union Home Ministry has approved the proposal of the Uttar Pradesh Government to rename Allahabad as Prayagraj.

### Background:

- The city of Allahabad was originally known as Prayag in ancient times. Between 1574 and 1583, the 16th-century Mughal emperor Akbar founded a fort near the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, known as Sangam, as he was impressed with its strategic position.
- Hence, Akbar named the fort and its neighbourhood as Ilahabad, which meant the "Abode of God", inspired by the religion he had founded, Din-i-Illahi. In the later years, Akbar's grandson Shah Jahan

renamed the entire city as Allahabad. However, the area near the Sangam, which is the site of the Kumbh Mela, continued to be called Prayag.

## 16. MAKARAVILAKKU FESTIVAL SEASON

- **Context:** The hill shrine of Lord Ayyappa in Kerala has been opened for the 21 day-long Makaravilakku festival season, marking the concluding phase of the annual pilgrimage season.

### About Makaravilakku festival season:

- Makaravilakku is an annual festival held on Makar Sankranti in Kerala, at the shrine of Sabarimala. The festival includes the Thiruvabharanam (sacred ornaments of Ayyappan) procession and a congregation at the hill shrine of Sabarimala.

## 17. PAHARI COMMUNITY

- **Why in News?** Governor of Jammu and Kashmir has given his approval for the Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2014, providing reservation to the persons belonging to Pahari community of the State.
- The legislation is aimed at providing job opportunities to the Pahari people residing in backward areas of the State.

### About Pahari community:

- Pahari is a linguistic group, comprising both Muslims and Hindus, and is mainly located in Poonch, Rajouri, Kupwara and Baramulla districts.
- Because of the remoteness and inaccessibility of the areas of their residence, the Pahari community has historically faced considerable economic distress leading to overall socio-economic backwardness.

## 18. CHOWMAHALLA PALACE

- **Context:** The restoration of the *Chowmahalla Palace* to its age-old grandeur has been completed.

### Key facts:

- Chowmahalla Palace is *a palace of the Nizams of Hyderabad state*.
- It was *the seat of the Asaf Jahi dynasty and was the official residence of the Nizams of Hyderabad while they ruled their state*.
- The palace was *built by Nizam Salabat Jung*.

## 19. JAIPUR LITERATURE FESTIVAL

- **Context:** The historic Diggi Palace is hosting the five-day Jaipur Literature Festival.

### About the festival:

1. The Jaipur Literature Festival is an annual literary festival which takes place in the Indian city of Jaipur each January.
2. It was founded in 2006, and from 2008 has been produced by Teamwork Arts.
3. The Festival's core values are to serve as a democratic, non-aligned platform offering free and fair access.

## 20. AADI MAHOTSAV

- **Organized by** Ministry of Tribal affairs and TRIFED.
- **The Mahotsav will comprise** of display and sale of items of tribal art and craft, tribal medicine & healers, tribal cuisine and display of tribal folk performance, in which tribal artisans, chefs, folk dancers/musicians from 23 States of the country shall participate and provide glimpse of their rich traditional culture.
- **The festival will feature** exhibition-cum-sale of tribal handicrafts, art, paintings, fabric, jewellery and much more.
- **Significance of the event:** As the name of this event Aadi Mahotsav suggests, it is its 'Adi' factor that is important about them. The Adivasi way of life is guided by primal truths, eternal values and a natural simplicity. The greatness of the tribes lies in this that they have managed to retain the primal skills and natural simplicity. This quality gives their arts and crafts a timeless appeal. The crudest tribal handicraft instantly touches a primal instinct in all of us. This is particularly true in tribal music and dance.

## 21. SARVA BHASHA KAVI SAMMELAN

- **Context:** *Kavi Sammelan*, a National Symposium of Poets, is being held in Chennai.

### About Sarva Bhasha Kavi Sammelan:

- **Sarva Bhasha Kavi Sammelan of All India Radio (AIR)** aims to provide a creative platform for national integration and linguistic harmony through mutual interaction and coordinated presentation of

the best in contemporary poetry of all Indian languages.

- The Kavi Sammelan made its beginning in 1956 and is one of its kind programme wherein 23 eminent poets from 22 Indian languages come together on one stage to offer their creative best.

## 22. WORLD HINDI DAY 2019

- **Context:** World Hindi Day is celebrated on January 10 every year, marking the anniversary of first World Hindi Conference which was held in 1975 by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- World Hindi Day was first observed on January 10, 2006. Since then, it is celebrated on January 10 every year.

## 23. WORLD HINDI DAY VS NATIONAL HINDI DIWAS

- National Hindi Diwas is celebrated every year on September 14. On that day in 1949, the constituent assembly adopted Hindi, written in Devanagari script, as the official language of the Union.
- While the focus of the World Hindi Day is to promote the language at the global stage, the National Hindi Diwas, which is held across the country at a national level, marks adaptation of Hindi, written in Devanagari script as the official language.

## 24. NEW DELHI WORLD BOOK FAIR

- **What is it?** New Delhi World Book Fair is a platform for displaying our rich treasure of knowledge through books. It is not just an opportunity for a reader but it also provides a huge platform to the publishers who exhibit their numerous books at the event.
- **Organizers:** Organised by National Book Trust, in association with ITPO.
- **The theme** of the 27th edition of the New Delhi World Book Fair is "Readers with special needs".

## 25. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIAN CINEMA IN MUMBAI

- **Context:** *National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC) has been inaugurated in Mumbai*. The museum depicts the journey

of over a century of Indian cinema in a story telling mode with the help of visuals, graphics, artifacts, interactive exhibits and multimedia expositions.

## 26. MANIYARO

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

## 27. ARUNACHAL GOVT DECLARES PAKKE HORNBILL FEST AS 'STATE FESTIVAL'

- **Context:** The government of Arunachal Pradesh has declared the *Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival (PPHF)—the state's only conservation festival, as a "state festival"*.

### About Great Indian Hornbill:

- The great hornbill is long-lived, living for nearly 50 years in captivity. It is predominantly fruit eating, but is an opportunist and preys on small mammals, reptiles and birds.
- **IUCN status:** Vulnerable (uplisted from Near Threatened in 2018).
- It is also listed in *Appendix I of CITES*.

## 28. FLAMINGO FESTIVAL AT PULICAT LAKE

### About the festival:

- *Flamingo Festival is held every year to promote tourism in Pulicat and Nellapattu.* Flamingo Festival is being organised for the past 12 years.

### Facts for Prelims:

- **About Nellapattu Bird Sanctuary:** It is considered one of the biggest habitat for some hundreds of pelicans and other birds.

Located about 20 km north of the Pulicat Lake on the Andhra Pradesh-Tamil Nadu border, the sanctuary is spread in about 459 hectares.

- **About Pulicat lake:** It is the second largest brackish water lake or lagoon in India, after Chilika Lake. It straddles the border of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu states with over 96% of it in Andhra Pradesh. *The lake encompasses the Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary. The barrier island of Sriharikota separates the lake from the Bay of Bengal and is home to the Satish Dhawan Space Centre.* Two rivers which feed the lagoon are the *Arani river at the southern tip and the Kalangi River from the northwest*, in addition to some smaller streams. *The Buckingham Canal, a navigation channel, is part of the lagoon on its western side.*

## 29. WOMEN'S WALL IN KERALA

- **Context:** Kerala government had on January 1<sup>st</sup> organised the Women's Wall or Vanitha Mathil to "protect renaissance values.

### WHAT IS IT?

- Around thirty lakh women formed a human chain across the National Highway from Kasargod to Thiruvananthapuram, around 620-kilometre long, extending their support to the state government's resolve to implement the Supreme Court's verdict allowing women of all ages access to Sabarimala and to protect the secular and progressive values of Kerala.
- Organised by the government and supported by various social organisations having links with the renaissance movement, the Women's Wall is an attempt by the government to defend the state from communal forces.

## 30. FIRST FEMALE CHIEF ECONOMIST OF IMF

- **Context:** Gita Gopinath has joined International Monetary Fund as its chief economist. She is the first woman to occupy the post of chief economist of IMF. She is the 11th chief economist of the IMF.

### Role of Chief Economist:

- The Chief Economist is also the Director of the Fund's Research Department and is responsible for providing independent

advice to the Fund on its policy issues, integrating ideas of the research in the design of policies, conveying these ideas to the policymakers inside and outside the fund and managing all research done at IMF.

- The Chief Economist is part of the senior leadership team of the IMF and directly advises the Managing Director.
- The Chief Economist also leads about a hundred PhD economists in the Research Department.

### 31. SAMBHAV

- **Context:** Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), which works to prevent gender-based violence, will travel to nine cities and four districts this year with its two-day travelling film festival called 'Sambhav'.
- **About the festival:** The festival tries to cover the lives and issues of all genders. There are films on gender discrimination and sexual harassment but also on toxic masculinity and its impact on men and boys. There are also films portraying the stigma and inhumane treatment faced by homosexual and transgender people.

### 32. INDIA'S LONGEST SINGLE-LANE STEEL CABLE SUSPENSION BRIDGE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

- **Context:** India's longest single-lane steel cable suspension bridge has been inaugurated over Siang River in Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The bridge is 300-metre-long and is also known as byorung bridge. The bridge will reduce the distance between Yingkiong and Tuting in Arunachal Pradesh by almost 40 km.
- **Siang River:** The Tsangpo river, which originates in the Angsi Glacier in the Himalayas, enters India through Arunachal Pradesh where it is called by name Siang. The river is also called as Dihang in the plain regions. It is joined by the rivers Dibang and Lohit.

### 33. ATAL SETU OF GOA

- **Context:** "Atal Setu" on the Mandovi river in Goa has been inaugurated.

- **Features of the bridge:** It is 5.1-km long cable-stayed bridge connecting state capital Panaji with north Goa. The bridge is constructed by the GIDC (Goa Infrastructure Development Corporation) in collaboration with construction major Larsen and Toubro.
- **Mahadayi, also known as the Mandovi river,** is known as a lifeline in the northern parts of Karnataka. The river originates and flows for 28 kilometer in Karnataka and goes through Maharashtra and Goa before meeting the Arabian Sea.

### 34. DIFFO BRIDGE

- **Why in News?** Bridge over Diffo river on Roing-Koron-Paya road has been inaugurated in Arunachal Pradesh. The construction of the Bridge was undertaken by the Project Udayak of the Border Roads Organisation.
- **Key facts:** It would provide uninterrupted access between Dibang valley and Lohit valley region of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. It would provide an all-weather Road to the troops deployed on the China Border.
- **Project Udayank of the Border Roads Organisation** was raised on June 1990 at Doomdooma Assam. The name of the project Udayank is synonymous to the land of rising sun which fits appropriately to the area it operates. It consists of two border road taskforces undertaking construction activities in the north-eastern region.

### 35. KEERIAN – GANDIAL BRIDGE

**Context:** Keerian – Gandial bridge, over river Ravi, was recently inaugurated.

- The bridge over Ravi at Keerian – Gandial will benefit over 2,20,000 people living on the two sides – Kathua in Jammu, and Pathankot in Punjab.
- It will reduce the distance between the two cities from 45 kms to 8.6 kms.
- The Keerian – Gandial bridge will improve inter-state connectivity.

### 36. GANGA EXPRESSWAY

**Context:** The government of Uttar Pradesh has approved the construction of the Ganga Expressway.

**Key facts:**

- The 600km long expressway would be the longest expressway in the world.

- The expressway will provide for better connectivity of the Prayagraj (Allahabad) to Western Pradesh.

### 37. INDIAN RAILWAYS' FASTEST TRAIN 18 NAMED VANDE BHARAT EXPRESS

- India's first indigenously built engineless semi-high speed train, Train 18, has been named **Vande Bharat Express**.
- The train is set to run between Delhi and Varanasi at a maximum speed of 160 kmph.
- Train 18 is a flagship train set; the first prototype 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.
- T-18 is a self-propelled engine-less train (similar to the Metro trains) and 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.

### 38. MANDAL DAM PROJECT

- Context:** Mandal Dam is being built on the North Koel River.

#### About the Mandal Dam Project:

- The Mandal Dam project will help around one lakh eleven thousand hectares of agricultural land in Jharkhand and Bihar to get irrigation facilities.
- Funding:** 60% of the project cost would be financed by the central government as a grant from Long-Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF) under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchay Yojana (PMKSY). Remaining 40% will be borne by the States through loan financed by NABARD.
- North Koel River:** North Koel River originates on Ranchi plateau in Jharkhand and joins the Sone River, a few miles north-west of Haidarnagar in Jharkhand. The river meanders through the northern part of Betla National Park. The principal tributaries of the North Koel River are Auranga and the Amanat.

### 39. SITA RAMA LIFT IRRIGATION PROJECT

- Context:** The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has given its *approval for the Sita Rama Lift Irrigation Project of Telangana*.
- About the Project:** The Sita Rama Lift Irrigation Project aims to divert Godavari river water to irrigate 2.72 lakh hectares in three districts of Telangana.

### 40. WORLD CAPITAL OF ARCHITECTURE

- Context:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has announced that the Brazilian city of *Rio de Janeiro will be the World Capital of Architecture for 2020*.
- Rio will be the first city to receive the title under a program launched together by UNESCO and the International Union of Architects (UIA) in November last year.* The city will host the World Congress of UIA, in July 2020, an event that occurs every three years.
- Significance:** According to UNESCO, the World Capital of Architecture is intended to become an international forum for debates about pressing global challenges from the perspectives of culture, cultural heritage, urban planning and architecture.

### 41. CINEREOUS VULTURE

- Context:** Bird watchers and researchers recently sighted Cinereous vulture in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.

#### Background:

- During the winter, the Cinereous vulture migrates from the mountainous regions of Europe and Asia to warmer places, including India.

#### Key facts:

- Cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) draws its name from "monachus", which means hooded (like a monk) in Latin.
- It is also known as the black vulture, monk vulture, or Eurasian black vulture.
- It is classified as Near Threatened under the IUCN Red List.

## 42. HAWAIIAN TREE SNAIL IS THE FIRST EXTINCTION OF 2019

- **Context:** George, the last known *Achatinella apexfulva*- a Hawaiian tree snail, died on New Year's Day 2019, making his species the *first to be declared officially extinct in 2019*.



## 43. GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

- **Context:** Wildlife activists have called for enforcement of recovery plan for the country's *most critically endangered bird-Great Indian Bustard*.
- Once the contender for becoming India's national bird, the Great Indian Bustard is now facing extinction.

### Key facts:

- Great Indian Bustard is listed in *Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in the CMS Convention and in Appendix I of CITES, as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List*.
- It has also been identified as one of the species for the recovery programme under the *Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment and Forests*, Government of India.
- *Project Great Indian Bustard — state of Rajasthan* — identifying and fencing off bustard breeding grounds in existing protected areas as well as provide secure breeding enclosures in areas outside protected areas

### Protected areas:

1. Desert National Park Sanctuary — Rajasthan.
2. Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary — Andhra Pradesh.
3. Karera Wildlife Sanctuary— Madhya Pradesh.

## 44. SMALL WOODBROWN BUTTERFLY

- **What?** After a span of 120 long years, researchers in Sikkim have rediscovered the *Small Woodbrown butterfly* species from Bakhim in Khanchendzonga National Park.

### Key facts:

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

## 45. TWO NEW SPECIES OF MOSS ROSE DISCOVERED IN SOUTH INDIA

- **What?** Two new species of moss rose discovered in south India.
- **Names:** *Portulaca badamica* and *Portulaca lakshminarasimhaniana*. Portulaca badamica is named after the site of its discovery that is, the Badami hills, while the second new species—Portulaca lakshminarasimhaniana—honours Pakshirajan Lakshminarashimhan, who is the head of the Botanical Survey of India, western regional circle in Pune, for his significant contribution to plant taxonomy.
- **IUCN Status:** *Portulaca badamica*- data deficient category and *Portulaca lakshminarasimhaniana*- critically endangered.

## 46. CROCODYLUS PALUSTRIS

- **Why in News?** The mugger crocodile, also called marsh crocodile or broad-snouted crocodile, has come to the centre of renewed attention in Gujarat, where the Forest Department has started evacuating muggers from two ponds on the Sardar Sarovar Dam premises on the Narmada, to

facilitate a seaplane service at the Statue of Unity.

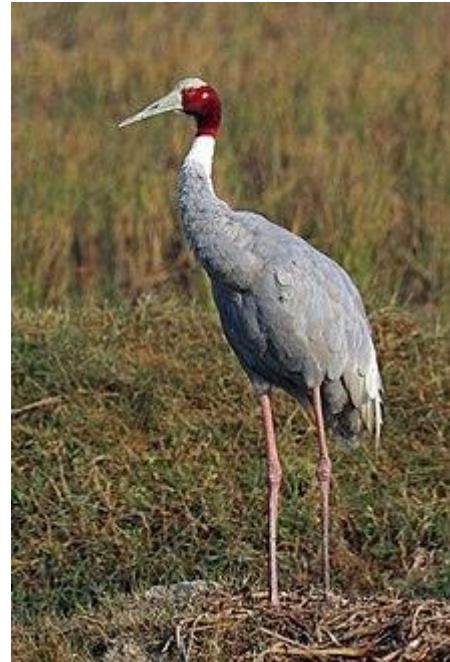
#### Key facts:

- Already extinct in Bhutan and Myanmar.
- Listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List since 1982.
- In India, it is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

### 47. GOLDEN LANGUR BREEDING PROJECT IN ASSAM

**Context:** Assam has announced the success of the Golden Langur Conservation Breeding Programme in the State. The golden langur conservation project was undertaken at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati during the 2011-12 fiscal.

- The **golden langur (*Trachypithecus geei*) is currently endangered.**
- Apart from a 60 square mile area in north-western Assam, small populations are found in Bhutan and Tripura.



### 48. SARUS CRANE

- **Context:** Sarus crane, whose numbers pushed to the edge by habitat degradation and human callousness, now seems to be getting a new lease of life in Uttar Pradesh, where it enjoys the status of official State bird.
- **Rise in numbers:** The population of the Sarus crane, a bird distinguishable by its red upper neck and white collar, has climbed to 15,938 as per the 2018 census (summer). This is a jump of 5.2% from 2017, when there were 15,138 Sarus cranes across U.P. Its population in Uttar Pradesh has steadily grown since 2013, as wetlands thrive and farmers, fisherfolk nurture their nests.

#### Key facts:

- The Sarus (*Grus antigone*) is **the tallest flying bird in the world**.
- It is also **India's only resident breeding crane**.
- **IUCN status-** 'vulnerable'.
- It has three disjunct populations in the Indian sub-continent, south-east Asia and northern Australia.

### 49. BANDIPUR TIGER RESERVE

- **Why in News?** The differences of opinion between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways over the proposal to construct elevated roads through sections of the Bandipur Tiger Reserve have given a sliver of hope to the State government to tackle the night traffic ban on National Highway 766.

#### What's the issue?

- The contention between the two Central Ministries on the issue, in which Kerala and Karnataka have stakes, had led the Supreme Court to ask the Centre to arrive at a consensus within six weeks. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has not concurred with the project for an elevated 5-km road over Bandipur while the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) is willing to construct five elevated sections, of which four will be in Bandipur and one in Wayanad.

#### Key facts on Bandipur National Park:

- Located in Karnataka.
- Together with the adjoining Nagarhole National Park, Mudumalai National Park and Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, it is part of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve making it the largest protected area in southern India and largest habitat of wild elephants in south Asia**.

- The park is flanked by the Kabini river in the north and the Moyar river in the south. The Nugu river runs through the park.
- The highest point in the park is on a hill called Himavad Gopalaswamy Betta.

## 50. SATKOSIA TIGER RESERVE

- **Why in News?** Two trained elephants will be used to patrol Odisha's Satkosia Tiger Reserve. The two elephants are being brought from the Simlipal Tiger Reserve. This step has been undertaken for resuming the ambitious tiger reintroduction programme in Satkosia.

### About Satkosia Tiger Reserve:

- It was established in 1976 as a wildlife sanctuary. The area was declared as Satkosia Tiger Reserve in 2007. Satkosia is the meeting point of two bio-geographic regions of India; the Deccan Peninsula and the Eastern Ghats, contributing immense biodiversity.

## 51. DELHI GOVT PLANS TO START BIRD HOSPITALS

- **Context:** In a first, the government of Delhi has proposed a specialised treatment facility for birds in the National Capital Territory, as part of its Animal Health and Welfare Policy 2018.
- **This setup would be developed in all the districts of Delhi** in order to provide high-end specialized referral clinical support and treatment to the birds.

## 52. COW URINE MAY BE ADDING TO GLOBAL WARMING

- **Context:** A study says cow urine may be adding to global warming.

### How?

1. The urine from the ruminant is a source of nitrous oxide emissions (N<sub>2</sub>O), a gas that is 300 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.
2. Most times, when cow urine is used in degraded pastures, N<sub>2</sub>O emissions are tripled.
3. The cattle and livestock are a significant source of methane, a greenhouse gas, and therefore a contributor to global warming, is

well-known. However, the role of cow urine is less understood.

### How vulnerable is India?

- Dung and urine are commonly mixed together for manure in Indian fields. Since, India also hosts the world's largest livestock population, as well as significant tracts of degraded land, the findings may have a bearing on nitrogen emissions from Indian fields.
- A 2012 satellite study by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said that about 30% of India's geographical area (or about 96.4 million hectares) is degraded.
- Degraded pastures not only affect food security and the livelihood of farmers today, but affect the livelihood of future farmers because they emit more gases that cause global warming.
- Degraded grasslands emitted more N<sub>2</sub>O than healthy pastures because the vegetation in the latter took up some of the reactive nitrogen compounds and only the leftovers were emitted.

## 53. INDUS FOOD 2019

- **Context:** INDUS FOOD-II will be held on 14th and 15th January, 2019, at India Expo Mart, Greater Noida.
- **Theme:** 'World Food Supermarket'.

### About INDUS FOOD:

- INDUS FOOD is a platform of its kind exclusively devoted to enhancing Indian exports in F&B sector. The event is aimed at promoting India as a strong and reliable exporter of food and beverage products to the world.
- It enables B2B engagements of buyers and suppliers, after careful business matchmaking, which takes care of precise business requirements of each participant, and enables him to pick and choose whom to meet.

## 54. EXIM BANK

- **Context:** Cabinet approves ₹6,000 crore capital infusion in Exim Bank and an increase in the Exim Bank authorised capital from ₹10,000 crore to ₹20,000 crore.

### About EXIM bank:

- Export–Import Bank of India was established in 1982 **under the Export–Import Bank of India Act 1981**.

#### **Functions:**

- It provides direct financial assistance to exporters of plant, machinery and related service in the form of medium-term credit.
- Underwriting the issue of shares, stocks, bonds, debentures of any company engaged in exports.
- It provides rediscount of export bills for a period not exceeding 90 days against short-term usance export bills discounted by commercial banks.
- The bank gives overseas buyers credit to foreign importers for import of Indian capital goods and related services.
- Developing and financing export oriented industries.

#### **55. ARMY TECH SEMINAR (ARTECH 2019)**

- In its quest for modernization through optimum use of emerging technologies, Indian Army organized the Army Technology Seminar – 2019 (ARTECH 2019) on the theme “Disruptive Impact of Emerging Technologies on Land Warfare” at Manekshaw Centre, New Delhi.
- **Aim of the Seminar** – The aim is to bring together stakeholders in the military, academia and industry to provide perspective on the available and emerging technologies which could have an impact on warfighting.

#### **56. IMBEX 2018-19**

- **What is it?** It is **India-Myanmar bilateral army exercise**. IMBEX 2018-19, is being held in Haryana. It is **the second edition of the IMBEX**.

#### **Main Objective of IMBEX 2018-19:**

- Train the Myanmar delegation for participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations under the UN flag.

#### **57. SEA VIGIL**

- **What is it?** It is the first coastal defence Exercise, conducted by the Navy and Coast Guard, in close coordination with State Governments and Union Territories. It was the largest such exercise the country had ever witnessed in recent times and saw participation by more than 100 ships,

aircraft and patrol boats manned and operated by various security agencies.

- **Aim:** To comprehensively and holistically validate the efficacy of the measures taken since '26/11'.

#### **58. INS KOHASSA**

- **Context:** (Indian Naval Station) INS Kohassa has been commissioned at Diglipur on North Andaman.
- **Significance:** Indian Navy will have full command over the new airbase, which will play an important role in strengthening the monitoring capabilities of Indian Navy in this part of the Indian Ocean. This region of Indian Ocean is very critical because it has been witnessing a lot of muscle-flexing by China.
- **Geographical importance:** Located in the region close to the opening of the Straits of Malacca, INS Kohassa is just 90 km from Indonesia, 45 km from Myanmar and 550 km from Thailand. It is interesting to note that around 80% of all cargo going to and from China passes through the Malacca.
- **NAS Shibpur:** The location had earlier been the site of (Naval Air Station) NAS Shibpur, which had been used as a waystation for Dornier aircraft and Chetak helicopters. Established in 2001, NAS Shibpur had been used by Dornier aircraft and Chetak helicopters to conduct surveillance and monitoring operations in the North Andaman Islands region.

#### **59. BIO-JET FUEL FOR MILITARY AIRCRAFT**

- **Context:** Indigenous produced bio-fuel has been finally cleared for use by Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC).
- **The bio-jet fuel has been produced from seeds of Jatropha plant** sourced from Chhattisgarh and processed at CSIR-IIP's lab at Dehradun.

#### **60. INDIA'S SECOND DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR**

- **What?** Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor has been inaugurated.

#### **Key facts:**

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

## **61. GLOBAL AVIATION SUMMIT 2019**

- **Context:** Global Aviation Summit 2019 is being held in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

**The theme of the Global Aviation Summit 2019** is 'Flying for all—especially the next 6 Billion'.

- The summit is being organised by the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation, Airport Authority of India (AAI) in association with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).
- The objective of the Summit is to provide a platform to the aviation industry to discuss the challenges faced in the newly developing growth spots and understand how technology-driven innovations will change air travel in the future.

## **62. STRATEGIC PROGRAMME BETWEEN INDIA AND SOUTH AFRICA**

- **Context:** India and South Africa have sealed a **three-year strategic programme** covering all aspects of bilateral ties.
- **The strategic programme will cover** cooperation in a range of areas, including defence and security, trade and investment, the blue economy, tourism, IT and agriculture.
- **Facts:** Strategic Partnership has been established between India and South Africa through the **Red Fort Declaration of March 1997 and the Tshwane Declaration of October 2006**.

## **63. ROADEO**

- **What is it?** The traffic police authorities of Pune are planning to introduce a **robot named 'Roadeo'** which would move around city roads, functioning as a quasi-traffic policeman and cautioning commuters about traffic rules and offences.
- It is a first of its kind initiative in the entire country. If this pilot project turns out to be successful it would go a long way in easing the traffic management burden and reducing the workload of overburdened policemen.

## **64. NSDC**

- **Why in News?** Renault-Nissan has signed a pact with National Skill Development Corporation to train its workforce in the alliance plant in Chennai for future technologies.
- NSDC would assist the Renault-Nissan workforce develop competency standards in emerging manufacturing technologies.

#### **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 was set up by Ministry of Finance as Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.** The Government of India through Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) holds 49% of the share capital of NSDC, while the private sector has the balance 51% of the share capital.

#### **Functions:**

- NSDC aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.
- It also 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.

## 65. DRI

- Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, formed in 1957, is the major intelligence agency which eradicates smuggling of drugs, gold, diamonds, electronics, foreign currency, counterfeit Indian currency, etc.
- The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence functions under the Central Board of Excise and Customs in the Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue.
- The Directorate is run by officers from Central Excise and Customs. Though its early days were committed to combating smuggling in of gold, it has now tuned itself to the changing nature of crimes in the field of narcotics and economic crimes.

## 66. SFIO

**About Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO):**

- SFIO comes under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)**.
- It is a multi-disciplinary organisation that investigates and guides prosecution in white-collar fraud requiring expertise in forensic auditing, corporate law, information technology, capital markets, taxation, and other allied fields.
- It was established in 2003, based on recommendations by the **Naresh Chandra Committee** on Corporate Audit and Governance.
- It received **statutory powers under the Companies Act, 2013**.
- The rules giving it **the power to make arrests** came into effect in 2017.
- Since its inception, the SFIO was understood to be a specialized organisation that would require a wide spectrum of expertise, and recruitment would be in large part deputation-based, drawing on expertise from various civil services cadres, and on consultants with the required expertise.
- Cases are assigned to the SFIO based on the scale of financial misappropriation or extent of public interest that is at stake.

## 67. BROADCAST AUDIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL OF INDIA (BARC)

**Why in News?** Punit Goenka is the new chairman of BARC.

**About BARC:**

- It is a collaborative Industry Company founded in 2010 by stakeholder bodies that represent Broadcasters, Advertisers, and Advertising and Media Agencies.
- BARC India was set up as per guidelines of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India.
- Promoters of BARC India are Indian Broadcasting Foundation, Indian Society of Advertisers and Advertising Agencies Association of India.
- BARC India has evolved a transparent, accurate, and inclusive TV audience measurement system on the foundation of robust and future-ready technology backbone. Together with the audience measurement system, BARC India provides a suite of Insight products designed for Broadcasters, Advertisers and Agencies. The data generated and the insights provided by BARC India aids in making efficient decision making by the stakeholders.

## 68. NATIONAL STATISTICAL COMMISSION

The Government of India through a resolution dated 1st June, 2005 set up the National Statistical Commission (NSC).

1. 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.
2. **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.
3. **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.

## 69. NALSA

- **Why in News?** President Ram Nath Kovind has nominated Justice AK Sikri as Executive Chairman of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

### About NALSA:

- NALSA has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society. The aim is to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities.

### Important functions performed by NALSA:

- NALSA organises Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- NALSA identifies specific categories of the marginalised and excluded groups and formulates various schemes for the implementation of preventive and strategic legal service programmes.
- Services provided by the agency include free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for the poor and marginalised people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer in any court or tribunal.
- Free legal services include provision of aid and advice to beneficiaries to access the benefits under the welfare statutes and schemes and to ensure access to justice in any other manner.

## 70. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU PORT TRUST (JNPT)

- **As per the latest Lloyds Report**, JNPT becomes the only Indian port to be listed amongst the world's top 30 container ports. It is ranked at 28<sup>th</sup> position.

## 71. ISRO'S FIRST MISSION OF 2019

- **Context:** India has successfully launched Microsat-R, a military satellite and Kalamsat onboard its Polar rocket PSLV C44, in the first mission for the ISRO in 2019.
- **Microsat-R** is meant for military use.
- **Kalamsat** is a communication satellite with a life span of two months. The nanosatellite is a 10cm cube weighing 1.2 kg. It was the first to use the rocket's fourth stage as an orbital platform. It is the world's lightest and first ever 3D-printed satellite.

## 72. HUMAN SPACE FLIGHT CENTRE (HSFC)

1. The HSFC, the hub of ISRO's future manned missions, was inaugurated at ISRO headquarters in Bengaluru.
2. HSFC shall be responsible for the implementation of Gaganyaan project — which involves mission planning, development of engineering systems for crew survival in space, crew selection and training and also pursue activities for sustained human space flight missions.

## 73. B.TECH COURSE IN AI BY IIT HYDERABAD

- **Context:** IIT Hyderabad has announced the launch of a full-fledged bachelor's programme in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. **IIT Hyderabad has become the first institute in the country to launch full-fledged Bachelor's programme in AI technology. IIT Hyderabad will be the third institute to globally to offer the B.Tech course in AI.**

## 74. PLACES IN NEWS- MOUNT SHINDAKE

- **Context:** A volcano- Mt Shindake has erupted on **Kuchinoerabu Island of Japan**. Kuchinoerabu Island belongs to Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan. The entire island lies within the borders of the Kirishima-Yaku National Park.

## 75. SHEHRI SAMRIDHI UTSAV

- **What is it?** It is an event which aims to **expand the outreach of National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) to the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable**, showcase its initiatives and facilitate access of SHG members to the other government schemes.
- This is **organized by Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation**.

## 76. OPERATION KABADDI

- **What is it?** It was to be the largest planned operation by the Indian Army to end cross-LoC infiltration by capturing at least 25 selected Pakistani posts along the Line of

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

- **Operation Kabaddi would include** a “wide spectrum of evolving punitive operations such as the execution of deliberate fire assaults to destroy military and terrorist points, and area targets across the LoC; ambushes and raids across the LOC; and company, battalion, and brigade-sized deliberate offensive attacks to capture objectives of tactical importance across the LoC that would improve the Indian Army’s counter-insurgency (CI) posture.”
- **The objective of Operation Kabaddi** was to change the geography of the LoC with access to tactical points there, which would then help the Army tackle the infiltration of militants by the Pakistani side.
- **Why is it news now?** Former army commanders have revealed the details of this operation in the book, Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics.

## 77. AADHAAR AS TRAVEL DOCUMENTS TO VISIT NEPAL, BHUTAN

- **What? Aadhaar cards are now valid travel documents for Indians under 15 and over 65 travelling to Nepal and Bhutan.** Indians other than those in the two age brackets will not be able to use Aadhaar to travel to the two neighbouring countries, for which no visas are needed.

### Background:

- Indian citizens going to Nepal and Bhutan have to have a valid passport, identity card issued by the Indian government or the Election Commission, they do not need a visa. “Earlier, persons over 65 and under 15 could show their PAN card, driving licence, Central Government Health Service (CGHS) card or ration card, but not the Aadhaar, to prove their identity and visit the two countries. The Aadhaar card has now been added to the list”

## 78. 33<sup>RD</sup> DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU- KALLAKURICHI

- **What?** The government of Tamil Nadu has announced the creation of the state’s 33rd district — **Kallakurichi, carved out of Villuppuram district**, south of Chennai.

## 79. PRAVASI BHARTIYA DIVAS 2019

- **Context:** The 15th annual Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) is being held in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Usually celebrated on or around 9th January, the grand scale of arrangements that went behind this year’s celebrations pushed the event to January 21-23.
- **Chief Guest:** The Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Jugnath.
- **Theme:** “Role of Indian Diaspora in building New India”.
- **The first chapter of Pravasi Bhartiya Divas was held in 2003** to recognise the contributions of NRIs in academic and professional fields across the world.
- **The reason 9th January** is usually set aside for celebrating Pravasi Bhartiya Divas is that Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa on this day in 1915.
- **Significance:** These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and Indian communities in India for mutually beneficial activities. These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

## 80. 9<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY

- **Context:** India is celebrating the 9th National Voters’ Day (NVD) on 25th January 2019.
- **Theme:** ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’.

### About National Voters Day:

- The National Voters’ Day (NVD) is celebrated all over the country on January 25 every year since 2011 to mark the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on 25th January 1950.
- The main purpose of the NVD celebration is to encourage, facilitate and maximize the enrollment, especially for the new voters.

## 81. WORLD BRAILLE DAY- JANUARY 4<sup>TH</sup>

- **Context:** The United Nations observed the first official World Braille Day on 4th January to create awareness about the importance of Braille.
- **Why January 4th?** World Braille Day is celebrated on the January 4th to honour

Louis Braille, who is credited for inventing the Braille script. Louis Braille was born in France on 4 January 1809.

#### **What is Braille?**

- Braille is a tactile writing system used by people who are visually impaired. It is traditionally written with embossed paper.
- **Braille invention** allows visually impaired individuals to lead an independent life through learning and understanding of the Braille codes. Initially, the code was devised in 1821 by Louis Braille, for the provision of accessibility in learning skills, gaining equal opportunities, achieving goals, managing security and creating various opportunities for intellectual thinkers.

### **82. INDIA'S SECOND TULIP GARDEN TO COME UP IN UTTARAKHAND**

- **Context:** India's second Tulip garden will be set up in Pithoragarh district at a cost of Rs 50 crore. First one is located in Srinagar of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **The Tulip Garden will be developed by ONGC,** under its corporate social responsibility programme in over 50 hectares of forest land near Chandak hilltop.
- The site was selected under the 13 districts, 13 new destinations' scheme, to attract more tourists to the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand.

### **83. NARI SHAKTI: HINDI WORD OF THE YEAR 2018**

**Context:** The word Nari Shakti is chosen as the word of the Year 2018 by the Oxford dictionaries.

#### **Why was Nari Shakti chosen?**

- Large spike in the use of word Nari Shakti in March 2018 around the Government of India's Nari Shakti Puraskar.
- Supreme Court also upheld Nari Shakti's prominence in 2018 with its two important decisions. One was a ban on 'triple-talaq' and second, the taking down of a rule that disallowed menstrual women entry to the Sabarimala temple in Kerala.

### **84. TECHNICAL TEXTILES**

- **Context:** Ministry of Textiles will hold National Conclave on Technical Textiles in Mumbai. The event will also be a curtain raiser for Techno Tex 2019.

#### **What are technical textiles?**

- Technical Textiles are defined as Textile material and products manufactured primarily for their Technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic and decorative characteristics.
- **Technical textiles include** textiles for automotive applications, medical textiles (e.g., implants), geotextiles (reinforcement of embankments), agrotextiles (textiles for crop protection), and protective clothing (e.g., heat and radiation protection for fire fighter clothing, molten metal protection for welders, stab protection and bulletproof vests, and spacesuits).

### **What are Technical Textiles?**

Conventional Textiles	Technical Textiles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manufactured primarily for aesthetic or decorative purpose</li> <li>• Fiber (natural or synthetic) is usually first Spun into Yarn and then Yarn is Woven / Knit into Fabric</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manufactured primarily for performance or function rather than aesthetics</li> <li>• May be both woven and non woven, and is made out of primarily synthetic and some natural fibers</li> </ul>

### **85. PALESTINE ASSUMES CHAIRMANSHIP OF G77**

- **Context:** Palestine has taken over the chairmanship of G77 from Egypt.
- **How is chairmanship of G77 decided?** The chairmanship of the G77 is based on the system of geographical rotation. 2019 was Asia's turn and the Asian group had unanimously endorsed Palestine. Egypt was representing the African Group of countries.

#### **G77:**

- The Group of 77 (G77) at the United Nations is a coalition of 134 developing nations, designed to promote its members' collective economic interests and create an enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the United Nations.
- G77 was formed on 15 June 1964 by the "Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Countries" issued at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- Since **China participates in the G77 but does not consider itself to be a member**, all official statements are issued in the name of The Group of 77 and China.

## 86. MACEDONIA RENAMED AS THE REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN MACEDONIA

- **Context:** The Parliament of Macedonia has passed the resolution to amend the constitution of the country to rename it as the Republic of Northern Macedonia.

## 87. FIRST HUMAN RIGHTS TV CHANNEL LAUNCHED

- **Context:** *The world's first television channel dedicated to human rights has been launched in London by the International Observatory of Human Rights (IOHR).*

### Key facts:

- It would be **a web-based channel and would deliver human rights issues to audiences in over 20 countries** across Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.
- The Human Rights Channel aims to deliver hidden stories ignored by mainstream media into people's living rooms.

## 88. INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR ADVANCING GLOBAL COLLABORATION IN HOMOEOPATHY

- **Context:** The World Integrated Medicine Forum on the regulation of Homoeopathic Medicinal Products is being held in India.
- **Theme:** 'Advancing Global Collaboration'.
- **Organised by** Central Council for Research in Homeopathy (CCRH), with the support of Ministry of AYUSH and many others.
- **Significance:** The Forum will be serving as the only truly global platform in which the public and private sector can meet and exchange ideas on how to ensure and increase the availability of safe and effective homeopathic medicines worldwide, now for the second time. The first forum on similar lines was organised by CCRH in 2017.

## 89. MALAYSIA NOT TO HOST 2019 WORLD PARA SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS

- **Context:** Malaysia was stripped of the right to host the 2019 World Para Swimming Championships for threatening to refuse to allow Israeli athletes to take part in the event. International Paralympic Committee said.

## 90. ENVIRONMENT, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) FUND

- **Context:** Three former Tata Group executives in partnership with Quantum Advisors will launch a \$1 billion Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Fund.

### About the Fund:

- The Fund will invest in Indian companies that value the environment, society and corporate governance to the core.
- The proposed equal joint venture(JV) would mobilise funds from long-term foreign investors such as pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and family offices of high networth individuals (HNIs) who value ESG.
- The fund will aim to drive higher ESG performance in Indian corporates and it will adopt an engaged, private equity approach to public markets investing, with a focus on working with companies willing to recognize the long-term advantages of actively adopting ESG standards of excellence.

**Significance:** There is pressing need for such a fund in India as there are concerns on standards of corporate governance in the country and Indian companies will need to play a central role to help achieve global climate change targets.

## 91. ABER- THE NEW DIGITAL CURRENCY

- **Context:** The *central banks of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia* have launched a common digital currency called 'Aber', which will be used in financial settlements between the two countries through Blockchains and Distributed Ledgers technologies.
- The use of the currency will be restricted to a limited number of banks in each state. In case that no technical obstacles are encountered, economic and legal requirements for future uses will be considered.

## 92. PANDA BONDS PAKISTAN

- **Context:** For the first time in history, the federal cabinet has approved a new financial strategy called Panda-Bonds in Pakistan.
- These bonds will become the new and favorable method to raise foreign exchange.

### What Are Panda Bonds?

- A Panda bond is a Chinese renminbi-denominated bond from a non-Chinese

issuer, sold in the People's Republic of China. These bonds were first issued in 2005 by the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank.

- The Chinese government had been negotiating for several years about implementation details before permitting the sale of such bonds; they had been concerned about the possible effects on their currency peg.

#### **How Will Panda Bonds Benefit Pakistan?**

- The bonds will help Pakistan's government to diversify the current investor base in capital market insurance and will also be used as a source of raising Renminbi.
- Furthermore, the tenor, size and pricing will be determined according to the market response at the time of issuance.

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