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SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

- I A S S E L F S T U D Y G U I D E -

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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GS PAPER I

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

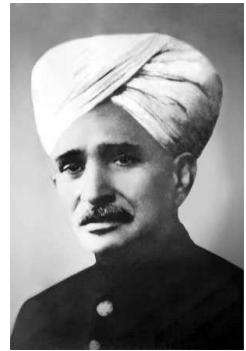
1. CHHOTU RAM

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Chhotu Ram and his contributions.
- Context:** A 64-foot-tall statue of peasant leader Sir Chhotu Ram has been unveiled at his native village Sampla in Haryana's Rohtak district.

About Sir Chhotu Ram:

- Sir Chhotu Ram, who was born on November 24, 1881, was regarded as **a messiah of peasants** and was instrumental in empowering farmers in pre-Independence era and getting pro-farmers law enacted. He had fought for farmers' rights during the British rule.
- On political front, he was a **co-founder of the National Unionist Party** which ruled all the time Panjab Province in per-Independent India and kept Congress and Muslim League at bay.
- Chhotu Ram was awarded the title of '**Rao Bahadur**'. He was knighted in 1937 and was popularly known as Deen Bandhu.
- His legacy has been evoked by the formation of a new party, **the National Unionist Zamindara Party** by gaur farmers in Rajasthan in 2013.



Sources: pib.

2. AZAD HIND GOVERNMENT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Particulars of Azad Hind Government- objectives, accomplishments and other related key facts.
- Context:** Seventy years after Subhash Chandra Bose assumed the leadership of the 'Azad Hind Government', PM Narendra Modi will hoist the national flag and unveil a plaque to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the erstwhile government on October 21 at the Red Fort.

About Azad Hind Government:

- Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose had announced the establishment of the provisional government of Azad Hind in occupied Singapore in 1943.
- Known as **Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind**, it was supported by the Axis powers of Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, the Italian Social Republic, and their allies.
- The revered freedom fighter had launched a struggle to free India from British rule under the banner of the provisional government-in exile during the latter part of the Second World War.

Objectives:

- Bose was convinced that armed struggle was the only way to achieve independence for India. He had been a leader of the radical wing of the Indian National Congress in the late 1920s and 1930s, rising to become Congress president in 1938 and 1939 but was ousted following differences with Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress leadership.
- Under his provisional government, the Indians living abroad had been united. The Indian National Army drew ex-prisoners and thousands of civilian volunteers from the Indian expatriate population in Malaya (present-day Malaysia) and Burma (now Myanmar).

The formation:

- On October 21, 1943, in his address announcing the setting up of the provisional government, he said India's Army of Liberation was drawn up in military formation on the battlefield of Singapore which was once the bulwark of the British Empire.
- Under the provisional government, **Bose was the head of the state, the prime minister and the minister for war and foreign affairs. Captain Lakshmi headed the women's organisation while S A Ayer headed the publicity and propaganda wing.**
- Revolutionary leader **Rash Behari Bose was designated as the supreme advisor.** The provisional government was also formed in the Japanese-occupied Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The islands were reoccupied by the British in 1945.
- Bose's death was seen as the end to the Azad Hind movement. The Second World War, also ended in 1945 with the defeat of the Axis powers.

Sources: pib.

3. SARDAR PATEL STATUE OF UNITY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Significance of the statue of unity and role and contributions of Sardar Vallabhai Patel in Indian National Movement.
- Context:** Statue of Unity has been inaugurated in Surat. The Statue of Unity is built in dedication to Iron Man Sardar Vallabhai Patel, who served as the first home minister of independent India.
- October 31, 2018 marks the 143rd birth anniversary of Sardar Patel.

Key facts:

- At 182 metre, the statue is 23 metre taller than China's Spring Temple Buddha statue and almost double the height of the Statue of Liberty (93 metre tall) in US.
- Located on the Sadhu Bet island, near Rajpipla on the Narmada river, the Statue of Unity is located between the Satpura and the Vindhya mountain ranges.
- The Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Rashtriya Ekta Trust (SVPRET), a special purpose vehicle set up by Modi in 2011, arranged some 129 tonnes of iron implements from nearly 100 million farmers in 169,000 villages across all states to construct the base of the statue in the 'Loha' campaign.
- The Statue of Unity was brought to fruition by Padma Bhushan-winning sculptor Ram V Sutar and intricate bronze cladding work was done by a Chinese foundry, the Jiangxi Toqine Company (JTQ).

About Sardar Vallabhai Patel:

- Sardar Patel is credited with uniting all 562 princely states in pre-independent India to build the Republic of India — hence the name of the statue. The date for the inauguration of the statue (October 31, 2018) also marks the 143rd birth anniversary of Sardar Patel.

Role in the Indian National Movement:

- In 1917, Sardar Vallabhbhai was elected as the **Secretary of the Gujarat Sabha**, the Gujarat wing of the Indian National Congress. In 1918, he led a massive "**No Tax Campaign**" that urged the farmers not to pay taxes after the British insisted on tax after the floods in Kaira.
- The peaceful movement forced the British authorities to return the land taken away from the farmers. His effort to bring together the farmers of his area brought him the title of 'Sardar'.
 - He actively supported the **non-cooperation Movement** launched by Gandhi. Patel toured the nation with him, recruited 300,000 members and helped collect over Rs. 1.5 million.
 - In 1928, the farmers of Bardoli again faced a problem of "tax-hike". After prolonged summons, when the farmers refused to pay the extra tax, the government seized their lands in retaliation. The agitation took on for more than six months. After several rounds of negotiations by Patel, the lands were returned to farmers after a deal was struck between the government and farmers' representatives.
 - In 1930, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was among the leaders imprisoned for participating in the famous Salt Satyagraha movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi.
 - Sardar Patel was freed in 1931, following an agreement signed between Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy of India. The treaty was popularly known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. The same year, **Patel**

was elected as the President of Indian National Congress in its Karachi session where the party deliberated its future path.

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: Role of women and women's organization and related issues.

1. FIRST REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON 'WOMEN IN DETENTION AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE'

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the conference.
- For Mains: Women in prisons- concerns, challenges, issues, need for reforms.
- **Context:** The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), Ministry of Home Affairs is organising the **First ever Regional Conference at Shimla on 'Women in Detention and Access to Justice'** in collaboration with the Prison Department, Himachal Pradesh.

Objectives of the conference:

- This conference is organised with a view to provide a platform for the prison personnel of all ranks at the national level to share their candid views on various operational as well as administrative issues not only with their counterparts, but also with other experts of national repute in this field.
- The conference also seeks to identify best practices and standards in the working of Correctional Administration to meet new challenges in the present day's context to bring out prison reforms in objective terms.
- This event would also promote research and developmental activities on the functioning of the Correctional Administration across the country on the one hand and nudge to develop a scientific approach among the various Correctional Administration in a professional manner.

Stats:

- As of 2015, there are 4,19,623 persons in jail in India, of which, 17,834 (about 4.3%) are women. Of these, 11,916 (66.8%) are undertrial prisoners.
- There is an increasing trend in the number of women prisoners – from 3.3% of all prisoners in 2000 to 4.3% in 2015.
- A majority of female inmates are in the age group of 30-50 years (50.5%), followed by 18-30 years (31.3%).
- Of the total 1,401 prisons in India, only 18 are exclusive for women, housing 2,985 female prisoners. Thus, a majority of women inmates are housed in women's enclosures of general prisons.

Need for reforms:

- Women in prisons face greater hardships than their male counterparts due to many factors such as social stigma, financial dependence on their families or husbands etc. These difficulties are further exacerbated when the woman has children.
- Women have to face numerous problems in prisons owing to **inadequacy of female staff** which often translates to the reality that male staff becomes responsible for female inmates, which is undesirable.
- Women are **not provided with meals that are nutritious** and according to their bodily requirements.
- Women are at a most disadvantageous position when it comes to their **reintegration in society after release**. Many are abandoned or harassed post-release, mainly due to the stigma attached with incarceration, which is even more pronounced in cases of women.
- Women also tend to **lose ties with their children over the years**, due to inadequate child custody procedures. Also, a robust grievance redressal mechanism was required to tackle cases of sexual harassment, violence and abuse against women in jails.

Way ahead:

- Reforms are needed for improving the lives of women under incarceration including the elderly and the disabled, addressing a wide range of issues pertaining to pregnancy and childbirth in prison, mental health, legal aid, reintegration in society and their caregiving responsibilities among others.

- In this regard, changes in the National Model Prison Manual 2016 have also been suggested to bring it in line with international standards and norms.

Sources: pib.

2. ASSAM WAGE COMPENSATION SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** Assam Government has become the first Indian state to offer a Wage Compensation Scheme for pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.
- **Aim:** The scheme is aimed at providing better health and nutrition supplements to the pregnant women. It stresses on providing proper healthcare facilities to the pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.

Highlights of the scheme:

- Under the scheme, an amount of Rs 12,000 will be given to the pregnant women so that they can take care of themselves and the unborn baby without compromising the livelihood of their family.
- The compensation of wages to pregnant women will be given in 4 instalments – Rs 2,000 in the first trimester, Rs 4,000 in the second trimester, Rs 3,000 for institutional delivery and Rs 3,000 for registration of the child's birth.
- The women would also be given a maternity leave. They will not be engaged in work from the third trimester of pregnancy to three months after delivery.
- In addition, they will get assistance for ante-natal care and the first cycle of immunization of the child.

Significance of the scheme:

- The bulk of the workforce in Assam's tea gardens is women. The maternal mortality rate of women working in the tea plantations of Assam is unusually high. The scheme is likely to benefit over 60,000 women in the state. It is expected to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality in the tea areas.

Background:

- In the Annual Health Survey of 2012-13, Assam recorded one of the highest maternal mortality rates in India, with over 300 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.
- The MMR in the state's tea gardens was even higher, as it was recorded to be 404. The national average during 2014-16 was 130.
- Further, almost 50% of the pregnant women aged between 15 and 49 years in the state were recorded to be anaemic, which is a leading contributor to maternal mortality.

Sources: the hindu.

3. JUSTICE VERMA COMMITTEE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of Justice Verma committee recommendations.
- **Context:** The Centre recently announced its plan to set up a panel of judges to look into the legal and institutional framework to curb sexual harassment at workplaces following the **#MeToo campaign** on social media.
- However, as early as 2013, the **Justice J.S. Verma Committee**, in its landmark report on gender laws, had recommended setting up of an employment tribunal instead of an internal complaints committee (ICC) in sweeping changes to the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill.
- The panel was formed in the aftermath of the December 16 Nirbhaya gangrape in 2012 and the ensuing nationwide protests, and submitted its report on January 23, 2013.

Background:

- At that time of the submission of the report, the Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill had already been passed by the Lok Sabha and was awaiting the Rajya Sabha's nod. The Bill was passed unchanged by the Upper House a month later.
- The Committee, chaired by Justice Verma and including Justice Leila Seth and senior lawyer Gopal Subramanium, termed the Sexual Harassment Bill "unsatisfactory" and said it did not reflect the spirit of the Vishakha guidelines — framed by the Supreme Court in 1997 to curb sexual harassment at the workplace.

Major recommendations made by the panel:

- Punishment for Rape:** The panel has not recommended the death penalty for rapists. It suggests that the punishment for rape should be rigorous imprisonment or RI for seven years to
- Punishment for other sexual offences:** The panel recognised the need to curb all forms of sexual offences and recommended – Voyeurism be punished with upto seven years in jail; stalking or attempts to contact a person repeatedly through any means by up to three years. Acid attacks would be punished by up to seven years if imprisonment; trafficking will be punished with RI for seven to ten years.
- Registering complaints and medical examination:** Every complaint of rape must be registered by the police and civil society should perform its duty to report any case of rape coming to its knowledge. Any officer, who fails to register a case of rape reported to him, or attempts to abort its investigation, commits an offence which shall be punishable as prescribed.
- Marriages to be registered:** As a primary recommendation, all marriages in India (irrespective of the personal laws under which such marriages are solemnised) should mandatorily be registered in the presence of a magistrate. The magistrate will ensure that the marriage has been solemnised without any demand for dowry having been made and that it has taken place with the full and free consent of both partners.
- Amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure:** The panel observed, "The manner in which the rights of women can be recognised can only be manifested when they have full access to justice and when the rule of law can be upheld in their favour." The proposed Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2012, should be modified, suggests the panel.
- Bill of Rights for women:** A separate Bill of Rights for women that entitles a woman a life of dignity and security and will ensure that a woman shall have the right to have complete sexual autonomy including with respect to her relationships.
- Review of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act:** The panel has observed that the "impunity of systematic sexual violence is being legitimised by the armed forces special powers act." It has said there is an imminent need to review the continuance of AFSPA in areas as soon as possible. It has also recommended posting special commissioners for women's safety in conflict areas.
- Police reforms:** To inspire public confidence, the panel said, "police officers with reputations of outstanding ability and character must be placed at the higher levels of the police force." All existing appointments need to be reviewed to ensure that the police force has the requisite moral vision.
- Role of the judiciary:** The judiciary has the primary responsibility of enforcing fundamental rights, through constitutional remedies. The judiciary can take suo motu cognizance of such issues being deeply concerned with them both in the Supreme Court and the High Court. An all India strategy to deal with this issue would be advisable. The Chief Justice of India could be approached to commence appropriate proceedings on the judicial side. The Chief Justice may consider making appropriate orders relating to the issue of missing children to curb the illegal trade of their trafficking etc.
- Political Reforms:** The Justice Verma committee observed that reforms are needed to deal with criminalisation of politics. The panel has suggest that, in the event cognizance has been taken by a magistrate of an criminal offence, the candidate ought to be disqualified from participating in the electoral process. Any candidate who fails to disclose a charge should be disqualified subsequently. It suggested lawmakers facing criminal charges, who have already been elected to Parliament and state legislatures, should voluntarily vacate their seats.

Sources: the hindu.

4. POCSO ACT

What to study?

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

- **Context:** The government has clarified that there is no time bar on reporting crimes related to child sexual abuse. Survivors of child sexual abuse can file a police complaint after they become adults.
- The Ministry of Law, after examining the provisions of POCSO Act vis-à-vis provisions of CrPC, has advised that there appears no period of limitation mentioned in Section 19 in regard to reporting of the offences under the POCSO Act, 2012.

Legal provisions:

- **Section 19 of the POCSO Act**, which deals with sexual crimes against children, lays down the procedure for reporting a crime but doesn't specify a time limit or statute of limitation for reporting it.
- **Whereas the CrPC lays down different time-limits** for crimes which carry a punishment of up to three years, there is no time bar for crimes that would attract a jail term of more than three years.

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012



Significance:

- This is an important step for survivors of child abuse, who may try to file a complaint as adults but are turned away at police stations.
- The development assumes significance after considering the fact that on many occasions children are unable to report crimes that they suffered as the perpetrator in many cases happens to be from the family itself or any other known person. Several cases have been reported where the victims have grown up and understood the crime.

POCSO Act:

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

Sources: pib.

5. NCW LAUNCHES E-MAIL ID FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE CASES

What to study?

- **For Prelims: NCW- key facts.**
- **For Mains: Sexual harassment- concerns, issues and measures to curb.**

- **Context:** The National Commission for Women (NCW) has come out with a dedicated e-mail address to report instances of sexual harassment at workplace after several such complaints were made to the body by women under the #Metoo movement on social media.
- The Commission urges women who have come forward on social media and other platforms about their alleged harassers to send their formal written complaints to metoo@gmail.com.
- The NCW will take forward complaints of sexual harassment at workplace received on the mail so that appropriate action may be taken, as per law.

What you need to know about NCW?

- The National Commission for Women was set up as statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990.
- The primary mandate of the National Commission for Women and State Commissions for Women Commission is to safeguard and protect the interests of women. It has wide responsibility covering almost all aspects of women development.
- The commission regularly publishes a monthly newsletter, Rashtra Mahila in both Hindi and English.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. MAHATMA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL SANITATION CONVENTION

What to study?

- For Prelims: International Sanitation Convention, SBM.
- For Mains: Manual scavenging-concerns and issues to be addressed, performance of SBM.
- **Context:** Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention is being held in New Delhi.



Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention:

- The Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention is being organised by the **Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation** to mark the beginning of the **150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi**, also coinciding with the fourth anniversary of the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission.
 - Ministers from over 70 countries will be invited and taken on a 'Gandhi Trail' in Gujarat.
 - The government will use the occasion to "showcase its performance" and "success story" in the Swachh Bharat programme in the past four years, which was launched on October 2, 2014, and have a face-to-face dialogue with the world leaders to share their experiences on sanitation programmes.

SDG:

- By 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG #6, aim to reach everyone with sanitation, and halve the proportion of untreated wastewater and increase recycling and safe reuse.
- The global sanitation crisis is reflected in the following facts, according to reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):
 - Around 60% of the global population – 4.5 billion people – either have no toilet at home or one that doesn't safely manage excreta.
 - 862 million people worldwide still practise open defecation.
 - Billions of people use an unimproved source of drinking water with no protection against contamination from faeces.
 - Globally, 80% of the wastewater generated by society flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused.

- Only 39% of the global population (2.9 billion people) use a safely-managed sanitation service, that is, excreta safely disposed of in situ or treated off-site.
- Combined with safe water and good hygiene, improved sanitation could prevent around 842,000 deaths each year.

Swachh Bharat Mission:

- The Government of India launched the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) on 2nd October 2014, with an aim to build a Clean and Open Defecation Free (ODF) India by 2nd October 2019, as a befitting tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.
- Since the inception of the program, the rural sanitation coverage of India has increased significantly, from 39% in October 2014 to over 90% as of September 2018. Over 78 million household toilets have been constructed under the Mission. As a result, 25 States/Union Territories, over 513 districts, and 5,04,316 villages have declared themselves as free from open defecation.

Sources: pib.

2. WORLD HABITAT DAY

- The United Nations designated the ***first Monday of October of every year as World Habitat Day*** to reflect on the state of our towns and cities, and on the basic right of all to adequate shelter. The Day is also intended to remind the world that we all have the power and the responsibility to shape the future of our cities and towns.
- **2018 theme:** Municipal Solid Waste Management. The focus of this year's World Habitat Day celebrations is taking action to address the municipal solid waste management challenge. This year's theme is Municipal Solid Waste Management with a slogan Waste-wise cities.



Background:

- The purpose of World Habitat Day is to reflect on the state of our towns and cities, and on the basic right of all to adequate shelter. It is also intended to remind the world that we all have the power and the responsibility to shape the future of our cities and towns.
- World Habitat Day was established in 1985 by the United Nations General Assembly through Resolution 40/202, and was first celebrated in 1986.

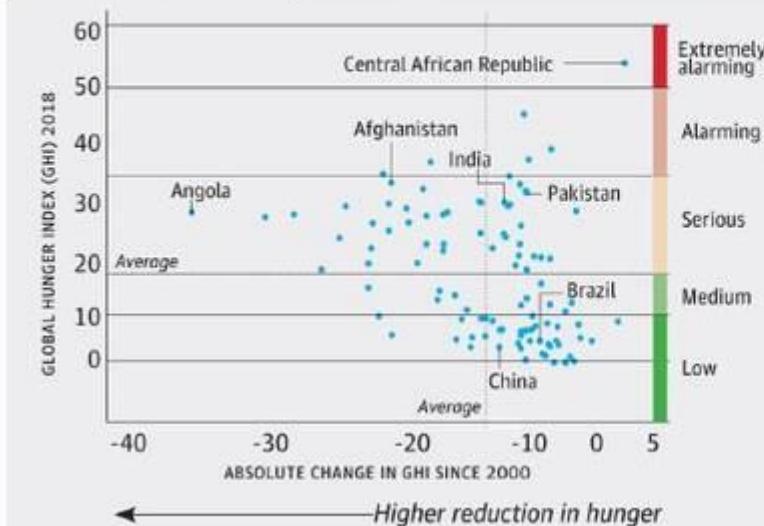
3. GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

What to study?

- For Prelims: GHI- key facts, Performance of India and other countries.
- For Mains: GHI- findings on India, concerns and challenges, remedies.
- **Context:** The 2018 ***Global Hunger Index report*** has been released. The report is a peer-reviewed publication released annually by ***Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide***.
- The GHI scores are based on a formula that captures three dimensions of hunger—insufficient caloric intake, child undernutrition, and child mortality—using four component indicators:
 - **UNDERNOURISHMENT:** the share of the population that is under-nourished, reflecting insufficient caloric intake
 - **CHILD WASTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are wasted (low weight-for-height), reflecting acute undernutrition.
 - **CHILD STUNTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are stunted (low height-for-age), reflecting chronic undernutrition.
 - **CHILD MORTALITY:** the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

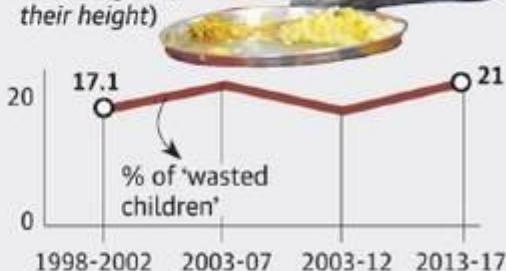
Growth pangs

India ranked 103 out of 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2018. India's score was 31.1, which was 7.7 points lesser than in 2000, but higher than the global average of 20.9 (higher the score, worse the situation)



More 'wasted children'

India has shown a rise in the percentage of 'wasted children' (low weight for their height)



Performance of India:

- India has been ranked at 103 out of 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2018, with hunger levels in the country categorized as "serious".
- At least one in five Indian children under the age of five is wasted. The only country with a higher prevalence of child wasting is the war-torn nation of South Sudan.
- India's ranking has dropped three places from last year, although the Index says its results are not accurately comparable from year to year and instead provides a few reference years for comparable data.
- India has shown improvement in three of the indicators over the comparable reference years. The percentage of undernourished people in the population has dropped from 18.2% in 2000 to 14.8% in 2018. The child mortality rate has halved from 9.2% to 4.3%, while child stunting has dropped from 54.2% to 38.4% over the same period.

Concerns:

- The report terms hunger and forced migration for the severity worldwide.
- Globally, the level of hunger still falls into the "serious" category, despite improvement over the last two decades.
- The Index projects that at the current rate of progress, 50 countries will fail to reach the "low" hunger category by 2030.
- This puts the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 2, which aims to end hunger by 2030, in jeopardy.

Way ahead:

- Child wasting is high across South Asia, constituting a "critical public health emergency". Wasting rates are highest for infants aged 0 to 5 months. Therefore, attention to birth outcomes and breastfeeding is important. Also, child wasting in the region is associated with a low maternal body mass index. Hence, there is need for a focus on the nutritional status of the mother during pregnancy.
- Factors that could reduce child stunting in South Asia include increased consumption of non-staple foods, access to sanitation, women's education, access to safe water, gender equality, and national food availability.

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: India and World Geography

1. MOUNT ETNA

- **Why in News?** The southeast flank of Mount Etna in Sicily is sliding towards the sea at a rate of several centimetres a year.

- **What's causing this?** It's likely caused by gravity pulling on Etna's lower underwater slopes, far from the summit.
- **Concerns:** The kind of stress that this movement creates inside volcanoes can cause devastating landslides. This means Etna is more susceptible to catastrophic collapse than had previously been realised.

About Mt. Etna:

- Mount Etna is the largest active volcano in Europe and one of the world's most frequently erupting volcanoes. It is also the volcano with the longest record of continuous eruption.
- Located near the east coast of the island of Sicily in Italy, Mount Etna is 10,900 feet (3,329 meters) tall with a base circumference of about 93 miles (150 kilometers).
- The mountain's largest feature is the Valle del Bove (Valley of the Ox), a large horseshoe-shaped caldera on the eastern slope.
- Etna sits on the active fault between the African plate and the Ionian microplate, which are both being subducted together beneath the Eurasian plate.
- In June 2013, it was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- Due to its history of recent activity and nearby population, Mount Etna has been designated a Decade Volcano by the United Nations.

2. SHOULD INDIA HAVE TWO TIME ZONES?

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about time zones, IST.
- For Mains: Two time zones- need, concerns, challenges, benefits and alternatives.
- **Context:** Scientists at the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research's National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL), which maintains Indian Standard Time, have published a research article describing the necessity of two time zones, with the new one an hour ahead of the existing time zone.

Background:

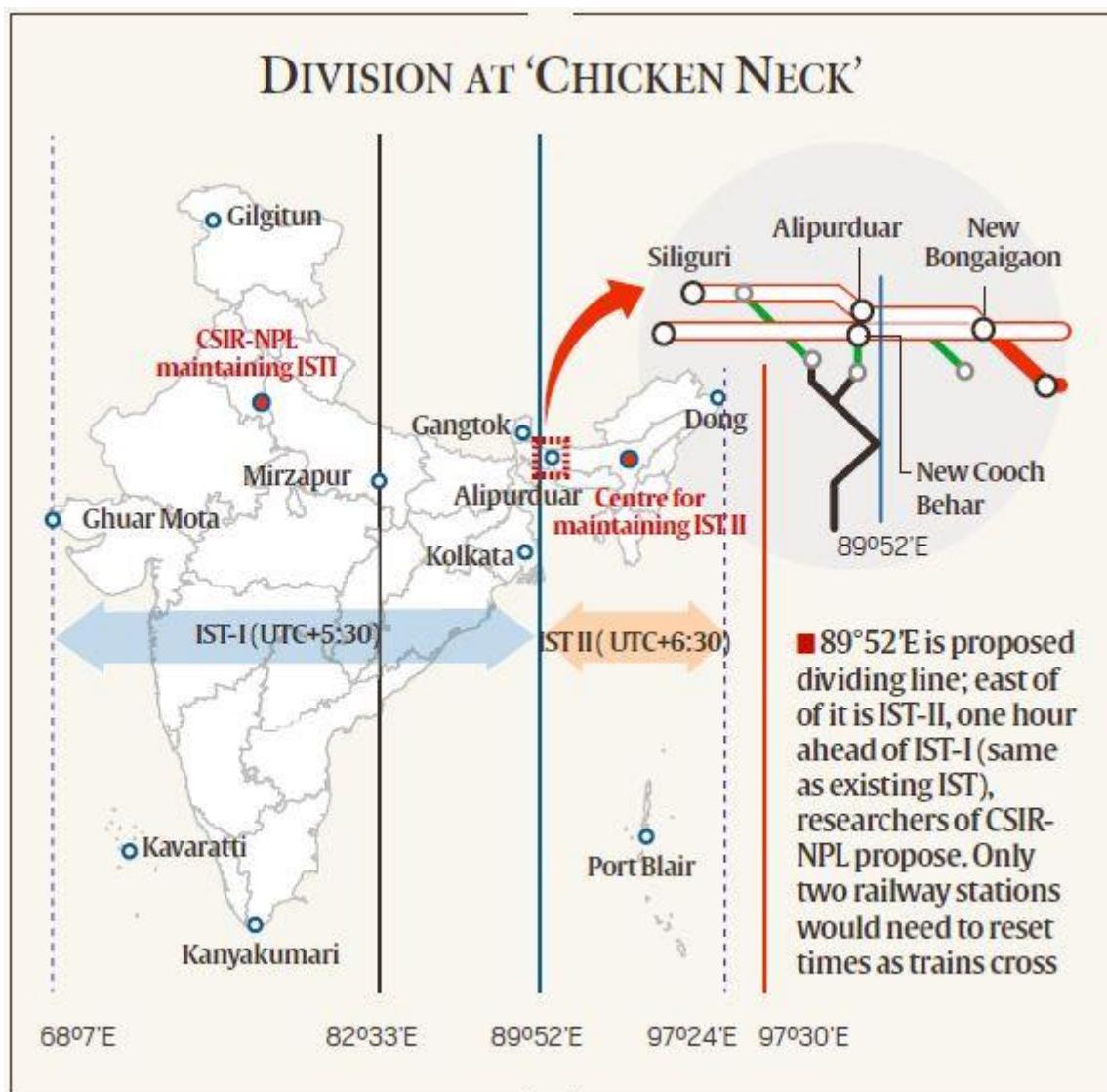
- Over the years, various citizens and political leaders have debated whether India should have two separate time zones. The demand is based on the huge difference in daylight times between the country's longitudinal extremes, and the costs associated with following the same time zone.
- Opposition to the idea is based on impracticability — particularly the risk of railway accidents, given the need to reset times at every crossing from one time zone into another.

Need for two time zones:

- India extends from 68°7'E to 97°25'E, with the spread of 29° representing almost two hours from the geographic perspective.
- Legislators, activists, industrialists and ordinary citizens from the Northeast have often complained about the effect of IST on their lives, and pursued the issue of having a separate time zone with the Central government, without much success.
- In the Northeast, the sun rises as early as four in the morning and in winter it sets by four in the evening. By the time government offices or educational institutions open, many daylight hours are already lost. In winter this problem gets even more accentuated and the ecological costs are a disaster with much more electricity having to be consumed.

The proposal:

- The research paper proposes to call the two time zones IST-I (UTC + 5.30 h) and IST-II (UTC + 6.30 h). The proposed line of demarcation is at 89°52'E, the narrow border between Assam and West Bengal.
- States west of the line would continue to follow IST (to be called IST-I). States east of the line — Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Andaman & Nicobar Islands —would follow IST-II.



Concerns:

- India has a huge population; if the country were divided into two time zones, there would be chaos at the border between the two zones. It would mean resetting clocks with each crossing of the time zone. There is scope for more dangerous kinds of confusion. Railway signals are not fully automated and many routes have single tracks. Trains may meet with major accidents owing to human errors. Just one such accident would wipe out any benefits resulting from different time zones in the country.
- Partitioning the already divided country further into time zones may also have undesirable political consequences. Moreover, our research shows that the energy saving from creating two time zones is not particularly large.
- While there is merit in the argument, the potentially adverse consequences of introducing a new time zone within the country are many. Not forgetting the fact that a country like Russia has as many as nine time zones across contiguous territory, having to cope with the zones and to be forced to reset the watch each time you need to cross a domestic line could be complicated.
- With a time difference of one hour in the mornings and in the evenings, there would be nearly 25% less overlap between office timings in the two zones. This could be important for banks, offices, industries and multinational companies which need to be constantly interconnected. This will be further detrimental to productivity and to the interests of the eastern region.
- There is already a sense of alienation between the relatively prosperous and industrialised western zone and the less developed eastern zone. The people in the Northeast sense a distance from the mainland and a separateness in clock time may accentuate it.
- Having a separate time zone for the eastern region will provide no energy or other benefits to the rest of the country. Moreover, India will continue to be in off-set time zones, five and a half hours in the west and six and a half in the eastern region ahead of.

Sources: Indian express.

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. HOW ARE CYCLONES NAMED?

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about cyclones and their naming.
- Context:** Cyclonic storm ‘**TITLI**’ has hit the Bay of Bengal and another cyclonic storm ‘**LUBAN**’ has hit the Arabian sea.

How are cyclones named?

- In September 2004, an international panel on tropical cyclones decided that countries from the region would each put in names, which would be assigned to storms in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea.
 - Eight countries — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Sri Lanka and Thailand — participated and came up with a list of 64 names.
 - In the event of a storm, the Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre, New Delhi, selects a name from the list.

Why it is necessary to name cyclones?

- The late origin of this naming system — unlike storms in the Atlantic, which have been getting named since 1953 — was ostensibly to protect sensitivities in the ethnically diverse region.
- The purpose of the move was also to make it easier for “people easily to understand and remember the tropical cyclone/hurricane in a region, thus to facilitate disaster risk awareness, preparedness, management and reduction.

Guidelines for naming cyclones:

- Citizens can submit names to the Director General of Meteorology, IMD, for consideration, but the weather agency has strict rules for the selection process.
 - A name, for instance, ‘should be short and readily understood when broadcast’.
 - The names must also be neutral, ‘not culturally sensitive and not convey some unintended and potentially inflammatory meaning’.
 - Furthermore, on the account of the ‘death and destruction’ a storm in the Indian Ocean causes, their names are retired after use, unlike those in the Atlantic and Eastern Pacific lists, which are reused every few years.

Cyclone categories:

- Category 1:** Wind and gales of 90-125 kph, negligible house damage, some damage to trees and crops.
- Category 2:** Destructive winds of 125-164 kph. Minor house damage, significant damage to trees, crops and caravans, risk of power failure.
- Category 3:** Very destructive winds of 165-224 kph. Some roof and structural damage, some caravans destroyed, power failure likely.
- Category 4:** Very destructive winds of 225-279 kph. Significant roofing loss and structural damage, caravans destroyed, blown away, widespread power failures.
- Category 5:** Very destructive winds gusts of more than 280 kph. Extremely dangerous with widespread destruction.

Names reused every six years:

- Atlantic and Pacific storm names are reused every six years, but are retired “if a storm is so deadly or costly that the future use of the name would be insensitive or confusing,” according to forecasters at the US National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Cyclone season:

- The country's cyclone season runs from April to December, with severe storms often causing dozens of deaths, evacuations of tens of thousands of people from low-lying villages and wide damage to crops and property.

What's the difference between hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons?

- Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are all tropical storms. They are all the same thing but are given different names depending on where they appear. When they reach populated areas they usually bring very strong wind and rain which can cause a lot of damage.
- Hurricanes are tropical storms that form over the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific. Cyclones are formed over the South Pacific and Indian Ocean. Typhoons are formed over the Northwest Pacific Ocean.

Sources: the hindu.

2. THIRD POLE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about third pole, its location, significance and climate change issues associated.
- Context:** Scientists conducting research in the third pole area have warned of disturbing global warming trends, and how, if they continue, they could affect the lives of 1.3 billion people. The glacier has lost 60% of its mass and shrunk 250 m since 1982.

What is the Third Pole?

- The Hindu Kush-Himalayan region spans an area of more than 4.3 million square kilometres in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.
- The region stores more snow and ice than anywhere else in the world outside the polar regions, giving its name: 'The Third Pole'. The Third Pole contains the world's highest mountains, including all 14 peaks above 8,000 metres, is the source of 10 major rivers, and forms a formidable global ecological buffer.

Significance:

- The Third Pole region has enormous socioeconomic and cultural diversity; it is home to many different ethnic communities speaking more than 600 languages and many more dialects. It is endowed with rich natural resources and contains all or part of four global biodiversity hotspots.
- The mountain resources provide a wide range of ecosystem services and the basis for the livelihoods to the 210 million people living in the region, as well as indirectly to the 1.3 billion people — one fifth of the world's population — living in the downstream river basins.
- More than 3 billion people benefit from the food and energy produced in these river basins that have their origin in the mountains.

The Third Pole and Climate Change:

- Climate change has become a major concern in the Third Pole. Mountain systems are particularly sensitive to climate change and the Third Pole region is home to some of the people most vulnerable to these changes in the world. Changes in the river systems and their basins have impacted directly on the wellbeing of millions of people.
 - The rate of warming in the Third Pole region is significantly higher than the global average, and the rate is higher at higher altitude, suggesting a greater vulnerability of the cryosphere environment to climate change. This trend is expected to continue.
 - Climate change projections suggest that all areas of South Asia are likely to warm by at least 1°C by the end of the century, while in some areas the warming could be as high as 3.5-4°C. The life and livelihoods of the people in the Third Pole region are challenged due to climate change, and the stability and prosperity of the region affected by the Third Pole is at risk, which will have implications for all of Asia and for the world.
 - However, there is still little knowledge of this situation, and its potential implications, outside the immediate vicinity; a special effort is needed to raise awareness of the fragility of the mountain social-ecological system.

Concerns:

- The melting of glaciers of the Third Pole could affect the lives of 1.3 billion people because of its proximity to densely populated and industrialised regions. And the continuous melting of glaciers will be catastrophic for the people who depend on water from the Third Pole.

Facts for Prelims:

- The Third Pole Environment (TPE):** TPE, an international research program, was launched in 2009 and focuses on the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding mountain ranges.

Sources: the hindu.

3. EARTH'S INNER CORE IS SOFTER, A STUDY REVEALS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about Earth's inner core, its state and significance of its finding.
- Context:** Contrary to the fact the Earth's inner core is solid, researchers from Australian National University (ANU) have found that it is comparatively softer.

Facts about the inner core of the Earth:

- Radius:** 1,220 kilometres (760 miles) i.e. 70 per cent of the Moon's radius.
- Composed of:** Nickel-iron alloy.
- Temperature:** 5,700 K (5,430 °C) or 9806 °F, which is almost the temperature of Sun.

What is inner core made of?

- The inner core is made up of two layers outer and inner.
- Outer core is 1,355 miles (2,180 km) thick.

Why is the radius of inner core unknown?

- There is no estimated radius of the inner core; however, it plays a distinct role in making Earth's magnetic field.
- The inner core is measured by shear waves, a seismology term, which are so tiny and feeble that it can't be observed directly.
- In fact, detecting them has been considered the 'Holy Grail' of global seismology since scientists first predicted the inner core was solid in the 1930s and 40s.

Purpose of the Earth's inner core:

- When charged particles from the solar wind collide with air molecules above Earth's magnetic poles, it causes the air molecules to glow, causing the auroras – the northern and southern lights.

How has it been discovered?

- Researchers came up with a way to detect shear waves, or "J waves" in the inner core – a type of wave which can only travel through solid objects.
- According to the research published by the university, the wavefield method looks at the similarities between the signals at two receivers after a major earthquake, rather than the direct wave arrivals. The study shows these results can then be used to demonstrate the existence of J waves and infer the shear wave speed in the inner core.
- It has been found that the inner core shares some similar elastic properties with gold and platinum.

What is the significance of this method?

- The understanding of the Earth's inner core has direct consequences for the generation and maintenance of the geomagnetic field, and without that geomagnetic field there would be no life on the Earth's surface.

Sources: the hindu.

GS PAPER II

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

1. OFFICE OF PROFIT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Meaning of Office of Profit, exemptions and related key facts.
- For Mains: Issues associated and recent cases.
- **Context:** President R N Kovind has dismissed a petition seeking disqualification of 27 AAP MLAs from Delhi on grounds of having held '**office of profit**' as chairpersons of patient welfare committees (Rogi Kalyan Samiti) constituted by Delhi government.

Background:

- The decision was based on an opinion tendered by the Election Commission in July, stating that the said office was exempt from purview of 'office of profit' under provisions of the Delhi MLAs (Removal of Disqualification) Act, 1997.
- Government of NCT of Delhi, in its submission to EC, had made it clear that **Rogi Kalyan Samitis** were constituted by it and that their chairpersons were not entitled to any remuneration and would therefore fall under the exemption granted by item 14 of the Schedule of the Delhi MLAs (Removal of Disqualification) Act.
- The Act provides for exemption of office of chairman, vice-chairman and members of the hospital advisory committee, Delhi, from purview of "office of profit".

What is the underlying principle for including 'office of profit' as criterion for disqualification?

- Makers of the Constitution wanted that legislators should not feel obligated to the Executive in any way, which could influence them while discharging legislative functions. In other words, an MP or MLA should be free to carry out her duties without any kind of governmental pressure.

Sources: the hindu.

What the law says

Article 102 (1)(a) says a person shall be disqualified from being a member of either House of Parliament if he holds any office of profit, among other grounds

Article 103 says if a question arises whether a member has incurred such disqualification, it will be referred to the President's decision. The President shall obtain the Election Commission's opinion and act accordingly



Article 191(1) contains a similar provision for MLAs and MLCs in the States. Legislators in Delhi are covered by corresponding provisions in the Government of National Capital Territory Act, 1991

What is an 'office of profit'?

- If an MLA or an MP holds a government office and receives benefits from it, then that office is termed as an "office of profit".
- A person will be disqualified if he holds an office of profit under the central or state government, other than an office declared not to disqualify its holder by a law passed by Parliament or state legislature.

What are the basic criteria to disqualify an MP or MLA?

- Basic disqualification criteria for an MP are laid down in Article 102 of the Constitution, and for an MLA in Article 191.
- They can be disqualified for:
 - Holding an office of profit under government of India or state government;
 - Being of unsound mind;
 - Being an undischarged insolvent;
 - Not being an Indian citizen or for acquiring citizenship of another country.

2. ANTI- DEFLECTION LAW

What to study?

- For Prelims: Anti- Defection law- objectives and key facts.
- For Mains: Significance of the law and issues associated.
- **Context:** In a major relief to the AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu, the Madras High Court has upheld the state Assembly Speaker's decision disqualifying 18 AIADMK legislators last year.

Background:

- In 2017, a group of 19 lawmakers met then Governor C. Vidyasagar Rao and gave a memorandum expressing loss of confidence in Palaniswami and requested him to appoint a new Chief Minister.
- The Speaker then issued notice to the lawmakers asking them why they should not be disqualified under the anti-defection law. Subsequently, one of legislators, S.T.K. Jakkaiyan, switched over to the Palaniswami side and the others were disqualified.

The anti-defection law:

- ***The 10th Schedule to the Constitution***, popularly referred to as the ‘Anti-Defection Law,’ was inserted by the 52nd Amendment in 1985.

The grounds for disqualification are mentioned under Articles 102 (2) and 191 (2). A Member of Parliament or state legislature is deemed to have defected:

- When the elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorised to do so, without obtaining prior permission.
- Independent members would be disqualified if they joined a political party.
- Nominated members who were not members of a party could choose to join a party within six months; after that period, they were treated as a party member or independent member.

Exceptions under the Law:

- Any person elected as speaker or chairman could resign from his party, and rejoin the party if he demitted that post.
- A party could be merged into another if at least two-thirds of its party legislators voted for the merger.
- The law initially permitted splitting of parties, but that has now been outlawed.

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.

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

1. ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of Electoral Bonds and highlights of the scheme.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme, benefits and concerns associated.
- **Context:** The Finance Ministry has authorised the sale of sixth tranche of electoral bonds. The State Bank of India, will issue and encash them from November 1 to November 11 via its 29 authorised branches.

About Electoral bonds:

- **What are electoral bonds?** Electoral bonds will allow donors to pay political parties using banks as an intermediary.
- **Key features:** Although called a bond, the banking instrument resembling promissory notes will not carry any interest. The electoral bond, which will be a bearer instrument, will not carry the name of the payee and can be bought for any value, in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh or Rs 1 crore.
- **Eligibility:** As per provisions of the Scheme, electoral bonds may be purchased by a citizen of India, or entities incorporated or established in India. A person being an individual can buy electoral bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals. Only the registered Political Parties which have secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last Lok Sabha elections or the State Legislative Assembly are eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds.

- **Need:** The electoral bonds are aimed at rooting out the current system of largely anonymous cash donations made to political parties which lead to the generation of black money in the economy.

Sources: pib.

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

1. LARGE VACANCIES FOR JUDGES IN LOWER COURTS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Malik Mazhar Sultan case.
- For Mains: Vacancies in lower courts- concerns, challenges and what needs to be done, is central recruitment necessary?
- **Context:** Describing as “unacceptable” the existence of 5,133 vacancies of judges in “Higher Judicial Service” and “Lower Judicial Service”, the Supreme Court has sought the response of the State governments and the High Courts whether the time for the ongoing recruitment of 4,180 judicial officers could be shortened.

Directions issued:

- Passing a suo motu order on the huge number of vacancies in the subordinate judiciary across the country, the court has sought the response from the High Courts/State governments as it noted that the recruitment process for filling 4,180 posts was already underway.
- Noting that there was a mismatch in the number of vacancies, the number of posts for which recruitment process is underway and those still pending, the apex court also sought details of the vacancies that have occurred since the current recruitment process commenced.
- The court also sought information whether “infrastructure and manpower available in the different states is adequate if all the posts that are borne in the cadre are to be filled up.

Malik Mazhar Sultan case:

- A seven-month schedule for recruitment has been formulated by the top court in the Malik Mazhar Sultan case.
- If the time taken exceeds the schedule fixed by this Court, the reasons thereof should be furnished by the Registries of such High Courts/concerned authorities of the State where the recruitment is done through the Public Service Commission(s) which are in default.

Central recruitment to fill judges' vacancies is the right idea:

- The Union law ministry is working with the Supreme Court to conduct a nationwide examination to recruit around 6,000 judges for the lower judiciary as a one-time measure.
- Under the nationwide recruitment scheme, a central agency will conduct the test with due importance given to local languages for those opting for a particular state. Subsequently, an all-India merit list will be prepared based on which the state governments will make the final appointments.
- Although this has been proposed as a one-time measure, there is a case here to have a permanent central judicial recruitment mechanism. This will also help ensure uniformity in judicial recruitment across the country.

Significance:

- This is much needed given the huge number of vacancies for judges and the high pendency of cases. In fact, lower courts currently have a backlog of 2.78 crore cases.
- Unless judges are quickly recruited, this number can't be kept down.
- True, appointment of judges in district and subordinate courts is the responsibility of state governments and the high courts concerned.
- But things have come to this pass because of inordinate delays in holding examinations for judicial recruitment at the state level.

Sources: the hindu.

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. RENAMING OF STATES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Procedure to change the name of states in India.
- Context:** West Bengal government's move to rename WB as "Bangla" has hit a roadblock after concerns that the new name may sound like Bangladesh, and it would be difficult to differentiate the two at international forums.
- In a letter to Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Union Home Ministry stated that the proposed name "Bangla" may sound similar like Bangladesh and some confusions may arrive in the international arena over Bangla and Bangladesh.
- Since Bangladesh shares a cordial relationship with India, Home Ministry was advised to seek a response from MEA on the issue.

Background:

- In 2016, the West Bengal Assembly passed a resolution to change the name of West Bengal to Bangla in Bengali, Bengal in English and Bangal in Hindi.

Rationale behind renaming:

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

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

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

Initiation by a State:

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

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

1. SPECIAL COURTS TO TRY POLITICIANS

What to study?

- For Prelims: States where special courts have been set up.
- For Mains: Need, challenges and significance of these courts.
- Context:** The Supreme Court has upped the ante on the States, Union Territories and High Courts which have not provided it with details of criminal cases pending against sitting lawmakers, warning that their Chief Secretaries and Registrars General will be made personally liable for non-compliance.

Background:

- The apex court had on December 14 last year ordered special courts to be established to fast track the long-pending trials against MPs and MLAs in a bid to weed out corruption and criminality in politics.
- So far, the centre has set up 12 special courts to deal such cases.

Need for special courts:

- There are several high-profile cases against leaders from almost all political parties—regional and national where investigations have dragged on for years and those facing trial have evaded prison.

Implications of this move:

- The Centre's decision could be a setback to politicians who, despite facing serious charges, have remained members of Parliament and state assemblies due to time consumed in trials.
- Such cases will fall in the purview of special courts and their fate will be decided expeditiously.

Way ahead:

- The court has given 11 States/Union Territories (UTs) and the High Courts of Karnataka, Kerala and Tripura a deadline of four weeks to comply with its September 12 order.
- The order has called on States/UTs to furnish data to determine the number of special courts to be set up across the country to exclusively try accused legislators.
- The States/UTs which have not complied with the September 12 order are Goa, Himachal Pradesh Meghalaya, Mizoram, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. EASTERN ZONAL COUNCIL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Particulars and significance of Zonal Councils.
- Context:** The 23rd meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council was held recently at Kolkata under the Chairmanship of the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh. The meeting was attended by the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, and Ministers from the States of the Council including Odisha as well as senior officers from Central and State Governments.

Lens on lawmakers

Total number of cases against MPs & MLAs: 1,581

Budget allocated by the Centre to set up special courts: ₹7.8 crore

Courts expected to be operational by March 1, 2018

Petitioner asks SC: Can 12 special courts decide 1581 cases in one year?

 These 12 courts are not the end of it. Let these courts start. It's easy to find fault, but difficult to start something

— RANJAN GOGOI,
SC BENCH



- The Council reviewed progress of unresolved items of the last meeting relating to Phulbari Dam under the Agreement of 1978 between Bihar and West Bengal, release of central share under post-matric and pre-matric scholarship schemes for SCs/STs/OBCs, scheme for modernization of state police forces among others.

Zonal councils:

- Zonal councils have been established by the Parliament to promote interstate cooperation and coordination. They are **statutory bodies** established under the States Reorganisation Act 1956 and not constitutional bodies. They are only deliberative and advisory bodies.

There are 5 five Zonal councils namely:

- The **Northern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh.
- The **Central Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- The **Eastern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.
- The **Western Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- The **Southern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.
- The North Eastern States** i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya (vii) Sikkim and (viii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.

Composition:

- Chairman – The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- Vice Chairman – The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- Members- Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.
- Advisers- One person nominated by the Planning Commission (which has been replaced by NITI Ayog now) for each of the Zonal Councils, Chief Secretaries and another officer/Development Commissioner nominated by each of the States included in the Zone.
- Union Ministers are also invited to participate in the meetings of Zonal Councils depending upon necessity.

The main objectives of setting up of Zonal Councils are:

- Bringing out national integration.
- Arresting the growth of acute State consciousness, regionalism, linguism and particularistic tendencies.
- Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate and exchange ideas and experiences.
- Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States for successful and speedy execution of development projects.

Sources: pib.

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

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: EPCA- objectives, composition and significance.
- Context:** Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has reconstituted Supreme Court-empowered Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA).

About Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA):

- EPCA was constituted with the objective of ‘protecting and improving’ the quality of the environment and ‘controlling environmental pollution’ in the National Capital Region. The EPCA also assists the apex court in various environment-related matters in the region.

- EPCA is **Supreme Court mandated body** tasked with taking various measures to tackle air pollution in the National Capital Region. It was notified in 1998 by Environment Ministry under Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Composition:

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

Functions:

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

Sources: pib.

3. COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: CCI- features, composition, functions and significance, Key features of the Competition Act.
- **Context:** The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has amended the Combination Regulations. This amendment inter alia provide certainty & transparency and expedites faster disposal of combination cases before CCI.

Latest amendments:

- The provisions of the Competition Act, 2002 ("Act") relating to the regulation of combinations as well as the Combination Regulations have been in force with effect from 1st June 2011.
 - A key change brought about by the present amendments is that ***the parties to combinations can now submit remedies voluntarily in response to the notice issued under Section 29(1) of the Act.*** If such remedies are considered sufficient to address the perceived competition harm, the combination can be approved. This amendment is expected to expedite disposal of such combination cases.
 - In another significant amendment, where the notice is found to exhibit significant information gaps, ***parties to combinations are allowed to withdraw the notice and refile the same.*** With this amendment, the parties could address the deficiencies without facing an invalidation by CCI. Further, fee already paid in respect of such notice shall be adjusted against the fee payable in respect of new notice, if the refiling is done within a period of 3 months.
 - Apart from these, certain consequential and other clarificatory changes have also been made in the Combination Regulations.

About Competition Commission Of India:

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) was established under the Competition Act, 2002 for the administration, implementation and enforcement of the Act, and was duly constituted in March 2009.
- Chairman and members are appointed by the central government.

The following are the objectives of the Commission:

- To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition.
- To promote and sustain competition in markets.
- To protect the interests of consumers.
- To ensure freedom of trade.

Functions of the commission:

- It is the duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.

- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

The Competition Act:

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

Sources: the hindu.

4. INDIAN COUNCIL OF FORESTRY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION (ICFRE)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About ICFRE, NVS and KVS, Prakriti programme.
- For Mains: Significance of MoUs.
- Context:** The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) has signed two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS).

Key Highlights:

- The agreements were signed to launch '**Prakriti programme**', which aims to promote awareness about forests and environment and stimulate interest among the students of NVS and KVS in maintaining a balanced environment and for acquiring skills that reflect care and protection towards forests, environment and society.
- The **main objective** behind the agreements is to provide a platform for the school children to learn practical skills towards sustainable use of the resources.
- The two agreements have been signed for a period of 10 years. They aim to make the Indian youth more sensitive towards national and global issues of environment and thus, help them become responsible citizens.
- The agreements also aim to mobilise a cadre of youth for raising a peoples' movement, which is committed to the conservation of forest and environment.
- The collaboration will enable transfer of knowledge to students and teachers of NVS and KVS on environment, forest, environmental services and contemporary areas of forestry research through lectures and interactive sessions by ICFRE scientists.

About ICFRE:

- The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) is **an autonomous council under the Union Environment Ministry**.
- The council mainly guides, promotes and coordinates forestry research, extension and education at the national level through its nine institutes and five centres located across the country.

Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS):

- The Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti is an autonomous organisation established under the Department of School Education and Literacy in the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- The organisation was established to provide modern quality education to talented children, predominantly from rural areas, without regard to their family's socio-economic condition.

5. INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS OF INDIA (ICAI)

What to study?

- For Prelims: ICAI- key facts.
- Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Certified Professional Accountants Afghanistan (CPA Afghanistan).
- The MoU will establish mutual co-operation framework in the areas of Capacity Building of "Afghanistan Accountancy Board (AAB)", strengthening the IT Capacity and Quality Assurance in Afghanistan through

facilitating Knowledge Transfer; Students and Members Exchange Programs; Conduct of Seminars, Conferences and Joint Activities mutually beneficial to both the parties.

About ICAI:

- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) is **a statutory body** established by an Act of Parliament of India, 'The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949', to regulate the profession of Chartered Accountancy in India.
 - ICAI is the second largest professional Accounting & Finance body in the world.
 - ICAI is the only licensing cum regulating body of the financial audit and accountancy profession in India.
 - It recommends the accounting standards to be followed by companies in India to National Advisory Committee on Accounting Standards (NACAS).
 - ICAI is solely responsible for setting the Standards on Auditing (SAs) to be followed in the audit of financial statements in India.
 - ICAI is one of the founder members of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA), and Confederation of Asian and Pacific Accountants (CAPA).

Sources: pib.

6. APPELLATE TRIBUNALS AGAINST BENAMI TRANSACTIONS

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Appellate tribunal, composition and functions.
- For Mains: Benami transactions- challenges, issues and measures to prevent such transactions.
- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved setting up of Appellate Tribunal and Adjudicating Authority for speedy disposal of cases related to benami transactions.

Background:

- Earlier the cabinet had notified sessions courts in 34 states and Union Territories, which will act as special courts for trial of offences under the benami transaction law. The rules and all the provisions of the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act came into force on November 1, 2016.

Salient Features:

- Under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act of 1998, the government will appoint Adjudicating Authority Appellate Tribunal.
- The officials will come from the existing posts at the same level from the Income Tax Department and the Central Board of Direct Taxes.
- The Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal will be based in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD).
- Benches of Adjudicating Authority may sit in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai, and the necessary notification in this regard will be issued after consultation with the Chairperson of the proposed Adjudicating Authority.

Benefits of the Tribunals:

- The approval will result in effective and better administration of cases referred to the Adjudicating Authority and speedy disposal of appeals filed against the order of the Adjudicating Authority before the Appellate Tribunal.
- It would provide first stage review of administrative action under the PBPT Act. Establishment of the proposed Appellate Tribunal would provide an appellate mechanism for the order passed by the Adjudicating Authority under the PBPT Act.

Sources: pib.

7. EXPERIENCING NORTH EAST FESTIVAL

What to study?

- For Prelims: NEC, its functions and composition, about Experiencing North East festival.
- For Mains: Significance of North Eastern region of the country and efforts by government for the development of the region.

- **Context:** The 'Experiencing North East' festival is being held. It depicts the uniqueness of North Eastern culture.

'Experiencing North East' Festival:

- The event which is *a part of 'Destination North East' series* aims at showcasing the diverse culture and heritage of North East all under one roof.
 - The festival is being organised by **North Eastern Council (NEC)**, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) in collaboration with India International Centre.
 - The festival will showcase the vibrant strengths of North East India and display its art, handicraft, handlooms, tourism, food, culture etc.
 - There will be special performances daily by eminent cultural troupes, bands and artistes from North East, including Nise Meruno, classical pianist and vocalist.

About NEC:

- NEC was established under the **North Eastern Council Act, 1971** as an apex level body for securing balanced and coordinated development and facilitating coordination with the States.
- Subsequent to the Amendment of 2002, NEC has been mandated to function as a regional planning body for the North Eastern Area and while formulating a regional plan for this area, shall give priority to the schemes and projects benefiting two or more states provided that in the case of Sikkim, the Council shall formulate specific projects and schemes for that State.

Recent amendments:

- The Union Cabinet, in June 2018, approved the proposal of Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) for the nomination of the Union Home Minister as ex-officio Chairman of North Eastern Council (NEC). The Cabinet has also approved that Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of DoNER would serve as Vice Chairman of the Council.
- Under the new arrangement, Home Minister shall be the Chairman and Minister of DoNER as Vice Chairman, NEC and all the Governors and Chief Ministers of North Eastern States will be Members.

Background:

- **Destination North East event** is one of the steps taken by Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region to bring North East closer and help assimilate the diverse cultural heritage of India while encouraging investment in priority sectors like Tourism, Handloom, Handicrafts, Food Processing etc.
- Other steps taken by Ministry of DoNER towards assimilation of North Eastern Region, are funding Business Summits, Seminars, Buyers & Sellers meets to attract investors in North Eastern Region and supporting participation of weavers/artisans of NER in Craft Bazaars and exhibitions all over India to promote their Handloom and Handicrafts and give them exposure to the National Market.

Sources: the hindu.

8. NATIONAL CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION (NCDRC)

What to study?

- For Prelims: NCDRC, Consumer Protection Act- Key features.
- For Mains: Dispute redressal mechanisms and their significance.
- **Context:** Department of Consumer Affairs & NCDRC had recently organized a conference to review functioning of State Commissions and District Fora.
- The Conference was attended by Presidents of State Commissions and Secretaries in charge of Consumer Affairs of States and UTs.

Significance:

- The Conference is being held to discuss the issues relating to the functioning of the Consumer Fora such as pendency of case and filling up of vacancies in the post of President and Members of the Commissions.
- The Conference is being held at a crucial time, when the Government has introduced a new Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 in the Lok Sabha repealing the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 with substantial changes for meeting the emerging challenges faced by consumers in the new markets.

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: pib.

9. DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Composition, functions and significance of DAC.
- **Context:** The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has accorded approval for the Mid Life Upgrade of 17 Dornier Aircraft of Indian Coast Guard (ICG) at an approximate cost of Rs. 950 crore.
- The upgrades will be carried out by M/s Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the aircraft manufacturer of India.

Background:

- ICG is also the nodal agency in India for maritime pollution response. The Coast Guard has a fleet of Dornier aircraft which play a pivotal role in maritime surveillance.
- In order to enhance the capabilities of the fleet, DAC accorded approval for upgradation of these aircraft with state-of-the-art technology, spares, Special Maintenance Tools (SMT) and Special Test Equipment (STE).

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC):

- **What is it?** To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- **Objective:** The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- **Functions:** The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans. It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

Sources: pib.

10. CENTRAL ADOPTION RESOURCE AUTHORITY (CARA)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About CARA and Missionaries of Charity.
- For Mains: Significance and role of CARA in monitoring adoptions in the country, a brief overview of Hague Convention.
- **Context:** Three years after the Missionaries of Charity (MoC) decided to stop giving children in its homes up for adoption, it has agreed to join hands with the country's nodal agency- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) for adoption.

Background:

- In October 2015, soon after the Central government announced new rules for adoption and made it mandatory for all homes to be linked to the Child Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), which would be the

only body in the country authorised to process adoptions, the Missionaries of Charity sought de-recognition of its homes.

About CARA:

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is *a statutory body of Ministry of Women & Child Development*, Government of India.
- It functions as *the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions*.
- CARA is designated as *the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions* in accordance with the provisions of the *Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993*, ratified by Government of India in 2003.
- CARA primarily deals with adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through its associated /recognised adoption agencies.

Facts for Prelims:

- Missionaries of Charity** is a Roman Catholic religious congregation established in 1950 by Mother Teresa.

Sources: the hindu.

11. VIGILANCE AWARENESS WEEK

What to study?

- For Prelims: CVC- eligibility, appointment and removal.
- For Mains: Corruption- issues, challenges and ways to prevent.
- Context:** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare will observe the Vigilance Awareness Week from 29th October to 3rd November, 2018 as per the directions of Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Government of India.
- The **theme of the vigilance awareness** this year is “Eradicate Corruption- Make a New India.”
- During the week-long Vigilance Awareness campaign, various activities like seminars, debates and essay competitions will be organized in the Ministry to sensitize and motivate its officers and staff to remain vigilant and transparent in their work in order to eradicate corruption in all spheres of life.

Background:

- The Central Vigilance Commission aims to promote integrity, transparency and accountability in public life.
- As part of its efforts to promote probity in public life and to achieve a corruption free society, CVC observes Vigilance Awareness Week every year.
- The observation of Vigilance Awareness Week creates greater awareness among public and encourages all the stakeholders to collectively participate in prevention of and fight against Corruption.

About CVC:

- It is the apex vigilance institution. It was created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964 but was conferred with statutory status in 2003.
- It submits its report to the President of India.
- Composition:** Presently, the body consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.
- Appointment:** They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
- Term:** Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- Removal:** The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. SECTION 151A OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT, 1951

What to study?

- For Prelims: Section 151A of RPA.
- For Mains: Issues associated, frequent elections and problems posed by it.
- **Context:** Amidst murmurs in political circles that the Lok Sabha bypolls in Karnataka to three seats was “unnecessary”, the Election Commission has cited Section 151 A of the Representation of People Act, which mandated it.

What's the issue now?

- Experts have written to the President questioning the rationale behind holding byelections close to general elections. President Ram Nath Kovind has been requested to withdraw notification of the byelection.
- They have questioned EC's move as the announcement of byelections to parliamentary constituencies were only in Karnataka while there are vacant constituencies in Andhra Pradesh too.

What is Section 151A of RPA all about?

- It mandates the Election Commission to fill the casual vacancies in the Houses of Parliament and State Legislatures through bye elections within six months from the date of occurrence of the vacancy, provided that the remainder of the term of a member in relation to a vacancy is one year or more.

How EC defends its move?

- Byelections are required to be held under Section 151A of RP Act within six months from the date of occurrence of the vacancy.
- Vacancies in Karnataka occurred more than a year before the expiry of the term of the house.
- In case of vacancies in Andhra Pradesh, there is no need to hold byelections as the remaining term of Lok Sabha is less than one year.

Sources: pib.

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

1. COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE COMPETITION ACT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Act.
- For Mains: Need for review.
- **Context:** In pursuance of its objective of ensuring that Legislation is in sync with the needs of strong economic fundamentals, the Government has constituted a Competition Law Review **Committee to review the Competition Act headed by Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs.**

The Terms of References of the Committee are as follows:

- To review the Competition Act/ Rules/ Regulations, in view of changing business environment and bring necessary changes, if required.
- To look into international best practices in the competition fields, especially anti-trust laws, merger guidelines and handling cross border competition issues.
- To study other regulatory regimes/ institutional mechanisms/ government policies which overlap with the Competition Act.
- Any other matters related to competition issue and considered necessary by the Committee.

Background:

- The Competition Act was passed in the year 2002 and the Competition Commission of India was set up in pursuance of the same. The Commission started functioning in right earnest from 2009 and has contributed immensely towards the development of competition and fair play practices in the Indian market.

Need for review of the act:

- During the past nine years the size of the Indian Economy has grown immensely and India is today amongst the top five Economies in the World and poised to forge ahead further.
- In this context, it is essential that Competition Law is strengthened, and re-calibrated to promote best practices which result in the citizens of this country achieving their aspirations and value for money.

The Competition Act:

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

Sources: pib.

2. KARNATAKA GOOD SAMARITAN BILL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the Bill.
- **Context:** The president has given his assent to the Karnataka Good Samaritan and Medical Professional (Protection and Regulation during Emergency Situations) Bill, 2016.

About the Bill:

- The legislation aims to give protection to good samaritans and ensure immediate medical assistance for road accident victims within the ‘golden hour’ and encourage people to offer first aid to victims without fear of harassment in the hands of police and investigations.
- Under the new law, the Karnataka government will provide financial help to good samaritans who help victims in a timely manner, they will be exempted from repeated attendance in courts and police stations, in case attendance is mandatory, expenses of such “running around to courts and police stations” will be taken care through the proposed ‘Good Samaritan Fund’.
- After admitting the accident victim to the hospital, the good samaritan can leave immediately, all government as well as private hospitals are bound to give first aid to the accident victims.

Significance:

- With this, Karnataka has become the first state to give legal protection to good samaritans through a legislation amidst the rising incidents of accidental deaths in India, which saw 1,50,785 people getting killed in road accidents in 2016.
- In medical terms, the ‘golden hour’ is the first hour after a traumatic injury when emergency treatment is very crucial.

Need for legal protection:

- There were 4,80,652 road accidents in the country in 2016 in which 1,50,785 people were killed. In 2015, there were 5,01,423 road accidents in the country in which 1,46,133 people were killed.
- There is no central law to protect the good samaritans. However, the Union Surface Transport Ministry had issued a set of guidelines in 2015 following a Supreme Court order to protect the good samaritans.
- There have been many instances when people get busy in clicking photos or making videos of the victims, instead of providing the accident victims medical help. With the new law, there will be clear message that good samaritans will not be harassed in any manner.
- Karnataka is one of the top five states which saw a large number of people getting killed in road accidents in 2016 and 2015.

Sources: pib.

3. ODISHA FOOD SECURITY SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the scheme, issues related to NFSA.

- **Context:** The state government of Odisha has launched its own food security scheme- State Food Security Scheme (SFSS)- to benefit the 25 lakh poor people who were left out of the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Key Highlights:

- Under the scheme, the beneficiaries will get 5 kg of rice per person per month at the rate of Rs 1 per kg, the same as availed by people covered under the National Food Security Act, 2013.
- As per the provisions of the State Food Security Scheme, 25 lakh poor people “left out” from the benefits of the NFSA, will get the rice at subsidised rates.
- The distribution of rice to selected beneficiaries will be carried out through e-Point of sale (e-PoS) device at the designated fair price shops.

Background:

- The NFSA was implemented in 2014; however, many people were denied the benefit. The move was taken after the centre repeatedly failed to respond to the state's plea of including the left out people in its national food security scheme.

Sources: the hindu.

4. NATIONAL POLICY ON ELECTRONICS 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: Highlights of NPE.
- For Mains: Potential, Significance and challenges ahead in the sector.
- **Context:** Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has issued draft ‘National Policy on Electronics 2018’ (NPE 2018) for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) Sector of India.

Highlights of the policy:

- **Aim:** To promote domestic manufacturing in entire value-chain of ESDM sector for spur economic development in the country. It also aims to double the target of mobile phone production from 500 million units in 2019 to 1 billion by 2025 to meet objective.
- **Target:** Create \$400 billion electronics manufacturing industry by 2025, with mobile phone devices segment accounting for three-fourths of production. It also includes targeted production of 1 billion mobile handsets by 2025, valued at \$190 billion (approximately Rs. 13 lakh crore) and also 600 million mobile handsets valued at \$110 billion (approximately Rs. 7 lakh crore) for export.
- **Incentives:** It replaces existing incentive schemes like Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme (M-SIPS), with schemes that are easier to implement such as interest subsidy and credit default guarantee etc. It also takes into consideration interest subsidy and credit default guarantee in order to encourage new units and in expansion of existing units in electronics manufacturing sector.
- **It also proposes to push development of core competencies** in all sub-sectors of electronics including electronic components and semiconductors, automotive electronics, defence electronics, industrial electronics, strategic electronics etc. It also proposes to set up 20 greenfield and three brownfield electronic manufacturing cluster projects have been sanctioned with project outlay of Rs 3,898 crore, including Rs 1,577 crore from Central Government.
- **Tax benefits:** It proposes suitable direct tax benefits, including inter-alia investment-linked deduction under Income Tax (IT) Act for electronics manufacturing sector, for setting up of new manufacturing unit or expansion of an existing unit. The proposal includes increasing tax benefits on expenditure incurred on R&D, enhancing rate of duty drawback for electronics sector, reimbursement of state levies and other levies for which input tax credit is not available, allowing duty free import of second-hand capital goods for electronics hardware manufacturing etc. It also proposes cess on select electronic goods resources to promote certain critical sub-sectors of electronic manufacturing such as semiconductor wafer fabrication and display fabrication units.

Sources: pib.

5. DATA LOCALISATION

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:** A last-minute effort to dilute the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) directive on data localisation by American global payment companies has triggered direct intervention by US lawmakers urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to soften tough stand taken by the country's monetary authority.

What's the issue?

- The US companies want Donald Trump administration to put pressure on Indian authorities in a bid to seek relaxation on the RBI order of ensuring implementation of data localisation by 15 October.
- US companies have been lobbying with the Finance Ministry and the RBI over the issue.

Background:

- U.S trade groups, representing companies such as Amazon, American Express and Microsoft, have opposed India's push to store data locally.
- That push comes amid rising global efforts to protect user data but is one that could hit planned investments by the firms in the Indian market, where the companies currently have limited data storage.

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.
- Free flow of digital data, especially data which could impact government operations or operations in a region, is restricted by some governments.
- Many attempt to protect and promote security across borders, and therefore encourage data localization.

Policy goals:

- Goals set in the Draft National Digital Communications Policy 2018, along with various government notifications and guidelines such as Reserve Bank of India's notification on Payment Data Storage 2018, and the Guidelines for Government Departments for Contractual Terms related to Cloud Storage 2017, show signs of data localisation.
- The rationale behind such mandates has been attributed to various factors, such as: securing citizen's data, data privacy, data sovereignty, national security, and economic development of the country. The extensive data collection by technology companies, due to their unfettered access and control of user data, has allowed them to freely process and monetise Indian users' data outside the country.

Why technology firms are worried?

- Stricter localisation norms would help India get easier access to data when conducting investigations, but critics say it could lead to increased government demands for data access.
- Technology firms worry the mandate would hurt their planned investments by raising costs related to setting up new local data centres.

Why government is in favour of data localisation?

- Greater use of digital platforms in India for shopping or social networking have made it a lucrative market for technology companies, but a rising number of data breaches have pushed New Delhi to develop strong data protection rules.
- Also, minimal or deregulated governance on critical data, due to absence of localisation requirements, could be detrimental to India's national security as data would be outside the purview of existing data protection legislation. The ineffectiveness of Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) in this realm aggravates such government fears.
- In addition to these, India also aspires to become a global hub for, among others, cloud computing, data hosting and international data centres, all of which are prompting the government to enact data localisation requirements for accelerating the nation's economic growth, especially in the sphere of digital technologies.

Is data localisation the solution to physical data access and decryption of enciphered data? Can data localisation be conflated with access?

- The proposed law by Srikrishna Committee cannot be a knee-jerk reaction to some events; it has to be in line with the SC judgement, which supports the march of technology, innovations, growth of knowledge, and big data analytics for the growth of economies, and for better services to citizens.
- It recognizes the role of data driven innovation (DDI) for the growth of economies, and for job creation. But it emphasises that the data so collected be utilised for legitimate purposes.

Way ahead:

- Though these policy goals are justifiable, a deeper analysis is required to determine the possible adverse spill-over effects on relevant stakeholders in case a faulty roadmap is adopted to achieve them.
- 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.

6. STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVES

What to study?

- For Prelims: India's strategic oil reserves- locations, ISPRL.
- For Mains: Energy security, need for SPR.
- **Context:** India is planning to forge partnerships with private players to build out its strategic petroleum reserves within the coming year.
- It is seeking \$1.5 billion of investments from global oil producers and traders to build additional emergency crude reserves that will act as a buffer against volatility in oil prices. The plan is to build underground caverns that can hold a combined 6.5 million tons of crude at two locations.

Background:

- India has built 5.33 million tons of underground reserves in three locations, including Padur, under an earlier phase that can meet 9.5 days of the country's oil needs. The government purchased crude to fill the caverns in Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and half of another facility in Mangalore in Karnataka, while leasing out the other half to Abu Dhabi National Oil Co.
- Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves, which was formed in 2006, is scouting investors to fill the caverns at Padur. It will hold roadshows in New Delhi, Singapore and London this month to draw investors for the new caverns as well as filling the Padur facility.

About SPR programme:

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

Need for strategic oil reserves:

- In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days. While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.
- It is unlikely that India's energy needs will dramatically move away from fossil fuels in the near future. Over 80% of these fuels come from imports, a majority of which is sourced from West Asia. This is a major strategic risk and poses a massive financial drain for an embattled economy and its growing current account deficit.

- To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. Today, with India consuming upwards of four million barrels of crude every day (January 2015 figures), the case for creating such reserves grows stronger.

Sources: pib.

7. LPG SET TO MAKE KERALA THE FIRST SMOKE-FREE STATE

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMUY- features.
- For Mains: Significance of PMUY.
- Context:** Kerala is now set to become the first smoke-free State in the country with public sector oil companies eyeing 100% LPG penetration here.

Key facts:

- LPG is being supplied beyond commercial considerations with the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana initiated by the Ministry of Petroleum.
- With three bottling plants at Kochi, Kozhikode, and Kollam, LPG is being brought to 49.79 lakh customers through 308 distributors.

Background:

- Kerala is one of the States with the highest penetration of LPG, which is transforming lifestyles. The target has almost been achieved in most villages, towns and cities in the Kerala.
- LPG consumption was 933.3 TMT (thousand tonnes) in the Kerala in 2017-18. It is estimated that one crore tonnes of emissions, from poisonous gases like firewood cooking, have been contained and 25 lakh trees have been saved.

About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

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

Some of the objectives of the scheme are:

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

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

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

Significance of the project:

- PMUY has been a revolutionary initiative that has transformed the lives of more than 3.57 crore households spanning across the length and breadth of the country.
- The initiative is in line with Government's aim to eradicate energy poverty, thereby promoting economic empowerment.

Way ahead:

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

Sources: the hindu.

8. SPECIAL COURTS FOR TRIAL OF BENAMI TRANSACTION CASES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features of the benami act, special courts and significant features.
- **Context:** The Union Government has issued a notification stating that sessions courts in 34 states and union territories, will act as special courts for the trial of offences under the benami transaction law.

Key facts:

- The sessions courts were notified after consultation with Chief Justices of High Courts under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, 1988 for the trial of offences punishable under the provision of the Act.
- In the case of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the courts of additional session's judge in each district have been designated as the special court.

Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act:

- The Indian Parliament passed the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act in August 2016 to curb the menace of black money. The bill sought to amend the Benami Transactions Act, 1988.
 - The new legislation provided for seven years imprisonment and fine for those indulging in illegal transactions.
 - The act has amended the definition of benami transactions and establishes adjudicating authorities and an Appellate Tribunal to deal with benami transactions.
 - Further, the act defines benami transactions, prohibits them and provides that violation of the PBPT Act is punishable with imprisonment and fine.
 - It also prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamidar by the real owner. The properties held benami are liable for confiscation by the Government without payment of compensation.

Sources: the hindu.

9. CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016

What to study?

- For Prelims: NRC and key features of Citizenship Bill.
- For Mains: Controversies and issues associated.
- **Context:** The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is gaining momentum yet again as the Assam Government has refused the proposed rally of organisations from West Bengal in support of the Bill.

What is the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill was proposed in Lok Sabha on July 19, amending the Citizenship Act of 1955.
 - If this Bill is passed in Parliament, illegal migrants from certain minority communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan will then be eligible for Indian citizenship.
 - In short, illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan would not be imprisoned or deported.
 - Moreover, these citizens gain permanent citizenship after six years of residency in India instead of 11 years — as mentioned in the Citizenship Act (1955).
 - The registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may get cancelled if they violate any law.

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.
 1. 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.
 2. In Section 8 of the Citizenship Act 1955, if an adult makes a declaration of renunciation of Indian citizenship, he loses Indian citizenship.

Who is an illegal immigrant?

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

What are the guidelines to become an Indian citizenship?

- Citizenship is granted to an individual by the government of the country when he/she complies with the legal formalities, so it's like a judicial concept.

In India, the Citizenship Act, 1995 prescribes five ways of acquiring citizenship:

1. Birth.
2. Descent.
3. Registration.
4. Naturalization.
5. Incorporation of the territory.

Assam NRC:

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a list that contains names of Indian citizens of Assam. It was last prepared after Census in 1951. Assam, which had faced an influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th century, is the only state having an NRC.
 - The Assam government on July 30, 2018 released the second and final draft of the state's National Register of Citizens (NRC). The draft includes the names of Indian citizens who have been residing in Assam before March 25, 1971.
 - As per the Draft, the total number of persons included in the list is 2,89,83,677 leaving a total of 40,70,707 as ineligible for inclusion. Out of 40,70,707 names, 37,59,630 names have been rejected and 2,48,077 names are kept on hold.

Sources: India today.

10. PRADHAN MANTRI ANNADATA AAY SANRAKSHAN ABHIYAN

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of PM- AASA.
- For Mains: Significance and issues associated with PM- AASA.
- **Context:** A recent analysis by agricultural experts has revealed that Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan will make no difference to the plight of farmers on the ground this season, and will not improve their chances of getting MSP for their crops.

Why?

- Only Madhya Pradesh has opted for the cash payment component. No other state has readied the IT infrastructure needed to implement it.
- With regard to the private stockists scheme, guidelines were issued to states last week. It will probably take states and private players about six months. And there may not be any takers in the current season.

Background:

- Giving a major boost to the pro-farmer initiatives of the Government and in keeping with its commitment and dedication for the Annadata, the Union Cabinet approved, in September 2018, a new Umbrella Scheme "Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan" (PM-AASHA).
- The Scheme is aimed at ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers for their produce as announced in the Union Budget for 2018.

The umbrella scheme 'PM-AASHA' comprises three sub-schemes:

1. Price Support Scheme (PSS).
2. Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS).
3. Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).

Price Support Scheme (PSS):

- Under the scheme, the physical procurement of pulses, oilseeds and Copra will be done by Central Nodal Agencies with the proactive role of the state governments.
 - Further, in addition to NAFED, the Food Cooperation of India (FCI) will take up PSS operations in states and districts.
 - The procurement expenditure and losses due to procurement will be borne by the Union Government as per norms.

Price Deficiency Payment Scheme this scheme (PDPS):

- Under the scheme, it is proposed to cover all oilseeds for which minimum support price (MSP) is notified.
- In this, direct payment of the difference between the MSP and the selling/modal price will be made to pre-registered farmers selling his produce in the notified market yard through a transparent auction process. All payments will be done directly into the registered bank account of the farmer.
- This scheme does not involve any physical procurement of crops as farmers are paid the difference between the MSP price and sale or modal price on disposal in the notified market. The support of the central government for PDPS will be given as per norms.

Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS):

- For oilseeds, the states will have the option to roll out Private Procurement Stockist Scheme (PPSS) on pilot basis in selected districts and Agricultural Produce Market Committee's (APMC) of district involving the participation of private stockiest.
- The pilot district and selected APMC(s) will cover one or more crop of oilseeds for which MSP is notified.
- Since this is similar to the PSS scheme, as it involves physical procurement of the notified commodity, the scheme shall substitute PSS/PDPS in the pilot districts.
- The selected private agency shall procure the commodity at MSP in the notified markets during the notified period from the registered farmers in accordance with the PPSS Guidelines, whenever the prices in the market fall below the notified MSP and whenever authorised by the state or UT government to enter the market. The maximum service charges up to 15% of the notified MSP will be payable.

Background:

- Increasing MSP is not adequate and it is more important that farmers should get the full benefit of the announced MSP. For the same, it is essential that if the price of the agriculture produce market is less than MSP, then in that case state governments and the central government should purchase either at MSP or work in a manner to provide MSP for the farmers through some other mechanism.

Sources: the hindu.

11. GUJARAT'S FIRST MEGA FOOD PARK

What to study?

- For Prelims: Mega food park scheme and mega food parks in the country.
- For Mains: Need for Mega food parks and other related agricultural issues.
- **Context:** Gujarat's first **Mega Food Park** has been inaugurated in **Surat**.

- Promoted by M/s Gujarat Agro Infrastructure Mega Food Park Pvt. Ltd the Park is located at Village Shah and Vasravi, Taluka Mangrol, District Surat. It will provide direct and indirect employment to 5,000 persons and benefit about 25,000 farmers.

About Mega Food Parks:

- Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.
- The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastages, increasing farmers' income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.
- These food parks give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables.
- A maximum grant of R50 crore is given for setting up a MFP, in minimum 50 acres of contiguous land with only 50% contribution to the total project cost.

Mode of operation:

- The Scheme has a cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model. It includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure at Central Processing Centre (CPC).
- PPCs are meant for functioning as a link between the producers and processors for supply of raw material to the Central Processing Centres.
- CPC has need based core processing facilities and basic enabling infrastructure to be used by the food processing units setup at the CPC. The minimum area required for a CPC is 50 acres.
- The scheme is demand-driven and would facilitate food processing units to meet environmental, safety and social standards.

Facts for Prelims:

- Gujarat's 2nd Mega Food Park has been sanctioned by the Ministry in Mehsana District of Gujarat.

Sources: the hindu.

12. NAMAMI GANGE PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the programme.
- Context:** The Executive Committee (EC) of the National Mission for Clean Ganga has approved 12 projects worth Rs. 929 Crore under the Namami Gange programme in its 16th meeting held recently.

About Namami Gange Programme:

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

Implementation:

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

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. ASSAM TO LAUNCH WAGE COMPENSATION SCHEME FOR PREGNANT WOMEN IN TEA GARDENS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the scheme.
- Context:** Assam Government has become the first Indian state to offer a Wage Compensation Scheme for pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.
- Aim:** The scheme is aimed at providing better health and nutrition supplements to the pregnant women. It stresses on providing proper healthcare facilities to the pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.

Key facts:

- Under the scheme, an amount of Rs 12,000 will be given to the pregnant women so that they can take care of themselves and the unborn baby without compromising the livelihood of their family.
- The compensation of wages to pregnant women will be given in 4 instalments – Rs 2,000 in the first trimester, Rs 4,000 in the second trimester, Rs 3,000 for institutional delivery and Rs 3,000 for registration of the child's birth.
- The women would also be given a maternity leave. They will not be engaged in work from the third trimester of pregnancy to three months after delivery.
- In addition, they will get assistance for ante-natal care and the first cycle of immunization of the child.

Significance:

- The scheme is likely to benefit over 60,000 women in the state. It is expected to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality in the tea areas.

Background:

- The maternal mortality rate of women working in the tea plantations of Assam is unusually high. In the Annual Health Survey of 2012-13, Assam recorded one of the highest maternal mortality rates in India, with over 300 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. The MMR in the state's tea gardens was even higher, as it was recorded to be 404. The national average during 2014-16 was 130.
- Also, almost 50% of the pregnant women aged between 15 and 49 years in the state were recorded to be anaemic, which is a leading contributor to maternal mortality. The bulk of the workforce in Assam's tea gardens is women.

Sources: the hindu.

2. RASHTRIYA VAYOSHRI YOJANA CAMP

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.
- Context:** A Distribution camp for free of cost distribution of Aids and Assistive Living devises under **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)**, a scheme of Social Justice & Empowerment Department for Senior Citizen under BPL category, was recently organized in Delhi by **Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO)**, a PSU working under the aegis of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.



- Implemented through 'Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation (ALIMCO) (PSU under M/o SJ&E)
- First of its kind in the country
- To address disabilities like low vision, hearing impairment, Loss of teeth and Locomotor disability
- Beneficiaries will get walkers, crutches, hearing aids, tripods, wheelchair, Artificial Dentures & Spectacles
- Devices are of high quality and conforming to BIS standards

About Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana:

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



Background:

- As per the Census figures of 2011, the population of senior citizens in India is 10.38 crore. More than 70% of the population of senior citizens live in rural areas of the country.
- A sizeable percentage (5.2%) of the senior citizens suffers from some sort of disabilities related to old age. Projections indicate that the number of elderly population will increase to around 173 million by 2026.

Sources: pib.

3. 'NIRMAN KUSUMA' PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the scheme.
- Context:** Odisha government has launched the '**Nirman Kusuma' programme** to help the children of construction workers get trained in Industrial Training Institutes and polytechnics.

Key facts:

- Under the scheme, the children of construction workers would get financial assistance for their education in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and polytechnics.

- While an ITI student will be entitled to get financial assistance of Rs. 23,600, a diploma student to get Rs. 26,300 per annum.

Outreach:

- Under the scheme, an ITI student will get assistance of Rs. 23,600 a year and a diploma student will get Rs. 26,300.

Sources: the hindu.

4. 'SAUBHAGYA' SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Saubhagya scheme and its significance.
- Context:** Ministry of Power and New & Renewable Energy has announced an award scheme under Saubhagya to felicitate the DISCOMs / Power Department of the States and their employees for achieving 100% household electrification in their area of operations. It includes cash prize and certificate of appreciation.

PMO

- Named: 'Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana aka '**Saubhagya'**
- Aims:
 - To provide electricity to un-electrified households by March 2019.
 - To provide subsidy on equipment like transformers, meters and wires.
- Budget: Rs 16000 crore
- No price will be charged for the poor to get an electricity connection.**
- Thomas Alva Edison invented the bulb and said: *'We will make electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles'.*
- 4 crore people of the country are yet to get electricity.
- India which used to face power shortage, is now a power surplus country.
- Mr Modi said, the installed power capacity has increased by 12 per cent during last three years and 60 thousand Mega Watt power has been added.



About the award scheme:

- Eligibility:** Awards would be provided for achieving 100% household electrification at DISCOM/Power Department level of the States. Eight States which have already achieved more than 99% household electrification prior to launch of Saubhagya (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab and Tamil Nadu), are ineligible for participation under the award scheme. All the remaining States and their Discoms are eligible for the award.
- Award will be given in three categories,** (i) DISCOMs / Power Departments of Special Category States (which includes seven North Eastern States, Sikkim, J&K and Uttarakhand); (ii) DISCOMs / Power Departments of other than Special Category States (which includes Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Telengana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) having more than 5 Lakh un-electrified households and (iii) DISCOMs / Power Departments of other than Special Category States having less than 5 Lakh un-electrified households.

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 at a cost of Rs 16,320 crore, including Gross Budgetary Support of Rs 12,320 crore from the government.

- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme in line with DDUGJY.
- The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 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.
- There are around 4 Crore un-electrified households in the country and they are targeted for providing electricity connections by December 2018.

Sources: pib.

5. SWASTH BHARAT YATRA NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

What to study?

- For Prelims: Highlights and significance of the campaign, about World Food Day.
- For Mains: Generic medicines- popularity, challenges and potential.
- **Context:** Union Government has launched national campaign ‘Swasth Bharat Yatra’ on occasion of World Food Day (16 October) to sensitise people about eating safe food and be healthy. The campaign has been launched in association with states and led by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

About Swasth Bharat Yatra national campaign:

- Under it, pan-India cycle rally is being organized to create consumer awareness about eating safe and nutritious food for becoming healthy and combating food adulteration.
 - In this rally, about 7,500 cyclists are expected to participate in over 18,000 km travelling across six tracks through almost every state and UT over 100 days to propagate a powerful message ‘Eat Right India’.
 - This campaign will not only mobilise masses but also create large pool of local community to sustain this movement.

World Food Day:

- World Food Day is celebrated on October 16 every year to raise awareness on the issues of poverty and hunger. World Food Day was established by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in November 1979 and since then the day is celebrated worldwide by many organisations that are concerned with food security.
- **2018 theme:** “OUR ACTIONS ARE OUR FUTURE. A #ZERO HUNGER WORLD BY 2030 IS POSSIBLE”.

About FAO:

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a specialised agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.
- Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy.

Sources: pib.

6. PRADHAN MANTRI BHARTIYA JANAUSHADHI PARIYOJANA (PMBJP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of PMBJP and Janaushadhi Suvidha.
- For Mains: Health facilities for the underprivileged- need and efforts by the government, generic medicines and their increasing popularity worldwide.
- Context:** Central Warehouse of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana has been set up at Bilaspur, Gurugram. It has been setup by the Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI).
- The hi-tech Central Warehouse would facilitate seamless distribution of Jan Aushadhi generic medicines to all PMBJP Kendra functional across the country.

What is a Generic Medicine?

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

About PMBJP:

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

Sources: the hindu.

7. RASHTRIYA VAYOSHRI YOJANA (RVY)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of RVY and about ALIMCO.
- For Mains: Significance of the programme and similar policies for the aid of old aged.
- Context:** An ADIP-RVY Distribution Camp for free of cost distribution of Aids and Assistive Living Devices to Divyangjans and Senior Citizens in BPL category under Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY) was organized by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment Department recently.
- The event was organized by **Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO)**, a PSU working under the aegis of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

About Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana:

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

Background:

- As per the Census figures of 2011, the population of senior citizens in India is 10.38 crore. More than 70% of the population of senior citizens live in rural areas of the country.
- A sizeable percentage (5.2%) of the senior citizens suffers from some sort of disabilities related to old age. Projections indicate that the number of elderly population will increase to around 173 million by 2026.

Sources: pib.

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

1. WHO GUIDELINES ON SANITATION AND HEALTH

What to study?

- For Prelims: Brief overview of guidelines, about WHO, key facts on SBM.
- For Mains: Significance and need for global guidelines.
- Context:** The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched the first global guidelines on sanitation and health.

**Highlights:**

- The new WHO Guidelines on Sanitation and Health summarize the evidence on the effectiveness of a range of sanitation interventions and provide a comprehensive framework for health-protecting sanitation, covering policy and governance measures, implementation of sanitation technologies, systems and behavioural interventions, risk-based management, and monitoring approaches.
- Critically, the guidelines articulate the role of the health sector in maximizing the health impact of sanitation interventions.
- The guidelines also identify gaps in the evidence-base to guide future research efforts to improve the effectiveness of sanitation interventions.

Need for global guidelines on sanitation and health:

- Worldwide, 2.3 billion people lack basic sanitation (with almost half forced to defecate in the open). They are among the 4.5 billion without access to safely managed sanitation services – in other words a toilet connected to a sewer or pit or septic tank that treats human waste. Without proper access, millions of people the world over are deprived of the dignity, safety and convenience of a decent toilet.
- Sanitation is a fundamental foundation of human health and development and underpins the core mission of WHO and ministries of health worldwide. WHO's Sanitation and Health Guidelines are essential to securing health and wellbeing for everyone, everywhere.

Significance of the guidelines:

- Poor sanitation is a major factor in transmission of neglected tropical diseases. Billions of people live without access to even the most basic sanitation services.

- WHO developed the new guidelines on sanitation and health because current sanitation programmes are not achieving anticipated health gains and there is a lack of authoritative health-based guidance on sanitation.
- By adopting WHO's new guidelines, countries can significantly reduce the diarrhoeal deaths due to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene. For every US \$1 invested in sanitation, WHO estimates a nearly six-fold return as measured by lower health costs, increased productivity and fewer premature deaths.

Sources: the hindu.

2. GLOBAL SKILLS PARK (GSP)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: GSP- location, objectives and significance, Skilling India- challenges and programmes in this regard.
- **Context:** Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India have signed a \$150 million Loan Agreement to establish a ***Global Skills Park (GSP) in Madhya Pradesh.***

About the Global Skills Park (GSP):

- It will be the First Multi-Skills Park in India, to enhance the quality of Technical and Vocational Education And Training (TVET) System in the State and create a more skilled workforce.
- The Project will engage international TVET partners to support advanced training at the GSP who will bring global best practices in TVET management, training infrastructure, industry cooperation, and quality assurance.
- The GSP campus will consist of core Advanced Training Institutes including the Center for Occupational Skills Acquisition and the Center for Advanced Agricultural Training as well as other support services focusing on entrepreneurship, training of trainers, and skill-related research.
- The campus will have training facilities focusing on skills for manufacturing, service, and advanced agricultural jobs, benefitting about 20,000 trainees and trainers.

Significance:

- The Project will help improve the quality and relevance of the State's TVET programs and will help impart advanced job-ready skills training of international standards that can meet the employment needs of the State's emerging sectors.
- The Project will also help in modernizing 10 industrial training institutes across the state by renovating training infrastructure and upgrading skills courses to align with industry and market needs.

Sources: pib.

3. ATAL INNOVATION MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of Atal Innovation Mission.
- For Mains: Promotion of innovation at global level and efforts by India in this regard.
- **Context:** To promote innovative cooperation between students of India and Russia, a Memorandum of Understanding was recently exchanged between India's Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and the Russian Federation's SIRIUS Educational Foundation.

The MoU seeks to:

- Remove cultural and language barriers between students of Russia and India.
- Share the best practices in the promotion of educational, scientific, innovative achievements.
- Promote innovative cooperation.
- Search and develop the talented youth of both countries fostering a knowledge-driven innovation ecosystem in both the countries.

About AIM:

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is the Government of India's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.
- AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country and revolutionizing the innovation eco-system – touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.

The Atal Innovation Mission shall have two core functions:

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

Sources: the hindu.

4. TASK FORCE FOR CLOSING SKILLS GAP IN INDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the Task force and its functions.
- For Mains: Significance of the task force, skills gap in India.
- ***Context:*** The government has launched a task force for closing the skills gap in India, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum.
- The Task Force is the second country-led public-private collaboration of the World Economic Forum's Closing the Skills Gap Project after South Africa.

About Closing the skills gap task force:

- The task force will bring together leaders from business, government, civil society and the education and training sectors to accelerate the future-proofing of education and training systems in the country.
- The goal of the Task Force is to develop an action plan to address skills gaps in India and make the Indian workforce ready for jobs of future.

Significance:

- With more than half of our population in the working age, skills development will be critical to sustaining inclusive growth and development in India.'
- The "Closing the Skills Gap" task force will be a significant step to accelerate the impact on skills development already achieved by bringing together relevant stakeholders to act collectively.

Closing the Skills Gap Project by WEF:

- The Closing the Skills Gap Project aims to create global and national platforms to address current skills gaps and to reshape education and training for the future. It works at three levels:
 1. ***Country implementation deep-dives:*** At the national level, the Closing the Skills Gap Task Forces provides a platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration to close the skills gap and prepare for the future of work. Each Closing the Skills Gap Task Force brings together leaders from business, government, civil society, and education and training sectors to accelerate reskilling and upskilling efforts in the current workforce and the future-proofing of national education and training systems.
 2. ***Global and regional knowledge exchange:*** At the global level, an informal Global Alliance for Closing the Skills Gap provides an exclusive global platform for leaders and experts from business, government, civil society, and the education and training sectors to build consensus, share ideas, and identify preferred models and best practices.
 3. ***Global business commitments:*** With skilling, reskilling and upskilling becoming a clear "no-regret" move for addressing the flux in labour markets, there is a rapid movement of multinational businesses towards such efforts for their employees, communities and wider audience. Managed strategically, this can be impactful and a win-win for companies and workers alike. As a first step, the Forum is consolidating global business commitments with the goal to reach 10 million people by January 2020.

Sources: the hindu.

5. NRC FOR TRIPURA

What to study?

- For Prelims: National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- For Mains: Need for updation of NRC and related issues.
- **Context:** The Supreme Court has issued notice to the government to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Tripura, as is being done in Assam, in order to detect and deport the “illegal immigrants” from Bangladesh.

Need:

- A petition has been filed in the court contending that the “influx” of illegal immigrants into Tripura amounted to ‘external aggression’ under Article 355 of the Constitution.
- Also, the presence of illegal immigrants violates the political rights of the citizens of Tripura said the PIL.

Concerns:

- Tripura was a predominantly tribal State, but now it has become a non-tribal State. Indigenous people who were once the majority has now become a minority in their own land claimed the PIL.
- Uncontrolled influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to Tripura has caused huge demographic changes in Tripura.

Sources: the hindu.

6. NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (NCVET)

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about NSDA, NCVT and NCVET.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for merger to fill the Skills gap in the country.
- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the merger of the existing regulatory institutions in the skills space – National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) into the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET).

Functions:

- NCVET will regulate the functioning of entities engaged in vocational education and training, both long-term and short-term and establish minimum standards for the functioning of such entities. The primary functions of NCVET will include:
 - Recognition and regulation of awarding bodies, assessment bodies and skill related information providers.
 - Approval of qualifications developed by awarding bodies and Sector Skill Councils (SSCs).
 - Indirect regulation of vocational training institutes through awarding bodies and assessment agencies.
 - Research and information dissemination.
 - Grievance redressal.

Composition:

- The Council would be headed by a Chairperson and will have Executive and Non-Executive Members.

Benefits:

- This institutional reform will lead to ***improvement in quality and market relevance*** of skill development programs lending credibility to vocational education and training encouraging greater private investment and employer participation in the skills space.
- This in turn will help ***achieve the twin objectives of enhancing aspirational value of vocational education and of increasing skilled manpower*** furthering the Prime Minister’s agenda of making India the skill capital of the world.
- Being a regulator of India’s skill ecosystem, NCVET will have ***a positive impact on each individual who is a part of vocational education and training in the country***. The idea of skill-based education will be seen in a more inspirational manner which would further encourage students to apply for skill-based educational courses.

- This is also expected to **facilitate the ease of doing business** by providing a steady supply of skilled workforce to the industry and services.

Need:

- A need was felt for an overarching regulatory authority which could tend to all aspects of short-term and long-term skill-based training. In view of this, NCVET is envisaged as an institution which will perform the regulatory functions so far vested in NCVT and NSDA.
- Regulatory functions currently being carried out by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) through the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) will also be housed in the NCVET.

Facts for Prelims:

- The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA)** is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. It coordinates and harmonizes the skill development efforts of the Indian government and the private sector to achieve the skilling targets of the 12th Plan document and beyond.
- The NSDA's role is also to anchor the **National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)** and facilitate the setting up of professional certifying bodies in addition to the existing ones.

Sources: pib.

7. ZIKA VIRUS

What to study?

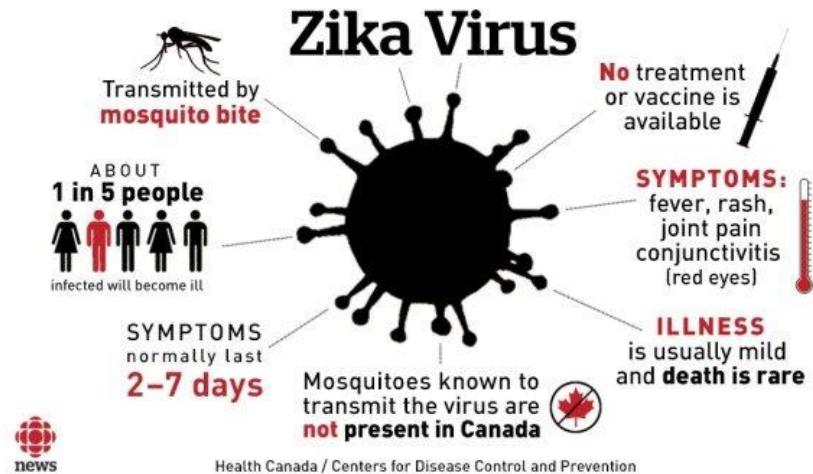
- For Prelims: Zika virus related key facts.
- For Mains: Global concerns and preventive measures in place.
- Context:** Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has confirmed cases of Zika virus in Rajasthan's capital Jaipur. It was detected through Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) surveillance system.

Following this, the Health Ministry has taken precautionary measures:

- It has activated control room at National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to undertake regular monitoring of the situation.
- A Central team also has been deputed to Jaipur. State government also has been supplied with IEC material prepared to create awareness about zika virus disease and its prevention strategies.
- Extensive surveillance and vector control measures are also being undertaken in area as per protocol by the state government.

What is Zika Virus?

- Zika virus is similar to dengue fever, yellow fever and West Nile virus. Carried by infected Aedes aegypti mosquitos, Zika is largely transmitted through bites, but can also occur through intrauterine infection.
 - It was first identified in 1947 in Zika Forest, Uganda from where it derives its name.
 - If a woman is bitten by an infected mosquito and becomes infected, Zika can cross into the placenta and affect the fetus. While anyone can contract Zika, pregnant women are the most at risk due to the potential for fetal microcephaly and other neurologic abnormalities.
 - Symptoms include fever, headache, red eyes, skin rash, fatigue, muscle pain etc.
- Treatment and Prevention:** There is no specific treatment or vaccine currently available to treat Zika. The best form of prevention is protection against mosquito bites and clearing stagnant water where mosquitoes breed.



8. WORLD BANK'S HUMAN CAPITAL INDEX

What to study?

- For Prelims: HCI related key facts and performance of various countries.
- For Mains: HCI, HCP and HDI, need for improvements in human capital and ways to achieve it, India's reservations about HCI.
- Context:** The World Bank has released a Human Capital Index (HCI) as part of the World Development Report 2019.
- Theme for the World Development Report (WDR) 2018:** "The Changing Nature of Work".

Human Capital Project (HCP):

- As part of this report, the World Bank has launched a Human Capital Project (HCP).
 - The HCP programme is claimed to be a program of advocacy, measurement, and analytical work to raise awareness and increase demand for interventions to build human capital.
 - There are three components of HCP- a cross-country human capital measurement metric called the Human Capital Index (HCI), a programme of measurement and research to inform policy action, and a programme of support for country strategies to accelerate investment in human capital.

About Human Capital Index (HCI):

- The HCI has been constructed for 157 countries. It claims to seek to measure the amount of human capital that a child born today can expect to attain by age 18.
- The HCI index values are contended to convey the productivity of the next generation of workers, compared to a benchmark of complete standard education and full health.

The HCI has three components:

- Survival, as measured by under-5 mortality rates.
- Expected years of Quality-Adjusted School which combines information on the quantity and quality of education.
- Health environment using two proxies of (a) adult survival rates and (b) the rate of stunting for children under age 5.

HCI Vs. HDI:

- UNDP constructs Human Development Index (HDI) for several years. The HCI uses survival rates and stunting rate instead of life expectancy as measure of health, and quality-adjusted learning instead of merely years of schooling as measure of education.
 - HCI also excludes per capita income whereas the HDI uses it. Two significant changes from HDI are exclusion of income component and introduction of quality adjustment in learning.
 - Exclusion of income element and introduction of quality adjustment makes HCI far less representative of Human Capital Development than the Index claims it to be.

Global performance:

- The HCI measures the Index outcomes for each country as a fraction of maximum value of 1.
- As expected the advanced economies such as North America and Europe mostly have HCI value of above 0.75, while South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa have the lowest HCI among the regions.

Performance of India:

- The HCI for India has been estimated at 0.44. The quality adjusted learning has been measured in case of India by using the data as old as 2009.
- Human Capital Index: A child born in India today will be only 44 per cent as productive when she grows up as she could be if she enjoyed complete education and full health.
- The HCI in India for females is marginally better than that for males. Further, there has been marked improvement in the HCI components in India over the last five years.
- Probability of Survival to Age 5: 96 out of 100 children born in India survive to age 5.
- Expected Years of School: In India, a child who starts school at age 4 can expect to complete 10.2 years of school by her 18th birthday.

- Harmonized Test Scores: Students in India score 355 on a scale where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 represents minimum attainment.
- Learning-adjusted Years of School: Factoring in what children actually learn, expected years of school is only 5.8 years.
- Adult Survival Rate: Across India, 83 per cent of 15-year olds will survive until age 60.
- Healthy Growth (Not Stunted Rate): 62 out of 100 children are not stunted. 38 out of 100 children are stunted, and so at risk of cognitive and physical limitations that can last a lifetime.
- Gender Differences: In India, HCI for girls is marginally higher than for boys.

Why India has decided to ignore the HCI?

- Discontent with the Methodology.
- Assessment lacking Global Standard.
- Gross negligence of important measures.

Sources: pib.

9. GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS INDEX 2018

The Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 2018 Rankings

Covering 140 economies, the Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 measures national competitiveness—defined as the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity.

Rank	Economy	Score ¹	Diff. from 2017 ²	Rank	Score	Diff. from 2017 ²	Rank	Score	Diff. from 2017 ²
1	United States	85.6	—	+0.8	48	Hungary	64.3	—	+0.9
2	Singapore	83.5	—	+0.5	49	Mauritius	63.7	—	+0.8
3	Germany	82.8	—	+0.2	50	Bahrain	63.6	-4	-0.2
4	Switzerland	82.6	—	+0.2	51	Bulgaria	63.6	—	+1.2
5	Japan	82.5	+3	+0.9	52	Romania	63.5	—	+1.3
6	Netherlands	82.4	-1	+0.2	53	Uruguay	62.7	-3	—
7	Hong Kong SAR	82.3	—	+0.3	54	Kuwait	62.1	+2	+0.5
8	United Kingdom	82.0	-2	-0.1	55	Costa Rica	62.1	-1	+0.4
9	Sweden	81.7	—	+0.1	56	Philippines	62.1	+12	+2.3
10	Denmark	80.6	+1	+0.7	57	Greece	62.1	-4	+0.3
11	Finland	80.3	+1	+0.5	58	India	62.0	+5	+1.2
12	Canada	79.9	-2	-0.1	59	Kazakhstan	61.8	—	+0.7
13	Taiwan, China	79.3	—	+0.1	60	Colombia	61.6	-3	+0.1
14	Australia	78.9	+1	+0.7	61	Turkey	61.6	-3	+0.2
15	Korea, Rep.	78.8	+2	+0.8	62	Brunei Darussalam	61.4	+2	+1
16	Norway	78.2	-2	-0.8	63	Peru	61.3	-3	+0.2

What to study?

- For Prelims: GCI- features, performance of India and other countries.
- For Mains: GCI- significance and India's potential.
- Context:** The World Economic Forum (WEF) has released the Global Competitiveness Report 2018.

Performance of India:

- India was ranked as the 58th most competitive economy with a score of 62.0 on the Global Competitiveness Index 2018.
- India jumped five spots from 2017, the largest gain among G20 economies.
- India ranked highest among South Asian countries. Sri Lanka was ranked 86th, Bangladesh 103rd, Pakistan 107th and Nepal 109th.
- As per the report, India leads the region in all other areas of competitiveness except for health, education and skills.
- As per the report, India's greatest competitive advantages include its market size and innovation.

Global performance:

- On the list of 140 economies, the United States topped the list with a score of 85.6, followed by Singapore and Germany at the second and the third positions respectively.
- Other countries in the top 10 include Switzerland (4th), Japan (5th), Netherlands (6th), Hong Kong (7th), United Kingdom (8th), Sweden (9th) and Denmark (10th).
- In Europe, Sweden is ranked the highest among the Nordic economies at 9th position, while France (17th) is among the top 20. Countries such as Germany and Switzerland set the global standards for innovation.
- Competitiveness performance in the Middle East and North Africa remains diverse, with Israel (20th) and the United Arab Emirates (27th), leading the way in their respective regions.
- 17 of the 34 sub-Saharan African economies are among the bottom 20. Mauritius (49th) leads the region, ahead of South Africa and nearly 91 places ahead of Chad (140th).
- Among the BRICS economies, China topped the list at 28th place with a score of 72.6, followed by Russia, India, South Africa and Brazil respectively.

Background:

- The Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) is prepared on the basis of country-level data covering 12 categories or pillars of competitiveness.
- Institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication and innovation are the 12 pillars.

Sources: the hindu.

10. SCHEME FOR PROMOTION OF ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH COLLABORATION (SPARC)

What to study?

- For Prelims: SPARC- objectives and key features.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for international collaboration.
- Context:** Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched the web portal of the Scheme "*Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)*".

About Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC):

- The Government in August 2018 had sanctioned the scheme "Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)" at a total cost of Rs.418 Cr for implementation up to 31.3.2020.
- Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur is the National Coordinating Institute to implement the SPARC programme. Details may be viewed at www.sparc.iitkgp.ac.in.
- The scheme aims at improving the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world.
- Under this Scheme, 600 joint research proposals will be awarded for 2 years to facilitate strong research collaboration between Indian research groups with the best in class faculty and renowned research groups in the leading universities of the world, in areas that are at the cutting edge of science or with direct social relevance to the mankind, specifically India.

Significance of the scheme:

- This Scheme is expected to have a major impact in providing the best international expertise to address major national problems, expose Indian academicians to the best collaborators abroad, enable international faculty to stay in India for a longer duration, provide Indian students an opportunity to work in the world class laboratories, to develop strong bilateral relationships in research, and improve the international ranking of Indian Institutes.

Sources: pib.

Topic: Role of civil services in a democracy.

1. COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT AWARD, 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Awards, awardees and its significance.
- Context:** India wins Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management Award, 2018.

Transforming the Public Sector for Climate Governance

CAPAM 2018 BIENNIAL CONFERENCE
22-24 OCTOBER
GEORGETOWN, GUYANA

#capam2018biennial



About CAPAM:

- Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) is a non-profit association representing an international network of over 1100 senior public servants, Heads of Government, leading academics and researchers located in over 50 different countries across the Commonwealth.
- The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions is an institutional member of Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM).
- CAPAM has been announcing its International Innovations Awards (IIA) Programme bi-annually, since 1998. The CAPAM Awards celebrate the spirit of innovation in the public service by recognizing organizations that have made significant contributions to improve governance and services in the public sector.

Awardees:

Unnayan Banka:

- The initiative entitled “Unnayan Banka- Reinventing Education Using Technology of Banka District, State of Bihar has been awarded under the Category “Innovation Incubation”.
- “Unnayan Banka” is an initiative which envisages “Quality education for all’ especially for those at the bottom of the Pyramid, using latest technologies. It’s a holistic model of overall development of youths from Education to Employability.

Unified Agriculture Markets:

- “Unified Agriculture Markets” of Co-operation Department of Government of Karnataka has also been selected under the Category ‘Innovation in Public Service Management’.
- This initiative has also been awarded the overall Gold Award for CAPAM Awards, 2018.

Sources: pib.

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

1. SWACHH SURVEKSHAN GRAMEEN AWARDS 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: SSG Survey- criteria, rankings.
- For Mains: SSG- significance.
- Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently conferred Swachh Survekshan Grameen Awards 2018 to top ranked states and districts. The rankings were based on the National Swachh Survekshan Grameen 2018 of the Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- Haryana was ranked as **best State**.
- Satara District of Maharashtra was ranked as **best district**.
- Uttar Pradesh was rewarded for **maximum citizens' participation**.

Zonal Ranking – Top States:

- Northern: Haryana.
- Southern: Andhra Pradesh.
- Eastern: Chhattisgarh.
- Western: Gujarat.
- North-East: Sikkim.
- Union Territories: Dadar & Nagar Haveli.

Zonal Ranking – Top Districts:

- Northern: Rewari (Haryana).
- Southern: Peddapalli (Telangana).
- Eastern: Surajpur (Chhattisgarh).
- Western: Satara (Maharashtra).
- North-East: Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh).

About Swachh Survekshan Grameen:

- SSG is a rural cleanliness survey to rank all states and districts on basis of qualitative and quantitative evaluation.
- **The objective of SSG 2018** is to undertake ranking of states and districts on basis of their performance attained on key quantitative and qualitative Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) parameters. The rankings will be based on taking into account set of comprehensive cleanliness parameters.
- **The criteria of SSG-2018** include survey of public places, citizens' perspective of cleanliness, their recommendations and data from SBM-G. As part of it, more than 6000 villages in 698 districts across India were covered. It covered nearly 30,000 public places namely schools, anganwadis, public health centres, haat/bazaars/religious places in these villages.

Weightage:

- The SSG 2018 will assign 65% weightage to findings and outcome and 35% to service level parameters to be obtained from Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) of the MDWS.
- The weights to different elements of SSG are direct observation of sanitation in public places (30%), citizen's feedback on sanitation parameters (35%), service level progress on sanitation progress in the country as per SBMG-MIS (35%).

Survey:

- The SSG 2018 was conducted by independent survey agency in all districts from 1st to 31st August 2018.
- It will also take feedback from over 50 lakh citizens on SBM related issues through direct interaction as well as online feedback.

Sources: pib.

2. 'MAIN NAHIN HUM' PORTAL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the portal.
- **Context:** The government has launched 'Main Nahin Hum' portal for IT professionals.

About 'Main Nahin Hum' portal and its significance:

- The portal, which works on the theme 'Self4Society', will enable IT professionals and organisations to bring together their efforts towards social causes on one platform. The platform has been developed by MyGov.
- The portal will also help the employees in identifying the volunteering opportunities for social causes and they can also collaborate with other employees on such projects.
- In doing so, the portal is expected to help catalyse greater collaboration towards the service of the weaker sections of society, especially by leveraging the benefits of technology.
- It is also expected to generate wider participation of interested people who are motivated to work for the benefit of society.

Way ahead:

- Since India has already become the third largest in terms of the start-up, social start-ups should become an intrinsic part of the ecosystem.
- Some of areas which require participation are saving natural resources such as water, agriculture, climate change etc.

Sources: pib.

3. IMPRESS SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** Union HRD Ministry has launched the web portal of IMPRESS scheme with an aim to build a research ecosystem in educational institutions.

IMPRESS Scheme:

- The **objective** of Impactful Policy Research in Social Sciences (IMPRESS) is to identify and fund research proposals in social sciences with maximum impact on the governance and society.
 - It will provide an opportunity for social science researchers in any institution in the country which includes all universities (central and state) and also a few private institutions meeting the requirement.
 - The scheme will focus on broad thematic areas such as state and democracy, urban transformation; media, culture and society; employment, skills and rural transformation; governance; innovation and public policy; macro-trade and economic policy and social media and technology.
 - Under IMPRESS, 1,500 research projects will be awarded for two years to support social science research in the higher educational institutions.
 - **The Indian Council of Social Science and Research (ICSSR) will be the project implementing agency.**
 - The scheme will be implemented till March, 2021.

Sources: the hindu.

4. KARNATAKA LAUNCHES SAMRUDDHI SCHEME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** Karnataka has launched Samruddhi scheme for aspiring SC/ST rural entrepreneurs.

About Samruddhi:

- It is a rural entrepreneurship programme for Scheduled Castes (ST) and Scheduled Tribes (SC) in Karnataka.
- Through this rural employment and skill development programme, the government will partner with private organisations to provide training free of cost.
- The industry partners would invest up to 10 percent or more in retail management, taxation policies and GST, inventory management, soft skills, logistics, etc.”
- The government has also set up a seed grant of up to Rs 10 lakh to help the beneficiaries set up their own franchises or retail outlets. It hopes to create 10,000 SC/ST rural entrepreneurs over the next three years.
- As part of the Samruddhi scheme, the government will also provide a seed grant to deserving youth to start their own franchises or retail outlets after they receive the required training and certification.

Significance of the scheme:

- The government is hoping to create around 10,000 entrepreneurs annually in the next three years from among the economically and socially marginalised communities in the State.
- These entrepreneurs will in their turn create jobs in rural and semi urban areas, and help push employment and skill development in the State further.
- The government hopes that this scheme will ultimately benefit aspiring, young citizens from rural and tier II cities and ensure sustainable and all-round development.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. GOVERNMENT E-PAYMENTS ADOPTION RANKING (GEAR)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About GEAR, performance of India.
- For Mains: e- Payments- significance, challenge, concerns and potential.
- **Context:** The 2018 **Government E-Payments Adoption Ranking (GEAR) study** has been released by **VISA**, a global leader in payments technology. This is the third edition of the study after those in 2007 and 2011.
- The 2018 GEAR, an Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) global Index and benchmarking study commissioned by Visa, ranks governments by quantifying their e-payment capabilities based on various indicators.
- The ranking is based on seven parameters viz. Government-to-Citizen (G2C), Citizen-to-Government (C2G), Business-to-Government (B2G), Government-to-Business (G2B) transactions, infrastructure, socio-economic and policy environment.

Performance of India across various categories:

In the latest study, India is ranked 28th among 73 countries. This is up from 36th rank in 2011.

- **B2C category:** India leads the Business to Government category, along with Australia, Singapore and South Korea. The category refers to the ease with which businesses can calculate and make their tax payments, register and renew their registrations online and digitally calculate their pension fund contributions, thereby making those payments on a periodic basis.
- **G2B category:** At the same time, by simplifying refund and loan application processes, wherein businesses can track status digitally, coupled with dedicated digital portals to submit proposals for government procurement services, India leads the Government to Business category as well.
- The **C2G category** evaluates the extent to which citizens can complete various transactions electronically by assessing six indicators, including online one-stop shops, income tax payments, and obtaining an ID card. India ranks third in this category, along with four other countries, while France and the UAE top the list.
- The **G2C category** captures the extent to which various government transfers like tax refunds, pension and welfare benefits and unemployment benefits can be accessed electronically. In India, while everything pertaining to tax filing and pension and welfare benefits has smoothly migrated to digital, the unemployment benefits system continues to be driven by paper processes, as a result of which the country still lags behind, in 25th place.
- The **infrastructure and socio-economic categories** examine the supportive infrastructure for e-payments and their acceptance in society at large. With respect to infrastructure, while India has witnessed an increase in Internet penetration over recent years, substantial pockets of communities continue to lack reliable access, leaving country ranked 58th.
- In the **socio-economic category**, India is ranked 60th out of 73 countries, highlighting an urgent need to focus efforts on enhancing educational levels, as well as improving citizens' and businesses' engagement with Internet-enabled services.
- The **policy category** assesses the policy environment and examines how it spurs e-payments adoption. Though India ranks at a low 40th owing to a few inhibiting policy decisions, the government's efforts to strengthen Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) with an objective to foster innovation and protect country's traditional knowledge could motivate innovation and act as a catalyst businesses to grow. Incentives to consumers and merchants to adopt digital payments are also restricted to selected e-payment methods, potentially limiting the effectiveness of these measures.

Sources: the hindu.

2. DIGI YATRA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of Digi Yatra.

- **Context:** Union Ministry of Civil Aviation has released policy on biometric based digital processing of passengers at airports called Digi Yatra. With this initiative, ticket booking, airport entry and boarding pass security check-in will be made digital.

Digi Yatra:

- The initiative seeks to promote paperless and hassle-free air travel. It will be operational by end of February, 2019 at Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports. In later phase, Airports Authority of India (AAI) will roll out this initiative at Kolkata, Varanasi, Pune and Vijayawada airports by April 2019.
- Under it, there will be one-time verification at departure airport while travelling for first time using ID. After successful verification, facial recognition biometric will be captured and stored in Digi Yatra ID.
- For this system, passengers will be registered through centralized system and will be given Digi Travel ID. This ID will include details such as names of passengers, their e-mail id, mobile number and any other identity card in case of non-basis. Travelers can also use this ID when booking tickets.

Significance:

- This initiative will bring benefits to passengers and all stakeholders involved in process including airport operator who will be having travel information in advance for better resource planning and real-time data of passengers within terminal. This will enable the operator to take proactive action to avoid congestion.

Sources: the hindu.

3. MEDWATCH

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of MedWatch.
- **What is it?** It is an innovative mobile health App launched by the Indian Air Force (IAF) to provide health information to the users, including first-aid and other health and nutritional topics. It is the first mobile health app in the three Armed Services.



Key facts:

- The app is conceived by the doctors of IAF and developed in house by Directorate of Information Technology (DIT) with ZERO financial outlay.
- 'MedWatch' will provide correct, Scientific and authentic health information to air warriors and all citizens of India.
- It comprises of host of features like information on basic First Aid, Health topics and Nutritional Facts; reminders for timely Medical Review, Vaccination and utility tools like Health Record Card, BMI calculator, helpline numbers and web links.

Sources: pib.

4. YOUTH ROAD SAFETY LEARNERS LICENCE PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the programme.
- **Context:** The government has launched the Youth Road Safety Learners Licence programme.

About the youth road safety learners licence programme:

- It is a PPP initiative to be run in collaboration with Diageo India and the Institute of Road Traffic Education (IRTE).
- It attempts to bring a formal and structured training program for the young, first-time drivers as they apply for learner's license.
- It covers varied aspects of responsible driving including defensive driving, ill effects of driving under the influence of alcohol, speeding and wearing of helmets spread over two days.
- In the first year, the programme will cover 20 universities with a total of 400 programmes across the country.

Significance:

- The programme is a part of the Union Government's efforts to emphasise on the importance of road safety, as recent times have seen an alarming rise in road fatalities especially among the youth.
- The programme will help the government achieve its target of reducing road accidents by 50 percent by 2020. It will help improve road safety awareness amongst the young adults by inculcating behavioural change and creating awareness about responsible driving habits.

Background:

- India accounts for 12.5 per cent (over 1.45 lakh fatalities a year) of global road accidents, with one road accident occurring every four minutes. Alarmingly, 72 per cent victims involved in such road mishaps are between the age groups of 15-44 years with speeding, reckless and drunk driving being the top reason accounting for 1.5 per cent of road traffic accidents and 4.6 per cent of fatalities.
- Some of the major factors resulting in high road accidents include rash driving, drunken driving and the lack of adequate safety measures like not wearing helmets.

Sources: pib.

5. ASK DISHA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Ask Disha- features and significance.
- **Context:** Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has launched Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered chatbot— Ask Disha ((Digital Interaction to Seek Help Anytime) to help its users answer various queries.

About Ask Disha:

- The chatbot is special computer programme designed to simulate conversation with users, especially over the internet.
- The first-of-its-kind initiative by IRCTC is aimed at facilitating accessibility by answering users' queries pertaining to various services offered to railway passengers.
- The chatbot is voice enabled and will support several regional languages in the near future. It will offer greatly improved and intuitive customer support by answering customer queries pertaining to all aspects of the services that IRCTC provides.
- The essential features of AskDisha include ability to quickly answer to customer queries, ability to provide round-the-clock customer support, ability to multitask, zero waiting time for query to get answered and overall ability to provide customer with stress-free experience and overall customer satisfaction.

Sources: pib.

6. #SELF4SOCIETY APP

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the app.
- **Context:** #Self4Society app, developed by MyGov, has been launched by the government to help coordinate volunteer work undertaken by professionals.

About #Self4Society App:

- This platform will help to create better synergies among so many CSR and other initiatives and lead to a much better outcome of the efforts of professionals.
- Companies have observed that a spirit of service and volunteering improves employee satisfaction and reduces employee attrition.
- The app will have incentives, gamification and intra- and inter-company competitions, and social networking.
- The volunteer time for the government's flagship programmes such as Swachh Bharat is expected to increase.

Sources: pib.

Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. SITTWE PORT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Sittwe port- location, significance, challenges and potential.
- Context:** India and Myanmar have signed an important MoU for the appointment of a private Port Operator for the Operation and Maintenance of Sittwe Port, Paletwa Inland Water Terminal and associated facilities included in the Kaladan Multi Model Transit Transport Project in implementation of India's Act East Policy.

Where is Sittwe located?

- Sittwe is the capital of Rakhine State (which has been in the news for the plight of Rohingya Muslims) in south-western Myanmar.
- It is located at the mouth of the Kaladan river, which flows into Mizoram in north-eastern India.

Significance of this port for India:

- India has for years sought transit access through Bangladesh to ship goods to the landlocked north-eastern States.
- At present, the only route to this region from the rest of India is a rather circuitous one through a narrow strip of Indian territory nicknamed the Chicken's Neck in West Bengal, sandwiched between Bhutan and Bangladesh.
- The new route through Sittwe would significantly lower the cost and distance of movement from Kolkata to Mizoram and beyond.

About Kaladan project:

- The Kaladan project connects Sittwe Port in Myanmar to the India-Myanmar border.
 - The project was jointly initiated by India and Myanmar to create a multi-modal platform for cargo shipments from the eastern ports to Myanmar and to the North-eastern parts of the country through Myanmar.
 - It is expected to open up sea routes and promote economic development in the North-eastern states, and also add value to the economic, commercial and strategic ties between India and Myanmar.
 - This project will reduce distance from Kolkata to Sittwe by approximately 1328 km and will reduce the need to transport good through the narrow Siliguri corridor, also known as Chicken's Neck.

Way ahead:

- Following this MoU the process of identifying bidders to maintain these facilities will be initiated by floating an RFP.
- Subsequent to the commencement of operations at this port, it would offer new infrastructure for trade including between India and Myanmar, thereby contributing to job creation and development in the whole region, particularly in the Rakhine and Chin States of Myanmar.

Sources: the hindu.

2. CHABAHAR PORT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Location of Chabahar port.
- For Mains: Significance of the port for India, Challenges to its development.
- Context:** India, Afghanistan and Iran recently held their first trilateral meeting on Chabahar port project during which they reviewed its implementation. The meeting assumes significance as the strategically-located port on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast was coming under the ambit of US sanctions on Tehran.

Outcomes of the meeting:

- The meeting decided to constitute a follow-up committee that would hold its first meeting within two months in Chabahar port. The committee would discuss and aim to finalise protocol to harmonise transit, roads, customs and consular matters for making the route attractive and decrease logistic costs.

Where is Chabahar port?

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

Why Chabahar port is crucial for India?

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

Sources: the hindu.

3. MOU AMONGST BRICS NATIONS REGARDING COOPERATION IN THE SOCIAL AND LABOUR SPHERE

What to study?

- For Prelims: About BRICS and its summits.
- For Mains: Highlights and significance of MoU.
- Context:** The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China, South Africa, regarding Cooperation in the Social and Labour Sphere. The MoU was signed on 3rd August, 2018 during BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers (LEM) Meeting.

As per the MoU:

- The parties including India have agreed to cooperate and hold mutual events in the prominent areas viz. labour legislation and enforcement, protection of workers' rights with focus on vulnerable groups, Employment and labour market policies, Professional education, skills and training and Social protection.
- The member countries may utilize the BRICS Network of Labour Research Institutes and BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework for cooperation on Social Security and other labour issues.
- However, the Memorandum is not an International Treaty and does not create rights and obligations for the parties governed by international law.

Significance and major Impacts:

- The MoU provides a mechanism for cooperation, collaboration and maximum synergy amongst BRICS member countries with the common objective of inclusive growth and shared prosperity in the new industrial revolution.

- This would facilitate member countries to share knowledge and also implement joint programmes on matter of Labour and Employment, Social Security and Social dialogue.
- This would also ensure networking of International Training Centre of International Labour Organisation (ILO) with the BRICS Network of Labour Institutes which includes V.V. Giri National Labour Institute of India. This network would specifically focus on the theme of youth employment and research on new forms of employment. This network will also explore new learning technologies, including virtual network to deepen cooperation, exchange of information and capacity building.
- The BRICS Social Security cooperation framework will deepen social security cooperation among BRICS nations and would facilitate cooperation for improvement of social security systems and social security agreements among member countries.

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- **Summits:** The BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually with discussions representing spheres of political and socio-economic coordination, in which member countries have identified several business opportunities, economic complementarities and areas of cooperation.
- **Chairship:** The Chairship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S. Over and above the summit, BRICS cooperation in the past decade has expanded to include an annual programme of over 100 sectoral meetings. Cooperation among members is predicated on three levels or "tracks" of interaction, namely:
 - Track I: Formal diplomatic engagement between the national governments.
 - Track II: Engagement through government-affiliated institutions, e.g. state-owned enterprises and business councils.
 - Track III: Civil society and "people-to-people" engagement.

Facts for Prelims:

- The First BRIC Summit was held in June 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia.
- The Ninth BRICS Summit was held in Xiamen, China under the theme "BRICS: Stronger Partnership for a Brighter Future". The leaders built on achievements already made with a shared vision for future development of BRICS, discussed international and regional issues of common concern and adopted the Xiamen Declaration.

Sources: pib.

4. CURRENCY SWAP AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND JAPAN

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, significance and implications of Currency swap.
- **Context:** Japan and India have entered into a \$75-billion currency swap arrangement that will bolster the country's firepower as it battles a steep drop in the rupee's value. An agreement to this effect was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing visit to Japan.

Key facts:

- The Agreement shall aid in bringing greater stability to foreign exchange & capital markets in India. The facility will serve as a second line of defence for the rupee after the \$393.5 billion of foreign exchange reserves that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has at its disposal.
- Under the arrangement, India can acquire dollars from Japan in exchange for rupees. Conversely, Japan can also seek dollars from India in exchange for yen.
- The arrangement will be used only when required, and will help meet short-term liquidity mismatches.

Significance of the agreement:

- The currency swap agreement is an important measure in improving the confidence in the Indian market and it would not only enable the agreed amount of capital being available to India, but it will also bring down the cost of capital for Indian entities while accessing the foreign capital market.
- The swap arrangement should aid in bringing greater stability to foreign exchange and capital markets in India. With this arrangement in place, prospects of India would further improve in tapping foreign capital for

country's developmental needs. This facility will enable the agreed amount of foreign capital being available to India for use as and when the need arises.

What is this Currency Swap Arrangement (CSA)?

- This is an arrangement, between two friendly countries, which have regular, substantial or increasing trade, to basically involve in trading in their own local currencies, where both pay for import and export trade, at the pre-determined rates of exchange, without bringing in third country currency like the US Dollar.
- In such arrangements no third country currency is involved, thereby eliminating the need to worry about exchange variations.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. DEAL REPLACING NAFTA SIGNED

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of NAFTA and United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).
- For Mains: Controversies surrounding NAFTA.
- **Context:** Canada has agreed to sign a trade deal with the United States and Mexico, revamping the North American Free Trade Agreement after almost a year of negotiations. The new deal has been named the **United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)**.
- The trilateral pact is expected to be signed by the three North American countries before the end of November, after which it would be submitted to Congress.

About United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA):

It's basically NAFTA 2.0, with major changes on cars and new policies on labor and environmental standards, intellectual property protections, and some digital trade provisions. The changes include:

- **Country of origin rules:** Automobiles must have 75% of their components manufactured in Mexico, the US, or Canada to qualify for zero tariffs (up from 62.5 percent under NAFTA).
- **Labor provisions:** 40 to 45 percent of automobile parts have to be made by workers who earn at least \$16 an hour by 2023. Mexico has also agreed to pass laws giving workers the right to union representation, extend labor protections to migrant workers, and protect women from discrimination. The countries can also sanction one another for labor violations.
- **US farmers get more access to the Canadian dairy market:** The US got Canada to open up its dairy market to US farmers, which was a big issue for Trump.
- **Intellectual property and digital trade:** The deal extends the terms of copyright to 70 years beyond the life of the author (up from 50). It also extends the period that a pharmaceutical drug can be protected from generic competition.
- **It also includes new provisions to deal with the digital economy,** including prohibiting duties on things like music and e-books, and protections for internet companies so they're not liable for content their users produce.
- **Sunset clause:** The agreement puts in a 16-year "sunset" clause — meaning the terms of the agreement expire, or "sunset," after a set period of time. The deal is also subject to a review every six years, at which point the US, Mexico, and Canada can decide to extend USMCA.

What is NAFTA?

- NAFTA is the initialism for the North American Free Trade Agreement, an agreement signed by Canada, Mexico, and the United States that reduced or eliminated trade barriers in North America. (Since the U.S. and Canada already had a free trade agreement (signed in 1988), NAFTA merely brought Mexico into the trade bloc.)
- Negotiations for the trade agreement began in 1990 under the administration of George H.W. Bush and were finalized under Bill Clinton's presidency in 1993. The agreement went into effect on January 1, 1994.

What was the purpose of NAFTA?

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

Why is NAFTA controversial?

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

Sources: the hindu.

2. IORA- DELHI DECLARATION

What to study?

- For Prelims: About IORA- composition, objectives and associated institutions, highlights of Delhi declaration.
- For Mains: IORA- significance, challenges and benefits for India.
- **Context:** 21 countries in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) recently adopted the Delhi Declaration on Renewable Energy in the Indian Ocean Region. The declaration was the outcome of the 2nd IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial Meeting.

The Delhi declaration on Renewable Energy in the Indian Ocean Region:

- It calls for collaboration among IORA member states in meeting the growing demand for renewable energy in the Indian Ocean littorals, development of a common renewable energy agenda for the Indian Ocean region and promote regional capacity building.
- The declaration also calls for promotion of technology development and transfer, strengthening of public private partnerships in renewable energy and collaboration among IORA member states and the member nations of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- IORA member countries resolved to collaborate with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). As per the declaration adopted, IORA member nations will also collaborate with the ISA member nations to exchange knowledge and share views and potential interests in the renewable energy sector.
- Additionally, IORA member nations and IRENA will undertake the expansion of the Global Renewable Energy Atlas, the world’s largest-ever joint renewable resource data project, coordinated by IRENA, thereby creating the Indian Ocean region’s first and most comprehensive map and database which can then be used to tap the sizable renewable energy potential of the region.

About IORA:

- The Indian Ocean Rim Association was set up with the objective of strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean Region with 21 Member States and 7 Dialogue Partners.
- The IORA is a regional forum, tripartite in nature, bringing together representatives of Government, Business and Academia, for promoting co-operation and closer interaction among them.
- It is based on the principles of Open Regionalism for strengthening Economic Cooperation particularly on Trade Facilitation and Investment, Promotion as well as Social Development of the region.
- India, Australia, Iran IR, Indonesia Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius, Madagascar, UAE, Yemen, Seychelles, Somalia, Comoros and Oman are members of IORA.

Sources: pib.

3. ASEM SUMMIT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on ASEM and significance of the grouping.
- Context:** 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is being held in Brussels.
- Theme:** 'Global Partners for Global Challenges'.

ASEM:

- The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation bringing together the 28 European Union member states, 2 other European countries, and the European Union with 21 Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretariat.
- The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between the two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership.
- It was officially established on 1 March 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand.
- The ASEM Summit is a biennial meeting between the Heads of State and Government, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. COUNTERING AMERICA'S ADVERSARIES THROUGH SANCTIONS ACT (CAATSA)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About S-400 missile systems, CAATSA- provisions and brief overview.
- For Mains: Issues associated and how CAATSA would affect India- Russia bilateral relations.
- Context:** India and Russia have concluded the contract for five S-400 'Triumf' missile systems, one of the biggest defence deals in recent times.
- However, the U.S. has warned the deal would invoke sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) law.

What is CAATSA?

- CAATSA is a US federal law that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia. It includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors.
- However, any imposition of sanctions on India, which is now a major defence partner, could be disastrous for the bilateral relationship.

What is S-400?

- It is an air defence missile system that can take down enemies' aircraft in the sky from the surface itself.
- The S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system, capable of destroying hostile strategic bombers, jets, missiles and drones at a range of 380-km.
- The S-400 is an upgraded version of the S-300 systems. The missile system, manufactured by Almaz-Antey, has been in service in Russia since 2007.

Why does India want S-400?

- S-400 would be like a "booster shot" in the Indian Air Force's (IAF) arm. India needs to be well-equipped against neighboring threats. Pakistan has over 20 fighter squadrons, with upgraded F-16s, and inducting J-17 from China in large numbers. China has 1,700 fighters, including 800 4-Gen fighters.

Sources: the hindu.

2. MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT DECIDES TO ABOLISH CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the abolition.
- For Mains: Capital punishment- concerns, its effectiveness, challenges and need for abolition.
- **Context:** The Malaysian Cabinet has decided to abolish the death penalty for all crimes and halt all pending executions. The government has taken the decision to scrap capital punishment following strong domestic opposition to the practice.

Why is it being abolished?

- Activists contended that the death penalty is barbarous, unimaginably cruel and pointless, as it has never been proven to deter serious crimes. They say, once the sentence is scrapped, Malaysia will have the moral authority to fight for the lives of Malaysians facing death sentences abroad.

Background:

- Capital punishment is currently mandatory in Malaysia for a wide range of crimes including murder, drug trafficking, treason, kidnapping, possession of firearms and acts of terror.
- The sentence is carried out in the nation by hanging, a legacy which has lived on since the British colonial rule.

Can capital punishment reduce crime rates?

- Statistics have not been able to prove or disprove the efficacy of capital punishment as a deterrent.
- While the U.K. has seen an increase in murders since 1965 when capital punishment for murder was removed from the statute book, Canada has not seen any such impact since it abolished the death penalty in 1976.
- The underlying socio-economic conditions in a society that cause crimes seem to have as much of an impact on the increase or decrease of crimes as the law does.

Need of the hour:

- It is not the severity of the punishment but the certainty and uniformity of it which will reduce crime.
- Even for capital punishment to work as a deterrent, the fairness of the investigation, the certainty of conviction, and the speed of the trial are vital.
- With the police and judicial independence being under a cloud, especially after the incidents in Kathua and Unnao, the deterrent value of capital punishment seems diminished unless police reforms and fast-track courts are a part of the package.

Sources: the hindu.

3. CURRENCY MONITORING LIST

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is currency monitoring list?
- For Mains: Why is India placed in the list?- implications and what needs to be done?
- **Context:** In its latest report, the US has said that it could remove India from its currency monitoring list of major trading partners citing certain developments and steps taken by New Delhi, which address some of its major concerns.

Background:

- India was for the first time, in April, placed by the US in its currency monitoring list of countries with potentially questionable foreign exchange policies along with five other countries — China, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland.

Recent developments:

- India's circumstances have shifted markedly, as the central bank's net sales of foreign exchange over the first six months of 2018 led net purchases over the four quarters through June 2018 to fall to \$4 billion, or 0.2% of GDP.

- This represented a notable change from 2017, when purchases over the first three quarters of the year pushed net purchases of foreign exchange above 2% of GDP. Recent sales came amid a turnaround in foreign portfolio inflows, as foreign investors pulled portfolio capital out of India (and many other emerging markets) over the first half of the year.
- The rupee depreciated by around 7% against the dollar and by more than 4% on a real effective basis in the first half of 2018. India has a significant bilateral goods trade surplus with the US, totalling \$23 billion over the four quarters through June 2018, but India's current account is in deficit at 1.9% of GDP.

On what basis is a country named a 'currency manipulator'?

- The three pre-conditions for being named currency manipulator are: a trade surplus of over \$20 billion with the US, a current account deficit surplus of 3% of the GDP, and persistent foreign exchange purchases of 2% plus of the GDP over 12 months.

Sources: the hindu.

4. THE INTERMEDIATE-RANGE NUCLEAR FORCES (INF) TREATY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of INF Treaty.
- **Context:** U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that he would "terminate" the INF Treaty in response to a long-running dispute over Russian noncompliance with the treaty.

What's the issue?

- The United States first alleged in its July 2014 Compliance Report that Russia is in violation of its INF Treaty obligations "not to possess, produce, or flight-test" a ground-launched cruise missile having a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers or "to possess or produce launchers of such missiles."
- Subsequent State Department assessments in 2015, 2016, and 2017 repeated these allegations. Russia denies that it is in violation of the agreement. On December 8, 2017, the Trump administration released a strategy to counter alleged Russian violations of the Treaty.

About the Intermediate- Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty:

- The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty required the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate and permanently forswear all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers.
 - The treaty marked the first time the superpowers had agreed to reduce their nuclear arsenals, eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons, and utilize extensive on-site inspections for verification. As a result of the INF Treaty, the United States and the Soviet Union destroyed a total of 2,692 short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missiles by the treaty's implementation deadline of June 1, 1991.
 - Despite its name, the INF Treaty covers all types of ground-launched cruise and ballistic missiles — whether their payload is conventional or nuclear. Moscow and Washington are prohibited from deploying these missiles anywhere in the world, not just in Europe. However, the treaty applies only to ground-launched systems. Both sides are free to deploy air- and sea-launched missiles within the 500-to-5,500-kilometer range.

What are the military implications of withdrawal?

- 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.

What are the diplomatic implications of withdrawal?

- Withdrawal is likely to be controversial with U.S. allies in NATO, further splitting the alliance at a difficult time for transatlantic relations. Many Western European NATO states favor retaining the INF, in conjunction with previous U.S. policy designed to push Moscow back into compliance. This raises concerns that divisions within NATO may worsen when the United States officially withdraws from the INF.
- Withdrawal will probably not lead to a new INF deal. Given its heavy investment in intermediate-range systems, China will not take up Trump's offer of talks with the United States and Russia. Moscow seems to be in no mood for negotiations.
- Trump's 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.

Sources: the hindu.

5. CURRENCY MANIPULATOR TAG

What to study?

- For Prelims: Meaning of Currency manipulator.
- For Mains: Concerns, implications, challenges and issues associated with currency manipulation.

What is currency manipulation and who determines it?

- The US Department of the Treasury publishes a semi-annual report in which the developments in global economic and exchange rate policies are reviewed.
- If a US trade partner meets three assessment criteria, the US labels it a currency manipulator. The US then tries to solve it via bilateral talks.

Implications:

- The October report of the Treasury says that it continues to press major trading partners that have maintained large, persistent external surpluses to support stronger and more balanced global growth by facilitating domestic demand growth as the primary engine for economic expansion.

How are countries identified for the currency manipulation list?

- The US Treasury has established thresholds for the three criteria.
- First, a significant bilateral trade surplus with the US is one that is at least \$20 billion; second, a material current account surplus is one that is at least 3% of GDP; and third, persistent, one-sided intervention reflected in repeated net purchases of foreign currency and total at least 2% of an economy's GDP over a year.
- The Treasury's goal is to focus attention on those nations whose bilateral trade is most significant to the US economy and whose policies are the most material for the global economy.

How are currencies on the watch list faring in 2018?

- Such currencies have been falling against the dollar. Japan's yen fell 0.13%, South Korea's won slipped 5.13%, Switzerland's Swiss Franc fell 2.3% and China's yuan dropped 6.3%.

Does India feature on the currency manipulation list?

- The US Treasury, in its report, said no major trading partner met the criteria to be designated as manipulating its currency. It has kept India, China, Japan, South Korea, Germany and Switzerland on the monitoring list.
- It said that India's circumstances have shifted markedly, as the central bank's net sales of forex over the first six months of 2018 led net purchases over the four quarters through June 2018 to fall to \$4 billion, or 0.2% of GDP. The rupee has depreciated by 13.05% this fiscal.

Do policymakers in India need to worry?

- Economists say India doesn't need to worry as it only meets one of the three criteria. If this remains the case at the time of its next report, Treasury would remove India from the Monitoring List.
- India being on the watch list was not important. If we were to be labelled as manipulators, there would have been pressure on India to reduce tariffs.

6. BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP IN US

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Meaning of Birthright Citizenship and issues related, implications of the recent proposal.
- Context:** President Trump recently said he was preparing an executive order that would nullify the long-accepted constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship in the United States.
- To accomplish the idea, Mr. Trump would have to find a way around the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

What is the 14th Amendment?

- The 14th Amendment, which grants citizenship to anyone born on U.S. soil, was ratified in 1868 after the Civil War so that recently-freed slaves could become citizens.
- The amendment reads, "***all person born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.***"

What is birthright citizenship?

- Birthright citizenship, or *jus soli*, a legal term that means "right of the soil," is the right guaranteed by the 14th Amendment, and upheld by the Supreme Court, that says anyone born on U.S soil is automatically a citizen.

What's the main contention now?

- Some conservatives have long made the argument that the 14th Amendment was meant to apply only to citizens and legal permanent residents, not immigrants who are present in the country without authorization.
- They say, birthright citizenship was based on a misreading of the amendment, and of an 1898 Supreme Court ruling that they argue pertained only to the children of legal residents.

Background:

- The U.S. is one of more than 30 other countries that also grant citizenship to children born within their borders.
- Citizenship policies vary around the world, somewhat based on geography. Countries in Europe or Asia don't have similar policies, but countries further west, including Canada and most South American nations, do.

Implications:

- Aside from being unconstitutional, such an executive order would exacerbate racial tensions, exploit fears and drive further polarization across the country at a moment that calls for the promotion of unity and inclusion.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. COMPREHENSIVE CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM (CCIT)

What to study?

- For Prelims: CCIT- key facts.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for convention, terrorism- threats, concerns and need for international cooperation in curbing.
- Context:** External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj reiterated India's demand for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the UN General Assembly recently.

Background:

- As a country affected by terrorism, long before the more powerful countries of the developed world began to take cognisance of the threat it poses to international peace and security, India has always condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations; stressed that tackling such behaviour required a holistic approach and collective action; and recommended that the scope of legal instruments must be expanded to bring the perpetrators of terrorism to justice.

- India, therefore, has a vital stake in the formulation of counter-terrorist measures at the international level, including a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). It is in this context that India had proposed a draft of a CCIT as far back as 1996.

CCIT:

What is it?

- The Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism is a proposed treaty which intends to criminalize all forms of international terrorism and deny terrorists, their financiers and supporters access to funds, arms, and safe havens. It is a draft proposed by India in 1996 that is yet to be adopted by the UNGA.

What does it call for?

- Universal definition of terrorism: no good terrorist or bad terrorist.
- Ban on all groups regardless of country of operation, cut off access to funds and safe havens.
- Prosecution of all groups including cross border groups.
- Amending domestic laws to make cross-border terror an extraditable offence.
- It also addresses, among other things, the issue of Pakistan's alleged support for cross-border terrorism in south Asia.

Concerns expressed by various countries:

- US + allies: concerns over definition of terrorism, including acts by US soldiers in international interventions without UN mandate.
- Latin American countries: concerns over international humanitarian laws being ignored.
- There are also concerns that convention will be used to target Pakistan and restrict rights of self-determination groups in Palestine, Kashmir etc.

Sources: the hindu.

2. ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Particulars and significance of the programme, and Key facts on ADB and SASEC.
- **Context:** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India have signed a \$150 Million Loan to finance continued improvements to road connectivity and efficiency of the International Trade Corridor in West Bengal and North-Eastern Region of India.
- South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation Road Connectivity Investment Program, approved in 2014, aims to expand about 500 kilometers of roads in India's North Bengal and North-Eastern Region that will enable efficient and safe transport within India and regionally with other SASEC member countries.
- The Program is an important initiative in Regional Connectivity aimed at increasing domestic and regional trade through North Bengal-North East Region International Trade corridor by upgrading key roads.

Significance of the project:

- The Project will upgrade about 65 kilometers of Imphal-Moreh Section of National Highway in Manipur, construction of about 1.5 km of an international bridge between India and Nepal, and completion of about 103 km of a State Highway in Manipur between Imphal and Tamenglong under Project-I.
- The Project will reduce transaction costs along the targeted cross-border corridors substantially, creating economies of scale and commercial prosperity.

Background:

- Manipur being a landlocked state with almost 90% of the area under difficult terrain presently has only road transport as a means of mass transport system within the state.
- Hence development of the road infrastructure is of paramount importance to improve connectivity and progress of the State and to ensure that the administrative set up reaches the isolated and remote habitats.

About SASEC:

- The SASEC programme of ADB was formed in 2001 in response to the request of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal to assist in facilitating economic cooperation among them. Sri Lanka and Maldives joined the sub-regional group in 2014.
- As a project-based partnership, SASEC programme has been helping enhance cross-border connectivity, facilitate faster and more efficient trade and promote cross-border power trade.
- The Manila, Philippines-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) serves as the Secretariat for the SASEC member countries.

Sources: pib.

3. UNESCO SITE STATUS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: UNESCO Global Geopark Network status- key facts, criteria for selection and sites in India.
- **Context:** Geological Survey of India has chosen heritage locations in Maharashtra and Karnataka for UNESCO Global Geopark Network status. The Geopark tag is akin to that of a 'World Heritage Site' for historical monuments that can bring India's famed geological features to the global stage.
- **The sites chosen are- Lonar Lake** in Maharashtra and **St. Mary's Island and Malpe beach** in coastal Karnataka are the GSI's candidates for UNESCO Global Geopark Network status.

Global Geopark:

- UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development.
- Their bottom-up approach of combining conservation with sustainable development while involving local communities is becoming increasingly popular. At present, there are 140 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 38 countries.
- An aspiring Global Geopark must have a dedicated website, a corporate identity, comprehensive management plan, protection plans, finance, and partnerships for it to be accepted.

Once a UNESCO Global Geopark, always a UNESCO Global Geopark?

- No, a UNESCO Global Geopark is given this designation for a period of four years after which the functioning and quality of each UNESCO Global Geopark is thoroughly re-examined during a revalidation process.
 - As part of the revalidation process, the UNESCO Global Geopark under review has to prepare a progress report and a field mission will be undertaken by two evaluators to revalidate the quality of the UNESCO Global Geopark. If, on the basis of the field evaluation report, the UNESCO Global Geopark continues to fulfil the criteria the area will continue as a UNESCO Global Geopark for a further four-year period (so-called "**green card**").
 - If the area no longer fulfils the criteria, the management body will be informed to take appropriate steps within a two-year period (so-called "**yellow card**"). Should the UNESCO Global Geopark not fulfil the criteria within two years after receiving a "yellow card", the area will lose its status as a UNESCO Global Geopark (so-called "**red card**").

What is the Global Geoparks Network?

- The Global Geoparks Network (GGN), of which membership is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks, is a legally constituted not-for-profit organisation with an annual membership fee.
- The GGN was founded in 2004 and is a dynamic network where members are committed to work together and exchange ideas of best practise and join in common projects to raise the quality standards of all products and practises of a UNESCO Global Geopark.
- While the GGN as a whole comes together every two years, it functions through the operation of regional networks, such as the European Geoparks Network that meets twice a year to develop and promote joint activities.

Difference between UNESCO Global Geoparks, Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites:

- UNESCO Global Geoparks, together with the other two UNESCO site designations Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites, give a complete picture of celebrating our heritage while at the same time conserving the world's cultural, biological and geological diversity, and promoting sustainable economic development.
 - While Biosphere Reserves focus on the harmonised management of biological and cultural diversity and World Heritage Sites promote the conservation of natural and cultural sites of outstanding universal value, UNESCO Global Geoparks give international recognition for sites that promote the importance and significance of protecting the Earth's geodiversity through actively engaging with the local communities.
 - In case an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark includes a World Heritage Site or Biosphere Reserve, a clear justification and evidence has to be provided on how UNESCO Global Geopark status will add value by being both independently branded and in synergy with the other designations.

Key facts:

- Lonar lake is an ancient circular lake created by a meteorite strike in Maharashtra. It is the only known meteorite crater in basaltic rock. Lonar crater became a geo-heritage site in 1979. It is relatively young geologically, at just 50,000 years old.
- Mary's Island, declared a national geo-heritage site in 1975, is estimated to be an 88-million-year-old formation that goes back to a time when Greater India broke away from Madagascar.

Sources: the hindu.

4. INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: ISA- key facts, significance and India's potential.
- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated the first Assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in New Delhi. The same event also marked the inauguration of the second IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial Meeting, and the second Global RE-Invest (Renewable Energy Investors' Meet and Expo).

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.

About IORA:

- The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), formerly known as the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative and Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), is an international organisation consisting of coastal states bordering the Indian Ocean.
- The IORA is a regional forum, tripartite in nature, bringing together representatives of Government, Business and Academia, for promoting co-operation and closer interaction among them.
- The IORA is an association of 21 countries and 7 dialogue partners which have identified 6 areas of cooperation including medicinal plants. The Coordinating Secretariat of IORA is located at Ebene, Mauritius.

Sources: the hindu.

5. INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about ICJ and comparison with ICC, overview of trade war and sanctions between US and Iran.
- Context:** International Court of Justice has ordered the United States to lift sanctions on Iran that affect imports of humanitarian goods and products and services linked to the safety of civil aviation. *The ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is legally binding.*



Background:

- Mr. Trump moved to restore tough U.S. sanctions in May after withdrawing from Tehran's nuclear accord with world powers. Iran challenged the sanctions in a case filed in July at the ICJ.

Why lift imposed sanctions?

- The U.S. sanctions "have the potential to endanger civil aviation safety" in Iran and sanctions limiting sales of goods required for humanitarian needs such as food, medicines and medical devices "may have a serious detrimental impact on the health and lives of individuals on the territory of Iran."

About ICJ:

What is it?

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

Members of the Court:

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

Who nominates the candidates?

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

What are the qualifications of ICJ judges?

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

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

- Three from Africa.
- Two from Latin America and Caribbean.

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

Independence of the Judges:

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

Sources: the hindu.

6. UN CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about CoD and its relationship wrt UN.
- **Context:** Pankaj Sharma has been appointed as ambassador and India's permanent representative to United Nations Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

About the Conference on Disarmament:

- The Conference on Disarmament (CD) is a multilateral disarmament forum established by the international community to negotiate arms control and disarmament agreements based at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The Conference meets annually in three separate sessions in Geneva.
- The Conference was first established in 1979 as the Committee on Disarmament as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community. It was renamed the Conference on Disarmament in 1984.
- The Conference succeeded three other disarmament-related bodies: the Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1960), the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1962–68) and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (1969–78).
- **Membership:** The conference is currently composed of 65 formal members, representing all areas of the world, as well as all known nuclear-weapon states. Additionally, members are organized into a number of informal regional groups to facilitate their preparation for, and representation in the plenary meetings of the Conference.

Relationship to the United Nations:

- The Conference is formally independent from the United Nations. However, while it is not formally a UN organization, it is linked to it in various ways.
- First and foremost, the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva serves as the Secretary-General of the Conference.
- Furthermore, while the Conference adopts its own rules of procedure and agenda, the United Nations General Assembly can pass resolutions recommending specific topics to the Conference.
- Finally, the Conference submits a report of its activities to the General Assembly yearly, or more frequently, as appropriate.

Sources: the hindu.

7. "FUTURE OF WORK IN INDIA" SURVEY BY WEF

What to study?

- For Prelims: About WEF and highlights of its report.
- For Mains: Significance of the report, concerns raised and challenges ahead.

Context: "Future of Work in India" survey report has been released by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

- The "Future of Work in India" survey of 770 companies conducted by the WEF (World Economic Forum) included various sectors such as textiles, banking & financial services, transport & logistics, and retail.

Highlights and findings of the report:

- Major gender gap in Indian corporates:** Four out of five retail firms hire less than 10% women. Companies in India experiencing the highest growth prefer hiring men and technology-led job growth benefits men more than women. Notably, while one in three companies preferred hiring men, only one in 10 companies said they wanted to hire more women, accentuating the gender gap rampant in the country.
- Statistics:** The report found that just 2.4% of these have half or more female employees, and as many as 71% have fewer than 10%. Out of this 71%, 30% companies have no female employees, and another 32% have less than 5%. The sector-wise breakup showed that 79% companies in retail, and 77% in transport & logistics, have less than 10% female employees, while banking & finance companies have 61% female participation and textiles 64%.
- Global comparison:** India's female workforce participation is mere 27% and stands 23% points lower than global average. Jobs in India are experiencing highest growth and companies are hiring women at only 26%. Women in India are entering workforce at a slower rate than current female workforce participation.
- More than 33% of the total companies said that they prefer to hire men, as compared to just over one-tenth that said that they are looking to hire more women going forward. In the last five years, the surveyed companies stated that they hired just 26% female workers in the job roles that saw the most growth, which is less than India's already low female labour force participation of 27%.

About WEF:

The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.

- The Forum engages the foremost political, business and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.
- It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests. The Forum strives in all its efforts to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest while upholding the highest standards of governance. Moral and intellectual integrity is at the heart of everything it does.

Sources: the hindu.

8. INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About ISSA and its role, about 'Regional Social Security Forum for Asia and the Pacific'.
- Context:** The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) was awarded the 'ISSA Good Practice Award' for administrative solution for coverage extension at the 'Regional Social Security Forum for Asia and the Pacific' held recently at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- The award recognizes the measures taken by ESIC for extension of coverage of the **Scheme for Promoting Registration of Employers and Employees (SPREE)**, reducing the rate of contribution rates for 24 months in newly implemented areas and raising the wage limit for coverage under the ESI Act.

About International Social Security Association:

- The ISSA is the principal international organization for Social Security Organizations, Govts. and Departments of Social Security.
- The ISSA was founded in 1927 under the auspices of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva.
- It promotes excellence in social security administration through professional guidelines, expert knowledge, services and support to enable its Members to develop dynamic social security systems.
- The ESI Corporation hosts ISSA Liaison Office for South Asia at New Delhi. The Liasion Office coordinates with the Member countries and Social Security Institutions in Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Iran on activities of ISSA related to social security.



Facts for Prelims:

- **The regional social security forum for Asia and the Pacific** is a triennial Forum, which is the most important social security event in the region.
- The International Social Security Association (ISSA) invites submissions for the ISSA Good Practices award for Asia and the Pacific regions, on the occasion of the triennial regional forum. The Forum provides unique opportunities to CEOs and Managers of ISSA Member Institutions to discuss key social security challenges and share their experiences.

Sources: the hindu.

9. 2ND WORLD CONFERENCE ON ACCESS TO MEDICAL PRODUCTS: ACHIEVING THE SDGS 2030

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about the conference and its organizers.
- For Mains: Significance of the Conference, Access to Medical Products- issues, concerns and opportunities.
- **Context:** To enable a holistic view on access to medical products, the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India with the support of World Health Organization is organizing the '2nd World Conference on Access to Medical Products – Achieving the SDGs 2030' at New Delhi.
- **The main objective** of the 2nd World Conference 2018 is to take forward the recommendations from the 1st World Conference 2017 and build on the work done for access to medical products in the context of SDGs, including trade agreements.
- **The specific objectives** are to promote an enabling ecosystem in the context of WHO's 13th Global Programme of Work for access to medical products; foster new approaches in innovation landscape for medical products and health technologies for accelerating research and innovation; and identify knowledge, information and policy options on the interface of international trade and health to achieve SDG 2030 goals.

Background:

- Reliable access to effective, safe, quality-assured and affordable medical products (medicines, vaccines, diagnostics, devices) is key to progressing towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the SDGs.
- UHC includes appropriate access to affordable and quality-assured medical products supporting countries in achieving the targets of the health SDGs. India's contribution towards access to medical products worldwide is well recognized.

Sources: pib.

10. SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGULATORY NETWORK (SEARN)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About SEARN and its objectives and functions.
- **Context:** Information Sharing Platform Gateway for South-East Asia Regulatory Network (SEARN) developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing has been launched. It will promote regulatory and health collaboration among the countries of the South-East Asia Region.

Background:

- In the South-East Asia region in WHO, India is actively contributing & providing support for the SEARN to guarantee access to high-quality medical products.

About SEARN:

- The South East Asia Research Network (SEARN), based at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, is a platform to facilitate research collaboration.
- It provides a forum to support the communication and dissemination of research findings, highlight research areas and a network connecting people and collaborators outside with an interest in South East Asia.

Composition:

- SEARN includes all ASEAN countries: Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Timor-Leste (East Timor) and the Philippines.

Objective are:

- Encourage communication and dissemination of research findings.
- Showcase ongoing research.
- Act as a news forum.

Facts for Prelims:

- Communicable Diseases Policy Research Group:** CDPRG is a multidisciplinary team based in Bangkok, Thailand, which conducts research in South East Asia, and beyond.
- It carries out research, with a focus on the diverse public health problems associated with communicable disease control internationally, that is in support of and for policy reform.

Sources: pib.

11. UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION (UPU)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About World Posts Day and UPU.
- Context:** *World Post Day is observed every year on October 9* to spread awareness about the postal services and their role in the everyday lives of people and businesses. The day is celebrated to mark anniversary of the establishment of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in 1874 in the Swiss Capital, Bern.
- The 2018 theme is:** "Imagine you are a letter travelling through time. What message do you wish to convey to your readers?".

About Universal Postal Union (UPU):

- It is a specialized agency of United Nations that coordinates postal policies among member nations, in addition to worldwide postal system.
- It was established in 1874 and is second oldest international organization worldwide after International Telecommunication Union (ITU) which was established in 1865. It is headquartered in Berne, Switzerland.
- It has 192 member countries.
- It is primary forum for cooperation between postal sector players among member countries.

Functions:

- It helps to ensure truly universal network of up-to-date products and services.
- It sets rules for international mail exchanges and makes recommendations for growth in mail, financial and parcel services volumes and also to improve quality of service for customers.

Sources: the hindu.

12. INTERNATIONAL COURT OF ARBITRATION

What to study?

- For Prelims: About ICC- its functions, role and composition.
- For Mains: Alternative Dispute Resolution- Need, significance and challenges.
- Context:** The NITI Aayog and ICC International Court of Arbitration had recently organised a Workshop on Best Practices in International Arbitration in New Delhi.
- The workshop is part of on-going efforts to institutionalize and streamline dispute resolution to make India a hub for doing business. It encourages and highlights the need for understanding and implementing arbitration across the spectrum of commercial contracts.

Efforts by Government of India in this regard- Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018:

- The Lok Sabha has passed the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018. It will amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.
- The Act contains provisions to deal with domestic and international arbitration, and defines the law for conducting conciliation proceedings.

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.

Way ahead:

- Moving towards a New India in 2022, ensuring legal reform is a key and critical priority. Complementing 'Make in India' vision with 'Resolve in India', strong alternate dispute resolution mechanisms are important levers in encouraging the Ease of Doing Business and Ease of Living in India.

Facts for Prelims:

- The International Court of Arbitration** is a branch of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and one of the world's leading institutions for providing international arbitration services. The International Court of Arbitration is known for resolving international commercial and business disputes, administering more than half of all arbitration disputes worldwide. The ICC seat is located in Paris.
- The International Chamber of Commerce** is an international business organization with hundreds of thousands of member companies in over 130 countries spanning virtually every sector of private enterprise.

Sources: pib.



13. UNHRC

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about NHRC and its role, objectives and significance.
- Context:** India has been re-elected to UNHRC for a period of three years beginning January 1, 2019, getting 188 votes in the Asia-Pacific category, the highest number of votes among all candidates.

Background:

- Besides India, the 18 new members were elected by absolute majority through a secret ballot. India had previously been elected to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council for the 2011-2014 and 2014-2017 terms.

About UNHRC:

- The UN body was established in 2006 with the aim of promoting and protecting human rights around the globe, as well as investigating alleged human rights violations.
- It is made up of 47 member states, which are selected by the UN General Assembly on a staggered basis each year for three-year-long terms.
- Members meet around three times a year to debate human rights issues and pass non-binding resolutions and recommendations by majority vote.
- The council also carries out the Universal Periodic Review of all UN member states, which allows civil society groups to bring accusations of human rights violations in member states to the attention of the UN.

Sources: the hindu.

14. IMF QUOTAS

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about IMF Quotas, about IMF.
- For Mains: Need for reforms.
- **Context:** India has called for quota reforms so that share of emerging nations increases in line with their growing economic position.
- Quota shares of Emerging Market & Developing Countries need increase in line with its growing relative economic position in the world.

What are IMF Quotas?

- The IMF is a quota-based institution. Quotas are the building blocks of the IMF's financial and governance structure. An individual member country's quota broadly reflects its relative position in the world economy.
- Quotas are denominated in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), the IMF's unit of account.

Multiple roles of quotas:

- **Resource Contributions:** Quotas determine the maximum amount of financial resources a member is obliged to provide to the IMF.
- **Voting Power:** Quotas are a key determinant of the voting power in IMF decisions. Votes comprise one vote per SDR100,000 of quota plus basic votes (same for all members).
- **Access to Financing:** The maximum amount of financing a member can obtain from the IMF under normal access is based on its quota.
- **SDR Allocations:** Quotas determine a member's share in a general allocation of SDRs.

Quota reviews:

- The IMF's Board of Governors conducts general quota reviews at regular intervals (no more than five years). Any changes in quotas must be approved by an 85% majority of the total voting power, and a member's own quota cannot be changed without its consent.
- Two main issues addressed in a general quota review are the size of an overall quota increase and the distribution of the increase among the members.

About IMF:

- The IMF, along with the World Bank, was conceived in 1944 at a conference in Bretton Woods, in the US state of New Hampshire.
- It aims to preserve economic stability and to tackle – or ideally prevent – financial crises. Over time, its focus has switched to the developing world.
- The IMF is funded by a charge – known as a “quota” – paid by member nations – based on a country's wealth.
- The IMF also acts as a lender of last resort, disbursing its foreign exchange reserves for short periods to any member in difficulties.

Sources: the hindu.

15. REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (RCEP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: RCEP- objectives and composition.
- For Mains: Significance, concerns by India and challenges involved.
- **Context:** The 6th Interregional Ministerial Meeting of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was held recently in Singapore.

Outcomes:

- Trade ministers of 16-member RCEP bloc, including India and China, have urged all participating countries to continue to exert all efforts for early conclusion of the negotiations.

- The meeting assumes significance as there is a tremendous pressure on India to conclude the negotiations as early as possible despite the fact that several issues pertaining to goods and services have yet to be agreed upon by the member countries.

What you need to know about RCEP?

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

India's Concerns with member countries:

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

Challenges ahead for India:

- More developed countries such as Australia and Singapore are unwilling to accommodate India's demands to liberalise their services regime and allow freer mobility of Indian workers.

Way ahead:

- The negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, among 16 Asian and Pacific Ocean countries, have entered a decisive phase. Most potential member-countries of the grouping would like to see a "substantive agreement" on the trade deal by the end of this year.
- At a meeting in Singapore countries which still have issues with the outline of the agreements reached so far may be told politely to step aside and allow a smaller group to go ahead with finalising the RCEP.

Sources: the hindu.

16. ADMM-PLUS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: ASEAN and ADMM- Plus- objectives, functions and significance.
- Context:** The 12th ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and 5th ADMM-Plus were held recently in Singapore.
- The conferences were attended by defence ministers from India, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and US. This was second time Singapore has chaired ADMM since its establishment in 2006 and first time to chair ADMM-Plus since its establishment in 2010.

Background:

- ADMM and ADMM-Plus serves as key Ministerial-level platforms in regional security architecture for promoting strategic dialogue and practical cooperation between ASEAN and its partners.

About ASEAN:

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
 - At present there are 10 members namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.
 - The motto of ASEAN is "One Vision, One Identity, One Community".

ADMM-Plus:

- ADMM-Plus is platform for ASEAN and its eight dialogue partners to strengthen security and defence co-operation for peace, stability, and development in the region. Its objective is to promote mutual trust and confidence between defence establishments through greater dialogue and transparency.
- The inaugural ADMM-Plus was convened in Hanoi, Vietnam in 2010. The defence ministers then had agreed on five areas of practical cooperation, including maritime security, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian assistance.

Sources: the hindu.

17. FINANCIAL ACTION TASK FORCE (FATF)

What to study?

- For Prelims: FATF, Grey list, G7.
- For Mains: What is Grey list and Black list, how are countries in the list affected?
- **Context:** After an on-site assessment of the steps taken by Pakistan to curb terror financing and money laundering, a visiting Financial Action Task Force (FATF) team has finalised a report with 40 recommendations for de-listing Islamabad from its grey list from September next year.
- The 40 recommendations are segregated in 11 outcomes performance benchmarks. Pakistan is compliant in more than 50% of the recommendations.

Background:

- Pakistan was placed on the grey list by the FATF in June for failing to curb anti-terror financing.
- It has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations by the Paris-based FATF, a measure that officials here fear could further hurt its economy.

About FATF:**What is it?**

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7.
- It is a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.
- The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.

Objectives:

- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

Functions:

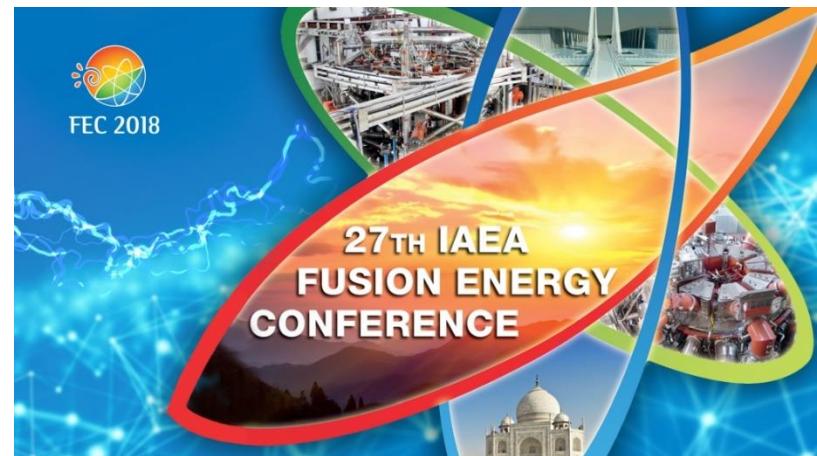
- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally.
- In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

Sources: the hindu.

18. FUSION ENERGY CONFERENCE (FEC 2018)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: FEC 2018, IAEA-significance, objectives, composition and related key facts.
- Context:** The 27th Fusion Energy Conference (FEC 2018) was held recently in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- It was organised by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and hosted by Department of Atomic Energy and Gandhinagar-based Institute of Plasma Research.



Fusion Energy Conference (FEC 2018):

- The 27th IAEA Fusion Energy Conference (FEC 2018) aims to provide a forum for the discussion of key physics and technology issues as well as innovative concepts of direct relevance to the use of nuclear fusion as a source of energy.
- The scientific scope of FEC 2018 is intended to reflect the priorities of this new era in fusion energy research.
- With the participation of international organizations such as the ITER Organization and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), as well as the collaboration of more than forty countries and several research institutes, including those working on smaller plasma devices, it is expected that this conference will, like previous conferences in the series, serve to identify possibilities and means for continuous and effective international collaboration in this area.

About IAEA:

- The IAEA is the world's centre for cooperation in the nuclear field. It was set up as the world's "Atoms for Peace" organization in 1957 within the United Nations family. The Agency works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to promote the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.
- It seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.
- IAEA reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.
- The IAEA has its headquarters in Vienna, Austria.
- The IAEA serves as an intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear technology and nuclear power worldwide.

Board of Governors:

- 22 member states (must represent a stipulated geographic diversity) — elected by the General Conference (11 members every year) – 2 year term.
- At least 10 member states — nominated by the outgoing Board.
- Board members each receive one vote.
- Recommendations to the General Conference on IAEA activities and budget.
- Responsible for publishing IAEA standards.
- Responsible for making most of the policy of the IAEA.
- Appoints the Director General subject to General Conference approval.

General Conference:

- 169 member states — one vote per member.
- Forum for debate on current issues and policies.
- Meets once a year.
- Approve the actions and budgets passed on from the Board of Governors.
- Approves the nominee for Director General.

Sources: the hindu.

19. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STATUS AND PROTECTION OF CORAL REEFS (STAPCOR – 2018)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About STAPCOR, Coral reefs- significance, threats and measures to save them.
- Context:** The International Conference on Status and Protection of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR – 2018) is being held at **Bangaram coral Island of Territory of Lakshadweep**.
- Theme:** “Reef for Life”
- Organizers:** It was jointly organized by Department of Environment and Forest, Union Territory of Lakshadweep Administration with the technical support of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and in association with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Environmental Information System (ENVIS) in consonance with declaration of year 2018 as 3rd decadal International year of Reefs.



What is STAPCOR?

- The effect of climate change and global warming along with El-Nino on the corals has lead to heavy bleaching internationally during the year 1998.
- This led to the foundation of STAPCOR with a decision to have a international conference in every 10 years to review the status and progress of coral reefs all over the world.

The goals of the 3rd IYOR – 2018 are to:

- Strengthen awareness about ecological, economic, social and cultural value of coral reefs and associated ecosystems.
- Improve understanding of the critical threats to reefs and generate both practical and innovative solutions to reduce these threats.
- Generate urgent action to develop and implement effective management strategies for conservation and sustainable use of these ecosystems.

Background:

- The first IYOR was designated in 1997 in response to the increasing threats on coral reefs and associated ecosystems.
- The hope was to increase awareness of the value of and threats to coral reefs, and to promote conservation, research and management efforts on a global scale.

What are Corals?

- Corals are invertebrates belonging to a large group of colourful and fascinating animals called Cnidarians. Other animals in this group include jellyfish and sea anemones.
- Each individual coral animal is called a polyp, and most live in groups of hundreds to thousands of genetically identical polyps that form a ‘colony’.
- The colony is created by a process called budding, where the original polyp literally grows copies of itself.

Hard and Soft Corals:

- Corals are generally classified as either “hard” or “soft”. There are around 800 known species of hard coral, also known as ‘reef building’ or scleractinian corals. Soft corals, or octocorals, which include seas fans, sea feathers and sea whips, don’t have the rock-like calcareous skeleton, instead they grow wood-like cores for support and fleshy rinds for protection.
- Soft corals also live in colonies, that often resemble brightly coloured plants or trees, and are easy to tell apart from hard corals as their polyps have tentacles that occur in multiples of 8, and have a distinctive feathery appearance. Soft corals are found in oceans from the equator to the north and south poles, generally in caves or on ledges. Here, they hang down in order to capture food floating by in the currents.

What are coral reefs?

- Coral reefs have evolved on earth over the past 200 to 300 million years, and have developed a unique and highly evolved form of symbiosis. Coral polyps have developed this relationship with tiny single-celled algae known as zooxanthellae. Inside the tissues of each coral polyp live these zooxanthellae, sharing space and nutrients.
- This symbiosis between plant and animal also contributes to the brilliant colors of coral that can be seen while diving on a reef. It is the importance of light that drives corals to compete for space on the sea floor, and so constantly pushes the limits of their physiological tolerances in a competitive environment among so many different species. However, it also makes corals highly susceptible to environmental stress.

Sources: pib.

20. INTERNATIONAL AIR TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION (IATA)**What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: IATA- composition, functions and functions.
- **Context:** In its latest 20-year forecast for the aviation industry, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) says that India will be the third largest aviation market globally a year sooner than was earlier predicted. It is now expected to be among the top three countries by 2024 from its current seventh position.

Highlights of the report:

- Air passenger numbers worldwide could double to 8.2 billion in 2037. The biggest contribution in this growth will come from the Asia-Pacific region, which will account for half the total number of new passengers over the next 20 years.
- While China will climb up one spot to displace US as the world's largest aviation market in the mid-2020s, India will take the third place by surpassing the U.K. around 2024.
- By 2037, India is expected to add 414 million passengers to its existing 572 million passengers.
- In fact, the Asia-Pacific region is expected to see the fastest growth at the rate of 4.8%, followed by Africa (4.6%) and west Asia (4.4%).
- The other south-east Asian countries predicted to grow rapidly include Indonesia, likely to be the fourth largest by 2030 from its current ranking of 10th largest aviation market. Thailand, too, is expected to enter the top 10 markets in 2030.

About IATA:

- **What is it?** The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 280 airlines or 83% of total air traffic. Formed in April 1945, it is the successor to the International Air Traffic Association, which was formed in 1919.
- **What it does?** IATA supports airline activity and helps formulate industry policy and standards. It also provides consulting and training services in many areas crucial to aviation.
- **Headquarters:** It is headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with Executive Offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

Sources: the hindu.

GS PAPER III

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

1. PURCHASING MANAGERS INDEX (PMI)

What to study?

- Prelims: What, WHEN AND WHO is PMI?
- Mains: Economic growth indicators and significance.
- **Context:** India's manufacturing economy recorded an improvement in growth during September amid firmer gains in new orders, output and employment.
- The Nikkei India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 52.2 in September from 51.7 in August. A reading above 50 indicates an expansion while one below 50 denotes a contraction.

What is a PMI?

- PMI or a Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) is an indicator of business activity — both in the manufacturing and services sectors. It is a survey-based measure that asks the respondents about changes in their perception of some key business variables from the month before.
- It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors and then a composite index is constructed.

How is the PMI derived?

- The PMI is derived from a series of qualitative questions. Executives from a reasonably big sample, running into hundreds of firms, are asked whether key indicators such as output, new orders, business expectations and employment were stronger than the month before and are asked to rate them.

How does one read the PMI?

- A figure above 50 denotes expansion in business activity. Anything below 50 denotes contraction. Higher the difference from this mid-point greater the expansion or contraction.
- The rate of expansion can also be judged by comparing the PMI with that of the previous month data.
- If the figure is higher than the previous month's then the economy is expanding at a faster rate. If it is lower than the previous month then it is growing at a lower rate.

What are its implications for the economy?

- The PMI is usually released at the start of the month, much before most of the official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP growth becomes available. It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.
- Economists consider the manufacturing growth measured by the PMI as a good indicator of industrial output, for which official statistics are released later. Central banks of many countries also use the index to help make decisions on interest rates.

What does it mean for financial markets?

- The PMI also gives an indication of corporate earnings and is closely watched by investors as well as the bond markets. A good reading enhances the attractiveness of an economy vis-a-vis another competing economy.

Sources: the hindu.

2. BSE FIRST TO LAUNCH COMMODITY DERIVATIVES CONTRACT IN GOLD AND SILVER

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Meaning and significance of derivatives.
- **Context:** The Bombay Stock Exchange became the first stock exchange in the country to launch commodity derivatives contract in gold and silver.

Background:

- Till date, commodity derivatives contract are available only on MCX and NCDEX, the two specialised commodity derivatives exchanges in the country.
- The launch of commodity derivatives platform on the BSE will help in efficient price discovery, reduce timeline and make it cost-effective.
- **Definition:** A derivative is a contract between two parties which derives its value/price from an underlying asset. The most common types of derivatives are futures, options, forwards and swaps.
- **Description:** It is a financial instrument which derives its value/price from the underlying assets. Originally, underlying corpus is first created which can consist of one security or a combination of different securities. The value of the underlying asset is bound to change as the value of the underlying assets keep changing continuously. Generally stocks, bonds, currency, commodities and interest rates form the underlying asset.

Sources: the hindu.

3. UDYAM ABHILASHA

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the campaign, SIDBI, Aspirational Districts Programme.
- For Mains: Employment challenges in the country, need for entrepreneurship training.
- **What is it?** It is a National Level Entrepreneurship Awareness Campaign launched by Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) on the occasion of Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- The campaign has been launched in 115 Aspirational Districts identified by NITI Aayog in 28 States.

About the Campaign:

- The campaign would create and strengthen cadre of more than 800 trainers to provide entrepreneurship training to the aspiring youths across these districts thus encouraging them to enter the admired segment of entrepreneurs.
- SIDBI has partnered with CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, a Special Purpose Vehicle, (CSC SPV) set up by the Ministry of Electronics & IT, Govt. of India for implementing the campaign through their CSCs.

The objectives of the missionary campaign include:

- To inspire rural youth in aspirational districts to be entrepreneurs by assisting them to set up their own enterprise.
- To impart trainings through digital medium across the country.
- To create business opportunities for CSC VLEs.
- To focus on women aspirants in these aspirational districts to encourage women entrepreneurship.
- To assist participants to become bankable and avail credit facility from banks to set up their own enterprise.

About SIDBI:

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



Udyam Abhilasha

Entrepreneurship Awareness Campaign

Through this campaign, SIDBI in collaboration with CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, would instil confidence among youth to select "entrepreneurship" as preferred occupational choice with high self-esteem, dignity and pride.

Objective

- To inspire rural youth to become entrepreneurs by assisting them to set up their own enterprise.
- To impart motivational training through digital medium across the country.
- To create business opportunities for CSC VLEs.
- To encourage women aspirants to promote women entrepreneurship.
- To provide handholding services for bankable project and to access bank /lenders to set up enterprise.

Initiative details

- Entrepreneur & Entrepreneurship
- Basic Financial Tools for Entrepreneurs
- Enterprise Planning & Marketing
- Business Communication and Interpersonal Skills for Entrepreneurs
- Innovation, Ethics & Enterprise Launching

Outcome

- Awareness of 2,25,000 hours
- 20% of the rural youth and women to start their own enterprise.
- 10% to access financial support (MUDRA, Stand up India, MSE loans)
- Suitable performance link incentive to VLEs.

A SIDBI initiative in collaboration with CSC e-Governance Services India Limited
Visit us at www.sidbi.in To apply for loans, visit <https://www.udayamimitra.in/>
For becoming a VLE, visit <https://register.csc.gov.in/>

For more details please visit our website - <http://www.udayamabhilasha.in/>

28 states
115 districts
460 VLEs
Around 800 Master Trainers
13,800 youth



Sources: pib.

4. WHAT IS MONETARY POLICY AND MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE (MPC) ?

- To achieve the goals of broad economic policy, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) uses monetary policy to control inflation, interest rates, supply of money and credit availability.
- The RBI has a government-constituted **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** which is tasked with framing monetary policy using tools like the repo rate, reverse repo rate, bank rate, cash reserve ratio (CRR).

Composition of MPC:

- The committee will have six members. Of the six members, the government will nominate three. No government official will be nominated to the MPC.

- The other three members would be from the RBI with the governor being the ex-officio chairperson. Deputy governor of RBI in charge of the monetary policy will be a member, as also an executive director of the central bank.
- Decision:** Decisions will be taken by majority vote with each member having a vote.
- RBI governor's role:** The RBI Governor will chair the committee. The governor, however, will not enjoy a veto power to overrule the other panel members, but will have a casting vote in case of a tie.
- Selection:** The government nominees to the MPC will be selected by a Search-cum-Selection Committee under Cabinet Secretary with RBI Governor and Economic Affairs Secretary and three experts in the field of economics or banking or finance or monetary policy as its members.
- Term:** Members of the MPC will be appointed for a period of four years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

5. UNIFIED PAYMENTS INTERFACE (UPI)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of UPI, how it operates.
- Context:** The Reserve Bank of India has released the guidelines for interoperability between prepaid payment instruments (PPIs) such as wallets and cards that will effectively allow users of popular payment wallets such as Paytm, Freecharge, MobiKwik, PhonePe and PayZapp, among others, to transfer money from one wallet to another.
- As per the guidelines, where PPIs are issued in the form of wallets, interoperability across PPIs shall be enabled through UPI and Where PPIs are issued in the form of cards, the cards shall be affiliated to the authorised card networks.

Unified Payment Interface (UPI)



Significance:

- The guidelines, while boosting the e-wallet segment, would also ensure the safety and accuracy of the transfer of money by individuals from one wallet to another.
- The interoperability amongst PPIs is going to significantly boost the e-wallet industry.
- The guidelines would also ensure that not only the customer's money remains safe but when the transition happens from one e-wallet app to another, it reflects utmost speed and accuracy for the interoperability to be effective and efficient.

What exactly is UPI?

- The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is a system developed by the NPCI and the RBI to aid instant transfer of money using a cashless system. Using UPI services, one just requires a smartphone and a banking app to send and receive money instantly or to pay a merchant for retail purchase.
- In the long run, UPI is likely to replace the current NEFT, RTGS, and IMPS systems as they exist today.

The UPI ecosystem functions with three key players:

- Payment service providers (PSPs) to provide the interface to the payer and the payee. Unlike wallets, the payer and the payee can use two different PSPs.
- Banks to provide the underlying accounts. In some cases, the bank and the PSP may be the same.
- NPCI to act as the central switch by ensuring VPA resolution, effecting credit and debit transactions through IMPS.

How does it work?

- UPI, built on IMPS, allows a payment directly and immediately from bank account. There is no need to pre-load money in wallets.

- It allows payments to different merchants without the hassle of typing one's card details or net-banking password.

Sources: the hindu.

6. RBI OBJECTS TO PAYMENTS REGULATOR OUTSIDE ITS CONTROL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Independent payment regulatory board- need, concerns, challenges, issues and what needs to be done?
- **Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opposed the Centre's proposal to set up an independent Payment Regulatory Board (PRB) which will oversee all payment systems in the country stating that the proposed body "must remain with the Reserve Bank" and headed by the RBI Governor.
- Coming out strongly against the Inter-Ministerial Committee's proposal to take PRB out of the RBI's purview, the RBI said there has been no evidence of any inefficiency in payment systems of India.

Background:

- The seven-member government panel was headed by Subhash Chandra Garg.
- The panel proposed in August that a payments regulator should be established independent of the RBI, with a chairperson appointed by the government in consultation with the RBI.
- The proposal overruled the central bank's recommendation that its governor should be head of the payments regulator.

Why the RBI is opposing this move?

- The RBI cited the report of the **Ratan Watal Committee on digital payments** as recommending the establishment of the PRB within the overall structure of the RBI, arguing therefore that there is no need for any deviation.
- Also, as per RBI, there has been no evidence of any inefficiency in payment systems of India. The digital payments have made good and steady progress. India is gaining international recognition as a leader in payment systems. Given this, there need not be any change in a well-functioning system.
- The RBI has argued that the payment system is bank-dominated in India. "Regulation of the banking systems and payment system by the same regulator provides synergy and inspires public confidence in the payment instruments. Regulation of the payment system by the central bank is the dominant international model for stability consideration. Thus, having the regulation and supervision over Payment and Settlement systems with the central bank will ensure holistic benefits," it said.

Way ahead:

- The RBI said it is not totally against a new Payment and Settlement System Bill but stressed that changes should not lead to existing foundations being shaken in a well-functioning structure.

Sources: the hindu.

7. FINANCIAL STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (FSDC)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Composition, role, objectives and significance of FSDC.
- **Context:** FSDC meeting held recently was chaired by the Union Finance Minister.

About FSDC:

- The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) was constituted in December, 2010.
- The FSDC was set up to strengthen and institutionalise the mechanism for maintaining financial stability, enhancing inter-regulatory coordination and promoting financial sector development.

Composition:

- The Council is chaired by the Union Finance Minister and its members are Governor, Reserve Bank of India; Finance Secretary and/or Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs; Secretary, Department of Financial

- Services; Chief Economic Adviser, Ministry of Finance; Chairman, Securities and Exchange Board of India; Chairman, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority and Chairman, Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. It also includes the chairman of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board (IBBI).
- In May, the government through a gazette notification, had included ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) secretary in the FSDC in view of the increased focus of the government on digital economy.

What it does?

- The Council deals, inter-alia, with issues relating to financial stability, financial sector development, inter-regulatory coordination, financial literacy, financial inclusion and macro prudential supervision of the economy including the functioning of large financial conglomerates.
- No funds are separately allocated to the Council for undertaking its activities.

Sources: the hindu.

8. COMMERCIAL PAPERS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, features and significance of commercial papers.
- Context:** Commercial papers have become one of the popular routes for corporates to raise funds when compared with loans from banks in recent times.

What is a commercial paper?

- A commercial Paper (CP) is an unsecured loan raised by firms in money markets through instruments issued in the form of a promissory note. CPs can be issued for maturities between a minimum of 7 days and a maximum of up to one year from the date of issue.

Why are CPs popular?

- Because of surplus liquidity, short-term borrowing rates in money markets have significantly declined post demonetisation and are much lower than the lowest benchmark lending rates of the banks.

What are the advantages of issuing CPs?

- Apart from being a cheaper source of funds, it helps meet funding requirements relatively quickly for better-rated corporates.
- Procedural requirements for securing bank facilities and charge creation on assets is not required.

What are the key challenges with CPS?

- As the CP is an unsecured loan, the investor in commercial papers largely prefers highly-rated corporates or public sector entities in terms of credit rating. Lender appetite is limited to better rated companies.
 - Also commercial paper markets can be seasonal and vulnerable to liquidity conditions. In case of sudden tightening of liquidity, a firm's ability to secure funding can be challenged. Within the year, liquidity conditions can become tight in certain months such as the end of a quarter, because of advance payment of taxes and the like. At such times, funding costs can also rise for the issue of CPs.
 - Therefore, commercial papers should not be used as a permanent source of capital and should largely be used to benefit from liquidity conditions and arbitrage in short-term borrowing rates.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. OPEN ACREAGE LICENSING PROGRAMME (OALP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: OALP, HELP and Hydrocarbon reserves in the country.
- For Mains: Significance and need for OALP.

- **Context:** Government of India recently signed the contracts of the blocks awarded under the Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) Bid Round-I with the awardees.

Significance:

- Initially, 110 e-bids were received for 55 blocks on offer with participation from 9 companies, singly or in consortium. Finally, contracts have been signed for all 55 blocks with 6 companies.
- This will add a huge accretion of 59,282 sq.km to the exploration area. This is about 65% of the area presently under exploration in the country. This will lead to significant increase in E&P activities in India and in long run discoveries from these field may significantly boost domestic production.

Background:

- The bid round-I of OALP was launched in January 2018 under the liberalized Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP). It is for the first time that bidding in the E&P sector in India was for blocks that had been selected by bidders themselves with government playing a facilitator role.

Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP):

- The OALP, a part of the government's Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP), gives exploration companies the option to select the exploration blocks on their own, without having to wait for the formal bid round from the Government.
- The company then submits an application to the government, which puts that block up for bid. The new policy will open up 2.8 million square kilometres of sedimentary basins for exploration and eventual production.

About Hydrocarbon Exploration & Licensing Policy (HELP):

- The Hydrocarbon Exploration & Licensing Policy (HELP) opens up India's entire sedimentary basin for investment from domestic and foreign players under a simplified, transparent and investor-friendly fiscal and administrative regime.
- **The new policy aims to** provide Investors a ready access to huge amount of seismic data available in National Data Repository (NDR), flexibility to carve out exploration acreages through an open acreage licensing process and increased operational autonomy through a new revenue sharing model.
- **The National Data Repository (NDR)** manifested through an open acreage licensing (OAL) process will be a key facilitator by providing seamless access to India's entire E&P data process through a digital medium to all investors with the objective of harnessing the potential of India's large basinal area.

Way ahead:

- Open Acreage Licensing Policy and the National Data Repository together are a significant and welcome step towards opening up the hydrocarbon exploration and production industry in India. By placing greater discretion in the hands of explorers and operators, the Licensing Policy attempts to address a major drawback in the New Exploration Licensing Policy, which forced energy explorers to bid for blocks chosen by the government. Such initiatives help India attract enough investment to meet the government's objective of reducing oil imports by 10% by 2022.
- There's a compelling opportunity for gas, which India must seize to reduce import dependency and shift to a lower carbon trajectory. HELP is more about gas than oil. While the overall thrust is positive, concerns regarding the contractual regime and gas pricing formula remain, and will need to be addressed.

Sources: pib.

2. LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP (LLP)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Meaning and features of LLP.
- **Context:** Ministry of Corporate Affairs has launched a process re-engineering by making incorporation of Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) through a complete online system- titled "RUN-LLP (Reserve Unique Name – Limited Liability Partnership)".

What is LLP?

- LLP is an alternative corporate business form that gives the benefits of limited liability of a company and the flexibility of a partnership. The LLP can continue its existence irrespective of changes in partners. It is capable of entering into contracts and holding property in its own name.
 - The LLP is a separate legal entity, is liable to the full extent of its assets but liability of the partners is limited to their agreed contribution in the LLP. Further, no partner is liable on account of the independent or unauthorized actions of other partners, thus individual partners are shielded from joint liability created by another partner's wrongful business decisions or misconduct.
 - Mutual rights and duties of the partners within a LLP are governed by an agreement between the partners or between the partners and the LLP as the case may be. The LLP, however, is not relieved of the liability for its other obligations as a separate entity. Since LLP contains elements of both 'a corporate structure' as well as 'a partnership firm structure' LLP is called a hybrid between a company and a partnership.

LLP form is a form of business model which:

- Is organized and operates on the basis of an agreement.
- Provides flexibility without imposing detailed legal and procedural requirements.
- Enables professional/technical expertise and initiative to combine with financial risk taking capacity in an innovative and efficient manner.

Sources: pib.

3. CENTRE FOR THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About the centre, its objectives and functions, all about fourth Industrial revolution.
- **Context:** The World Economic Forum has announced its new Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution in India, which would aim to bring together the government and business leaders to pilot emerging technology policies.

About the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution:

- The centre would be based in Maharashtra and it has selected drones, artificial intelligence and blockchain as the first three project areas.
- It will work in collaboration with the government on a national level to co-design new policy frameworks and protocols for emerging technology alongside leaders from business, academia, start-ups and international organizations.
- NITI Aayog will coordinate the partnership on behalf of the government and the work of the centre among multiple ministries. The WEF has also entered into partnerships with the Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh governments for the new initiative and more states would be roped in going forward.
- Projects will be scaled across India and globally. As part of the WEF's global network, the new centre in India will work closely with project teams in San Francisco, Tokyo and Beijing, where such Centres are already present.

What is Fourth Industrial Revolution?

- As described by the founder and executive chairman of WEF, Klaus Schwab, "the fourth industrial revolution is a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work and relate to one another".

Background:

- **1st industrial revolution:** The first Industrial Revolution began in Britain in the last quarter of the 18th century with the mechanisation of the textile industry, harnessing of steam power, and birth of the modern factory.
- **2nd industrial revolution:** The Second Industrial Revolution, from the last third of the nineteenth century to the outbreak of World War I, was powered by developments in electricity, transportation, chemicals, steel, and mass production and consumption. Industrialization spread even further – to Japan after the Meiji Restoration and deep into Russia, which was booming at the outset of World War I. During this era, factories could produce countless numbers of identical products quickly and cheaply.
- **3rd industrial revolution:** The third industrial revolution, beginning c. 1970, was digital — and applied electronics and information technology to processes of production. Mass customisation and additive

manufacturing — the so-called ‘3D printing’ — are its key concepts, and its applications, yet to be imagined fully, are quite mind-boggling.

How different will be the 4th industrial revolution?

- There are three reasons why today's transformations represent not merely a prolongation of the Third Industrial Revolution but rather the arrival of a Fourth and distinct one: velocity, scope, and systems impact.
 - The speed of current breakthroughs has no historical precedent. When compared with previous industrial revolutions, the Fourth is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace.
 - Moreover, it is disrupting almost every industry in every country. And the breadth and depth of these changes herald the transformation of entire systems of production, management, and governance.
 - The 4th revolution will be characterized by the advent of cyber-physical systems which, while being reliant on the technologies and infrastructure of the third industrial revolution, represent entirely new ways in which technology becomes embedded within societies and even our human bodies. Examples include genome editing, new forms of machine intelligence, and breakthrough approaches to governance that rely on cryptographic methods such as blockchain.
 - Hence, it can be said that the 4th industrial revolution is conceptualised as an upgrade on the third revolution and is marked by a fusion of technologies straddling the physical, digital and biological worlds.

Sources: pib.

4. CROSS-BORDER INSOLVENCY

What to study?

- For Prelims: Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, 2016- key features.
- For Mains: Cross-Border Insolvency- need, challenges and global practices.
- **Context:** The Insolvency Law Committee (ILC) on October 22, 2018 submitted its 2nd Report on Cross Border Insolvency to Arun Jaitley, Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs. The ILC was constituted by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to recommend amendments to Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code of India, 2016.
- The ILC recommended the adoption of the UNCITRAL Model Law of Cross Border Insolvency, 1997 as it provides for a comprehensive framework to deal with cross border insolvency issues.
- The Committee also recommended a few steps to ensure that there is no inconsistency between the domestic insolvency framework and the proposed Cross Border Insolvency Framework.

Need for cross-border insolvency framework:

- As the size of the Indian economy grows, business and trade have adopted an increasingly international character. Creditors and corporates frequently transact business in more than one jurisdiction.
- Foreign banks and creditors finance Indian companies and Indian banks have foreign exposure. Also, as part of its Ease of Doing Business and Make in India policies, India seeks to attract foreign companies to set up manufacturing facilities in India.
- Besides, global experience demonstrates that cross-border investment decisions and their outcomes, are considerably affected by the insolvency laws in force in a country.
- Towards this end, even though the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 has resulted in significant improvement in India’s insolvency regime, there is a need to include cross-border insolvency in the Code to provide a comprehensive insolvency framework.

Benefits associated:

- Inclusion of cross-border insolvency framework will further enhance ease of doing business, provide a mechanism of cooperation between India and other countries in the area of insolvency resolution, and protect creditors in the global scenario.
- Also, it will make India an attractive investment destination for foreign creditors given the increased predictability and certainty of the insolvency framework.

UNCITRAL Model Law of Cross Border Insolvency, 1997:

- The UNCITRAL Model Law has till now been adopted in 44 countries and forms part of international best practices in dealing with cross border insolvency issues. The model law gives precedence to domestic proceedings and protection of public interest.

- The advantages of the model law include greater confidence generation among foreign investors, adequate flexibility for seamless integration with the domestic Insolvency Law and a robust mechanism for international cooperation.

Four major principles of UNCITRAL Model Law- The model law deals with four major principles of cross-border insolvency, namely:

- Direct access to foreign insolvency professionals and foreign creditors to participate in or commence domestic insolvency proceedings against a defaulting debtor.
- Recognition of foreign proceedings & provision of remedies.
- Cooperation between domestic and foreign courts & domestic and foreign insolvency practitioners.
- Coordination between two or more concurrent insolvency proceedings in different countries. The main proceeding is determined by the concept of centre of main interest (COMI).

Global scenario:

- On the global scale, the UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency, 1997 (Model Law) has emerged as the most widely accepted legal framework to deal with cross-border insolvency issues while ensuring the least intrusion into the country's domestic insolvency law.
- Due to the growing prevalence of multinational insolvencies, the Model Law has been adopted by 44 States till date, including Singapore, UK and US.

Sources: the hindu.

5. INVEST INDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Invest India- features, roles and significance.
- Context:** Invest India, the country's investment promotion body, has won United Nations (UN) Award for excellence in promoting investments in sustainable development.
- Invest India received this award for excellence in servicing and supporting major global wind turbines company in establishment of blade manufacturing plant in India while committing to train local staff and produce 1 gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy. Implementation of this project is expected to reduce India's wind energy cost significantly.



INVEST INDIA
World's most awarded IPA

What is Invest India?

- Invest India is the **National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency** of India and acts as the first point of reference for investors in India.
- Invest India is set up as **a non profit venture under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion**, Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Government of India.
- A joint venture:** Operationalized in early 2010, Invest India is set up as a joint venture company between the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce & Industry (35% equity), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) (51% equity), and State Governments of India (0.5% each).
- Functions:** The core mandate of Invest India is investment promotion and facilitation. It provides sector-specific and state-specific information to a foreign investor, assists in expediting regulatory approvals, and offers hand-holding services. Its mandate also includes assisting Indian investors to make informed choices about investment opportunities overseas.

Why Invest in India?

- India to remain one of the fastest growing economies in the world- International Monetary Fund.
- FDI inflows increased by 37% since the launch of Make in India initiative.
- Leading investors ranked India as the most attractive market.

- Largest youth population in the world.
- Huge domestic market.
- Rising economic influence- IOR and INSTC.
- India registered a record improvement on EoDB ranking from 142 to 100 between 2014-2017.

UN Investment Promotion Award:

- The awards are given annually by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) since 2002 as part of its investment promotion and facilitation programme.
 - It honours investment promotion agencies (IPAs) and their governments for their achievements.
 - It also seeks to showcase best practices in attracting investment into Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)-related projects that can inspire investment promotion practitioners in developing and developed countries.

Sources: the hindu.

6. DISPUTE SETTLEMENT BODY (DSB)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Dispute settlement body.
- For Mains: India – US dispute, MEIS and its key features and issues associated.
- **Context:** The World Trade Organisation's dispute settlement body has set up a panel to examine the US complaint against certain export-subsidy measures by India as both the sides failed to resolve the issue at consultation level.

What's the issue?

- In March, the US dragged India to the global trade body's dispute settlement mechanism over export subsidies, saying that these incentives were harming the American companies.
- The US has challenged India's export subsidy programmes such as Merchandise Exports from India Scheme in the WTO, asserting that these initiatives harm its companies by creating an uneven playing field.

Dispute Settlement Body:

- The General Council convenes as the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to deal with disputes between WTO members. Such disputes may arise with respect to any agreement contained in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round that is subject to the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU).
- The DSB has authority to establish dispute settlement panels, refer matters to arbitration, adopt panel, Appellate Body and arbitration reports, maintain surveillance over the implementation of recommendations and rulings contained in such reports, and authorize suspension of concessions in the event of non-compliance with those recommendations and rulings.

About MEIS- What is it?

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) is one of the two schemes introduced in Foreign Trade Policy of India 2015-20, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.
- **Objective of Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)** as per Indian Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 (FTP 2015-20) is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products, which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India's export competitiveness.

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

1. TEA BOARD

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Tea Board- functions, objectives and programmes.

- **Context:** Tea Board of India is planning to launch an app aimed at guiding small growers, whose share in total tea production is increasing. The proposed name of the app is Chai Sahay (tea help).

Key facts:

- The mobile platform would have user-interface facilities with the targeted user groups (the small tea grower) and the various officials. It would also have information on the various activities of the board officials.
- The existing database of the STGs would be incorporated in the app, which would also give information on their registration process. There would be advisories on application of farm inputs and pesticide use. Small growers can also post queries for advice on pest control.

About Tea Board of India:

- The Tea Board is set up under the **Tea Act 1953**. It has succeeded the Central Tea Board and the Indian Tea Licencing Committee which functioned respectively under the Central Tea Board Act, 1949 and the Indian Tea Control Act, 1938 which were repealed.
- The Tea Board is functioning as a **statutory body** of the Central Government under the **Ministry of Commerce**.
- The Board is constituted of 31 members (including Chairman) drawn from Members of Parliament, tea producers, tea traders, tea brokers, consumers, and representatives of Governments from the principal tea producing states, and trade unions. The Board is reconstituted every three years.

Functions:

- The Tea Board India is responsible for the assignment of certification numbers to exports of certain tea merchants. This certification is intended to ensure the teas' origin, which in turn would reduce the amount of fraudulent labelling on rare teas.
- The Tea Board India's tasks include endorsement of the diverse production and productivity of tea, financial support of research organisations and the monitoring of advances in tea packaging as it relates to health beneficial aspects.
- It coordinates research institutes, the tea trade and government bodies, ensuring the technical support of the tea trade in the global industry.

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices.

1. PRADHAN MANTRI FASAL BIMA YOJNA (PMFBY)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key facts on PMFBY.
- For Mains: Significance, features and performance of Crop Insurance programmes in India.
- **Context:** Gram Sabhas across the country have been asked to inform the farmers about the enrolment and benefits of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojan (PMFBY) at the beginning of the Rabi Season. The Gram Sabhas will also inform the farmers on how they can insure their crops under the Scheme.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has requested the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the State Governments to include this as an agenda in the upcoming Gram Sabhas, especially for the one scheduled on 2nd October 2018, in connection with Gandhi Jayanti.
- This is as part of the awareness initiatives taken up at various levels by the Govt and Insurance Companies to create awareness about the Scheme and mobilise farmers to insure their crops.

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: pib.

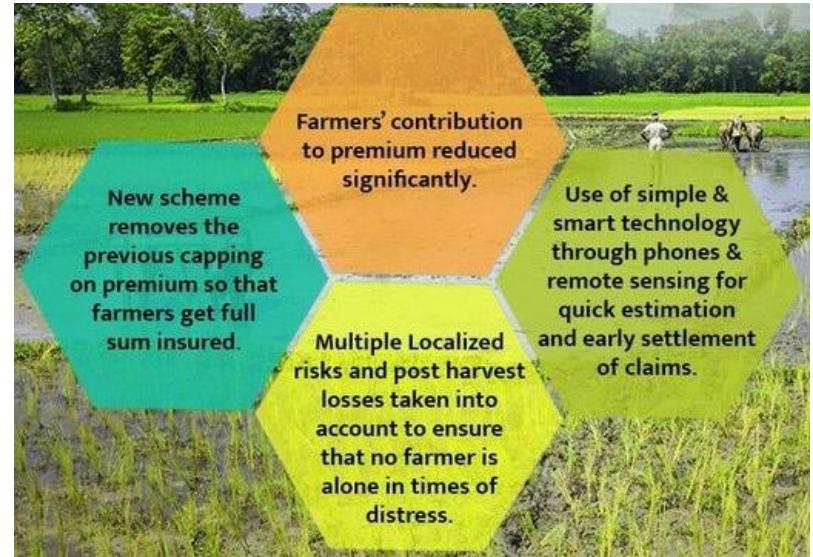
2. PMFBY TO INCLUDE CROP DAMAGES FROM WILD ANIMAL ATTACKS

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMFBY- key features.
- For Mains: PMFBY performance analysis, shortcomings and ways to address them.
- **Context:** Union Government has decided to cover damages to crops in wild animal attacks under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna in select districts on an experimental basis.
- In this regard, Government has amended provisions of crop insurance scheme in consultation with various stakeholders after review of its working for the last two years. The amended provisions of the scheme have been implemented from October 2018.

As per the new provisions:

- Certain horticultural crops have been brought under ambit of PMFBY on experimental basis.
- Damages due to individual fields due to incidents of localised disasters like water logging, land slide, cloud bursts, hailstorms and fire too are brought under scheme.
- Henceforth, insurance firms will also have to spend 0.5% of their earnings from annual premium to advertise provisions of the scheme.
- Fines in cases of delay in clearing insurance claims for crop damages have been proposed.
- In case firm delays insurance clearances beyond two months, it will have to pay an annual interest of 12%.
- Similarly, State government too will have to pay interest of 12% in case of delay in release of state's share of subsidy in premium to insurance firms.



Sources: the hindu.

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. SIKKIM WINS FAO'S FUTURE POLICY AWARD 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about organic farming, FAO, Future Policy Awards.
- For Mains: Significance, potential, challenges and potential of organic farming.
- **Context:** Sikkim has been awarded UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Future Policy Gold Award (Gold Prize) for its achievement in becoming the world's first totally organic agriculture state.

Background:

- Sikkim became the first fully organic state of India in 2016. Over the years around 75000 hectares of land in the state has been converted into certified organic farms following the guidelines as prescribed by National Programme for Organic Production.
- Within 1.24 million tonnes of organic production in the country around 80000 million is supplied by Sikkim alone.

Organic farming and its significance:

- Organic cultivation doesn't involve the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and thus helps to maintain a harmonious balance among the various complex ecosystems.
- Also it improves the quality of the soil which further improves the standards of the crops produced there. In the long term, organic farming leads in subsistence of agriculture, bio-diversity conservation and environmental protection.
- It will also help in building the soil health resulting in sustainable increased crop production.

The first steps towards an Organic State:

- The first step towards making Sikkim an organic state was to recognise its natural factors that made it an ideal location for organic farming. These included its topography, the local use of traditional farming systems, the diversity of its climatic conditions and the fact the local soil is rich in organic carbon.
- Then, in 2003, the 'Going for Organic Farming in Sikkim' programme was prepared, along with the Sikkim State Organic Board, which prioritised the creation of new infrastructures and the mobilising of resources.
- From here, a seven-year plan was introduced to ban chemical fertilisers – gradually replacing them with organic plant nutrients.

The initiatives that propelled Sikkim's progress:

- In 2004, the production of organic manure began, replacing other compost.
- Between 2004 and 2006, two seed testing and processing units were introduced, as well as soil testing laboratories for studying soil health.
- The Centre of Excellence for Organic Farming was created.
- Starting in 2008, several organic certification programmes took place, with much of the land being certified by organisations such as the Department of Science and Technology and the Food Security and Agriculture Department.
- In 2010, a bio fertiliser production unit was put together, and the National Level Workshop was introduced in Sikkim's villages.
- Later that year, a plan for the adoption of fully organic farming was put into place, known as the Sikkim Organic Mission.

Maintaining the state for the future- To ensure Sikkim stays green in the long term, there are a few additional initiatives that have been introduced to the state:

- Firstly, animals are no longer allowed to graze in the reserve forest in order to conserve natural resources. There are still plenty of other spaces for animals to graze, while protecting this land.
- Plastic bags have been banned, encouraging shoppers to take their own bags to the store to cut down on plastic manufacturing and waste.
- The State Green Mission was launched, which includes planting fruit bearing trees, plantation drives and more.

Future Policy Gold Award:

- The prizes, nicknamed the "Oscar for best policies", honour exceptional policies adopted by political leaders who have decided to act, no longer accepting widespread hunger, poverty or environmental degradation.
- Previously it was honoured for policies combating desertification, violence against women and girls, nuclear weapons and pollution of the oceans.

Sources: the hindu.

2. SOIL MOISTURE MAP

What to study?

- For Prelims: ISA, Soil Moisture Map- significance and need.
- For Mains: Renewable energy and its significance, India's leadership in the sector.
- Context:** With the rabi season around the corner, a countrywide forecast has been prepared. This forecast, following **a joint exercise by IIT Gandhinagar and the India Meteorological Department (IMD)**, for the first time, provides a country-wide soil moisture forecast at seven and 30-day lead times.

How was it developed?

- The experts used the 'Variable Infiltration Capacity' model to provide the soil moisture prediction.
- The product, termed 'Experimental Forecasts Land Surface Products', is available on the IMD website. It has been developed using the hydrological model that takes into consideration soil, vegetation, land use and land cover among other parameters.

Highlights of the findings:

- In Bundelkhand, most farmers keep their land fallow or just grow some fodder crop during the kharif season since the rains are unpredictable and there could be extended dry spells after sowing. They then mainly cultivate the rabi crop using the soil moisture left behind by the monsoon rains.
- It is a similar trend in Bihar, in low lying areas of Seemanchal and Kosi belt, where no crop is grown during Kharif because of inundated lands. This means that if there is not enough rainfall in one or two months, these are regions which will demand heavy irrigation whether that comes from groundwater or surface water storage (reservoirs).
- Based on observed conditions at present, Gujarat, parts of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and parts of Andhra Pradesh are deficient in terms of soil moisture right now.

Significance and the need for data on soil moisture:

- Soil moisture is crucial for agriculture since it directly affects crop growth and how much irrigation is required for the area. It is because crucial information needed for agriculture is not revealed only through rainfall data.
- Soil moisture gives us more information on what is needed for crop growth in different parts of the country. Besides, timely soil moisture forecasts will help target interventions, in terms of seed varieties for better planning in agriculture.

Sources: pib.

3. FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND (FIDF)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of FIDF.
- Context:** The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for creation of special Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF).
- The approval entails an estimated fund size of Rs.7,522 crore, comprising Rs.5,266.40 crore to be raised by the Nodal Loaining Entities (NLEs), Rs. 1,316.6 crore beneficiaries contribution and Rs.939.48 crore budgetary support from the Government of India.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Cooperatives Development Corporation (NCDC) and all scheduled Banks (hereinafter referred as Banks) shall be the **nodal Loaining Entities**.

Benefits- it helps in:

- Creation of fisheries infrastructure facilities both in marine and Inland fisheries sectors.
- Employment opportunities to over 9.40 lakh fishers/fishermen/fisherfolk and other entrepreneurs in fishing and allied activities.
- Attracting private investment in creation and management of fisheries infrastructure facilities.

- Adoption of new technologies.
- Augmenting fish production to achieve its target of 15 million tonne by 2020 set under the Blue Revolution; and achieving a sustainable growth of 8% -9% thereafter to reach the fish production to the level of about 20 MMT by 2022-23.

Funds:

- FIDF would provide concessional finance to State Governments / UTs and State entities, cooperatives, individuals and entrepreneurs etc., for taking up of the identified investment activities of fisheries development.
- Under FIDF, loan lending will be over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23 and maximum repayment will be over a period of 12 years inclusive of moratorium of two years on repayment of principal.

Sources: pib.

4. KRISHI KUMBH-2018

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of Krishi Kumbh.
- **Context:** The government of Uttar Pradesh in association with the Government of India is organizing a mega Agriculture Expo called “Krishi Kumbh-2018”.

About Krishi Kumbh- 2018:

- Krishi Kumbh-2018 would comprise of the National level exhibition, technical sessions around the theme of doubling farmers income, Business Meet, and host of other engaging activities.
- The primary objective of Krishi Kumbh 2018 is to provide a common platform to farmers, farmers group, technical experts and entrepreneurs for seamless exchange of knowledge regarding agriculture production food processing and marketing, agriculture mechanization, agro-food processing, high value crops, input and technology management in agriculture etc.

Significance:

- As Uttar Pradesh is the state with the largest number of farm holdings and largest numbers of farmers, this event offers a great opportunity for showcasing their work to the stakeholders in this field.
 - The event is planned to project the state's agriculture potential on one hand and provide a platform for interaction among stakeholders on the other hand.
 - Participation of over one lakh farmers is expected in this mega event besides several ministers, senior Government officials and other Policy makers, international organizations, heads of banks and development institutions and captains of industries working in this vast area.

Sources: the hindu.

5. 11TH GLOBAL AGRICULTURE SUMMIT – 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Global Agriculture Summit and awards, about ICAF.
- **Context:** 11th Global Agriculture Leadership Summit & Awards were recently organised by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture (ICFA) with support of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; Ministry of Food Processing Industries and Ministry of Commerce.

Outcomes of the 2018 summit:

- 11th Global Leadership Awards were announced and the Agriculture Year Book 2018 was launched.
- Leveraging upon its past experiencing, ICFA has launched 1st World Agriculture Prize and MS Swaminathan Global Dialogue on Climate Change and Food Security to come up with blue print for sustained agriculture growth in changing face of climate and weather extremes.

Global Agriculture Summit:

- Global Agriculture Summit is an annual event organized by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture to discuss the broad scenario and trends in agriculture sector, trade, technology, investments and the need for appropriate policy initiatives on the part of the Government by bringing together eminent personalities of Indian and global agriculture on one platform.
- The summit aims to discuss the broad issues in agriculture and agribusiness, and measures to empower farmers and unleash the potential of India's agriculture sector by deliberating upon national and global challenges for farmers, agribusinesses and startups, the issue of employment and agriculture development and bring out a road map for the same.

About Global Leadership Awards:

- ICFA had established the Agriculture Leadership Awards in 2008 to recognize the leadership roles played by individuals and institutions positively impacting the lives of farmers and rural masses.

Notable facts and winners:

- Andhra Pradesh CM N. Chandrababu Naidu was awarded the Policy Leadership Award for his proactive policies for uplifting the farming community by focusing on irrigation, investment, global partnerships, marketing initiatives and zero budget natural farming.
- **Best States in Various Fields:** The best fisheries State Award was given Jharkhand for efforts in augmenting the production potential of the state in fisheries segment. Further, Bihar is Best Animal Husbandry State, Nagaland is best Horticultural state, Gujarat is Best Agriculture State and Haryana has been conferred with Program Leadership Award.

About ICAF:

- Indian Council of Food and Agriculture is an apex think tank for addressing policy issues concerning farmers, food and agro industries.
- ICFA is serving as global platform for trade facilitation, partnerships, technology, investments and agribusiness services.

Sources: pib.

Topic: Infrastructure- Roadways, Railways, waterways. Etc;

1. INLAND WATERWAYS AUTHORITY OF INDIA (IWAI)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about IWAI, about Majuli Island and need for its protection.
- **Context:** Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) will be starting a new Roll on-Roll off (Ro-Ro) facility in collaboration with the Government of Assam to provide the much-needed connectivity for Majuli Island.

Benefits:

- This Ro-Ro facility will cut down the circuitous road route of 423 KMs that trucks take from Neamati to Majuli Island via Tezpur Road Bridge, by limiting the distance to only 12.7 KM with the use of river route.

About Majuli Island:

- Majuli is the first island district of the country. The island is formed by the Brahmaputra river in the south and the Kherkutia Xuti, an anabranch of the Brahmaputra, joined by the Subansiri River in the north. Majuli is the nerve centre of neo-Vaishnavite.
- Majuli Island was also declared the largest river island in the world, toppling Marajo in Brazil, by Guinness World Records in 2016.

Charter of IWAI

- Development and regulation of National Waterways
- Advise Central Government on matters relating to IWT
- Assist State Governments in development of IWT
- Lay down standards for classification of inland waterways
- Enter into joint ventures concerning inland shipping
- Conduct research in matters relating to IWT

Know about IWAI:

- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is ***the statutory authority*** in charge of the waterways in India.
- Its headquarters is located in Noida, UP. It does the function of building the necessary infrastructure in these waterways, surveying the economic feasibility of new projects and also administration.

Sources: pib.

2. INDIA AND BANGLADESH SIGN AGREEMENTS FOR ENHANCING INLAND AND COASTAL WATERWAYS CONNECTIVITY

What to study?

- For Prelims: Ports mentioned and their geographical locations.
- For Mains: Significance of waterways between the two countries.
- **Context:** India and Bangladesh have signed several milestone agreements for enhancing inland and coastal waterways connectivity between the two countries for trade and cruise movements.
- These agreements will facilitate easier movement of goods and passengers between the two countries, giving an impetus to trade and tourism.

Key facts:

- The two countries have signed an agreement to use ***Chattogram and Mongla Ports*** in Bangladesh for movement of goods to and from India. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has also been signed for movement of passenger and cruise services.
- An addendum to 'Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade' (PIWTT) between India and Bangladesh has been signed for inclusion of ***Dhubriin India and Pangaonin Bangladesh as new Ports of Call***.
- The two sides have also agreed to consider inclusion of ***Rupnarayan river (National Waterway-86) from Geonkhali to Kolaghat in the protocol route and to declare Kolaghat in West Bengal as new Port of Call***.
- Both sides agreed to declare ***Badarpur on river Barak (NW 16) as an Extended Port of Call of Karimganj in Assam and Ghorasal of Ashuganj in Bangladesh on a reciprocal basis***.
- Both sides have also agreed for ***development of Jogighopa as a hub/trans-shipment terminal for movement of cargo*** to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Bhutan and notifying Munsiganj River terminal by Bangladesh Customs for routing third party Exim cargo through Kolkata Port.

Benefits and significance:

- The new arrangement will facilitate the movement of fly ash, cement, construction materials from India to Bangladesh through IWT on Rupnarayan river.
 - The North Eastern states would get connected to directly to the ports of Kolkata and Haldia in India and Mongla in Bangladesh through waterways which would facilitate movement EXIM cargo and would also reduce the logistic costs.
 - The reconstruction and opening up of Jangipur navigational lock on river Bhagirathi subject to the provisions of the Treaty between India and Bangladesh on Sharing of Ganga Waters at Farakka, 1996. This move has the potential to reduce the distance to Assam by more than 450 kms on the protocol routes.

Sources: pib.

3. INDIA'S FIRST CONTAINER MOVEMENT ON INLAND WATERWAYS

What to study?

- For Prelims: IWAI- objectives, composition and significance, NW- 1.
- For Mains: Significance of Inland waterways, challenges involved therein.
- **Context:** Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) will transport container cargo belonging to the food and beverage giant PepsiCo (India) from Kolkata to Varanasi on river Ganga (National Waterway-1).
- **Significance:** This would be the country's first container movement on inland vessel post-independence.

Facts for Prelims:

- PepsiCo (India) will move 16 containers – equivalent to 16 truckloads- filled with food and snacks in the vessel MV RN Tagore which will reach Varanasi in 9-10 days. MV RN Tagore will make its return journey with fertilizers belonging to IFFCO that will be procured from its Phulpur plant near Allahabad.
- The government is developing NW-1 (River Ganga) under Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) from Haldia to Varanasi (1390 Km) with the technical and financial assistance of the World Bank** at an estimated cost of Rs 5369 crore. The project would enable commercial navigation of vessels with capacity of 1500-2,000 DWT.
- States covered under NW-1: States:** Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal.

Benefits of container movement on inland waterways:

- Container cargo transport comes with several inherent advantages.
- Even as it reduces the handling cost, allows easier modal shift, reduces pilferages and damage, it also enables cargo owners to reduce their carbon footprints.

Know about IWAI:

- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is **the statutory authority in charge of the waterways in India**.
- Its headquarters is located in Noida, UP. It does the function of building the necessary infrastructure in these waterways, surveying the economic feasibility of new projects and also administration.

Sources: pib.

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. WORLD'S FIRST HYPERLOOP PASSENGER CAPSULE UNVEILED**What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: Hyperloop technology- features, significance and its use in India.
- Context:** Hyperloop Transportation Technologies Inc. has unveiled its first full-scale passenger capsule in Spain.
- The capsule is 105 feet (32 meters) long and weighs 5 tons. Named as the Quintero One, the product is made almost entirely out of composite material.

What is hyperloop transportation system?

- It is a transportation system where a pod-like vehicle is propelled through a near-vacuum tube connecting cities at speeds matching that of an aircraft.
- The hyperloop concept is a brainchild of Tesla founder Elon Musk. US-based Hyperloop Transport Technology (HTT) claimed it costs \$40 million per kilometre to build a hyperloop system while building a high-speed train line would cost almost twice. The hyperloop system is being designed to transport passengers and freight.

How it operates?

- In hyperloop transportation, custom-designed capsules or pods are expected to zip smoothly through continuous steel tubes which are held at partial vacuum. The pod which sandwiches the passenger compartment between an air compressor upfront and a battery compartment in the rear is supported by air caster skis at the bottom.
- The skis float on a thin layer of air provided under high pressure, eliminating rolling resistance and allowing for movement of the pods at high speeds. These capsules are expected to be driverless with estimated speeds of 1,000 km/h. Linear induction motors that are placed along the tube control the speed of the pod. Electronically-assisted acceleration and braking determines the speed of the capsule.

The Problems Plaguing the Hyperloop:

- Constructing a tube hundreds of kilometers long would be an engineering marvel in of itself. However, introducing a tube hundreds of kilometers long that operates at a near perfect vacuum which can support the force of capsule weighing thousands of kilograms as it travels hundreds of kilometers an hour is nothing short of sci-fi fantasy.

- Small scale experiments reveal the fundamentals of the idea are sound. Although, in the real world, there are too many factors that cannot be accounted for with a small scale design. In the real world, there are tens of thousands of kilograms of atmospheric pressure which threatens to crush any vacuum chamber.
- There is also the problem with thermal expansion which threatens to buckle any large structure without proper thermal expansion capabilities. The Hyperloop would also be stupendously expensive. There are many unavoidable problems facing the Hyperloop that threaten the structural integrity, and every human life on board. The problems can be addressed, but at a great cost.

Facts for Prelims:

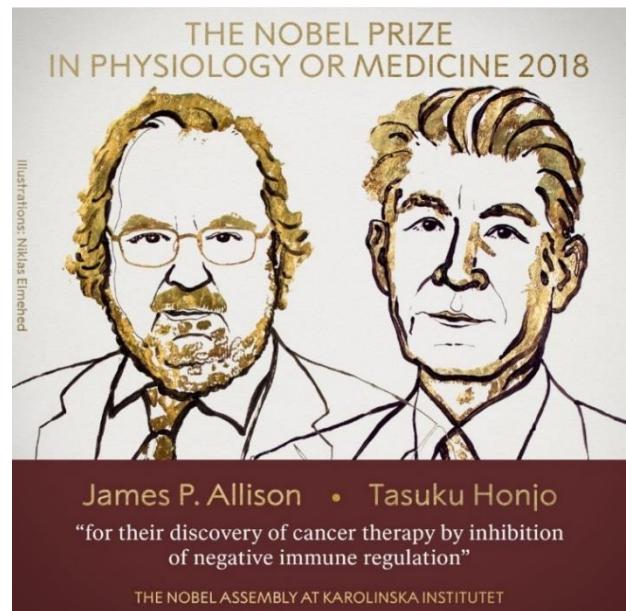
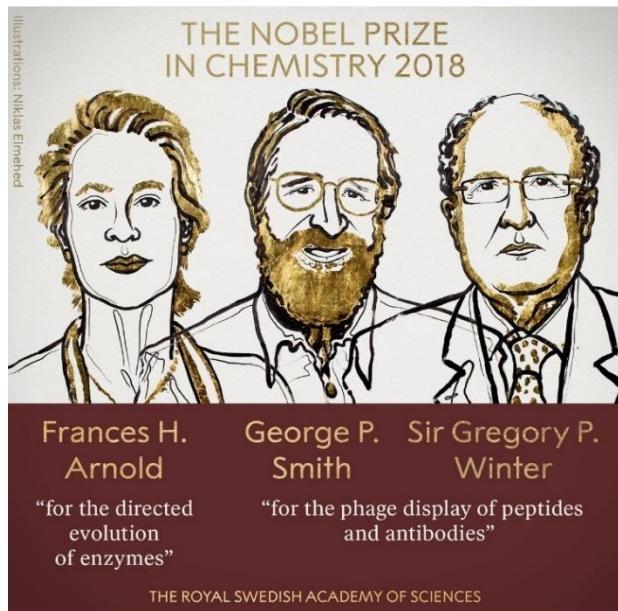
- The government of Andhra Pradesh has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with California-based Hyperloop Transportation Technologies (HTT) to develop India's first Hyperloop route in the state.
- The proposed route for the Hyperloop between the city centers of Vijayawada and Amaravati could potentially turn a trip of more than one hour into a 6 minute ride.
- The project will use a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model with funding primarily from private investors.

Sources: the hindu.

2. NOBEL PRIZE

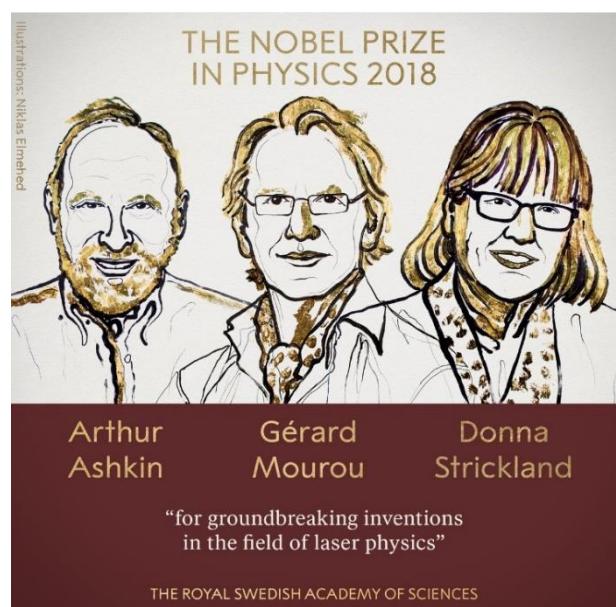
What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: brief overview of the awardees and their contributions and about Nobel prizes in various categories.



Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine:

- The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine is awarded once a year for outstanding discoveries in the fields of life sciences and medicine. It is one of five Nobel Prizes established in 1895 by Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, in his will.
 - The 2018 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine has been jointly conferred to James P. Allison and Tasaku Honjo "for their discovery of cancer therapy by inhibition of negative immune regulation".
 - The duo successfully established an entirely new principle for cancer therapy by stimulating the ability of immune system to attack tumour cells. It is called "Immune checkpoint therapy". They showed how different strategies for slowing down the brakes on



the immune system can be used in the treatment of cancer. Their discoveries are landmark in fight against cancer.

Nobel Prize in Chemistry:

- US scientists Frances Arnold and George Smith and British researcher Gregory Winter have won the 2018 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. They were selected for harnessing power of evolution to develop enzymes and antibodies that have led to new pharmaceuticals and biofuels.

Nobel Physics Prize:

- Three scientists Arthur Ashkin (USA), Gerard Mourou (France) and Donna Strickland (Canada) have won the 2018 Nobel Prize in Physics. They were selected for groundbreaking inventions in the field of laser physics.
- Arthur Ashkin: He received prize for optical tweezers and their application to biological systems. His optical tweezers are able to grab particles, atoms, viruses and other living cells with their laser beam fingers, allowing use of radiation pressure of light to move physical objects.
- Gerard Mourou and Donna Strickland: They were jointly awarded for their method of generating high-intensity, ultra-short optical pulses. They have created ultrashort high-intensity laser pulses without destroying amplifying material, thus paving way towards shortest and most intense laser pulses ever created by mankind. Their innovative technique is known as 'chirped pulse amplification' (CPA), has now become standard for high-intensity lasers, including ultra-sharp beams used in corrective eye surgeries.

Sources: the hindu.

3. INDIA INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FESTIVAL (IISF-2018)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: IISF- objectives, theme and significance.
- **Context:** India International Science Festival (IISF-2018) has begun in Lucknow.
- **Theme:** "Science for Transformation".



About IISF- 2018:

- IISF is conceivably the biggest platform in India that brings together students, researchers, artists and general public to celebrate our nation's achievements in science and technology.
- It is a medium to encourage the young minds towards the field of science and to promote the networking of stakeholders working towards the propagation of science.
- Through this festival, the largest of its kind in the country and in this region, it is expected that the message of excitement of Science and scientific temper will be spread to the students and will be inspiring for the youth.
- All stakeholders collectively work towards "Vigyan se Vikas"- contributing to the Making of a New India.

Sources: pib.

4. GI TAG FOR ALPHONSO FROM KONKAN

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about GI tags and related key facts.
- **Context:** Alphonso from Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Palghar, Thane and Raigad districts of Maharashtra, is registered as Geographical Indication (GI).
- The king of mangoes, Alphonso, better known as 'Hapus' in Maharashtra, is in demand in domestic and international markets not only for its taste but also for pleasant fragrance and vibrant colour. It has long been one of the world's most



popular fruit and is exported to various countries including Japan, Korea and Europe. New markets such as USA and Australia have recently opened up.

About GI tag:

What is it?

- A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.

Significance of a GI tag:

- Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

Security:

- Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

Provisions in this regard:

- GI is covered as element of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under Paris Convention for Protection of Industrial Property.
- At international level, GI is governed by WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
- In India, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999 governs it.

Sources: pib.

5. BIHAR'S 'SHAHI LITCHI' GETS GI TAG

What to study?

- For Prelims: Shahi litchi.
- For Mains: All about GI tag.
- **Context:** Bihar's Shahi litchi has got the Geographical Indication (GI) tag and has become an exclusive brand in the national and international market.



Key facts:

- The famous Shahi litchi, which is famous for its sweet, juicy, unique flavour and aroma, is mostly grown in Muzaffarpur and neighbouring districts including East Champaran, Vaishali, Samastipur and Begusarai.
- The GI registration was done in the name of Litchi Growers Association of Bihar, which had applied for the tag.

Significance:

- Bihar produces 40% of the litchi grown in the country on 38% of the area. The GI tag to Shahi litchi will boost up its demand in the market and will minimise the fear of fake and poor quality litchis.
- The GI tag for the fruit will help and benefit thousands of litchi growers who will gain access to more markets and get better price in the country and abroad.

Facts for Prelims:

- Other GI tags associated with Bihar: Katrani rice, Jardalu mango and Magahi paan (betel vine).

Sources: the hindu.

6. ONEERTM

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance OneerTM.
- **Context:** CSIR has developed an affordable Water Disinfection System "OneerTM". The device will go a long way in meeting the requirements of potable water in rural and urban areas.

About “OneerTM”:

- **Use:** It is useful for continuous treatment of water and eliminates all disease causing pathogens such as virus, bacteria, fungi, protozoa and cyst to provide safe drinking water to domestic and communities settings as per National and International standards prescribed for potable water (BIS, WHO etc.).

Significance:

- According to the World Health Organization, “access to safe drinking-water is essential to health, a basic human right and a component of effective policy for health protection”.
 - However, currently, a large proportion of India’s rural community is consuming water that does not meet the WHO drinking water quality standards. And infection through drinking water results in an increase in morbidity and mortality particularly amongst children.
 - Oneer developed by CSIR-IITR, will provide access to safe and clean drinking water at a cost of just 2 Paise / Ltr. The Community level model is of 450 LPH capacity which can be scaled up to 5000 to 1 lakh L/day; and is also maintenance and membrane free. The technology will be helpful especially for rural people since it can be solar powered.

Sources: pib.

7. INDIA'S FIRST ENGINE-LESS TRAIN SET TO HIT TRACKS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and technological implications of the feat.
- **Context:** *Train 18, India's first engine-less train* for inter-city travel is set to hit the tracks very soon.

About Train 18:

- 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.
- The full AC train is equipped to run at a speed of up to 160 kmph as against Shatabdi’s 130 kmph which will cut down travel time by 15%.

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

1. MOBILE ASTEROID SURFACE SCOUT (MACOT)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Objectives and significance of the mission, Asteroid Ryugu.
- **Context:** The Hayabusa2 probe launched the French-German Mobile Asteroid Surface Scout, or MASCOT towards the Ryugu asteroid’s surface.

About MASCOT:

- The 10-kg box-shaped MASCOT is loaded with sensors. It has been built by the German Aerospace Center (DLR) and the French Space Agency (Cnes).
- It can take images at multiple wavelengths, investigate minerals with a microscope, gauge surface temperatures and measure magnetic fields.
- MASCOT will be largely immobile — it will “jump” just once on its mission, and it can turn on its sides.
- The MASCOT has a maximum battery life of just 16 hours.

MINERVA-II micro-rovers:

- About 10 days ago, Hayabusa2 dropped a pair of MINERVA-II micro-rovers on the Ryugu asteroid. It was the first time that moving, robotic observation device have been successfully landed on an asteroid.
- The rovers will take advantage of Ryugu's low gravity to jump around on the surface -travelling as far as 15 metres (49 feet) while airbourne and staying in the air for as long as 15 minutes — to survey the asteroid's physical features with cameras and sensors.

Objectives of Hayabusa2 mission:

- The Hayabusa2 is scheduled later this month to deploy an "impactor" that will explode above the asteroid, shooting a two-kilo (four-pound) copper object into it to blast a small crater on the surface. The probe will then hover over the artificial crater and collect samples using an extended arm.
- The samples of "fresh" materials, unexposed to millennia of wind and radiation, could help answer some fundamental questions about life and the universe, including whether elements from space helped give rise to life on Earth.

Background:

- Hayabusa2, about the size of a large fridge and equipped with solar panels, is the successor to JAXA's first asteroid explorer, Hayabusa — Japanese for falcon.
- That probe returned from a smaller, potato-shaped, asteroid in 2010 with dust samples despite various setbacks during an epic seven-year odyssey and was hailed as a scientific triumph.

Sources: the hindu.

2. PARKER SOLAR PROBE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Parker Solar Probe- mission objectives, significance and why study sun and its corona.
- **Context:** NASA's historic mission- Parker Solar Probe- to solve the mysteries of the Sun has successfully completed its flyby of Venus on October 3rd. The probe successfully completed its flyby of Venus at a distance of about 1,500 miles during the first Venus gravity assist of the mission.
- These gravity assists will help the spacecraft tighten its orbit closer and closer to the Sun over the course of the mission.

What next?

- Throughout its mission, the probe will make six more Venus gravity assist and 24 total passes by the Sun.
- This manoeuvre will change Parker Solar Probe's trajectory to take the spacecraft closer to the Sun.

About the mission:

- **What is it?** NASA's historic Parker Solar Probe mission will revolutionize our understanding of the sun, where changing conditions can propagate out into the solar system, affecting Earth and other worlds. Parker Solar Probe will travel through the sun's atmosphere, closer to the surface than any spacecraft before it, facing brutal heat and radiation conditions — and ultimately providing humanity with the closest-ever observations of a star.
- **Journey:** In order to unlock the mysteries of the sun's atmosphere, Parker Solar Probe will use Venus' gravity during seven flybys over nearly seven years to gradually bring its orbit closer to the sun. The spacecraft will fly through the sun's atmosphere as close as 3.9 million miles to our star's surface, well within the orbit of Mercury and more than seven times closer than any spacecraft has come before.
- **Goals:** The primary science goals for the mission are to trace how energy and heat move through the solar corona and to explore what accelerates the solar wind as well as solar energetic particles.

Parker Solar Probe has three detailed science objectives:

1. Trace the flow of energy that heats and accelerates the solar corona and solar wind.
2. Determine the structure and dynamics of the plasma and magnetic fields at the sources of the solar wind.
3. Explore mechanisms that accelerate and transport energetic particles.

Why study corona?

- The corona is hotter than the surface of the sun. The corona gives rise to the solar wind, a continuous flow of charged particles that permeates the solar system.
- Unpredictable solar winds cause disturbances in our planet's magnetic field and can play havoc with communications technology on Earth. NASA hopes the findings will enable scientists to forecast changes in Earth's space environment.

Why do we study the sun and the solar wind?

- The sun is the only star we can study up close. By studying this star we live with, we learn more about stars throughout the universe.
- The sun is a source of light and heat for life on Earth. The more we know about it, the more we can understand how life on Earth developed.
- The sun also affects Earth in less familiar ways. It is the source of the solar wind; a flow of ionized gases from the sun that streams past Earth at speeds of more than 500 km per second (a million miles per hour).
- Disturbances in the solar wind shake Earth's magnetic field and pump energy into the radiation belts, part of a set of changes in near-Earth space known as space weather.
- Space weather can change the orbits of satellites, shorten their lifetimes, or interfere with onboard electronics. The more we learn about what causes space weather – and how to predict it – the more we can protect the satellites we depend on.
- The solar wind also fills up much of the solar system, dominating the space environment far past Earth. As we send spacecraft and astronauts further and further from home, we must understand this space environment just as early seafarers needed to understand the ocean.

Facts for Prelims:

- The previous closest pass to the Sun was by a probe called Helios 2, which in 1976 came within 27 million miles (43 million km).
- By way of comparison, the average distance from the Sun for Earth is 93 million miles (150 million km).

Sources: the hindu.

3. GAGANYAAN 2022

What to study?

- For Prelims: Particulars of the programme.
- For Mains: Challenges involved.
- Context:** Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**) and Russia's Roscosmos State Corporation for Space Activities (**ROSCOSMOS**) have signed an MoU to work together for **Gaganyaan**.
- As per the MoU, ROSCOSMOS has offered ride to Indian astronaut short visit to International Space Station (ISS) on board Soyuz spacecraft for short training mission in 2022.

About Gaganyaan:

- It is India's first manned space mission. Under it, India is planning to send three humans (Gaganyatris) into space i.e. in low earth orbit (LEO) by 2022 i.e. by 75th Independence Day for period of five to seven days.
- India plans to build a crew vehicle that can accommodate 2 or 3 astronauts and human rate its GSLV Mk-III launcher.

Recent technological advancements:

- In what appears to be a preparation for the Gaganyaan mission, ISRO recently conducted its first 'pad abort' test that was successful.
 - The 'pad abort' test or Crew Escape System is an emergency escape measure that helps pull the crew away from the launch vehicle when a mission has to be aborted. The test was conducted at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.
 - The Pad Abort Test demonstrated the safe recovery of the crew module in case of any exigency at the launch pad.

Way ahead:

- A manned space mission is very different from all other missions that ISRO has so far completed. In terms of complexity and ambition, even the missions to the Moon (Chandrayaan) and Mars (Mangalyaan) are nowhere in comparison.
 - For a manned mission, the key distinguishing capabilities that ISRO has had to develop include the ability to bring the spacecraft back to Earth after flight, and to build a spacecraft in which astronauts can live in Earth-like conditions in space.
 - If India does launch the Gaganyaan mission, it will be the fourth nation to do so after the United States, Russia and China.

Sources: the hindu.

4. NASA'S NEW HORIZONS MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the mission.
- **Context:** NASA's New Horizons probe is on course to fly by the Kuiper Belt object nicknamed Ultima Thule, which is at a distance of 6.6 billion kilometers from Earth. This event will set the record for the most distant object ever visited by a spacecraft.

About New Horizons Mission:

- New Horizons was launched on 19 January 2006, and has been travelling through space for the past nine years.
- Just over a year after launch, it passed Jupiter and used the giant world's gravity to boost its velocity, as well as making scientific observations. This boost shortened the time to reach Pluto by years.
- The mission will complete what NASA calls the reconnaissance of the classical solar system, and it makes the U.S. the first nation to send a space probe to every planet from Mercury to Pluto. The probe has traveled more than 3 billion miles to reach Pluto.
- New Horizons' core science mission is to map the surfaces of Pluto and Charon, to study Pluto's atmosphere and to take temperature readings.
- The spacecraft was launched in 2006, before the big debate started over Pluto's status as a planet. In August of that same year, the International Astronomical Union reclassified Pluto as a dwarf planet.

Facts for Prelims:

- **The Kuiper belt** sometimes called the Edgeworth–Kuiper belt, is a region of the Solar System beyond the planets, extending from the orbit of Neptune (at 30 AU) to approximately 50 AU from the Sun. It is similar to the asteroid belt, but it is far larger—20 times as wide and 20 to 200 times as massive.

Sources: the hindu.

5. 100K GENOME ASIA PROJECT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About the project and its significance.
- **Context:** A group of Indian scientists and companies are involved with a 100k GenomeAsia project, led out of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore, to sequence the whole genomes of 100k Asians, including 50,000 Indians.

About 100k Genome Asia Project:

- A non-profit consortium called GenomeAsia 100K has announced an ambitious plan to sequence 100,000 Asian individuals in hopes of accelerating precision medicine applications for Asian populations.
- It will also leverage on big data analytics and advances in data science and artificial intelligence. Participants from 12 South Asian countries and at least seven North and East Asian countries will be selected.
- In the first phase, the project will focus on creating phased reference genomes for all major Asian ethnic groups—representing a major step forward in understanding the population history and substructure of the region.

- The sequencing of 100,000 individual genomes will be paired with microbiome, clinical and phenotype information to allow deeper analysis of diseased and healthy individuals in the context of inferred local ancestries.

Significance:

- With recent insights into the genome diversity of Asian ethnicities, it will become possible to understand the biology of disease in the currently under-studied Asian populations that represent 40 percent of humankind.
- Furthermore, the unique genetic diversity prevalent in South, North and East Asia provides a valuable source of clinical insights that should enhance our understanding of several rare and inherited diseases, as well as chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Sources: the hindu.

6. CHANDRA X-RAY OBSERVATORY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About the observatory, its objectives and accomplishments.
- Context:** NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory has entered protective "safe mode" due to a malfunction of some soft.

About Chandra X-Ray Observatory:

- The Chandra X-Ray Observatory is a NASA telescope that looks at black holes, quasars, supernovas, and the like – all sources of high energy in the universe. It shows a side of the cosmos that is invisible to the human eye.
- It was previously known as the Advanced X-ray Astrophysics Facility (AXAF).
- After more than a decade in service, the observatory has helped scientists glimpse the universe in action. It has watched galaxies collide, observed a black hole with cosmic hurricane winds, and glimpsed a supernova turning itself inside out after an explosion.
- The telescope is named after the Nobel Prize-winning Indian-American astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar.

Sources: the hindu.

7. BEPICOLOMBO

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: The mission- objectives, significance and working.
- Context:** European Space Agency's (Esa) first mission to Mercury- BepiColombo, is all set for launch.
- The four-tonne spacecraft will be launched into orbit by Esa's rocket Ariane 5 from the European spaceport at Kourou, French Guiana, on 20 October.
- It will then make a 5.2bn mile (8.5bn km) journey over seven years to reach its destination by 2025.

About BepiColombo:

- BepiColombo is a joint mission between ESA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), executed under ESA leadership.
- The mission comprises two spacecraft:** the Mercury Planetary Orbiter (MPO) and the Mercury Magnetospheric Orbiter (MMO). The MPO will study the surface and internal composition of the planet, and the MMO will study Mercury's magnetosphere, that is, the region of space around the planet that is influenced by its magnetic field.
- Need:** The scientific interest in going to Mercury lies in the valuable information that such a mission can provide to enhance our understanding of the planet itself as well as the formation of our Solar System; information which cannot be obtained with observations made from Earth.
- Challenges:** Europe's space scientists have identified the mission as one of the most challenging long-term planetary projects, because Mercury's proximity to the Sun makes it difficult for a spacecraft to reach the planet and to survive in the harsh environment found there.

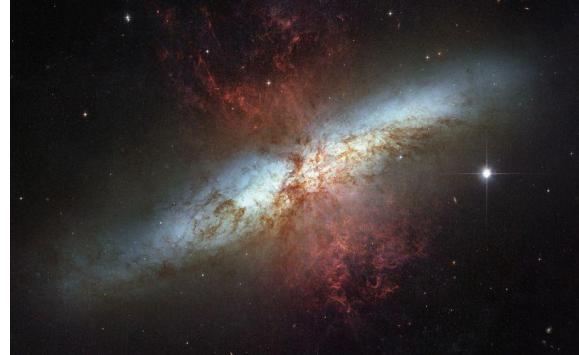
- **Significance:** Mercury is a poorly explored planet. So far, only two spacecraft have visited the planet: NASA's Mariner 10, which flew past three times in 1974–5 and returned the first close-up images of the planet, and NASA's MESSENGER spacecraft, which performed three flybys (two in 2008 and one in 2009) before entering orbit around the planet in March 2011. The information obtained when BepiColombo arrives will throw light not only on the composition and history of Mercury, but also on the history and formation of the inner planets in general, including Earth.

Sources: [toi](#).

8. GALAXY PROTO-SUPERCLUSTER — HYPERION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Hyperion- key facts.
- **Context:** A team of scientists at the European Southern Observatory (ESO) have cited the most massive structure in the early universe known to date. The galaxy proto-supercluster found has been named Hyperion.
- The galaxy has been found using new measurements made by the visible multi-object spectrograph of ESO's Very Large Telescope and pouring over vast arrays of archive data.



Key facts:

- Hyperion's unimaginably enormous mass is estimated to be a million billion times that of our own Sun (which is approximately 1,048 Jupiters, or 333,000 Earths).
- Hyperion is an adolescent in astronomy terms. Its distance from earth means astronomers are viewing it as it was created just over 2 billion years after the Big Bang, which gave rise to the universe about 13.8 billion years ago. The Milky Way galaxy, which hosts our Solar System, is about 13.6 billion years old.
- Understanding Hyperion and how it compares to similar recent structures can give insights into how the universe developed in the past and will evolve into the future, and allows us the opportunity to challenge some models of supercluster formation. Unearthing this cosmic titan helps uncover the history of these large-scale structures.

Significance:

- This is the first time that such a large structure has been identified at such a high redshift, just over two billion years after the Big Bang. Normally, these kinds of structures are known at lower redshifts, which means when the universe has had much more time to evolve and construct such huge things.

About visible multi-object spectrograph:

- The VIMOS, an instrument that measures objects at a distance of billions of light years away, in practice allows experts to see what the early universe was like in the distant cosmic past.
- The spectrograph is hosted by the Chile-based Very Large Telescope.

About VLT:

- The Very Large Telescope (VLT) is a telescope facility operated by the European Southern Observatory on Cerro Paranal in the Atacama Desert of northern Chile.
- The VLT consists of four individual telescopes, each with a primary mirror 8.2 m across, which are generally used separately but can be used together to achieve very high angular resolution. The four separate optical telescopes are known as Antu, Kueyen, Melipal and Yepun, which are all words for astronomical objects in the Mapuche language.
- The VLT operates at visible and infrared wavelengths. Each individual telescope can detect objects roughly four billion times fainter than can be detected with the naked eye, and when all the telescopes are combined, the facility can achieve an angular resolution of about 0.001 arc-second. This is equivalent to roughly 2 meters resolution at the distance of the Moon.
- The VLT is the most productive ground-based facility for astronomy, with only the Hubble Space Telescope generating more scientific papers among facilities operating at visible wavelengths.

Sources: [toi](#).

9. CHINA'S ARTIFICIAL MOON PROJECT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the project.
- Context:** China is in the process of creating an “artificial moon” that would be bright enough to replace the streetlights in the south-western city of **Chengdu** by 2020.

Key facts:

- Chinese scientists plan to send three artificial moons into space in the next four years, and the moons — made from reflective material like a mirror — are expected to orbit at 500 kilometres above the Earth and light up an area with a diameter of 10 to 80 kilometres.
- The artificial moon will have a reflective coating that can deflect sunlight back to Earth, similar to how the moon shines.
- The illuminated satellite is said to be eight times brighter than the real moon. The satellites’ brightness and service time are both adjustable, and the accuracy of the lighting can be controlled within tens of metres.
- The three artificial moons would operate alternately in order to significantly reduce infrastructural electricity consumption, especially during winter. The illuminated satellite is designed to complement the moon at night.
- Lighting from the artificial moon covering 50 square kilometres in Chengdu could save about 1.2 billion yuan (\$240 million) in electricity costs every year. It could also be used to light up areas experiencing power outages caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes.

Background:

- The idea for the man-made moon originated from a French artist who imagined hanging a necklace made of mirrors in the sky to light up the streets of Paris at night.
- Russia attempted to launch a 25-metre “space mirror” but the project was put off in 1999.

Sources: [toi](#).

10. DAWN MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features, significance and accomplishments of the mission.
- Context:** NASA’s Dawn mission is drawing to a close after 11 years of breaking new ground in planetary science, gathering breathtaking imagery, and performing unprecedented feats of spacecraft engineering.
- Dawn’s mission was extended several times, outperforming scientists’ expectations in its exploration of two planet-like bodies, Ceres and Vesta, that make up 45 percent of the mass of the main asteroid belt. Now the spacecraft is about to run out of a key fuel, hydrazine.
- When that happens, most likely between mid-September and mid-October, Dawn will lose its ability to communicate with Earth. It will remain in a silent orbit around Ceres for decades.

Dawn mission:

- NASA’s Dawn mission was aimed at studying the asteroid Vesta and dwarf planet Ceres, celestial bodies believed to have accreted early in the history of the solar system. The mission characterized the early solar system and the processes that dominated its formation.
- Dawn is the only mission ever to orbit two extraterrestrial targets. It orbited giant asteroid Vesta for 14 months from 2011 to 2012, then continued on to Ceres, where it has been in orbit since March 2015.

Sources: [toi](#).

11. INDIA'S FIRST BITCOIN ATM KIOSK SET UP IN BENGALURU

What to study?

- For Prelims: India's first Bitcoin ATM.
- For Mains: Cryptocurrencies- regulation, concerns, pros and cons.
- Context:** Amidst uncertainty over the validity of cryptocurrencies and the Central government directions preventing banks from trading the same, Unocoin Technologies Private Ltd has set up India's first ATM kiosk to trade in cryptocurrencies in Bengaluru.

How it works?

- The first-of-its-kind automated teller machine will have both a trading and exchange platform, and will allow verified customers to use the device. It is expected to become operational soon.
- This kiosk is accessible to registered customers of Unocoin. The customers will be able to buy or sell up to 10 Bitcoins — one of the high value cryptocurrencies per day. However, all the transactions will have to be conducted in Indian rupees which will then be changed into the currency of choice of the consumer.
- The kiosk will allow customers to trade in Bitcoin and Ethereum, while providing an exchange platform for 24 other cryptocurrencies in circulation.
- Customers risking the use of Bitcoins will have to register by using their mobile number and entering a password. A verification process is initiated during which details such as PAN number, phone number, address, bank details, and others have to be furnished. It uses an elaborate procedure for both deposits and withdrawals, with the withdrawals requiring a prior request and 12-digit OTP.



Fiat and Non-fiat currency:

- A **fiat currency** is any currency that has no intrinsic physical value, but whose value is established by government decree. For example, most national currencies around the world, including the Rupee and the Dollar, are fiat currencies as their values are dictated by the government.
- Non-fiat currencies** such as the Gold Standard have more or less been effectively phased out, as they require adequate physical stockpiles to maintain their value.
- However, the new breed of digital cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin blurs the boundaries between fiat and non-fiat — they don't have any physical value as such, but are also not government-controlled. This has created uncertainties about their role in the modern financial system.

What is bitcoin?

- Bitcoin is one of many cryptocurrencies that have gained popularity across the world.
- A cryptocurrency is basically a digital asset that has been created to function as a medium of exchange, like cash.
- It uses cryptography to ensure the security of transactions — authentication and prevention of duplicate transactions — and to control the creation of new units of currency.
- This is different from cash in that cryptocurrencies have no physical form. These blur the boundaries between fiat and non-fiat currencies. They are simply numbers on a screen and there is no central bank that issues new currency. However, bitcoin has emerged as the popular face of cryptocurrencies.

Sources: the hindu.

12. ACINETOBACTER JUNII

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Acinetobacter Junii- key facts and how it helps in degradation of toluene.
- Context:** Using bacteria- Acinetobacter Junii, isolated from soil and effluents near an oil refinery, researchers from the University of Delhi and IIT-BHU, have successfully degraded toluene into less-toxic byproducts.

Background:

- Toluene is one of the petrochemical wastes that get released without treatment from industries such as refineries, paint, textile, paper and rubber.
- Toluene has been reported to cause serious health problems to aquatic life, and studies point that it has genotoxic and carcinogenic effects on human beings.

**Acinetobacter Junii:**

- The bacteria were isolated from the soil samples, identified and studied for their toluene-degrading abilities.
- These bacteria change the morphology of toluene to remove its toxicity. The degradation is found to be general aerobic (in presence of oxygen) biodegradation. The bacteria use up this toluene as their carbon source in the presence of oxygen.

Sources: the hindu.

13. PARKER SOLAR PROBE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About Parker Solar Probe- mission objectives, significance and why study sun and its corona.
- **Context:** The Parker Solar Probe now holds ***the record for closest approach to the sun by a human-made object***. The spacecraft – which launched on August 12, 2018 – passed the current record of 26.55 million miles (43 million km) from the sun's surface October 29, 2018.

Key facts:

- The previous record for closest solar approach was set by the German-American Helios 2 spacecraft in April 1976.
- As the Parker Solar Probe mission progresses, the spacecraft will repeatedly break its own records, with a final close approach of 3.83 million miles (6.2 million km) from the sun's surface expected in 2024.
- Parker Solar Probe is also expected to break the record for fastest spacecraft traveling relative to the sun, also on October 29. The current record for heliocentric speed is 153,454 miles per hour, set by Helios 2 in April 1976.

About the mission:

- **What is it?** NASA's historic Parker Solar Probe mission will revolutionize our understanding of the sun, where changing conditions can propagate out into the solar system, affecting Earth and other worlds. Parker Solar Probe will travel through the sun's atmosphere, closer to the surface than any spacecraft before it, facing brutal heat and radiation conditions — and ultimately providing humanity with the closest-ever observations of a star.
- **Journey:** In order to unlock the mysteries of the sun's atmosphere, Parker Solar Probe will use Venus' gravity during seven flybys over nearly seven years to gradually bring its orbit closer to the sun. The spacecraft will fly through the sun's atmosphere as close as 3.9 million miles to our star's surface, well within the orbit of Mercury and more than seven times closer than any spacecraft has come before.
- **Goals:** The primary science goals for the mission are to trace how energy and heat move through the solar corona and to explore what accelerates the solar wind as well as solar energetic particles.

Parker Solar Probe has three detailed science objectives:

- Trace the flow of energy that heats and accelerates the solar corona and solar wind.
- Determine the structure and dynamics of the plasma and magnetic fields at the sources of the solar wind.
- Explore mechanisms that accelerate and transport energetic particles.

Why study corona?

- The corona is hotter than the surface of the sun. The corona gives rise to the solar wind, a continuous flow of charged particles that permeates the solar system.

- Unpredictable solar winds cause disturbances in our planet's magnetic field and can play havoc with communications technology on Earth.
- NASA hopes the findings will enable scientists to forecast changes in Earth's space environment.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. IUCN THREAT CATEGORIES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on IUCN, red list and India related facts.
- **Context:** Scientists have identified the threat status of 59 Indian plant species based on criteria used by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in the hope that this "streamlines" conservation efforts for the plants.

Key facts:

- Around 2,700 plant species in India are at risk but very few have been assessed by the IUCN. To bridge this gap, experts from several institutes prioritized 59 plant species that are at risk of "elimination" if the threat levels they face are not assessed soon. They assigned each species a threat status based on IUCN criteria.
- This included the extent and area of each plant's geographical range, which revealed that 10 species are critically endangered, 18 endangered, six vulnerable, five near threatened and one species each are data deficient and least concern.

Causes for decline in population:

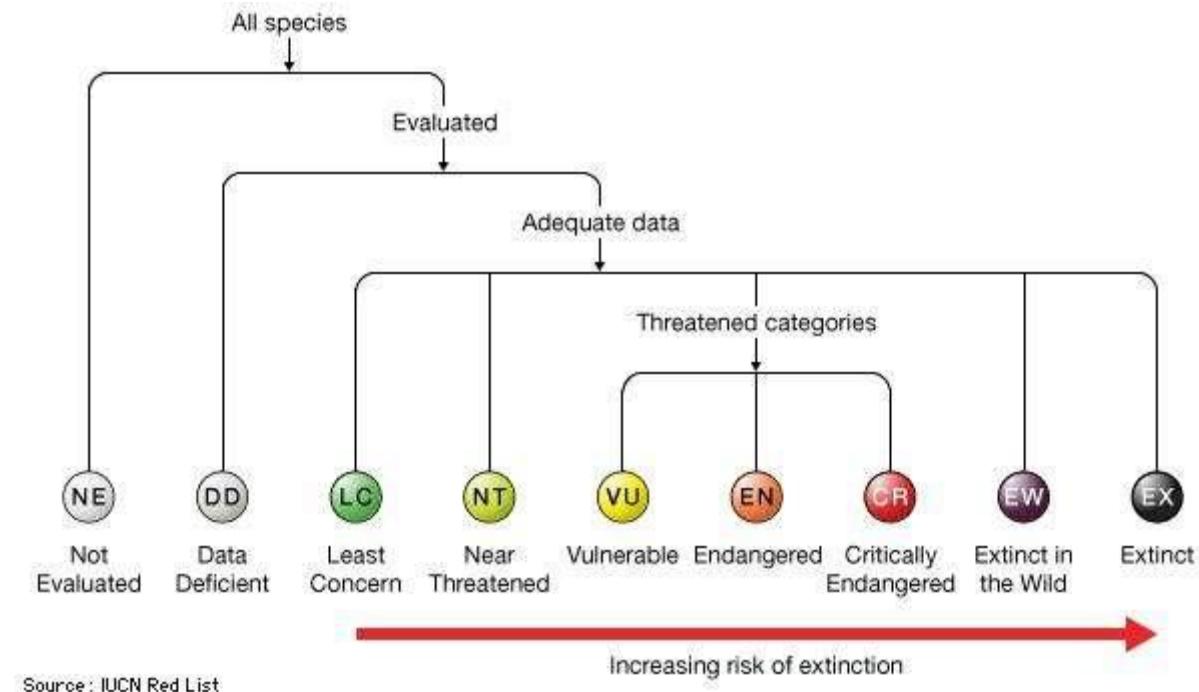
- Based on population sizes and numbers of mature individuals remaining in the wild (using field surveys that also revealed that **habitat loss** was a huge factor affecting many declining plant populations), the team classified 10 species as critically endangered, three as endangered and five as vulnerable. Germination tests in the laboratory also suggest that factors such as **low seed viability** could have caused declines in the wild too.

Why quantify threat levels?

- Quantifying threat levels of species can be crucial for their conservation. For instance, funding agencies often consider the threat status of species provided in IUCN's Red List (a catalogue of the world's threatened species), to sponsor research and conservation activities to save them.

IUCN- key facts:

- IUCN was founded in October 1948 as the International Union for the Protection of Nature (or IUPN) following an international conference in Fontainebleau, France.
- It was renamed as International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1956 with the acronym IUCN.
- IUCN is the world's first global environmental organization. Today it is the largest professional global conservation network
- The Union's HQ is located in Gland, near Geneva, in Switzerland.
- It demonstrates how biodiversity is fundamental to addressing some of the world's greatest challenges such as climate change, sustainable development and food security.
- **The IUCN Red List** is set upon precise criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species and subspecies. These criteria are relevant to all species and all regions of the world. The aim is to convey the urgency of conservation issues to the public and policy makers, as well as help the international community to try to reduce species extinction.
- **Species are classified by the IUCN Red List into nine groups**, set through criteria such as rate of decline, population size, area of geographic distribution, and degree of population and distribution fragmentation.



Sources: the hindu.

2. UN CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH AWARD 2018

- Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been awarded with the UN's highest environmental honour- Champions of the Earth Award, bestowed upon five other individuals and organisations.
- French President Emmanuel Macron, President of France and Modi have been jointly recognised in the Policy Leadership category** for their pioneering work in championing the International Solar Alliance and promoting new areas of levels of cooperation on environmental action, including Macron's work on the Global Pact for the Environment and Modi's unprecedented pledge to eliminate all single-use plastic in India by 2022.
- Cochin International Airport** has also been honoured this year with the award for Entrepreneurial Vision, for its leadership in the use of sustainable energy.



Champions of the Earth Award:

- The Champions of the Earth award, the UN's highest environmental recognition, was founded in 2005.
- The award celebrates exceptional figures from the public and private sectors and from civil society, whose actions have had a transformative positive impact on the environment.
- The award also recognises the efforts for promoting new areas of levels of cooperation on environmental action.

3. METHANOL COOKING FUEL PROGRAM OF INDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about Methanol- uses, advantages, significance and future potential, about the **Programme**.
- Context:** Signifying a paradigm shift towards the use of alternate cooking fuel technology, the Namrup-based Assam Petrochemicals Limited (APL) has rolled out the country's first methanol-based cooking fuel project- 'Green and Clean Fuel Pilot Project on Methanol Cooking Stove'.

Highlights of the project:

- Under the pilot project, stove and methanol canister will be made available in a limited scale. The methanol cooking fuel will be available in canisters of 1.2 kg capacity each, which will be priced at around Rs 32 and around 18 of them would be equivalent to one conventional domestic LPG cylinder.
- The technology for the canister and the special burner has been provided by Sweden. In two months, APL will start commercial production of methanol-based cooking fuel. Initially the product will be made available for the northeastern region.

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.

Boost to NITI Aayog's Programme:

- This is India's first step towards realising the concept of 'Methanol Economy', the flagship programme of NITI Aayog. Through the programme, the NITI Aayog has been working on a roadmap to replace 20% of the country's crude imports through methanol alone.

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 CO₂ (greenhouse gas emission) both from using Methanol and while producing Methanol can be tapped back to produce Methanol.
- Thereby a seamless loop of CO₂ sequestration cycle is created to perpetually burn fuels without polluting the environment at all. CO₂ 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: pib.

4. NATIONAL DOLPHIN RESEARCH CENTRE (NDRC)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About Gangetic Dolphins and NDRC.
- For Mains: Conservation efforts both at National and International levels.
- Context:** India's and Asia's first Dolphin Research Centre will be set up on the banks of the Ganga river in Patna University campus in Patna, Bihar. It will be named- National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC).
- The announcement for the centre was made on the occasion of Dolphin day (October 5), observed in Bihar for protection and conservation of Gangetic river dolphin to create awareness to save endangered species.

Role:

- NDRC will play important role in strengthening conservation efforts and research to save endangered mammal whose population is decreasing.
- Bihar is home to around half of the country's estimated 3,000 dolphin population.

About Gangetic Dolphins:

- The Ganges River dolphin, or susu, inhabits the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh.
- It is classified as endangered by the IUCN.
- This dolphin is among the four “obligate” freshwater dolphins – the other three are the baiji now likely extinct from the Yangtze river in China, the bhulan of the Indus in Pakistan and the boto of the Amazon River in Latin America. Although there are several species of marine dolphins whose ranges include some freshwater habitats, these four species live only in rivers and lakes.
- Being a mammal, the Ganges River dolphin cannot breathe in the water and must surface every 30-120 seconds. Because of the sound it produces when breathing, the animal is popularly referred to as the '**'Susu'**'.

Threats:

- The survival of the Ganges River dolphin is threatened by unintentional killing through entanglement in fishing gear; directed harvest for dolphin oil, which is used as a fish attractant and for medicinal purposes; water development projects (e.g. water extraction and the construction of barrages, high dams, and embankments); industrial waste and pesticides; municipal sewage discharge and noise from vessel traffic; and overexploitation of prey, mainly due to the widespread use of non-selective fishing gear.

Sources: the hindu.

5. TINY SPHERES TO TRAP WATER CONTAMINANTS DEVELOPED

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: BPA- what is it? And how it pollutes water, about the newly developed spheres.
- **Context:** Scientists have created tiny spheres that can catch and destroy bisphenol A (BPA), a synthetic chemical used to make plastics that often contaminates water.

Bisphenol A (BPA):

- BPA is commonly used to coat the insides of food cans, bottle tops and water supply lines, and was once a component of baby bottles.
- **Concerns:** While BPA that seeps into food and drink is considered safe in low doses, prolonged exposure is suspected of affecting the health of children and contributing to high blood pressure.

Tiny spheres to trap BPA- how they function?

- The micron-sized spheres developed resemble tiny flower-like collections of titanium dioxide petals.
- The supple petals provide plenty of surface area for researchers to anchor cyclodextrin — a benign sugar-based molecule often used in food and drugs.
- It has a two-faced structure, with a hydrophobic (water-avoiding) cavity and a hydrophilic (water-attracting) outer surface.
- BPA is hydrophobic and naturally attracted to the cavity. Once trapped, reactive oxygen species (ROS) produced by the spheres degrades BPA into harmless chemicals.

Sources: the hindu.

6. CANINE DISTEMPER VIRUS (CDV)

What to study?

- For Prelims: About CDV, Gir forest and Asiatic lions.
- For Mains: Cause of death of lions- measures needed to tackle it.

- **Context:** Gujarat Forest Department has started vaccination of lions in Gir sanctuary to protect them from a deadly canine distemper virus (CDV). The virus is blamed for the death lions in Gujarat's Gir sanctuary in last one month.

What is Canine Distemper Virus?

- Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) is a viral disease that infects the gastrointestinal, respiratory, and central nervous systems. Dogs who have not been vaccinated for Canine Distemper are the most at-risk. While the disease can also be contracted when improperly vaccinated or when a dog has high susceptibility to bacterial infection, these cases are rare.
- CDV can be spread through direct contact (licking, breathing air, etc.) or indirect contact (bedding, toys, food bowls, etc.), though it cannot live on surfaces for very long. Inhaling the virus is the primary method of exposure. There is no known cure for CDV.

What's the issue?

- The magnificent Asiatic lion is under threat. Twenty-three lions have died in as many days in the eastern part of Gujarat's Gir sanctuary.
- This case is more worrisome as the big cat population in Gujarat is the last of the Asiatic lions in the wild.

Facts for Prelims:

- Gir sanctuary is the only wild population of Asiatic lions in the world.
- It is listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, has been categorized as Endangered on IUCN Red List and is listed Appendix I of CITES.

Sources: the hindu.

7. EURASIAN OTTER

- **Context:** Researchers have confirmed the presence of the elusive Eurasian Otter one of the least-known of India's three Otter species in the Western Ghats after more than 70 years.
- While the species is widespread across Europe, northern Africa and several south Asian countries, it is not as frequently seen as smooth-coated or small-clawed otters in India.

Key facts:

- Otters are members of the mammalian family called Mustelidae. They are shy and have elusive habits, adapting to a variety of habitats ranging from marine to freshwater environments.
- **IUCN Status:** Near Threatened.
- It is protected under the **Wildlife Protection Act (1972)**.
- **Major threats** to Asian otter population are loss of wetland habitats due to construction of large-scale hydroelectric projects, conversion of wetlands for settlements and agriculture, reduction in prey biomass, poaching and contamination of waterways by pesticides. Poaching for pelt and other body parts that are believed to possess therapeutic properties.
- Few nomadic hunting tribes eat otter flesh. Reductions in prey biomass (fish stocks) and infrastructural developments have led to disappearance of otters from the many streams and rivers which were once major otter habitats.

8. FOREST FIRES IN INDIA AND ITS IMPACT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Highlights of the report.
- For Mains: Forest fires- spread, causes, management and strategy.
- **Context:** A report titled "**Strengthening Forest Fire Management in India**", jointly prepared by the MoEFCC and the World Bank, has been released.

Highlights of the report:

- **Occurrence of forest fires and their impact:** Forest fires occur in around half of the country's 647 districts every year. Central India has the largest area affected by fire. North-East accounts for 56% of burnt forest land during 2003-2016, followed by southern states and the North-East. However, North-eastern states account for the biggest share of fire detections, with at least 55% of fire incidents reported during 2003-2016.
- **Concerns:** With at least one in four people dependent on forests for their livelihood, India is losing at least ₹1,100 crore due to forest fires every year, says a new World Bank report. The report calls for a national plan for the prevention of forest fire. Repeated fires in short succession are reducing diversity of species and harming natural regeneration, while posing a risk to over 92 million in India who live in areas of forest cover.

Way ahead:

- The findings are significant since preventing forest fires is crucial to meet Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) in order to limit global warming.
- As per the Fifth Assessment Report of IPCC, forest fires globally contribute 2.5 billion to 4.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ to carbon emissions every year.
- Tackling forest fires is even more important in India as the country has committed to bringing 33% of its geographical area under forest cover by 2030, as part of NDCs.

Facts for Prelims:

- India aims to increase its forest cover by 5 million hectares, as part of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change.

Sources: the hindu.

9. 'MINIMUM RIVER FLOWS' FOR THE GANGA

What to study?

- For Prelims: Specified limits and the in-charge authority.
- For Mains: Ganga river conservation- efforts, concerns, challenges and interventions.
- **Context:** In a first, the National Mission for Clean Ganga has mandated the minimum quantity of water — or ecological flow — that various stretches of the Ganga must necessarily have all through the year.

Implications:

- The new norms would require hydropower projects located along the river to modify their operations so as to ensure they are in compliance. Power projects that don't meet these norms as yet would be given three years to comply and "mini and micro projects" would be exempt from these requirements.

Flow specifications:

- **The upper stretches of the Ganga** — from its origins in the glaciers and until Haridwar — would have to maintain: 20% of the monthly average flow of the preceding 10-days between November and March, which is the dry season; 25% of the average during the 'lean season' of October, April and May; and 30% of monthly average during the monsoon months of June-September.
- **For the main stem of the Ganga** — from Haridwar in Uttarakhand to Unnao, Uttar Pradesh — the notification specifies minimum flow at various barrages: Bhimgoda (Haridwar) must ensure a minimum of 36 cubic metres per second (cumecs) between October-May, and 57 cumecs in the monsoon; and the barrages at Bijnor, Narora and Kanpur must maintain a minimum of 24 cumecs in the non-monsoon months of October-May, and 48 cumecs during the monsoon months of June-September.

Designated Authority:

- The Central Water Commission would be the designated authority to collect relevant data and submit flow monitoring-cum-compliance reports on a quarterly basis to the NMCG, according to the notification.

Background:

- The notification is issued in the backdrop of ongoing 'fast unto death' by environmentalist and former IIT Kanpur faculty member GD Agarwal at Haridwar on issue of Ganga conservation.

- The 87-year-old Agrawal has been observing hunger strike since June 22 for pollution free and uninterrupted flow in the Ganga.

Facts for Prelims:

- About CWC:** Central Water Commission is a premier Technical Organization of India in the field of Water Resources and is presently functioning as an attached office of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India.
- Functions:** The Commission is 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. It also undertakes the investigations, construction and execution of any such schemes as required.

Sources: pib.

10. NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT SURVEY (NES)

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about NES, its need and significance.
- Context:** India's first ever National Environment Survey (NES) will be launched in January, 2019 to map environment data of 55 districts across 24 states and 3 Union Territories.

About NES:

- What it does?** The NES will rank all districts on their environmental performance and document their best green practices based on various environmental parameters.
- How?** The first NES will be carried out by Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) through Environmental Information System (ENVIS) and its hubs and resource partners across the country. It will be done through grid-based approach, using grids measuring 9x9 km to collect comprehensive data on various environmental parameters.
- The parameters include** air, water, soil quality; solid, hazardous and e-waste; emission inventory; forest & wildlife; flora & fauna; wetlands, lakes, rivers and other water bodies. It will also assess carbon sequestration potential of all the districts across the country.

Significance:

- The green data from this survey will provide important tool in hands of policy-makers for decision making at all levels – district, state and national. The survey will fully map and create emission inventory, provide valuation of ecosystem services and collate research in the field of environment.
- Initially the survey will be focusing on 55 districts and later will be scaled up to all districts in the country. The skilled manpower required for the survey will be provided from persons skilled and trained under MoEFCC's Green Skill Development Programme.

Sources: the hindu.

11. UNISDR REPORT ON CLIMATE RELATED DISASTERS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Concerns and challenges highlighted by the report, about UNISDR.
- Context:** UN has released a report titled 'Economic Losses, Poverty and Disasters 1998-2017'. It was compiled by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- India suffered a whopping \$79.5 billion economic loss due to climate-related disasters in the last 20 years.

Highlights of the report:

- The report highlights the impact of extreme weather events on the global economy. It states that the years between 1998 to 2017 have seen a dramatic rise of 151% in direct economic losses from climate-related disasters.

- In terms of the impact of disasters on the global economy between 1998 and 2017, affected countries reported direct losses of \$2.908 trillion, more than twice of what was lost in the previous two decades.
- Extreme weather events now account for 77 % of total economic losses of \$2.245 trillion. This represents a “dramatic rise” of 151% compared with losses reported between 1978 and 1997, which amounted to \$895 billion.
- The greatest economic losses have been experienced by the US at \$944.8 billion, followed by China at \$492.2 billion, Japan at \$376.3 billion, India at USD 79.5 billion and Puerto Rico at USD 71.7 billion.
- Storms, floods and earthquakes place three European countries in the top ten nations for economic losses: France, \$48.3 billion; Germany, \$57.9 billion and Italy \$56.6 billion. Thailand with \$52.4 billion and Mexico at \$46.5 billion complete the list.
- In terms of occurrences, climate-related disasters also dominate the picture, accounting for 91 per cent of all 7,255 major recorded events between 1998 and 2017. Floods (43.4 per cent) and storms (28.2 per cent) are the two most frequently occurring disasters.
- During this period, 1.3 million people lost their lives and 4.4 billion people were injured, rendered homeless, displaced or in need of emergency assistance. 563 earthquakes, including related tsunamis, accounted for 56 per cent of the total deaths or 747,234 lives lost.

Concerns:

- The report concludes that climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.
- The disasters will continue to be major impediments to sustainable development so long as the economic incentives to build and develop hazard-prone locations outweigh the perceived disaster risks.

Way ahead:

- In the wake of the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, it is clear that disasters have a steep human cost as millions of people are displaced every year, losing their homes and jobs because of extreme weather events and earthquakes. Therefore, a better understanding of the economic losses from extreme weather events can help to generate greater action on climate change and increased ambition on reducing greenhouse-gas emissions.
- Measuring economic losses can also motivate Governments to do more to achieve the targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which seeks a substantial reduction in disaster losses by 2030. Besides, reducing the economic losses from disasters has the power to transform lives and contribute greatly to the eradication of poverty.
- Integrating disaster risk reduction into investment decisions is the most cost-effective way to reduce these risks; investing in disaster risk reduction is therefore a pre-condition for developing sustainable in a changing climate.

UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR):

- It was established in 1999 as dedicated secretariat to facilitate implementation of International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). It is an organisational unit of UN Secretariat and is led by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction (SRSG). It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- It is mandated by United Nations General Assembly resolution (56/195) to serve as focal point in United Nations system for coordination of disaster reduction and to ensure synergies among disaster reduction activities of United Nations system and regional organizations and activities in socio-economic and humanitarian fields.

Sources: the hindu.

12. DELHI TO ENFORCE EMERGENCY PLAN

What to study?

- For Prelims: GAP- key facts.
- For Mains: Pollution- concerns, challenges and measures to prevent.
- **Context:** With the Air Quality Index or AQI moving to the “poor” category, the Central Pollution Control Board has decided to implement an emergency action plan in the National Capital.

Key facts:

- An AQI in the range of 0-50 is considered 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor' and 401-500 'severe'.
- The Supreme Court has empowered the Environment Pollution Control Authority(EPCA) to take various measures to tackle pollution. Under the order, the EPCA has mandated enforcement of Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the city.

Graded Action plan:

- An emergency protocol under the Graded Response Action Plan which involve a series of measures on basis of the Air Quality Index are set to be implemented. When the mark is between moderate and poor category, the burning of garbage will be stopped and pollution control regulations will be enforced.
- If the air quality drops to very poor category, additional measures will be taken including stopping of diesel gensets, enhancing parking fees and increasing frequency of metro and buses.
- For severe and very severe category air quality, additional measures would include frequent mechanised cleaning of roads and sprinkling of water, stopping entry of trucks, stopping construction activities and appointment of task force to take decisions like shutting of schools.

Background:

- Over the last several years, air quality in Delhi begins sliding from October-November as winds slow down and temperature drops. Pollutants like sand particles and smoke get trapped, turning the national capital virtually into a gas chamber.
- The particulate matter in Delhi's air went off charts last year, pushing up the level of pollutants to 10 times more than Chinese capital Beijing, known as the world's most polluted city.

About Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA):

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

Composition:

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

Functions:

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

Sources: the hindu.

13. AIR QUALITY EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

What to study?

- For Prelims: About AQE warning system.
- For Mains: Air pollution related issues and the need for early warning.
- **Context:** Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi has been launched.

About the Air Quality Early Warning System:

- The System is designed to predict extreme air pollution events and give alerts to take necessary steps as per Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) of the Government of India.

- The air pollution system has been developed jointly by the scientists at Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, India Meteorological Department and National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCFMRWF).
- The system will help in proactively forewarning, 3-4 days in advance, any large scale air pollution events which may occur over the Delhi region.
- The warning system consists of a) real time observations of air quality over Delhi region and details about natural aerosols like dust (from dust storms) and particulate matter using different satellite data sets b) Predictions of air pollutants from two different air quality prediction systems based on state-of-the-art atmospheric chemistry transport models and c) Warning Messages and Alerts and Bulletins.

Sources: pib.

14. GREEN CLIMATE FUND

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: GCF- key objectives, significance and funding in various projects.
- **Context:** Green Climate Fund has approved more than \$1 billion in new investments after a meeting held recently in Bahrain.
- The meeting approved 19 new projects, including a programme to protect freshwater resources in Bahrain. Environmentalists had argued the Gulf nation should pay for the project itself using money it made from its vast reserves of oil and gas.

About GCF:

- The GCF was set up in 2010 under the UNFCCC's financial mechanism to channel funding from developed countries to developing countries to allow them to mitigate climate change and also adapt to disruptions arising from a changing climate.
- It was central to the Paris climate agreement signed in 2015, that the world's largest historical emitter.

How it helps?

- The Green Climate Fund will support projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing country Parties using thematic funding windows.
- It is intended to be the centrepiece of efforts to raise Climate Finance of \$100 billion a year by 2020.
- The Fund will promote the paradigm shift towards low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways by providing support to developing countries to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change, taking into account the needs of those developing countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.
- The Fund will strive to maximize the impact of its funding for adaptation and mitigation, and seek a balance between the two, while promoting environmental, social, economic and development co-benefits and taking a gender-sensitive approach.

Who will govern the Fund?

- The Fund is governed and supervised by a Board that will have full responsibility for funding decisions and that receives the guidance of the COP. The Fund is accountable to, and functions under the guidance of, the COP.

Sources: the hindu.

15. HARIT DIWALI-SWASTH DIWALI CAMPAIGN

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the campaign.
- **Context:** Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has launched Harit Diwali-Swasth Diwali campaign. MoEFCC has merged this year's campaign with "Green Good Deed" movement that has been initiated as social mobilization for conservation and protection of environment.
- **Aim:** To reduce adverse environmental conditions especially pollution in the country after post Diwali celebrations due to excessive bursting of crackers which contributes significantly to air and noise pollution.

Harit Diwali-Swasth Diwali campaign:

- This campaign was initiated in 2017-18 to enlighten children about harmful fire crackers and motivate them to celebrate Diwali in environment-friendly manner and not to buy fire crackers, instead buy gift, food items, or sweets for poor and underprivileged children living in their locality.
- Under this campaign, the MoEFCC will undertake various activities for creating awareness among various stakeholders and encourage people to participate in combating air pollution. This campaign was extremely successful and the air quality had not deteriorated post Diwali in 2017 unlike what was experienced in 2016.

Background:

- Air pollution is a serious health issue in the country especially in the northern parts during winter seasons. It is attributed to dust, burning of crops in certain states, burning of garbage construction and prevailing climatic conditions.
 - This air pollution has serious impacts on the health of children aged people and people suffering from respiratory ailments. Diwali which is a festival of lights falls during the same period. As a matter of practice people have been celebrating Diwali by bursting crackers.
 - Crackers contains combustible chemicals that include potassium chlorate powdered aluminum, magnesium, salts of barium, copper, sodium, lithium, strontium etc. and emits smoke on combustion of these chemicals along with sound. This smoke and sound has health impacts on children, aged people and also animal and birds. Apart from these compounds large amount of waste is also generated after bursting of crackers.

Sources: the hindu.

16. SC ORDER ON USE AND SALE OF FIRECRACKERS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the order.
- **Context:** The Supreme Court has ordered a partial ban on the sale and use of firecrackers, ahead of Diwali next month. Hearing a bunch of petitions seeking a blanket ban on firecrackers to help curb air pollution, the court has allowed the use of “safer” firecrackers for a limited time period during festivals.

What's in the Supreme Court order?

- Refusing a complete ban, the top court has permitted the use and sale of “greener” firecrackers which have low emission. Firecrackers with permissible decibel sound limits will be allowed to be sold in the market.
- Firecrackers will be allowed to be burst for 2 hours, 8pm to 10pm on Diwali. For New Year and Christmas, the time allotted is 11.45 pm to 12.30 am.
- The Supreme Court has restrained E-commerce websites like Flipkart and Amazon from selling firecrackers which are beyond the permissible limit. Websites will attract contempt of court charges if they don't adhere to court's direction.
- Station house officers of police stations concerned will be held liable if banned firecrackers are sold in their areas.
- The Court has also directed Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO) to review the clinical composition of fireworks, particularly reducing Aluminium content.

Background:

- Three children, aged between three and four, were among the petitioners who sought blanket ban on the sale, use and transportation of firecrackers citing concerns of air pollution. On October 9 last year, the Supreme Court had suspended the use of firecrackers till November 1 in Delhi-NCR to test whether and how much, firecrackers contribute to the air quality.
- The apex court had said there is a need to take into account all aspects, including the fundamental right of livelihood of firecracker manufacturers and the right to health of over 1.3 billion people in the country, while considering a plea for the ban.

Sources: the hindu.

17. NATIONAL MONITORING FRAMEWORK ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about SDGs, key facts on National Monitoring Framework.
- For Mains: Significance of SDGs and ways to achieve them, efforts by India.
- Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the constitution of a High Level Steering Committee for periodically reviewing and refining the National Indicator Framework (NIF) for monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with associated targets.

Composition of the committee:

- The High Level Steering Committee will be chaired by Chief Statistician of India and Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
- Special invitees:** The Secretaries of data source Ministries and NITI Aayog as members and Secretaries of other related Ministries.

Targets:

- Measures to mainstream SDGs into on-going national policies, programmes and strategic action plans to address the developmental challenges.
- Statistical indicators of NIF will be the backbone of monitoring of SDGs at the national and state level and will scientifically measure the outcomes of the policies to achieve the targets under different SDGs.
- Based on statistical indicator, the MoSPI will bring out national reports on implementation of SDGs. The Report will facilitate assessment of progress, identify challenges and give recommendations for follow up at the national level.
- High Level Steering Committee will review the National Indicator Framework on regular basis for its improvement.
- Data source Ministries / Departments will be responsible for providing regular information to MoSPI on these indicators at required intervals and disaggregation for national and sub-national reporting of SDGs.
- Advanced IT tools will be used for close and effective monitoring.

Significance of the framework:

- SDGs with 17 Goals and 169 Targets intend for promotion of sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.
- NIF will help in outcome-based monitoring & reporting on progress on SDGs at National level. There is no direct financial implication on implementation of the National Indicator Framework. However, the respective Ministries will need to re-align and strengthen their data systems to facilitate monitoring of the SDG indicators.
- SDGs are expected to bring change in the lives of people and the monitoring of progress of implementation of SDGs will benefit the entire nation.

About SDGs:

- The UN General Assembly in its 70th Session considered and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years.
- The 17 SDGs came into force with effect from 1st January, 2016.
- Though not legally binding, the SDGs have become de facto international obligations and have potential to reorient domestic spending priorities of the countries during the next fifteen years.
- Countries are expected to take ownership and establish a national framework for achieving these Goals. Implementation and success will rely on countries' own sustainable development policies, plans and programmes.
- Countries would be responsible for follow-up and review at the national level, with regard to the progress made in implementing the Goals and targets. Actions at the national level to monitor progress under SDGs will require quality, accessible and timely data.

Sources: pib.

18. BS NORMS

What to study?

- For Prelims: BS Norms and composition.
- For Mains: BS norms- implementation- issues, challenges and solutions.
- **Context:** The Supreme Court has banned the sale and registration of motor vehicles conforming to the emission standard Bharat Stage-IV in the entire country from April 1, 2020.

What are BS norms?

- The BS — or Bharat Stage — emission standards are norms instituted by the government to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles.
- India has been following the European (Euro) emission norms, though with a time-lag of five years.

Difference between BS-IV and the new BS-VI:

- The major difference in standards between the existing BS-IV and the new BS-VI auto fuel norms is the presence of sulphur. The newly introduced fuel is estimated to reduce the amount of sulphur released by 80 per cent, from 50 parts per million to 10 ppm.
- As per the analysts, the emission of NOx (nitrogen oxides) from diesel cars is also expected to reduce by nearly 70 per cent and 25 per cent from cars with petrol engines.

Why is it important to upgrade these norms?

- Upgrading to stricter fuel standards helps tackle air pollution. Global automakers are betting big on India as vehicle penetration is still low here, when compared to developed countries. At the same time, cities such as Delhi are already being listed among those with the poorest air quality in the world. The national capital's recent odd-even car experiment and judicial activism against the registration of big diesel cars shows that governments can no longer afford to relax on this front.
- With other developing countries such as China having already upgraded to the equivalent of Euro V emission norms a while ago, India has been lagging behind. The experience of countries such as China and Malaysia shows that poor air quality can be bad for business. Therefore, these reforms can put India ahead in the race for investments too.

The government could face two key challenges in implementing the decision:

- First, there are questions about the ability of oil marketing companies to quickly upgrade fuel quality from BS-III and BS-IV standards to BS-VI, which is likely to cost upwards of Rs 40,000 crore.
- Second, and more challenging, is the task of getting auto firms to make the leap. Automakers have clearly said that going to BS-VI directly would leave them with not enough time to design changes in their vehicles, considering that two critical components — diesel particulate filter and selective catalytic reduction module — would have to be adapted to India's peculiar conditions, where running speeds are much lower than in Europe or the US.

Sources: the hindu.

19. CITIZEN- SCIENCE REPOSITORY OF INDIAN MAMMALS

What to study?

- For Prelims: MaOI- key facts.
- For Mains: Conservation of mammals- need, challenges and measures.
- **Context:** Scientists and researchers from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bangalore have come up with a new citizen-science repository on Indian mammals, called Mammals of India (MaOI). MaOI is a part of the Biodiversity Atlas (India project).

Key facts:

- The initiative aims to develop individual species pages for all Indian mammals with information on identification, variation, distribution, breeding and non-breeding ecology and species conservation.

- Now one can contribute to the cause of science by sharing the picture of the animal on a specific website, providing the location of spotting. This will make more information available about lesser known mammals of the country.

Background:

- As per current estimates, 426 species of mammals are found in India; of them 47 species are endemic to the Indian subcontinent.
- Along with well known species, the mammals of 100 species of rats and 126 species of bats and 24 species of whales of dolphins.

Significance of MoI:

- These photographic records will help researchers in having distribution map of mammals in the country.
- The photographs will not only help gather information on the distribution of the various species but also interactions between different species of mammals, like predation and mutualism.

Sources: the hindu.

20. CSIR DEVELOPS LESS POLLUTING FIRECRACKERS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of the new crackers.
- For Mains: Pollution related to firecrackers and measures to reduce pollution.
- Context:** CSIR develops Less Polluting Firecrackers named – safe water releaser (SWAS), safe minimal aluminium (SAFAL) and safe thermite cracker (STAR).

Technical Details:

- These crackers have unique property of releasing water vapour and /or air as dust suppressant and diluent for gaseous emissions and matching performance in sound with conventional crackers.
- SWAS crackers eliminates usage of (KNO₃) Potassium nitrate and Sulphur with consequent reduction in particulate matter (30-35%) SO₂ and NO_x. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 105-110 dBA. SWAS has been tested for shelf life upto 3 weeks with consistent performance.
- STAR eliminates usage of KNO₃ and S with consequent reduction in particulate matter (35-40%), SO₂ and NO_x. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 105-110 dBA.
- SAFAL has minimal usage of aluminium (only in flash powder for initiation) with consequent significant reduction in particulate matter (35-40 %) compared to commercial crackers. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 110-115 dBA.

Benefits:

- Indian Fireworks industry is over 6000-crore worth of annual turnover and provides employment opportunities to over 5 lakh families directly or indirectly.
- This endeavour of CSIR aims at addressing the pollution concerns at the same time protecting the livelihoods of those involved in this trade.
- These Firecrackers are not only environment friendly but 15-20 % cheaper than the conventional ones.

Sources: pib.

21. WHO'S FIRST GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON AIR POLLUTION AND HEALTH

- Context:** The first Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health will be held at WHO Headquarters in Geneva.
- Organizers:** The conference is being held in collaboration with UN Environment, World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (CCAC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).
- Participants** will include Ministers of Health and Environment and other national government representatives; representatives of intergovernmental agencies, health professionals, other sectors (e.g. transport, energy, etc.), as well as from research, academia and civil society.

- **Background:** The conference responds to a World Health Assembly mandate to combat one of the world's most significant causes of premature death, causing some 7 million deaths annually.
- Air pollution in most cities exceeds recommended WHO Air Quality levels and household air pollution is a leading killer in poor rural and urban homes.
- Up to 1/3 of deaths from stroke, lung cancer and heart disease are due to air pollution.

22. LIVING PLANET REPORT 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: About WWF and the living planet report.
- For Mains: Highlights of the report, concerns raised and measures proposed.
- **Context:** The *bi-annual Living Planet Report 2018* has been released by the World Wide Fund for Nature. The Report tracked more than 4,000 species of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians.

Highlights of the report:

- Global wildlife population shrank by 60% between 1970 and 2014.
- Declines are worst in the tropics, according to the data, as South and Central America saw an 89% decrease. Also, freshwater species saw an 83% drop, threatened by factors including overfishing, pollution and climate change.
- The report estimates that only a quarter of the world's land is untouched by humans, who are increasing food production and use of natural resources.
- Since 1960, the global ecological footprint has increased by more than 190%. Globally, the extent of wetlands was estimated to have declined by 87% since 1970.
- The two key drivers of biodiversity loss were the over exploitation of natural resources and agriculture.

Threat to soil biodiversity and pollinators:

- A key aspect of this year's report is the threat to soil biodiversity and pollinators.
 - *Soil biodiversity encompasses the presence of micro-organisms, micro-fauna (nematodes and tardigrades for example), and macro-fauna (ants, termites and earthworms).*
 - The report notes that India's soil biodiversity is in grave peril. The WWF's 'risk index' for the globe — indicating threats from loss of above-ground diversity, pollution and nutrient over-loading, over-grazing, intensive agriculture, fire, soil erosion, desertification and climate change — shows India among countries whose soil biodiversity faces the highest level of risk.

What needs to be done?

- To address these challenges, the WWF suggests three necessary steps: "clearly specifying a goal for biodiversity recovery; developing a set of measurable and relevant indicators of progress; and agreeing on a suite of actions that can collectively achieve the goal in the required time frame."
- The WWF has called for an international treaty, modelled on the Paris climate agreement, to be drafted to protect wildlife and reverse human impacts on nature.

Way ahead:

- The current efforts to protect the natural world are not keeping up with the speed of man-made destruction, and that the world is heading for an "ecological credit crunch" far worse than the current financial crisis because humans are overusing the natural resources of the planet.
- This trend will continue unless human beings learn to minimise the use of resources and internalise the benefits of recycling/reuse.
- The nature conservation agenda is not only about securing the future of tigers, pandas, whales and all the amazing diversity of life. It's bigger than that. There cannot be a healthy, happy and prosperous planet with a destabilised climate, depleted oceans and rivers, degraded land and empty forests, all stripped of biodiversity, the web of life that sustains us all.

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: Disaster and disaster management.

1. INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION 2018

What to study?

- For Prelims: About the International Day for Disaster Reduction- theme, significance.
- For Mains: All about Sendai framework and its significance.
- Context:** International Day for Disaster Reduction was observed on October 13th.
- Theme:** The theme of the 2018 International Day for Disaster Reduction was ‘Reducing Disaster Economic Losses’.
- The 2018 theme continues as part of the “Sendai Seven” campaign, centred on the seven targets of the Sendai Framework. This year focuses on Target C of the Sendai Framework, which is, ‘reducing disaster economic losses in relation to global GDP by 2030’.



Background:

- In 1989, the UN General Assembly through a resolution had designated the second Wednesday of October as International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction.
- Later on December 21, 2009, the Assembly adopted a new resolution in which it designated 13 October as the date to commemorate the Day and it also changed the day’s name to International Day for Disaster Reduction.
- The main objective of the observance is to raise awareness of how people are taking action to reduce their risk to disasters.

About Sendai Framework:

- The “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030” was adopted during the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015.

Key features of the Sendai framework:

- It is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action.
- It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly following the 2015 Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR).
- The Framework is for 15-year. It is a voluntary and non-binding agreement which recognizes that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government, the private sector and other stakeholders.
- The new Framework is the successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

Implementation:

- The implementation of the Sendai Framework involves adopting integrated and inclusive institutional measures so as to work towards preventing vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery and strengthen resilience.

Sources: the hindu.

2. NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY (NDMA)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about NDMA and its significance.
- Context:** The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi recently chaired the sixth meeting of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) at New Delhi.

- Prime Minister reviewed the activities of NDMA to effectively manage and respond to disasters affecting the country. He also reviewed ongoing projects undertaken by NDMA.
- Prime Minister emphasized on the need for better coordination between the various stakeholders and undertake more joint exercises to bring about effective response to save life and property. He stressed upon the need to bring in global expertise in the field of disaster management.

About NDMA:

- On 23 December 2005, the Government of India enacted the Disaster Management Act, which envisaged the creation of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), headed by the Prime Minister, and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) headed by respective Chief Ministers, to spearhead and implement a holistic and integrated approach to Disaster Management in India.
- NDMA, as the apex body, is mandated to lay down the policies, plans and guidelines for Disaster Management to ensure timely and effective response to disasters. Towards this, it has the following responsibilities:
 - Lay down policies on disaster management.
 - Approve the National Plan.
 - Approve plans prepared by the Ministries or Departments of the Government of India in accordance with the National Plan.
 - Lay down guidelines to be followed by the State Authorities in drawing up the State Plan.
 - Lay down guidelines to be followed by the different Ministries or Departments of the Government of India for the Purpose of integrating the measures for prevention of disaster or the mitigation of its effects in their development plans and projects.
 - Coordinate the enforcement and implementation of the policy and plans for disaster management.
 - Recommend provision of funds for the purpose of mitigation.
 - Provide such support to other countries affected by major disasters as may be determined by the Central Government.
 - Take such other measures for the prevention of disaster, or the mitigation, or preparedness and capacity building for dealing with threatening disaster situations or disasters as it may consider necessary.
 - Lay down broad policies and guidelines for the functioning of the National Institute of Disaster Management.

Significance:

- There was no institutional framework for disaster management earlier, but after the setting up of NDMA, a mechanism has been developed not only for disaster management, but also for disaster risk reduction.
- India got appreciation due to NDMA's work at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting on Disaster management held in Kyrgyzstan last month. India had extended help to earthquake-hit Nepal in 2014 and also India had sent NDRF team to Japan for help.
- Its time to further strengthen the legal and institutional systems in place for disaster management.

Sources: the hindu.

Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

1. GCTF TERRORIST TRAVEL INITIATIVE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Need, features and significance of GCTF Terrorist Travel Initiative, about GCTF.
- **Context:** United States and Morocco have launched GCTF Terrorist Travel Initiative under auspices of Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). It was launched on sidelines of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session in New York.

GCTF Terrorist Travel Initiative:

- The initiative brings together stakeholders to share expertise on developing and implementing effective counterterrorism watchlisting and screening tools.

- The new initiative will strengthen UNSC Resolution 2396 aiming to stop terrorist travel altogether. It will improve capabilities for detecting and interdicting terrorist travel through enhanced terrorist screening and information sharing.
- It will bring together national and local governments, law enforcement and border screening practitioners and international organizations to share expertise to develop and implement effective counterterrorism watchlisting and screening tools.
- Under this initiative, series of four regional workshops in 2018 and 2019 will be convened to develop set of good practices that will be endorsed at 2019 GCTF Ministerial. The resulting document will reinforce countries and organizations to use border security tools prescribed in UNSC Resolution 2396 to stop terrorist travel.

Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF):

- GCTF's is international apolitical, multilateral counter-terrorism (CT) platform of 29 countries and European Union (EU) with overarching mission of reducing vulnerability of people worldwide to terrorism by preventing, combating, and prosecuting terrorist acts and countering incitement and recruitment to terrorism. It was launched officially in New York on 22 September 2011.
- GCTF's goal** is to strengthen capabilities to develop strategic, long-term approach to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremist ideologies that underpin it. Its mission is to diminish terrorist recruitment and increase countries' civilian capabilities for dealing with terrorist threats within their borders and regions.

Sources: the hindu.

2. CITIZENSHIP STATUS OF GORKHAS LIVING IN ASSAM

What to study?

- For Prelims: All about NRC and Geographical location of Assam.
- For Mains: Issues associated with NRC and Gorkhas.
- Context:** Ministry of Home Affairs has issued a clarification to the Government of Assam on the citizenship status of members of the Gorkha Community living in the State as per the Foreigners Act, 1946.

What's the issue?

- Recently, some cases of members of Gorkha community living in Assam were referred to the Foreigners Tribunals. Following this, a representation from the All Assam Gorkha Students' had approached the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh to solve the issue.

Directions by the Centre:

- In a communication to the Government of Assam, MHA has listed various provisions to obviate the difficulties faced by Gorkhas in the matter of Indian citizenship. These include:
 - The members of the Gorkha community who were Indian citizens at the time of commencement of the Constitution, or those who are Indian citizens by birth, or those who have acquired Indian citizenship by registration or naturalization in accordance with the provisions of The Citizenship Act, 1955 are not "foreigners" in terms of section 2 (a) of The Foreigners Act, 1946 as well as The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, therefore, such cases will not be referred to the Foreigners Tribunals.
 - Any member of the Gorkha community holding Nepalese nationality and who has arrived in India by land or air over the Nepal border even without a passport or visa and staying in India for any length of time shall not be treated as an illegal migrant if he/she is in possession of any of the identity documents namely the Nepalese Passport, Nepalese Citizenship Certificate, voter Identification card issued by the Election Commission of Nepal, limited validity photo-identity certificate issued by Nepalese Mission in India when deemed necessary and for children between age group of 10-18 years, photo ID issued by the principal of the school, if accompanied by parents having valid travel documents.
 - No such document is required for children below the age group of 10 years, the communication added citing provisions of India-Nepal Treaty signed in 1950.

Exempt from Foreigner Tribunals:

- The cases of members of Gorkha community falling within the parameters shall not be referred to the Foreigner Tribunals for opinion as to whether the person is a "foreigner" within the meaning of The Foreigners Act, 1946.

- Only those individuals, who have come from specified territories i.e. territories included in Bangladesh immediately before commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1985, to the State of Assam, and are not Indian citizens, can be referred to the Foreigners tribunals.

What is National Register of Citizens (NRC)?

- The NRC was introduced to identify illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and recognise the Indian citizens in Assam. It was first prepared in 1951 and Assam is the only state having this arrangement.

Sources: pib.

3. WING LOONG II

- What is it?** It is a high-end reconnaissance, strike and multi-role endurance unmanned aerial system, capable of being fitted with air-to-surface weapons. It is designed for both reconnaissance and strike missions.
- Why in News?** China has agreed to sell 48 Wing Loong II high-end armed drones to Pakistan.

Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

1. STRATEGIC POLICY GROUP

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: About SPG, roles and significance.
- Context:** The government has set up Strategic Policy Group or SPG to help the National Security Council, which advises the Prime Minister on matters of national security and strategic interests.

About the Strategic Policy Group (SPG):

Composition:

- It will be headed by National Security Advisor. Its members include the NITI Aayog vice chairman, cabinet secretary, the chiefs of the three defence services, the RBI governor, the foreign secretary, the home secretary, the finance secretary and the defence secretary.
- The secretary of the Department of Defence Production and Supplies, the scientific adviser to the defence minister and the secretary, cabinet secretariat will also be members of the panel.
- The other members are secretary, department of revenue; secretary, department of atomic energy; secretary, department of space; director, Intelligence Bureau, and secretary, National Security Council Secretariat.
- Representatives of other ministries and departments will be invited to the meetings of the group as and when necessary.

Functions:

- It will assist the National Security Council and undertake among other tasks, a long-term strategic review of country's security affairs.
- It will be the principal mechanism for inter-ministerial coordination and integration of relevant inputs in the formulation of national security policies.

Meetings:

- The NSA will convene the meetings of the SPG and the cabinet secretary will coordinate implementation of the group's decisions by union ministries and departments, and state governments.

Sources: pib.

Topic: Cyber security related issues.

1. CRIME AND CRIMINAL TRACKING NETWORK SYSTEM (CCTNS)

What to study?

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

- **Context:** Conference on “CCTNS–Good practices and success Stories” is being held in New Delhi.

What is CCTNS project?

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

What it does?

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

Benefits:

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

Sources: pib.

Facts for Prelims

1. UTTARAKHAND HC DIRECTS STATE TO PROVIDE RESERVATION TO TRANSGENDERS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- The Uttarakhand High Court has directed the state government to provide reservation to transgenders in educational institutions and public appointments. The high court gave the state government six months' time to implement the decision.
- The court stated that the transgenders lead a miserable life and are often treated unfairly. Observing that they have the right to a life of dignity, the court gave the state government six months time to implement its decision.

2. NIWARI IS 52ND DISTRICT OF MP

- Niwari** will become the 52nd district of Madhya Pradesh, with effect from October 1. A proposal to this effect was cleared by the **state Cabinet** recently.

3. EXERCISE AVIAINDRA-18

- The second edition of **Exercise Aviaindra**, a **Biennial Air Force level** exercise between **Indian** and the **Russian** Federation, was held recently in Russia.
- The aim of the exercise was to formulate and validate use of airpower in anti-terrorist operation in a bilateral scenario. It also includes simulator training. The exercise included briefing on Aerospace safety and anti-terrorist air operations.

4. VAYOSHRESHTHA SAMMAN- 2018

- What are they?** They are National Awards for Senior Citizens. They were recently presented by the President to eminent senior citizens and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of elderly persons, especially indigent senior citizens.
- Vayoshreshtha Samman is a **Scheme of National Awards** instituted by the **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment** (D/o Social

Justice & Empowerment) initially in 2005 and was upgraded to the status of National Awards in 2013, for institutions involved in rendering distinguished service for the cause of elderly persons especially indigent senior citizens and to eminent citizens in recognition of their service/achievements.

- Ministries of Social Justice & Empowerment, Health and Rural Development are running such useful schemes for the welfare of elderly persons.
- The awards are presented on 1st of October every year pursuant to the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons.

5. 'WORLD PEACE MONUMENT' DOME

- The world's largest dome has been inaugurated at the Maharashtra Institute of Technology (MIT)'s World Peace University (MIT-WPU) campus at Loni Kalbhor on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.



- The World Peace Monument dome has a diameter of 160 feet, compared with the Vatican Dome's 139.6 feet, and stands 263 feet tall with a bell hanging from the centre, and the prayer hall is of around 30,000 sq ft.
- It is supported by 24 massive columns, each 63 feet tall, at the periphery of the dome and underneath — inside and outside — stand imposing bronze statues of 54 of the biggest names in world history stand, irrespective of nationality or religion.
- The dome is built atop the MIT World Peace Library and the World Peace Prayer Hall, which are named after the 13th century poet-saint and philosopher Dnyaneshwar — a pivotal figure of the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra.

6. IBSAMAR VI

- The sixth edition of IBSAMAR, a joint Multi – National Maritime Exercise between the **Indian, Brazilian and South African Navies**, is being held at **Simons Town, South Africa**.

About IBSAMAR:

- IBSAMAR are a series of naval exercises between the navies of India, Brazil, South Africa. The aim of the exercise is to undertake collective training for participating navies, building interoperability and mutual understanding as well as sharing of best practices. The first exercise took place in 2008.

7. INDIAN RAILWAY STATIONS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED (IRSDC)

- Context:** Cabinet approves Redevelopment of Railway Stations by IRSDC as Nodal Agency, through simplified procedures and longer lease tenure.

About IRSDC:

- The Indian Railway Stations Development Corporation (IRSDC) is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) of the Government of India that has been designed to develop new stations and redevelop existing Indian railway stations.
- IRSDC is a joint venture between IRCON and Rail Land Development Authority with a 51:49 equity shareholding ratio respectively.

8. NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH REHABILITATION IN SEHORE DISTRICT

- The Union Cabinet has approved the establishment of National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation (NIMHR) in Sehore District in Madhya Pradesh.

About:

- NIMHR will be the first of its kind in the country in the area of mental health rehabilitation.
- It will serve as an institution of excellence for capacity building in human resource and research in the area of mental health rehabilitation, and also recommending body suggesting models/protocols for effective rehabilitation of persons with mental illness.

9. SAHYOG HOP TAC -2018

- What is it?** It is the maiden joint exercise of Coast Guards of India and Vietnam.
- It was held recently in the Bay of Bengal off the Chennai coast, Tamil Nadu.
- It was aimed at strengthening the working level relationship between coast guards of both navies.

10. OPERATION SAMUDRA MAITRI

- India has launched massive **humanitarian operation Samudra Maitri** to provide assistance to *earthquake and tsunami victims in Indonesia*.
- Under this operation, India has dispatched two aircraft C-130J and C-17 and three naval ships carrying relief material and personnel to the country.

11. IBSAMAR

- Context:** The sixth edition of **IBSAMAR**, a joint multi-national maritime exercise between **Indian, Brazilian and South African Navies** was held at **Simons Town, South Africa**.
- Aim:** The aim of this maritime exercise is to undertake collective training for participating navies, building interoperability and mutual understanding as well as sharing of best practices.
- Exercise IBSAMAR:** It was initiated in **2006**. It is considered as most visible manifestation of convergence of democratic values, economic interests and maritime cooperation. The last edition of IBSAMAR V was conducted off Goa, India in February 2016 and all previous exercises were held in South Africa.

12. NATIONAL REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (NAREDCO)

- Why in News?** Realtors body National Real Estate Development Council (**NAREDCO**) has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to provide skill training and jobs in construction sector for 2.5 lakh poor people.
- The partnership will strengthen skill trainings and employment opportunities in construction sector for urban poor under **Deendayal**

Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission.

About National Real Estate Development Council (NAREDCO):

- It is **autonomous self-regulatory body** under **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**. It was established in **1998** and is headquartered in **New Delhi**.
- It serves as apex national body for real estate industry and provides single platform for Government, industry and public to discuss various problems and opportunities face to face for speedy resolution of issues.
- Its mandate also includes to induce transparency and ethics in real estate business and transform unorganized Indian real estate sector into matured and globally competitive business sector.

13. GITA GOPINATH BECOMES FIRST WOMAN CHIEF ECONOMIST AT IMF

- India-born **Gita Gopinath** has been appointed as the Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- She has become the **first woman** to hold the position.
- Gita Gopinath has also become the **second Indian** to hold the position, after former RBI Governor **Raghuram Rajan**.



14. JIMEX

- What is it?** It is a joint Maritime Exercise between India and Japan. It was started in January 2012 with special focus on Maritime Security Cooperation.
- Why in News?** The 3rd edition of **Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX)** is being held at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. JIMEX-18 is aimed to enhance interoperability, improve understanding and imbibe best practices between navies of two countries.

15. NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

- Dr. Denis Mukwege** and **Nadia Murad** have jointly been awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize. They were given award for their efforts

to end use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.

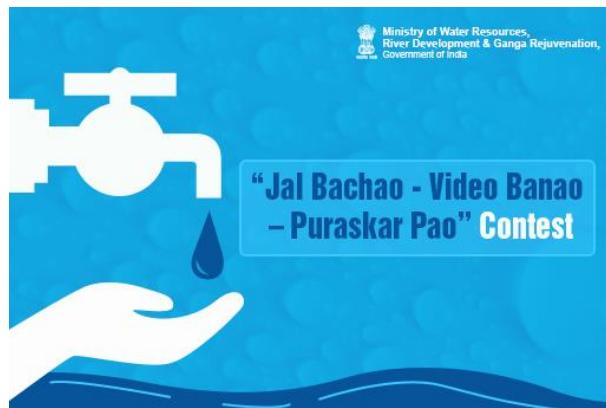
- The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded by a committee elected by the Norwegian Parliament.

16. INDIA FOR HUMANITY INITIATIVE

- Context:** Union Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has launched India for Humanity initiative to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and honour of his service to humanity. It will feature year-long series of artificial limb fitment camps in a number of countries spanning globe.
- For this initiative, MEA has collaborated with renowned charitable organisation Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti (BMVSS).
- Aim:** to provide physical, economic and social rehabilitation of differently-abled around world by helping them regain their mobility and dignity to become self-respecting and productive members of society. It focuses on Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of compassion, caring and service to humanity.

17. JAL BACHAO, VIDEO BANAO, PURASKAR PAO CONTEST

- The Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation announced the winners for the Third and Fourth fortnight of the Jal Bachao, Video Banao, Puraskar Pao contest.



What is the contest about?

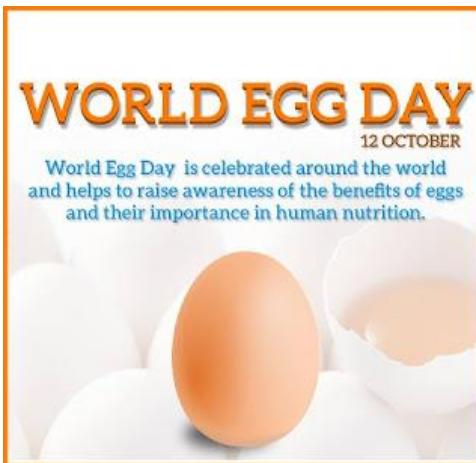
- Jal Bachao, Video Banao, Puraskar Pao contest was launched by the Ministry in collaboration with the MyGov portal of the Government of India with the objective of spreading awareness about water conservation.

18. IND-INDO CORPAT 2018

- **Context:** The 32nd edition of India-Indonesia coordinated patrol (IND-INDO CORPAT) is being held in **Belawan, Indonesia**.

19. WORLD EGG DAY 2018- OCTOBER 12TH

- World Egg Day is celebrated on the second Friday in October. It was founded by the International Egg Commission (IEC) at a conference held in Vienna in 1996.



- The idea behind the day was raising awareness across the world, of the important place eggs have in human nutrition.
- The IEC was formed in 1964 in order to give a global presence to egg producers and to promote and popularize egg consumption as part of a balanced diet.

20. ALTERNATIVE NOBEL LITERATURE PRIZE

- **Context:** Guadeloupean author Maryse Conde has won the New Academy Prize in Literature, an alternative award formed in protest to Nobel Literature Prize.

About New Academy Prize in Literature:

- New Academy Prize in Literature was formed by New Academy consisting of more than 100 Swedish writers, artists and journalists in protest to denounce what its founders called bias, arrogance and sexism of Swedish Academy, which selects Nobel laureates.
- The New Academy Prize is accompanied by one million kronor, or around \$112,000.

21. THE WORLD'S MOST INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITIES- 2018

- **What is it?** The Reuters' top 100 World's Most Innovative University ranking recognises universities from across the world for their work in inventing new technologies, advance science and power new markets and industries. It was first published in 2015, since then there has been no mention of any Indian university in the list.

The 2018 edition:

- For the fourth year running, Stanford University tops Reuters' ranking of the World's Most Innovative Universities. No Indian university is in the list.
- In this top 100 list, 48 universities are from North America find mention on the list, 23 Asian universities, 27 from Europe and 2 from the Middle East. The list has no mention of universities from South America, Africa and Oceania countries that include Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.
- US dominated the list with 46 universities among the top 100. This year Chinese varsities have increased their presence in this with total five universities.
- The key factor was this year's ranking was Geopolitical trends. Stanford University from US has topped this list for four consecutive years. The second and third spots have been held by US's Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University respectively.

22. EINSTEIN PRIZE

- **Context:** Indian American Professor Abhay Ashtekar has been conferred with prestigious Einstein Prize for numerous and seminal contributions to general relativity, including the theory of black holes, canonical quantum gravity, and quantum cosmology.

About Einstein Prize:

- The Einstein Prize is a biennial prize awarded by the American Physical Society.
- The recipients are chosen for their outstanding accomplishments in the field of gravitational physics.
- The prize carries an award of \$10,000.
- The prize is special because is it the highest honour bestowed by APS in the broad area of gravitational science.

- The first Einstein prize was awarded jointly to Peter Bergmann and John Wheeler, who introduced general relativity to American universities by creating research groups.

23. CHIEF MINISTER'S URBAN LEADERS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

- Context:** Delhi government has launched Chief Minister's Urban Leaders Fellowship Programme that seeks to attract young leaders across the country to work with it on addressing some of the most pressing urban challenges.

About Chief Minister's Urban Leaders Fellowship Programme:

- It aims to provide unique opportunity to young leaders across India to work within the Delhi government to address some of the most pressing urban challenges in India.
- It also seeks to attract youth who are passionate about public service and are willing to work for two years.
- Fellows selected under this programme will be assigned to work with ministers or senior officials across various departments Delhi government such as health, education, water, transport, art and culture.
- They will be paid remuneration of Rs 1.25 lakh per month and Rs 75,000 per month to Associate Fellows.

24. LHOTSHAMPA

- Who are they?** They are a heterogeneous Bhutanese people of Nepalese descent. The Lhotshampa people are native to southern Bhutan. The Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa were branded as immigrants and stripped of citizenship rights when the then-king introduced a "One Nation, One People" policy in 1985. The edict made following the customs of the Buddhist majority mandatory, including wearing their traditional dress, and speaking Nepali was banned.
- Why in News?** Bhutan is holding elections this week. But the Lhotshampa people, brutally driven out of the small kingdom in the 1990s, won't be voting. Bhutan still describes the Lhotshampa as immigrants, justifying its nationalistic laws as essential for cultural identity and political stability.

25. INDIAN SILK EXPORT PROMOTION COUNCIL (ISEPC)

- Context:** 6th India International Silk Fair (IISF), organized by Indian Silk Export Promotion Council, is being held in New Delhi. The fair will give a platform to exporters to display their products and to overseas buyers an opportunity to place orders and source their merchandise.
- Background:** India is the second largest producer of silk in the world. The country's silk industry is agriculture based and labour intensive and provides gainful employment to around eight million artisans and weavers in rural areas.

About The Indian Silk Export Promotion Council:

- The Indian Silk Export Promotion Council (ISEPC) was set up in 1983 as a company not for profit under Companies Act duly sponsored by the Government of India in the Ministry of Textiles.
- ISEPC works closely with the Government of India on policy formulation concerning silk sector and provides specialized services to the entrepreneurs enlarging global business opportunities for the silk industry in India.

26. UP CABINET APPROVES CHANGING NAME OF ALLAHABAD TO 'PRAYAGRAJ'

- The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet has approved the proposal of the state government to rename the city of 'Allahabad' as 'Prayagraj'. The decision has been vehemently opposed by the opposition parties.

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.

27. MAN BOOKER PRIZE

- **Context:** Northern Irish writer- Anna Burns has won the 2018 Man Booker Prize for her third full-length novel- "Milkman".

About Man Booker Prize:

- The leading literary award in English, The Man Booker Prize was launched in 1969. It aims to promote the 'finest in fiction' and is awarded each year to the book adjudged as the best novel of the year written in English and published in the United Kingdom.
- The winner of The Man Booker Prize receives £50,000. Sponsored by Man Group, the foundation also awards £2,500 and a designer bound copy of their book to each of the six shortlisted authors. The winner and shortlisted authors are also guaranteed a worldwide readership as well as a dramatic spike in book sales.
- The judges of The Man Booker Prize are chosen from a wide range of disciplines including critics, writers, academics, poets, politicians, actors and 'all with a passion for quality fiction'. Subject to widespread speculation before the official announcement, the prize usually brings the winner a huge boost in sales and profile.

28. DHARMA GUARDIAN

- **What is it?** It is a joint military exercise between India and Japan.
- **Why in News?** The first edition of this joint military exercise will be held in Mizoram.
- **Aim:** The exercise is aimed at developing mutual understanding and respect between militaries of both countries, as also facilitate in tracking worldwide phenomenon of terrorism.

29. NCR RASTA AND YATRI RASTA

- The North Central Railways (NCR) has launched two mobile apps:
 - NCR RASTA** (Railway assets Summerised Tracking Application):
 - It is for use of railway officers and staff and has exact mapping of all railway assets. It will enable railway staff to reach desired asset using Google Navigation in case of any emergency.
 - Yatri RASTA** (Railway Approach to Station Tracking Application):

- **Yatri RASTA app:** It will allow general public to locate railway stations easily. It is already available for smartphones running on Android and can be downloaded free of cost from Google Play Store.

30. INDIA'S FIRST RAILWAY STATION INSIDE TUNNEL TO COME UP IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

- **Context:** For the first time in India, a railway station will be built inside a tunnel at a height of 3,000 metres, on the strategic Bilaspur-Manali-Leh line close to the China-India border.
- The station will be at a height of around 3,000 metres and will be inside a 27-km-long tunnel.
- Keylong is the administrative centre of Lahaul and Spiti district, 26 km north of Manali and 120 km from the India-Tibet border.

31. CARNOT PRIZE

- **Context:** Minister of Railways and Coal will receive the University of Pennsylvania's top prize in energy policy for his leadership in reforming India's power sector through various initiatives.

Carnot Prize:

- The Carnot Prize is intended to honour those leading revolutions in energy policy to further progress and prosperity.
- The ministry is being recognised for directing a fast-track effort to electrify 18,000 villages in remote parts of India, helping bridge the country's vast energy divide.
- The Carnot Prize is named in memory of French scientist Sadi Carnot, who in 1824 published Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire, which is recognised as the first statement of what is now known as the second law of thermodynamics.
- Carnot recognised that the power of the steam engine would produce a great revolution in human development.

32. SHAKTI BHATT FIRST BOOK PRIZE

- **Context:** US-based writer Sujatha Gidla has won 2018 Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize for her debut book "Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India".

About Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize:

- The Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize is funded by the Shakti Bhatt Foundation. It was set up in 2008 in memory of young writer and editor Shakti Bhatti.
- It honours first-time writers from Indian sub-continent for their outstanding work of fiction or non-fiction. It carries cash prize of Rs. 2 lakh.

33. INDIA'S LONGEST RIVER BRIDGE

- Context:** India's longest river bridge with total length of 19.3 kilometers will be built on Brahmaputra river in Assam.

**Key facts:**

- This bridge will connect Dhubri of Assam to Fulbarani of Meghalaya. This bridge will reduce the distance between these two places by 203 kms. At present, India's largest river bridge is Dhola-Sadia bridge, its length is 9.15 kilometers.
- Japanese Finance Agency (JICA) has approved the loan for this project as part of road infrastructure improvement package in the north-east after assessing the economic benefit of the big project.
- Two northeastern states of Assam and Meghalaya will be connected by NH127B with the help of this bridge.

34. COPE INDIA AIR EXERCISE

- Context:** India and US have agreed to elevate their bilateral '**Cope India'** air exercise to trilateral format by including Japan. The next edition of this exercise is scheduled to be held in December 2018.

About Cope India:

- It is series of international Air Force exercises between Indian Air Force (IAF) and United States Air Force conducted on and over Indian soil.

- The first such exercise was conducted at IAF air force station in Gwalior from February 2004.

35. GAMING GARAGE

- Context:** Andhra Pradesh government has proposed to set up a 'Gaming Garage' to generate employment and encourage entrepreneurs and game developers in view of its growing importance. The 'Gaming Garage' will be launched in Vijayawada very soon.

Key facts:

- Companies such as the Unity Technologies, Denmark/San Francisco would provide the software. The Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK) of Finland would be knowledge/operational partner.
- Any creative thinker could walk into the Garage to develop a game of choice. The government would provide them with "the necessary software and infrastructure free of cost". It would also encourage them in commercialising their product.
- Background:** The gaming became an industry with crores of rupees turnover with the rapid development of computers and smartphone technologies. The Cabinet in April gave its nod to animations and visual effects, gaming and comics policy to attract the best from the sector and an investment of about ₹6,400 crore by 2020.

36. MGINGO ISLAND**Where is Mgingo Island Located?**

- Compared to half the size of a football pitch, Mgingo is a small rock Island, located in Lake Victoria which is the largest lake in Africa and the largest Tropical Lake in the whole world.

**Why in News?**

- For over a decade, Mgingo has been a source of tension between Uganda and Kenya, who have been unable to decide to whom it really belongs.

37. WORLD'S LONGEST SEA CROSSING: HONG KONG-ZHUHAI BRIDGE



- Chinese President Xi Jinping has officially opened the world's longest sea crossing bridge, nine years after construction first began.
- Including its access roads, the bridge spans 55km (34 miles) and connects Hong Kong to Macau and the mainland Chinese city of Zhuhai.
- The bridge has cost about \$20bn (£15.3bn) and seen several delays. The bridge, designed to withstand earthquakes and typhoons, was built using 400,000 tonnes of steel, enough to build 60 Eiffel Towers.
- About 30km of its total length crosses the sea of the Pearl River delta. To allow ships through, a 6.7km section in the middle dips into an undersea tunnel that runs between two artificial islands.

38. SEOUL PEACE PRIZE

- Context:** Seoul Peace Prize Committee has decided to confer 2018 Seoul Peace Prize on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



- PM Modi has been selected for award in recognition of his dedication for improving international cooperation, raising global economic growth, accelerating Human Development of people in India by fostering economic growth and furthering development of democracy through anti-corruption and social integration efforts.

About Seoul Peace Prize:

- It was established in 1990 to commemorate success of the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul, South Korea.
- It was established to crystallize Korean people's yearning for peace on Korean Peninsula and in the rest of the world.
- It is awarded biennially to those individuals who have made their mark through contributions to harmony of mankind, reconciliation between nations and world peace.

39. DRUZHBA-III

- What is it?** It is a joint bilateral military exercise between Pakistan and Russian special forces. The 2018 edition is being held in Pakistan.
- Background:** Druzhba military exercise between Russia and Pakistan was started in 2016. "Druzba" is Russian word, which means "friendship".

40. IRON MAGIC 19

- What is it?** It is joint military exercise between United Arab Emirates (UAE) and United States (US). The latest edition is being held in Dubai.

41. TAGORE AWARD FOR CULTURAL HARMONY

- Context:** The Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony for the years 2014, 2015 & 2016 is being conferred on the doyen of Manipuri dance Sh. Rajkumar Singhajit Singh; Chhayanaut (a cultural organization of Bangladesh) and on one of India's greatest sculptors, Sh. Ram Vanji Sutar, respectively.

About the Tagore award:

- The annual award was instituted by the Government of India during the commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.
- The first Tagore Award was conferred on Pt. Ravi Shankar, the Indian Sitar Maestro in 2012 and second was conferred on Shri Zubin Mehta in 2013.
- The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation in a scroll, a plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/ handloom item.

- The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.
- Awardees are selected by a jury headed by the Prime Minister of India.

42. IMC-2018

- **Context:** India Mobile Congress is being held in New Delhi.
- **Theme:** "NEW DIGITAL HORIZONS: Connect. Create. Innovate."
- **About IMC:** The India Mobile Congress 2018, hosted by the Department of telecommunications and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), is an excellent platform for policy makers, industry and regulators to engage in meaningful deliberations to drive the future direction of this important sector.

43. INDIA BUILDING WORLD'S HIGHEST RAILWAY LINE

- **Context:** India railways is planning to link New Delhi and Ladakh by means of a railway line that will run along the India-China Border.
- **Significance:** The proposed **Bilaspur-Manali-Leh Line will be the world's highest at 5,360 metres** above mean sea level which is comparable to China's Qinghai-Tibet Railway Line at 2,000 metres.

44. UN HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZE

- **Context:** UN names Human Rights Prize winners for 2018. Asma Jahangir, Rebeca Gyumi, Joenia Wapichana and Front Line Defenders are honoured by the UN for promoting human rights.

About UN Human Rights Prize:

- The **United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights** is an honorary award given for outstanding achievement in human rights.
- Prize was established by the **UN General Assembly in 1966** and was awarded for the first time on December 10, 1968, on the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- The Prize is an opportunity not only to give public recognition to the achievements of the recipients themselves, but also to send a clear message to human rights defenders the world over that the international community is

- grateful for, and supports, their tireless efforts to promote all human rights for all.
- The 2018 award ceremony will take place on December 10 on World Human Rights Day in New York.

45. MAHILA MALL

- **Context:** Mahila Mall, *the first mall in the country with an all-women crew*, is coming up in Kozhikode. The mall, a venture of Unity Group under the Kozhikode Corporation Kudumbashree CDS, houses business establishments run by around 75 women entrepreneurs or groups.

46. INDIA'S LARGEST DRY DOCK AT COCHIN SHIPYARD

- **Context:** India's largest Dry Dock will be built at Cochin Shipyard. With this Cochin Shipyard will be able to build specialized and technologically advanced large vessels.
- **Significance:** The Dry Dock will give an impetus to "Make in India" initiative under Sagarmala and raise India's share in global shipbuilding to 2%. India currently occupies 0.66% share in global shipbuilding market.

47. INS TARANGINI

- **Context:** The sail training ship of Indian Navy, INS Tarangini based at Kochi, has returned after a seven month long sailing across the world to a grand reception at naval base, Kochi.
- The Voyage named "**Lokayan 18**" was flagged off on 10 Apr 18 from Kochi. During the voyage, the ship travelled across 15 ports in 13 countries.
- The ship sailed across the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Mediterranean Sea, Strait of Gibraltar, North Atlantic Ocean, Bay of Biscay, English Channel and North Sea, right up to Norway.