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**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**JUNE 2019**

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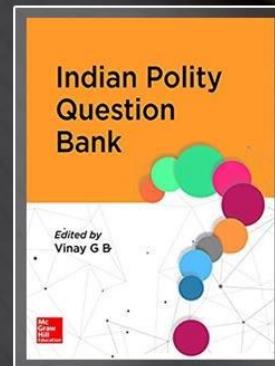
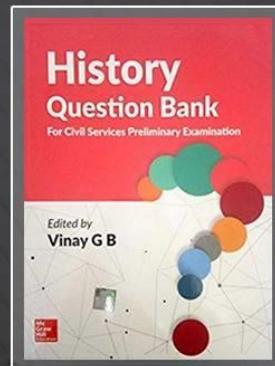
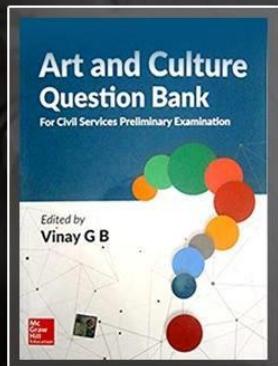
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# GENERAL STUDIES - I

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

## 1. MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH OF PUNJAB

- **Context:** A statue of Ranjit Singh, who ruled Punjab for almost four decades (1801-39), was recently inaugurated in Lahore.

**Key facts:**

- Ranjit Singh was born on November 13, 1780 in Gujranwala, now in Pakistan. At that time, Punjab was ruled by powerful chieftains who had divided the territory into Misls. Ranjit Singh overthrew the warring Misls and established a **unified Sikh empire after he conquered Lahore in 1799**.
- He was given the title **Lion of Punjab (Sher-e-Punjab)** because he stemmed the tide of Afghan invaders in Lahore, which remained his capital until his death.
- His **general Hari Singh Nalwa built the Fort of Jamrud at the mouth of the Khyber Pass**, the route the foreign rulers took to invade India.
- At the time of his death, **he was the only sovereign leader left in India**, all others having come under the control of the East India Company in some way or the other.
- He also **employed a large number of European officers**, especially French, to train his troops. He appointed French General Jean Franquis Allard to **modernise his army**. In 2016, the town of St Tropez unveiled the maharaja's bronze statue as a mark of respect.
- **Ranjit Singh's trans-regional empire spread over several states**. His empire included the former Mughal provinces of Lahore and Multan besides part of Kabul and the entire Peshawar. The boundaries of his state went up to Ladakh — Zorawar Singh, a general from Jammu, had conquered Ladakh in Ranjit Singh's name — in the northeast, Khyber pass in the northwest, and up to Panjab in the south where the five rivers of Punjab fell into the Indus.
- During his regime, **Punjab was a land of six rivers, the sixth being the Indus**.
- The maharaja was **known for his just and secular rule**; both Hindus and Muslims were given powerful positions in his darbar.
- He turned **Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar into the Golden Temple by covering it with gold**.
- He is also credited with **funding Hazoor Sahib gurudwara** at the final resting place of Guru Gobind Singh in Nanded, Maharashtra.

Sources: Indian Express.

*Topics: Role of women and women related issues.*

## 1. SDG GENDER INDEX

**What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: key features and findings of the latest SDG Index.
- **Context:** The 2019 edition of **SDG Gender Index** has been released.

**About the SDG Gender Index:**

- Developed by **Equal Measures 2030**, a joint effort of regional and global organisations including African Women's Development and Communication Network, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation etc.
- It **accounts for 14 out of 17 SDGs** (sustainable development goals) that cover aspects such as poverty, health, education, literacy, political representation and equality at the workplace.
- A **score of 100 reflects** the achievement of gender equality in relation to the targets set for each indicator. It means, for example, that 100% of girls complete secondary education, or that there is around 50-50 parity for women and men in Parliament. A score of 50 signifies that a country is about halfway to meeting a goal.

### **Key findings- India specific:**

- India is ranked 95th among 129 countries.
- India's highest goal scores are on health (79.9), hunger & nutrition (76.2), and energy (71.8).
- Its lowest goal scores are on partnerships (18.3, in the bottom 10 countries worldwide), industry, infrastructure and innovation (38.1), and climate (43.4).
- On indicators that define such goals, India scored 95.3 on the percentage of female students enrolled in primary education who are overage.
- Some of India's lowest scores on indicators include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. On seats held by women in the Supreme Court (4%), India has a score of 18.2.
- Gender-based violence
- On gender-based violence, indicators include proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (27.3%).

### **Global findings:**

- The world is far from achieving gender equality with 1.4 billion girls and women living in countries that get a "very poor" grade.
- The global average score of the 129 countries — which represent 95% of the world's girls and women — is 65.7 out of 100 ("poor" in the index).
- Altogether, 2.8 billion girls and women live in countries that get either a "very poor" (59 and below) or "poor" score (60-69) on gender equality.
- Just 8% of the world's population of girls and women live in countries that received a "good" gender equality score (80-89) and no country achieved an "excellent" overall score of 90 or above.

Sources: Indian Express.

## **2. BUS AND METRO TRAVEL FREE FOR WOMEN IN DELHI**

### **What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: logic and rationale behind the move, significance, concerns and challenges associated, criticism, evaluation.
- **Context:** Few experts have criticised the Delhi government's proposal to **make buses and the Metro free for women**.
- Under the proposal announced by the Delhi government, women will have the option to not pay for rides. The move, which is at the stage of feedback and planning, has drawn reactions ranging from enthusiastic approval to vehement rejection.

### **Rationale behind this move:**

- To **tackle congestion on the roads**.
- To make it easier for women to move from informal and more unsafe modes of transport such as shared autos and cabs to **more formal and safer modes such as the Metro**.
- To help **more women enter the workforce**.

### **Past experiences elsewhere:**

- Studies on fully free public transport systems have underlined both positives and challenges.
- **Hasselt, Belgium**, made public transport free in 1996, and also expanded its transport fleet. A decade later, a study reported a tenfold increase in ridership. However, rising operational costs forced Hasselt to do away with the scheme in 2014.
- German town of **Templin** made public transport free in 1997, and continues with the policy even today. Within three years, ridership increased 1,200%, with children and the youth making up the vast majority of the increased numbers. This, however, led to increased vandalism. Also, "the vast majority of the substitution effects were due to shift from soft modes — 30-40% from biking and 35-50% from walking. Only 10-20% of the substitution effects were associated with previous car trips."
- In 1991, the **Netherlands** introduced a seasonal free-fare travel card for higher education students, which led to the share of trips made by students rising from 11% to 21%. Fifty-two per cent of cyclists, and 34% of car users moved.

### **How different is Delhi's scheme when compared to similar schemes in the West?**

- The West has done it to battle road congestion and pollution. However, the reasons given by the Delhi government are different- safety and security.

### **Challenges ahead:**

- **Funding:** The challenge for the Delhi government is to find the funds for the project — which it says it has. According to the Delhi government, the cost of subsidising women's travel will be around Rs 1,200 crore annually. However, studies show that operational costs frequently rise in the long run, and schemes become increasingly less viable.
- **Challenges of implementation:** Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) is looking at special passes for women. But the Metro has automated fare collection (AFC) gates that require tokens or Metro cards — the Metro will have to either isolate entry and exit points for women where AFC gates can be done away with, or come up with special cards or tokens for women.
- **Last mile connectivity:** For women, walking to and from the nearest bus stop or Metro station, especially during the early mornings and late evenings, remains unsafe in many places in the city.

Sources: Indian Express.

## **3. ONE STOP CENTRE SCHEME**

### **What to study?**

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

### **About the scheme:**

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

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

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

### **Funds:**

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

### **Need for protection:**

- **Gender Based Violence (GBV)** is a global health, human rights and development issue that transcends geography, class, culture, age, race and religion to affect every community and country in every corner of the world.
- The **Article 1 of UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence 1993** provides a definition of gender – based abuse, calling it "any act of gender – based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or

psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

- In India, **gender based violence has many manifestations**; from the more universally prevalent forms of domestic and sexual violence including rape, to harmful practices such as, dowry, honour killings, acid attacks, witch – hunting, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, child marriage, sex selective abortion, sati etc.

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

## 1. UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF URBAN INDIA

- **Context:** Metropolises are going to be a key feature of India’s urbanisation and will play a crucial role in fuelling growth.

### Significance:

- The Global Metro Monitor 2018 reports that 36% of employment growth and 67% of GDP growth were contributed by the 300 largest global metros, with those in emerging economies outperforming those in advanced economies.
- **Nine Indian metros feature in the top 150 ranks of the economic performance index.** By 2030, India will have 71 metropolitan cities, of which seven would have a population of more than 10 million.

### Definition:

- **Article 243P(c)** of the Constitution defines ‘metropolitan areas’ as those having “population of ten lakhs [a million] or more, comprised in one or more districts and consisting of two or more municipalities/panchayats/ other contiguous areas, specified by the governor through public notification to be a metropolitan area”.

### Constitutional provisions:

- It recognises metropolitan areas as multi-municipal and multi-district entities.
- It mandates the formation of a **Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC)** for preparing draft development plans, considering common interests between local authorities, objectives and priorities set by Central and State governments, and investments likely to be made in the area by various agencies.
- To ensure the democratic character of the MPC, it is mandated that **at least two-thirds of the members of the committee must be elected by and from among the elected members of the municipalities and chairpersons of the panchayats in the metropolitan area, proportionate to the ratio of their respective populations.**
- The size and manner of filling such seats are left to the **State's discretion**.

### Issues with MPCs:

- Only nine out of 18 cities mandated to form MPCs have constituted them.
- Where constituted, their functionality is questionable, with the limited role of local elected representatives raising further questions on democratic decentralisation.
- Thus, the provision for an MPC has not introduced robust governance of metropolises, as the metropolises continue to be a collection of parastatals and local bodies in an entirely fragmented architecture.

### What can we learn from the UK model?

- The U.K. has rolled out ‘**City Deals**’, an agreement between the Union government and a city economic region, modelled on a ‘competition policy style’ approach.
- The city economic region is represented by a ‘**combined authority**’.
- This is a **statutory body** set up through national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate decisions, and which is steered by a directly elected Mayor.
- This is to further democratise and incentivise local authorities to collaborate and reduce fragmented governance, drive economic prosperity, job growth, etc.
- ‘City Deals’ move from budget silos and promote ‘economic growth budget’ across regions.

### What India needs to do?

- It is time India envisions the opportunities and challenges from a 'city' level to 'city-region' level.
- The Central government must create a platform to build consensus among State governments.

## 2. WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS 2019 REPORT

### What to study?

- For prelims: Key findings of the report.
- For mains: concerns raised, challenges associated and measures necessary to tackle the population growth.

**Context:** World Population Prospects 2019 has been released by the **Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs**.

- As per the report, **India is projected to become the most populous country by 2027 surpassing China**, and host 1.64 billion people by 2050; the world as a whole could be home to 8.5 billion people in just over a decade from now, and the number could go up to 9.7 billion by mid-century.

### Key findings:

#### India specific:

- **India will overtake China as the most populous country by around 2027.**
- India is also expected to add 273 million people by 2050 and will remain the most populated until the end of the century.
- India leads the set of nine countries that will make up for more than half the projected growth of the global population by 2050.
- **Top five:** India is expected to remain the world's most populous country with nearly 1.5 billion inhabitants, followed by China at 1.1 billion, Nigeria with 733 million, the United States with 434 million, and Pakistan with an estimated population of 403 million.

#### New challenges for India:

- India will have a vast number of young people and insufficient natural resources left for exploitation.
- At the national level, achieving a **reduction in fertility rates** in States such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh — which are high as per Sample Registration System data — is a challenge for India as it seeks to stabilise population growth.

#### Global scenario:

- The global population is projected to increase by another 2 billion people by 2050, from 7.7 billion in 2019 to 9.7 billion thirty years down the line.
- Between now and 2050, 55 countries are estimated to see their populations shrink by at least one per cent.
- Incidentally, since 2010, 27 countries have recorded a minimum one per cent reduction in population. This trend of a growing number of countries experiencing a decline in population has been attributed to sustained low levels of fertility and, in some cases, high rates of emigration.
- In China, the largest of these 55 countries, **the population is projected to shrink by as much as 2.2 per cent or 31.4 million by 2050.**
- Overall, **the world's population is ageing**, with the age group of 65 and above growing at such a fast rate that by 2050, one in six people in the world will be part of it as compared to one in 11 in 2019. By the end of the century, the world population is set to peak at a level of about 11 billion.
- **Life expectancy:** Although overall life expectancy will increase (from 64.2 years in 1990 to 77.1 years in 2050), life expectancy in poorer countries is projected to continue to lag behind.
- **Sex ratio:** Males are projected to continue to outnumber females until the end of the century, but the gap will close.

#### Need of the hour:

- **Stabilise population numbers** by raising the quality of life of people, and **achieve sustainable development** that will not destroy the environment.

- State governments must singularly **focus on improving education and health access for women**, both of which will help them be gainfully employed.
- **A growing population** of older adults is a certainty, and it opens up prospects for employment in many new services catering to them.
- **Urban facilities have to be reimagined**, with an emphasis on access to good, affordable housing and mobility.
- The progress in poverty reduction, greater equality, better nutrition, universal education and health care, needs **state support and strong civil society institutions**.
- **Making agriculture remunerative and keeping food prices stable** are crucial to ensure nutrition for all.

Source: The Hindu

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

## 1. PACIFIC RING OF FIRE

### What to study?

- For Prelims: About Mount Sinabung, pacific ring of fire and key geographical locations.
- For Mains: Volcanic eruptions- causes, effects and management.

**Context:** Mount Sinabung volcano recently erupted.

- **Where is it located?** in Sumatra Island, western Indonesia.
- It had erupted in 2010 for the first time in past 400 years.
- **Background:** Indonesia sit along the **Ring of Fire region**, an area where most of the world's volcanic eruptions occur. The Ring of Fire has seen a large amount of activity in recent days, but Indonesia has been hit hard due to its position on a large grid of tectonic plates.
- **Vulnerability:** Indonesia is at the **meeting point of three major continental plates – the Pacific, the Eurasian and the Indo-Australian plates** – and the much smaller Philippine plate. As a result, several volcanoes on the Indonesian islands are prone to erupting. Indonesia is home to roughly 400 volcanoes, out of which 127 are currently active, accounting for about a third of the world's active volcanoes.

### What is the Ring of Fire?

- The Ring of Fire is a Pacific region home to over 450 volcanoes, including **three of the world's four most active volcanoes** – Mount St. Helens in the USA, Mount Fuji in Japan and Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines. It is also sometimes called the **circum-Pacific belt**.
- Around **90% of the world's earthquakes occur in the Ring of Fire, and 80% of the world's largest earthquakes**.

### Location:

- It stretches along the Pacific Ocean coastlines, where the Pacific Plate grinds against other, smaller tectonic plates that form the Earth's crust – such as the Philippine Sea plate and the Cocos and Nazca Plates that line the edge of the Pacific Ocean.
- The 40,0000 kilometre horse-shoe-shaped ring loops from New Zealand to Chile, passing through the coasts of Asia and the Americas on the way.

### Risk:

- The people most at risk from activity in the Ring of Fire are in the US west coast, Chile, Japan and island nations including the Solomon Islands. These areas are most at risk because they lie on so-called subduction zones – which are boundaries that mark the collision between two of the planet's tectonic plates.

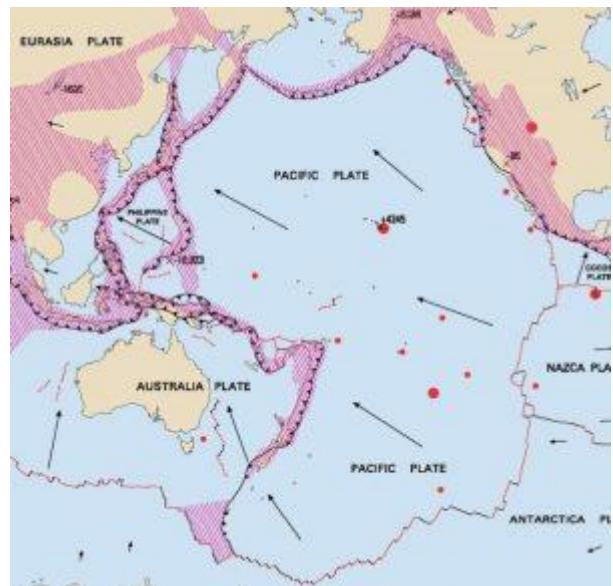
### How was the Ring of Fire formed?

- The Ring of Fire is the result from **subduction of oceanic tectonic plates beneath lighter continental plates**. The area where these tectonic plates meet is called a subduction zone.

## Why does the Ring of Fire trigger earthquakes?

- The world's deepest earthquakes happen in subduction zone areas as tectonic plates scrape against each other – and the Ring of Fire has the world's biggest concentration of subduction zones.
- As energy is released from the earth's molten core, it forces tectonic plates to move and they crash up against each other, causing friction. The friction causes a build-up of energy and when this energy is finally released it causes an earthquake. If this happens at sea it can cause devastating tsunamis.
- Tectonic plates usually only move on average a few centimetres each year, but when an earthquake strikes, they speed up massively and can move at several metres per second.

Sources: the hindu.



(Q) What is Pacific Ring of Fire? Explain its relevance in the case of recent volcanic eruption in Indonesia?

## 2. SUMMER SOLSTICE 2019

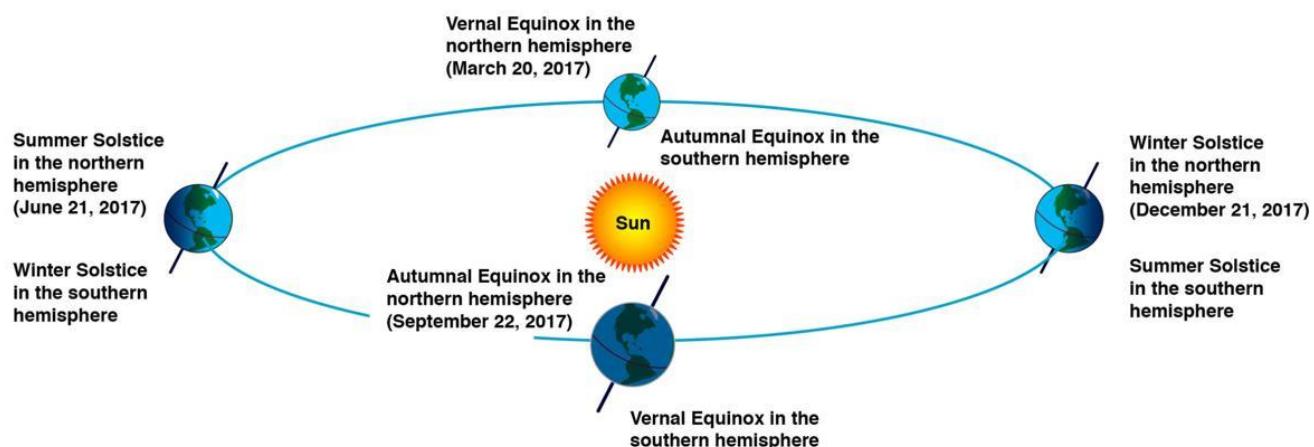
### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: All about summer Solstice- its occurrence, why it occurs, significance and changes associated.

**Context:** 21 June marks the beginning of Summer Season. June 21 is the **longest day of the year 2019** as it marks the Summer Solstice in the Northern Hemisphere.

### What does 'solstice' mean?

- The term 'solstice' derives from the Latin word 'solstitium', meaning 'Sun standing still'. On this day the Sun seems to stand still at the Tropic of Capricorn and then reverses its direction as it reaches its southernmost position as seen from the Earth. Some prefer the more teutonic term 'suntur' to describe the event.



### What causes this?

- Solstice is an astronomical event, caused by Earth's tilt on its axis and its motion in orbit around the sun.
- At the June solstice, Earth is positioned in its orbit so **that our world's North Pole is leaning most toward the sun**. As seen from Earth, the sun is directly overhead at noon 23 1/2 degrees north of the equator, at an

imaginary line encircling the globe known as the **Tropic of Cancer – named after the constellation Cancer** the Crab. This is as far north as the sun ever gets.

**Implications:**

- All locations north of the equator have days longer than 12 hours at the June solstice. Meanwhile, all locations south of the equator have days shorter than 12 hours.

Sources: the Hindu.

The image is a composite of two parts. On the left, there is a red rectangular graphic with white text. The text reads "MASTERING ANSWER WRITING SKILLS MATTERS" on three lines, followed by "CORE BATCH" and "2020" on the next two lines. Below this text is a circular logo containing a stylized red book with a small figure standing on top of it. On the right side of the image, there is a photograph of a person's hands writing in an open notebook with a yellow pen. The background is blurred, showing other people and possibly a classroom setting.

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# GENERAL STUDIES - II

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

## 1. CAN AN INDIVIDUAL SIMULTANEOUSLY BE A MEMBER OF BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT ?

### What to study?

- For prelims: constitutional provisions on this.
- For mains: Concerns and issues associated with simultaneous membership.
- **Why in News?** Some of those who won in the recent elections were elected from more than one constituency; some were already members of either Rajya Sabha or the legislature of a state. These MPs must vacate one of their seats — because **under the Constitution, an individual cannot simultaneously be a member of both Houses of Parliament (or a state legislature), or both Parliament and a state legislature, or represent more than one seat in a House.**

### What are the procedures and timelines for effecting this?

#### Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha:

- If a person is **elected simultaneously to both Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha**, and if he has not yet taken his seat in either House, he can choose, within 10 days from the later of the dates on which he is chosen to those Houses, the House of which he would like to be a member. [**Article 101(1) of the Constitution read with Section 68(1) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951**]
- The member must intimate his choice in writing to the Secretary to the Election Commission of India (ECI) within the 10-day window, failing which his seat in Rajya Sabha will fall vacant at the end of this period. [Sec 68(2), RPA 1951]. The choice, once intimated, is final. [Sec 68(3), RPA, 1951]
- No such option is, however, available to a person who is already a member of one House and has contested the election for membership of the other House. So, **if a sitting Rajya Sabha member contests and wins a Lok Sabha election, his seat in the Upper House becomes automatically vacant on the date he is declared elected to Lok Sabha**. The same applies to a Lok Sabha member who contests an election to Rajya Sabha. [Sec 69 read with Sec 67A, RPA 1951]

#### Elected on two Lok Sabha seats:

- There is no one in this category in the new Lok Sabha. **Under Sec 33(7) of RPA, 1951**, an individual **can contest from two parliamentary constituencies but, if elected from both, he has to resign one seat within 14 days of the declaration of the result, failing which both his seats shall fall vacant**. [Sec 70, RPA, 1951 read with Rule 91 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961]

#### State Assembly and Lok Sabha:

- **Under Article 101(2) of the Constitution** (read with Rule 2 of the Prohibition of Simultaneous Membership Rules, 1950, made by the President under this Article) members of state legislatures who have been elected to Lok Sabha must resign their seats within 14 days “from the date of publication in the Gazette of India or in the Official Gazette of the State, whichever is later, of the declaration that he has been so chosen”, failing which their seats in Lok Sabha shall automatically fall vacant.

Sources: Indian Express.

## 2. ARTICLE 370

### What to study?

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

- **Context: Article 370 only temporary provision, not permanent**, Said Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently. He said this during a debate on extension of President's rule in J&K.

#### **Important provisions under the article:**

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

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

- Focus on investing in J&K's **infrastructure**.
- Absence of an **effective information and communication plan** has hobbled the government's ability to respond even when it is on the moral high ground. This must be immediately corrected.
- **Standard operating procedures must require the use of lethal force only when there is an imminent threat to life and property**, force should be used proportionately and not as a punitive measure.
- What is needed at the moment is the deployment of **new socio-cultural resources, and a new operational culture** to wind down the militancy without alienating more locals who could either join or influence their relatives and friends to join various terrorist organisations.
- **Lethal force should be the last resort**, used only when lives are threatened. Promptly investigating allegations of abuses and prosecuting those responsible is key to resolving this mess.
- **Externally**, wide-ranging peace talks between India and Pakistan, the Indian administration and 'azaadi' groups is needed and **internally**, peace-building on the ground by multiple stakeholders involved is necessary.

Sources: the hindu.

#### **What is Article 370?**

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

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

## 1. RULE 49MA

### What to study?

- For prelims: related provisions in News.
- For mains: need for protection of electors, concerns over misuse and reforms needed.

**Context:** The Election Commission may “revisit” the rule for prosecution of a voter for making a false complaint of malfunction of an electronic voting machine or a voter verifiable paper audit trail machine- Rule 49MA.

### Background:

- The Supreme Court, in April 2029, sought a response from the Election Commission on a plea seeking abolition of a provision in election rules that provides for prosecution of an elector if a complaint alleging malfunctioning of EVMs and VVPATs turns out to be false.

### What is rule 49MA?

- **Rule 49MA is mentioned under ‘The Conduct of Elections Rules’ .**
- **Under the rule**, where printer for paper trail is used, if an elector after having recorded his vote under rule 49M alleges that the paper slip generated by the printer has shown the name or symbol of a candidate other than the one he voted for, the presiding officer shall obtain a written declaration from the elector as to the allegation, after warning the elector about the consequence of making a false declaration.
- The rules outline that if after investigation, the allegation of EVM malfunctioning is found to be false or incorrect, then the complainant can be prosecuted under Section 177 of the Indian Penal Code for “furnishing false information”.
- In such a case, **a jail term of six months or a fine of Rs 1,000 or both** is guaranteed.

### Arguments against Rule 49MA:

- It is unconstitutional as **it criminalises reporting of malfunctioning of Electronic Voting Machines and Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails.**
- The obligation of proving an allegation cannot be on the voter when machines used for voting showed ‘arbitrary deviant behaviour’. Putting the responsibility on the elector in cases of arbitrary deviant behaviour of machines used in the election process, infringes upon a citizen’s right to freedom of expression under the Constitution.
- When an elector is asked to cast test vote as prescribed under Rule 49MA, he may not be able to reproduce the same result which he was complaining about, one more time in a sequence, because of the pre-programmed deviant behaviour of the electronic machines.
- Therefore, holding an elector accountable for deviant behaviours of EVMs and VVPATs could deter them from coming forth and making any complaint, which is essential for improving the process.
- Since only an elector could be a witness to the secrecy of his vote cast, it would violate **Article 20(3)** of the Constitution which says that no person accused of an offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.

Sources: The Hindu.

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

## 1. PRO-TEM SPEAKER

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Pro- tem Speaker- appointment, oath, functions and powers.

**Context:** Virendra Kumar a BJP MP from Madhya Pradesh will be the Pro-tem Speaker of the 17th Lok Sabha.

### **What is Pro-tem Speaker?**

- It is a Latin phrase which translates to for the '**time being**' in English. So the Pro-tem Speaker is a temporary speaker appointed for a limited period of time.

### **The need for pro- tem speaker:**

- The **speaker of the Lok Sabha/legislative assembly vacates the office immediately before the first meeting of the newly elected house.**
- Hence **President/governor appoints the pro-tem speaker to preside over the sittings of the house.**

### **Appointment:**

- Usually the **senior most member is elected as the pro-tem speaker.**
- The **president/governor will administer the oath of the office** for the pro-tem speaker.
- When the house elects the new speaker the office of the pro-tem speaker ceases to exist. Hence **the office of the pro-tem speaker is a temporary one which will be in existence for few days.**

### **Duties and functions:**

- The main duty of the pro-tem speaker is to administer the oath to the newly elected members.
- Pro-tem also enables the house to elect the new speaker.

### **Powers:**

- The Bombay High Court in its 1994 judgement in the **Surendra Vasant Sirsat case** holds that a pro-tem is Speaker of the House "for all purposes with all powers, privileges and immunities" until the Speaker is elected.
- The Odisha High Court also agreed in the **Godavaris Misra versus Nandakisore Das, Speaker, Orissa Legislative Assembly case** when it said the "powers of the Speaker pro-tem are co-extensive with the powers of elected Speaker".
- The pro-tem speaker also has **same powers, privileges as that of the Speaker.**

### **Key facts:**

- **Article 180 (1)** of the Constitution gives the Governor the power to appoint a pro-tem Speaker. The Article says that if the chair of the Speaker falls vacant and there is no Deputy Speaker to fill the position, the duties of the office shall be performed "by such member of the Assembly as the Governor may appoint for the purpose".

Sources: the Hindu.

## **2. REMOVAL OF JUDGES**

### **What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: Removal of High Court judges- procedure, constitutional provisions, issues associated and the need for relevant judicial reforms.

**Context:** Months after an in-house panel found an Allahabad High Court judge, Justice S.N. Shukla, guilty of misconduct, Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to initiate a motion for his removal.

### **Removal of Judges:**

- **Article 124(4) and the Judges Inquiry Act 1968** determine the procedure of removal of the judges:
- A **motion of impeachment** addressed to the President is to be **signed by at least 100 members of the Lok Sabha or 50 members of the Rajya Sabha** and then delivered to the Speaker of Lok Sabha or the Chairman of Rajya Sabha.
- The motion is **to be investigated by a Committee of 3 judges of the Supreme Court and a distinguished jurist.**
- If the Committee finds the judge guilty of misbehavior or that he suffers from incapacity, the motion along with the report of the committee is **taken up for consideration in the House where motion was moved.**

- The judge is then removed by the requisite majority, i.e. **majority of total and 2/3 of its members present and voting**.

#### **Key facts:**

- A member of the higher judiciary, which means the Judges and Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of India and the state High Courts, can be removed from service **only through the process of impeachment under Article 124 (4) of the Constitution**.
- A judge is removable from his office, only **on the grounds of proved misbehavior or incapacity**.
- Parliament is empowered to regulate the procedure for the investigation and proof of such misbehavior or incapacity.**
- A judge may be **removed from his office only by an order of the president**.

#### **Issues present and the need for reforms:**

- Method pursued by the legislature in the Act of 1968 falls abysmally short of the mark as **the same makes judges susceptible to a political process of voting which may or may not impeach judges despite a 3-member committee holding the Judge guilty**. Such an event is a travesty of natural justice as **there is propensity for a 'guilty' judge to be let off on the whims of a political process of voting**.
- Entire process concerns of a possibility of harming **judicial independence**. This stems from a possibility of Judges being harassed to toe the ideology of a party in majority or face their wrath in an impending motion of impeachment.
- The words "misbehaviour" or "incapacity" have neither been defined nor clarified in the Constitution.**
- The process of removing a judge is **too elaborate and somewhat cumbersome**.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

## **1. LEADER OF OPPOSITION**

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

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

**Why in News?** Congress, with 52 MPs, has declined to stake claim for the position of **Leader of Opposition** in Parliament.

**Background:** Any party that has 55 members can get the post as recognised as such by the speaker/chairman.

#### **Who is the Leader of Opposition?**

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

#### **Significance of the office:**

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

#### **What reforms are needed?**

- There arises a problem when no party in opposition secures 55 or more seats. In such situations, the numerically largest party in the opposition should have the right to have a leader recognised as leader of the opposition by the speaker.

- Besides, the 10% formulation is inconsistent with the law '**the salary and allowances of leaders of opposition in Parliament Act, 1977**' which only says that the largest opposition party should get the post.

Sources: the Hindu.

**(Q)** What is the significance of Leader of opposition in Indian Polity? Explain in what way an effective opposition is crucial to an effective democracy?

## 2. LEADER OF RAJYA SABHA

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Leader of House- provisions, roles and functions.

**Context:** Thawarchand Gehlot, Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment was recently appointed as **Leader of Rajya Sabha**. The Leader of the Rajya Sabha is **appointed by the party in power at Centre**.

### Leader of House:

- The term Leader of the House has been defined in **Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha**.
- Leader of the House, according to **Rule 2 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha means the prime Minister, if he is a Member of the House or a Minister who is a Member of the House and is nominated by the Prime Minister to function as the Leader of the House.**
- The **Prime Minister is invariably the Leader of the Lok Sabha**.

### Roles and functions:

- The Leader of the House is an important parliamentary functionary and exercises direct influence on the course of parliamentary business.
- The whole policy of the Government especially in so far as it is expressed in the inner life of the House and in measures dealing with the course of its business, is concentrated in his person.
- The **arrangement of Government business is the ultimate-responsibility of the Leader of the House**, though the details are settled, subject to his approval, by the Chief Whip.
- The Leader of the House makes **proposals for the dates of summoning and prorogation of the House for the approval of the Chair**.
- He has to draw up the **programme of official business to be transacted in the Session of Parliament**, namely, Bills, motions, discussions on general or specific subjects like five-year plans, foreign policy, economic or industrial policy and other important State activities.
- He fixes inter se **priorities for various items of business to ensure their smooth passage**.
- After settling tentative programme for the whole session, he maps out weekly and daily programme depending upon the state of progress of work and announces the programme to the members in advance every week.
- The **Business Advisory Committee determines the allocation of time for Government Bills and other business on the basis of suggestions made by or received from him from time to time**.
- The **Leader of the Lok Sabha. viz., Prime Minister, never sits in the Business advisory Committee; he or she is represented by the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs in the Business Advisory Committee. The Leader of the House in the Rajya Sabha is generally a member of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC)**. In the event, he is not a member of the BAC, he is invited to attend its meetings.

## 3. SPEAKER OF THE LOK SABHA

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: The office of Speaker, powers, roles, appointment and functions.

**Context:** Om Birla has been named as the new Lok Sabha Speaker by the NDA. He is elected Member of Parliament from Kota, Rajasthan.

### Speaker of the Lok Sabha:

- The chairman or **the Presiding Officer of Lok Sabha** is called Speaker.
- The speaker of the Lok Sabha is **elected from all other members by simple majority**.

- Any member of Parliament is eligible to be nominated as a speaker but most commonly the candidate of ruling party or the party with majority wins this post.
- However, there are certain cases when the elected Speaker does not belong to the majority ruling party of Lok Sabha (G. M. C. Balyogi, Manohar Joshi, Somnath Chatterjee).

#### **Functions and Powers of Lok Sabha Speakers:**

- Speaker of Lok Sabha is basically the head of the house and presides over the sittings of Parliament and controls its working.
- The constitution has tried to ensure the independence of Speaker by charging his salary on the consolidated Fund of India and the same is not subject to vote of Parliament.
- While debating or during general discussion on a bill, the members of the parliament have to address only to the Speaker.
- Whenever there is a joint sitting of both houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha) the Speaker of the Lok Sabha presides over this meeting.
- The Speaker of Lok Sabha comes at sixth position in the Order of Precedence of Government of India.
- In the normal circumstances the Speaker does not casts his vote over any matter in Lok Sabha. But whenever there is a tie on votes between the ruling party and opposition, the Speaker at that time can exercise his vote.
- It is the Speaker who decides the agenda of various discussions.
- The speaker has the power to adjourn or suspend the house/meetings if the quorum is not met.
- The Speaker ensures the discipline and decorum of the house. If the speaker finds the behaviour and a member of Parliament is not good, he/she can punish the unruly members by suspending.
- The Speaker decides whether a bill brought to the house is a money bill or not. In the case Speaker decides some bill as a money bill, this decision can not be challenged.
- Speaker is the final and sole authority to allow different types of motions and resolutions such as No Confidence Motion, Motion of Adjournment, Censure Motion etc.
- The Speaker of Lok Sabha does not leave the office just after dissolution of the assembly. He continues to be in the office till the newly formed assembly takes its first meeting and elects the new Speaker.

#### **The Speaker of Lok Sabha automatically disqualifies from his post if:**

- he is no longer the Member of Parliament.
- if he tenders his resignation to the Deputy Speaker.
- if he holds the office of profit under central government or any state government.
- if he is of unsound mind and that too declared by the court of law.
- if he is declared undischarged insolvent.
- if he is no longer the citizen of India or voluntarily accepts the citizenship of any other country.
- if he is removed from the post of Speaker by passing a resolution by majority of the members of Lok Sabha. This is to note that during resolution for removal of Speaker, the Speaker is not in position to cast his vote even if there is tie.

#### **Speaker and the Committees:**

- The Committees of the House function under the overall direction of the Speaker. All such Committees are constituted by her or by the House.
- The Chairmen of all Parliamentary Committees are nominated by her.
- Any procedural problems in the functioning of the Committees are referred to her for directions.
- Committees like the Business Advisory Committee, the General Purposes Committee and the Rules Committee work directly under her Chairmanship.

## **4. PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT**

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

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

**Context:** President Ramnath Kovind recently addressed joint sitting of Parliament outlining the govt's goals for next five years.

### What does the Constitution say about this?

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

### President's address:

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

## 5. MOTION OF THANKS TO PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

### What to study?

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

### Amendments to the “Motion of Thanks”:

- **Notices of amendments to Motion of Thanks** on the President's Address can be tabled after the President has delivered his Address. **Amendments may refer to matters contained in the Address as well as to matters, in the opinion of the member, the Address has failed to mention.** Amendments can be moved to the Motion of Thanks in such form as may be considered appropriate by the Speaker.

### Limitations:

- The only limitations are that **members cannot refer to matters which are not the direct responsibility of the Central Government and that the name of the President cannot be brought in during the debate since the Government and not the President is responsible for the contents of the Address.**

### Provisions governing them:

- President's Address and Motion of Thanks are governed by **Articles 86 (1) and 87 (1) of the Constitution and Rules 16 to 24 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.**
- **Its passage:**
- **Members of Parliament vote on this motion of thanks.** This motion must be passed in both of the houses.
- A failure to get motion of thanks passed **amounts to defeat of government and leads to collapse of government. This is why, the Motion of Thanks is deemed to be a no-confidence motion.**

### Constitutional provisions on this:

- **Article 86(1) of the Constitution** provides that the President may address either House of Parliament or both Houses assembled together, and for that purpose require the attendance of members.
- **Article 87** provides for the special address by the President. Clause (1) of that article provides that at the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year, the President shall address both Houses of Parliament assembled together and inform Parliament of the causes of its summons. No other business is transacted till the President has addressed both Houses of Parliament assembled together.

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

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

**(Q)** What is an amendment to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address? Why is it resorted to? Give examples and examine significance of this amendment.

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

## 1. CABINET COMMITTEES

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Cabinet committees- establishment, mandate, composition, functions and significance.

**Context:** The Government reconstituted eight key cabinet committees under the **Transaction of Business Rules**.

### What are they?

- The Cabinet Committee are organizations which are instrumental in reducing the workload of the Cabinet. These committees are **extra-constitutional** in nature and are nowhere mentioned in the Constitution.
- Types and Composition of Cabinet Committees:**
- Standing Cabinet Committee:** These are permanent in nature with a specific job. The Cabinet Ministers are called its 'members' while the people without the rank of Cabinet Committee are called '**special invitees**'.
- Ad-hoc Cabinet Committee:** These are **temporary** in nature and are formed time to time to deal with specific tasks.
- Composition:** The composition of a Cabinet Committee varies from 3 to 8 people. Even Ministers who are not the part of the Cabinet can be added to a Cabinet Committee. Usually, each cabinet committee has at least one Cabinet Minister. **The members of the Cabinet Committee can be from both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.**

## 2. WHY CABINET COMMITTEES ARE FORMED, WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF EACH ?

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key committees, composition, roles, functions and their significance.

**Context:** The Union government has released the composition of eight Cabinet Committees, including **two new ones — one on Investment, the other on Employment and Skill Development**.

### What are these Cabinet Committees for?

- Government of India Transaction of Business Rules, 1961** emerging out of **Article 77(3) of the Constitution** states: "The President shall make rules for the more convenient transaction of the business of the Government of India, and for the allocation among Ministers of the said business."
- The Rules mandate the **minister-in-charge of a department (ministry) to dispose of "all business allotted to a department under" him or her**. However, "when the subject of a case concerns more than one department", no decision can be taken "until all such departments have concurred, or, failing such concurrence, a decision thereon has been taken by or under the authority of the Cabinet".

### Who constitutes and assigns functions to these committees?

- The **Prime Minister constitutes Standing Committees of the Cabinet** and sets out the specific functions assigned to them. He can add or reduce the number of committees.
- Ad hoc committees of ministers, including Groups of Ministers, may be appointed by the Cabinet or by the Prime Minister** for specific matters.

### Overview of the committees:

- Cabinet Committee on Appointments-** This panel makes appointments to posts of the three service chiefs, Director General of Military Operations, chiefs of all Air and Army Commands, Director General of Defence Intelligence Agency, Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister, Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services, Director General of Ordnance Factories, Director General of Defence Estates, Controller General of Defence Accounts, Director of Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Solicitor-General, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Chairman and Members of the Railway Board, Chief Vigilance Officers in Public Sector

Undertakings and Secretariat posts of and above the rank of Joint Secretary in the Central Government. This Committee decides on all important empanelments and shift of officers serving on Central deputation.

- **Accommodation:** The Cabinet Committee on Accommodation determines the guidelines or rules with regard to the allotment of government accommodation. It also takes a call on the allotment of government accommodation to non-eligible persons and organisations as also the rent to be charged from them. It can consider the allotment of accommodation from the General Pool to Members of Parliament. It can consider proposals for shifting existing Central Government Offices to locations outside the capital.
- **Economic Affairs:** The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs is supposed to review economic trends, problems and prospects "for evolving a consistent and integrated economic policy", coordinate all activities requiring policy decisions at the highest level, deal with fixation of prices of agricultural produce and prices of essential commodities. It considers proposals for investment of more than Rs 1,000 crore, deal with industrial licensing policies and review rural development and the Public Distribution System.
- **Parliamentary Affairs:** The Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs draws the schedule for Parliament sessions and monitors the progress of government business in Parliament. It scrutinises non-government business and decides which official Bills and resolutions are to be presented.
- **Political Affairs:** The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs addresses problems related to Centre-state relations. It also examines economic and political issues that require a wider perspective but have no internal or external security implications.
- **Security:** The Cabinet Committee on Security deals with issues relating to law and order, internal security and policy matters concerning foreign affairs with internal or external security implications. It also goes into economic and political issues related to national security. It considers all cases involving capital defence expenditure more than Rs 1,000 crore. It considers issues related to the Department of Defence Production and the Department of Defence Research and Development, Services Capital Acquisition plans and schemes for procurement of security-related equipment.

#### The new panels:

- **Investment:** The Cabinet Committee on Investment will "identify key projects required to be implemented on a time-bound basis", **involving investments of Rs 1,000 crore or more, or any other critical projects**, as may be specified by it, with regard to infrastructure and manufacturing. It will prescribe time limits for giving requisite approvals and clearances by the ministries concerned in identified sectors. It will also monitor the progress of such projects.
- **Employment:** The Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development is supposed to provide "direction to all policies, programmes, schemes and initiatives for skill development aimed at increasing the employability of the workforce for effectively meeting the emerging requirements of the rapidly growing economy and mapping the benefits of demographic dividend". It is required to enhance workforce participation, foster employment growth and identification, and work towards removal of gaps between requirement and availability of skills in various sectors. **The panel will set targets** for expeditious implementation of all skill development initiatives by the ministries and to periodically review the progress in this regard.

Sources: Indian Express.

## 3. CABINET SECRETARY

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Cabinet secretary- roles, functions, appointment and significance.

**Context:** Govt Amends 60-Year-Old Rule to Pave Way for Cabinet Secretary Extension.

- With this, the current Cabinet Secretary Pradeep Kumar Sinha, has become **the longest-serving bureaucrat in the post in the country's history**.

#### Key concept- changes made:

- A cabinet secretary is appointed for a **fixed tenure of two years**.
- According to **All India Services (Death-Cum-Retirement-Benefits) Rules, 1958**, the government can give extension in service to a cabinet secretary provided the total tenure does not exceed four years.

- As per the modified rules, the **central government may give an extension in service for a further period not exceeding three months, beyond the period of four years to a cabinet secretary.**

#### **Role of the cabinet secretary:**

- The cabinet secretariat is under the **direct charge of the prime minister.**
- The administrative head of the secretariat is the cabinet secretary who is also **the ex-officio chairman of the civil services board.**

#### **Functions:**

- The cabinet secretariat assists in decision-making in government by ensuring inter-ministerial coordination, ironing out differences amongst ministries or departments and evolving consensus through the instrumentality of the standing or ad hoc committees of secretaries.
- Management of major crisis situations in the country and coordinating activities of various ministries in such a situation is also one of the functions of the cabinet secretariat.
- Cabinet Secretariat is responsible for the administration of the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961 and the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules 1961, facilitating smooth transaction of business in Ministries/ Departments of the Government.

## **4. J&K PRESIDENT'S RULE**

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

- For Prelims and Mains: Difference between President's Rule under Article 356 and Governor's Rule in J&K, Special status for J&K under Article 370.

**Context: Cabinet approves** extension of **President's Rule in J&K** for six months with effect from 3rd July, 2019. Resolution to be moved in the forthcoming Parliament session.

#### **President's rule in J&K:**

- Since J&K has a separate Constitution, **Governor's rule is first imposed under Section 92 for six months** after an approval by the President. In case the Assembly is not dissolved within six months, **President's rule under Article 356 is extended to the State.**
- Governor's rule is mentioned under **Article 370 section 92** – 'Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State.'
- Article 370 section 92: Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State:**
- If at any time, the Governor is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the Government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, the Governor may by Proclamation:
  - Assume to himself all or any of the functions of the Government of the State and all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by anybody or authority in the State.
  - Make such incidental and consequential provisions as appear to the Governor to be necessary or desirable for giving effect to the objects of the Proclamation, including provisions for suspending in whole or in part the operation of any provision of this Constitution relating to anybody or authority in the State.

#### **Related key facts:**

- Any such Proclamation may be **revoked or varied by a subsequent Proclamation.** Any such Proclamation whether varied under subsection (2) or not, shall except where it is a **Proclamation revoking a previous Proclamation, cease to operate on the expiration of six months** from the date on which it was first issued.
- If the Government or by a Proclamation under his section assumes, to himself any, of the powers of the Legislature to make his laws, **any law made by him in the exercise of that power shall, subject to, the terms thereof continue to have effect until two years have elapsed from the date on which the proclamation ceases to have effect, unless sooner.**
- No Proclamation under this section shall, except where it is a Proclamation revoking a previous Proclamation, be laid before each House of the Legislature as soon as it is convened.

## What is President's Rule in the Indian context?

- The imposition of Article 356 of the Constitution on a State following the failure of constitutional machinery is called President's Rule in India. Once the President's Rule has been imposed on a state, the elected state government will be **temporarily dissolved**, and the Governor, who is appointed by the government at the Centre, will replace the Chief Minister as the chief executive of the State.
- The state will fall under the direct control of the Union government, and the Governor will continue to be head the proceedings, representing the President of India – who is the Head of the State.
- The imposition of the President's rule requires the sanction of both the houses of Parliament. If approved, it can go on for a period of six months. However, the imposition cannot be extended for more than three years, and needs to be brought before the two houses every six months for approval.

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

## 1. 'JAL SHAKTI' MINISTRY

- The Centre has created a new Ministry called 'Jal Shakti'.
- It has been created by merger of Ministries of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation along with Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- 'Nal se Jal' scheme to provide piped drinking water to every household will be a component of government's Jal Jivan Mission.
- The ministry will roll out government's ambitious plans to provide piped water connections to every household in India by 2024.
- It will also address international and inter-states water disputes and the Namami Gange project which is the flagship initiative to clean the River Ganga, its tributaries and sub-tributaries.

## 2. WHY CBI NEEDS CONSENT ?

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: CBI- Establishment, its functioning, issues related to its autonomy and need for consent in investigations.

**Context:** Reversing his predecessor's orders, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has allowed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to go ahead with investigations and raids in the State without prior permission of the State government.

### Background:

- The Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal governments, had last year, withdrawn "general consent" to the CBI for investigating cases in their respective states. The state governments said they had lost faith in the CBI in the backdrop of its internal turmoil marked by the open war among the agency's top officers. They had also alleged that the Centre is using the CBI to unfairly target Opposition parties.

### What is general consent?

- Unlike the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which is governed by its own NIA Act and has jurisdiction across the country, the CBI is governed by the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act that makes consent of a state government mandatory for conducting investigation in that state.

### There are two kinds of consent:

- **case-specific and general**— Given that the CBI has jurisdiction only over central government departments and employees, it can investigate a case involving state government employees or a violent crime in a given state only after that state government gives its consent.
- "General consent" is normally given to help the CBI seamlessly conduct its investigation into cases of corruption against central government employees in the concerned state. Almost all states have given such consent. Otherwise, the CBI would require consent in every case.

### **What does withdrawal mean?**

- It means the CBI will not be able to register any fresh case involving a central government official or a private person stationed in these two states without getting case-specific consent. Withdrawal of consent simply means that CBI officers will lose all powers of a police officer as soon as they enter the state unless the state government has allowed them.

### **Under what provision can general consent been withdrawn?**

- In exercise of power conferred by **Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946**, the state governments can withdraw the general consent accorded. Section 6 of the Act says, “Nothing contained in Section 5 (which deals with jurisdiction of CBI) shall be deemed to enable any member of the Delhi Special Police Establishment to exercise powers and jurisdiction in any area in a State, not being a Union Territory or Railway, area, without the consent of the Government of that State.”

### **Can withdrawal mean that the CBI can no longer probe any case?**

- No. The CBI would still have the power to investigate old cases registered when general consent existed. Also, cases registered anywhere else in the country, but involving people stationed in states which have withdrawn consent, would allow CBI's jurisdiction to extend to these states.

### **What can the CBI do in such instances?**

- The CBI can always get a search warrant from a local court in the state and conduct searches. In case the search requires a surprise element, there is CrPC Section 166, which allows a police officer of one jurisdiction to ask an officer of another to carry out searches on his behalf. And if the first officer feels that the searches by the latter may lead to loss of evidence, the section allows the first officer to conduct searches himself after giving a notice to the latter.

### **What happens in fresh cases?**

- Withdrawal of consent will only bar the CBI from registering a case within the jurisdiction of states which have withdrawn consent. However, the CBI could still file cases in Delhi and continue to probe people inside such states.
- An October 11, 2018, order of the Delhi High Court makes it clear that the agency can probe anyone in a state that has withdrawn “general consent” if the case is not registered in that state. The order was given with regard to a case of corruption in Chhattisgarh, which also gives consent on a case-to-case basis. The court ordered that the CBI could probe the case without prior consent of the Chhattisgarh government since it was registered in Delhi.

Sources: the Hindu.

## **3. COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA (CCI)**

### **What to study?**

- For prelims: objectives, composition and functions of CCI.
- For mains: issues associated with its functioning and the need for reforms.

**Context:** CCI imposes penalty on pharma companies, trade associations for violating the provisions of the Competition Act, 2002.

### **Competition Commission of India:**

- It is a **statutory body** of the Government of India, responsible for enforcing the **Competition Act, 2002** throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition.

### **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.

## **4. NITI AAYOG**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims: Composition of NITI Aayog, various initiatives.
- For Mains: Cooperative federalism- meaning, significance and efforts by the government.

**Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the reconstitution of government of India's policy think tank **NITI Aayog**.

### **About NITI Aayog:**

- The Government, in January 2015, replaced Planning Commission with NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India).
- **Aim:** to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and to enhance cooperative federalism by fostering the involvement of State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.

### **Role of NITI Aayog:**

- The institution has to provide governments at the central and state levels with relevant strategic and technical advice across the spectrum of key elements of policy. This includes matters of national and international import on the economic front, dissemination of best practices from within the country as well



as from other nations, the infusion of new policy ideas and specific issue-based support. The institution has to be able to respond to the changing and more integrated world that India is part of.

#### Composition of NITI Aayog:

- **Chairperson:** Prime Minister of India as the Chairperson.
- **Governing Council** comprising the Chief Ministers of all the States and Lt. Governors of Union Territories.
- **Regional Councils** will be formed to address specific issues and contingencies impacting more than one state or a region. These will be formed for a specified tenure.
- The Regional Councils will be **convened by the Prime Minister** and will **comprise of the Chief Ministers of States and Lt. Governors of Union Territories in the region**. These will be chaired by the Chairperson of the **NITI Aayog or his nominee**.
- Experts, specialists and practitioners with relevant domain knowledge as **special invitees nominated by the Prime Minister**.

The full-time organizational framework will comprise of, in addition to the Prime Minister as the Chairperson:

- **Vice-Chairperson:** To be appointed by the Prime Minister.
- **Members:** Full-time.
- **Part-time members:** Maximum of 2 from leading universities research organizations and other relevant institutions in an ex-officio capacity. Part time members will be on a rotational basis.
- **Ex Officio members:** Maximum of 4 members of the Union Council of Ministers to be nominated by the Prime Minister.
- **Chief Executive Officer :** To be appointed by the Prime Minister for a fixed tenure, in the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.

#### Facts for Prelims- Initiatives by NITI Aayog:

- Its important initiatives include “15 year road map”, “7-year vision, strategy and action plan”, AMRUT, Digital India and Atal Innovation Mission.

#### Is NITI Aayog old wine in a new bottle?

##### Why review the composition and working of NITI Aayog?

- The country's economy has not performed to the expectations of the citizens since it was created.

##### Need of the hour:

- Review what NITI Aayog has achieved so far to adopt the new role described in its charter — that of a **catalyst of change in a complex, federal, socioeconomic system**.
- Assess whether **it has transformed its capabilities sufficiently to become an effective systems reformer and persuader of stakeholders**, rather than merely an announcer of lofty multi-year goals and manager of projects, which many suspect it is.
- **Current concerns over it's functioning:**
- There is deep concern that NITI Aayog has **lost its integrity as an independent institution to guide the government**; that it has become a **mouthpiece of the government and an implementer of the government's projects**.

##### What needs to be done?

- NITI Aayog must have the ability to independently evaluate the government's programmes at the Centre and in the States.
- The transformational approach to planning and implementation that 21st century India needs, which is alluded to in NITI's charter, requires evaluations and course-corrections in the midst of action.
- It requires new methods to speed up 'organisational learning' amongst stakeholders in the system who must make plans together and implement them together.
- There is a need for new methods of cooperative learning and cooperative implementation by stakeholders, who are not controlled by any central body of technical experts with political and/or budgetary authority over them.

### Way ahead:

- There must be a review of what the think tank has achieved to adopt the new role described in its charter.

### Reimagining the NITI Aayog:

Typically, federations (including the Indian one) face vertical and horizontal imbalances:

- A **vertical imbalance** arises because the tax systems are designed in a manner that yields much greater tax revenues to the Central government when compared to the State or provincial governments; the **Constitution mandates relatively greater responsibilities to the State governments**. For example, in India, post the advent of Goods and Services Tax (GST), the share of States in the public expenditure is 60% while it is 40% for the Centre to perform their constitutionally mandated duties.
- The **horizontal imbalances** arise because of differing levels of attainment by the States due to differential growth rates and their developmental status in terms of the state of social or infrastructure capital.

Horizontal imbalance involves two types of imbalances:

- **Type I** is to do with the adequate provision of basic public goods and services.
- **Type II** is due to growth accelerating infrastructure or the transformational capital deficits.

What needs to be done to remove these imbalances?

- Removing these two imbalances clearly comprises two distinct policy goals and calls for following the **Tinbergen assignment principle**, which are two different policy instruments.
- It is in this context that the role of **NITI Aayog 2.0 must be reimagined** to create a niche, assume the role of another policy instrument and become the second pillar of the new fiscal federal structure.

Issues present:

- With the Planning Commission disbanded, there is a **vacuum especially as the NITI Aayog is primarily a think tank with no resources to dispense, which renders it toothless to undertake a “transformational” intervention**.

Need of the hour:

- There is an urgent need for an optimal arrangement. The Finance minister cannot do the dual job. It is best that the **Union Finance Commission be confined to focussing on the removal of the horizontal imbalance across States of the Type I**: i.e. the basic public goods imbalance.
- The need is to **create another institution to tackle the horizontal imbalance of the Type II**; for this the NITI Aayog is the most appropriate institution.

How can NITI Aayog 2.0 play a renewed role in cooperative federalism?

- NITI Aayog 2.0 should **receive significant resources** (say 1% to 2% of the GDP) to promote accelerated growth in States that are lagging, and overcome their historically conditioned infrastructure deficit, thus reducing the developmental imbalance.
- NITI Aayog should be engaged with the allocation of “transformational” capital in a formulaic manner, complete with incentive-compatible conditionalities.
- NITI Aayog 2.0 should also be **mandated to create an independent evaluation office** which will monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the utilisation of such grants.
- It must be also **accorded a place at the high table of decision-making** as it will need to objectively buy-in the cooperation of the richer States as their resources are transferred to the poorer ones.

## 5. ALL STATES CAN NOW CONSTITUTE FOREIGNERS TRIBUNALS

What to study?

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

Context: The MHA has amended the **Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964**,

### **Changes proposed as per the amendment:**

- It has empowered district **magistrates** in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.
- The amended Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 2019 also **empowers individuals to approach the Tribunals**.
- The amended order also **allows District Magistrates to refer individuals who haven't filed claims against their exclusion from NRC** to the Tribunals to decide if they are foreigners or not.
- **Current Practice:**
- So far, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre. **The 1964 order on Constitution of Tribunals said:** "The Central Government may by order, refer the question as to whether a person is not a foreigner within meaning of the Foreigners Act, 1946 (31 of 1946) to a Tribunal to be constituted for the purpose, for its opinion."

Sources: the Hindu.

## **6. NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL**

### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** Centre releases 3rd issue of Newsletter of North Eastern Council.

### **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**.
- 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 also approved that Minister of State (Independent Charge), **Ministry of DoNER would serve as Vice Chairman of the Council**.
- NEC and all the Governors and Chief **Ministers of North Eastern States will be Members**.

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

## **1. POPULATION RESEARCH CENTRES (PRCS)**

### **What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: PRCs- roles, objectives and significance.

**Context:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) recently organized a two-day orientation workshop for **Population Research Centres (PRCs)** to highlight various features of Health Ministry's flagship schemes and for their concurrent monitoring.

### **About Population Research Centres (PRCs):**

- The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** established a network of Population Research Centres (PRCs) with the mandate to provide, inter alia, critical research based inputs related to the **Health and Family Welfare Programs and Policies** at the national and state levels.
- Their main role is to **undertake research projects** relating to family planning, demographic research and biological studies & qualitative aspect of population control, with a view to gainfully utilize the feedback from these research studies for plan formulation, strategies and modifications of on-going schemes.

- **Functioning:** Autonomous in their functioning, these PRCs are provided 100 per cent central assistance in the form of grant-in-aid on a year-to year basis.
- **Activities of PRCs are monitored by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** through regular periodical progress reports and meeting, seminars etc. Besides, guidance is also provided by various institutions as well as committees both at State and national level constituted by the Ministry from time to time.
- **Administratively,** these PRCs are under the **control of their host University/Institutions** where they are located.
- However, as the PRCs are established as well as fully funded by the Ministry of health & family Welfare, they are governed by the guidelines issued by the Ministry from time to time.

## 2. NATIONAL DEFENCE FUND (NDF)

**Context:** A major change has been brought about in the ‘Prime Minister’s Scholarship Scheme’ under the National Defence Fund.

**Key changes:**

- Scholarships increase from ₹2,000 to ₹2,500 a month for boys and from ₹2,250 to ₹3,000 a month for girls.
- The ambit of the scheme was widened to cover the wards of State police officials martyred in terror or Naxal attacks.
- new scholarships are given to 5,500 wards of armed forces personnel, 2,000 wards of paramilitary forces personnel and 150 wards of forces under the Railways Ministry every year.

**About National Defence Fund (NDF):**

The National Defence Fund (NDF) was set up in 1962 to take charge of the:

- Voluntary donations in cash and kind received for promotion of the national
- Defence effort, and to decide on their utilisation.
- Currently the fund is being used for the welfare of the members of the Armed Forces, Para Military forces and Railway Protection Force, and their dependents.
- The fund is administered by an Executive Committee with the Prime Minister as the Chairperson and the Defence, Finance and Home Ministers as Members.
- Under National Defence Fund major scheme of ‘Prime Minister’s Scholarship Scheme (PMSS)’ is being implemented to encourage technical and post-graduate education for the widows and wards of the deceased/ex-service personnel.
- Scholarships are available for education at technical institutions (medical, dental, veterinary, engineering, MBA, MCA and other equivalent technical professions with suitable AICTE/UGC approval).
- The National Defence Fund accepts online voluntary contributions through the website.

## 3. HOME MINISTRY WARNS NGOS

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: FCRA guidelines on foreign funding to NGOs, eligibility.
- For Mains: Misuse of foreign funds, issues and the need for stringent measures to prevent the misuse of foreign funds.

**Context:** The Home Ministry has warned NGOs, who have changed their office-bearers and key functionaries without informing the Ministry, with penal action, if they fail to do so within a month.

**Background:**

- All NGOs and associations registered under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 have to submit online application for addition, deletion and change of details about office-bearers and key functionaries within one month.

**Regulation of Foreign Funding:**

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and rules framed under it (the “FCRA” or “Act”) regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) in India.

### **Scope and objective of FCRA:**

- The intent of the Act is to prevent use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activity detrimental to the national interest. It has a very wide scope and is applicable to a natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities (whether incorporated or not) as well as NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India. It is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

### **In order to achieve the above objective, the Act:**

- Prohibits acceptance and use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by a certain specified category of persons such as a candidate for election, judge, journalist, columnist, newspaper publication, cartoonist and others.
- Regulates the inflow to and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs by prescribing a mechanism to accept, use and report usage of the same.

### **Definition:**

- It defines the term 'foreign contribution' to include currency, article other than gift for personal use and securities received from foreign source. While foreign hospitality refers to any offer from a foreign source to provide foreign travel, boarding, lodging, transportation or medical treatment cost.

### **Acceptance of foreign funds:**

- The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.

### **Registration and prior approval under FCRA:**

- In order to be registered under the FCRA, an NGO must be in existence for at least three years and must have undertaken reasonable activity in its field for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be utilised. Further, it must have spent at least INR 1,000,000 over three years preceding the date of its application on its activities.
- The registration certificate is valid for a period of five years and must be thereafter renewed in the prescribed manner.
- NGOs not eligible for registration can seek prior approval from FCRA for receiving foreign funding. This permission is granted only for a specific amount of foreign funding from a specified foreign source for a specific purpose. It remains valid till receipt and full utilisation of such amount.

### **The Act imposes various conditions on the use of foreign funds and some of them are as follows:**

- All funds received by a NGO must be used only for the purpose for which they were received.
- Such funds must not be used in speculative activities identified under the Act.
- Except with the prior approval of the Authority, such funds must not be given or transferred to any entity not registered under the Act or having prior approval under the Act.
- Every asset purchased with such fund must be in the name of the NGO and not its office bearers or members.

### **Reporting requirement:**

- Every NGO registered or having prior approval under the Act must file an annual report with the Authority in the prescribed form. This report must be accompanied by an income and expenditure statement, receipt and payment account, and balance sheet for the relevant financial year. For financial years where no foreign contribution is received, a 'NIL' report must be furnished with the Authority.

Sources: The Hindu.

**(Q)** Do you think that the FCRA [Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act] violates international human rights standards on freedom of association? Critically examine

## 4. DRAFT NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP)

### What to study?

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

**Context:** the draft National Education Policy (NEP) has been released.

### Highlights of the draft:

- It proposes **expansion of the RTE Act**. It aims to cover the three years of preschool before Class 1.
- It wants early childhood education to be overseen and regulated by the **Ministry of HRD as part of the school system**.
- This will be in addition to the **private pre-schools and anganwadis** that currently cater to the 3-to-6 years age group.
- It suggests a new **integrated curricular framework for 3 to 8-year olds** with a flexible system based on play, activity and discovery, and beginning exposure to three languages from age 3 onwards.
- The NEP could result in an **upheaval in the anganwadi system** which has been overseen by the Ministry of WCD for more than four decades.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 5. CLEAN DRINKING WATER TO ALL BY 2024

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: the target, need, concerns and challenges and what needs to be done?

**Context:** The Central government has decided to **increase coverage of piped water to households from current 18 per cent to 100 per cent by 2024**.

### Performance of NRDG:

- National Rural Drinking Water Programme**, despite spending 90% of Rs 89,956 crore budget over five years to 2017, has “failed” its targets, according to an August 2018 report from the government’s auditor.
- The programme’s target: providing 35% of rural households with water connections and 40 litre – about two buckets – of water per person per day. Less than half that target was achieved, thanks to “poor execution” and “weak contract management.”
- About 78% of 1.7 million rural Indian habitations have access to the minimum required quantity of water, 40 litre per person per day, but that does not mean they actually get this water, experts said. **Nearly 18% of rural habitations get less than 40 litre per person per day under the National Rural Drinking Water Programme.**
- National Rural Drinking Water Programme is a **centrally sponsored scheme** aimed at providing every person in rural India with “adequate, safe water” for drinking, cooking and other domestic basic needs in a “sustainable manner”.
- The scheme provides **financial and technical assistance to state governments** to install rural drinking water connections.

### Facts:

- More than 163 million Indians – higher than the population of Russia – do not have access to safe drinking water.
- Irrespective of the source of water, in most parts of rural India, availability of water decreases dramatically in the summer months as the water levels drop and surface sources may dry up.
- India’s estimated **per capita availability of water in 2025 will be 1,341 cubic metre**. This may further fall to 1,140 cubic metre in 2050, bringing it closer to becoming water-scarce.

### Way ahead:

- There are nearly 14 crore households where clean drinking water is yet to reach.
- Water falls under the **state list** of the Constitution and participation of states is crucial to make the mission of providing clean drinking water a success.
- Therefore, there has to be a **holistic approach** towards water supply and demand.

## 6. NEW DELHI INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION CENTRE BILL, 2019

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the Bill, need for and significance of arbitration.

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the **New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) Bill, 2019** for introduction in the ensuing session of Parliament.

### Benefits:

- The benefits of institutionalized arbitration will accrue to Government and its agency and to the parties to a dispute.
- This shall be to the advantage of the public and the public institutions in terms of quality of expertise and costs incurred and will facilitate India becoming a hub for Institutional Arbitration.

### Salient Features:

- In order to facilitate the setting up of NDIAC, the Ordinance envisages the **transfer and vesting of the undertakings of the International Centre For Alternative Dispute Resolution (ICADR)**
- in the Central Government. The Central Government will subsequently vest the undertakings in NDIAC.**

### Composition:

- New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) will be **headed by a chairperson who has been a Judge of the Supreme Court or a Judge of a High Court or an eminent person, having special knowledge and experience in the conduct or administration of arbitration law or management, to be appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India.**
- There will be **two Full time or Part time Members** from amongst eminent persons having substantial knowledge and experience in institutional arbitration, both domestic and international.
- Also, **one representative of a recognised body of commerce and industry shall be chosen on rotational basis as Part time Member.**
- Secretary, Department of Legal Affairs, Financial Adviser nominated by the Department of Expenditure and Chief Executive Officer, NDIAC **shall be ex-officio Members.**

### What is Arbitration?

- Arbitration is a settlement of dispute between two parties to a contract by a **neutral third party** i.e. the arbitrator without resorting to court action. The process can be tailored to suit parties' particular needs.
- Arbitrators can be chosen for their expertise. It is confidential and can be speedier and cheaper than court. There are limited grounds of appeal. Arbitral awards are binding and enforceable through courts.

### Significance of ADR:

- It is felt that a reliable and responsive alternative dispute resolution system is essential for rapidly developing countries like India. While business disputes need speedy resolution, litigation is the least favoured method for that. The Indian judicial system is marred by delays because of which businesses suffer as disputes are not resolved in a reasonable time period. Therefore, need for alternative dispute resolution processes like negotiation, mediation conciliation and arbitration is felt from time to time.

## 7. AADHAAR AND OTHER LAWS (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE, 2019

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of the Bill.
- For Mains: Need and concerns associated with the use of Aadhaar, issues of privacy.

**Context:** In a major move aimed at making Aadhaar people friendly, the Union Cabinet has approved "**The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2019**" to replace the earlier ordinance.

### Impact:

- The amendments would enable **UIDAI to have a more robust mechanism to serve the public interest and restrain the misuse of Aadhaar.**
- Subsequent to this amendment, **no individual shall be compelled to provide proof of possession of Aadhaar number for the purpose of establishing his identity unless it is so provided by a law made by Parliament.**

**The salient features of the amendments are as follows:**

- Provides for **voluntary use** of Aadhaar number in physical or electronic form by authentication or offline verification with the **consent of Aadhaar number holder**.
- Provides for use of **twelve-digit Aadhaar number and its alternative virtual identity** to conceal the actual Aadhaar number of an individual.
- Gives an **option to children who are Aadhaar number holders to cancel their Aadhaar number on attaining the age of eighteen years**.
- Permits the entities to perform **authentication only when they are compliant with the standards of privacy and security specified by the Authority; The authentication is permitted under any law made by Parliament or is prescribed to be in the interest of State by the Central Government**.
- Allows the use of Aadhaar number for authentication on voluntary basis as **acceptable KYC document under the Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002**.
- Prevents denial of services for refusing to, or being unable to, undergo authentication.
- Provides for **establishment of Unique Identification Authority of India Fund**.
- Provides for **civil penalties**, its adjudication, appeal thereof in regard to violations of Aadhaar Act and provisions by entities in the Aadhaar ecosystem.

**Background:**

- The Supreme Court in its judgement had held Aadhaar to be **constitutionally valid**. However, it read down/struck down few sections of the Aadhaar Act and Regulations and gave several other directions in the interest of **protecting the fundamental rights to privacy**.
- Consequently it was proposed to amend the Aadhaar Act, Indian Telegraph Act and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act in line with the Supreme Court directives and the report of **Justice B.N.Srikrishna (Retd.) committee on data protection**, in order to ensure that personal data of Aadhaar holder remains protected against any misuse and Aadhaar scheme remains in conformity with the Constitution.

## **8. MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON MARRIAGE), BILL 2019**

**What to Study?**

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

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2019**.

**Benefits:**

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

**Key provisions of the Bill:**

- The Bill makes **all declaration of talaq**, including in written or electronic form, to be void (i.e. not enforceable in law) and **illegal**.
- **Definition:** It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
- **Offence and penalty:** The Bill makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine. (A cognizable offence is one for which a police officer may arrest an accused person without warrant.)
- **The offence will be cognizable only if information relating to the offence is given by:** (i) the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared), or (ii) any person related to her by blood or marriage.
- **The Bill provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused.** The bail may be granted only after hearing the woman (against whom talaq has been pronounced), and if the Magistrate is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.

- **The offence may be compounded by the Magistrate** upon the request of the woman(against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.
- **Allowance:** A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children. The amount of the allowance will be determined by the Magistrate.
- **Custody:** A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children. The manner of custody will be determined by the Magistrate.

#### **Significance:**

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

## **9. A LAW TO PROTECT DOCTORS:**

- **Context:** Recent attack on a junior doctor in West Bengal had sparked the agitation, which spread to other parts of the country when it appeared that the State government was reluctant to negotiate with the striking doctors.

#### **Challenges faced by the doctors:**

- Reprisal attacks on doctors by agitated relatives of patients.
- Such violence is invariably the result of systemic problems that adversely affect optimal attention to patients, such as infrastructural and manpower constraints.

#### **Protection to doctors:**

- Doctors work in stressful environments, sometimes under political pressure with regard to admissions. Several States have enacted laws to protect doctors and other health-care personnel from violence.

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

- Need for stringent action against anyone who assaults doctors.
- Focus should be on addressing the deficiencies afflicting the health-care system as a whole.

#### **Way ahead:**

- It is clear that having a law alone does not prevent such incidents from recurring. The real solution may lie in improving health infrastructure, counselling patients about possible adverse treatment outcomes, and providing basic security in medical institutions.

## **10. NATIONAL ACCREDITATION BOARD FOR CERTIFICATION BODIES (NABCB)**

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

- For prelims and mains: about NABCB, roles, objectives and significance of accreditation.

**Context:** The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB), India's national accreditation body, has secured **international equivalence for its accreditation programme** for personnel certification bodies.

#### **Background:**

- NABCB signed the **Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA)** of the **Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC)**for its accreditation programme based on international standard, ISO/IEC 17024.
- **ISO/IEC 17024:** Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons specifies criteria for the operation of a Personnel Certification Bodies (also known as a certification body for persons). The standard includes requirements for the development and maintenance of the certification schemes for persons upon which the certification is based.

#### **Significance:**

- With the above recognition, NABCB hopes to facilitate export of Indian services and skills into the world market by attesting that persons are certified following international standards by the certifying bodies.

- Personnel Certification would support many professionals in India, especially those who do not have formal education or certificate programme.
- Any person carrying ISO/IEC 17024 certificate with NABC logo will be recognized internationally.
- It can also be used by regulators for establishing confidence in certified personnel for different activities.
- This signifies that the accreditation of personnel certification bodies by NABC is now accepted as equivalent at international level.

#### About NABC:

- NABC, a **constituent Board of the Quality Council of India**, an autonomous body attached to the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, is responsible for accreditation of certification/inspection bodies as per applicable international standards under an international system of equivalence.

#### Significance of accreditation:

- Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring that accredited Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation.

#### The Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC):

- It was established on 1 January 2019 by the **amalgamation of two former regional accreditation cooperations – the Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) and the Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC)**.
- APAC's primary role is **to manage and expand a mutual recognition arrangement (MRA)** among accreditation bodies in the Asia Pacific region.
- The **MRA facilitates the acceptance of conformity assessment results** (e.g. test reports, test certificates, inspection reports, and certification) across the region and with other regions around the world.
- **APAC's members include** accreditation bodies, accreditation focal points and other organisations that have an interest in accredited conformity assessment results.

## 11. SHYAMA PRASAD MUKHERJI RURBAN MISSION

#### What to study?

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

**Context:** National Workshop on Experience Sharing under **Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission**.

#### About SPMRM:

- The Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) is a unique programme, designed to deliver catalytic **interventions to rural areas on the threshold of growth**.

#### Funding Support:

- There is a funding support of up to 30% of the estimated investment for each Rurban cluster, given as Critical Gap Funding (CGF), while 70% of the funds is mobilized by the States through convergence with synergic State and Central programmes and private investment and institutional funding.
- The CGF is now shared between the Centre and the State in a ratio of 60:40 for Plain area States and 90:10 for Himalayan and NE States.

#### Various Provisions:

##### 1. Provision of basic amenities –

- Provision of 24/7 Water Supply to all households,
- Solid and Liquid Waste Management facilities at the household and cluster level

##### 2. Provision of Inter and Intra village roads–

- Adequate Street Lights and Public Transport facilities using green technologies.

### **3. Provision of Economic Amenities –**

- Various thematic areas in the sectors of Agri Services and Processing, Tourism, and Skill development to promote Small and Medium Scale Enterprises.

#### **Mission's Objective:**

- The objective of the National Rurban Mission (NRuM) is to stimulate local economic development, enhance basic services, and create well planned Rurban clusters.

#### **Need for development of such clusters:**

- As per Census of India Statistics, the rural population in India stands at 833 million, constituting almost 68% of the total population.
- The rural population has shown a growth of 12% during the 2001-2011 period and there has been an increase in the absolute number of villages during the same period.
- Large parts of rural areas are not stand-alone settlements but part of a cluster of settlements, which are relatively proximate to each other.
- These clusters typically illustrate potential for growth, have economic drivers and derive location and competitive advantages.
- Hence, **making a case for concerted policy directives for such clusters; these clusters once developed can then be classified as 'Rurban'.**

(Q) Write a critical note on the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission.

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

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

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

**Context:** Draft National Policy on Domestic Workers Under Consideration.

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

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

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

- **Its aim** is to protect the domestic workers from abuse, harassment, violence and guarantee them rights in the matter of social security and minimum wages. The policy also includes social security cover and provisions against sexual harassment and bonded labour.
- **It is a national policy for all kinds of household helps**, under which payment of wages will be made to the board under fixed slab rates and the central board/trust will be managed by all stakeholders.
- The policy intends to set up an **institutional mechanism** to social security cover, fair terms of employment, grievance redressal and dispute resolution.

- It provides for **recognising domestic workers as a worker with the right to register themselves** with state labour department or any other suitable mechanism.
- The policy will also **promote the rights** for them to organise and form their own unions/associations and affiliate with other unions/associations. It will also **provide for model contract of employment** with well-defined period of work and rest.
- It also aims to **regulate the recruitment and placement agencies by respective governments** through formulation of a policy.
- It will also have a **tripartite implementation committee** at centre, state and district levels.
- It will also **clearly define various terms** such as part time workers, full time workers, live in workers, employers and private placement agencies.

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

## 13. NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS (NRC)

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Particulars of NRC.
- For Mains: Update of NRC- issues associated including ethical concerns.

**Context:** Over one lakh people who were part of the final draft of the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** published in July last year but were found ineligible thereafter — they have been named in the Additional Draft Exclusion List published recently.

### Why they are out of Assam NRC additional draft exclusion list?

- These over one lakh people were found ineligible during re-verification for any one of the following reasons: Persons who were found to be DF (Declared Foreigner) or DV (Doubtful Voter) or PFT (persons with cases Pending at Foreigners Tribunals) or their descendants, as applicable, discovered after publication of draft NRC, persons who were found to be ineligible while appearing as witness in hearings held for disposal of Claims & Objections, persons who were found to be ineligible during the process of verification carried out by the Local Registrars of Citizens Registration (LRCRs) after publication of draft NRC.

### NRC Assam Additional Draft List 2019: What happens now?

- People in the latest list will be informed individually through Letters of Information (LOI) to be delivered at their residential addresses along with the **reason for exclusion**.
- Such persons will have the opportunity to file their Claims which will be disposed through a hearing by a **Disposing Officer**. The submission of Claim and its disposal by the Disposing Officer through a hearing will happen together.

### On what basis was the Assam NRC additional draft exclusion list prepared?

- The preparation of the draft exclusion list of the NRC was approved by the SC under the **Clause 5 of the Schedule of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003**.
- The provision of suo moto verification is mentioned in **Section 4 (3) of the Schedule of the above mentioned Citizenship Rules, 2003**, which says that the local registrar of citizen registration (LRCR) may at any time before the final publication of NRC in the state of Assam may verify names already in the final draft NRC if considered necessary.

### What is the Assam NRC?

- The NRC is basically a **list of Indian citizens of Assam**.
- NRC **prepared in 1951** is being updated to include the names of people or their descendants who appear in the 1951 NRC, in any of the Electoral Rolls, or in any one of the other admissible documents issued up to the midnight of March 24, 1971.

## Why is March 24, 1971 the cut-off date?

- There have been several waves of migration to Assam from Bangladesh, but the biggest was in March 1971 when the Pakistan army crackdown forced many to flee to India. The Assam Accord of 1985 that ended the six-year anti-foreigners' agitation decided upon the midnight of March 24, 1971 as the cut-off date.

Sources: Indian Express.

## 14. NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT (NFSA), 2013

### What to study?

- For prelims: key features, objectives and coverage of the act.
- For mains: significance, issues present with the legislation and ways to address them.

**Context:** The Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Shri Ram Vilas Paswan met State Food Secretaries and State government officials along with officials of Food Corporation of India (FCI), Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC) and State Warehousing Corporations (SWCs) in New Delhi. Shri Paswan discussed various issues pertaining to efficient implementation of **national food security act**.

### National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:

- As passed by the Parliament, Government has notified the **National Food Security Act, 2013** on 10th September, 2013.
- The **objective is to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach**, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.

### Key features:

- The Act provides for **coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population** for receiving **subsidized foodgrains** under **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**, thus covering about two-thirds of the population.
- The eligible persons will be **entitled to receive 5 Kgs of foodgrains per person** per month at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains.
- The existing **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AYY)** households, which constitute the **poorest of the poor**, will **continue to receive 35 Kgs of foodgrains per household per month**.
- The Act also has a special focus on the **nutritional support to women and children**. Besides **meal to pregnant women and lactating mothers during pregnancy and six months after the child birth**, such women will also be entitled to receive **maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000**.
- **Children upto 14 years of age** will be entitled to **nutritious meals** as per the prescribed nutritional standards.
- In case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals, the beneficiaries will receive **food security allowance**.
- The Act also contains provisions for setting up of **grievance redressal mechanism at the District and State levels**.
- Separate provisions have also been made in the Act for ensuring transparency and accountability.

### Ways to increase the efficiency:

- Use of **Information Technology right from the time of purchase of food grains till its distribution** will help in increasing the overall efficiency of the entire process, while maintaining transparency and curbing corruption.
- It is imperative that **there is a seamless flow of information online between the FCI and States** and therefore they need to be integrated so that exact information about how much food grain has been procured from which mandi, which warehouse it is stored in and for how long and when it has been released for distribution can be available.
- There should also be **information about the quality of food grains** at the time of purchase, storage conditions in the warehouse, when it is given to PDS shops and when the shops have distributed it to the beneficiaries.
- Move towards **One Nation One Ration Card (RC)** which will ensure all beneficiaries especially migrants can access PDS across the nation from any PDS shop of their own choice. This will provide freedom to the beneficiaries as they will not be tied to any one PDS shop and reduce their dependence on shop owners and curtail instances of corruption.

- Expand the coverage of **Integrated Management of PDS (IMPDS)** to all the states.

#### **Why ensure food security?**

- The basic concept of food security globally is to ensure that all people, at all times, should get access to the basic food for their active and healthy life and is characterized by availability, access, utilization and stability of food. Though the Indian Constitution does not have any explicit provision regarding right to food, the fundamental right to life enshrined in **Article 21** of the Constitution may be interpreted to include right to live with human dignity, which may include the right to food and other basic necessities.

**(Q)** Is there any improvement in public distribution system since the implementation of reforms enacted by the National Food Security Act 2013? Critically discuss.

## **15. ATAL TINKERING LABS**

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

- For Prelims: AIM, ATL and their important features.
- For Mains: Various initiatives to promote innovation and their significance.

**Context:** 8878 schools have been selected for establishing Atal Tinkering Lab (ATLs) to promote research and innovation in schools.

#### **What are ATLs?**

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

#### **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 ecosystem – touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.

#### **Significance of ATLs:**

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

## **16. PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA – URBAN**

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

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

**Context:** Houses Sanctioned Under **PMAY(U)** now Stands at 83.62 Lakhs. **Uttar Pradesh tops list** for Sanctioned Houses at 13 Lakhs.

#### **About PMAY- Urban:**

- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Programme launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA), in **Mission mode** envisions provision of **Housing for All by 2022**, when the Nation completes 75 years of its Independence.
- **The Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme verticals:**
- Slum rehabilitation of Slum Dwellers with participation of private developers using land as a resource.

- Promotion of Affordable Housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy.
- Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors.
- Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction /enhancement.

#### **Key facts:**

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

#### **Challenges ahead:**

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

#### **Significance of the scheme:**

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

## **17. NATIONAL MISSION ON NATURAL LANGUAGE TRANSLATION**

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

- For prelims: key features of the programme.
- For mains: Language translation- need, challenges and ways to address them.

**Context:** The Ministry of Electronics and IT is planning to launch a National Mission on Natural Language Translation.

- It is one of the key missions identified by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).

#### **Key features of the programme:**

- It aims to make science and technology accessible to all by facilitating access to teaching and researching material bilingually — in English and in one's native Indian language.

#### **Significance and the need for translation:**

- Translation activities can help generate employment for educated unemployed. The mission would help not just students but also teachers, authors, publishers, translation software developers and general readers.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

## 1. PENSION SCHEME FOR SMALL RETAIL TRADERS AND SHOPKEEPERS

### What to study?

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

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved a monthly **pension scheme for small retail traders and shopkeepers**. The scheme that offers pension coverage to the trading community will cover 3 crore small retail traders and shop keepers.

### Key features:

- Under the scheme **all small shopkeepers, retail traders and self-employed persons are assured a minimum of Rs.3,000 monthly pension after attaining 60 years of age.**
- Eligibility:** All small shopkeepers, self-employed persons and retail traders aged between 18-40 years and with Goods and Service Tax (GST) turnover below Rs.1.5 crore can enrol for pension scheme.
- The scheme is based on **self-declaration** as no documents are required except bank account and Aadhaar Card.
- The **Central Government will make matching contribution** (same amount as subscriber contribution) i.e. equal amount as subsidy into subscriber's pension account every month.

## 2. PM – KISAN SCHEME

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Key Features of the scheme.
- For Mains: Significance, relevance and need for the scheme, concerns and challenges over its implementation, is it sufficient?

**Context:** The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved that the **ambit of the Pradhan Mantri KisanSamman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) would be comprehensively extended**.

- The revised Scheme is expected to cover around 2 crore more farmers, increasing the coverage of PM-KISAN to around 14.5 crore beneficiaries.
- With this decision, all land holding eligible farmer families (subject to the prevalent exclusion criteria) would avail of the benefits under this scheme.

### About Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:

- Under this programme, **vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land upto 2 hectares**, will be provided direct income support at the rate of Rs. 6,000 per year.
- This income support will be transferred directly into the bank accounts of beneficiary farmers, in three equal installments of Rs. 2,000 each.
- The complete expenditure of Rs 75000 crore for the scheme will borne by the Union Government in 2019-20.

### Definition:

- For the purpose of the calculation of the benefit, the Centre has defined a small and marginal landholder family as the one comprising of husband, wife and minor children up to 18 years of age, who collectively own cultivable land up to two hectare as per the land records of the concerned states.

### Significance:

- Around 12 crore small and marginal farmer families are expected to benefit from this. It would not only provide assured supplemental income to the most vulnerable farmer families, but would also meet their emergent needs especially before the harvest season. It would pave the way for the farmers to earn and live a respectable living.

#### **Similar programmes by states:**

- **Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana in Madhya Pradesh** was sought to provide relief to farmers by providing the differential between MSPs and market prices.
- The **Rythu Bandhu scheme** of the Telangana government provides ₹4,000 per acre for every season to all the farmers of the state. Similar initiatives have also been framed in Jharkhand and Odisha.
- In December 2018, Odisha launched the **Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income augmentation (KALIA)**. KALIA is more complicated in design and implementation. It commits to give Rs 5,000 per SMF, twice a year, that is Rs 10,000 a year.

#### **Benefits of direct cash transfers:**

- It has immediate impact on reducing hunger and rural poverty.
- They can help households to overcome credit constraints and manage risk. This can increase productive investment, increase access to markets and stimulate local economies.
- Income support can be used to make a repayment or at least activate a bank account which can then receive a loan.
- It can increase investment in agricultural inputs, including farm implements and livestock.
- It can serve as an important complement to a broader rural development agenda, including a pro-poor growth strategy focusing on agriculture.

#### **Challenges with cash transfers- criticisms:**

- Landless labourers are not being covered under PM-KISAN.
- Cash transfers are not greatly superior in terms of leakages compared to other schemes of in-kind transfer such as the public distribution system (PDS).
- A targeted cash transfer scheme envisions the role of the state to only providing cash income to the poor. This kind of approach seeks to absolve the state of its responsibility in providing basic services such as health, education, nutrition and livelihood.
- Cash transfer scheme such as PM-KISAN cannot be substituted for subsidies and other institutional support systems such as the National Food Security Act-powered public distribution system. In fact, such cash transfer schemes could be counterproductive and may lead to more distress.
- Cash transfers do not solve the following problems which are the reasons for the current agrarian crisis. The Agrarian crisis is not just of low incomes in agriculture. The genesis of the current crisis lies in the faulty and ad hoc export-import policy, lack of infrastructure and cartelisation and collusion in agricultural markets, which have prevented farmers from realizing the market prices for agricultural produce.
- Cash transfer is neither a substitute for the structural reforms needed in agriculture, nor does it adequately compensate the farmer for the risks and uncertainty of crop cultivation.
- In the absence of proper tenancy records, it will also benefit the absentee landlords.
- It is no substitute for the lack of investment in agriculture, which has declined at 2.3% per annum in real terms.

### **3. ABUJA MARIA'S AND OTHER PVTGS**

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

- For Prelims and Mains: About PVTGs, spread in different states, issues related to their protection and statutory rights given to them.

**Why in News?** The Chhattisgarh government is processing habitat rights for **Abujh Marias**, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).

#### **Key facts:**

- Since **Abujh Marias is a PVTG community**, they are entitled to the **habitat rights** under FRA.
- Abujhmarh, where this tribe lives, is considered by the government to be one of the last remaining strongholds of Left-wing extremism.
- Abujh Marias have their **own governance structure**.
- The **Abujhmarh forest** is spread over 1,500 square miles in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh.

- The FRA has a provision that says**, “In view of the differential vulnerability of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) among the forest dwellers, the District Level Committee should play a pro-active role in ensuring that all PTGs receive habitat rights in consultation with the concerned PTGs’ traditional institutions of these groups, after filing claims before the **gram sabha**”.
- Habitat is defined under the act as**, “the area comprising the customary habitat and such other habitats in reserved forests and protected forests of primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities and other forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes.”

**The criteria followed for determination of PVTGs are as under:**

- A pre-agriculture level of technology.
- A stagnant or declining population.
- Extremely low literacy.
- A subsistence level of economy.

#### About ‘Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)’:

- PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups. In 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs and declared 52 such groups, while in 1993 an additional 23 groups were added to the category, making it a total of **75 PVTGs out of 705 Scheduled Tribes, spread over 18 states and one Union Territory (A&N Islands) in the country (2011 census)**.
- Among the 75 listed PVTG’s the **highest number are found in Odisha (13)**, followed by Andhra Pradesh (12).
- The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs implements the Scheme of “Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)”** exclusively for them .
- Under the scheme, **Conservation-cum-Development (CCD)/Annual Plans are to be prepared by each State/UT for their PVTGs based on their need assessment**, which are then appraised and approved by the Project Appraisal Committee of the Ministry.
- Priority is also assigned to PVTGs under the schemes of **Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Tribal Sub-Scheme (TSS), Grants under Article 275(1) of the Constitution, Grants-in-aid to Voluntary Organisations working for the welfare of Schedule Tribes and Strengthening of Education among ST Girls in Low Literacy Districts**.

Sources: Down to Earth.

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

## 4. PMUY

### What to study?

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

**Context:** 7.23 Crore Connections released under **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana**.



### About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

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

### **Key objectives of the scheme are:**

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

### **What makes LPG adoption necessary?**

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

**(Q)** Examine the objectives, merits and demerits of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

## **5. VAN DHAN YOJANA**

### **What to study?**

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

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

### **Implementation:**

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

### **About Van Dhan Vikas Kendras initiative:**

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

### **Significance of MFP:**

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



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## 1. E-CIGARETTES

### What to study?

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

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

### Why ICMR has recommended a complete ban?

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

### Why its hard to regulate them?

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

### WHO report on e-cigarettes and effects:

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

### What are e-cigarettes?

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

## 2. NIPAH VIRUS

### What's important?

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

**Context:** The deadly Nipah Virus has resurfaced in Kerala.

### When was it first reported?

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

### What are the symptoms in humans?

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

### Are there any vaccines?

- Currently, there are **no vaccines for both humans and animals**. Intensive supportive care is given to humans infected by Nipah virus.
- According to WHO, **ribavarin** can reduce the symptoms of nausea, vomiting, and convulsions associated with the disease. Individuals infected need to be hospitalised and isolated. Special care should be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission. Surveillance systems should be established to detect the virus quickly and to initiate appropriate control measures.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 3. NEP ON IMPOSITION OF HINDI

**Context:** Following the protests in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal and Maharashtra, the Human Resource Development has revised draft of the National Education Policy.

### What's the issue?

- The draft of National Education Policy had suggested the inclusion of Hindi in all the non-Hindi speaking states in the country. This had given rise to a controversy over the draft version which was seen by many in the southern states as an attempt to impose Hindi on school students.

### Recent changes:

- The updated draft retains the recommendation to introduce a three-language formula from Class 1, merely having removed the clause stipulating the specific languages that students must choose.
- As per the update, the draft says "students who wish to change one or more of the three languages they are studying may do so in Grade 6 or Grade 7, so long as they are able to still demonstrate proficiency in three languages (one language at the literature level) in their modular Board Examinations some time during secondary school."

### Issue of three language formula:

- Ever since the Constitution adopted Hindi as the official language, with English also as an official language for 15 years initially, there has been considerable tension between those who favour the indefinite usage of English and those who want to phase it out and give Hindi primacy.
- The imposition of Hindi – In Tamil Nadu, it is seen as a creeping imposition of Hindi in subtle and not-so-subtle forms.
- The tension has been managed based on the statesmanship behind Jawaharlal Nehru's assurance in 1959 that English would be an associate language as long as there are States that desire it.

### What is Nipah Virus?

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

### What next?

- Language is primarily a utilitarian tool. While acquisition of additional tools can indeed be beneficial, compulsory learning should be limited to one's mother tongue and English as the language that provides access to global knowledge and as a link language within India. It is time attempts to force Indians proficient in their mother tongue and English to acquire proficiency in a third are given up.

### What is the three-language formula?

- A 50-year-old controversy got a new lease of life recently when a paragraph in the Draft **New Education Policy 2019** referred to the mandatory teaching of Hindi in States where Hindi is not spoken. This was a reiteration of the Central government's three-language formula, but it set off a storm in Tamil Nadu, which stoutly opposes any attempt to impose Hindi and adheres to a two-language formula. The Union government sought to neutralise the hostile reaction by dropping the controversial reference to Hindi.
- It is commonly understood that the three languages referred to are Hindi, English and the regional language of the respective States.

### Origin:

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

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

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

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

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

### What needs to be done?

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

Sources: the Hindu.

## 4. HOW EDUCATION CAN BE FLEXIBLE ?

- **Context:** Recommendations made on higher education reforms by a committee set up for drafting a new educational policy (NEP).

### Key recommendations:

1. The main thrust of the draft policy is on **breaking the "rigid boundaries of disciplines"** in higher education and moving towards broad-based, flexible learning. Institutions offering single streams (such as technical

- education) must be phased out, and all universities and colleges must aim to become **multidisciplinary** by 2030.
2. Reintroduction of the four-year undergraduate programme in **Liberal Arts Science Education (LASE)** with multiple exit options, and scrapping of the MPhil programme. The LASE curriculum will be designed to develop broadly “useful capacities” (critical thinking, communication skills, scientific temper, social responsibilities etc), while offering rigorous education in specialisations (called majors or dual majors) across disciplines.
  3. Build a small number of **new liberal arts universities**, modelled after **Ivy League schools**, in the next five years.
  4. Increase in the number of **off-shore campuses of Indian institutions and permitting the world's top 200 institutions to set up branches in India**, with a new law to regulate the latter's entry and operation.
  5. A **National Research Foundation (NRF)**, tasked with creating a conducive ecosystem for research through funding and mentoring, should be set up.
  6. There is need for a **common regulatory regime** for the entire higher education sector, “eliminating isolation and disjunction”. As with primary education, in higher education, too, the functions of “regulation, provision of education, funding, accreditation and standard setting will be separated, and will not be performed by the same institution or institutional hierarchy”.
  7. **Rules of various regulatory bodies:** The National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA) will be the sole regulatory authority, while NAAC, along with other accreditation agencies, will oversee accreditation. The existing University Grants Commission, currently regulator as well as grants disbursing agency, will transform into the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) and will limit itself to grants giving.
  8. **Other regulatory bodies** — such as Medical Council of India, Bar Council of India, AICTE, National Council for Teacher Education — will become Professional Standard Setting Boards in their respective fields, without regulatory powers in professional education.
  9. **Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog (RSA):** It will be a new apex institution for education. It will be created through an Act of Parliament, that will be responsible for “developing, articulating, implementing, evaluating, and revising the vision of education in the country on a continuous and sustained basis”.
  10. Composition of RSA: It will be chaired by the Prime Minister and run by executive and advisory bodies, half of which will be made up of ministers and the other half of educationists and civil society members. A range of institutions — NRF, NCERT, NHERA, National Testing Agency, Higher Education Grants Council, and state education regulatory authorities, among others — will be reporting to this super organisation.
  11. **A committee chaired by the UME (Union Minister for Education)** and consisting of the ED (Executive Director of RSA) and a few members appointed by the UME will be constituted for this purpose at the earliest. Over a period of time, as the roles and functions stabilise, the RSA will be given Constitutional status through an Act of the Parliament.
  12. The draft policy proposes a **National Education Technology Forum**, a group of education leaders and government officials to discuss and advise on how to strengthen educational technology, and Centres of Excellence in Educational Technology in prominent institutions.

#### **Other suggestions:**

- Public investment in higher education to be raised from the current 10% of overall public expenditure in education to 20%, over a 10-year period.
- Substandard and dysfunctional technical educational institutions to be closed.
- **Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog** to commission a perspective plan for professional education.
- A quasi-judicial body may be constituted for a mission-mode clean-up of teacher education.
- The four-year integrated BEd. will, by 2030, become the minimal degree qualification for schoolteachers. All pre-service teacher education programmes will be offered only in multidisciplinary institutions.
- First year or two of MBBS will be designed as a common period for all science graduates after which they can take up MBBS, BDS, Nursing or other specialisations.
- A common exit examination for MBBS.
- All new colleges started from 2020 onwards must only be autonomous colleges. No new affiliated colleges shall be started after 2020. After 2030 there will be no affiliated colleges – all colleges must develop to become autonomous degree granting colleges or a university.

## Need for multidisciplinary approach:

- The future workplace will demand critical thinking, communication, problem solving, creativity, and multidisciplinary capability. Single-skill and single-discipline jobs are likely to become automated over time. Therefore, there will be a great need to focus on multidisciplinary and 21st century competencies for future work roles — these are indeed the capabilities that will separate humans from robots.

## WHY NEW EDUCATION POLICY

### 1 FROM THE CENTRE, UP TO THE STATES

**THE POLICY:** The National Education Policy (NEP) serves as a comprehensive framework to guide the development of education. A new policy has come along every few decades and offered the government of the day an opportunity to leave its imprint on the education system.

**NOT MANDATORY.** Although the state governments are expected to follow NEP, they are not bound to do so. Tamil Nadu, even today, does not follow the three-language formula prescribed by the first education policy in 1968.

### 2 BEFORE THIS ONE, 1968 AND 1986

**SO FAR:** There have been two National Education Policies, in 1968 and 1986, during the respective regimes of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. The NEP of 1986 was revised in 1992 when P V Narasimha Rao was Prime Minister.

**NEP & BJP:** The Bharatiya Jana Sangh, or the BJP in its original form, was part of the 1977-79 Janata Party government, which attempted to draw up a policy in 1979, but it was not approved by the Central Advisory Board for Education. In a way, this is the BJP's second attempt at drafting the NEP.

### 3 THE LATEST ONE, AFTER DELAYS

**NDA's NEP:** Since 2014, the NDA government has set up two committees to draft the new NEP. The second panel, led by former ISRO chief K Kasturirangan, submitted its report to the HRD Minister on May 31, after five deadline extensions.

**WHAT NEXT:** The draft policy is now in the public domain for feedback and suggestions. A meeting with all state governments has been called later this month to seek their views. After assimilating feedback, the government will finalise the policy and present it in Parliament.

## 5. TAMIL NADU HEALTH SYSTEM REFORM PROGRAMME

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the programme, about World Bank and related facts.

**Context:** The Government of India, Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN) and the World Bank recently signed a \$287 million loan agreement for the **Tamil Nadu Health System Reform Programme**.

### About the Tamil Nadu Health System Reform Programme:

- The programme aims to improve the quality of health care, reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and fill equity gaps in reproductive and child health services in Tamil Nadu.
- The programme supports **interventions to strengthen institutional and state capacity** to achieve results.
- The programme will promote **population-based screening, treatment and follow-up for NCDs**, and improve monitoring and evaluation. Patients will be equipped with knowledge and skills to self-manage their conditions. Lab services and health provider capacity will also be strengthened to address mental health. To tackle road injuries, the programme will improve in-hospital care, strengthen protocols, strengthen the 24x7 trauma care services and establish a trauma registry.
- Another key aim of this programme is to **reduce the equity gaps in reproductive and child health**. Special focus will be given to nine priority districts, which constitute the bottom quintile of the RCH indicators in the state and have a relatively large proportion of tribal populations.
- This Programme focuses on **results instead of inputs through a Programme-for-Results (PforR) lending instrument**. This will provide a much greater focus on outputs and outcomes through better alignment of expenditures and incentives with results.

The Tamil Nadu Health System Reform Program will support the state government to:

- develop clinical protocols and guidelines;
- achieve national accreditation for primary, secondary, and tertiary-level health facilities in the public sector;
- strengthen physicians, nurses and paramedics through continuous medical education;
- strengthen the feedback loop between citizens and the state by making quality and other data accessible to the public.

### **Background:**

- Tamil Nadu ranks third among all Indian states in the NITI Aayog Health Index which is reflected in vastly improved health outcomes. The state's maternal mortality rate has declined from 90 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2005 to 62 deaths in 2015-16 while infant mortality has declined from 30 deaths per 1000 live births to 20 in the same period.
- A key contribution to these achievements has been the establishment of emergency obstetric and neonatal care centres and the 108 ambulance service with previous support from the World Bank. These have ensured that no mother has to travel more than 30 minutes to access emergency obstetric and neonatal care 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## **6. JAN SHIKSHAN SANSTHANS (JSS)**

### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has decided to waive off fee for SC/ST candidates who join vocational training under **Jan Shikshan Sansthanas (JSS)**.

### **About Jan Shikshan Sansthanas (JSS):**

- Formerly under the **Ministry of Human Resources Development**, Jan Shikshan Sansthan was transferred to the **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship** in 2018.
- Jan Shikshan Sansthanas (JSS) were established to provide vocational training to non-literate, neo-literate, as well as school dropouts by identifying skills as would have a market in the region of their establishment.
- They were formerly known as **Shramik Vidyapeeth**.
- The JSSs are unique, they link literacy with vocational skills and provide large doses of Life Enrichment Education (LEE) to the people.
- They aim for convergence with other stakeholders in society. It is their endeavour to shape their beneficiaries into self reliant and self-assured employees and entrepreneurs.

## **7. FIXED DOSE COMBINATIONS (FDCS)**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims: Meaning of FDCs.
- For Mains: FDCs- why are they popular, concerns associated and the need for measures to check their quality and standard.

**Context:** A drug advisory body sub-committee has asked pharmaceutical companies to prove that 324 combination medicines are safe and effective for patients to consume in order to decide whether these drugs should continue to be sold in India.

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

- Fixed dose combinations (FDCs) were declared "irrational" by a Health Ministry expert committee set up in 2014.
- To give an opportunity to drug makers to defend the 324 FDCs, the sub-committee has given the companies until June 30 to submit and present "precise data".

### **Concerns:**

- As of April, the CDSCO had approved 1,288 FDCs. This is disproportionately high compared with the availability in a tightly regulated market like USFDA, which has only a few hundred approved FDCs.

### **What are FDCs?**

- An FDC is a cocktail of two or more active drug ingredients in a fixed ratio of doses. According to US healthcare provider IMS Health, almost half the drugs sold in India in 2014 were FDC, making it a world leader in combination drugs.

### **Why are they popular in India?**

- FDCs' popularity in India is due to advantages such as increased efficacy, better compliance, reduced cost and simpler logistics of distribution. FDCs have shown to be particularly useful in the treatment of infectious diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis, where giving multiple antimicrobial agents is the norm. FDCs are also useful for chronic conditions especially, when multiple disorders co-exist.

- The problem of **unapproved FDCs mainly affects those who get treated in the private sector**. In the absence of a strong pharmacovigilance mechanism in India, there is no data on adverse events of these unapproved FDCs.

#### What's ailing the system?

- There are multiple deficiencies in the CDSCO's approval process for FDCs. Main amongst them are institutional problems such as understaffing, lack of skills, and inadequate infrastructure. However, the most significant issue is the issuance of manufacturing licenses by the State Licensing Authority without the prior clearance of the Drug Controller General of India DCG(I), the head of CDSCO.

Sources: down to earth.

## 8. NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF CANCER, DIABETES, CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES AND STROKES (NPCDCS)

#### What to study?

- For prelims: Key features, objectives of NPCDCS.
- For mains: NCDs- burden, Concerns, efforts by government and global efforts on this.

**Context:** A meeting to review the status of **National Programme for prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and strokes (NPCDCS)** was held recently.

#### The main strategies of the programme are as follows:

- Health promotion through behaviour change with involvement of community, civil society, community-based organizations, media etc.
- Outreach Camps are envisaged for opportunistic screening at all levels in the health care delivery system from sub-centre and above for early detection of diabetes, hypertension and common cancers.
- Management of chronic Non-Communicable diseases, especially Cancer, Diabetes, CVDs and Stroke through early diagnosis, treatment and follow up through setting up of NCD clinics.
- Build capacity at various levels of health care for prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, IEC/BCC, operational research and rehabilitation.
- Provide support for diagnosis and cost-effective treatment at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of health care.
- Provide support for development of database of NCDs through a robust Surveillance System and to monitor NCD morbidity, mortality and risk factors.

#### Funding:

- The funds are being provided to States under NCD Flexi-Pool through State PIPs of respective States/UTs, with the Centre to State share in ratio of 60:40 (except for North-Eastern and Hilly States, where the share is 90:10).

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

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

#### About NPCDCS:

- National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) was **launched in 2010** in 100 districts across 21 States, in order to prevent and control the major NCDs.
- The main **focus of the programme** is on health promotion, early diagnosis, management and referral of cases, besides strengthening the infrastructure and capacity building.

#### What are NCDs?

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

- In low-resource settings, health-care costs for NCDs quickly drain household resources. The exorbitant costs of NCDs, including often lengthy and expensive treatment and loss of breadwinners, force millions of people into poverty annually and stifle development.

#### **NCDs and Concerns associated:**

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

## **9. ACUTE ENCEPHALITIS SYNDROME (AES)**

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

- For prelims and mains: AES- causes, symptoms, effects and prevention.

**Context:** An epidemic of **Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES)** has broken out in five north Bihar districts.

- Locally known as **Chamki Bukhar** in the state.

#### **About AES:**

- **Acute encephalitis syndrome (AES)** is a serious public health problem in India.
- It is characterized as **acute-onset of fever and a change in mental status** (mental confusion, disorientation, delirium, or coma) and/or new-onset of seizures in a person of any age at any time of the year.
- The disease most **commonly affects** children and young adults and can lead to considerable morbidity and mortality.
- **Viruses are the main causative agents** in AES cases, although **other sources** such as bacteria, fungus, parasites, spirochetes, chemicals, toxins and noninfectious agents have also been reported over the past few decades.
- **Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) is the major cause of AES in India** (ranging from 5%-35%).
- **Nipah virus, Zika virus are also found as causative agents** for AES.
- In India, AES outbreaks in north and eastern India have been linked to children eating **unripe litchi fruit on empty stomachs**. Unripe fruit contain the toxins **hypoglycin A and methylenecyclopropylglycine (MCPG)**, which cause vomiting if ingested in large quantities. Hypoglycin A is a naturally occurring amino acid found in the unripened litchi that causes severe vomiting (Jamaican vomiting sickness), while MCPG is a poisonous compound found in litchi seeds.

Sources: down to earth.

## **10. THE ONE HEALTH CONCEPT**

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

- For prelims and mains: One health concept- background, features, need and significance.

#### **What is it?**

- **The World Organization of Animal Health**, commonly known as OIE (an abbreviation of its French title), summarises the One Health concept as “human health and animal health are interdependent and bound to the health of the ecosystems in which they exist”.

#### **Is it a new concept?**

- The philosophy of One Health recognises **inter-connectivity among human health, the health of animals, and the environment**.

- Circa 400 BC, Hippocrates in his **treatise On Airs, Waters and Places** had urged physicians that **all aspects of patients' lives need to be considered including their environment**; disease was a result of imbalance between man and environment. So One Health is not a new concept, though it is of late that it has been formalised in health governance systems.

#### **Why it has received renewed interests?**

- As human populations expand, it results in greater contact with domestic and wild animals, providing more opportunities for diseases to pass from one to the other. Climate change, deforestation and intensive farming further disrupt environment characteristics, while increased trade and travel result in closer and more frequent interaction, thus increasing the possibility of transmission of diseases.

#### **Key facts:**

- According to the OIE, 60% of existing human infectious diseases are zoonotic i.e. they are transmitted from animals to humans; 75% of emerging infectious human diseases have an animal origin.
- Of the five new human diseases appearing every year, three originate in animals.
- 80% biological agents with potential bio-terrorist use are zoonotic pathogens.
- It is estimated that zoonotic diseases account for nearly two billion cases per year resulting in more than two million deaths — more than from HIV/AIDS and diarrhoea.
- One-fifth of premature deaths in poor countries are attributed to diseases transmitted from animals to humans.

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

- There is need for **strengthening veterinary institutions and services**.
- The most effective and economical approach is to **control zoonotic pathogens** at their animal source.
- It calls not only for **close collaboration at local, regional and global levels among veterinary, health and environmental governance**, but also for greater **investment in animal health infrastructure**.
- This calls for **strict health surveillance** to incorporate domestic animals, livestock and poultry too.
- Humans require a **regular diet of animal protein**. Thus, loss of food animals on account of poor health or disease too becomes a public health issue even though there may be no disease transmission, and we lose 20% of our animals this way.
- There could not be a stronger case for **reinventing the entire animal husbandry sector** to be able to reach every livestock farmer, not only for disease treatment but for prevention and surveillance to minimise the threat to human health.
- **Early detection at animal source** can prevent disease transmission to humans and introduction of pathogens into the food chain.
- So a **robust animal health system** is the first and a crucial step in human health.
- **Disease surveillance has to go beyond humans and encompass preventive health and hygiene in livestock and poultry**, improved standards of animal husbandry for greater food safety, and effective communication protocols between animal and public health systems.

#### **Challenges for India:**

- Developing countries like India have much greater stake in strong One Health systems on account of **agricultural systems resulting in uncomfortably close proximity of animals and humans**.
- The **size of India's human and animal populations is almost the same**; 121 crore people (2011 Census) and 125.5 crore livestock and poultry.
- A **network of 1.90 lakh health institutions in the government sector** form the backbone of health governance, supported by a large number of private facilities.
- On the other hand, **only 65,000 veterinary institutions tend to the health needs of 125.5 crore animals**; and this includes 28,000 mobile dispensaries and first aid centres with bare minimum facilities.
- **Private sector presence in veterinary services is close to being nonexistent**.

Sources: Indian express.

## 11. 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:** The Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI) has found 25 batches of drugs of 18 pharmaceutical companies to be of substandard quality since January 2018.

- BPPI implements the Centre's flagship affordable medicine scheme **Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)**.

### SALIENT FEATURES OF THE SCHEME:

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

### Outreach of generic medicines:

- With developments like more and more doctors prescribing generic medicines and opening of over 5050 Janaushadhi stores across 652 districts, awareness and availability of high quality affordable generic medicines has increased in the country. About 10-15 lakh people benefit from Janaushadhi medicines per day and the market share of generic medicines has grown over three fold from 2% to 7% in last 3 years.
- The Janaushadhi medicines have played a big role in bringing down the out of pocket expenditure of patients suffering from life threatening diseases in India. The PMBJP scheme has led to total savings of approximately Rs.1000 crores for common citizens, as these medicines are cheaper by 50% to 90% of average market price.
- The PMBJP is also providing a good source of self-employment with self-sustainable and regular earnings.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 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.

### 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.

## 12. AWARE- A WHO TOOL FOR SAFER USE OF ANTIBIOTICS

### What to study?

- For prelims: about AWaRe and its key features.
- For mains: antibiotic resistance, causes, effects and concerns.

**Context:** WHO launches tool for safer use of antibiotics, curb resistance- **AWaRe**.

### About AWaRe:

- It is an **online tool** aimed at guiding policy-makers and health workers to use antibiotics safely and more effectively.

The tool, known as 'AWaRe', classifies antibiotics into three groups:

- Access** — antibiotics used to treat the most common and serious infections.
- Watch** — antibiotics available at all times in the healthcare system.
- Reserve** — antibiotics to be used sparingly or preserved and used only as a last resort.

#### **Concerns:**

- Antibiotic resistance is already one of the biggest health risks and is estimated to kill 50 million by 2050 worldwide.
- The threat continues to escalate globally because more than 50 per cent of antibiotics in many countries are used inappropriately such as for treatment of viruses when they only treat bacterial infections or use of the wrong (broader spectrum) antibiotic.
- Besides, reduced access to effective and appropriate antibiotics in many low- and middle-income countries contributes to childhood deaths and lack of funding and implementation of national plans to tackle antimicrobial resistance.

#### **Factors underlying the problem:**

- The factors underlying the problem of suboptimal antibiotic use are complex, but include, among others, lack of knowledge and awareness of the problem by prescribers and the public, diagnostic uncertainty due to limitations of actual diagnostic tests and insufficient diagnostic capacities, lack of access to evidence-based treatment guidelines taking into account local epidemiology, lack of access to data reflecting the quality of antibiotic prescribing and use, preference for dispensing large spectrum antibiotics even when narrow spectrum alternatives are available).

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

- With the emergence of infections that are untreatable by all classes of antibiotics, antimicrobial resistance has become “**an invisible pandemic**”.
- In the absence of development of new drugs, “we must safeguard these precious last-line antibiotics to ensure we can still treat and prevent serious infections”.

Sources: down to earth.

## **13. ANTHRAX**

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

- For prelims and mains: Anthrax- causes, effects, symptoms and prevention.

**Context:** DRDO, JNU scientists develop more potent **Anthrax vaccine**. Claim new vaccine superior than existing ones as it can generate immune response to **anthrax toxin** as well as spores.

#### **About Anthrax:**

- Anthrax is a disease caused by **Bacillus anthracis**, a germ that lives in soil.
- It affects animals such as cattle, sheep, and goats more often than people. People can get anthrax from contact with infected animals, wool, meat, or hides. It can cause three forms of disease in people.

#### **Spread:**

- Anthrax does not spread directly from one infected animal or person to another; it is spread by spores. These spores can be transported by clothing or shoes.

#### **Symptoms & Infection:**

- In most cases, symptoms develop within seven days of exposure to the bacteria. The one exception is inhalation anthrax, which may take weeks after exposure before symptoms appear.
- Respiratory infection in humans initially presents with cold or flu-like symptoms for several days, followed by pneumonia and severe (and often fatal) respiratory collapse.
- Gastrointestinal (GI) infection in humans is most often caused by consuming anthrax-infected meat and is characterized by serious GI difficulty, vomiting of blood, severe diarrhea, acute inflammation of the intestinal tract, and loss of appetite.
- Cutaneous anthrax, also known as Hide porter's disease, is the cutaneous (on the skin) manifestation of anthrax infection in humans. It presents as a boil-like skin lesion that eventually forms an ulcer with a black center (eschar).

#### **Exposure:**

- Occupational exposure to infected animals or their products (such as skin, wool, and meat) is the usual pathway of exposure for humans. Workers who are exposed to dead animals and animal products are at the highest risk, especially in countries where anthrax is more common.
- It does not usually spread from an infected human to a noninfected human. But, if the disease is fatal to the person's body, its mass of anthrax bacilli becomes a potential source of infection to others and special precautions should be used to prevent further contamination. Inhalational anthrax, if left untreated until obvious symptoms occur, may be fatal.
- Anthrax can be contracted in laboratory accidents or by handling infected animals or their wool or hides.

#### **Use in Bioterrorism:**

- Anthrax has been used in biological warfare by agents and by terrorists to intentionally infect.
- It was spread in US through a mail. It killed 5 people and made 22 sick.

#### **Treatment:**

- The standard treatment for anthrax is a 60-day course of an antibiotic. Treatment is most effective when started as soon as possible.
- Although some cases of anthrax respond to antibiotics, advanced inhalation anthrax may not. By the later stages of the disease, the bacteria have often produced more toxins than drugs can eliminate.

Sources: down to earth.

## **14. WORLD BEST UNIVERSITIES RANKING**

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

- For Prelims: QS World University Rankings and India's top performers.
- For Mains: Reforms in higher education.

**Context:** QS World University Rankings for 2020 has been released.

- **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** is at the top of the global list for the **eighth consecutive year**.

#### **Background:**

- QS World University Rankings is an annual publication of university rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).
- QS evaluates universities and institutions on **parameters** such as academic and employer reputation, faculty-student ratio, citations per faculty and international students and faculty on campuses.

#### **Top institutions from India:**

- **IIT-Bombay** has been ranked India's best university for the second year in a row.
- Two other Indian universities — IIT Delhi (182) and the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru (184) — have also cracked the top 200.
- There are a total of 23 Indian institutions in the top 1,000. While most are government-funded universities, five are privately funded.
- The Manipal Academy of Higher Education, which falls within the 701-750 ranking band, is the top private university in the country. The O.P. Jindal Global University, founded in 2009, is the only new entrant in the list this year, ranking in the 751-800 band.
- Indian science and technology institutions funded by the government scored high in terms of citations per faculty, with the IISc, Bengaluru, achieving a perfect 100 in that indicator.
- For private institutions on the list, on the other hand, it was other indicators such as teacher-student ratio, and international faculty and student populations that propelled them to the top.

Sources: Indian Express.

## **15. E-2020 INITIATIVE**

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

- For prelims and mains: features and significance of the initiative.

**Context:** Four countries from Asia — China, Iran, Malaysia and Timor-Leste — and one from Central America — El Salvador — reported no indigenous cases of malaria in 2018, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

- The countries were part of the global health body's **E-2020 initiative**, launched in 2016, working in 21 countries, spanning five regions, to scale up efforts to achieve malaria elimination by 2020.

#### What is the E-2020 initiative?

- In May 2015, the World Health Assembly endorsed a new Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016-2030, setting ambitious goals aimed at dramatically lowering the global malaria burden over this 15-year period, with milestones along the way to track progress. A key milestone for 2020 is the **elimination of malaria in at least 10 countries that had the disease in 2015. To meet this target, countries must report zero indigenous cases in 2020.**
- According to a WHO analysis published in 2016, **21 countries have the potential to eliminate malaria by 2020**. They were selected based on an analysis that looked at the likelihood of elimination across 3 key criteria:
  - trends in malaria case incidence between 2000 and 2014;
  - declared malaria objectives of affected countries; and
  - informed opinions of WHO experts in the field.
- Together, these 21 malaria-eliminating countries are part of a concerted effort known as the E-2020 initiative, supported by WHO and other partners, to eliminate malaria in an ambitious but technically feasible time frame.

#### Malaria and concerns for India:

- **Contracted through the bite of an infected mosquito**, malaria remains one of the world's leading killers. It accounted for an estimated 219 million cases from 87 countries and over 400,000 related deaths in 2017.
- Over 60 per cent of fatalities were among children under five years, and caused 266,000 of all malaria deaths worldwide.
- India (4 per cent) was among the five countries, the others being — Nigeria (25 per cent), Democratic Republic of the Congo (11 per cent), Mozambique (5 per cent), and Uganda (4 per cent) — that accounted for nearly 50 per cent of all malaria cases worldwide.
- The country was also among the 11 countries — 10 in Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania) — that reported approximately 70 per cent of all malaria cases (151 million) and deaths (274,000).
- Among these countries, only India reported progress in reducing its malaria cases in 2017 (24 per cent reduction in cases) compared to 2016, according to the report.

Sources: down to earth.

## 16. NITI AAYOG'S HEALTH INDEX

#### What to study?

- For prelims: key features of the index, performance of various states.
- For mains: Need for and significance of the index.

**Context:** NITI Aayog has released its second edition of comprehensive Health Index report titled, “**Healthy States, Progressive India**”.

#### What you need to know about the report?

- The report has been developed by **NITI Aayog**, with technical assistance from the World Bank, and in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- The report ranks states and Union territories innovatively on their year-on-year incremental change in health outcomes, as well as, their overall performance with respect to each other.
- It aims to establish an annual systematic tool to measure and understand the heterogeneity and complexity of the nation's performance in Health.

#### **Background:**

- States and UTs have been ranked in **three categories** namely, Larger States, Smaller States, and Union Territories (UTs), to ensure comparison among similar entities.

#### **How are states ranked?**

- The **Health Index** is a weighted composite Index, which for the larger States, is based on indicators in three domains: (a) Health Outcomes (70%); (b) Governance and Information (12%); and (c) Key Inputs and Processes (18%), with each domain assigned a weight based on its importance.

#### **Significance:**

- Health Index has been developed as a tool to leverage co-operative and competitive federalism to accelerate the pace of achieving health outcomes.
- It would also serve as an instrument for “nudging” States & Union Territories (UTs) and the Central Ministries to a much greater focus on output and outcome-based measurement of annual performance than is currently the practice.
- With the annual publication of the Index and its availability on public domain on a dynamic basis, it is expected to keep every stakeholder alert to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal number 3.

#### **Performance of various states:**

- Kerala has emerged as the top-ranking state in terms of overall health performance.
- Uttar Pradesh is the worst when it comes to overall health performance.
- Gujarat, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh stood at fourth, fifth and sixth spots.
- Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have emerged as the top ranking states based on historical performance across health indicators.
- Haryana, Rajasthan and Jharkhand top the index based on incremental performance.
- Among the UTs, Chandigarh jumped one spot to top the list with a score of (63.62), followed by Dadra and Nagar Haveli (56.31), Lakshadweep (53.54), Puducherry (49.69), Delhi (49.42), Andaman and Nicobar (45.36) and Daman and Diu (41.66).
- Only about half the States and UTs showed an improvement in the overall score between 2015-16 (base year) and 2017-18 (reference year).
- Among the eight Empowered Action Group States, only three States — Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh — showed improvement in the overall performance.

Sources: the Hindu.

## **17. EQUIP PROJECT**

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

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

**Context:** The Higher Education Department of the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has finalized and released a 5-year Vision Plan titled as **Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme (EQUIP)**.

#### **Key features:**

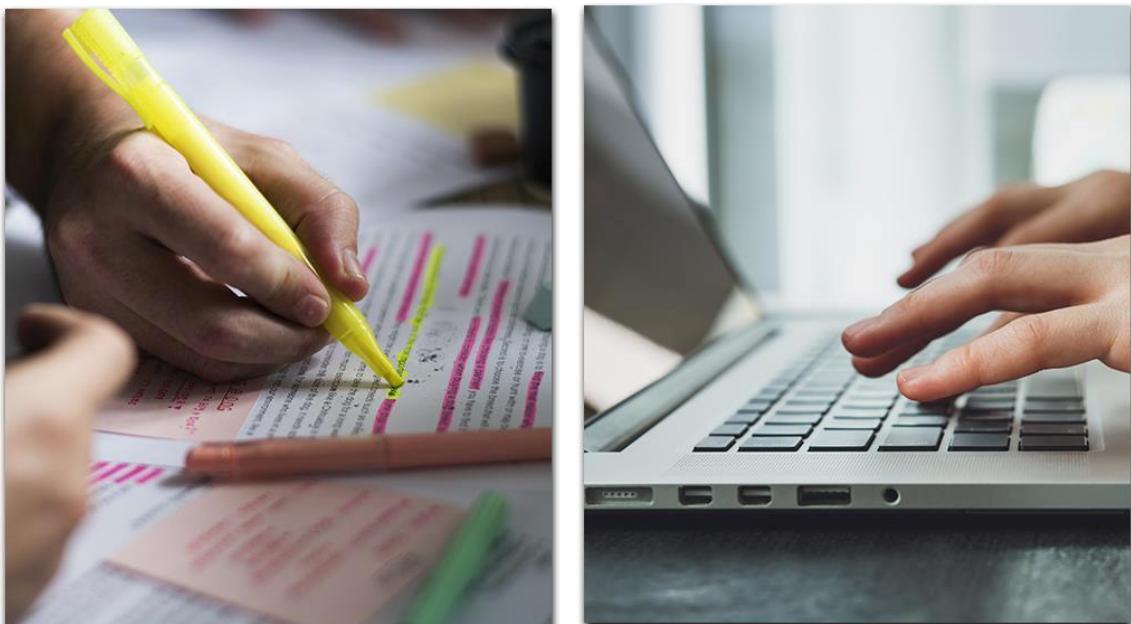
- EQUIP was crafted by ten committees led by experts within the government.
- **Aims:** EQUIP is meant to bridge the gap between policy and implementation. The project is made to bring transformation in the higher education system in the **upcoming 5 years**.

#### **Goals set for Higher Education Sector by Expert Group are:**

- Doubling Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and resolving geographically and socially skewed access to higher education institutions in India.
- Promoting India as a global study destination.
- Upgrade Quality of Education to global standards.
- Positioning minimum 50 Indian institutions among Top-1000 Global Universities.

- Promote Research & Innovation ecosystems for positioning India in Top-3 countries globally in matters of knowledge creation.
- Introducing governance reforms in higher education for well-administered campuses.
- Accreditation of all institutions for assurance of quality.
- Doubling employability of students passing out of higher education.
- Harnessing education technology for expanding reach and improving pedagogy (method and practise of teaching).
- Achieving a quantum increase in investment in higher education.

Sources: the Hindu.



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

## 1. REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES UNDER SECTION 29A OF THE RP ACT, 1951

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Registration of political parties and provisions governing them, benefits of registration.

**Context:** The Election Commission of India has declared the **National People's Party** as a national party. This made the NPP, formed in 2013, the first from the north-eastern region to earn the tag.

- The NPP is recognised as a **State party** in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

### Registration of political parties:

- Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**. A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by **Article 324** of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**.

**To be eligible for a 'National Political Party of India,' the Election Commission has set the following criteria:**

- It secures at least six percent of the valid votes polled in any four or more states, at a general election to the House of the People or, to the State Legislative Assembly; and
- In addition, it wins at least four seats in the House of the People from any State or States. OR
- It wins at least two percent seats in the House of the People (i.e., 11 seats in the existing House having 543 members), and these members are elected from at least three different States.

**To be eligible for a 'State Political Party,' the Election Commission has set the following criteria:**

- It secures at least six percent of the valid votes polled in the State at a general election, either to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned; and
- In addition, it wins at least two seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned. OR
- It wins at least three percent (3%) of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State, or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more.

### Benefits:

- If a party is recognised as a State Party', it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its **reserved symbol** to the candidates set up by it in the State in which it is so recognised, and if a party is recognised as a 'National Party' it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India.
- Recognised 'State' and 'National' parties need only **one proposer** for filing the nomination and are also entitled for **two sets of electoral rolls** free of cost at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get one copy of electoral roll free of cost during General Elections.
- They also get **broadcast/telecast facilities** over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
- Political parties are entitled to nominate "**Star Campaigners**" during General Elections. A recognized National or State party can have a maximum of 40 "Star campaigners" and a registered un-recognised party can nominate a maximum of 20 'Star Campaigners'.
- The **travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted** for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 2. ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: One Nation One Election- need, challenges associated, concerns and significance.

**Context:** PM Modi calls for all-party meet on ‘one nation, one election’.

- **Simultaneous elections** refer to holding elections to Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats and Urban local bodies simultaneously, once in five year.

#### **Problems associated with frequent elections:**

- The massive expenditure that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections.
- The policy paralysis that results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time.
- Impact on delivery of essential services.
- Burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time.
- Frequent elections affect policymaking and governance as the government is trapped in short-term thinking.
- It also destabilises duly-elected governments and imposes a heavy burden on the exchequer.
- It also puts pressure on political parties, especially smaller ones, as elections are becoming increasingly expensive.
- The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) which comes into force with the announcement of poll dates, prevents government from announcing any new schemes, make any new appointments, transfers and postings without the approval of election commission. This brings normal work of the government to a standstill.
- It also increases the cost of management to the election commission.

#### **Merits of Simultaneous elections:**

- **Governance and consistency:** The ruling parties will be able to focus on legislation and governance rather than having to be in campaign mode forever.
- **Reduced Expenditure of Money and Administration:** The entire State and District level administrative and security machinery will be busy with the conduct of elections twice in a period of five years as per the current practice. Expenditure can be reduced by conducting simultaneous elections.
- **Continuity in policies and programmes.**
- **Efficiency of Governance:** Simultaneous elections can bring the much-needed operational efficiency in this exercise. Populist measures by governments will reduce.
- Simultaneous elections can also be a means to **curb corruption** and build a more conducive socio-economic ecosystem.
- The **impact of black money on the voters will be reduced** as all elections are held at a time.

#### **But, why it is difficult to go for simultaneous elections?**

- The biggest challenge is achieving political consensus, which seems to be “chimerical”.
- Regional parties will be more opposed to the idea than national parties because there is always a tendency for voters to vote the same party in power in the state and at the Centre in case the Lok Sabha polls and the state elections are held together.
- Also, according to IDFC, there is a 77% chance that the Indian voter will vote for the same party for both the state and Centre when elections are held simultaneously.

#### **For simultaneous elections to be implemented, Changes to be made in Constitution and Legislations:**

Amendments needed in the following articles:-

- Article 83 which deals with the duration of Houses of Parliament need an amendment
- Article 85 (on dissolution of Lok Sabha by the president)
- Article 172 (relating to the duration of state legislatures)
- Article 174 (relating to dissolution of state assemblies)
- Article 356 (on President’s Rule).
- The Representation of People Act, 1951 Act would have to be amended to build in provisions for stability of tenure for both parliament and assemblies. This should include the following crucial elements:
- Restructuring the powers and functions of the ECI to facilitate procedures required for simultaneous elections
- A definition of simultaneous election can be added to section 2 of the 1951 act.

Sources: the Hindu.

**(Q) Analyze the feasibility of holding simultaneous election in India in the near future?**

### 3. ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME

#### What to study?

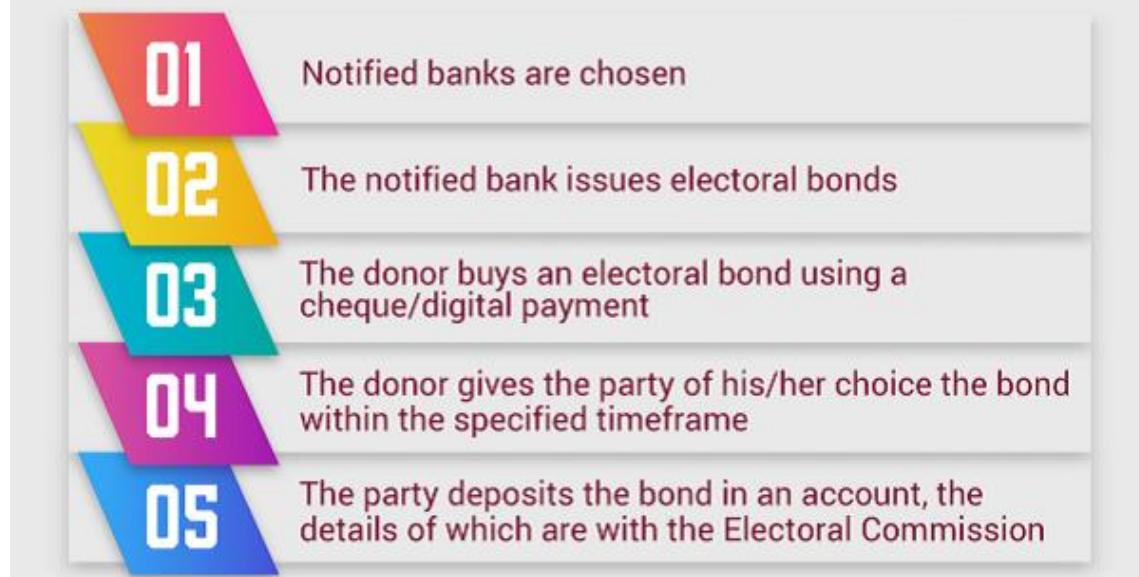
- For Prelims: Key features of Electoral Bonds and highlights of the scheme.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme, benefits and concerns associated.

**Context:** State Bank of India (SBI) has been authorized to issue and encash Electoral Bonds through its 29 Authorized 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.

## How An Electoral Bond Works



#### How will the Bonds help?

- The previous system of cash donations from anonymous sources is wholly non-transparent. The donor, the donee, the quantum of donations and the nature of expenditure are all undisclosed.
- According to government the system of Bonds will encourage **political donations of clean money** from individuals, companies, HUF, religious groups, charities, etc. After purchasing the bonds, these entities can hand them to political parties of their choice, which must redeem them within the prescribed time.
- Some element of transparency would be introduced in as much as all donors declare in their accounts the amount of bonds that they have purchased and all parties declare the quantum of bonds that they have received.

**(Q)** Critically examine the effectiveness of electoral bonds in ensuring transparent political funding and suggest alternatives?



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

## 1. DATA LOCALIZATION

### What to study?

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

**Context:** Commerce & Industry Minister Meets Industry Stakeholders on E-Commerce & Data Localization.

- Common issues for discussion include opportunities for India in the growing digital economy, value addition in Indian GDP due to advent of e-commerce, understanding data flows from four aspects – privacy, security, safety and free choice, ownership and sharing of data, gains and costs of cross border flow of data and means to monitor use of data.

### Why data localization is necessary for India?

- For securing citizen's data, data privacy, data sovereignty, national security, and economic development of the country.
- Recommendations by the RBI, the committee of experts led by **Justice BN Srikrishna, the draft ecommerce policy** and the draft report of the **cloud policy panel** show signs of data localisation.
- The extensive data collection by technology companies, has allowed them to process and monetize Indian users' data outside the country. Therefore, **to curtail the perils of unregulated and arbitrary use of personal data**, data localization is necessary.
- Digital technologies like machine learning (ML), artificial intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) can generate tremendous value out of various data. It can turn disastrous if not contained within certain boundaries.
- With the advent of cloud computing, Indian users' data is outside the country's boundaries, leading to a conflict of jurisdiction in case of any dispute.
- Data localization is an **opportunity for Indian technology companies to evolve an outlook from services to products**. International companies will also be looking at the Indian market, and this will benefit the growth of the local ecosystem.
- More data centres in India could mean new, power-hungry customers for India's renewable energy market. **That means Data localisation could boost India's renewable energy**.

### Policies that imply data localization:

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

### Concerns / Challenges:

- Several of the recommendations in including the draft e-commerce policy, falter on a key ground like they gloss over the negative economic impact of data localization. This approach exhibits **lack of evidence-based policy making**.

### 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**.

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

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

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

## **2. COMMON SERVICE CENTRES**

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

- For prelims and mains: CSCs- establishments, need, functioning and significance.

**Context: NSIC signs MoU with Common Service Centres- eGovernance Services India** for enhancing new offerings for the MSME sector.

#### **What are CSCs?**

- Common Services Centers (CSCs) are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme. They are the **access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India**, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.
- They are multiple-services-single-point model for providing facilities for multiple transactions at a single geographical location.** They are the access points for delivery of essential public utility services, social welfare schemes, healthcare, financial, education and agriculture services, apart from host of B2C services to citizens in rural and remote areas of the country.

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

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

#### **Significance of CSCs:**

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

### **Key facts:**

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

### **CSC 2.0 Scheme:**

- Based on the assessment of CSC scheme, the Government launched the CSC 2.0 scheme in 2015 to expand the outreach of **CSCs to all Gram Panchayats across the country**. Under CSC 2.0 scheme, **at least one CSC will be set up in each of the 2.5 lakh GPs across the country by 2019**. CSCs functioning under the existing scheme will also be strengthened and integrated with additional 1.5 lakh CSCs across the country.

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

## **1. 'BACK TO VILLAGE' PROGRAM BEGINS IN J&K**

### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** The ambitious "back to village" programme has begun in Jammu and Kashmir.

### **The ambitious programme has four main goals:**

- energising panchayats.
- collecting feedback on delivery of government schemes and programmes.
- capturing specific economic potential.
- undertaking assessment of needs of villages.

### **Key features of the program:**

- Under the program, the entire administrative apparatus of the state government is going to visit all the 4483 Panchayat halqas to get the **grassroots level feedback from general public**.
- The government has deployed **one gazetted officer as nodal officer in each panchayat halqa**, who will interact with panchayat members, general public to get the general feedback.
- The program is primarily aimed at **directing development efforts in rural areas through community participation and to create in the rural masses an earnest desire for decent standard of living**.

Sources: Indian Express.

## **2. INDIA MUST RECOGNISE THE RIGHT TO A MINIMALLY DECENT LIFE**

**Context:** Recent Incidents of systematic failure of health care in Bihar highlight the need for having a **robust doctrine of basic rights**.

### **But, what are basic rights?**

- Basic rights flow from **basic needs** such as physical security or subsistence.
- These needs depend on the way human bodies are constituted. They are a **solid necessity**; one cannot get on without them. Nor can they be fulfilled by substitutes.
- It is true, of course, that **though terribly important, basic needs are not what we live for**. They don't make our life worth living. But, **anything really worth pursuing depends on the satisfaction of basic needs**.

### **Why ensure basic needs?**

- People suffer if basic needs are met inadequately or with delay. **They are then denied a minimally decent life**.
- When basic needs are not fully met, people **feel vulnerable and helpless**.

### **What does the language of rights add to the idea of basic needs?**

- First, a **right is something that is owed to us**; it is not a favour. So, rights help the recognition of anything that satisfies basic needs as an entitlement. **Basic rights are claims on the state to provide us with goods and services that satisfy our basic needs.**

### **Which basic needs should be considered rights?**

- The **right to physical security** is socially guaranteed when the state provides its people a well-trained, professional police force.
- **The right to minimum economic security and subsistence**, that includes clean air, uncontaminated water, nutritious food, clothing and shelter.
- The **right to free public expression of helplessness and frustration**, if deprived of other basic rights.
- These three basic rights can be summed up in a single phrase, the **right to a minimally decent life**. This is a **threshold right**.

### **Why classify them as rights?**

- When something is identified as a basic right, it puts **the state under a duty to enable its exercise**. The state becomes its **guarantor**. When society and its government reneges on its commitment to do so, people can hold them **accountable**. It follows that basic rights are a **shield for the defenceless against the most damaging threats to their life** which include starvation, pestilence and disease.
- As the philosopher Henry Shue, puts it, it is '**an attempt to give to the powerless a veto over some economic, social and political forces that harm them**'.
- These rights are basic also because **many intrinsically valuable rights can be enjoyed only once these rights are secured**.

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

- Credible threats to these rights can be reduced by the government by **establishing institutions and practices** that assist the vulnerable; for example, by setting up hospitals with adequate number of doctors, nurses, beds, medical equipment, intensive care units, essential drugs and emergency treatments.
- For this, **proper budgetary allocation** is required that depends in turn on getting one's political priority and commitment right. **When a government fails to provide primary health care to those who can't afford it, it violates their basic rights.**
- Governments must make **arrangements for people to demand that their basic rights be satisfied**, to complain when these demands are not met, to report lapses and omissions on the part of governments, point fingers at apathetic government officials, criticise the government for its failures and to do so without fear.

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

- First, like the constitutional principle of a basic structure, it is time to **articulate an equally robust doctrine of basic rights**.
- Second, **these basic rights must be viewed primarily as positive**, rights not against interference from the state (negative rights) but to the provision of something by it.
- Third, just as individuals are punished for legal violations, the **government of the day must also be punished for the violation of these basic rights**. Defaulting governments must be held legally accountable. The **systematic violation of basic rights must be treated on a par with the breakdown of constitutional machinery**.

*Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.*

## **1. QUAD COUNTRIES TO FOCUS ON MARITIME SECURITY**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims: Members of the Quad grouping, countries in the Indian ocean region, Chinese military bases.
- For Mains: The Quad grouping- features, significance, concerns and potential.

**Context:** The fourth edition of the **Quadrilateral meet** among India, Japan, Australia and the United States, after it was revived in November 2017, was held recently at **Bangkok, Thailand**.

#### Outcomes of the meeting:

- India, Australia, Japan and the US have backed ASEAN-led mechanisms in efforts to create a rule-based regional architecture for the Indo-Pacific, where China is seeking to exert its influence.
- They held consultations on collective efforts to “advance a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific”.
- The meet also referred to efforts to “maintain universal respect for international law and freedom of navigation and overflight”.

#### Significance Quad- grouping for the US:

- The US believes the Quad, as one of the elements of its larger Indo-Pacific strategy for “a free, open and rules-based order” in face of an aggressive and expansionist China in the region, should eventually evolve into a ministerial-level dialogue imbued with a strong military dimension.
- But Washington also recognizes that New Delhi for now remains opposed to any militarization of the Quad, which was revived after a decade as a joint secretary-level dialogue in November 2017, with its second meeting being held in June this year. India has also made it clear that the US should not “conflate” the Indo-Pacific with the Quad, stressing the centrality of Asean in the former.

#### Significance:

- Quad is an opportunity for like-minded countries to share notes and collaborate on projects of mutual interest. All four countries share a vision of an open and free Indo-Pacific. Each is involved in development and economic projects as well as in promoting maritime domain awareness and maritime security.
- The Quad grouping is one of the many avenues for interaction among India, Australia, Japan and the US and should not be seen in an exclusive context. Quad should not be seen in any comparative or in an exclusive context.

**(Q)** Describe India’s core foreign policy goals and origin of Quad. How is Quad a reflection of multi-polar foreign policy ?

## 2. INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE (IFC) FOR THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION (IOR)

#### What to study?

- For Prelims: Key facts on IOR.
- For Mains: IOR- significance, potential, challenges to its security and the need for international collaboration.

**Context:** The Indian Navy is hosting a **Maritime Information Sharing Workshop 2019 edition** under the aegis of the **Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** at Gurugram, Harayana.

- The workshop aims to acquaint all participants about IFC-IOR and its information sharing mechanisms. It also aims to promote sharing of best practices in this field so as to yield better response to myriad security and safety challenges that IOR faces.

#### About IFC- IOR:

- The IFC-IOR is being established with the vision of **strengthening maritime security in the region and beyond**, by building a common coherent maritime situation picture and acting as a maritime information hub for the region.
- The IFC has been established at the **Navy’s Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC)** in **Gurugram**, which is the single point centre linking all the coastal radar chains to generate a seamless real-time picture of the nearly 7,500-km coastline.
- Through this Centre, **information on “white shipping”, or commercial shipping, will be exchanged** with countries in the region to improve maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.

#### The Quad:

- Regional coalition known as the ‘Quad’, **the quadrilateral formation includes Japan, India, United States and Australia**.
- All four nations find a **common ground of being the democratic nations and common interests of unhindered maritime trade and security**.
- The idea was **first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**. However, the idea couldn’t move ahead with Australia pulling out of it.

### **Significance and the need:**

- The IOR has a diverse set of littorals and island nations, each with their unique needs, aspirations, interest and values.
- It is necessary to counter the Rise in **maritime piracy** in the region.
- IFR-IRO would also ensure that the entire region is benefited by **mutual collaboration and exchange of information** and understanding the concerns and threats which are prevalent in the region.

### **The Indian Ocean is important for the following reasons:**

- It enjoys a **privileged location at the crossroads of global trade**, connecting the major engines of the international economy in the Northern Atlantic and Asia-Pacific. This is particularly important in an era in which global shipping has burgeoned.
- Indian Ocean is also **rich in natural resources**. 40% of the world's offshore oil production takes place in the Indian Ocean basin.
- **Fishing** in the Indian Ocean now accounts for almost 15% of the world's total.
- **Mineral resources** are equally important, with nodules containing nickel, cobalt, and iron, and massive sulphide deposits of manganese, copper, iron, zinc, silver, and gold present in sizeable quantities on the sea bed.
- Indian Ocean coastal sediments are also **important sources of titanium, zirconium, tin, zinc, and copper**. Additionally, various **rare earth elements** are present, even if their extraction is not always commercially feasible.

Sources: the hindu.

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

## **1. MULTILATERAL CONVENTION TO IMPLEMENT TAX TREATY RELATED MEASURES**

### **What to study?**

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

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the ratification of the **Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (MLI)**.

### **Background:**

- India has already ratified the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting.

### **What you need to know about the convention?**

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

### Benefits for India:

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

Sources: the Hindu.

## 2. OPERATION SUNRISE AND KALADAN PROJECT

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the project, overview of Sittwe port, Operation Sunrise.

### Context: Operation Sunrise: India-Myanmar target insurgent groups camp in North East.

- Named Operation Sunrise, the strategy is aimed at hitting **militant groups that are impacting both India and Myanmar**.
- It was carried out by **the armies of India and Myanmar**.
- In the operation, Other than NSCN (K), **the groups hit** were Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), the United Liberation Front of Assam, and the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB).

### Background:

- In February when **the first phase of the Operation Sunrise** was launched, the trigger was a threat to the **mega Kaladan Project**.



#### 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.
- **Significance:** 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.

#### 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.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. SOUTH ASIA

#### Significance of South Asia:

- Covers **only about 3.5% of the world's land surface area** but hosts **a fourth of its population**, making it a region of significant importance for international development.

#### Challenges present:

- It is one of **the world's least integrated regions**.
- **Intra-regional trade** is a meagre 5% of the total trade these countries do globally, while **intra-regional investment** is less than 1% of the region's overall global investment.
- South Asia's **average GDP per capita** is only about 9.64% of the global average. **Accounting for more than 30% of the world's poor**, the region faces myriad economic and environmental challenges.
- While the countries share a host of common development challenges, **economic cooperation remains less than adequate**.
- Most South Asian countries have made good progress in ending extreme poverty, but they face persistent challenges to **goals related to industry, innovation and infrastructure, zero hunger, gender equality, education, sustainable cities and communities and decent work and economic growth**. Most of South Asia continues to be **vulnerable to climate change and climate-induced natural disasters**.
- The **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**, the platform for regional economic cooperation in this region, has become moribund and remains unsuccessful in promoting regional economic cooperation.

#### What needs to be done?

- A **regional strategic approach to tackle common development challenges** can bring enormous benefits to South Asia. SDGs related to energy, biodiversity, infrastructure, climate resilience and capacity development are transnational, and here **policy harmonisation** can play a pivotal role in reducing duplication and increasing efficiency.
- To address institutional and infrastructural deficits, South Asian countries need deeper **regional cooperation**.
- On financing the SDGs in South Asia, countries can work towards **increasing the flow of intra-regional FDI**. **The private sector too can play a vital role in resource mobilisation**.

### Way ahead:

- While A few noteworthy regional initiatives such as the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** and the **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative** have been undertaken to bring the countries closer together, economically and socially, there is scope for much more. For a region with common development challenges of inequality, poverty, weak governance and poor infrastructure, a shared vision of attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides enormous opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and convergence (3C).
- If the countries of South Asia, the fastest growing region of the world, can come to a common understanding on regional integration and cooperation in achieving the SDGs, it can unleash a powerful synergistic force that can finally make South Asia converge. A convergence towards achieving a common socio-economic agenda gives hope that no one in South Asia will be left behind in the journey towards eradicating poverty and enduring dignity to all.

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

## 1. GENERALISED SYSTEM OF PREFERENCES (GSP)

### What to study?

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

**Context:** The United States of America (USA) President Donald Trump has terminated **India's designation as a beneficiary developing nation under the GSP (Generalized System of Preference)** trade program with effect from **5<sup>th</sup> June 2019**.

### Why has it been terminated?

- Because India no longer complied with the statutory eligibility criteria.
- The trigger for the latest downturn in trade ties was India's new rules on e-commerce that restrict the way Amazon.com Inc. and Walmart-backed Flipkart do business in a rapidly growing online market set to touch \$200 billion by 2027.
- That, coming on top of a drive to force global card payments companies such as Mastercard and Visa to move their data to India and the imposition of higher tariffs on electronic products and smartphones, left a broader trade package the two sides were working on through last year in tatters.

### Implications:

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

### Generalised System of Preferences (GSP):

- It is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by **providing preferential duty-free entry** for up to 4,800 products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.

### What is the objective of GSP?

- The objective of GSP was to give development support to poor countries by promoting exports from them into the developed countries. GSP promotes sustainable development in beneficiary countries by helping these countries to increase and diversify their trade with the United States.

### Benefits of GSP:

- Indian exporters benefit indirectly – through the benefit that accrues to the importer by way of reduced tariff or duty free entry of eligible Indian products
- Reduction or removal of import duty on an Indian product makes it more competitive to the importer – other things (e.g. quality) being equal.

- This tariff preference helps new exporters to penetrate a market and established exporters to increase their market share and to improve upon the profit margins, in the donor country.

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

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

#### **What is the impact of GSP withdrawal on India?**

- India exports nearly 50 products of the 94 products on which GSP benefits are stopped. The GSP removal will leave a reasonable impact on India as the country enjoyed preferential tariff on exports worth of nearly \$ 5.6 billion under the GSP route out of the total exports of \$48 bn in 2017-18.
- Removal of GSP indicate a tough trade position by the US; especially for countries like India who benefited much from the scheme. India is the 11th largest trade surplus country for the US and India enjoyed an annual trade surplus of \$ 21 bn in 2017-18.

Sources: the Hindu.

**(Q)** What do you understand by Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) ? Discuss the features in detail. Quote the reasons for which US withdrew GSP with India, the repercussions of the same and what should India do ?

## **2. OIC'S REFERENCE TO J&K AND INDIA'S RESPONSE TO IT**

- **Context:** India has rejected the reference to J&K by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

#### **India's response:**

- India said, **OIC has no locus standi** in matters relating to J&K being an integral part of India.
- India reiterated that **OIC should refrain from making such unwarranted references**.

#### **What did the OIC say?**

- The OIC affirmed **its support for the people of J&K for the realization of their legitimate right to self-determination**, in accordance with relevant UN resolutions.
- It condemned the recent outbreaks of violence in the region and invited India to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions to settle its protracted conflict with its neighbour.
- It also called for the expedited establishment of a **UN commission of inquiry** to investigate into the alleged HR violations in Kashmir.
- It called on **India to allow this proposed commission and international human rights organizations** to access Indian-occupied Kashmir.
- It approved the **appointment of Saudi Arabia's Yousef Aldobeay as its Special Envoy for Jammu and Kashmir**.

#### **India and the OIC:**

- Last year, Bangladesh had suggested that India, where more than 10% of the world's Muslims live, should be given Observer status, but Pakistan had opposed the proposal.
- However, EAM Sushma Swaraj had addressed the Inaugural Plenary of the 46th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC in Abu Dhabi on March 1 this year.

#### **Way ahead for India:**

- India has consistently and emphatically underlined that Jammu and Kashmir is an "integral part of India and is a matter strictly internal to India."
- The strength with which India has made this assertion has varied slightly at times, but never the core message. OIC having no locus standi on J&K itself is stronger statement.

### 3. WHY US WANTS SOCIAL MEDIA DETAILS OF MOST VISA APPLICANTS?

#### What to study?

- For prelims: The announcement.
- For mains: rationale behind, concerns and ways to address them.

**Context:** The United States government has updated **visa application forms** to require nearly all applicants to provide their social media usernames, email addresses, and phone numbers for the past five years. The requirement to provide the additional information is in line with the Donald Trump administration's decision to ensure more stringent screening of potential immigrants and visitors to the United States.

#### Impact:

- The new policy will affect roughly 15 million US visa applicants around the world every year. More than a million non-immigrant and immigrant US visas are given to Indians every year. Government officials and diplomats are exempt from providing the additional information.
- Critics say the sweeping surveillance potential of the new regulations could discourage a wide range of visa applicants.

#### Why the change?

- To improve screening processes to protect US citizens, while supporting legitimate travel to the United States.
- Collecting this additional information from visa applicants will strengthen the process for vetting applicants and confirming their identity.

#### Why some are concerned?

- Social media is an intricate map of its users' contacts, associations, habits and preferences. Full information on accounts will give the US government access to a visa applicant's pictures, locations, birthdays, anniversaries, friendships, relationships, and a whole trove of personal data that is commonly shared on social media, but which many may not like to share with agencies of state.
- Research shows that this kind of monitoring has chilling effects, meaning that people are less likely to speak freely and connect with each other in online communities that are now essential to modern life.

#### Elsewhere in the world:

- In 2015, Indians faced further scrutiny in Schengen visas, after it was made mandatory to provide biometric data through fingerprints and a digital photo. That requirement was already in place in the US and Britain. Currently, the UK and Canada — popular destinations for Indian visitors and immigrants — do not have any policy of collecting social media information from visa applicants.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. NEW START (STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TREATY)

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features, significance, targets and the need for the treaty.

**Context:** Russia has warned that it was prepared to drop **New START treaty** with the U.S. and warned of "global catastrophe" if Washington keeps dismantling a global arms control regime.

- It alleged that Washington showed no genuine interest in conducting talks on extending the New START treaty, which caps the number of nuclear warheads well below Cold War limits.

#### About New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty):

- It is a nuclear arms reduction **treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation** with the formal name of **Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms**.
- It was signed on 8 April 2010 in Prague, and, after ratification entered into force on 5 February 2011.

- New START replaced the **Treaty of Moscow (SORT)**, which was due to expire in December 2012. Its name is a follow-up to the **START I treaty**, which expired in December 2009, the proposed **START II treaty**, which never entered into force, and the **START III treaty**, for which negotiations were never concluded.

#### **Under terms of the treaty:**

- The number of strategic nuclear missile launchers will be reduced by half.
- A new inspection and verification regime will be established, replacing the SORT mechanism.
- The number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads is limited to 1,550, which is down nearly two-thirds from the original START treaty, as well as 10% lower than the deployed strategic warhead limit of the 2002 Moscow Treaty.
- It will also limit the number of deployed and non-deployed inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers, submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments to 800. The number of deployed ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments is limited to 700.

#### **Timeline to meet these Targets:**

- These obligations must be met within seven years from the date the treaty enters into force. The treaty will last ten years, with an option to renew it for up to five years upon agreement of both parties.

Sources: the Hindu.

## **5. NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR WELLBEING 2031 (UAE)**

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

- For prelims: key features of the strategy.
- For mains: significance, need for, challenges in implementation and expected outcomes.

**Context:** The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Cabinet has adopted a **National Strategy for Wellbeing 2031**.

#### **Aims:**

- To make UAE a world leader in quality of life by undertaking various strategic objectives and initiatives.
- To promote an integrated concept of wellbeing, thereby supporting vision of UAE Vision 2021 and UAE Centennial 2071.

#### **Key highlights of the proposed strategy:**

- **National Wellbeing Observatory:** It proposes to establish a National Wellbeing Observatory, which will support policymaking process.
- **Functions of the observatory:** monitoring a number of indicators of wellbeing in UAE, submitting regular reports to UAE Cabinet, proposing training programmes for government employees and will launch Academy of Wellbeing future generations. In addition to this observatory is also charged with formation of a **National Wellbeing Council** to manage and coordinate national strategy.
- National Wellbeing Strategy is based on a **national framework of three main levels-** Individuals, Society and the Country.
- It includes **14 key areas and 9 strategic objectives**, which includes enhancing people's wellbeing by promoting healthy & active lifestyles and good mental health and adopting positive thinking.
- Under the strategy **90 new projects** will be launched that will target more than 40 priority areas and will improve physical, psychological and digital health of future generations.

Sources: the Hindu.

## **6. HONG KONG PROTESTS**

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

- For prelims: Geographical and political position of Hong Kong.
- For mains: The recent controversy over the extradition bill, concerns expressed, key features of the bill and what needs to be done?

**Context:** Huge protests in **Hong Kong**.

### Reasons behind:

- The protesters were marching against proposed changes in the law that would allow suspects accused of crimes such as murder and rape to be extradited to mainland China to face trial.
- Once the law is changed, Hong Kong will also hand over to China individuals accused of crimes in Taiwan and Macau. **Macau, like Hong Kong, is a Chinese special administrative region with significant autonomy.**



### China's response:

- The government has said that the proposed amendments would "plug loopholes" that allow the city to be used by criminals. It has assured that courts in Hong Kong would make the final decision on extradition, that only certain categories of suspects would be liable, and that individuals accused of political and religious offences would not be extradited.

### The protesters in Hong Kong are concerned mainly because:

- China may use the changed law to target political opponents in Hong Kong.
- Extradited suspects are likely to face torture. Also, they say, the change in the law will deal another blow to Hong Kong's already crumbling autonomy.

### International response:

- Human Rights Watch and the International Chamber of Commerce have warned against changing the law. A body of the US Congress has said it would make Hong Kong vulnerable to Chinese "political coercion", and the UK and Canada have expressed concern over the potential impact on their citizens in Hong Kong. The EU has sent a diplomatic note.

### Relationship of Hong Kong with respect to China:

- The former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997, and is **semi-autonomous** under the "one country, two systems" principle. It has its own laws and courts, and allows its residents a range of civil liberties. Hong Kong does not have an extradition agreement with Beijing.

Sources: Indian express.

## 7. WINDRUSH SCHEME (UK)

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key features of the scheme, issues associated.

**Context:** UK Home Secretary has issued another personal apology for the **Windrush scandal**, involving migrants being wrongly denied their British citizenship rights, as a latest official update revealed that hundreds more Indians were caught up in the row.

### What is Windrush Scheme?

- The Windrush Scheme enables **Commonwealth citizens, their children, and some other long term residents of the UK to obtain documentation confirming their status free of charge**.

### Who is eligible for support under the scheme?

- a Commonwealth citizen who settled in the UK before 1 January 1973 or has right of abode.
- a child of a Commonwealth citizen parent who settled before 1 January 1973, where you were born in the UK or arrived in the UK before the age of 18.
- a person of any nationality who settled in the UK before 31 December 1988 and is settled in the UK.

### Background:

- The **Windrush generation** refers to **citizens of former British colonies who arrived before 1973**, when the rights of such Commonwealth citizens to live and work in Britain were substantially curtailed.
- The name derives from the **ship MV Empire Windrush**, which on June 22, 1948, docked in Tilbury, Essex, bringing nearly 500 Jamaicans to the UK.
- The **immigrants came at the invitation of the British government**, which was facing a labour shortage due to the destruction caused by World War II.
- While a large proportion of them were of Jamaican/Caribbean descent who came on the ship Windrush, Indians and other South Asians were also affected by the UK government's handling of their immigration status.

### What is happening to them?

- A scandal over the treatment of members of the Windrush generation has been mounting in recent months as a multitude of reports have come out about mostly elderly people being denied services, losing their jobs and even facing deportation.
- Many of the Windrush generation had arrived as children on their parents' passports. And although they have lived in Britain for many decades – paying taxes and insurance – they never formally became British citizens.
- Amid the tightening of the immigration rules, an estimated 50,000 long-term UK residents could now be facing problems.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 8. BRAZIL'S SLAVERY 'DIRTY LIST'

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Meaning of dirty list, features, what it contains and significance?

**Context:** Brazil's "dirty list" is under scrutiny as major firms have been found to have used legal means to avoid being put on it.

### What is the "dirty list"?

- It is a registry of employers that have been found by the government to have engaged in slave labour. It gives transparency to a decision already reached by the Brazilian state. Created in 2004, it has been hailed by the United Nations as a key tool in Brazil's anti-slavery drive.
- The **list is edited by the Division of Inspection for the Eradication of Slave Labor (DETRAE)**, a state body staffed by labour inspectors.

### How does a company get added to it?

- If a labour inspector fines someone for employing slave labour, it starts an internal government procedure where the employer can defend himself.
- After all possibility of appeal is exhausted, if the employer is found guilty, his name or the name of his firm is added to the list.

### Why is the “dirty list” feared by employers?

- Beyond having their brand or names associated with slave labour, employers on the list have their access to credit lines by state banks restricted.
- Private banks also use it to gauge credit risk. International buyers concerned with their supply chain also look up names on the list.

Sources: India's Express.

## 9. 2019 YEARBOOK OF THE STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SIPRI)

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the report, concerns over increased arms trade and need for their regulation, about NEW START policy.

**Context:** The 2019 Yearbook of the **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)**, which is part-funded by the Swedish government, was recently released.

### Key findings:

- Worldwide total of nuclear warheads has decreased since 2018 but countries are modernising their nuclear arsenals.
- Nine nuclear-armed countries (including India) had a total of some 13,865 nuclear weapons at the start of 2019, which is a decrease of 600 nuclear weapons from 14,465 at the start of 2018.

### WORLD NUCLEAR FORCES, JANUARY 2019

COUNTRY	DEPLOYED WARHEADS*	OTHER WARHEADS**	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2018
USA	1,750	4,435	6,185	6,450
Russia	1,600	4,900	6,500	6,850
UK	120	80	200	215
France	280	20	300	300
China	—	290	290	280
India	—	130–140	130–140	130–140
Pakistan	—	150–160	150–160	140–150
Israel		80–90	80–90	80
North Korea	—	—	(20–30)	(10–20)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,750</b>	<b>10,115</b>	<b>13,865</b>	<b>14,465</b>

\* ‘Deployed warheads’ refers to warheads placed on missiles or located on bases with operational forces. \*\* ‘Other warheads’ refers to stored or reserve warheads and retired warheads awaiting dismantlement. Total figures include the highest estimate when a range is given. Figures for North Korea are uncertain and are not included in total figures. All estimates are approximate.

Figures for North Korea were not added to the total on account of uncertainty.

- The report separately counts “**deployed warheads**” (warheads placed on missiles or located on bases with operational forces) and “**other warheads**” (stored or reserve warheads and retired warheads awaiting dismantlement). For India, it gives a figure of 130-140 “other warheads” in 2019, the same as in 2018.

- The decrease is mainly attributed to **Russia and the US—which together still account for over 90 per cent of all nuclear weapons**—further reducing their strategic nuclear forces pursuant to the implementation of the **2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START)** while also making unilateral reductions.
- However, both Russia and the US have extensive and expensive programmes under way to replace and modernize their nuclear warheads, missile and aircraft delivery systems, and nuclear weapon production facilities.

**Stockholm International Peace Research Institute:**

- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) established in 1966 is **an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament**.
- Based in Stockholm the Institute provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

Sources: down to earth.

## 10. ‘DEFENDING IN NUMBERS’ REPORT

**What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: key findings, concerns and measures needed.

**Context:** The **biennial report**, titled **Defending In Numbers**, has been released by the **Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**.

- The report documented 688 cases of violations and abuses affecting 4,854 people — including human rights organisations, local communities and media outlets — across 18 countries in the continent between 2017 and 2018.

**Most common forms of violation were:**

- Judicial harassment (327 cases).
- (Arbitrary) arrest and detention (249 cases).
- Violence (164 cases).

**Key findings:**

- **Asia continues to be a dangerous place for defenders of human and environment rights**, even after 20 years of United Nations Declaration on Human right defenders (HRDs).
- Across Asia, HRDs are threatened, harassed, persecuted, and at times killed for promoting and protecting human rights.
- **Fifty per cent of the total 688 cases in the year have been against those fighting for the cause of democracy and access to land and environmental rights**.
- Over 210 cases were against **pro-democracy** defenders — the most targeted group of HRDs. Between 2017 and 2018, pro-democracy defenders were harshly targeted with violations such as: judicial harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and violence, six of which resulted in the death of the defender.
- This was followed by **land and environmental right activists** — fighting to access natural resources.
- **The activists include indigenous and tribal peoples, farming and peasant groups and other local communities**, whose land, life, and livelihoods are threatened by the exploitation of the environment and the establishment of development projects that violate people’s rights.
- **State actors such as the police, the judiciary and armed forces were ranked as the number one perpetrator of harassment and abuse** against HRDs, the report stated.
- Besides, **the role of non-state actors in harassing land and environmental defenders was increasingly common** between 2017 and 2018.
- This primarily **includes businesses and corporations in the mining and extractives industries and agribusinesses**, which are competing to access natural resources for profit or otherwise seeking to implement large-scale development projects with little regard for its impact on the surrounding communities or environment.

### Need of the hour:

- As development projects proliferate and the competition for natural resources increase, the situation of activists fighting for the cause of environment is expected to worsen unless measures are established for their protection.
- According to the United Nations mandated **Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 16)** states must protect fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
- The human costs associated with these attacks on HRDs cannot be easily quantified but if states do not take requisite actions to halt this onslaught, key targets of Agenda 2030 will be missed.
- There is need for **action to be taken by various stakeholders in order to create a safer and more enabling environment for these defenders.**
- The report also calls upon the corporations to comply with the guiding principles for business and human rights while implementing the **United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ framework** and other international human rights standards.
- It has also asked the government **to ensure that all laws comply with international human rights standards and the judicial processes remain just and transparent.**

Sources: the Hindu.

## 11. JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA)

### What to study?

- For prelims and Mains: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)- objectives, why US has withdrawn from this, implications and what needs to be done?

**Context:** Amid escalating tensions with the United States, Iran has said that it would surpass the limit on the **uranium supply permitted under the 2015 nuclear agreement**, a potentially combustible new phase in the country's confrontation with Washington.

### Iran's response:

- Iranian leaders have sought to justify these steps as a response to the Trump administration's abandonment of the nuclear accord last year and its reimposition of sanctions, which have weakened Iran's economy and in particular choked its ability to sell oil, the country's most important export.
- Iran insists its nuclear work remains peaceful, as guaranteed under the accord. But Iran also insists that the country has the right to stop honoring some or all of provisions because the United States has reimposed sanctions in violation of the accord.

### Why is this a cause for concern?

- Iran is permitted to keep up to 300 kilograms, or about 660 pounds, of uranium enriched to 3.67% purity, a level that can be used for civilian purposes like nuclear power fuel.
- Iran would need roughly triple the amount of 3.67%-enriched uranium it is permitted to possess under the accord in order to further enrich the material into weapons-grade strength sufficient to make one bomb.
- Iran has said that it is quadrupling production of low-enriched uranium, raising the possibility they could start stockpiling far greater quantities again.

### What is the Iran nuclear deal?

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

### Why did Iran agree to the deal?

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

### **Why has US pulled out of the deal now?**

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

### **Impact of escalated tension between Iran and the US:**

- Iran can make things difficult for the U.S. in Afghanistan as also in Iraq and Syria.
- The U.S.'s ability to work with Russia in Syria or with China regarding North Korea will also be impacted.
- And sooner or later, questions may be asked in Iran about why it should continue with other restrictions and inspections that it accepted under the JCPOA, which would have far-reaching implications for the global nuclear architecture.
- Coming after the rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris climate change accord and the North American Free Trade Agreement, President's decision further diminishes U.S. credibility.

### **What role does the U.N. Security Council play in this crisis?**

- The Security Council adopted a resolution in 2015 that endorsed the nuclear agreement and ended U.N. sanctions against Iran. **The resolution, 2231**, includes what is known as a "snapback" provision that could reinstate those sanctions if other parties to the agreement complained that Iran was cheating. Such a step would likely doom the agreement.

Sources: Indian Express.

**(Q)** Withdrawing from Iran nuclear deal by US is a serious mistake and has many possible ramifications for India. Analyse.

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

## **1. UN WOMEN**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims: About UN Women- composition, objectives, programmes and significance.
- For Mains: 33% reservation for women- need, significance, challenges in implementation and role in overall women empowerment.

**Context:** United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) recently appointed Indian-origin Anita Bhatia as Deputy Executive Director of **United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for Resource Management, Sustainability and Partnerships**.

### **About UN Women: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women:**

- It is the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It was established in 2010 to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.
- It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:
- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

### **The main roles of UN Women are:**

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 2. ISLAMIC COOPERATION COUNTRIES (OIC)

### What to study?

- For Prelims: IOC- key facts.
- For Mains: India's involvement in the organization, need, significance and challenges.

**Context:** The 14th summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was held in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The agenda of meeting was to address 'current issues in Muslim world' and 'recent developments in a number of OIC member states'.

### About the OIC:

- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states.
- It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- The organisation states that it is "the collective voice of the Muslim world" and works to "safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony".
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.
- Permanent Secretariat is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- Like NAM again, the OIC is a toothless tiger when it comes to dealing with squabbles among member states.

### Significance of OIC for India:

- OIC's growing economic and energy interdependence with India has become important in recent times.
- That India has one of the world's largest Muslim populations, of course, is the immediate explanation of the surprising invite for Swaraj to address the OIC.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 3. 2<sup>ND</sup> GLOBAL DISABILITY SUMMIT AT BUENOS AIRES

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features, location, mandate and significance of the summit.

**Context:** 2nd Global Disability Summit is being held at Buenos Aires, Argentina.

### About the Summit:

- The objectives of the summit is to deliberate on issues across the world concerning empowerment and inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and to work out a mechanism for enabling them to live an independent and dignified life.
- The first-ever Global Disability Summit was held at London, United Kingdom (UK) in 2018. It was hosted by UK Department for International Development (UK DFID), along with the co-hosts International Disability Alliance (IDA) and Government of Kenya.
- Mandate: The Global leaders attending the summit express their commitments towards eliminating stigma and discrimination against PWDs and to work towards promoting inclusive education, economic empowerment, technology and innovation in assistive devices, data desegregation etc. for them.

(Q) Our understanding of disability must expand to include people with invisible disabilities. Examine.

## 4. 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:** With little action against terrorism, Pak likely to stay on FATF grey list.

### **Background:**

- Pakistan was placed on the grey list by the FATF in June 2018 for failing to curb anti-terror financing. It has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations by the Paris-based FATF, a measure that officials here fear could further hurt its economy.

### **Implications of this move:**

- Pakistani analysts say being put on the FATF watchlist could deal a blow to Pakistan's economy, making it harder for foreign investors and companies to do business in the country.
- It would be counterproductive to put Pakistan on the watch list as it would hurt its capability to fight terrorism. Also, being put back on the grey list would heighten Pakistan's risk profile and some financial institutions would be wary of transacting with Pakistani banks and counterparties.
- Being placed on the FATF watchlist carries no direct legal implications but brings extra scrutiny from regulators and financial institutions that can chill trade and investment and increase transaction costs.

### **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.

### **What is blacklist and grey list?**

- FATF maintains two different lists of countries: those that have deficiencies in their AML/CTF regimes, but they commit to an action plan to address these loopholes, and those that do not end up doing enough. The former is commonly known as grey list and latter as blacklist.
- Once a country is blacklisted, FATF calls on other countries to apply enhanced due diligence and counter measures, increasing the cost of doing business with the country and in some cases severing it altogether. As of now there are only two countries in the blacklist — Iran and North Korea — and seven on the grey list, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria and Yemen.

Sources: the hindu.

**(Q)** What is the mandate and objectives of Financial Action Task Force? Discuss its importance for India – Pakistan relations

## **5. SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)**

### **What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: SCO- objectives, members, functions, significance, various organs and issues associated.

**Context:** SCO Summit 2019 is being held in **Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan**.

### **About SCO:**

- **What is it?** The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also known as the Shanghai Pact, is a **Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai**.
- **Founding members:** China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The cooperation was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation after Uzbekistan joined the organisation in 2001.

- **The SCO's main goals are:** strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.
- Presently, the SCO comprises **eight member states**, namely the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- The SCO counts **four observer states**, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Mongolia.
- **The SCO has six dialogue partners**, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

**(Q)** Discuss the organizational structure, aims and mandate of Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

## 6. KIMBERLEY PROCESS

### What to study?

- For prelims: About the Kimberley process, previous chair, conflict diamonds.
- For mains: How does the Kimberley Process work?

**Context:** The Intersessional meeting of Kimberley Process (KP) is being hosted by India in Mumbai.

- India is currently the Chair of **Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)** since 1st January 2018. It was handed Chairmanship by the European Union during KPCS Plenary 2018, which was held in Brussels, Belgium.
- **India is founding member** of KPCS.

### What is the Kimberley Process?

- The Kimberley Process is an **international certification scheme that regulates trade in rough diamonds**. It aims to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds, while helping to protect legitimate trade in rough diamonds.
- The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) outlines the **rules** that govern the trade in rough diamonds.
- The KP is **not, strictly speaking, an international organisation**: it has **no permanent offices or permanent staff**. It relies on the contributions – **under the principle of 'burden-sharing'** – of participants, supported by industry and civil society observers. **Neither can the KP be considered as an international agreement from a legal perspective, as it is implemented through the national legislations of its participants.**

### What are Conflict diamonds?

- “Conflict Diamonds” means rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance conflict aimed at undermining legitimate governments. It is **also described in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions**.

### Who is involved?

- The Kimberley Process (KP) is open to all countries that are willing and able to implement its requirements. The KP has **55 participants, representing 82 countries, including the European Union** and its Member States counting as a single participant. KP members account for approximately 99.8% of the global production of rough diamonds.
- In addition, the **World Diamond Council, representing the international diamond industry, and civil society organisations, such as Partnership-Africa Canada, participate in the KP and have played a major role since its outset.**

### How does the Kimberley Process work?

- The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) imposes extensive requirements on its members to enable them to certify shipments of rough diamonds as ‘conflict-free’ and prevent conflict diamonds from entering the legitimate trade.

- Under the terms of the KPCS, participating states must put in place national legislation and institutions; export, import and internal controls; and also commit to transparency and the exchange of statistical data.
- Participants can only legally trade with other participants who have also met the minimum requirements of the scheme, and international shipments of rough diamonds must be accompanied by a KP certificate guaranteeing that they are conflict-free.

#### Rough diamond trading under the KPCS:

- As per the Scheme, each shipment of rough diamonds being exported and imported by crossing an international border be transported in a tamper proof container and accompanied by a validated Kimberley Process Certificate. The shipment can only be exported to a co-participant country in the KPCS. No uncertified shipments of rough diamonds are permitted to enter a participant country.

## 7. GLOBAL PEACE INDEX 2019

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: GPI- criteria, rankings and key findings.

**Context:** Global Peace Index is released by Australian think tank **Institute for Economics & Peace**. The GPI was founded by **Steve Killelea**, an Australian technology entrepreneur and philanthropist.

- The report covers 99.7 per cent of the world's population and uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly respected sources to compile the index.
- This year's report includes **new research on the possible effects of climate change on peace**.
- It ranks countries according to their level of peacefulness based on **three thematic domains**:
- The level of societal safety and security.
- The extent of ongoing domestic and international conflict.
- The degree of militarisation.

#### Performance of India:

- India's rank has slipped five places to **141** this year.
- **India's neighbours:** In South Asia, Bhutan topped the index with 15th rank, followed by Sri Lanka 72, Nepal 76 and Bangladesh 101. The neighbouring country Pakistan has been ranked 153rd on the index.
- India together with Philippines, Japan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Indonesia, Vietnam and Pakistan are the nine countries with the **highest risk of multiple climate hazards**. The country has the **7th highest overall natural hazard score**.
- India, the US, China, Saudi Arabia, and Russia are the **top five countries with the largest total military expenditure**.
- According to the report, **South Asia's score for every indicator in ongoing conflict is less peaceful than the global average, with four out of six deteriorating last year**. Only deaths from internal conflict improved, with fewer fatalities in Pakistan, Afghanistan and India than the year prior.
- The score for **internal conflicts fought** had the highest rating at five in both India and Pakistan. China, Bangladesh, and India, score in the bottom half of the GPI and have significant exposure to climate hazards, with 393 million people in high climate hazard areas.

#### Performance of other countries:

- **Iceland** remains the most peaceful country in the world, a position it has held since 2008.
- It is joined at the top of the Global Peace Index (GPI) by New Zealand, Austria, Portugal, and Denmark.
- **Afghanistan** is now the least peaceful country in the world, replacing Syria, which is now the second least peaceful. South Sudan, Yemen, and Iraq comprise the remaining five least peaceful countries.

#### Key observations:

- While **global peacefulness improved for the first time in five years**, as per the index findings, the world remains less peaceful than a decade ago.
- Since 2008 **global peacefulness has deteriorated by 3.78 per cent**.

- State sponsored terror has declined markedly over the last decade, with 62 countries improving their scores while only 42 deteriorated. However, incarceration shows the opposite trend with 95 countries increasing the incarceration rate compared to 65 that improved.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 8. ASIA MEDIA SUMMIT

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: AMS summit and AIBD.

**Context:** 16th Asia Media Summit 2019 was organised in Siem Reap province, Cambodia to deliberate on many issues pertaining to media & broadcasting industry.

### About the AMS Summit:

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

### About AIBD:

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

### Founders:

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

### Membership:

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

### Role and mandate:

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

Sources: the Hindu.

## 9. AFRICAN UNION (AU)

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: AU- objectives, composition, functions and significance.

**Context:** India has for the first time extended \$15 Million financial support to **Niger** as a support for organising **African Union (AU) summit** scheduled to be held in Niger. This will be the 1st time that Niger will be hosting an AU summit.

#### About AU:

- The African Union (AU) is a continental union consisting of **55 countries of the continent of Africa, with exception of various territories of European possessions located in Africa.**
- The bloc was **founded on 26 May 2001 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia** and launched on 9 July 2002 in South Africa.
- The intention of the AU is **to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)**, established on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa by 32 signatory governments.
- The most important decisions of the AU are made by the Assembly of the African Union, a semi-annual meeting of the heads of state and government of its member states.
- The AU's **secretariat, the African Union Commission, is based in Addis Ababa.**
- **Key objectives:** To achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and Africans. To defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States. To accelerate the political and social-economic integration of the continent.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 10. INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO)

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: ICAO- composition, roles, functions and significance.

**Context:** Senior bureaucrat Shefali Juneja was appointed as representative of India in council of **International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)**, Montreal, Canada.

#### About ICAO:

#### What is it?

- The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a **UN specialized agency**, established by States in 1944 to manage the administration and governance of the **Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention)**.

#### What it does?

- ICAO works with the Convention's 193 Member States and industry groups to reach consensus on international civil aviation **Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs)** and policies in support of a safe, efficient, secure, economically sustainable and environmentally responsible civil aviation sector.
- These SARPs and policies are used by ICAO Member States **to ensure that their local civil aviation operations and regulations conform to global norms**, which in turn permits more than 100,000 daily flights in aviation's global network to operate safely and reliably in every region of the world.
- ICAO also **coordinates assistance and capacity building for States in support of numerous aviation development objectives**; produces global plans to coordinate multilateral strategic progress for safety and air navigation; monitors and reports on numerous air transport sector performance metrics; and audits States' civil aviation oversight capabilities in the areas of safety and security.

#### Chicago convention:

- **Convention on International Civil Aviation (also known as Chicago Convention)**, was signed on 7 December 1944 by 52 States.
- Pending ratification of the Convention by 26 States, the Provisional International Civil Aviation Organization (PICAO) was established.
- It functioned from 6 June 1945 until 4 April 1947. By 5 March 1947 the 26th ratification was received. ICAO came into being on 4 April 1947. In October of the same year, ICAO became a specialized agency of the **United Nations linked to Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**.
- The Convention establishes rules of airspace, aircraft registration and safety, and details the rights of the signatories in relation to air travel. **The Convention also exempts air fuels in transit from (double) taxation.**

Sources: the Hindu.

## 11. SAUDI ARABIA BECOMES 1<sup>ST</sup> ARAB COUNTRY TO GET FATF MEMBERSHIP

### 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:** Saudi Arabia has become the **first Arab country to be granted full membership of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** following the group's annual general meeting in the US.

- The kingdom's accession came as the global money laundering watchdog celebrated the **30th anniversary of its first meeting held in Paris in 1989**.
- Saudi Arabia had received an invitation from the FATF at the beginning of 2015 to join as an "**observer member**".

### 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.

### What is blacklist and grey list?

- FATF maintains two different lists of countries: those that have deficiencies in their AML/CTF regimes, but they commit to an action plan to address these loopholes, and those that do not end up doing enough. The former is commonly known as grey list and latter as blacklist.
- Once a country is blacklisted, FATF calls on other countries to apply enhanced due diligence and counter measures, increasing the cost of doing business with the country and in some cases severing it altogether.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 12. UN SECURITY COUNCIL

### What to study?

- For Prelims: About UNSC- composition, objectives and functions.
- For Mains: Role and significance of UNSC, need for UNSC reforms, why India should be given permanent membership?

**Context:** India's candidature for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council has been endorsed unanimously by the **Asia Pacific group**, which comprises 55 countries, including Pakistan.

- The endorsement means that India has a "**clean slate" candidature**" – that is there is no other contestant from the group – for the elections that will be held for five non-permanent members next year, for the 2021-22 term.

### Background:

- India has been a non-permanent member of the Security Council eight time previously: 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92 and 2011-12. For the 2011-12 term, India won 187 of 190 votes after Kazakhstan stood down from its candidacy.

### How are non- permanent members elected?

- **Each year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members out of a total of 10, for a two-year term.**
- **Distribution of seats:** These 10 seats are distributed among the regions thus: five for African and Asian countries; one for Eastern European countries; two for Latin American and Caribbean countries; two for Western European and other countries.
- **Of the five seats for Africa and Asia, three are for Africa and two for Asia;** there is an informal understanding between the two groups to reserve **one for an Arab country**. The Africa and Asia Pacific group takes turns every two years to put up an Arab candidate.
- **Elections for terms beginning in even-numbered years** select two African members, and one each within Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Terms beginning in **odd-numbered years** consist of two Western European and Other members, and one each from Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
- **Votes:** Irrespective of whether a country is a “clean slate” candidate and has been endorsed by its group, it needs to secure the votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting at the General Assembly session (a minimum of 129 votes if all 193 member states participate). When contested, the elections for non-permanent seats can be fraught and can go on for several rounds, In 1975, there was a contest between India and Pakistan, which went to eight rounds. Pakistan won the seat that year. In 1996, India lost a contest to Japan.

### About UNSC:

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.
- **Members:** The Security Council consists of **fifteen members**. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body's **five permanent members**. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.
- The Security Council also has **10 non-permanent members**, elected on a regional basis to serve **two-year terms**. The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

### Facts for prelims:

- **The G4 Bloc:** Group of 4 countries, (Germany, Japan, Brazil, India) bidding for permanent seats in the UN Security Council.
- **The Coffee Club or Uniting for Consensus:** Group of countries opposed to the G4. They favoured the expansion of the non-permanent category of seats with members to be elected on a regional basis  
Italy, Spain, Argentina, Canada, Mexico, South Korea and Pakistan.

### Proposed reforms:

- Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses **five key issues**: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship. There is also a proposal to admit more permanent members.

### India's demands:

- India has been calling for the reform of the UN Security Council along with Brazil, Germany and Japan for long, emphasising that it rightly deserves a place at the UN high table as a permanent member.

### Why India should be given a permanent seat in the council?

- India was among the **founding members** of United Nations.
- It is the **second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions**.
- It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.

Sources: Indian Express.

## 13. G20 SUMMIT 2019

### What to study?

- For prelims: All about G20, composition, objectives and significance.
- For mains: Significance, composition, issues associated and need for revamping the grouping.

**Context:** World leaders from 19 countries – and the European Union – are meeting in **Osaka, Japan** for latest edition of **G20 summit**.

### What is the G20?

- The G20 is an annual meeting of leaders from the countries with the largest and fastest-growing economies. Its members account for **85% of the world's GDP, and two-thirds of its population**.
- The G20 Summit is formally known as the "**Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy**".

## G20 members



Note: The European Union is also a member

BBC

### Establishment:

- After the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998, it was acknowledged that the participation of major emerging market countries is needed on discussions on the international financial system, and **G7 finance ministers agreed to establish the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in 1999**.

### Presidency:

- The group has **no permanent staff** of its own, so every year in December, a G20 country from a rotating region takes on the presidency.
- **That country is then responsible for organising the next summit**, as well as smaller meetings for the coming year.
- They can also choose to **invite non-member countries along as guests**. The first G20 meeting took place in **Berlin in 1999**, after a financial crisis in East Asia affected many countries around the world.

### **Who attends these meetings?**

- At first, the G20 was mostly attended by finance ministers and central bank governors.
- That changed after the global financial crisis in 2008. With banks collapsing, unemployment rising and wages stagnating, **the organisation turned into an emergency council for presidents and prime ministers**.
- **Full membership of the G20:** Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

### **Its relevance in changing times:**

- As globalization progresses and various issues become more intricately intertwined, the recent G20 summits have focused not only on macroeconomy and trade, but also on a wide range of global issues which have an immense impact on the global economy, such as development, climate change and energy, health, counter-terrorism, as well as migration and refugees.
- The G20 has sought to realize an inclusive and sustainable world through its contributions towards resolving these global issues.

### **Facts for prelims:**

- A **Sherpa** is a personal representative of the leader of a member country at an international Summit meeting such as the G8, G20 or the Nuclear Security Summit and are responsible for thrashing out the details before the meeting of the leaders.

**(Q)** Do you think the G20 and its summits are just talking shops for powerful world leaders? Discuss its role in the time of economic crises.

## **14. INTERNATIONAL SEED TESTING ASSOCIATION (ISTA)**

### **What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: ISTA- composition, objectives, roles, functions and significance.

**Context:** The International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) is to hold its 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress in Hyderabad.

- The **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and the Telangana government are jointly hosting** the conference, which will be attended by stakeholders from across the globe.

### **About ISTA:**

- **Founded in 1924**, with the aim to develop and publish standard procedures in the field of seed testing, ISTA is inextricably linked with the history of seed testing.
- It is an **association of laboratories** which are authorised to check on the marketability of seed as defined in various countries' laws.
- **Its duties include** defining methods to determine the ability to germinate, the vigour of seed, and the content of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in seed.
- The test results, as certified by ISTA member laboratories, are accepted by the trading partners of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in **international seed traffic**.
- The North American equivalent of the ISTA is the **Association of Official Seed Analysts (AOSA)**.

Sources: the Hindu.

# GENERAL STUDIES - III

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

## 1. NANDAN NILEKANI-LED PANEL ON DIGITAL PAYMENTS

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key recommendations of the panel, challenges to less- cash economy and reforms needed.

**Context:** Nandan Nilekani-led **panel on digital payments** has submitted its recommendations.

### Background:

- The five-member high-level panel headed by Aadhar architect and former Infosys chairman Nilekani was constituted earlier this year by the central bank tasked to submit a comprehensive report holding consultations with all the major stakeholders to strengthen the digital payments industry which has seen a ten-fold growth in the last five years.

### Key recommendations:

- Targets:** It has set a target for the government and regulators to achieve a ten-fold volume growth in digital payments over the next three years through customer-friendly pricing mechanisms and broadening access infrastructure.
- Measures to increase the outreach:** Banks need to ensure that no user is more than 5 kms away from a banking access point and if such areas are found, these must be considered 'shadow areas' and a local vendor be made a banking correspondent (BC) as he deals in money and stays there.
- Measures to less-cash economy:** removing transaction charges on digital payments made to government, inducing a competitive Merchant Discount Rates (MDR) pricing structure and easing KYC costs to banks are amongst the key recommendations put forward by the committee.
- Role of the governments:** committee has put the onus on government to be at the forefront of the transition by taking steps such as removing transaction charges on all digital payments made by customers to the government. The committee recommends that the Government, being the single largest participant in payments, take the lead on all aspects of digitization of payments.
- Committee has also asked RBI to set an **interchange rate for transaction** between customers and leave the MDR on competitive market pricing which would reduce the transaction cost for customers.
- Special impetus on **digitising mass volume channels** such as recurring bill payments, toll and ticket payments at public facilities and digital onboarding of khirana store merchants has also been recommended by the panel in order to achieve the targeted growth.
- The panel has also asked the government to set up **special risk mitigation and complaint registering digital portals**. A special data monitoring mechanism to garner granular district level data on consumer trends and payment behaviour has also been suggested by the committee for targeted intervention to improve the existing infrastructure.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 2. PERIODIC LABOUR FORCE SURVEY (PLFS)

### What to study?

- For prelims: key findings.
- For mains: concerns raised, challenges associated and what needs to be done?

**Context:** The latest edition of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) has been released.

### Key findings:

- The unemployment rate (UR) in both rural and urban India is at its **highest since 1972**.

- The unemployment rates among men and women in both rural and urban groups, are also the highest ever. **The increase in the UR is more than three times among rural men and more than double among rural women according to the usual status since 2011-12.**
- In urban areas, the UR among men is more than twice and has increased twice among women** since 2011-12. It is to be noted that the UR between 1972 and 2012 was almost static or did not have many differences (See Table 1). Besides, the UR rose sharply among youth of ages between 15-29 years and those who got better education.
- The unemployment rates in urban areas are higher than those in rural areas.** In rural areas, the UR is 5.3 per cent, whereas in urban areas, the UR is 7.8 per cent according to the usual status. The overall unemployment rate is 6.1 per cent in India according to the usual status. The rural employment rate is 8.5 per cent whereas the urban rate is 9.6 per cent. The overall unemployment rate is 8.9 per cent.
- In urban areas, the unemployment rates for females are higher than those for males.**
- The unemployment rate **among youth between 15 and 29 years** has risen sharply since 2011-12. **Among rural males and females,** the UR is almost three times since 2011-12, whereas among urban males and females, this rate is more than double.
- The UR has also sharply increased among those who are more educated. Since 2011-12, the UR among rural males has increased by almost three times, from 1.7 per cent to 5.7 per cent. Those who have higher degree of education and those who are completely not-literate have witnessed almost the same level of unemployment.
- Interestingly, **unemployment among rural not-literate females has reduced and among urban females, the number of those who are literate up to primary-level jobs, is the same as 2011-12.**
- Among social groups, the highest UR is among the 'General' or 'Others' category — 6.7 per cent.** This group is followed by Schedule Castes (6.3 per cent), Other Backward Classes (6 per cent) and Scheduled Tribes (4.3 per cent).
- Among religious groups, Christians have the highest UR in both urban and rural areas.** In rural areas, Christians have a UR of 7.4 per cent, Muslims have a UR of 6.5 per cent, Sikhs 6.3 per cent and Hindus 5.2 per cent.
- In urban areas, Christians have a UR of 11 per cent,** Sikhs 9.1 per cent, followed by Muslims 8.5 per cent and Hindus 7.6 per cent.

#### Background:

- The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation had constituted PLFS under the chairmanship of **Amitabh Kundu**. The data was collected by NSSO from July 2017 to June 2018. The survey was spread over 12,773 first-stage sampling units (7,014 villages and 5,759 urban blocks) covering 1,02,113 households (56,108 in rural areas and 46,005 in urban areas) and enumerating 4,33,339 persons (2,46,809 in rural areas and 1,86,530 in urban areas).

Sources: the Hindu.

## 3. ECONOMIC CENSUS

#### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: What is Economic Census, who conducts and coordinates, uses and significance.

**Context:** The 7th Economic Census -2019 is being conducted by MoSPI to provide disaggregated information on various operational and structural aspects of all establishments in the country.

- Implementing agency:** MoSPI has partnered with Common Service Centres, CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, a Special Purpose Vehicle under the MEITY as the implementing agency.

#### About Economic Censuses:

- Launched** in 1976 as a plan scheme.
- Coverage:** All entrepreneurial units in the country which are involved in any economic activities of either agricultural or non-agricultural sector which are engaged in production and/or distribution of goods and/or services not for the sole purpose of own consumption.
- Objective:** It provides detailed information on operational and other characteristics such as number of establishments, number of persons employed, source of finance, type of ownership etc.

- **Significance:** This information used for micro level/ decentralized planning and to assess contribution of various sectors of the economy in the gross domestic product (GDP).
- **Total Six Economic Censuses (EC) have been conducted till date.** First one was conducted in 1977 by CSO.

## 4. FISCAL PERFORMANCE INDEX (FPI) LAUNCHED BY CII

### What to study?

- For prelims: About CII, components of your PI.
- For mains: Significance and the need for such index.

**Context:** Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has launched a **Fiscal Performance Index (FPI)** to assess state and central budgets.

### Components of CII:

- The Index incorporates qualitative assessments of revenue expenditure, capital expenditure, revenues, fiscal prudence and the level of public debt.

### Key findings:

- The CII has used this index to analyse state and central budgets from 2004-05 to 2016-17.
- The study found that despite improvement a reduction in the fiscal deficit between FY13 and FY18, the overall performance of the budget has been remained steady with improvements only in FY16 and FY17.
- This is largely due to moderation in the revenue, capital expenditure and net tax revenues indices.
- The analysis also shows that the combine performance of all state budgets has improved despite worsening of fiscal deficit numbers because of improvements in revenue and capital expenditure indices.
- The study also points out that relatively high income states including Gujarat, Haryana and Maharashtra which are presumed to have good fiscal health because of low fiscal deficit to GDP ratio do not perform well on the composite FPI because of poor expenditure and revenue quality compared to other states.
- Other states including, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have done well on the FPI because of their good performance in revenue and capital expenditure indices.

### Need for FPI:

- A single criterion such as the 'fiscal deficit to GDP ratio' does not tell us anything about the quality of the Budget. Hence, the Government should use multiple indicators to measure the quality of Budgets at the Central and the State levels rather than a single indicator.

### Way ahead- recommendations from CII:

- the government should attempt to broaden the tax base, increase investments in education and healthcare as well as maintenance of assets and well as increase investments in infrastructure, affordable housing and encourage public sector undertakings to also increase capital expenditure by limiting dividends to the government.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 5. RBI ISSUES REVISED NORMS TO DEAL WITH STRESSED ASSETS

### What to study?

- For prelims: key highlights of the guidelines, about ICA.
- For mains: need for and significance of these guidelines.

**Context:** Following the quashing of its 'revised framework for resolution of stressed assets' by the Supreme Court in April, the Reserve Bank of India has issued a '**prudential framework for resolution of stressed assets**'.

### Highlights of the latest norms:

- The new framework gives lenders a breather from the **one-day default rule** whereby they had to draw up an resolution plan (RP) for implementation within 180 days of the first default.
- It gives lenders (scheduled commercial banks, all-India financial institutions and small finance banks) **30 days to review the borrower account on default**.

- During this review period, lenders may decide on the **resolution strategy**, including the nature of the RP and the approach for its implementation.
- Lenders may also choose to **initiate legal proceedings** for insolvency or recovery.
- The new circular is **also applicable to** small finance banks and systemically important non-deposit taking non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and deposit-taking NBFCs.
- In cases where the RP is to be implemented, all lenders have to enter into an **inter-creditor agreement (ICA)** for the resolution of stressed assets during the review period to provide for ground rules for finalisation and implementation of the RP in respect of borrowers with credit facilities from more than one lender.
- **Under the ICA**, any decision agreed to by the lenders representing 75 per cent of total outstanding credit facilities by value and 60 per cent by number will be **binding upon all the lenders**. In particular, the RPs will provide for payment which will not be less than the liquidation value due to the dissenting lenders.
- In cases where the aggregate exposure of a borrower to lenders (scheduled commercial banks, all-India financial institutions and small finance banks) is ₹2,000 crore and above, the **RP has to be implemented within 180 days from the end of the review period**, and the reference date has been set as June 7, 2019.
- In the case of borrowers in the ₹1,500 crore and above but less than ₹2,000 crore category, **January 1, 2020 has been set as the reference date for implementing the RP**. In the less than ₹1,500 crore category, **the RBI will announce the reference date in due course**.

#### **Additional provisions:**

- If the implementation of an RP crosses the stipulated 180 days from the end of the review period, the lenders have to make additional provisions of 20 per cent of the outstanding loan. If this timeline exceeds 365 days, they further have to make a provision of 15 per cent.
- These additional provisions are **over and above the provisions already held or the provisions required to be made as per the asset classification status of the borrower account**.

#### **What is Inter-Creditor Agreement (ICA)?**

- The inter-creditor agreement is aimed at the resolution of loan accounts with a size of ₹50 crore and above that are under the control of a group of lenders. It is part of the “**Sashakt**” plan approved by the government to address the problem of resolving bad loans.
- The agreement is based on a recommendation by the **Sunil Mehta committee** that looked into resolution of stressed assets.

Sources: the Hindu.

**(Q) An agency like PARA is much needed to alleviate the NPA issue being faced by Indian banks. Discuss.**

## **6. CRISIS IN NBFC**

- **Context:** The woes of non-banking finance companies and housing finance companies continue to reverberate through the financial system.

#### **Present concerns:**

- Financial conditions have worsened with spreads of NBFC bonds rising significantly in the recent past. Lenders are re-evaluating their risk.

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

- RBI should open a special borrowing window to provide liquidity to NBFCs/HFCs.
- RBI, under sections 17 and 18 of the RBI act, can provide short term liquidity to NBFCs, till financial conditions normalise.
- It could also nudge banks to increase their lending to NBFCs.

#### **Challenges ahead:**

- Risk-averse banks may be unwilling to lend.
- There is difficulty in differentiating between illiquid NBFCs from those that are insolvent.

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

- NBFC crisis could accentuate contagion risk in the financial sector. Cabinet committee on investment and growth must address it.

- And, the RBI could identify systemically important NBFCs and backstop them through banks.

## 7. UNEMPLOYMENT RELATED ISSUES

- **Context:** India's problem is not unemployment — this has bounced in the low and narrow range of 4-7 per cent for 50 years — but employed poverty.

### Challenges:

- Larger percentage of workforce in informal sector.
- India's labour laws have an insane **reverse payroll wedge** — employers are forced to deduct 40 per cent-plus of gross wages for employees with monthly wages up to Rs 25,000.
- Our skill development system faces the difficult trinity of cost, quality and quantity combining with challenging changes to the world of education.
- Apprenticeships are the future of learning, yet India only has 5 lakh apprentices.
- India's credit to GDP ratio is 50 per cent (rich countries are at 100 per cent).

### What needs to be done?

- Massive ease-of-doing business that rationalises (cuts down ministries, compliances, and filings), simplifies (adopts a universal enterprise number and one labour code) and digitises (adopts a paperless, presenceless and cashless process for all employer compliance by shifting from uploads to websites to an API architecture with straight-through-processing).
- Employee contribution must be made optional, employees must choose who handles their employer contributions, and social security programme fees must be capped to their costs.
- To improve Apprenticeship, the two central government initiatives, Regional Directorates Of Apprenticeship Training (RDAT) and Board of Apprentice Training (BOAT) could be merged.
- An effective online matching platforms could be launched and the regulatory legitimacy of apprenticeships could be reinforced as classrooms to overcome the trust deficit with employers.
- It's also time to enable degree-linked apprentices (skill universities await clearance for linking apprentices to degrees via distance and online delivery).
- There must also be a focus on financialisation reform and sustainable competition.
- A higher credit to GDP ratio needs more bank licences, fixing the governance at nationalised banks, blunting the asset liability mismatch at NBFCs (some irrationally funded 30 per cent of their balance sheet with commercial paper) and restoring the sanctity of the 270-day IBC bankruptcy deadline.
- We should consider making labour a state subject and must continue the decentralisation of funds, functions and functionaries to states while simultaneously creating accountability, capabilities and resources in city governance.

## 8. RBI PANEL ON ECONOMIC CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

### What to study?

- For Prelims: Meaning of Economic Capital Framework, arrangements for sharing of surplus between RBI and the government.
- For Mains: Issues over RBI autonomy, need for transfer of surplus and the need for review of existing arrangements.

**Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)-appointed committee to review the economic capital framework of the central bank has failed to arrive at a consensus during a recently held meeting leading to a delay in finalising its report.

### Difference of opinion:

- The main difference of opinion has arisen between the panel members and the government's representative on the panel **over the transfer of the RBI's 'excess' capital reserves**.
- While most panel members were in favour of a **phased transfer of the RBI's capital reserves** to the government over the years, the government's view is for a **one-time transfer**.

## Background:

1) THE RBI'S RESERVES		2) HOW DOES RBI BUILD ITS RESERVES?	
Various Funds (₹ lakh crore)			
		FY17	FY18
Contingency fund		2.28	2.32
Currency and gold revaluation account	5.3	6.92	
Asset development fund	0.23	0.23	
Investment revaluation account-rupee	0.57	0.13	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8.38</b>	<b>9.6</b>

**1** RBI earns income from:

- 1] Interest on government bonds held for conducting open market operations
- 2] Fees from government's market borrowing programme
- 3] Income from investment in foreign currency assets

**2** Earnings retained after giving dividends to govt are parked in reserves

**3** Revaluation of foreign assets and gold goes to revaluation reserves

- RBI had constituted a panel on economic capital framework. It was headed by Ex-RBI governor **Bimal Jalan**.
- The expert panel on RBI's economic capital framework was formed **to address the issue of RBI reserves**—one of the sticking points between the central bank and the government.

## What's the issue?

- The government has been insisting that the central bank hand over its surplus reserves amid a shortfall in revenue collections. Access to the funds will allow the government to meet deficit targets, infuse capital into weak banks to boost lending and fund welfare programmes.

## What is economic capital framework?

- Economic capital framework refers to the **risk capital required by the central bank while taking into account different risks**. The economic capital framework reflects the capital that an institution requires or needs to hold as a counter against unforeseen risks or events or losses in the future.

## Why it needs a fix?

- Existing economic capital framework which governs the RBI's capital requirements and terms for the transfer of its surplus to the government is based on a **conservative assessment of risk by the central bank** and that a review of the framework would result in excess capital being freed, which the RBI can then share with the government.
- The government believes that RBI is sitting on much higher reserves than it actually needs to tide over financial emergencies that India may face.
- Some central banks around the world (like US and UK) keep 13% to 14% of their assets as a reserve compared to **RBI's 27% and some (like Russia) more than that**.
- Economists in the past have argued for RBI releasing 'extra' capital that can be put to productive use by the government. The **Malegam Committee** estimated the excess (in 2013) at Rs 1.49 lakh crore.

## What is the nature of the arrangement between the government and RBI on the transfer of surplus or profits?

- Although RBI was promoted as a private shareholders' bank in 1935 with a paid up capital of Rs 5 crore, the government **nationalised RBI in January 1949**, making the sovereign its "owner". What the central bank does, therefore, is transfer the "surplus" — that is, the **excess of income over expenditure** — to the government, in accordance with **Section 47 (Allocation of Surplus Profits) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**.

## Does the RBI pay tax on these earnings or profits?

- No. Its statute provides exemption from paying income-tax or any other tax, including wealth tax.

## Why RBI needs excess reserves?

- The RBI needs adequate capital reserves for monetary policy operations, currency fluctuations, possible fall in value of bonds, sterilisation costs related to open-market operations, credit risks arising from the lender of last resort function and other risks from unexpected increase in its expenditure.
- The RBI has maintained the view that it needs to have a stronger balance sheet to deal with a possible crisis and external shocks.

Sources: the Hindu.



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## 9. 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.
- An apex-level FSDC is not a statutory body.

### 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).
- Recently, 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.

## 10. THE FORGOTTEN FUNDS

### What is a cess?

- A cess is levied on the tax payable and not on the taxable income. In a sense, for the taxpayer, it is equivalent to a surcharge on tax.
- A cess can be levied on both direct and indirect taxes. The revenue obtained from income tax, corporation tax, and indirect taxes can be allocated for various purposes.
- The proceeds of all taxes and cesses are credited in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI), an account of the Government of India.

### Difference between tax and cess?

- Unlike a tax, a cess is levied to meet a specific purpose; its proceeds cannot be spent on any kind of government expenditure. While the tax proceeds are shared with the States and Union Territories according to the guidelines by the Finance Commission, the cess proceeds need not be shared with them.
- Recent examples of cess are: infrastructure cess on motor vehicles, clean environment cess, Krishi Kalyan cess (for the improvement of agriculture and welfare of farmers), and education cess.

### Education cess:

- The education cess, at 2%, which was first proposed in 2004, was aimed at improving primary education. In 2007, an additional cess of 1% was introduced to fund secondary and higher education (SHEC). And recently, in the 2019 Union Budget, a 4% health and education cess was announced which incorporates the previous 3% education cess as well as an additional 1% to provide for the health of rural families.

### How is it utilised?

- In order to utilise the cess proceeds lying in the CFI, the government has to create a dedicated fund. As long as a dedicated fund is not created, the cess proceeds remain unutilised.

- The dedicated fund for primary education is the '**Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh**', or PSK, (created in October 2005, a year after the cess was introduced) while that for higher and secondary education is the '**Madhyamik and Uchchatar Shiksha Kosh**' (set up in August 2017).

**Present concerns:**

- It is shocking that **Madhyamik and Uchchatar Shiksha Kosh** has remained dormant as of March 2018.
- Moreover, data from the 2017-18 annual financial audit of government finances conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) show that Rs. 94,036 crore of **SHEC proceeds is lying unutilised in the CFI**.
- The degree of economic injustice becomes sharper when the **unspent account is seen in conjunction with the Central government's expenditure on education**; for example, in 2017-18, the public expenditure on school and higher education was estimated to be Rs. 79,435.95 crore. In other words, the cumulative unutilised SHEC funds far exceeded the expenditure on both school and higher education for the year 2017-18.

**Need of the hour:**

- Since a cess is introduced with a specific purpose, it is completely unjustified when the proceeds remain unutilised for so many years. Moreover, in the current context of self-imposed fiscal discipline and the consequent reduction of public expenditure, the opportunity cost of unutilised education cess proceeds is significantly high. Finally, it is imperative that the government immediately begins utilising cess proceeds and also publishes an annual account of the manner in which they have been utilised.
- To make the point clear, the proceeds from the education cess cannot be used for cleaning the environment and vice versa.

## 11. NATIONAL ANTI-PROFITEERING AUTHORITY (NAA)

**What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: NAA- establishment, composition, functions and significance.

**Context:** The tenure of National Anti-Profiteering Authority has been extended by 2 years.

**About NAA:**

- The National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) has been constituted under **Section 171 of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017**.
- It is to ensure the reduction in rate of tax or the benefit of input tax credit is passed on to the recipient by way of commensurate reduction in prices.
- The Authority's core function** is to ensure that the benefits of the reduction in GST rates on goods and services made by GST Council and proportional change in the Input tax credit passed on to the ultimate consumers and recipient respectively by way of reduction in the prices by the suppliers.

**Composition:**

- The National Anti-Profiteering Authority shall be headed by a senior officer of the level of a Secretary to the Government of India and shall have four technical members from the Centre and/or the States.

**Powers and functions of the authority:**

- In the event the National Anti-Profiteering Authority confirms the necessity of applying anti-profiteering measures, it has the power to order the business concerned to reduce its prices or return the undue benefit availed along with interest to the recipient of the goods or services.
- If the undue benefit cannot be passed on to the recipient, it can be ordered to be deposited in the Consumer Welfare Fund.
- In extreme cases the National Anti-Profiteering Authority can impose a penalty on the defaulting business entity and even order the cancellation of its registration under GST.

## 12. COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (CMS) BY RBI

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: CMS- need for, features and significance.

**What is it?** Launched by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Complaint Management System (CMS) is a software application to facilitate RBI's grievance redressal process.

- Aim: to improve customer experience in timely redressal of grievances.

### How it works?

- Customers can lodge complaints against any regulated entity with public interface such as commercial banks, urban cooperative banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs). The complaint would be directed to the appropriate office of the Ombudsman/Regional Office of the RBI.

### Benefits:

- The application improves transparency by keeping the complainants informed through auto-generated acknowledgements and enabling them to track the status of their complaints and file appeals online against the decisions of the Ombudsmen, where applicable.
- Complainants can also voluntarily share feedback on their experience in obtaining redressal.

### Need:

- Sustaining the confidence of consumers in banks and other financial service providers (FSPs) through prompt and effective grievance redressal, together with empowering customers through education is pivotal for maintaining trust in the banking system.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

## 1. IMD COMPETITIVENESS RANKINGS

### What to study?

- For prelims: about the World Competitiveness Rankings- features, criteria and key findings.
- For mains: India's relative performance and measures needed to boost the competitiveness in the country.

**Context:** The 2019 edition of the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) Business School World Competitiveness Rankings has been released.

### About IMD World Competitiveness Rankings:

- started in 1989, the report ranks 63 economies on 235 indicators which are incorporated from each of these economies.
- The indicators are used to evaluate country's ability to foster an environment where enterprises can achieve desirable sustainable growth, generate employment and increase its citizen's welfare.
- IMD takes into account a wide range of statistics and hard data such as unemployment, GDP and government spending on health and education as well as soft data from an international business executive opinion survey on topics such as social cohesion, globalisation and corruption.

### The economies are judged in four categories:

- Economic Performance
- Infrastructure
- Government Efficiency
- Business Efficiency.

### Performance of India:

- India has moved up one place to rank 43<sup>rd</sup> (Previously: 44th position in 2018, 45th in 2017 and 41st in 2016.)

- This improved rank is result of India's robust economic growth, a large labour force and its huge market size.

#### **Global findings:**

- topped by Singapore. It has grabbed top position for the first time in nine years. In 2018 it stood at third rank.
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) has held onto its second position same as last year.
- The US slipped to the third place.
- Asia-Pacific region has emerged as a global beacon with 11 out of 14 economies either improved or holded onto their ground.

Sources: the Hindu.

## **2. RECIPROCAL TRADE AGREEMENTS**

- **Why in news?** Commerce Minister emphasizes on reciprocal market access for Indian goods.
- Countries use bilateral/regional trade agreements to increase market access and expand trade in foreign markets. These agreements are called **reciprocal trade agreements (RTAs)** because members grant special advantages to each other.
- **RTAs include** many types of agreements, such as preferential arrangements, free trade agreements, customs unions, and common markets, in which members agree to open their markets to each other's exports by lowering trade barriers.
- **Need:** They have become an increasingly prominent feature of the multilateral trading system in recent years, in part, because of stalled global negotiations taking place under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Many observers believe that RTAs deepen market integration and complement efforts by the WTO to liberalize international markets. While acknowledging that RTAs can open up markets, other observers contend that these agreements also distort trade and discriminate against non-member countries.

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

## **1. SHANTA KUMAR COMMITTEE**

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

- For prelims: about FCI, key recommendations.
- For mains: FCI- issues, need for reforms and measures to revamp.

**Context:** Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Shri Ram Vilas Paswan lays down the future roadmap for Food Corporation of India (FCI).

- He stated that primacy will be given to ensuring that the functioning of FCI is streamlined and fast paced as per recommendations of the **Shanta Kumar Committee**.

#### **Background:**

- The government had set up a six-member committee to suggest restructuring or unbundling of FCI to improve its financial management and operational efficiency in procurement, storage and distribution of food grains.

#### **Important recommendations made:**

- **Reduce the number of beneficiaries under the Food Security Act**—from the current 67 per cent to 40 per cent.
- **Allow private players to procure and store food grains.**
- **Stop bonuses on minimum support price (MSP)** paid by states to farmers, and adopt cash transfer system so that MSP and food subsidy amounts can be directly transferred to the accounts of farmers and food security beneficiaries.
- **FCI should involve itself in full-fledged grains procurement only in those states which are poor in procurement.** In the case of those states which are performing well, like Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, the states should do the procurement.

- **Abolishing levy rice:** Under levy rice policy, government buys certain percentage of rice (varies from 25 to 75 per cent in states) from the mills compulsorily, which is called levy rice. Mills are allowed to sell only the remainder in the open market.
- **Deregulate fertiliser sector** and provide cash fertiliser subsidy of Rs 7,000 per hectare to farmers.
- **outsource of stocking of grains:** The committee calls for setting up of negotiable warehouse receipt (NWR) system. In the new system, farmers can deposit their produce in these registered warehouses and get 80 per cent of the advance from bank against their produce on the basis of MSP.
- **Clear and transparent liquidation policy for buffer stock:** FCI should be given greater flexibility in doing business; it should offload surplus stock in open market or export, as per need.

**(Q)** Some argue that the report of the Shanta Kumar committee on food management contains several cogent recommendations and they should be implemented to make PDS efficient. Analyse these recommendations and comment if they should indeed be implemented.

## 2. RASHTRIYA GOKUL MISSION

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Rashtriya Gokul Mission – features and significance, significance of the dairy sector.

**Context:** Funds have been mobilized under **Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)** for setting up of 21 Gokul Grams as Integrated Cattle Development Centres.

### About Rashtriya Gokul Mission:

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

### Implementation:

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

### Gokul Gram:

- Funds under the scheme will be allocated for the establishment of Integrated Indigenous Cattle Centres viz “**Gokul Gram**”.
- **Gokul Grams will be established** in the native breeding tracts and ii) near metropolitan cities for housing the urban cattle.
- Gokul Gram will act as **Centres for development of Indigenous Breeds and a dependable source for supply of high genetic breeding stock** to the farmers in the breeding tract.
- The Gokul Gram will be **self sustaining and will generate economic resources from sale of A2 milk** (A2 milk is cow's milk that mostly lacks a form of  $\beta$ -casein proteins called A1 and instead has mostly the A2 form), organic manure, vermi-composting, urine distillates, and production of electricity from bio gas for in house consumption and sale of animal products.
- The Gokul Gram will also function as **state of the art in situ training centre for Farmers, Breeders and MAITRI's**.
- The Gokul Gram will maintain milch and unproductive animals in the ratio of **60:40** and will have the capacity to maintain about 1000 animals. Nutritional requirements of the animals will be provided in the Gokul Gram through in house fodder production.
- Gokul Gram will also be **set up near to metropolitan cities for managing urban cattle**. Metropolitan Gokul Gram will focus on genetic upgradation of urban cattle.

### 3. JAL HI JEEVAN HAI

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features and significance of the scheme, the issue of water scarcity and measures needed to avert the problem.

**Context:** The farmers of northern districts of Haryana have shown a keen interest in crop diversification scheme called '**Jal Hi Jeevan Hai**' of the Haryana government which promotes to diversify paddy area into maize, arhar dal (pigeon pea) and soybean.

#### About the scheme:

- The scheme is for **replacement of Paddy by Maize and other crops in 7 dark zone blocks**.
- The target is **to diversify around 50000 Hectare area from this season**.

#### Need:

- Due to continuous Paddy growing in the State about 1 mtr. water table is depleting per year. **Crop diversification through the above scheme is intended to promote technological innovation with sustainable agriculture and enable farmers to choose crop alternatives for increasing productivity and income.**

**The root causes of this over-exploitation of water are because of the following:**

- A continuous cultivation of water guzzling crops in rice wheat cropping system.
- Ground water withdrawal has outpaced its recharge that take place from annual precipitation.
- The method of irrigation in the rice and wheat crops results in excess watering and wastage of water.

#### Objectives of the scheme:

- To reduce the area of water guzzling crops in Haryana
- Induction of technological innovation for establishing alternate crops for sustainable agriculture.
- To introduce Resource conservation,
- To restore ground water table
- To control soil fatigue because of rice-wheat cycle and introduce soil conservative and micronutrients balanced crop for the soil.
- To shift the farmer from paddy wheat cycle and give more profitable crop options to the farmers
- Ensure purchase of produce of this diversified area through MSP and also give farmer input support and cover his risk by insuring them completely under PMFBY by paying their insurance premium by the Government with an overall objective of increasing farmers' income which will step forward in achieving 'doubling of farmers' income goal'.

#### Incentives Provided By The Government:

- Rs 2000/- per acre for the farmer.
- High quality and high yield hybrid seed will be provided to these selected farmers on HSDC counters free of cost.
- The selected farmers will be covered by State Government by paying the farmer's premium share also for Maize Crop under PMFBY.
- The produce of these farmers will be purchased by the state Government at MSP.

Sources: TOI.

### 4. BEEKEEPING DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

#### What to study?

- For prelims: India's rank in honey production, key recommendations.
- For mains: Challenges faced by the industry and what needs to be done to realise the full potential of the industry.

**Context:** Beekeeping Development Committee under EAC-PM releases its report.

**Background:**

- The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister set up a Beekeeping Development Committee under the **Chairmanship of Professor Bibek Debroy**.
- BDC was constituted with the objective of **identifying ways of advancing beekeeping in India**, that can help in improving agricultural productivity, enhancing employment generation, augmenting nutritional security and sustaining biodiversity.

**Some of the recommendations in the report include:**

- Recognizing honeybees as inputs to agriculture and considering landless Beekeepers as farmers.
- Plantation of bee friendly flora at appropriate places and engaging women self-help groups in managing such plantations.
- Institutionalizing the National Bee Board and rechristening it as the Honey and Pollinators Board of India under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. Such a body would engage in advancing beekeeping through multiple mechanisms such as setting up of new Integrated Bee Development Centres, strengthening the existing ones, creating a honey price stabilization fund and collection of data on important aspects of apiculture.
- Recognition of apiculture as a subject for advanced research under the aegis of Indian Council for Agricultural Research.
- Training and development of beekeepers by state governments.
- Development of national and regional infrastructure for storage, processing and marketing of honey and other bee products.
- Simplifying procedures and specifying clear standards for ease of exporting honey and other bee products.

**Significance of Beekeeping:**

- As per **Food and Agricultural Organization** database, in 2017-18, **India ranked eighth in the world in terms of honey production** (64.9 thousand tonnes) while **China stood first** with a production level of 551 thousand tonnes.
- Further, **beekeeping can be an important contributor in achieving the 2022 target of doubling farmer incomes**.

**What needs to be done?**

- **Expand the scope:** Beekeeping cannot be restricted to honey and wax only, products such as pollen, propolis, royal jelly and bee venom are also marketable and can greatly help Indian farmers.
- **Increase in area:** Based on the area under cultivation in India and bee forage crops, India has a potential of about 200 million bee colonies as against 3.4 million bee colonies today. Increasing the number of bee colonies will not only increase the production of bee-related products but will boost overall agricultural and horticultural productivity.

**Way ahead:**

- India's recent efforts to improve the state of beekeeping have helped increase the volume of honey exports from 29.6 to 51.5 thousand tonnes between 2014-15 and 2017-18 (as per data from National Bee Board and Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare). However, challenges persist and a lot more can be done to enhance the scope and scale of beekeeping.

## 5. FALL ARMYWORM (FAW)

**What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: FAW- causes, effects, concerns and measures needed.

**Context:** The Department has taken note of Fall Army Worm (FAW) infestation in the country. The infestation has been found primarily on maize and to a small extent on Ragi and Sorghum.

### Life cycle:

- In its **45-day-long lifecycle**, the female moth of this pest lays around 1,500-2,000 eggs on the top of leaves. In the roughly 30-day larval stage, the caterpillar goes through six stages of development or instars.
- This is the most dangerous part of the lifecycle as the **caterpillar feeds on leaves, whorls, stalks and flowers of crop plants**. Once this stage is completed, the growing moth pupates in the soil — for 8-9 days in summer and 20-30 days in cold weather. The nocturnal egg-laying adults live for about 10 days, during which they migrate long distances.

### What makes FAW dangerous?

- It is the **polyphagous** (ability to feed on different kinds of food) nature of the caterpillar and the ability of the adult moth to fly more than 100 km per night.
- Given its **ability to feed on multiple crops** — nearly 80 different crops ranging from maize to sugarcane — FAW can attack multiple crops.
- Similarly, it can spread across large tracts of land as it can fly over large distances. This explains the quick spread of the pest across India.

### What is FAW?

- A native of the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the Americas, FAW was first detected in the African continent in 2016. Since then, it has spread to other countries such as China, Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.
- In India: It was reported in India for the first-time last year, when it affected crops in Karnataka. Within a span of only six months, almost 50 per cent of the country, including Mizoram, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal, has reported FAW infestations.

### How FAW affects output?

- Till date, India has reported FAW infestation on maize, sorghum (jowar) and sugarcane crops. Maize has been the worst affected as most maize-growing states in southern India have been affected by the pest.
- FAW infestation and drought has led to a shortfall of nearly 5 lakh tonnes in output, prompting the central government to allow import of maize under concessional duty. Maize is the third most important cereal crop grown in the country and the infestation, if not checked in time, can wreck havoc.

*Topics: Infrastructure related issues.*

## 1. IRENA REPORT ‘RENEWABLE POWER GENERATION COSTS IN 2018’

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Key findings of the report, challenges and concerns raised, ways and measures to address them.

**Context:** International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) has released a report titled ‘Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2018’.

- For the study, IRENA analysed eight major solar PV markets from 2010 to 2018. These countries include China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US.

### Key findings:

- **India is now the lowest-cost producer of solar power globally.** Total installed costs of utility-scale solar PV in India is as low as \$793 per kilowatt (kW) in 2018 which is 27 per cent lower than for projects commissioned in 2017. Costs have dropped by 80 per cent in India.
- **Canada has the highest cost** at \$2,427 per kW.
- Renewable energy sources have witnessed **cost decline globally**.

### Reasons behind the low cost:

- India has high solar potential that leads to **improved asset utilization**.

### About IRENA:

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation mandated to facilitate cooperation, advance knowledge, and promote the adoption and sustainable use of renewable energy**.
- It is the **first international organisation to focus exclusively on renewable energy**, addressing needs in both industrialized and developing countries.
- It was **founded in 2009** & its statute entered into force on 8 July 2010 and is **headquartered in Masdar City, Abu Dhabi**.
- IRENA is an **official United Nations observer**.

- The country imports majority of hardware for installation from China which is cheaper and helps cut the cost by a huge margin.
- As the cost of land and labor is cheaper than the rest of the world, it also contributes to low-cost production of solar power in India.

Sources: down to earth.

## 2. BS – VI NORMS

### What to study?

- For prelims: what are BS Norms, components and comparison between BS – IV norms and the BS- VI?
- For mains: Need for upgradation, role of new norms in reducing pollution.

**Context:** International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT) has released India's first Type Approval Certificate (TAC) for Bharat Stage – VI (BS – VI) norms for the two wheeler segment.

- Last year, ICAT issued the approval for BS –VI norms to M/s Volvo Eicher Commercial Vehicles for the Heavy Commercial Vehicle segment which was also the first in its segment in India.

### Difference between BS-IV and the new BS-VI:

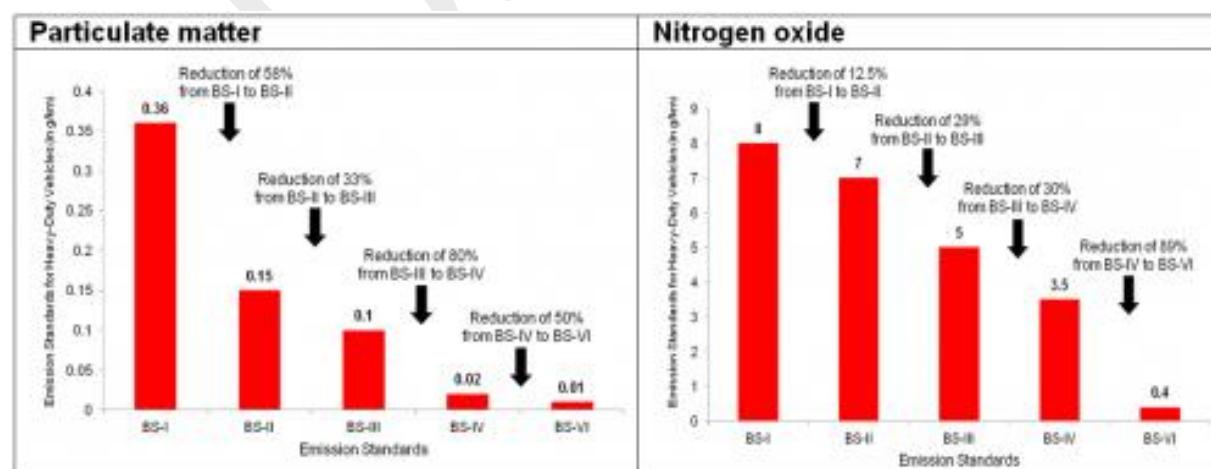
- The major difference in standards between the existing BS-IV and the new BS-VI auto fuel norms is the presence of sulphur.
- The newly introduced fuel is estimated to reduce the amount of sulphur released by 80%, from 50 parts per million to 10 ppm.
- As per the analysts, the emission of NOx (nitrogen oxides) from diesel cars is also expected to reduce by nearly 70% and 25% from cars with petrol engines.

### Background:

- Bharat Stage norms are the automotive emission norms which the automotive manufacturers have to comply to sell their vehicles in India. These norms are applicable to all two wheelers, three wheelers, fourwheelers and construction equipment vehicles.
- To curb growing menace of air pollution through the vehicles emission, the Government of India has decided to leapfrog from the exiting BS – IV norms to the BS- VI, thereby skipping the BS – V norms, and to implement the BS – VI norms with effect from 1st April 2020. Only those vehicles will be sold and registered in India from 1st April 2020 onwards, which comply to these norms. The norms are stringent and at par with global standards.

### About ICAT:

- ICAT is the premier testing and certification agency authorized by Ministry of Road Transport and Highways for providing testing and certification services to the vehicle and component manufacturers in India and abroad.



### 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.

### 3. DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISM FOR SOLAR/WIND SECTOR

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: DRM- need, significance, composition and functions.

**Context:** In a major decision to facilitate the solar and wind energy projects, the government has approved a proposal to set up a **Dispute Resolution Committee** to consider the unforeseen disputes between solar/wind power developers and SECI/NTPC, beyond contractual agreement.

- Significance:** The move will give further fillip to the smooth implementation of solar/wind energy projects in India. It fulfils a long pending demand of the industry to resolve expeditiously, unforeseen disputes that may arise beyond the scope of Contractual Agreements.

#### Need:

- The Solar and Wind Industry have been demanding setting up of Dispute Resolution Mechanism by MNRE for quite some time, to resolve expeditiously, unforeseen disputes that may arise beyond the scope of Contractual Agreements between solar power developers / wind power developers and SECI/ NTPC.
- The issue was considered and it was felt that there is need to erect a transparent, unbiased Dispute Resolution Mechanism, consisting of an independent, transparent and unbiased Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC), for resolving the unforeseen disputes that may arise in implementation of contractual agreements and also for dealing with issues which are beyond the scope of Contractual Agreements between solar power developers/ wind power developers and SECI / NTPC.

#### Composition and eligibility:

- A **three member Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC)** will be set up with the approval of Hon'ble Minister (NRE), consisting of eminent persons of impeccable integrity.
- The **upper age** for the DRC members shall be **70 years**.
- The Committee members of DRC shall be **chosen from the eminent persons located in NCR of Delhi so as to avoid expenditure on Air Travel & accommodation**.

#### Scope:

- The mechanism of Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) will be applicable for all solar/ wind Schemes/ Programmes/ Projects being implemented through/ by SECI/ NTPC.

#### The DRC will consider following kinds of cases:

- All cases of appeal against decisions given by SECI on Extension of Time requests based on terms of contract:
- All requests of Extension of Time not covered under the terms of contract.
- All such cases referred to it, including the cases where the developer is not satisfied with the decision of SECI/NTPC and it decides to appeal after paying the required fee.

#### Final decision:

- The recommendations of the 'Dispute Resolution Committee' (DRC) along with MNRE's observations, will be placed before Hon'ble Minister (NRE) for final decision. The Ministry shall examine and put up such recommendations to Minister (NRE) with the comments of IFD within twenty one (21) days of receipt of recommendation from the DRC.
- To arrive at any decision, Committee will be free to interact with the relevant parties of the case and shall record their views. For presenting the case before the DRC, no lawyers shall be permitted.

## 4. KALESWARAM PROJECT

### What to study?

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

**Context:** The world's largest irrigation and drinking water system—Kaleshwaram Multipurpose Lift Irrigation Project—was recently inaugurated by Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao.

### What's the project?

- The Kaleshwaram project is an off-shoot of the original **Pranahitha-Chevella Lift Irrigation Scheme** taken up by the Congress government in 2007 when Andhra Pradesh was not divided.
- After the formation of Telangana in 2014, the TRS government redesigned the project on the ground that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision — only about 16.5 tmc ft.
- After conducting a highly advanced **Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey** for a couple of months, the government separated the original component serving the Adilabad area as the **Pranahitha project** and **renamed the rest as Kaleshwaram** by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system based on the data of availability of water at different locations along the course of the Godavari and its tributaries.

### Impact:

- The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about 148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days. The project is designed to irrigate 7,38,851 hectares (over 18.47 lakh acres) uplands in the erstwhile districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy.

### What's unique?

- According to engineers, KLIP has many unique features, including the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia, running up to 81 km, between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir. The project would also utilise the highest capacity pumps, up to 139 MW, in the country to lift water.

Sources: the hindu.

## 5. NATIONAL FREIGHT INDEX

### What to study?

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

**Context:** In its bid to bring transparency in the road-freight marketplace, Gurgaon-based tech-enabled logistics start-up **Rivigo** has launched **National Freight Index (NFI)** that will provide live freight rates for different lanes and vehicles across the country.

### About NFI:

- This **first-of-its-kind barometer** of the road freight market in India is based on a **Rivigo rate exchange**.
- NFI gives a **live spot rate on over 7 million lane and vehicle type combinations in the country**.
- NFI offers an **aggregated picture of both live rates and historical trends of spot price movements in the road freight industry**.
- The index is represented in **two main forms**: In terms of actual freight rates condensed to INR per ton-km and in terms of relative movement with respect to a base month.
- Both the index and the exchange are based on **Rivigo's machine learning and economics powered pricing algorithms**, which are continuously improving on accuracy.
- The rates on the exchange and index are computed using millions of data points from historical transactions, current market dynamics, micro market insights and other factors – with the ultimate purpose of giving a **fair and precise representation of the state of the spot market in the country**.

### **Significance and the need for NFI:**

- In the existing logistics market structure, there are high inefficiencies due to **information asymmetry**, which leads to a great loss of value.
- NFI will enable unrestricted access and sharing of freight rate information. This will bring transparency in the market and propel the logistics sector towards efficiencies and growth.

### **Background:**

- The Indian road freight market for 2018 is estimated to be in the range of USD 150-160 billion. About USD 130-140 billion of this is the Full Truck Load (FTL) market. Within this, Rivigo estimates that the spot freight market is about USD 110-130 billion and is growing at 9%-10% per year.

Sources: the Hindu.

## **6. NATIONAL POLICY ON BIOFUELS – 2018**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims: National Biofuel Policy- key features, classification of biofuels.
- For Mains: Biofuels- significance, policies for their promotion and challenges therein.

**Context:** The National Policy on Biofuels-2018 approved by the Government envisages an indicative **target of 20% blending of ethanol in petrol and 5% blending of bio-diesel in diesel by 2030**.

### **National Policy on biofuels- salient features:**

1. **Categorization:** The Policy categorises biofuels as “**Basic Biofuels**” viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and “Advanced Biofuels” – Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.
2. **Scope of raw materials:** The Policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.
3. **Protection to farmers:** Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.
4. **Viability gap funding:** With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.
5. **Boost to biodiesel production:** The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.

### **Expected benefits:**

- **Import dependency:** The policy aims at reducing import dependency.
- **Cleaner environment:** By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be further reduction in Green House Gas emissions.
- **Health benefits:** Prolonged reuse of Cooking Oil for preparing food, particularly in deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. Used Cooking Oil is a potential feedstock for biodiesel and its use for making biodiesel will prevent diversion of used cooking oil in the food industry.
- **Employment Generation:** One 100klpd 2G bio refinery can contribute 1200 jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.
- **Additional Income to Farmers:** By adopting 2G technologies, agricultural residues/waste which otherwise are burnt by the farmers can be converted to ethanol and can fetch a price for these waste if a market is developed for the same.

### **Significance of Biofuels:**

- Globally, biofuels have caught the attention in last decade and it is imperative to keep up with the pace of developments in the field of biofuels. Biofuels in India are of strategic importance as it augers well with the

ongoing initiatives of the Government such as Make in India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill Development and offers great opportunity to integrate with the ambitious targets of doubling of Farmers Income, Import Reduction, Employment Generation, Waste to Wealth Creation.

#### Classification of Biofuels:

- **1st generation biofuels** are also called conventional biofuels. They are made from things like sugar, starch, or vegetable oil. Note that these are all food products. Any biofuel made from a feedstock that can also be consumed as a human food is considered a first generation biofuel.
- **2nd generation biofuels** are produced from sustainable feedstock. The sustainability of a feedstock is defined by its availability, its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on land use, and by its potential to threaten the food supply. No second generation biofuel is also a food crop, though certain food products can become second generation fuels when they are no longer useful for consumption. Second generation biofuels are often called “advanced biofuels.”
- **3rd generation biofuels** are biofuel derived from algae. These biofuels are given their own separate class because of their unique production mechanism and their potential to mitigate most of the drawbacks of 1st and 2nd generation biofuels.

**(Q)** Discuss the importance of biofuels for India? Critically examine whether the national policy on biofuels will help India unlock its biofuel potential?

## 7. SISTER-CITY AGREEMENT BETWEEN KOBE AND AHMEDABAD

- **Context:** In a bid to cultivate, promote and enhance opportunities on business, academic and cultural fronts between Kobe in Japan and Ahmedabad in Gujarat, India, a **sister-city agreement** has been inked between the two cities.

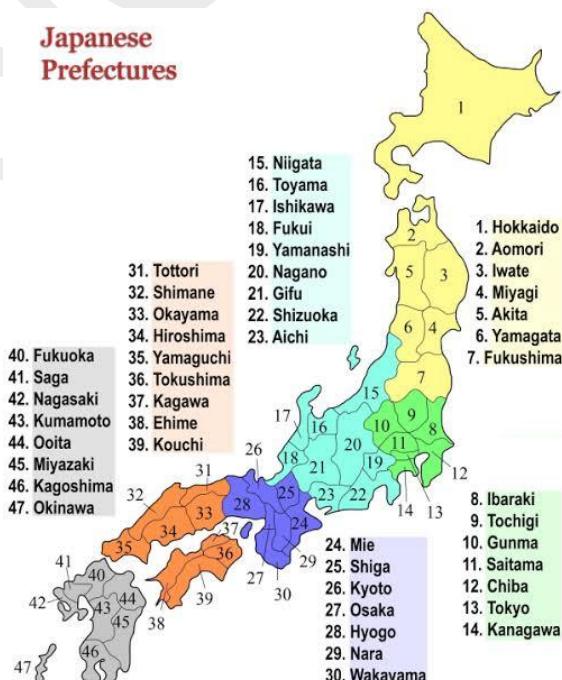
#### Significance:

- This agreement will formalize the relationship between the two cities, both of which are unique in their own ways. While Kobe is the Creative Design City of Asia, **Ahmedabad is India's first World Heritage City**.
- After the agreement, a plan will be laid out on creating more opportunities for cooperation between the two cities on the academic, cultural as well as business fronts.

#### Facts:

- Kobe is located in the **Hyogo Prefecture** in Japan. PM Narendra Modi and Japanese PM Shinzo Abe have also inked a **sister-state agreement for Gujarat and Hyogo Prefecture**.

Sources: the Hindu.



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

## 1. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, THE LAW AND THE FUTURE

**Context:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) has arrived in our everyday lives. For eg:

- In February, the Kerala police inducted a robot for police work.
- The same month, Chennai got its second robot-themed restaurant, where robots not only serve as waiters but also interact with customers in English and Tamil.
- In Ahmedabad, in December 2018, a cardiologist performed the world's first in-human telerobotic coronary intervention on a patient nearly 32 km away.

**Concerns:**

- AI has several positive applications, as seen in these examples. But the **capability of AI systems to learn from experience and to perform autonomously for humans** makes AI the most disruptive and self-transformative technology of the 21st century.
- Therefore, **if AI is not regulated properly, it is bound to have unmanageable implications.**

**Challenges of AI:**

- **Regulation of AI:** no comprehensive legislation to regulate this growing industry has been formulated in the country till date.
- Lack of broad-based expertise in research and application of AI.
- Absence of access to intelligent data.
- High resource cost.
- Low awareness for adoption of the technology.
- Privacy and security issues.
- Shortage of skilled manpower.

**Need of the hour:**

- A **legal definition** of AI.
- Establish the **legal personality of AI** (which means AI will have a bundle of rights and obligations), and whether any sort of intention can be attributed to it.
- Since privacy is a fundamental right, certain **rules to regulate the usage of data possessed by an AI entity** should be framed as part of the **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018**.

**National strategy for artificial intelligence:**

- The National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence published by NITI Aayog narrates the different pain points and key challenges involved in implementing Artificial Intelligence in India. It has also tried to touch upon many sectors where AI can play a significant role in bringing India to the forefront of AI revolution.

## 2. SUPERCONDUCTIVITY

**What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: what is superconductivity, meaning, features, challenges and significance of the new breakthrough.

**Context:** IISc researchers have reported **superconductivity at room temperature**. Their finding, now under review, will be a breakthrough if verified.

**Background:**

- Superconductivity is a **phenomenon that, so far, has been possible only at extremely low temperatures**, in the range of 100°C below zero. The search for a material that exhibits superconductivity at room temperature, or at least manageable low temperatures, has been going on for decades, without success. If

the claimed discovery were confirmed, it could be one of the biggest breakthroughs in physics in this century so far.

#### What is superconductivity?

- It is a state in which a **material shows absolutely zero electrical resistance**. While resistance is a property that restricts the flow of electricity, superconductivity allows unhindered flow.
- In a superconducting state, the **material offers no resistance at all**. All the electrons align themselves in a particular direction, and move without any obstruction in a “**coherent**” manner.
- Because of zero resistance, **superconducting materials can save huge amounts of energy**, and be used to make highly efficient electrical appliances.

#### Two fundamental properties of a superconductor:

- Zero resistance to electrical current.
- Diamagnetism

#### How rare is this?

- The problem is that superconductivity, ever since it was first discovered in 1911, has only been observed at very low temperatures, somewhere close to what is called absolute zero (0°K or -273.15°C). In recent years, scientists have been able to find superconductive materials at temperatures that are higher than absolute zero but, in most cases, these temperatures are still below -100°C and the pressures required are extreme. Creating such extreme conditions of temperature and pressure is a difficult task.
- Therefore, the applications of superconducting materials have remained limited as of now.

Sources: Indian express.

**Diamagnetism** is a property opposite to normal magnetism that we are used to. A diamagnetic substance repels an external magnetic field, in sharp contrast to normal magnetism, or ferromagnetism, under which a substance is attracted by an external magnetic field.

## 3. SPACE ACTIVITIES BILL, 2017

#### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key provisions and significance of the bill, the need for legislation on outer space.

**Context:** The government is likely to introduce the **Space Activities Bill** which will allow commercial use of space.

#### Features of Space activities bill:

- It is a proposed Bill to promote and regulate the space activities of India.
- The new Bill encourages the participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India under the guidance and authorisation of the government through the Department of Space.
- The provisions of this Act shall apply to every citizen of India and to all sectors engaged in any space activity in India or outside India.
- A non-transferable licence shall be provided by the Central Government to any person carrying out commercial space activity.
- The Central Government will formulate the appropriate mechanism for licensing, eligibility criteria, and fees for licence.
- The government will maintain a register of all space objects (any object launched or intended to be launched around the earth) and develop more space activity plans for the country.
- It will provide professional and technical support for commercial space activity and regulate the procedures for conduct and operation of space activity.
- It will ensure safety requirements and supervise the conduct of every space activity of India and investigate any incident or accident in connection with the operation of a space activity.
- It will share details about the pricing of products created by space activity and technology with any person or any agency in a prescribed manner.
- If any person undertakes any commercial space activity without authorisation they shall be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years or fined more than ₹1 crore or both.

### Need for a legislation on outer space:

- There is a need for national space legislation for supporting the overall growth of the space activities in India. This would encourage enhanced participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India, in compliance with international treaty obligations, which is becoming very relevant today.

*Topics: Awareness in space.*

## 1. NASA'S INSIGHT SPACECRAFT

### What to study?

- For prelims: Key facts on InSight Mission.
- For mains: Why study mars, Objectives of the mission and its significance.

**Context:** NASA's **InSight lander** is having some problems. The instrument, called a "mole," was designed to hammer itself deep under the Martian surface and monitor temperature changes. NASA figured it would be able to push itself as deep as 16 feet into the Martian crust, but the consistency of the soil has made that difficult. In fact, the mole has only made it around a foot deep, and now InSight's science team has come up with a new plan.

### What next?

- The new plan involves using InSight's robotic arm to push on the soil surrounding the probe. This, InSight team members suggest, could give the mole enough friction to hammer itself deeper underground.

### About InSight Mission:

- InSight is part of **NASA's Discovery Program**, managed by the agency's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.
- It will be the **first mission to peer deep beneath the Martian surface**, studying the planet's interior by measuring its heat output and listening for marsquakes, which are seismic events similar to earthquakes on Earth.
- It will use the seismic waves generated by **marsquakes** to develop a map of the planet's deep interior.

### Significance of the mission:

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

### Why Mars?

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

Sources: [toi](#).

## 2. SPECTRUM-ROENTGEN-GAMMA (SRG)

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: the telescope- features, objectives and significance.

**Context:** A joint team of German-Russian scientists is all set to launch next week a space telescope- **Spectrum-Roentgen-Gamma (SRG)**.

#### About the telescope:

- It will create a **three-dimensional (3D) X-ray map of the universe** and unveil unknown supermassive black holes, dark energy and stars.
- The telescope will be **launched into space on a Russian-built Proton-M rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on June 21, 2019**.
- The **four-year mission** will survey the entire sky eight times and track the evolution of the universe and dark energy — a mysterious repulsive force — that is accelerating its expansion.
- It also aims **to detect up to three million supermassive black holes — many of which are unknown — and X-rays from as many as 700,000 stars in the Milky Way**.
- The telescope is the **first to be sensitive to high-energy ‘hard’ X-rays and map the entire sky**.
- The SRG will **also find how dark matter** — the main engine of galaxy formation — is spread in the universe.
- The SRG will, however, **not detect gamma radiation**.

#### Background:

- X-ray sky surveys have also been conducted by previous missions, but they were not able to map the entire sky.
- While **Germany’s ROSAT mission** in the 1990s was sensitive only to ‘soft’ X-rays, with energies of about 2 keV, existing missions, such as **NASA’s Chandra X-ray Observatory and NuSTAR**, can see high-energy radiation and resolve tiny details of cosmic structures. But, they see only small parts of the sky.

Sources: down to earth.

## 3. SPITZER TELESCOPE

#### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and objectives of the telescope.

**Context:** Spitzer space telescope of NASA will be **retired on January 30, 2020**. Spitzer is going to shut down permanently after about 16 years of exploring the cosmos in infrared light. By 2020, Spitzer space telescope will have operated for more than 11 years beyond its prime mission.

#### Key achievements:

- Launched into solar orbit on August 25, 2003, Spitzer was initially scheduled for a minimum 2.5-year primary mission. But the space telescope has lasted far beyond its expected lifetime.
- Spitzer’s discoveries extend from our own planetary backyard, to planets around other stars, to the far reaches of the universe. And by working in collaboration with NASA’s other Great Observatories, Spitzer has helped scientists gain a more complete picture of many cosmic phenomena.
- Spitzer has logged over 106,000 hours of observation time in the past 15 years. It has illuminated some of the oldest galaxies in the universe, revealed a new ring around Saturn, and peered through shrouds of dust to study newborn stars and black holes.
- The space telescope also assisted in the discovery of planets beyond our solar system, including the detection of seven Earth-size planets orbiting the star TRAPPIST-1, among other accomplishments.

#### About Spitzer:

- NASA’s Spitzer Space Telescope was launched in 2003 **to study the universe in the infrared**. It is the last **mission of the NASA Great Observatories program**, which saw four specialized telescopes (including the Hubble Space Telescope) launched between 1990 and 2003.
- The goal of the Great Observatories is to observe the universe in distinct wavelengths of light. **Spitzer focuses on the infrared band, which normally represents heat radiation from objects. The other observatories looked at visible light (Hubble, still operational), gamma-rays (Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory, no longer operational) and X-rays (the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, still operational.)**
- Spitzer’s highly sensitive instruments allow scientists to peer into cosmic regions that are hidden from optical telescopes, including dusty stellar nurseries, the centers of galaxies, and newly forming planetary systems.

- Spitzer's infrared eyes also allows astronomers see cooler objects in space, like failed stars (brown dwarfs), extrasolar planets, giant molecular clouds, and organic molecules that may hold the secret to life on other planets.

Sources: the hindu.

## 4. NASA'S OSIRIS-REX

### What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: OSIRIS-Rex mission and facts on asteroid bennu.

**Context:** The US space agency NASA has announced that its asteroid probe **OSIRIS-REx set a new record for the closest-ever orbit of a planetary body made by a man-made spacecraft.**

- The recent maneuver has placed the spacecraft into an orbit **680 meters above the asteroid Bennu's surface** for about seven weeks.

### About the mission:

- OSIRIS-Rex stands for **Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer.**
- OSIRIS-REx is the **third mission in NASA's New Frontiers program**, which previously sent the New Horizons spacecraft zooming by Pluto and the Juno spacecraft into orbit around Jupiter.

### Why was Bennu chosen?

- Bennu was selected for a the OSIRIS-REx mission from over 500,000 known asteroids, due to it fitting a number of key criteria. These include:
- **Proximity to Earth:** In order for OSIRIS-REx to reach its destination in a reasonable timeframe, NASA needed to find an asteroid which had a similar orbit to Earth.
- **Size:** Small asteroids, those less than 200m in diameter, typically spin much faster than larger asteroids, meaning the regolith material can be ejected into space. Bennu is around 500m in diameter, so rotates slowly enough to ensure that the regolith stays on its surface.
- **Composition:** Bennu is a primitive asteroid, meaning it hasn't significantly changed since the beginning of the Solar System (over 4 billion years ago). It is also very carbon-rich, meaning it may contain organic molecules, which could have been precursors to life on Earth.
- Additionally, Bennu is of interest as it is a **Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA)**. Every 6 years, Bennu's orbit brings it within 200,000 miles of the Earth, which means it has a high probability of impacting Earth in the late 22nd Century.

Sources: toi.

## 5. ISRO'S PERMANENT SPACE STATION

- **Context:** ISRO is planning to build a permanent space station for itself, possibly in the next five to seven years.

### Need:

- ISRO would be undertaking many prolonged space exploration projects and sending many astronauts into space. Therefore, it would require a permanent station for itself.
- ISRO needs this facility in the context of its various space missions.
- **NASA's International Space Station, the only one functional right now, is slated to retire by 2025**, or latest by 2028, and no replacement for it has been confirmed so far.

### The Indian Space Station:

- A space station is an artificial satellite placed in orbit and is used as a long-term base for manned operations in space.
- The Indian space station would be stationed at an altitude of 400 kilometres from Earth.
- The proposed Indian space station would be similar to the International Space Station (ISS) but smaller in size weighing about 20 tonnes and would take another 5 to 7 years to construct.

## **What Is the International Space Station?**

- The International Space Station is a large spacecraft in orbit around Earth. It serves as a home where crews of astronauts and cosmonauts live. The space station is also a unique science laboratory. Several nations worked together to build and use the space station. The space station is made of parts that were assembled in space by astronauts. It orbits Earth at an average altitude of approximately 250 miles. It travels at 17,500 mph. This means it orbits Earth every 90 minutes. NASA is using the space station to learn more about living and working in space. These lessons will make it possible to send humans farther into space than ever before.

## **How Old Is the Space Station?**

- The first piece of the International Space Station was launched in November 1998. A Russian rocket launched the Russian Zarya (zar EE uh) control module. About two weeks later, the space shuttle Endeavour met Zarya in orbit. The space shuttle was carrying the U.S. Unity node. The crew attached the Unity node to Zarya.
- More pieces were added over the next two years before the station was ready for people to live there. The first crew arrived on November 2, 2000. People have lived on the space station ever since. More pieces have been added over time. NASA and its partners from around the world completed construction of the space station in 2011.

## **How Big Is the Space Station?**

- The space station has the volume of a five-bedroom house or two Boeing 747 jetliners. It is able to support a crew of six people, plus visitors. On Earth, the space station would weigh almost a million pounds. Measured from the edges of its solar arrays, the station covers the area of a football field including the end zones. It includes laboratory modules from the United States, Russia, Japan and Europe.

## **Why Is the Space Station Important?**

- The space station has made it possible for people to have an ongoing presence in space. Human beings have been living in space every day since the first crew arrived. The space station's laboratories allow crew members to do research that could not be done anywhere else. This scientific research benefits people on Earth.
- Space research is even used in everyday life. The results are products called "spinoffs." Scientists also study what happens to the body when people live in microgravity for a long time. NASA and its partners have learned how to keep a spacecraft working well. All of these lessons will be important for future space exploration.
- NASA currently is working on a plan to explore other worlds. The space station is one of the first steps. NASA will use lessons learned on the space station to prepare for human missions that reach farther into space than ever before.

### **Key facts:**

- ISS is the ninth space station to be inhabited by crews, following the Soviet and later Russian Salyut, Almaz, and Mir stations as well as Skylab from the US.
- The ISS programme is a joint project among five participating space agencies: NASA, Roscosmos, JAXA, ESA, and CSA.
- The ownership and use of the space station is established by intergovernmental treaties and agreements. The station is divided into two sections, the Russian Orbital Segment (ROS) and the United States Orbital Segment (USOS), which is shared by many nations.

## **6. LUNAR EVACUATION SYSTEM (LESA)**

### **What to study?**

- For prelims and mains: NASA's moon mission, various components and LESA.

**Context:** Among preparations for **NASA's 2024 Moon mission**, one has been to test a device called **Lunar Evacuation System Assembly, or LESA**.

### What is LESA?

- Developed by the European Space Agency (ESA), LESA is a pyramid-like structure whose purpose is to rescue an astronaut should he or she suffer an injury on the lunar surface.

### How it works?

- LESA can be operated by a single astronaut to rescue a fallen colleague. It enables an astronaut to lift their crewmate onto a mobile stretcher in less than 10 minutes, before carrying them to the safety of a nearby pressurised lander.

Sources: Indian Express.

## 7. METHANE ON MARS

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Significance of recent findings, what does this indicate and key facts related to Methane and its production.

**Context:** NASA's Curiosity rover recently discovered high amounts of **methane in the air on Mars**, leading to excitement whether this was an indication of life on the Red Planet, or beneath its surface. However, later it was confirmed that the methane had fallen back to usual levels.

### What caused this variation?

- High amounts of methane were a **transient methane plume**, which has been observed in the past.
- Curiosity unfortunately doesn't have the instruments to determine whether the source of methane is biological or geological. Further, scientists have yet to figure out a pattern for Martian's transient plumes.

### What is Methane?

- On Earth, methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) is a **naturally occurring gas**. Most of the methane on Earth is produced in **biological processes** — some of it by microbes, and some occurring as underground natural gas that had been formed by earlier generations of microbial life.
- Many of these **methane-producing microbes live in the digestive systems of animals, especially cows**.
- However, **methane can also be produced by abiotic processes** (those that do not involve living organisms).
- It has been found to **occur in formations** such as rocks, springs and aquifers, and studies have concluded that it was **formed there by chemical reactions between carbon and hydrogen atoms at low temperature**.
- Once it is released into the atmospheres of either Earth or Mars, **methane is relatively short-lived**.
- Methane concentrations on Earth is over **1,800 parts per million**.

### Significance of its discovery on Mars:

- Since the time the gas was first detected on Mars, it has been considered a potential **biomarker**.
- Scientists are hoping to detect the **source of the gas**, and in the process clues that might point to the existence of life on the Red Planet.

### Way ahead:

- To determine where the plumes are located on Mars, scientists would need a clearer understanding of these plumes, combined with coordinated measurements from other missions.

### NASA's Curiosity:

- Curiosity is a car-sized robotic rover exploring **Gale Crater** on Mars as part of NASA's Mars Science Laboratory mission (MSL).
- The rover's goals include:** investigation of the Martian climate and geology; assessment of whether the selected field site inside Gale Crater has ever offered environmental conditions favorable for microbial life, including investigation of the role of water; and planetary habitability studies in preparation for future human exploration.

Sources: Indian Express.

## 8. FALCON HEAVY LAUNCH

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: Payloads on Falcon Heavy, objectives and significance.

**Context:** Elon Musk's SpaceX recently launched its **Falcon Heavy spacecraft on its third mission**, and the most complex one yet by the company. Among the various reasons which make the mission important, one is its huge payload — **24 satellites from various organisations, including government agencies**.

### Various payloads:

#### Deep Space Atomic Clock:

- Sent by **NASA** and collaborators.
- DSAC is expected **to be stable to better than one microsecond per decade (one second per 10 million years)**, which would be about 50 times more accurate than atomic clocks already aboard GPS satellites.
- The technology targets aims at **helping spacecraft navigate by themselves, relying on the new atomic clock in space**.

#### ASCENT green fuel:

- It is a safer **rocket fuel**.
- Unlike the traditional fuel used in satellites, which is **hydrazine**, which is **extremely toxic to humans as well as the environment**, the new alternative called **ASCENT (Advanced Spacecraft Energetic Non-toxic Propellant)**, formerly called AF-M315E, is a **hydroxyl ammonium nitrate fuel/oxidiser blend**.
- First developed by the US Air Force** and now launched as part of a NASA-led collaboration, ASCENT is described as a fuel with significantly reduced toxicity levels compared to hydrazine, and potentially shorter launch processing times, resulting in lower costs.

#### Solar-powered sail:

- LightSail 2 is a **crowd-funded solar sail project from the Planetary Society**.
- It seeks to become the **first orbiting spacecraft to be propelled solely by sunlight**.
- In 2015, LightSail 1 spacecraft successfully completed a test flight.

Sources: Indian Express.

**Topics:** Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

## 1. BT COTTON

### What to study?

- For Prelims: About GM crops, their production and other Genetic engineering related key facts.
- For Mains: Concerns raised over the introduction of GM crops, arguments in favour and against.

**Context:** Recently, a group of more than 1,000 farmers gathered in a village in Akola of Maharashtra to sow seeds of an unapproved, genetically modified variety of cotton, defying government regulations. The government is now investigating what was planted.

### What is allowed?

- Bt cotton remains the **only GM crop allowed to be cultivated in the country**.
- Developed by **US giant Bayer-Monsanto**, it involves insertion of two genes viz 'Cry1Ab' and 'Cry2Bc' from the **soil bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis** into cotton seeds. This modification codes the plant to **produce protein toxic to Heliothis bollworm (pink bollworm) thus making it resistant to their attack**. The commercial release of this hybrid was sanctioned by the government in 2002.

### **Role of GEAC:**

- In India, it is the responsibility of the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) under the Environment Ministry to assess the safety of a genetically modified plant, and decide whether it is fit for cultivation.
- **The GEAC comprises** experts and government representatives, and a decision it takes has to be approved by the Environment Minister before any crop is allowed for cultivation.
- **Besides Bt cotton, the GEAC has cleared two other genetically modified crops — brinjal and mustard — but these have not received the consent of the Environment Minister.**

### **What's the concern now?**

- The farmers in Akola planted a herbicide-tolerant variety of Bt cotton. This variety (HtBt) involves the addition of another gene, '**Cp4-Epsps**' from another soil bacterium, **Agrobacterium tumefaciens**. It is **not cleared by GEAC**. The farmers claim that the HtBt variety can withstand the **spray of glyphosate**, a herbicide that is used to remove weeds, and thus it substantially saves them de-weeding costs.

### **Why it's a concern?**

- Genetic changes made in a plant can make it unsafe for consumption, have adverse impacts on human or animal health, or introduce problems in the soil or neighbouring crops. There is an elaborate process of tests and field trials to be followed. Critics of GM technology argue that some traits of genes start expressing themselves only after several generations, and thus one can never be sure about their safety.

### **What the law says?**

- Legally, sale, storage, transportation and usage of unapproved GM seeds is a **punishable offence under the Rules of Environmental Protection Act 1989**. Also, sale of unapproved seeds can attract action under the **Seed Act of 1966 and the Cotton Act of 1957**. The Environmental Protection Act provides for a jail term of five years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh for violation of its provisions, and cases can be filed under the other two Acts.

Sources: Indian express.

## **2. INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS (ICANN)**

### **What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: ccNSO, ICANN and its key features.

**Context:** Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Services Companies) have announced collaboration for working in developing standards and identifier technology that will feed into the global consultation for managing Internet-of-Things (IoT) devices and infrastructure using internet.

### **What is the ICANN?**

- The Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a **non profit organization** that was set up in 1998 **to oversee the administration of domain names**. ICANN coordinates and ensures the smooth and secure functioning of the cybernetic framework.

### **What it does?**

- The global nature of the Web today means that there are constantly increasing numbers of Domain Names, Host Names, IP addresses and web sites that are emerging on a daily basis. ICANN oversees this interconnected network and ensures that computers across the internet can find one another through defined unique pathways and identifiers.

### **ICANN performs four major functions namely:**

- Approval of companies that can become accredited registrars for domain names.
- Decision making regarding the addition of new Top Level Domains (TLDs) to the Root system.
- Coordinating technical parameters to maintain universal connectivity.
- Creating a Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) for competing domain names.

Sources: the hindu.

### 3. NAMMA KOLHAPURI CHAPPAL GETS GI BOOST

#### What to study?

- For Prelims: GI tags and about Kolhapuri chappal.
- For Mains: Significance of GI tags.

**Context:** Namma Kolhapuri chappal gets **GI boost**.

- The approval for GI tag was **jointly received by Karnataka and Maharashtra** recently for making these chappals. There is a perception that these artisans are from Maharashtra alone, but a large number of them are from Karnataka, and have been making these chappals for centuries.
- These leather chappals are **hand-crafted and tanned using vegetable dyes**. The art of making them is passed down one generation to another.

#### 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.

#### Registrar of Geographical Indications:

- The **Controller-General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks appointed under sub-section (1) of section 3 of the Trade Marks Act, 1999**, shall be the Registrar of Geographical Indications.
- The **Central Government may appoint such officers** with such designations as it thinks fit for the purpose of discharging, under the superintendence and direction of the Registrar, such functions of the Registrar under this Act, as he may from time to time authorise them to discharge.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. DNA TECHNOLOGY BILL

#### What to study?

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

**Context:** Cabinet has cleared the **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill** once again, paving the way for its reintroduction in Parliament. The Bill had been passed by Lok Sabha in January this year, but could not get the approval of Rajya Sabha. As a result, it lapsed once the tenure of the previous Lok Sabha expired last month.

#### Need for the legislation and its significance:

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

#### Highlights of the Bill:

- As per the Bill, **national and regional DNA data banks** will be set up for maintaining a national database for identification of victims, suspects in cases, undertrials, missing persons and unidentified human remains.

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

#### **Benefits of the Bill:**

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

#### **DNA technology- significance:**

- DNA analysis is an extremely useful and accurate technology in ascertaining the identity of a person from his/her DNA sample, or establishing biological relationships between individuals.
- A hair sample, or even bloodstains from clothes, from a scene of crime, for example, can be matched with that of a suspect, and it can, in most cases, be conclusively established whether the DNA in the sample belongs to the suspected individual. As a result, DNA technology is being increasingly relied upon in investigations of crime, identification of unidentified bodies, or in determining parentage.
- It is expected that the expanded use of DNA technology would result not only in speedier justice delivery but also in increased conviction rates, which at present is only around 30% (NCRB Statistics for 2016).

#### **Concerns:**

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

#### **Issues with the Bill:**

- **Written consent** is required from everyone for their DNA samples to be collected, processed and included in the database except from those who have committed crimes with punishment of 7+ years or death.
- However, **a similarly specific instruction is missing for the collection of DNA samples for civil matters**. Such matters include parentage disputes, emigration or immigration and transplantation of human organs.
- The **Bill also doesn't state that the consent has to be voluntary**.
- **Issues over storage:** It's not clear if DNA samples collected to resolve civil disputes will also be stored in the databank (regional or national), although there is no index specific for the same.
- If they will be stored, then the problem cascades because **the Bill also does not provide for information, consent and appeals**.
- If a person's DNA data has entered the databank, there is **no process specified by which they can have it removed**.
- All of these issues together could violate **the right to privacy**.
- **Safety issues:** There's also the question of whether the DNA labs accredited by the Regulatory Board are allowed to store copies of the samples they analyse.
- And **if so, how the owners of those samples can ensure the data is safe or needs to be removed from their own indices**.
- It's unclear **if the Regulatory Board will oversee other tests performed at the accredited labs**.
- This could become necessary because, unlike one's biometric data or PAN number, the human genome contains lots of information about every individual.
- **Prone to misuse:** a test undertaken to ascertain a person's identity by analysing her DNA will in the process may also reveal a lot of other things about that person, including information about their ancestry, diseases to which they are susceptible, etc. – i.e. information that the individual has a right to keep private.

- The Bill does not specify which parts of an individual's DNA can be analysed to ascertain their identity.

#### What the govt says?

- The government has been arguing that since DNA tests are already happening, and frequently used as the most reliable tool to establish identity, it would be better to have regulatory safeguards so that it is carried out only in prescribed manner and by authorised personnel and institutions.
- The government has also claimed that very limited information is proposed to be stored in the indices — just 17 sets of numbers out of billions that DNA samples can reveal.

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

## 5. FORTIFIED RICE

#### What to study?

- For Prelims: What is food fortification, FSSAI.
- For Mains: Food fortification and food security.

**Context:** Department of Food & Public Distribution has approved the "Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on Fortification of Rice & its distribution through Public Distribution System". Financial Assistance up to 90% in case of North-Eastern, Hilly and Island States and up to 75% in case of rest of the States has been extended.

#### What is Rice Fortification?

- Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health. Rice fortification is the practice of increasing the content of essential micronutrients in rice and to improve the nutritional quality of the rice.

#### Why Rice Fortification?

- Rice is the world's most important staple food. An estimated 2 billion people eat rice every day, forming the mainstay of diets across large of Asia and Africa.
- Regular milled rice is low in micronutrients and serves primarily as a source of carbohydrate only. The fortification of rice is a major opportunity to improve nutrition.
- Fortified rice are contains Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Iron and Zinc.

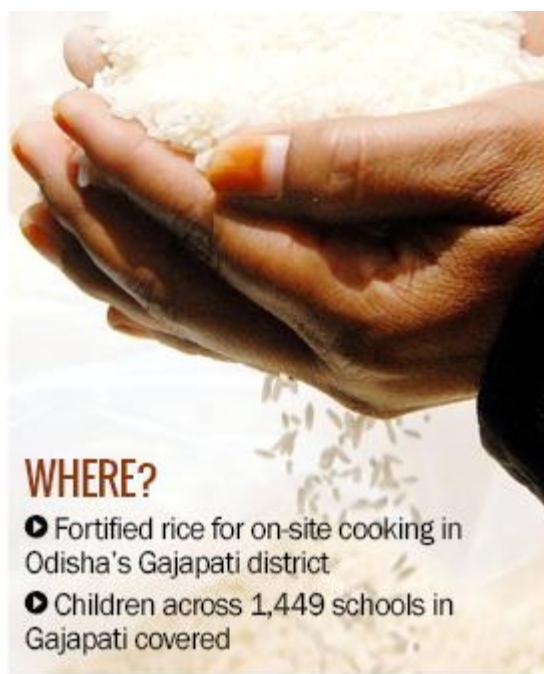
## FORTIFIED RICE ODISHA MODEL TO BOOST MIDDAY MEALS

#### WHAT?

- Fortified kernels blended at ratio 1:100 with ordinary rice
- 100g of fortified rice has 10mg iron

#### HOW?

- Manufactured by combining rice powder with iron
- Powder converted into rice-like kernels
- Micronutrient fortified kernels resemble regular rice



#### WHERE?

- Fortified rice for on-site cooking in Odisha's Gajapati district
- Children across 1,449 schools in Gajapati covered

Source: UN WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME // TIMES INTERNET //

#### **Food fortification in India:**

- **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** has formulated a comprehensive regulation on fortification of foods namely '**Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2016**'. These regulations set the standards for food fortification and encourage the production, manufacture, distribution, sale and consumption of fortified foods. The regulations also provide for specific role of FSSAI in promotion for food fortification and to make fortification mandatory. This sets the premise for the national summit on fortification of food.

**Topics:** *Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.*

## **1. #SELFIEWITHSAPLING**

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

- For prelims and mains: about the campaign and its significance, about World Environment Day.

**Context:** On the eve of World Environment Day, Union Environment Ministry has launched a people's campaign called **#SelfiewithSapling**, urging people to advocate the cause on social media.

- Under the campaign, **people have been urged to plant a sapling and post selfie with the planted sapling on social media.**

#### **World Environment Day:**

- Every **June 5th is World Environment Day**. On this day, communities and individuals around the world work to increase awareness of the importance of conserving the environment, the positive global impact of environmental regulations and controls and engage in activities that serve to educate and improve their environment locally.
- The World Environment Day is a **part of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP)** for creating awareness and action worldwide for the environment. The first World Environment Day was celebrated in 1973.
- **The theme for 45<sup>th</sup> World Environment Day** is Beat Air Pollution. It is the call for action to combat the global crisis for 'fresh air'.
- **Host:** China.

## **2. INDIA'S FERTILISER INDUSTRY NEEDS TO PRIORITISE POLLUTION CONTROL: CSE STUDY**

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

- For prelims and mains: pollution from fertiliser industry, concerns, challenges and measures needed.

**Context:** The Indian fertiliser industry has overlooked the aspects related to environmental pollution, while making improvements in energy efficiency, according to a study conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment, a New Delhi-based non-profit, under its **Green Rating Project (GRP)**.

#### **Highlights of the study:**

- The fertiliser industry has been classified under the '**red category**' of polluting sectors by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

#### **Water pollution:**

- The discharge of untreated or partially treated industrial wastewater has increased pollution of surface water (rivers and other water bodies) and groundwater sources. Most of the groundwater samples were found to be non-compliant with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) limits on amount of **ammonia**.
- According to the BIS, **the maximum permissible limit of ammonia (as total ammoniacal nitrogen) in drinking water is 0.5 ppm**. However, about 83 per cent groundwater samples collected from hand-pumps in surrounding villages and near ash ponds, tubewells and borewells near 18 plant sites (out of the total 23

plant sites studied) had an ammoniacal nitrogen content of 0.51–93.5 ppm, the upper limit of which is 187 times the permissible limit set by BIS.

- Such high levels of contamination can be linked to the seepage or overflow of a plant's ash pond water into the ground, the study showed.
- About 57 per cent samples collected near 14 plants were found non-compliant with fertiliser effluent discharge norms set by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, particularly with respect to cyanide concentrations in many of the samples and total Kjeldahl nitrogen levels in a few samples.
- Some plants were also found to be diluting their wastewater with freshwater to meet pollution control norms.

#### Air pollution:

- While most plants are meeting the particulate matter (PM) standards, inefficient air pollution control devices or improper fuel combustion within the systems have led to high emission levels at some plants. **There is also no regulation in India for parameters like emissions of gaseous ammonia from urea manufacturing, the study pointed out.**
- Emissions from prilling towers are the main source of pollution at a urea plants. The emissions, which contains urea dust, ammonia and oxides of nitrogen and carbon, also affects the growth and productivity of vegetation and crops around a plant. Crops become dry due to exposure to excess ammonia gas.

#### Solid Waste:

- Solid and hazardous waste management of most urea manufacturing plants is satisfactory. But, a few plants are not managing their hazardous waste properly, for which they have received notices or directions from the respective PCB or CPCB.
- Ash pond maintenance has emerged as an issue at most plants. At some plants, handling and storage of fly ash is inefficient and causes pollution due to fly ash dispersal into the atmosphere and leaching into the groundwater table.
- A few plants transport coal by road in uncovered trucks, taking advantage of lack of strict regulations regarding transportation of coal.

Sources: Down to Earth.

## 3. STATE OF INDIA'S ENVIRONMENT 2019

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key highlights, concerns raised and findings, measures proposed.

**Context:** The State of India's Environment 2019 in Figures is an exclusive data-driven analysis of major developmental and environmental sectors. SoE 2019 in Figures is an annual quantified statement of environmental statistics and analysis put together by Down To Earth magazine, which Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) helps publish.

- Usefulness:** The datasets can be used by the media to investigate compelling stories, ask better questions to policymakers to drive them to come up with better policies for sustainable development agenda.

#### Key findings:

- State of air** – Air pollution is responsible for 12.5 per cent of all deaths in India. Its impact on children is equally worrying. Over 100,000 children below the age of five die due to bad air in the country. While India was one of the first countries to pledge the phasing out of non-electric vehicles, its national scheme to promote the sale of e-vehicles is yet to pick up. Against the target of 15-16 million e-vehicles by 2020, the country had 0.28 million vehicles till May 2019.
- State of development** – Climate change poses the biggest economic threat in the world today and features prominently in the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. With just 10 years to go, India is yet to identify indicators to track its climate change preparedness. Of the 13 SDGs the country is tracking, indicators exist for only a handful of the targets.
- State of water** – Both surface and groundwater in the country are under stress. 86 water bodies are critically polluted. The bulk of the polluted water bodies are in Karnataka, Telangana and Kerala. One of the reasons is the substantial increase (136 per cent) in the number of grossly polluting industries between 2011 and

2018. Groundwater is also reeling under overexploitation, which is running 94.5 per cent of all minor irrigation schemes in the country. There has been an unsustainable increase in the number of deep tubewells that has gone up by 80 per cent between 2006-07 and 2013-14.

- **State of land and agriculture** – India's farm sector is under duress. While the input costs for major crops are rising, the average farmland size is shrinking. Even the share of the insured cropped area stands at a dismal 26 per cent.
- **State of Health** – India's rural health infrastructure is ailing. There is a 35 per cent shortfall in the number of 24x7 public health centres, where 26 per cent of the positions for medical officers are lying vacant. In fact, Kerala does not have a single 24x7 public health centre. Another worrying trend is that the number of new doctors qualifying every year in the country has decreased by 60 per cent between 2013 and 2017. The country also shares the world's largest absolute burden of at least 11 major neglected tropical diseases, which includes diseases like dengue.
- **State of cities** – By 2050, India is projected to add 416 million urban dwellers to the world's urban population and will be home to about 58 per cent of the total global population. Keeping this in mind, India in 2015-16 announced its ambitious plan of creating 100 smart cities. Four years later, only 21 per cent of the allocated funds for the smart cities have been spent. In the meanwhile, most urban cities have a sizeable population living in slums, which are unfit for habitation. India has 2,613 towns with slums. Of them, 57 per cent are in Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- **State of waste** – The burden of solid waste is becoming unmanageable. In fact, 79 major protests against unsanitary landfills and dump yards have been recorded in 22 states in the past three years. Maharashtra, which registered 16 major protests, leaves 43 per cent of its waste unprocessed. While India claims to process 96 per cent of its biomedical waste, eight states and UTs have defaulting hospitals. The country has also recorded a 56 per cent increase in the number of hazardous-waste generating industries between 2009 and 2016-17. At the same time, most of these industries are not properly maintaining their waste inventory, as mandated by the law.
- **State of energy** – India's natural gas and hydro-based power plants are in shambles. Gas-based plants are running at 24 per cent of their capacity due to the acute shortage of domestic natural gas. Hydropower projects, on the other hand, are running at just 19 per cent of their capacity and their share in total installed capacity has consistently declined since 1962. The country's progress in renewable energy in 2018-19 has also been dismal. In wind, the country met only 6.3 per cent of the target this year. In solar, it met 5.86 per cent.
- **State of climate** – There has been a 22 per cent increase in India's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions between 2010 and 2014. This has been fuelled by the energy sector, which is responsible for 73 per cent of the total GHG emissions. Besides, India phased out ozone depleting substances such as chlorofluorocarbon by 2011, it shifted to substances such as hydrochlorofluorocarbon, which have high globalwarming potential. India continues to bear the brunt of extreme weather events. In 2018, 11 states recorded major extreme weather events that claimed 1,425 lives.
- **State of forests** – India has recently shifted to a powerful forest fire monitoring and alert system, SNPP-VIIRS, which can capture forest fires with better accuracy and precision. In April 2019, the new technology recorded 69,523 forest fires, which was 9.5 times more than that recorded by the earlier technology.
- **State of wildlife** – 37 species were poached or seized in 2018. Of these, 13, including lion, marked an increase over the last year; 161 wild animals were also killed due to road and train accidents
- **State of employment** – India has witnessed a 1.9 times increase in the unemployment rate in the past two years. This has especially affected the youth and the educated. Unemployment rate among people with at least a graduate degree was 13.17 per cent in September-December 2018, up from 10.39 per cent in May-August 2017.

Sources: down to earth.

#### 4. GUJARAT LAUNCHES INDIA'S FIRST TRADING PROGRAMME TO COMBAT PARTICULATE AIR POLLUTION

##### What to study?

- For prelims: key features of the program.
- For mains: significance, need and potential of such programs, challenges ahead and ways to address them.

- **Context:** Gujarat has launched India's first trading programme to combat particulate air pollution—the emission trading scheme (ETS), on World Environment Day 2019, which has air pollution as its theme.

#### **Key features of the programme:**

- It is a **market-based system** where the **government sets a cap on emissions** and **allows industries to buy and sell permits to stay below the cap**.
- Being **initiated in Surat** by the **Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB)**.
- Gujarat programme is the **first in the world to regulate particulate air pollution**.

#### **How it works?**

- Under the cap and trade system, the regulator first defines the total mass of pollution that can be put into the air over a defined period by all factories put together.
- Then, a set of permits is created, each of which allows a certain amount of pollution, and the total is equal to the cap.
- These permits are the quantity that is bought and sold. Each factory is allocated a share of these permits (this could be equal or based on size or some other rule).
- After this, plants can trade permits with each other, just like any other commodity on the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX).

#### **Significance and benefits:**

- The reason for trading is that in a cap and trade market, the regulator will measure pollution over a period of time and industries must own enough permits to cover their total emissions.
- Factories who find it very expensive to reduce pollution, will seek to buy more permits. Those who can easily reduce pollution are encouraged to do so because then they have excess permits to sell.
- Eventually, after buying and selling by plants that find it cheap to cut pollution and those for whom it is expensive, most pollution is taken care of. Whatever the final allocation, the total number of permits does not change so the total pollution is still equal to the predefined cap. And yet the costs to industry are decreased.

#### **Current practice and issues associated:**

- Under existing regulations, every industry has to meet a certain maximum concentration of pollutants when it is operating. They are tested occasionally and manually (one or two times a year). However, there is widespread non-compliance across India. This is partly because penalties are rarely applied, in large part because they involve punishments such as closing down the entire plant which is not necessarily appropriate for small violations.

Sources: down to earth.

## 5. PROLIFERATION OF KELPS IN THE ARCTIC

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

- For prelims and mains: what are Kelps, why are they proliferating in Arctic and shrinking in other regions, Concerns, effects and what needs to be done?

**Context:** Climate change is altering marine habitats such as kelp forests.

- **Underwater Arctic forests are expanding thanks to global warming.**

#### **Significance of kelps:**

- Kelps function underwater in the same way trees do on land.
- They create habitat and modify the physical environment by shading light and softening waves.
- The underwater forests that kelps create are used by many animals for shelter and food.

#### **What are Kelps? How do they survive underwater?**

- Kelps are **large brown algae seaweeds** that make up the order Laminariales. There are about 30 different genera.
- Kelps have adapted to the severe conditions. These cool water species **have special strategies to survive freezing temperatures and long periods of darkness, and even grow under sea ice.**
- In regions with cold, nutrient-rich water, they can attain **some of the highest rates of primary production of any natural ecosystem on Earth.**

- More than 350 different species – up to 100,000 small invertebrates – can live on a single kelp plant, and many fish, birds and mammals depend on the whole forest.
- Kelp forests also help protect coastlines by **decreasing the power of waves during storms and reducing coastal erosion**.
- Kelp forests throughout the world play an important role in coastal economies, supporting **a broad range of tourism, recreational and commercial activities**.
- Kelp is a coveted **food source in many countries**, full of potassium, iron, calcium, fibre and iodine.
- In the Arctic, **Inuit** traditionally use kelp as food and wild harvest numerous species.

#### **How climate change is leading to expansion of Kelps?**

- Genetic evidence reveals that **most kelps reinvaded the Arctic from the Atlantic Ocean quite recently** (approximately 8,000 years ago, following the last Ice Age). As a result, **most kelps in the Arctic are living in waters colder than their optimal temperature**. Ocean warming will also move conditions closer to temperatures of maximum growth, and could increase the productivity of these habitats.
- As waters warm and sea ice retreats, **more light will reach the seafloor, which will benefit marine plants**. Researchers predict a **northern shift of kelp forests as ice retreats**.

#### **Facts for prelims:**

- The Canadian Arctic is the **longest Arctic coastline in the world**.
- In the northwestern Canadian Arctic, **lack of rock substrate and a harsher climate support smaller, fragmented kelp forests**.

#### **Concerns:**

- Other changes are happening in the Arctic that complicate this picture. In Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Norway and Siberia, **permafrost soils that have been frozen for thousands of years are receding by half a metre per year**. Thawing permafrost and crumbling Arctic coasts are dumping **sediments into coastal waters** at alarming rates, which **blocks light and could limit plant growth**.
- The **run-off from melting glaciers will also lower salinity and increase turbidity**, which impacts young kelp.

Sources: [toi](#).

## **6. WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT: 17 JUNE**

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

- For prelims: about WCDD- theme and significance.
- For mains: what is desertification, causes, effects, Concerns and measures needed to prevent?

**Context:** World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought is observed on **June 17 every year**.

- **The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought 2019 theme is ‘Let’s Grow the Future Together’** (Reflecting on 25 years of progress and envisaging to the next 25) encouraging people against depleting the land of its inbuilt resources.

#### **Desertification and the Sustainable Development Goals:**

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development declares that “we are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations”. Specifically, Goal 15 states our resolve to halt and reverse land degradation.

#### **What is Desertification?**

- Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It is caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations. Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts.
- It occurs because dryland ecosystems, which cover over one third of the world’s land area, are extremely vulnerable to overexploitation and inappropriate land use. Poverty, political instability, deforestation, overgrazing and bad irrigation practices can all undermine the productivity of the land.

#### **Facts for Prelims:**

- **About UNCCD:** Established in 1994, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land

management. The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.

#### Concerns for India:

- India has witnessed **increase in the level of desertification in 26 of 29 states between 2003-05 and 2011-13**, according to the State of India's Environment (SoE) 2019 in Figures.
- Twenty-one drought-prone districts, of the 78 in the country that were identified by the Indian Space Research Organisation, have more than half of their areas under desertification.
- Of these nine have also witnessed over two per cent increase in the area under desertification between 2003-05 and 2011-13.
- More than 80 per cent of the country's degraded land lies in just nine states:** Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana.
- Top three districts with highest area under desertification** or land degradation are Jaisalmer, Rajasthan (92.96 per cent during 2011-13 and 98.13 per cent during 2003-05), Lahaul and Spiti, Himachal Pradesh (80.54 per cent during 2011-13 and 80.57 per cent during 2003-05) and Kargil, Jammu and Kashmir (78.23 per cent during 2011-13 and 78.22 per cent during 2003-05).

Sources: the Hindu.

Main reasons that cause desertification in India are:

- Water erosion (10.98 per cent).
- Wind erosion (5.55 per cent).
- Human-made/settlements (0.69 per cent).
- Vegetation degradation (8.91 per cent).
- Salinity (1.12 per cent).
- Others (2.07 per cent).

(Q) Differentiate between land degradation and desertification? Discuss impact of desertification on ecology.

## 7. 'DEAD ZONE' IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

#### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: location of Gulf of Mexico, about dead zones and eutrophication.

**Context:** Scientists from the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Louisiana State University** have predicted that this spring's record rainfall would produce one of the largest-ever "dead zones" in the **Gulf of Mexico**.

#### What are dead zones?

- Unoxygenated "dead zones" appear in waterways wherever algae are overfed by runoff from human activities such as urbanization and agriculture – a phenomenon called **eutrophication**.

#### What caused dead zone in Gulf of Mexico?

- The dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, fueled by the **nutrient-laden water spilling from the mouth of the Mississippi River**, is the second-largest in the world.
- It blooms every summer**, when warming waters accelerate the metabolisms of microorganisms, and it is expected to get even worse as the climate continues to change.
- The primary culprits in eutrophication** appear to be excess nitrogen and phosphorus—from sources including fertilizer runoff and septic system effluent to atmospheric fallout from burning fossil fuels—which enter waterbodies and fuel the overgrowth of algae, which, in turn, reduces water quality and degrades estuarine and coastal ecosystems.

#### Effects of Eutrophication:

- Eutrophication can also produce carbon dioxide, which lowers the PH of seawater (ocean acidification). This slows the growth of fish and shellfish, may prevent shell formation in bivalve mollusks, and reduces the catch of commercial and recreational fisheries, leading to smaller harvests and more expensive seafood.

#### What needs to be done?

- Improvement of the purifying performance of waste water treatment plants, installing tertiary treatment systems to reduce nutrient concentrations;

- implementation of effective filter ecosystems to remove nitrogen and phosphorus present in the run-off water (such as phyto-purification plants);
- reduction of phosphorous in detergents;
- rationalisation of agricultural techniques through proper planning of fertilisation and use of slow release fertilisers;
- use of alternative practices in animal husbandry to limit the production of waste water.
- oxygenation of water for restore the ecological conditions, reducing the negative effects of the eutrophic process, such as scarcity of oxygen and formation of toxic compounds deriving from the anaerobic metabolism;
- chemical precipitation of phosphorous by the addition of iron or aluminium salts or calcium carbonate to the water, which give rise to the precipitation of the respective iron, aluminium or calcium orthophosphates, thereby reducing the negative effects related to the excessive presence of phosphorus in the sediments.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 8. FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION (FLR) AND BONN CHALLENGE

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: FLR and Bonn challenge- features and significance.

**Context:** The centre has launched a flagship project on enhancing capacity on **forest landscape restoration (FLR) and Bonn Challenge** in India, through a pilot phase of 3.5 years implemented in the States of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland and Karnataka.

### Background:

- At the UNFCC Conference of the Parties (COP) 2015 in Paris, India also joined the voluntary Bonn Challenge pledge to bring into restoration 13 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by the year 2020, and additional 8 million hectares by 2030. India's pledge is one of the largest in Asia.

### What is Bonn Challenge? What is FLR approach?

- The Bonn Challenge is a **global effort to bring 150 million hectares of deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030**.
- The 2020 target was launched at a high level event in **Bonn** in 2011 organised by the Government of Germany and IUCN, and was later endorsed and extended to 2030 by the **New York Declaration on Forests of the 2014UN Climate Summit**.
- The Bonn Challenge is an **implementation vehicle for national priorities** such as water and food security and rural development while simultaneously helping countries contribute to the achievement of international climate change, biodiversity and land degradation commitments.
- Underlying the Bonn Challenge is the **forest landscape restoration (FLR)** approach, which aims **to restore ecological integrity at the same time as improving human well-being through multifunctional landscapes**.
- It will create approximately USD 84 billion per year in net benefits that could bring direct additional income opportunities for rural communities.

### What is FLR?

- Forest landscape restoration (FLR) is the on-going process of regaining ecological functionality and enhancing human well-being across deforested or degraded forest landscapes.
- FLR is more than just planting trees – it is restoring a whole landscape to meet present and future needs.
- It is long-term because it requires a multi-year vision of the ecological functions.
- The majority of restoration opportunities are found on or adjacent to agricultural or pastoral land. In these situations, restoration must complement and not displace existing land uses.
- This result in a mosaic of different land uses including: agriculture, agroforestry systems and improved ecological corridors.
- It integrates a number of guiding principles, including: Focus on landscapes, restore functionality, Involve stakeholders, Tailor to local conditions and Avoid further reduction of natural forest cover.

## 9. CLIMATE CHANGE CAN TRIP SMALL ISLAND STATES ENROUTE SDGS: UN

### What to study?

- For prelims: about SIDS and its members.
- For mains: Impact of climate change on SIDS, concerns and measures needed.

**Context:** Many **small island developing states (SIDS)** may fail to achieve several Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 because of increasing population and climate change risks, according to the **United Nation's report on World Population Prospects 2019**.

### Key findings:

- While population growth is keeping all least developing nations from meeting the goals, the problem is **compounded by climate change in SIDS**.
- Several SIDS, including Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, are experiencing a sharper population growth than they can handle.
- The challenge is bigger for these small countries because of their **vulnerability to climate change, climate variability and sea-level rise**.
- They have higher **population growth rate than the global average**.
- The total population of these countries is only 71 million, but growing fast: said to increase to 78 million by 2030 and 87 million by 2050.

### About SIDS:

- SIDS are a group of small island countries that tend to share similar sustainable development challenges, including small but growing populations, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments.

### Vulnerability:

- Climate change affects the development of all nations, regardless of location or size of economy. Yet, no other group of nations is as vulnerable to its devastating effects as the SIDS, according to the United Nations Development Programme.
- One-third of the entire population of SIDS lives on lands that are less than five metres below the sea level. This makes them highly vulnerable to sea-level rise, storm surge and coastal destruction.
- These countries contribute to only 1 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, and yet are among the first to experience the worst impacts of climate change.
- Agricultural production, fisheries, and related sectors are declining as the climate changes, threatening livelihoods and economic growth. In addition, extreme weather spawned by climate change is destroying SIDS land, real estate and infrastructure, with economically catastrophic effects.
- Tourism forms the foundation of many SIDS economies, and the impact that climate change is having and will have on the tourism industry is undeniable. Tourists are also discouraged from travelling to SIDS in the fear of violent and life-threatening storms.

Sources: down to earth.

## 10. JAL SHAKTI ABHIYAN

### What to study?

- For prelims and mains: key features, significance and the need for Jal Shakti Abhiyan.

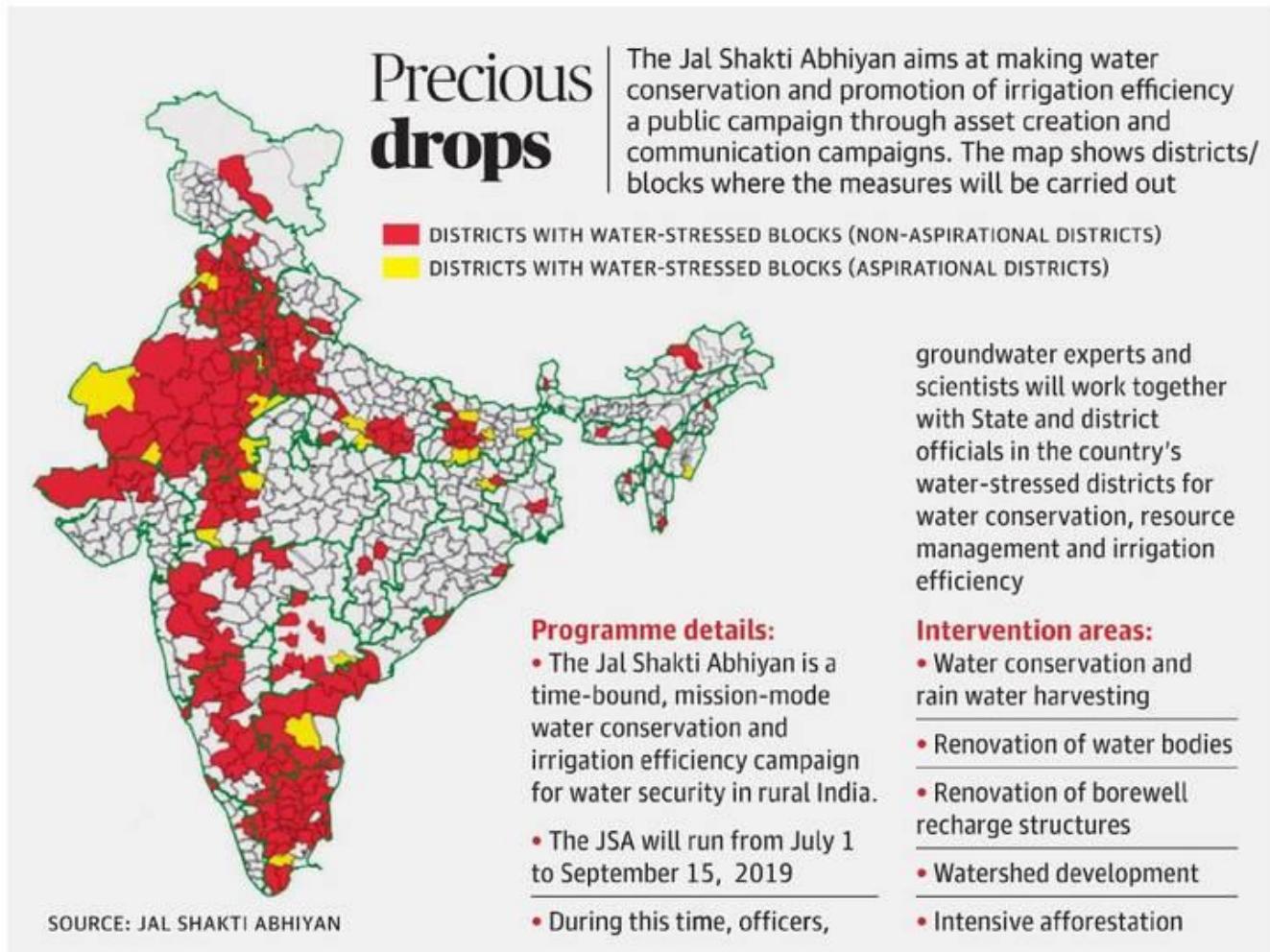
**Context:** The Centre is set to initiate the **Jal Shakti Abhiyan to ramp up rainwater harvesting and conservation** efforts in 255 water-stressed districts from July 1, in line with the government's promise to focus on water.

### Key features:

- The campaign would be **coordinated by 255 central IAS officers of Joint or Additional Secretary-rank**.
- **Coverage:** The campaign would run from July 1 to September 15 in States receiving rainfall during the south-west monsoon, while States receiving rainfall in the retreating or north-east monsoon would be covered

from October 1 to November 30. Overall, 313 blocks with critical groundwater levels would be covered, along with 1,186 blocks with over-exploited groundwater and 94 blocks with low groundwater availability.

- **Aim:** to accelerate water harvesting, conservation and borewell recharge activities already being carried out under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and the Integrated Watershed Management Programme of the Rural Development Ministry, along with existing water body restoration and afforestation schemes being undertaken by the Jal Shakti and Environment Ministries.
- **Block and district-level water conservation plans would be drafted,** and **Kisan Vigyan Kendras** would hold melas to promote better crop choices and more efficient water use for irrigation.



Sources: the Hindu.

*Topics: Disaster and management.*

## FIRST RESILIENT KERALA PROGRAM

### What to study?

- For prelims: key features and partnerships.
- For mains: Vulnerability of Kerala, challenges present and need for coordination among various stakeholders.

**Context:** The Government of India, the Government of Kerala and the World Bank have signed a Loan Agreement of USD 250 million for the **First Resilient Kerala Program** to enhance the State's resilience against the impacts of natural disasters and climate change.

### Key features of the programme:

- The Program will **focus on strengthening the State's institutional and financial capacity** to protect the assets and livelihoods of poor and vulnerable groups through an inclusive and participatory approach.

- The Program, which represents the **First ‘State Partnership’ of the World Bank in India**, is the First of two Development Policy Operations aiming to mainstream disaster and climate resilience into critical infrastructure and services.

#### **Need for and significance of the programme:**

- The 2018 floods and landslides in Kerala led to severe impact on property, infrastructure, and lives and livelihoods of people. One sixth of the State’s population – about 5.4 million people – were affected while 1.4 million were displaced from their homes, especially the poor and vulnerable segments of the population.

*Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.*

## **REGIONAL COOPERATION AGREEMENT ON COMBATING PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS IN ASIA (ReCAAP)**

- Context:** Indian Coast Guard (ICG) will be co-hosting 12th Capacity Building workshop with **Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) Information Sharing Centre (ISC)**.

#### **About ReCAAP:**

- The ReCAAP is the first **regional Government-to-Government agreement** to deal with piracy and armed robbery at sea in Asia.
- Presently **20 countries are members** of ReCAAP. India played an active role in the setting up and functioning of ReCAAPISc along with Japan and Singapore.
- Union Government has designated **ICG as the focal point within India for ReCAAP**.
- Information sharing, capacity building and mutual legal assistance are the **three pillars of co-operation under the ReCAAP agreement**.
- An **ISC has been established at Singapore** to collate and disseminate the information among the contracting parties and the maritime community.

*Topics: Role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges; Cybersecurity related issues.*

## **FACEBOOK’S NEW CRYPTOCURRENCY- LIBRA**

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

- For prelims and mains: various cryptocurrencies, their uses, concerns over their regulation and issues associated.

**Context:** Facebook has announced a digital currency called **Libra** that will roll out for use in 2020 and allow the platform’s billions of users across the globe to make financial transactions online.

#### **What is Libra?**

- Facebook says Libra is a “global currency and financial infrastructure”. In other words, it is a digital asset built by Facebook and powered by a new Facebook-created version of **blockchain**, the encrypted technology used by bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies.

#### **Why is it called Libra?**

- The name Libra comes from the basic Roman measurement of weight. The abbreviation lb for pound is derived from Libra, and the £ symbol originally comes from an ornate L in Libra.

#### **Who is in charge of Libra?**

- The currency will be serviced by a collective of companies called the **“Libra Association”**. It functions as what is known as a “stablecoin”, pegged to existing assets like the dollar or euro, in the aim of making it less subject to the volatility that many cryptocurrencies experience.

- The Libra Association is described by Facebook as an independent, **not-for-profit organisation** based in Switzerland. It serves two main functions: to validate transactions on the Libra blockchain and to manage the reserve Libra is tied to and allocate funds to social causes.
- Facebook claims that although it created the Libra Association and the Libra Blockchain, once the currency is launched in 2020 the company will withdraw from a leadership role and all members of the association will have equal votes in governance of Libra.

### **What you need to know about the cryptocurrencies?**

- Founded as a peer-to-peer electronic payment system, cryptocurrencies enable transfer of money between parties, without going through a banking system. These digital payment systems are based on cryptographic proof of the chain of transactions, deriving their name, Cryptocurrency.
- These employ cryptographic algorithms and functions to ensure anonymity (privacy) of the users (who are identified by an alphanumeric public key), security of the transactions and integrity of the payment systems. “Decentralised Digital Currency” or “Virtual Currency” is also interchangeably used for a cryptocurrency.

### **How cryptocurrency works?**

- It is a virtual currency, which users buy and store in any of several available digital wallets, and use it for transactions on a **decentralised network that is not controlled by one bank or a government**.
- Such a currency is powered by a technology called **blockchain**, which functions like an open ledger that gets updated in real time.
- Each transaction on a blockchain network is preserved, and reversing it is impossible. Because **data are encrypted**, cryptocurrency is supposed to be secure and anonymous.

### **How are they used?**

- Cryptocurrency is fundamentally a decentralised digital currency transferred directly between peers and the transactions are confirmed in a public ledger, accessible to all the users. The process of maintaining this ledger and validating the transactions, better known as mining, is carried out in a decentralised manner. The underlying principle of the authenticity of the present to historical transactions is cryptographic proof, instead of trust; different from how it happens in the case of traditional banking systems.
- Sources: the Hindu.

### **Is Libra different?**

- The values of most cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, tend to **fluctuate against real currencies**.
- The plan is to **ensure Libra is stable and give users confidence**.
- Libra will be backed by a **reserve of assets designed to “give it intrinsic value” and ensure stability**. These assets include securities and fiat currencies (like dollar, pound).

### **The Libra model:**

- Libra will be controlled by the **Libra Association**, a non-profit based in Geneva.
- Facebook will have a leadership role for 2019, but will later become one of many members of the association. Other prominent names backing Libra are Uber, Visa, Lyft, Mastercard, Paypal, and PayU from India.
- The association has 28 members now and aims at 100 founding members by the first half of 2020.
- Libra is planned as a **“global currency”** for use anywhere in the world without transaction fees. It will target those who are unbanked, who are believed to number around 1.7 billion across the world.



### **Privacy concerns:**

- Cryptocurrencies allow **anonymous funding** potentially acting as conduits for money laundering and terror financing. As the number of users and transactions are increasing, the **hackers are getting into the personal wallets or even to the entire transaction.**
- **Fraudsters** are finding new ways to deceive consumers and loot them.
- The anonymity of cryptocurrency has made way for **cybercriminals** to hold victims hard drives hostage to extort payment from them in terms of bitcoins.
- Since **cryptocurrency is borderless**, it can be really attractive for terrorist finances as they can transfer funds across countries in a cheap way.
- Certain characteristics of cryptocurrency like speed, cost, security make it a lucrative source to finance such activities
- Cryptocurrency is being used to fund child pornography, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking
- **Most new users know close to nothing of the technology**, or how to verify the genuineness of a particular crypto currency.
- **Intense volatility** of cryptocurrency.

### **Way ahead:**

- Facebook's entrance into the financial industry is a threat to democracies and their citizens around the world, on the same scale as disinformation and information warfare, which also depend on social media for their effectiveness.
- In the wake of the not too distant global financial crisis, and the "fake news" and disinformation culture that is developing, people must slow down and fully evaluate disruptive technology of this magnitude. Society cannot withstand a launch of a cryptocurrency in Facebook's infamous "move fast and break things" style.

Sources: The Hindu & Indian Express.

# FACTS for PRELIMS

## 1. IMPORTANT FACTS IN NEWS

- Prices of milk in the country are **decided by the Cooperative and Private dairies** based on cost of production.
- Under the distribution of legislative powers between the Union of India and States **under Article 246(3) of the Constitution, the preservation of cattle is a matter on which the legislature of the States has exclusive powers to legislate.**
- As per **article 48** of Indian Constitution the state shall endeavour to **organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall in particular take steps for preserving improving the breed, and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.**
- 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the **Seventh Schedule** to the Constitution of India and therefore, the State Governments are primarily responsible for prevention, detection, registration and investigation of crime and for prosecuting the criminals through the machinery of their law Enforcement agencies, as also for protecting the life and property of the citizens.

## 2. FINANCIAL LITERACY WEEK

- Context:** The Financial Literacy Week 2019 will be observed from 3 June to 7 June.
- It is an annual initiative by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to promote awareness on key topics through a focused campaign.
- The theme of Financial Literacy Week 2019 is 'Farmers' which focuses on how they can benefit by being a part of the formal banking system.
- The aim of initiative is to create awareness about financial products and services, good financial practices, going digital and consumer protection.

## 3. GO TRIBAL CAMPAIGN

- TRIFED has organized this event to **institutionalize collaborations and partnerships with different organizations to promote tribal products.**
- Campaign will be launched under which a number of innovative activities have been planned to be undertaken to promote use of tribal handicrafts, handicrafts and natural products.

## 4. "TRACKCHILD" AND "KHOYA-PAYA" WEB PORTALS

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed web portals "TrackChild" and "Khoya-Paya" to track the missing and found children.
- The **TrackChild Portal** is implemented in association with various stakeholders including Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Ministry of Railways, State Governments/UT Administrations, Child Welfare Committees, Juvenile Justice Boards and National Legal Services Authority.
- The "**Khoya-Paya**" has been integrated as a citizen corner on TrackChild portal.

## 5. GAMA PORTAL

- The Government has launched an online portal called "**Grievance Against Misleading Advertisements**" (GAMA) where complaints relating to misleading advertisements can be lodged.

## 6. APEDA

- Context:** The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) was established by the Government of India under the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act 1985**. The Authority replaced the Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPC).

APEDA is mandated with the responsibility of export promotion and development of the following scheduled products:

- Fruits, Vegetables and their Products.
- Meat and Meat Products.
- Poultry and Poultry Products.
- Dairy Products.
- Confectionery, Biscuits and Bakery Products.
- Honey, Jaggery and Sugar Products.
- Cocoa and its products, chocolates of all kinds.
- Alcoholic and Non-Alcoholic Beverages.
- Cereal and Cereal Products.
- Groundnuts, Peanuts and Walnuts.
- Pickles, Papads and Chutneys.
- Guar Gum.
- Floriculture and Floriculture Products.
- Herbal and Medicinal Plants.

### Administrative set up:

- Chairman – Appointed by the Central Government.
- Director – Appointed by APEDA.
- Secretary – Appointed by the Central Government.
- Other Officers and Staff – Appointed by the Authority.

## 7. NCPHR

- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPHR) was set up in March 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.
- It works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development.
- The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.
- The Commission's Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## 8. CENTRE FOR INLAND AND COASTAL MARITIME TECHNOLOGY (CICMT)

- As per a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), signed between the Union Ministry of Shipping and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, the Centre for Inland and Coastal Maritime Technology (CICMT) will be set up at IIT Kharagpur.
- CICMT will be a state-of-the-art centre which will be set up under the flagship Sagarmala Programme.
- CICMT will focus on ship design for coastal as well as inland waterways, shipbuilding technology & structural design, cryogenic cargo handling, transport systems & logistics, renewable energy harvesting from coastal and inland waters and artificial intelligence (AI) and automation for maritime operations.

## 9. JAMMU KASHMIR RESERVATION BILL

- Context:** Cabinet has approved the Jammu Kashmir Reservation Bill.
- The Jammu & Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2014, provides reservation to the persons belonging to Pahari community, clan or tribe having distinct cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity, in government jobs.
- This will bring relief for persons in Jammu and Kashmir residing in areas adjoining international border.

## 10. IRSDC

- Indian Railway Station Development Corporation (IRSDC) enters into Tripartite Agreement with French National Railways (SNCF) & AFD, a French Agency.
- AFD a French agency, has agreed to provide in-kind grant financing up to 7,00,000 EURO, through French National Railways (SNCF)-Hubs and Connexions as a Technical Partner to IRSDC to support the Railway Station Development Program in India. This will impose no financial liability on IRSDC or Indian Railways.

## 11. HYGIENE RATING MADE COMPULSORY IN PUNJAB

- The Punjab government has decided to make it mandatory for all online food aggregators to ensure that food supplied by them should compulsorily have hygiene rating as per Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) guidelines.
- Need:** The online food order and door to door delivery mechanism of food supply has created a physical disconnect between consumers and the food maker. Therefore, the onus of ensuring quality of food and that conditions under which food is prepared are hygienic has shifted to the intermediate food delivery mechanism.

## 12. HARYANA GOVERNMENT WITHDRAWS EBPG QUOTA

- Context:** The Haryana government has withdrawn its quotas of posts kept reserved under the Economically Backward Persons in General Category (EBPG) and Backward Class (Block-C) in government jobs and state-run educational institutions. The government has also asked all the departments of the state government to release reserved posts from the quota into the General/ unreserved category.

## 13. 'SMART' POLICING

- Context:** Rahimatpur police station in Satara district in western Maharashtra has emerged as the State topper in a survey based on the 'SMART' policing concept announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The Kalu police station in Rajasthan's Bikaner came first rank in the country for having recreational facilities for police personnel, and a helpdesk for women besides being equipped with wi-fi servers.
- Background:** Mr. Modi had first called for making the police force 'SMART' — strict and sensitive, modern and mobile, alert and accountable, reliable and responsive, techno-savvy and trained — while addressing the 49th annual conference of Directors-General and Inspectors-General of Police in Guwahati in 2014.
- Parameters:** The Quality Council of India (QCI), which executed the survey, assessed 87 shortlisted police stations across the country on a number of parameters like performance in controlling crime, infrastructure of the police building, mess and optimal use of technology, and citizen feedback.
- The other vital parameters included** approachability and discipline of the police personnel, storage of manual records in the police station as well as the station head officer's (SHO's) declaration of the budgetary process.

## 14. UDCHALO

- What is it?** 'UdChalo' is a travel portal that caters for the personal travel of the military and paramilitary

- forces personnel by aggregating defence fares and getting exclusive discounts.
- It aims to empower the disabled military veterans. The initiative is unique and has given a new lease of life of these soldiers who are now confined to wheelchairs.

## 15. BRAHMOS

- The **Anti-ship version of supersonic cruise missile BrahMos** was test fired from the launch complex-3 of Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur in Odisha.
- The name BrahMos is formed from names of **two rivers**. Indian river **Brahmaputra** and the **Moskva** River of Russia.
- Manufactured at **BrahMos Aerospace Limited** which is a joint venture between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyenia (NPOM).
- The medium-range **ramjet** supersonic cruise missile has a strike range of about **290 km**.
- The BrahMos is the **fastest cruise missile** of its class in the world.

## 16 SPICE 2000 GUIDED BOMBS

- Context:** Indian Air Force (IAF) has signed a deal with **Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems**, an Israeli defence firm to procure a batch of SPICE 2000 guided bombs.
- The SPICE stands for **Smart, Precise Impact and Cost-Effective**. It is guidance and maneuvering kit manufactured by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.
- SPICE can overcome errors in locating target, GPS jamming and also reduces collateral damage.

## 17. NASAMS-II

- Context:** US approves sale of **NASAMS-II air defence systems** to India.
- NASAMS-II (National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System – NASAMS) is an upgraded version of the NASAMS developed by Raytheon in partnership with KONGSBERG Defence and Aerospace of Norway.
- It features new 3D mobile surveillance radars and 12 missile launchers for quicker reaction.
- It provides tailor-able, state-of-the-art defence system that can maximise the ability to quickly identify, engage and destroy current and evolving enemy aircraft, UAV or emerging cruise missile threats.
- NASAMS-II is armed with 3D Sentinel radars, short and medium-range missiles, launchers, fire-distribution centres and command and control units to quickly detect, track and shoot down multiple airborne threats.

## 18. HYPersonic TECHNOLOGY DEMONSTRATOR VEHICLE (HSTDV)

- Context:** DRDO recently conducted maiden test of an **indigenously developed Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV)**.
- HSTDV is an **unmanned scramjet demonstration aircraft**.
- HSTDV is **dual-use technology** and can have multiple **civilian applications**. It can be **used for launching satellites at low cost and can also be available for long-range cruise missiles of future**.

## 19. VARUNAstra TORPEDOES

- Context:** Indian Navy and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) have signed a contract for supply of heavyweight torpedo **Varunastra to Indian Navy**.
- Varunastra is basically a **ship-launched, electrically-propelled underwater weapon** equipped with one of the most advanced automatic and remote-controlled guidance systems.
- It is the **only torpedo in the world to have a GPS-based locating aid**.
- The anti-submarine electric torpedo when fired can travel at 40 knots, or 74 kmph.
- The operational range is 40 km and it can carry a warhead weighing 250 kg.
- The weapon has been jointly developed by the Naval Science and Technology Laboratory (NTSL), Visakhapatnam and the Bharat Dynamics Limited - BDL (Hyderabad).

## 20. DEFENCE SPACE RESEARCH AGENCY (DSRA)

- The Cabinet Committee on Security headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has cleared the setting up of the **Defence Space Research Agency (DSRA)**.
- DSRA has been entrusted with the task of **creating space warfare weapon systems and technologies**.
- The agency would be provided with a team of scientists which would be working in **close coordination with the tri-services integrated Defence staff officers**.
- It would be providing the **research and development support to the Defence Space Agency (DSA)** which comprises members of the three services.
- The DSA has been created “**to help the country fight wars in the space**”.
- The **Defence Space Agency is being set up in Bengaluru** under an Air Vice Marshal-rank officer and will gradually take over the space-related capabilities of the three forces.

## 21. OPERATION SANKALP

- Indian Navy launched **Operation Sankalp** in the **Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman** to reassure Indian flagged vessels transiting through the area following the recent maritime incidents in the region.

- The operation has been launched in the wake of escalating tension in the Gulf of Oman, where two oil tankers were attacked last week.

## 22. KHARGA PRAHAR

- What is it?** It is a major training exercise conducted by the Indian Army.
- The latest edition was undertaken in plains of Punjab by various units and formations of Army's Kharga Corps.
- II Corps** is a corps of the Indian Army, based in Ambala and known as **Kharga Corps**.

## 23. INDIAN NAVY ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION ROADMAP (INECR)

- Context:** The Navy is pressing ahead with its eco-friendly programme, the Indian Navy Environment Conservation Roadmap (INECR).
- INECR that comprises specific action plans covering the gamut of operations, maintenance, administration, infrastructure and community living.
- The road map envisions 'reduction in energy consumption' and 'diversification of energy supply' as the key result areas.
- Under the INEGR, numerous policies aimed at reduction of energy consumption and environment sustenance have been formulated and disseminated to all ships, as well as shore establishments.

## 24. PLANT DISCOVERIES 2018 AND ANIMAL DISCOVERIES 2018

- Context:** 596 new species of flora and fauna were discovered from India in the year 2018. The details of the discoveries were made public by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in the publications Plant Discoveries 2018 and Animal Discoveries 2018 .

### Key findings:

- Of the 596 species, 372 come under fauna (311 invertebrates and 61 vertebrates).
- The newly identified 224 plant species include seed plants, pteridophytes, bryophytes, fungi and lichen.
- About 31% of the plant species were discovered in the **Himayalas**.
- In the case of animals, the **Western Ghats** remained a biological hotspot from where about 50% of the species were found.
- Of the 61 species of vertebrates discovered this year, reptiles dominate (30 species).
- Kerala recorded the highest number of discoveries** with 59 species. West Bengal, a state with both Himalayan and coastal ecosystems, recorded 38 and Tamil Nadu recorded 26.
- With these new discoveries, the updated list of animal species in India has risen to 1,01,681 which is **about 6.49% of all the species in the world**.
- The number of plant species in the country has been updated to 49,441 which is **5% of all flora in the world**.

## 25. NEW SPECIES OF WASP FROM GOA

- Context:** Scientists have recently identified a new species of wasp from the genus **Kudakrumia** in Goa. The new Wasp species was collected in the Western Ghats forests from **Cotigao Wildlife sanctuary**.
- The wasp is dubbed as **Kudakrumia rangnekari**. It has been named after Parag Rangnekar, a Goa-based researcher.
- It belongs to genus **Kudakrumia**. The Kudakrumia is a genus of primitive wasps that is described and previously known only from Sri Lanka.
- It is any insect of order **Hymenoptera** and suborder **Apocrita** which means neither a bee nor an ant. Wasps are proficient at controlling pest populations and thus are deployed to protect crops.

## 26. IMPRESSIVE TORTOISE FROM ARUNACHAL PRADESH

- A tortoise considered beautiful enough to be named '**impressed**' has been discovered in Arunachal Pradesh.
- This is the **first record of the tortoise in India**, taking the count to five and the non-marine chelonian count to 29. **Chelonian is an order of reptile that includes turtles, terrapins and tortoises**.
- India was known to be the **home of only the Asian Forest Tortoise (Manouria emys)** until the discovery of the Impressed Tortoise.
- The **Asian Forest Tortoise, the largest in mainland Asia, is found only in the northeast**, as are 20 of the other 28 species of chelonians.

## 27. PADDY FROG

- Researchers have discovered a new species of '**Paddy Frog**' from **Northeast India, primarily in Assam**.
- The newly discovered species has been named **Aishani**, which is derived from Sanskrit word 'aishani' or aisani meaning Northeast.
- The frog belongs to genus **Micryletta**, (a small genus of microhylid frogs). The microhylid genus is a group of narrow-mouthed frogs that are more commonly known as paddy frogs and are primarily and widely distributed in Southeast Asia (SEA). **As of now, there are only 4 recognised species in this group and newly discovered Micryletta aishani becomes the 5th**.
- It is likely to be more widely distributed in Northeast India, particularly Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot region.

## 28. ASIATIC GOLDEN CAT

- Context:** The coat of **Asiatic golden cat** comes in five other shades besides the golden colour in Arunachal Pradesh, scientists have discovered.
- Its **coat comes in six types**: cinnamon, golden, gray, melanistic, ocelot and tightly rosetted.
- The Asiatic golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*) is listed as **near threatened** on the International Union

- for Conservation of Nature's Red List of threatened species.
- It is found across eastern Nepal through north-eastern India to Indonesia.
  - Scientists believe that the wide variation displayed in the cat's coats provides them with several ecological benefits such as occupying different habitats at different elevations — from wet tropical lowland forests to alpine scrubs — and providing camouflage while preying on pheasants and rabbits.

## 29. TREE-FELLING BAN IN BIHAR

- Context:** The Government of Bihar recently banned felling of trees, citing increasing pollution as well as a fatal heatwave. The order was passed under the **Forest Conservation Act**.
- Trees on private land, however, can be felled in the absence of a tree-protection Act in Bihar.

## 30. PARTHENOGENESIS

- Context:** About a week ago, the New England Aquarium in the US announced that a "virgin" anaconda had given birth during the winter. The aquarium does not have a male anaconda. Yet Anna, a green anaconda, gave birth to a few babies in January, two of which have survived. In scientific terminology, it is known as **parthenogenesis**.

### How it happens?

- Parthenogenesis is "a reproductive strategy that involves development of a female (rarely a male) gamete (sex cell) without fertilisation. It occurs commonly among lower plants and invertebrate animals (particularly rotifers, aphids, ants, wasps and bees) and rarely among higher vertebrates".
- A gamete is the egg in females and the sperm in males. In animals, parthenogenesis means development of an embryo from an unfertilised egg cell.
- Many species that reproduce through parthenogenesis do not reproduce sexually. Others switch between the two modes taking cues from the environment.
- About 2,000 species are known to reproduce through parthenogenesis, which is one of the known means of asexual reproduction. Grafting (of plants) is also a type of asexual reproduction.

### Key features:

- Babies born through parthenogenesis are clones of the mother, as has now been confirmed by the aquarium through DNA tests.
- Parthenogenetic offspring tend to be clones of the parent because there has been no exchange and rearrangement of genetic information with another individual as happens in case of a sexual reproductive process.

## 31. BLIGHT DISEASE IN RICE

- Context:** Scientists unravel fungus responsible for **Sheath Blight disease in rice**.
- A strain of Rhizoctonia solani** is the fungal pathogen that causes the dreaded Sheath Blight disease in rice.
- The researchers have identified several genes and gene families in the strain that might account for their disease aggressiveness. **This genomic insight is expected to help develop rice varieties resistant to sheath blight disease**.
- About Sheath Blight disease:** It is a major issue in rice cultivation. It can cause up to 60 per cent reduction in rice yield. It is difficult to breed disease resistant rice varieties, as there is lack of natural source of disease resistance.

## 32. PER- AND POLYFLUOROALKYL (PFAS)

- Context:** Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAs), a chemical on non-stick cookware among many other things, has made its way into the human food chain, according to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- What are PFAs?** PFAs, currently unregulated in India, are a group of artificial chemicals used in many items of daily use. apart from cookware, they are found in resistant fabrics used for cleaning, paints and food packaging.
- Concerns:** The chemicals can be fatal for human beings, travelling through bloodstreams and collecting in the kidney and liver. Continuous deposition can lead to dysfunction of organs or cancer after a period.

## 33. BALSAMS OR JEWEL-WEEDS

- Context:** Eastern Himalayas, a treasure trove of Balsams, yields 20 new species.

### About Balsams:

- Belonging to Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, these plants are highly sensitive to climatic conditions like **extreme drought and extended exposure to sunlight**.
- Consisting of both **annual and perennial herbs**, balsams are **succulent plants** with high endemism. Because of their bright beautiful flowers, these group of plants are of prized horticultural significance.

## 34. PROTON THERAPY

- Proton therapy, also called **proton beam therapy**, is a type of radiation therapy.
- It **uses protons** rather than x-rays to treat cancer.
- Like x-ray radiation, proton therapy is a type of **external-beam radiation therapy**. It painlessly delivers radiation through the skin from a machine outside the body.
- A proton is a **positively charged particle**. At high energy, protons can destroy cancer cells. Doctors may use proton therapy alone.

## 35. AROGYAPACHA (TRICHOPUS ZEYLANICUS)

- **Context:** Scientists from the University of Kerala have decoded the genetic make-up of **Arogyapacha (Trichopus zeylanicus)**, a highly potent medicinal plant **endemic to the Agasthya hills**.
- This ‘miracle plant’ is known for its traditional use by the **Kani tribal community** to combat fatigue.
- Studies have also proved its varied spectrum of **pharmacological properties** such as anti-oxidant, aphrodisiac, anti-microbial, anti-inflammatory, immunomodulatory, anti-tumour, anti-ulcer, anti-hyperlipidemic, hepatoprotective and anti-diabetic.

## 36. RADARSAT CONSTELLATION MISSION (RCM)

- **Context: Canada’s RADARSAT Constellation Mission (RCM)** was launched successfully into space aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California.
- The constellation of three satellites will provide daily images of Canada’s vast territory and maritime approaches, as well as images of the Arctic, up to four times a day.
- It will have daily access to 90 percent of the world’s surface.
- The RCM is also equipped with an Automatic Identification System (AIS), allowing improved detection and tracking of ships, including those conducting illegal fishing.
- The RADARSAT Constellation Mission will provide improved data for the critical services our government provides to Canadians, including monitoring climate change, protecting the health of our oceans, forests and crops; and supporting our first responders’ disaster relief efforts.

## 37. DEVICE TO TRAP OCEAN PLASTIC RELAUNCHES

- A floating device designed to catch plastic waste has been redeployed in a second attempt to clean up an island of trash swirling in **the Pacific Ocean between California and Hawaii**.
- It is part of the **Ocean Cleanup Project**.
- Ocean currents concentrate plastic in five areas in the world: **the subtropical gyres, also known as the world’s “ocean garbage patches”**.
- The **Ocean Cleanup is a non-profit organization**, developing advanced technologies to rid the world’s oceans of plastic.

## 38. ANCIENT NORTH SIBERIANS

- Scientists have identified a previously unknown group of ancient people who lived in north eastern Siberia during the last Ice Age that lasted from about 126,000 to 11,700 years ago.
- The team named the group ‘**Ancient North Siberians**’ and described their existence as the ‘missing link’ in the Native American ancestry.

- Ancient North Siberians endured extreme conditions during the late Pleistocene (often referred to as the Ice Age) and survived by hunting woolly mammoths, woolly rhinoceroses, and bison.
- They were ancestors both to the first humans who inhabited the Americas (the first Peoples) and to a subsequent Siberian group (the Ancient Palaeo-Siberians).
- They also possessed the mosaic genetic make-up of modern-day people inhabiting across northern Eurasia and the Americas: These ancient Palaeo-Siberians got 75 per cent their DNA from East Asians, while for the first people in the Americas it was 63 per cent.

## 39. TRICHOPHYTON RUBRUM

- **Context:** Researchers have developed a novel translucent nail lacquer- **antifungal Bilayer Nail Lacquer (BNL)**- fortified with an antifungal drug to treat **onychomycosis**. The drug-infused, quick-drying polymer can be easily applied like nail polish.
- **Background:** A fungus, **Trichophyton rubrum**, causes painful infection of toe and fingernails. Prevalent in coastal regions and wet work zones, the infection known as **Onychomycosis** accounts for about half of all nail diseases. It **causes brittleness, discolouration and disfigurement of nails**.
- **Treatment:** The disease needs prolonged treatment with both oral medication and application of ointments, which are both expensive and have side effects.

## 40. CENTRALLY-CONTROLLED AIR TRAFFIC FLOW MANAGEMENT (C-AFTM) SYSTEM

- **Context:** Airports Authority of India (AAI) is working towards the implementation of a **Centrally-controlled Air Traffic Flow Management (C-AFTM)** system across country’s airspace and major airports, particularly those with high traffic density, in its bid to cut travel time for fliers.

### What is it?

- The new system would integrate data from airlines, airports and air-traffic agencies and inform airlines about the time planes will be parked at the destination airport well before departure.
- The system is primarily meant to address the balancing of capacity against the demand to achieve optimum utilization of the major resources such as airport, airspace and aircraft at every Indian airport where there is a capacity constraint.

## 41. ODISHA FLOOD HAZARD ATLAS

- **Context:** Odisha has come out with a unique **flood hazard atlas** on the basis of historic flood inundation captured through satellite imagery over the period from 2001 to 2018, which is expected to help the State manage floods more efficiently.
- The **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**,

Hyderabad had taken the study on flood hazard zonation for Odisha.

- **Background:** Vast areas of the State are inundated when there is flooding every year in major rivers, namely, the Mahanadi, Brahmani, Baitarani, Subarnarekha and Rushikulya. Some of the rivers like, the Vamsadhara and Budhabalanga, also cause flash floods due to instant run-off from their hilly catchments.

## 42. PLASTIC PARKS

- **Context:** 4 Plastic Parks approved for implementation in Phase-I- in the States of Assam (Tinsukia), Madhya Pradesh (Raisen), Odisha (Jagatsinghpur) & Tamil Nadu (Thiruvallur).
- There is a scheme in place to establish Plastic Parks across the country.
- As per the Scheme guidelines, a **Special Purpose Vehicle set up by the concerned State government**, which is the implementing agency, is responsible for all statutory approvals, including environmental clearances from the state level authorities at the DPR stage.
- Further, the Scheme also provides building common infrastructure to support the plastic production units for hazardous waste management, incinerator, buildings and equipment/machinery for common facilities for characterization, prototyping & virtualization, non-destructive material testing, incubation, training, warehousing, plastic recycling, tooling, designing, Research & Development, plastic waste recycling etc. and establishment of effluent treatment plant, to ensure environmentally sustainable growth through innovative methods of waste management, recycling, etc

## 43. PAROLE

- Parole is a system of releasing a prisoner with suspension of the sentence. The release is conditional, usually subject to behaviour, and requires periodic reporting to the authorities for a set period of time.
- Parole is considered a reformatory process, and the provision (along with furlough) was introduced with a view to humanising the prison system.

### How is it different from Furlough?

- A broadly similar but subtly different concept is furlough, which is given in case of long-term imprisonment. While furlough is seen as a matter of right, to be granted periodically irrespective of any reason and merely to enable the prisoner to retain family and social ties, parole is not a matter of right and may be denied to a prisoner even when he makes out a sufficient case.

### Granting authority:

- In India, parole and furlough are covered under the **Prison Act of 1894**. Prisoners convicted of

multiple murders or under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act are not eligible for parole.

- Since **prison is a subject of the state**, the Prison Act of the particular state government defines the rules under which parole is granted. **State governments have their own Prisoner Release on Parole Rules**.
- Parole is granted by the state executive — the jail authorities submit the report to state government — and competent authority takes a final decision on grant of parole on humanitarian considerations.
- If parole is rejected, the convict can move the High Court challenging the order of the competent authority. Also, apart from regular parole, the superintendent of a jail can also grant parole up to a period of seven days in emergent cases.

## 44. COMPULSORY RETIREMENT

- **Context:** Fifteen senior Finance Ministry officials of Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) have been sent into compulsory retirement, as a part of the action aimed at cleaning up the government service. Orders issued by the Finance Ministry have quoted clause J of rule 56 of the Fundamental Rules.

### Provisions in this regard:

- Clause (J) of Rule 56 of the Fundamental Rules says: "The Appropriate Authority shall, if it is of the opinion that it is in the public interest to do so, have the absolute right to retire any government servant by giving him notice of not less than three months in writing or three months' pay and allowances in lieu of such notice."
- Based on the above said rule, the President has retired these officials in public interest with immediate effect on completing 50 years of age.

## 45. YAMUNA WATER TAXI PROJECT

- It has been conceived as an integrated development project combining several functions like terminal development and vessels operation.
- The project covers a total length of 16 km and comprises five locations on the banks of River Yamuna in Delhi, including Fatepur Jat, Tronica City, Jagatpur, Sonia Vihar and Wazirabad.

## 46. DD DISTRIBUTES FREE DISH SET TOP BOXES IN J&K

- **Context:** Country's national broadcaster Doordarshan has distributed Free Dish Set Top Boxes in Jammu and Kashmir. This Set Top Boxes will be provided free of cost and the audience will be able to view 100 channels for free in the state.
- DD Free Dish is the biggest direct-to-home (DTH) operator in the country with 3.5 crore connections.

## 47. JNANPITH AWARD

- **Context:** Renowned English fiction writer Amitav Ghosh was recently felicitated with **54th Jnanpith Award**. He is the **1st English language writer to become a Jnanpith laureate**.

### About:

- The Jnanpith Award is one of the prestigious literary honours in the country. The award was **instituted in 1961**.
- **Eligibility:** Any Indian citizen who writes in any of the official languages of India is eligible for the honour.
- Initially English language was not considered for the Award but after 49th Jnanpith Award, **English language was added to the list of languages for consideration**.

## 48. BAL SAHITYA PURASKAR, YUVA PURASKAR

- **Context:** Sahitya Akademi, India's national academy of letters, has announced a list of 22 winners of the **Bal Sahitya Puraskar** and 23 recipients of the **Yuva Puraskar** for this year.
- While the Bal Puraskar will be conferred upon the winners on the Children's Day, the day for the Yuva Puraskar is yet to be decided.
- **About Bal Sahitya Puraskar:** The Awards relate to books 1st published during five years period immediately before the year Award is conferred, which means between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2017. However, during initial 10 years (from 2010 to 2019) award may also be given to an author based on his/her total contribution to Children Literature.
- **About Yuva Puraskar:** This Award relates to books published by an author who is 35 years of age and below as on 1st January of the year of award.

## 49. MEXICO'S HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD

- **Context:** Former Indian President of India Pratibha Patil has been conferred the "**Orden Mexicana del Aguila Azteca**" (**Order of the Aztec Eagle**) – the highest civilian award of Mexico given to foreigner.
- Ms Patil becomes only the **second Indian head of state to get the award**. Earlier, the late President S. Radhakrishna had been conferred this honour.

### About the Award:

- Mexico's highest distinction for foreigners is in recognition of their outstanding services to the Mexican nation or humanity, significant contributions to strengthening the bilateral relations between Mexico and other countries, said an official spokesperson.
- The royal eagle is Mexico's national animal, sacred to the ancient Aztecs and it is present on the National Emblem of the Mexican flag.
- **Created by a decree in 1993** by the then President of Mexico, Abelardo L. Rodriguez, it is awarded to

prominent heads of state or government, ambassadors after they have served in Mexico, important personalities who have made major contribution in various fields, service to the country or its people.

- **The award comes in five degrees** – Collar, Sash of Special Category, Sash, Plaque, Venera and Insignia.
- **Previous Indian recipients** in various categories include Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, renowned artist Satish Gujral, industrialist Raghupati Singhania, Consul-General of Mexico in Mumbai Rajju Shroff and others.

**Note: From prelims perspective, please remember the locations mentioned and their geographical positions.**

## 50. WORLD'S SOUTHERNMOST CITY

- **Puerto Williams** in Chile has become world's southernmost city after its status upgraded from hamlet to city. It is the main settlement, port and naval base on Navarino Island in Chile.
- It took over the title from **Ushuaia** in **Argentina** which was world's southernmost city till recently.
- Puerto Williams faces the **Beagle Channel**, which is a strait in Tierra del Fuego Archipelago (shared by Chile and Argentina) on South America's extreme southern tip.

## 51. SIACHEN GLACIER

- **Why in News?** New defence minister's visit.

### Key facts:

- Siachen Glacier is among of the largest glaciers in the non-polar region of the world.
- It lies in the **Karakoram Range system** which is a part of western Himalayas.
- It also lies to the south of the zone that separates **Eurasian Plate with the Indian Plate**, which is the result of convergence boundary interaction in geographical terms.
- The word Siachen comes out of two words: "Sia" which means rose and "Chun" which means anything found in abundance according to "Balti" language. Therefore it represents the **place of roses**.
- It is the **highest battle field in the world** and lies on LoC (Line of Control) between India and Pakistan. It has been continuously contested by Pakistan as its own part which has led to militarisation of the glacier.
- After the Indo-Pakistan war in 1971, an agreement was signed between the two countries in 1972, which came to be known as the **Shimla Agreement**, but it failed to clearly mention who controls the glacier.
- However, in 1984, the Pakistan army tried to enter the glacier, forcing India to launch a military operation known as "**Operation Meghdoot**" and

since then we have control over the glacier. Frequent skirmishes did occur between 1884 to 2003. A ceasefire agreement was signed between India and Pakistan in 2003

- The glacier is the source of many rivers including **Nubra River**, a tributary of Shyok, which is a part of the Indus River System.
- Siachen Glacier also boasts of the **world's highest helipad built by India at Point Sonam**, to supply its troops. India also installed the world's highest telephone booth on the glacier.
- The region is also a home to rare species of snow leopard, brown bear etc which may be affected by military presence. This has led to talks in international forums about creating a "Peace Park" in the area and demilitarise it.

## 52. MOUNT ETNA

- Context:** Italy's Mount Etna volcano has erupted again.

### 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 tall.
- 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.

## 53. STRAIT OF HORMUZ

- It is the waterway separates Iran and Oman, linking the Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- The Strait is 21 miles (33 km) wide at its narrowest point, but the shipping lane is just two miles (three km) wide in either direction.

### Why does Strait of Hormuz matter?

- 5 million barrels per day (bpd) of seaborne oil passed through the waterway in 2016. That was about 30 per cent of crude and other oil liquids traded by sea in 2016. About 17.2 million bpd of crude and condensates were estimated to have been shipped through the Strait in 2017 and about 17.4 million bpd in the first half of 2018.
- With global oil consumption standing at about 100 million bpd, that means almost a fifth passes through the Strait.

- Most crude exported from Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, Kuwait and Iraq — all members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries — is shipped through the waterway.
- It is also the route used for nearly all the liquefied natural gas (LNG) produced by the world's biggest LNG exporter, Qatar.

## 54. WORLD'S HIGHEST WEATHER STATION AT MOUNT EVEREST

- Context:** Climate scientists have created a history by installing **world's highest operating weather station at Mount Everest's Death Zone**, including five other automated stations on other parts of the mountain.
- The weather station will record data on** temperature, relative humidity, barometric pressure, wind speed, and wind direction. Besides, the new weather stations will also give scientists direct observations to understand **jet stream**, and will also help understand how the climate change is affecting the Himalayas.
- The other five weather stations that are located in the Mount Everest are in **Balcony area (8,430 m)**, **South Col (7,945m)** at Phortse (3,810 m), **Everest Base Camp (5,315 m)** and **Camp 2 (6,464 m)**.

## 55. VARIOUS ETHNIC COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE WORLD

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-where-are-the-worlds-stateless-people-5800506/>

- Myanmar/Bangladesh: **Rohingya**.
- Thailand: Yao, Hmong, Karen and Sea Gypsies.
- Syria: **Kurds**.
- Kuwait: Bedouin tribes.
- Iraq: Bidoon and Faili Kurds.

## 56. CYCLONE VAYU

- Cyclone Vayu** – it is still to develop into a cyclone and is only a deep depression as of now – is currently positioned around 250 km northwest of Aminidivi island in Lakshadweep and about 750 km southwest of Mumbai.
- Cyclones are sustained by very **strong low-pressure areas at their core**. Winds in surrounding areas are forced to rush towards these low-pressure areas.

### Arabian Sea cyclones:

- Though cyclones are common in the June, very few of them originate in the Arabian Sea. Most of them are found in the Bay of Bengal. In the last 120 years for which records are available, just about 14% of all cyclonic storms, and 23% of severe cyclones, around India have occurred in the Arabian Sea. Arabian Sea cyclones are also relatively weak compared to those emerging in the Bay of Bengal.
- This, along with the fact that the Gujarat coastline, which is where most of the cyclones emerging in the Arabian Sea are headed, is not very densely

populated, ensures that the damage potential of the cyclones on the western coast is comparatively low.

## 57. KAILASH MANASAROVAR YATRA

- Kailash Mansarovar Yatra (KMY) is known for its religious importance, cultural significance and arduous nature. The annual pilgrimage holds religious importance for Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.
- The Yatra is organized by the government of India in close cooperation with the Government of the People's Republic of China. State Governments of Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Delhi, and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam Limited (KMVN) are other major Indian partners of the Ministry in organizing the Yatra.
- Mansarovar Lake** is located at an altitude of 14,950 ft (4,558 m) is said to be the **highest freshwater lake in the world**. It is located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, 940 kilometres from Lhasa. To the west of it is **Lake Rakshastal** and to the north is **Mount Kailash**.
- Nathu La** is a mountain pass in the Himalayas. It connects the Indian state of Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region. It is also one of the four officially agreed BPM (Border Personnel Meeting) points between the Indian Army and People's Liberation Army of China for regular consultations and interactions between the two armies, which helps in defusing stand-offs.

## 58. KASHMIR ANNUAL KHEER BHAWANI MELA

- Hundreds gather in Kashmir for annual Kheer Bhawani mela.
- The Kheer Bhawani mela is one of the biggest religious functions of the Kashmiri Pandits.
- It has become a symbol of communal harmony as Muslims in the locality make all the arrangements for the devotees, including setting up of stalls for flowers and other offerings.

## 59. VAISHNO DEVI SHRINE TO HAVE OWN DISASTER RESPONSE FORCE

- Context:** The Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu will get a dedicated in-house disaster response force by September next year.
- The shrine is located atop the **Trikuta hills** in Reasi district of Jammu region.
- The **shrine board and the NDRF** have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) early this year keeping in mind the hilly terrain and need to impart advanced disaster management training to the shrine board staff in batches to keep them in a state of readiness for effectively and promptly responding to any disaster situation.

## 60. SAMADHI BUDDHA

- Context:** Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena has gifted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi a Samadhi Buddha statue.

- The Samadhi Buddha** is a famous statue situated at **Mahamevnāwa Park in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka**. The Buddha is depicted in the position of the **Dhyana Mudra**, the posture of meditation associated with his **first Enlightenment**. This statue is 7 feet 3 inches in height and carved from dolomite marble.



**Bhumisparsha Mudra**  
Touching the earth as Gautama did, to invoke the earth as witness to the truth of his words.



**Varada Mudra**  
Fulfillment of all wishes; the gesture of charity.



**Dhyana Mudra**  
The gesture of absolute balance, of meditation. The hands are relaxed in the lap, and the tips of the thumbs and fingers touch each other. When depicted with a begging bowl this is a sign of the head of an order.



**Abhaya Mudra**  
Gesture of reassurance, blessing, and protection. "Do not fear."



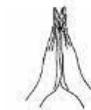
**Dharmachakra Mudra**  
The gesture of teaching usually interpreted as turning the Wheel of Law. The hands are held level with the heart, the thumbs and index fingers form circles.



**Vitarka Mudra**  
Intellectual argument, discussion. The circle formed by the thumb and index finger is the sign of the Wheel of Law.



**Tarjani Mudra**  
Threat, warning. The extended index finger is pointed at the opponent.



**Namaskara Mudra**  
Gesture of greeting, prayer, and adoration. Buddhas no longer make this gesture because they do not have to show devotion to anything.



**Jnana Mudra**  
Teaching. The hand is held at chest level and the thumb and index finger again form the Wheel of Law.



**Karana Mudra**  
Gesture with which demons are expelled.



**Ksepana Mudra**  
Two hands together in the gesture of 'sprinkling' the nectar of immortality.



**Uttarabodhi Mudra**  
Two hands placed together above the head with the index fingers together and the other fingers intertwined. The gesture of supreme enlightenment.

## 61. WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR 2019

- The **World Day against Child Labour** is observed across the world on June 12, 2019.
- Theme:** 'Children should not work in fields but on dreams'.
- The World Day against Child Labour was established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2002 to focus attention on the global extent of child labour and the action and efforts needed to eliminate it. The day brings together governments, employers and workers organizations, civil society as well as millions of people to highlight the plight of child labourers and measures to help them.
- UN Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7 set by the international community calls for an end to child labour in all its forms by 2025.
- World Day against Child Labour 2019 calls for full ratification and implementation of Convention No. 182 and of the ILO's Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). The day also aims to encourage ratification of the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, which protects both adults and children.
- This year marks 20 years since the adoption of the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

## 62. INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY 2018

- The International Yoga Day is celebrated every year on **June 21**. It was first introduced by the United Nations on June 21, 2015.
- The main **aim is to create an awareness worldwide on the importance of staying fit and healthy**.
- Why was June 21 selected to be International Yoga Day?** June 21 is the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere and has special significance in many parts of the world. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had proposed this date at the United Nations General Assembly 2014.
- 2019 Theme:** Yoga for Climate Action.



## 63. WORLD FOOD INDIA 2019

- The government initiated a **biennial event— World Food India to promote food processing sector at global level**.
- The first such event was conducted in 2017 and received wide success.
- The event created Brand India in global food map by positioning India as a **World Food Factory**.
- It was for the first time in India that all major policy makers and top industrialists across the globe in Food Processing Industries were together under one roof.

## 64. WORLD FOOD SAFETY DAY

- June 7 is set to be celebrated as the first World Food Safety Day.** This was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018.
- This year's **theme** is 'Food Safety, everyone's business'.
- The United Nations has designated two of its agencies — the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and the **World Health Organization (WHO)** —

to lead efforts in promoting food safety around the world.

### Various initiatives launched in India on the eve of World Food Safety Day

- State Food Safety Index (SFSI):** The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, has developed first State Food Safety Index (SFSI) to measure performance of States on five parameters of food safety. This is an effort of ministry to motivate states to work towards ensuring safe food for citizens. **Chandigarh topped the 2018-19 food safety index.** The first State Food Safety Index (SFSI) was to measure the performance of States on five parameters of food safety. The categories included human resources and institutional arrangements, compliance, food testing – infrastructure and surveillance, training and capacity building and consumer empowerment.
- Raman 1.0:** It is hand-held battery operated equipment that performs rapid detection, in less than a minute of economically driven adulteration in fats, ghee and edible oils.
- Food Safety Magic Box:** It is do-it-yourself food testing kit comprising of a manual and equipment to check for food adulterants. This can serve as innovative solution to take food safety to schools.
- Eat Right Awards:** instituted by FSSAI, with aim to recognize contributions made by food companies and individuals to empower citizens to choose safe and healthy food options so as to improve their health and well-being.

## 65. HIDDEN HUNGER

- What is it?** In many countries, in both the global North and South, **malnutrition and obesity** frequently co-exist in the same people. This is a condition known as "hidden hunger".
- Hidden hunger is a result of various factors.** These include poverty, inequality, urbanisation and industrialisation of the food system. The interplay of these factors leaves low income households with very limited access to fresh, healthy foods. Instead, many South Africans — and other people living in similar conditions — subsist on diets high in sugar and processed starch. These diets contribute to increasing levels of obesity.

## 66. AKSHAYA PATRA

- Context:** Akshaya Patra, a Bengaluru-based non-profit organisation (NGO) running one of the world's largest school meals project in India was recently awarded BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) World Service Global Champion Award for the programme.
- Funded by International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), Akshaya Patra is a

Bengaluru-based not-for-profit organisation that works with the government on **mid-day meal schemes**. It has a state-of-the-art kitchen in Vrindavan.

- Today, Akshaya Patra is the world's largest (not-for-profit run) Mid-Day Meal Programme serving wholesome food every school day to over 1.76 million children from 14,702 schools across 12 states in India.
- About BBC World Service Global Champion Award:** It is awarded to recognise a person or project who is changing the way world produces, processes, consumes or thinks about food for the better.

## 67. ANTARASHTRIYA YOGA DIWAS MEDIA SAMMAN (AYDMS)

- What is it?** It is a new award instituted recent life by the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting(I&B)**.
- Objective:** to recognise **contribution made by media** in spreading awareness about Yoga and for promotion and commemoration of International Yoga Day, held every year on 21 June.

## 68. RECIPROCAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

- Countries use bilateral/regional trade agreements to increase market access and expand trade in foreign markets. These agreements are called **reciprocal trade agreements (RTAs)** because members grant special advantages to each other.
- RTAs include many types of agreements**, such as preferential arrangements, free trade agreements, customs unions, and common markets, in which members agree to open their markets to each other's exports by lowering trade barriers.
- Need:** They have become an increasingly prominent feature of the multilateral trading system in recent years, in part, because of stalled global negotiations taking place under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Many observers believe that RTAs deepen market integration and complement efforts by the WTO to liberalize international markets. While acknowledging that RTAs can open up markets, other observers contend that these agreements also distort trade and discriminate against nonmember countries.

## 69. AFRICAN UNION

- The African Union (AU) is a continental union consisting of 55 countries of the continent of Africa, with exception of various territories of European possessions located in Africa.
- The bloc was founded on 26 May 2001 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and launched on 9 July 2002 in South Africa.
- The intention of the AU is to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), established on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa by 32 signatory governments.
- The most important decisions of the AU are made by the Assembly of the African Union, a semi-annual

meeting of the heads of state and government of its member states.

- The AU's secretariat, the African Union Commission, is based in Addis Ababa.

## 70. G20

- Context:** G20 Ministerial meeting on Trade and Digital Economy was recently held in **Japanese** city of Tsukuba.

### About G20:

- Formed in 1999, the G20 is an **international forum of the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies**.
- Collectively, the G20 economies account for around **85 percent of the Gross World Product (GWP)**, **80 percent of world trade**.
- The G20 has **no permanent staff of its own** and its **chairmanship rotates annually between nations divided into regional groupings**.

### Objectives:

- The Group was formed with an aim of studying, reviewing, and promoting high-level discussion of policy issues pertaining to the promotion of international financial stability.
- The forum aims to pre-empt balance of payments problems and turmoil on financial markets by improved coordination of monetary, fiscal, and financial policies.
- The forum seeks to address issues that go beyond the responsibilities of any one organisation.

### Member Countries:

- The members of the G20 consist of 19 individual countries plus the European Union (EU).
- The 19 member countries of the forum are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States.
- The European Union is represented by the European Commission and by the European Central Bank.

## 71. #IBELONG CAMPAIGN

- The **UNHCR #IBelong Campaign** was launched in November 2014. Together with States, civil society and other UN Agencies, it aims to end **statelessness by 2024 by resolving existing statelessness**, preventing new cases from emerging and better identifying and protecting stateless populations.
- Concerns:** At least 10 million people worldwide are currently stateless and a baby is born stateless every 10 minutes. Not allowed a nationality, they are often denied the rights and services that countries normally offer their citizens.

## 72. GOAML

- UAE Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) launched the new reporting platform, (goAML), developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), to facilitate the receipt, analysis and dissemination of suspicious transactions and activity reports.
- All financial institutions in the country have to now report any suspicious transactions through "goAML".

## 73. CONFETTI

- What is It? it's a first interactive game show Launched by Facebook in India.
- It will air from Wednesday to Sunday on Facebook Watch, Facebook's dedicated video platform.
- The participants stand a chance to win Rs.3 lakh as cash prize everyday on challenge of answering pop culture trivia questions.
- It seeks to enable its users to engage better and bring communities together around exceptional, interactive video experiences on Facebook.
- The interactive game was first launched in the United States (US) and is already available in other parts of the world the UK, Mexico, Canada, Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand.
- Facebook Watch: It is Facebook's video-on-demand service. It was globally rolled out by the social networking giant in 2018, in an attempt to take on its rival YouTube. It allows users to enjoy videos from different genres in their personalised Watch Feed (carries recent videos collection from pages followed).

## 74. EL SALVADOR RECOGNISES FORESTS AS LIVING ENTITIES

- El Salvador has, in a historic move, recognised forests as living entities. Its citizens, will now be required to preserve forests.
- El Salvador has lost about 85 per cent of its native forests since the 1960s, while Earth has lost about 80 per cent of its native forests.

## 75. INDIA, PORTUGAL TO JOIN HANDS IN SETTING UP MARITIME MUSEUM

- India and Portugal will cooperate in the setting up of a national maritime heritage museum at Lothal in Gujarat.
- It is likely to come up on the lines of a similar museum at Lisbon, which is administered by the Portuguese Navy.
- The project is being implemented by the Ministry of Shipping through its Sagarmala programme, with the involvement of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the State government and other stakeholders.

## 76. SAUDI LAUNCHES RESIDENCY SCHEME TO BOOST REVENUE

- Saudi Arabia has launched a new special residency scheme aimed at luring wealthy expats as it seeks to boost non-oil revenue.
- The scheme offers a permanent residency for 800,000 riyals (\$213,000) and a one-year renewable residency costing 100,000 riyals (\$27,000), according to the online portal for registrations.
- The scheme will allow expats to do business without a Saudi sponsor, buy property and sponsor visas for relatives.

## 77. NEPALESE NATIONALS REQUIRE VISA TO ENTER INDIA VIA PAK, CHINA

- Context: Nepalese nationals must hold a Indian visa if they are entering India from Pakistan, China, Hong Kong and Macau, according to a notice issued by the Nepalese Embassy in New Delhi. Similarly, Nepalese nationals travelling to Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and Lebanon, are required to acquire a 'no objection certificate' from the respective Nepalese Embassies.

## 78. RUSSIA EXTENDS BAN ON EUROPEAN FOOD IMPORTS UNTIL END OF 2020

- Context: Russia has extended its ban on food imports from the European Union until the end of 2020.
- Background: Russia imposed an embargo on a wide range of imports from the EU and other countries in 2014 in retaliation for international sanctions over Moscow's role in the Ukraine crisis.

## 79. INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE FORMALLY OPENS \$145M NEW HEADQUARTERS IN SWITZERLAND

- The International Olympic Committee has formally opened its 145 million Swiss francs (\$145 million) new headquarters exactly 125 years after the Olympic Games was revived.
- The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is a not-for-profit independent international organisation that is committed to building a better world through sport. Created on 23 June 1894, just under two years before the first Olympic Games of the modern era in April 1896, the IOC is the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement.
- Functions: As the leader of the Olympic Movement, the IOC acts as a catalyst for collaboration between all parties of the Olympic family, from the NOCs, the IFs, the athletes and the OCOGs to the Worldwide Olympic Partners, broadcast partners and United Nations (UN) agencies, and shepherds success through a wide range of programmes and projects. On this basis, it ensures the regular celebration of the Olympic Games, supports all affiliated member organisations of the Olympic Movement and

strongly encourages, by appropriate means, the promotion of the Olympic values.

## 80. JUNETEENTH

- Juneteenth is considered the oldest known celebration commemorating **the ending of slavery in the United States**.
- It was originally celebrated on June 19, the day that Union soldiers in 1865 told enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas, that the Civil War had ended and they were free.
- The celebration started with the freed slaves of Galveston, Texas. Although the Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves in the South in 1863, it could not be enforced in many places until after the end of the Civil War in 1865.
- The term Juneteenth is a blend of the words June and nineteenth. The holiday has also been called Juneteenth Independence Day or Freedom Day.

## 81. TRAFFIC INDEX 2018

- Context:** Traffic Index 2018 is published by **TomTom, an Amsterdam-based company**.
- It offers traffic solutions, uses location technology to collect traffic information, and has been publishing city rankings for eight years.
- The index factors for peak hours, accidents, inclement weather, construction work and all other factors likely to cause disruptions.
- The latest index ranks 403 cities across 56 countries, including 13 new cities.
- Definition:** For this study, congestion has been defined in terms of the additional time taken to reach a destination as opposed to when the road would have been clear of traffic.

## MOST CONGESTED CITIES

RANK	CITY	CONGESTION LEVEL	
		2018	2017
1	Mumbai (India)	65%	66%
2	Bogota (Colombia)	63%	62%
3	Lima (Peru)	58%	50%
4	New Delhi (India)	58%	62%
5	Moscow (Russia)	56%	57%
6	Istanbul (Turkey)	53%	59%
7	Jakarta (Indonesia)	53%	61%
8	Bangkok (Thailand)	53%	55%
9	Mexico City (Mexico)	52%	52%
10	Recife(Brazil)	49%	47%

Source: TomTom Traffic Index 2018

### Key findings:

- The study has ranked Mumbai as the most traffic-congested city in the world for the second straight year, and Delhi at fourth place.
- Nearly 75% of the cities part of the 2018 index had increased or stable congestion levels between 2017

and 2018, with only 90 cities showing measurable decreases.

- Globally, Christmas Day resulted in the least traffic congestion.

## 82. END OF CHILDHOOD INDEX

- The index is part of **Changing Lives in Our Lifetime – Global Childhood Report, 2019** and was released by Save the Children, a non-profit, on May 28, 2019.
- Countries are evaluated on **eight parameters on the wellbeing of those up to 19 years of age** — child mortality, malnutrition, lack of education, child labour, early marriage, adolescent birth, displacement by conflict and child homicide.

### Performance of countries:

- India ranks 113 in 176 countries. However, India has improved significantly on child mortality from 39 deaths per 1000 live births in 2017.
- Singapore tops the list and eight European countries figure among the top 10.
- Globally, the rate of child marriage has reduced by 25 per cent in 2019. In South Asia, India has performed significantly well where child marriage is down 51 per cent since 2000 and 63 percent since 1990.
- Indian progress alone accounts for almost three quarters of decline in teen births worldwide.

## 83. TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP) REPORT

- Context:** The U.S. State Department has released its 2019 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report.
- The report categorises countries into three groups based on the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA),** U.S. legislation enacted in 2000. The categorisation is based on efforts to meet minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking.

### Highlights:

- India continued to be placed in Tier 2 on the 1-3 country trafficking scale.
- Tier 2 comprises “countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.”
- The 2019 report highlights the national nature of trafficking: in 77% of the cases, victims are trafficked within their own countries of residence, rather than across borders. Victims of sex trafficking were more likely to be trafficked across borders while victims of forced labour were typically exploited within their own countries, the report says, citing International Labour Organisation (ILO) data.
- The recommendations for India include** amending the definition of trafficking in Section 370 of the Penal Code to “include forced labour trafficking and ensure that force, fraud, or coercion are not required to prove a child sex trafficking offence,” and to establish Anti-Human Trafficking Units in all districts with funding and clear mandates.

#### 84. NORMALIZED DIFFERENCE VEGETATION INDEX (NDVI)

- **What is it?** The NDVI is a simple indicator which tells how much of the ground is covered with vegetation. It basically calculates the difference between the red and near infrared components of light reflected by objects, from, say, a satellite. Since healthy vegetation strongly absorbs red and reflects near infrared light, this difference can indicate the presence of healthy vegetation and map it into a colour code.
- **Why in News?** Researchers recently found that NDVI does not yield a reliable estimate of food abundance for elephants in tropical forests. In fact, researchers show that this index has a negative correlation with graminoids (grassy food – grasses, sedges and rushes – preferentially consumed by elephants) in tropical forests.
- **Utility of NDVI:** NDVI has been used to estimate the amount of food abundance available to herbivorous animals, for example, elephants. The NDVI is used, for instance, in attempts to track the presence of elephants using the vegetation they consume.



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