



VAJIRAM & RAVI

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the RECITALS

Explore Current Affairs Through Q&A



Featured
Articles

Mains
Q & A

Prelims
Q & A

Bridging
Gaps

Citizenship Amendment Act
and Talks of Nation-wide NRC

Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill

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From the Desk of the Director

Dear Students

The preparation of current affairs magazine is an evolutionary process as its nature and content keeps changing according to the demands of Civil Service Exam. As you are aware about the importance of current affairs for the prelims as well as mains exam, our aim is to follow an **integrated approach** covering all stages of examination from prelims to interview. Keeping these things in mind, we, at Vajiram and Ravi Institute, are always in the process of evolving our self so as to help aspirants counter the challenges put forward by UPSC.

In fulfillment of our objective and commitment towards the students, we have introduced some changes in our current affairs magazine. The CA Magazines, now with the name of “**The Recitals**”, will have four sections. These are:

1. **Feature Article:** As you are aware of the fact that civil service mains exam has become quite exhaustive and analytical, especially since 2013 after the change in syllabus, we have decided to focus on 2-3 topics every month that will provide an insight into the issue so as to help students understand the core of the issue. This will help in Essay writing as well as Mains Exam.
2. **Mains Q&A:** New students quite often struggle to find out that in what way the given topic is useful for them and in what form questions can be framed from the article. To help those students, we at Vajiram and Ravi have designed an innovative way to teach current affairs. Now, we will cover the current issues through questions and answers so as to make it more targeted towards exam. This will not just provide the information and analysis on current issues but will also help in learning the art of answer writing. Further the related information on the topics on which questions have been framed but that is outside the purview of answer will be given in the Box as ‘**Extra Mile**’.
3. **Prelims Q&A:** This section will contain prelims based MCQs that will test your diligence while reading the current issues. These MCQs will be of UPSC standard and will contain detailed explanation. Students are advised to attempt these MCQs honestly and read the Explanation carefully. The idea is to also provide students with a question bank of around 600 current affairs MCQs (50 Qs × 12 months = 600 Qs) just before their prelims examination, which will act as revision on issues spanning over the entire year.
4. **Bridging Gaps:** This section will contain miscellaneous topics which has not been covered through Q&A. That is why it is called Bridging Gaps, meaning the left-over topics.

So, the new magazine is a complete overhaul of what we have been doing for so long. We hope that the new beginning will be to the liking of students.

Thanks

Best Wishes

Citizenship Amendment Act and Talks of Nation-wide NRC

Recently, the Government had passed *Citizenship Amendment Act* that was followed by the country wise protest in different parts of India. The issue further got muddled on the possible implication of the amendment post introduction of nation-wide National Register of Citizen (**NRC**). To understand the issue, let's first know about the provisions of the act.

Provisions Of The Act

- The Bill amends the Citizenship Act, 1955 to provide Indian citizenship to the **persecuted minorities** (Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi & Christian communities) from **Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh**, who have arrived in India on or before **31st Dec, 2014** & are living in India without valid travel documents.
- The amendment **reduces the aggregate period of residential qualification** for acquiring citizenship by naturalization from **11 years to 6 years**, along with continuous stay for **last 12 months**.
- The amendment Act also provides for **cancellation of registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCIs)** for violation of any law in the country.

Benefits For Persecuted Minorities

1. The Act is an atonement of the wrong that was done during India's partition as it will **safeguard all who had been victims of partition**.
2. In Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, religious minorities face *severe discrimination* that is often **state sanctioned and institutionalized**, especially in Pakistan.
3. Further, **women face major brunt**, sometimes stalked, molested and raped with no reprieve from state. Moreover, **areas of residence are targeted** during riots, bombings, terrorist attacks etc.
4. Several refugees living across the country have been victimized and were **forced upon to convert**, before fleeing to India.

The Citizenship Act, 1955

- It provides for acquisition of citizenship by **birth, descent, registration, naturalization and by incorporation of territory into India**.
- The Act prohibits illegal migrants from acquiring Indian citizenship. It **defines an illegal migrant** as a foreigner: (i) who enters India without a valid passport or travel documents, or (ii) stays beyond the permitted time.
- It **regulates registration of Overseas Citizen of India Cardholders (OCIs)**, and their rights. An OCI is entitled to a multiple-entry, multi-purpose lifelong visa to visit India.
- The earlier provision **allowed Central government to cancel the registration of OCIs** on grounds such as fraudulent registration, imprisonment for more than 2 years within 5 years of registration, sovereignty & security of country etc.

5. Lastly, the Act is said to **benefit many people** by allowing them to take up self-employment, buy property, open bank accounts and Aadhaar. E.g. it will be of immense benefit to communities like **Chakma and Hajongs** of Bangladesh.

Opposition To The Act

1. The Act provides for **differential treatment to illegal migrants on the basis of their religion**, which may *violate Article 14* of the Constitution guaranteeing equality to all persons, citizens and foreigners.
2. Another issue with listing out non-Muslim minorities is that it **excludes various persecuted minorities**. E.g. Rohingyas of Myanmar and Ahamadiya in Pakistan.
3. There is also an **issue with the choice of countries** as leaves out other neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar etc.
4. The Act is in conflict with **Assam Accord 1985** as on one hand NRC and the Assam Accord marks the line of eligibility for Indian citizenship as **24th March 1971**. However, the Act marks the eligibility line as **31st December 2014**.
5. The amendment also **goes against the spirit of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord**, which requires the government to provide safeguards to protect the culture & socio-linguistic identity of the Assamese people.
6. The local community fears that the prospect of citizenship will **encourage migration** from Bangladesh and might lead to **outsiders dominating indigenous population**.
7. Further, the amendment has **revived an old divide between the Brahmaputra and the Barak river valleys**. The large Bengali Hindu population of the Barak Valley have supported the amendment, whereas the residents of the Brahmaputra Valley see it as an instrument that may change the ethnic demography of the region.
8. The Act also grants the central government **wide discretion to cancel OCI registration**, even for minor offences like violation of a traffic law.
9. Lastly, the repercussions of the Act will also extend even to **neighbouring country of Bangladesh**. As the incumbent government in Bangladesh will find it difficult to face domestic opposition that the Act labels Bangladesh as the source country for illegal immigrants.

Assam Accord, 1985

- It was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement.
- As per the provisions of the Accord-
 - I. All those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 were to be given full citizenship, including the right to vote.
 - II. The entrants between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.
 - III. Those who had done so after 1971 were to be deported.

About National Population Register (NPR)

- Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved a proposal to conduct **Census 2021** and update the NPR.
- The **first NPR was prepared in 2010** and updating this data was done during 2015 by conducting door to door survey.
- The NPR is being prepared under provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003. It is mandatory for every "usual resident of India" to register in the NPR.
- While, the NPR is a list of **usual residents of the country**. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, a usual resident of the country is one who has been residing in a local area for *at least the last six months* or intends to stay in a particular location for the next six months.
- While the Census will be conducted in 2021, the NPR update will take place from April to September 2020 in all the States/UTs except Assam. It is conducted at the local, sub-district, district, state and national levels.
- The government position is based on two grounds.
 - One is that every country must have a comprehensive identity database of its residents with demographic details. The Home Ministry has said the objective of NPR is to prepare a credible register of every family and individual living in country. It will also help in strengthening security and improvement in targeting of beneficiaries under various Central government schemes.
 - The second ground, largely to justify the collection of data such as driving licence, voter ID and PAN, is that it will ease the life of those residing in India by cutting red tape. It is common to find different dates of birth of a person on different government documents, NPR will help eliminate that. With NPR data, residents will not have to furnish various proofs of age, address and other details in official work. It would also eliminate duplication in voter lists.

National Population Register (NPR)	National Register of Citizens (NRC)
All people staying in India 6 months and above and who intends to reside for 6 months or more including foreigners	Indian born or Indian parents or staying in India for 11 years are eligible for Indian Citizenship
Prepared with Census 2011 and was updated in 2015. The next update is scheduled during the next census from April 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020. Only Assam would not participate in this activity	First prepared during 1951 census and it is not updated regularly. Assam is the only state in the country where the NRC is updated
NPR is not a citizenship enumeration drive as it includes foreigners as well	NRC is a citizenship enumeration drive as it includes Indian citizens only
It is compulsory for all Indian residents to register with the NPR. The main purpose of the NPR is to identify illegal migrants and identify them as foreign nationals.	NRC is a subset of NPR where only the citizens of Indian are taken into account

DATA COLLECTION, THEN & NOW

Details of individual required for NPR in **2020**

1. Name of person
2. Relationship to head of household
3. Sex
4. Date of Birth
5. Marital status
6. Educational qualification
7. Occupation/Activity
8. Father's Name/Mothers Name/Spouse Name
9. Place of birth
10. Present address of usual residence
11. Duration of stay at present address
12. Nationality (as declared)
13. Permanent residential address
- NEW**
14. Aadhaar Number (Voluntary)
15. Mobile Number
16. Date & Place of Birth of Parents
17. Place of Last Residence
18. Passport Number*
19. Voter ID Card Number
20. Permanent Account Number
21. Driving License Number

*If holder of Indian Passport



Details of individual required for NPR in **2010**

1. Name of person
2. Relationship to head of household
3. Father's name
4. Mother's name
5. Spouse's name (if married)
6. Sex
7. Date of Birth
8. Marital status
9. Place of birth
10. Nationality (as declared)
11. Present address of usual residence
12. Duration of stay at present address
13. Permanent residential address
14. Occupation/Activity
15. Educational qualification

About National Register Of Citizens (NRC) And How Is It Connected To NPR

- Unlike the NPR, which record even a foreigner staying in a locality for more than six months, the **NRC is a citizenship enumeration drive** that list only **the legal citizens** of the country, with necessary documents.
- Earlier, following the SC's order, the Government conducted the NRC in Assam and as a result of which over 19 lakh applicants failed to make it to the NRC list.
- The Citizenship Act empowers the government to compulsorily register every citizen and maintain a National Register of Indian Citizens. A nationwide NRC, if undertaken, would flow out of NPR.
- This does not necessarily mean that an NRC must follow NPR — no such register was compiled after the previous NPR in 2010. After a list of residents is created, a nationwide NRC — if it happens — could go about verifying the citizens from that list.
- The Home Ministry issued a statement saying, “There is no proposal at present to conduct a nationwide NRC based on the NPR data. Further, the Home Minister said that the two were not connected and that NPR data would not be used for NRC.
- However, statements linking the NPR and NRC have been made by the government in Parliament. And as per the 2018-19 Annual Report of the Home Ministry the NPR is the first step towards the creation of the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) under the provisions of the Citizenship Act.

Need For Nation-Wide NRC or NRIC

- NRC will help identify a much-needed perspective on the **extent of illegal migration**. With this, the anxiety over illegal immigrants **changing the demography** of country will also be done away with.
- There is also **statutory obligation** of the state under **Section 14A of the Citizenship Act, 1955** that provides that the Central Government may compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue national identity card to him.
- This will also help in solving the immigration issue as it will **deter future migrants** from entering the country.
- The introduction of nation-wide will also **aid the border agencies** in effective border management, especially with Nepal and Bangladesh.

Arguments Against Nation-Wide NRIC

- The existing provisions like **the Foreigners Act, 1946 and Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and tribunals** are sufficient to detect, detain and deport them.

- The introduction of such a provision also has to **cross legal hurdle as NRIC scheme** would thus be directly in violation of the **K.S. Puttaswamy judgment** on right to privacy.
- The exercise also brushes aside the issues that cropped during Assam's NRC like **potential of statelessness, risk of deportation etc.**
- Many experts see it as a **wastage of public resources** and **expenditure of the taxpayers' money** that could otherwise have been fruitfully deployed.
- Further, there is **lack of adequate detention facility** and as per media reports detention camps are infamous for their **inhumane living conditions**.
- There are fears that such an exercise could end up **targeting minorities, poor and illiterate sections** in the country.
- There are also issues in implementation like it may take a **gigantic toll on people's time, money and productivity**.
- Lastly, the government has **not prepared a post NRC implementation plan** like deportation/disenfranchisement *etc.*
- With the government collecting data of such great magnitude across the country, there are data privacy concerns around it. Officials, however, insist that NPR information is confidential, meaning it will not be shared with third parties. However, there is as yet no clarity on the mechanism for protection of this vast amount of data that the government plans to collect.

Conclusion

- It is important for the **government to balance** its larger vision of providing a homeland to persecuted minorities in the immediate neighbourhood and its promise of non-dilution of indigenous identity of the citizens of North-East.
- The government must also seek to address the larger question of illegal migration. The NRC should attempt to **prevent further arrivals of illegal migrants**.
- To tackle issue of illegal migration comprehensively there is a need for a **multi prong approach** by focussing on comprehensive border management, assistance from international organisations such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) among others.

Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill

The **Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill** has been introduced in Lok Sabha. The introduction of this bill comes days after the **kidnapping of 18 Indians** off the coast of Nigeria. The Bill provides for **prevention of maritime piracy and prosecution of persons** for such piracy related crimes.

Need For This Bill

- **Absence of Any Specific Laws** - India does not have a separate domestic legislation on piracy. In the absence of any specific law relating to the offence of maritime piracy in India, problems are being faced in **ensuring effective prosecution of the pirates**.
- **Shift In Area of Piracy** - The incidents of piracy has been growing since 2008. Earlier the Gulf of Aden was the epicenter. However, due to the enhanced naval presence in the Gulf of Aden, pirates shifted their area of operations eastwards and southwards. It has now reached towards the **western coast of India as well**.
- **Being a Signatory of UNCLOS** - India signed United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982 & ratified it in 1995. The Bill was needed to keep up with India's commitment to UNCLOS.

The **provisions of the Indian Penal Code pertaining to armed robbery and the Admiralty jurisdiction** of certain courts have been invoked in the past to prosecute pirates apprehended by the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard. These penal codes are **only applicable upto the territorial waters**.

Key Highlights Of The Bill

- **Definition Of Piracy** – The bill defines piracy as any illegal act of violence, detention, or destruction committed against a ship, aircraft, person or property, for private purposes, by the crew or passengers of a private ship or aircraft. It also includes any *other act that is considered piracy under international law*.
- **Applicability of the Bill** - The Bill will apply to all parts of the sea adjacent to and beyond the limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone of India. Such acts may be carried out on the high seas or in any place outside the jurisdiction of India.
- **Offences and Penalties** – The bill seeks to provide for stringent punishment, including death penalty or life imprisonment, to those involved in piracy at sea.
- The bill makes **offences extraditable**. This means that the accused can be transferred to any country for prosecution with which India has signed an extradition treaty. In the absence of such treaties, offences will be extraditable on the basis of reciprocity between the countries.

- **Designated Court** - The central government, in consultation with the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court, may notify the Sessions Courts to be the Designated Courts under this Bill. It may also notify the territorial jurisdiction of each Designated Court.

Analysis

- The bill would help in promoting the **safety and security of India's maritime trade**, and the **safety of its crew members**.
- The bill **provides definition of piracy** which is in conformity with the definition provided by the UNCLOS.
- The **provision for designated courts** will further ensure speedy delivery of justice.
- However, many analysts have opposed the bill saying the **provision of automatic award of death penalty** or acts of piracy was against the law.

About UNCLOS:

- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is an international treaty which was **adopted and signed in 1982** in Montego Bay, Jamaica
- It lays down a **comprehensive regime of law and order** in the world's oceans and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.
- It enshrines the notion that all problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be addressed as a whole.
- The Convention has created **three new institutions** on the international scene :
 - the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea,
 - the International Seabed Authority,
 - the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.
- The United Nations has **virtually no role in management, implementation, or execution** of this treaty.

MAINS Q&A

1. Recently, on occasion of 250th session of Rajya Sabha many MPs suggested for equal number of seats for all states in Upper House. In this light, discuss the relevance of Rajya Sabha in today's polity and also suggest reform in the structure and functioning of Rajya Sabha as an institution.

Answer

Recently, on occasion of 250th Session of Rajya Sabha, some members demanded for that all States, irrespective of their population and size, be given **equal number of seats in the Rajya Sabha**. Further, there was also vociferous demand that irrespective of the parties' strength in the House, **the same amount of time to speak** in debates be given.

In light of continuous lingering demand for reform of Rajya Sabha it will be pertinent to highlight the challenges faced by Rajya Sabha in general:

- Rajya Sabha is **not the true representation of states** as after the amendment to **Representation of People's Act, 2003** the domicile requirement has been done away with. Consequently it is now increasingly used by the political parties to park unelectable or defeated candidates.
- Further, **control of few big states** is more than enough to scuttle the voice of numerous smaller states with significantly less representation.
- Another significant criticism of current state of affairs is **allotment of seats in Rajya Sabha to states on the basis of population**. This does great disservice to the federal role, which the Rajya Sabha has been envisaged to play.
- With time, Rajya Sabha has also become a **place of lobbying** for our moneybags as well. Thus, the very nature of the Rajya Sabha election process asks for underhand deals and backroom manoeuvres. Furthermore, the last obstacle for moneybags was removed when the **residency requirement** for contesting the Rajya Sabha election was abolished.
- On matters of importance like **Money Bill and Budget, Rajya Sabha has little say** which reduces its significance compared to Lok Sabha.
- Lastly, given the competitive politics today, the Rajya Sabha is also used by opposition **hinder speedy legislation**, which is detrimental to the growth of nation.

However, the above criticism should not obscure us from the fact in relation to the significance of Rajya Sabha as an institution that are as follows:

- Rajya Sabha provides for **checks and balances** in a republican government; to serve as an auxiliary precaution against abuse by majority factions.
- At the same time, nations with large territories and heterogeneous constituents prefer bicameralism for ensuring the **adequate representation of diverse interests** at the federal level.
- The importance of RS has renewed on account of **rise of regional parties**.
- Legislatures, world over, are grappling with increasing demand to legislate on newer areas. Thus, the Upper House becomes much more useful in **sharing the burden of the Lower House**.
- Rajya Sabha also act as a **forum for calm and informed deliberation**.
- It also provides a **space for experts** in their fields to voice their opinion on crucial legislative matters.

Way forward

- As seats in Lok Sabha have already been distributed on the basis of population of states, so there is little merit in Rajya Sabha having distribution on similar basis. Further, to bring small states in our political mainstream, it is important for them to have equal representation in Rajya Sabha as recommended by **Punchhi Commission**.
- To deal with abuse of money power, enhanced monitoring by election authorities and a need to **reintroduce the residency condition** is necessary.

Extra Mile

- Article 80** of the Constitution lays down the maximum strength of Rajya Sabha as 250, out of which **12 members are nominated** by the President and 238 are representatives of the States and of the two Union Territories.
- The **Fourth Schedule** to the Constitution provides for allocation of seats to the States and Union Territories in Rajya Sabha. The allocation of seats is made on the basis of the population of each State.
- The representatives are elected by the **elected members of the Legislative Assembly** of that State/ UT by means of the **single transferable vote**.

- Recently, former President Pranab Mukherjee recommended that the number of seats in Lok Sabha should be increased to 1,000 from the present 543 and advocated a corresponding increase in the number of MPs in Rajya Sabha and state legislatures. Discuss the arguments for and against any such move and also suggest suitable measure to balance the competing issues.

Answer

The issue of unequal representation in the legislature has been a recurrent issue. As per studies, **India has the lowest number of MPs relative to its population** across democracies.

Article 81 of the Constitution of India prescribes that every state and Union territory (UT) would be allotted seats in the Lok Sabha in such a manner that the ratio of population to seats should be as equal as possible across states. Further, **Article 82** stipulates that a delimitation of parliamentary constituencies be carried out after every census. This task is carried out by the **Delimitation Commission**. However, government has frozen delimitation till 2026 by the **84th constitutional amendment** (2002).

The arguments in favour of increasing the seats in Legislature are as follows:

- The delimitation has not been undertaken for a long time during which the **population has increased by almost 87%**. Thus, creating malapportionment in Democracy.
- It has also led to dilution of the **principle of One Citizen One Vote**. E.g. the average MP from Rajasthan represents over 30 lakh people while the one in Tamil

TABLE 1 Malapportionment in the Lok Sabha, 2011 (actual) and 2026 (projected)

State	Current Seats	Proportional Seats (2011)	Over- and Under-representation (2011)	Proportional Seats (2026)	Over- and Under-representation (2026)
Tamil Nadu	39	32	+7	31	+8
Andhra Pradesh + Telangana	42	37	+5	34	+8
Kerala	20	15	+5	12	+8
Odisha	21	18	+3	18	+3
West Bengal	42	40	+2	38	+4
Karnataka	28	27	+1	26	+2
Himachal Pradesh	4	3	+1	3	+1
Punjab	13	12	+1	12	+1
Uttarakhand	5	4	+1	4	+1
Assam	14	14	0	14	0
Jammu and Kashmir	6	6	0	6	0
Chhattisgarh	11	11	0	12	-1
Delhi	7	7	0	8	-1
Maharashtra	48	49	-1	48	0
Gujarat	26	27	-1	27	-1
Haryana	10	11	-1	11	-1
Jharkhand	14	15	-1	15	-1
Madhya Pradesh	29	32	-3	33	-4
Rajasthan	25	30	-5	31	-6
Bihar	40	46	-6	50	-10
Uttar Pradesh	80	88	-8	91	-11

SOURCE: Election Commission of India, Office of the Registrar General, 2006, and authors' calculations
NOTE: The number of seats each state merits is calculated using the Webster method

Nadu or Kerala represents less than 18 lakhs. This means the voter in Tamil Nadu and Kerala has more say than the one in Rajasthan.

- An MP today represents more than **four times** the number of voters than what an MP did in 1951-52. This has **increased the burden on the Representatives**.
- Further, if candidates cannot reach out to enough voters then it **leads to representation crisis**. It has also resulted in **lower voter turnouts** of people during elections.
- This also creates a **perception that one region controls the other**, thus lead to divide among the people and may invoke popular agitations.
- Finally, it creates **a divide of politically important vs. unimportant states** for the political parties and that in turn creates **demand for smaller states**.

However, the above arguments are opposed on following basis:

- The increase of seat will **negate the incentive** given to states working for **family planning programs**, without worrying about changing their political representation in the Lok Sabha.
- The **Presiding Officers of House** will find it extremely difficult to conduct the proceedings of the House.
- The sudden increase in numbers will further aggravate the **problem of disruptions of proceedings of the house**.
- Further, **working of the house will be subjected to severe strain** because the hourly window for the Zero Hour, Question Hour etc. will be too small for increased members.

About Delimitation Commission:

- Delimitation is the **redrawing of the boundaries of parliamentary or assembly constituencies** to ensure the same number of people in each constituency.
- The Delimitation Commission is a high-power body whose orders has the **force of law** and **cannot be called in question before any court**.
- Delimitation commissions have been set up **four times** in the past *i.e.* in 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002.

Way forward

- As recommended by the **Chairman of Delimitation Commission, 2002** that delimitation should be carried out after every census so that changes are not too extensive and the value of every elector's vote remains more or less steady.
- Further, the issue needs to be debated so as to arrive at consensus on how to deal with the problems that is likely to arise.

3. **Recently, Congress has moved privilege motion against Smriti Irani for remark on Rahul Gandhi. In this light discuss the concept of privileges and issues relating to its use. Also suggest suitable measures to prevent its misuse.**

Answer

The concept of privileges has emerged from the **British House of Commons**. In India under **Article 105** and **Article 194** for State Legislature, its members & committees confers certain privileges on legislative institutions and their members. E.g. protecting freedom of speech and expression, ensuring sovereignty of Parliament etc. However, currently, there is **no law that codifies all the privileges** of the legislators in India. General rules in relation to privileges are provided under **Rule No. 222 in Chapter 20** of the Lok Sabha Rule Book and correspondingly **Rule 187 in Chapter 16** of the Rajya Sabha rulebook.

Whenever any of these rights and immunities is disregarded, the offence is called a **breach of privilege** and is punishable under law of Parliament. The issues in relation to the power of privilege given to the legislature:

- The privileges power conferred on the legislature is against the **principle of constitutionalism or doctrine of limited powers**.
- Absence of codified privileges gives **unbridled power to house** to decide when and how breach of privilege occurs.
- Further, **judicial scrutiny is barred** in cases of privileges, which is against the doctrine of judicial review.
- It creates a unique case where speaker acts as **complainant, advocate and the judge** and used as a **substitute for legal proceedings**.
- Breach of privilege invoked for genuine criticism of members of the house or due to political vendetta, reduces accountability of elected representatives.
- Further, the invocation of privilege motion **violates the fundamental right** of freedom of expression and personal liberty.

Way forward

- There is a need for proper **codification of privileges**. For ex.- Australia has passed **Parliamentary Privileges Act in 1987**, clearly defining privileges, the conditions of their breach and consequent penalties.
- Further, the decisions of the speaker may be influenced by his/her political affiliations. Therefore, the trial must be conducted by a **competent, independent and impartial tribunal**.
- The power of privilege must only be invoked by legislature when there is **real obstruction to its functioning**.
- Finally, higher judiciary must also set **limits on punitive powers** of the Legislature.

Procedure In Privilege Case

- A **notice** is moved in the form of a motion by any member of either house against those being held guilty of breach of privilege.
- The **Speaker or Chairperson** is the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion. They can take a decision themselves or refer it to the **Privileges committee of parliament**.
- Then, an inquiry is conducted by the committee and based on findings a recommendation is made to the legislature.
- A debate can be initiated on the report in the House and based on the discussion, the **Speaker can order the punishment** as defined by the privileges committee.

Committee on Privileges:

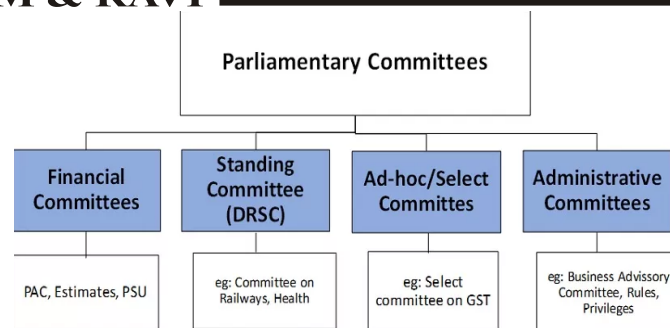
- It consists of **15 members** in Lok Sabha (LS) and **10 members** in Rajya Sabha (RS) to be nominated by the Speaker/Chairman in RS.
- Its function is to investigate the cases of breach of privilege and recommend appropriate action to the Speaker/Chairperson.

4. Vice President suggested that persistent absenteeism from meetings of Parliamentary committees should cost MPs their spot on these parliamentary panels. In this light, discuss the challenges faced by the Parliamentary Committees and also suggest suitable measures to reform their functioning.

Answer

Parliamentary Committees are setup as an instrument to assist the working of Parliament in its various activities. They are classified into **two broad categories** i.e. Standing Committee and Ad-hoc Committee

(temporary). Parliamentary committees draw their authority from **Article 105** (Parliamentary privileges) and **Article 118** (Parliament power to make). The Parliamentary committee have proved to be a boon for our parliamentary system in following ways:



- The Committees help in **detailed scrutiny of the bill/ policies etc.** and effectively **uphold the accountability of the executive.**
- Members of the Committees are not bound by party whips, which allows them the latitude for a more meaningful exchange of views. Thus, Committees to a large extent **work in non-partisan manner.**
- It aids the opposition to play a greater role in **exercising control over the executive.**
- The committees regularly seek feedback from citizens and experts on subjects. Thus, **act as a link** between Parliament and people on the one hand, and between the administration and Parliament on the other.
- The Committee system also ensures **economy and efficiency in public expenditure**, as otherwise the ministries/ departments would not be more careful in formulating their demands.

However, it has been observed that these committee faces challenges on various counts such as:

- The **poor attendance of members** has been a cause for concern, which was about 50% since 2014-15.
- The **short tenure for members** i.e. Constitution of Parliamentary Committees for a year leaves very little time for specialisations.
- The members of the committee also **lack technical expertise** required to go into intricacies of specialized subjects under consideration of some committees such as accounting, administrative principles etc.
- It has also been found that there is **lack of discussion on Committee reports** as they are merely recommendatory bodies.
- With greater public interest shown in some issues, members have started taking strict party lines in committee meetings, thus leading to **politicization of the proceedings.**

Way Forward

- Scrutiny of all the legislations through Parliamentary Standing Committees **must be made mandatory by convention.**
- Here, it will also be pertinent to note the **recommendation of the NCRWC.** It suggested for **trimming the number of Standing Committees** and entrusting them with additional responsibilities of financial oversight and **doing away with existing finance committees** to avoid overlapping of work. It also recommended for establishing **Standing Committee on Economy** providing space for deliberations on economic policies and its implementation separately.
- Further, there are **best practices in other countries** that can contribute to strengthening the committee system in India. **For ex-** in the British House of Commons, the committees interact on certain overlapping subjects.
- Thus, **strengthening the committee system** can go a long way in improving the quality of laws drafted and minimise potential implementation challenges.
- The need of the hour is for greater and effective utilisation of Parliamentary Committees to strengthen Parliament as a deliberative body which can ensure effective oversight.

5. Recently, the government has decided to seek review of **Jarnail Singh v. Lachhmi Narain Gupta** case that has sought exclusion of creamy layer within the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) categories for reservation benefits. In this background, discuss the arguments for and against introduction of creamy layer among SCs/ STs.

Answer

A 5-judge bench in case of **Jarnail Singh case (2018)** had made observations regarding applying creamy layer exclusion to SCs/ STs as well. The court asserted that the objective of reservation would not be fulfilled if only the creamy layer within that class bag all the coveted jobs, leaving the rest of the class as backward as they always were. However, **govt has sought review of the judgement** by a larger bench.

In this light, it is necessary to discern the argument for and against the move to exclude creamy layers among SCs/ STs from the purview of reservation. Some of the arguments for exclusion of creamy layer are as follows:

- There is a concern that the **rich among the SC/STs are benefiting** from the reservation policies. Whereas, the intended deserving among them continue to be excluded.
- Non-introduction of the creamy layer in SC/ST is **perpetuating the problem of rich-poor divide**.
- There is **lack of percolation of benefits** to nearly 95% members of these communities at the bottom, thereby defeating the whole purpose.
- It is also **becoming a cause of social unrest**, especially the Naxalite movements and the perennial problem of poverty.

On the other side the arguments against introduction of creamy layer in SC's/ST's are as follows:

- SC/ST have faced years of oppression and there have been repeated incidents of assault, humiliation of members of SC/ST. Thus, the creamy layer can't be introduced among these communities due to such **historical and present-day discrimination**.
- It is a **fallacy that reservation is in perpetuity**. The Constitution provides appropriate manner in which it can be done by the legislature, which represents the will of the people.
- **M. Nagaraj case ruling** held that the creamy layer concept couldn't be applied to SCs and STs for promotions in government jobs.
- Lastly, **SCs/STs are a homogenous group** and any action to regroup them based on economic or social advancement would not be appropriate.

Way forward

At this stage, it will be appropriate to refer the matter for decision to a larger bench. Meanwhile, the government and civil society group must take appropriate action to remove caste-based discrimination.

6. As protesters against the Citizenship Amendment Act came out in several states, state govts sought to clamp down demonstrations by issuing prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code Of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973. Throw light on Section 144 of CrPC, highlighting the powers under the Section, its criticisms and the judicial challenges it has endured.

Answer

The history of Section 144 goes back to British Raj as it was used for the first time in 1861 by the British Raj. Thereafter, it became an important tool to stop all nationalist protests during the India's Independence Struggle.

Powers Under Section 144

- It empowers a district magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate or any other executive magistrate empowered by the state government to issue orders to prevent danger to human life, health or safety, or a disturbance of the public tranquility, or a riot.
- The magistrate can direct any person to abstain from a certain act or to take a certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his management. This usually includes restrictions on movement, carrying arms and from assembling unlawfully.
- It is generally believed that assembly of three or more people is prohibited under Section 144. However, it can be used to restrict even a single individual.
- However, no order passed under Section 144 can remain in force for more than two months from the date of the order, unless the state government considers it necessary. Even then, the total period cannot extend to more than six months.

Criticisms of Section 144

- Section 144 of CrPC is also a **reflection of a colonial legacy** and the **unquestioning adoption of most of the provisions of the 1872 Code of Criminal Procedure** by the contemporary Indian State.
- The provision appears to be in contravention of **Article 19(1)(a), (b) and (c) of the Constitution**.
- The general criticism of section 144 is that it **confers unbridled powers on the local magistrate** without any accountability. The section is *too broad* and the words of the section are wide enough to give absolute power to a magistrate that may be exercised unjustifiably. The only check placed upon the officer before passing any order under Section 144 is whether or not it satisfied his conscience, about there being a need for such orders.
- There has been **trigger happy use** of its provisions as evident from the fact that it was invoked 535 times in 2012.
- Section 144 has often been used to **clamp down on telecommunication services and order Internet shutdowns**. Thus, impacting freedom of speech and economic life of general public.
- Further, far from being a power to be used only in an emergency, the prohibitory order has, to an extent, **become a tool used in daily police work**. For ex.- the orders in 2011 and 2012, imposed on liquor shops requiring them to install CCTV cameras to cover the area just outside the shop to crack down on people who drink in public.
- Moreover, **imposition of Section 144 to an entire state** has also drawn criticism as the security situation differs from area to area.
- Lastly, although an aggrieved individual can approach the High Court by filing a writ petition if his fundamental rights are at stake. However, fears exist that before the High Court intervenes, the **rights could already have been infringed**

Thus, absence of any narrow tailoring of wide executive powers with specific objectives, coupled with very limited judicial oversight over the executive branch, makes it ripe for abuse and misuse.

Challenges Against Section 144 In The Court

- The first major challenge to the law was made in 1961 in ***Babulal Parate vs State of Maharashtra and Others***, wherein a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court refused to strike down the law.
- It was challenged again by Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya in 1967 and was once again rejected, with the court saying *“no democracy can exist if ‘public order’ is freely allowed to be disturbed by a section of the citizens”*.

- In another challenge in 1970 (***Madhu Limaye vs Sub-Divisional Magistrate***), the Bench said the power of a magistrate under Section 144 “is not an ordinary power flowing from administration but a power used in a judicial manner and which can stand further judicial scrutiny”.
- The court, however, upheld the constitutionality of the law and said that it cannot be held to be violative of the right to freedom of speech and expression, which is a fundamental right because it falls under the reasonable restrictions. The court further said that the fact that the law may be abused is no reason to strike it down.

Although noble in conception and a much-needed instrument of statecraft as pointed by the judiciary on numerous occasions, it is equally important that the State guards against the misuse of this overarching provision and lives up to its responsibility of protecting civil liberties accorded by the Constitution.

Extra Mile

Does Section 144 Provide For Communications Blockades Too?

- The rules for suspending telecommunication services, which include voice, mobile internet, SMS, landline, fixed broadband, etc, are the **Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017**.
- **These Rules derive their powers from the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885, Section 5(2)**, which talks about interception of messages in the “interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India”.
- However, shutdowns in India are not always under the rules laid down, which come with safeguards and procedures. Section 144 CrPC has often been used to clamp down on telecommunication services and order Internet shutdowns.
- In Sambhal, UP, Internet services were suspended by the District Magistrate under Section 144. In West Bengal on June 20, 2019, mobile internet, cable services, broadband were shut down by the District Magistrate in North 24-Parganas under Section 144 over communal tensions.

7. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment recently informed that as many as 282 people have died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the country between 2016 and November 2019. What is Manual Scavenging? What are the provisions in the country to curtail the practice of Manual Scavenging and why does it still persist in the country?

Answer

- Manual scavenging is a term used for the practice of physically removing human excrement from dry toilets with bare hands, brooms and metal scrappers.
- The Socio-Economic Caste Census of 2011 counted over 1.82 lakh families that had at least one member employed in manual scavenging.
- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has recently said that as many as 282 people have died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the country between 2016 and November 2019. The deaths have been higher in states like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh where there has been rapid and unplanned urbanisation.
- As per the data, there are about 60,440 manual scavengers identified across the country, in 17 States. More than half of them, about 35,472, have been identified from Uttar Pradesh alone.

Provisions To Prevent Manual Scavenging

- There have been two legislations concerning this particular occupation, the ***Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993*** and the ***Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013***.

- While manual scavenging was outlawed in the country in 1993, it was only in 2013 that the law recognized other hazardous aspects of the work.
- The Act prohibits the employment of manual scavengers, the manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks without protective equipment and the construction of insanitary latrines.
- It seeks to rehabilitate manual scavengers and provide for their alternative employment. The Act directs state governments to provide a one-time rehabilitation package of Rs 40,000 to identified manual scavengers.
- It mandates the central government and every state government to constitute a Central Monitoring Committee and State Monitoring Committees. These Committees are required to advise the appropriate government and local authorities on effective implementation of the law.
- The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis monitors the implementation of this Act, inquires into complaints of contravention of the Act and advises the central and state government on effective implementation of the Act.
- Offences under the Act are cognizable and non-bailable. If any person employs a manual scavenger or constructs an insanitary latrine, he shall be penalized with imprisonment up to one year or a fine of upto Rs50,000 or both. The penalty for subsequent offences is higher.
- Every local authority or agency is prohibited from employing a person for hazardous cleaning (manual cleaning without protective gear and other safety precautions) of a sewer or a septic tank. The penalty for violation is imprisonment for up to two years or a fine up to Rs 2 lakh or both.

Perpetuation Of The Practice

Despite the legislation, the practice of manual scavenging continues. Rights groups Safai Karamchari Andolan pegs the number of manual scavengers across India at over 7 lakh. While, unofficial records put the number of deaths of manual scavengers inside sewers, septic tanks and sewage pits at over 1500 since 2013. The reasons being-

- The prime reason why manual scavenging continues, is the existence of primitive “insanitary latrines”, meaning those without water, where the excreta must be physically removed.
- People regard manual scavengers as untouchable because of their work. Therefore, the society is not ready to accept and include them in community activities. No employer offers them a job and also, landlords bar them from renting their houses.
- Moreover, there are no proper strategies put forward to liberate manual scavengers psychologically. This pushes those in the practice to get even deeper and deeper into the practice of manual scavenging.
- Lacunae With The Act
 - Despite being a stringent legislation, the utilisation of the Act has not been impressive. The violations are happening all over the country but no convictions have been recorded for the violation of the Act.
 - Neither the state nor the centre is mandated under the Act to provide financial assistance for the conversion of insanitary latrines. This adversely impacts implementation of the Act.
 - A state government can grant the Executive Magistrate the judicial power to try offences under the Act. This may create a conflict of interest if the Executive Magistrate is also the implementing authority.
- The government and other major private institutions deny the existence of scavenging despite the deaths reported especially in India. As a result, no measures are taken to solve this problem.

Manual Scavenging is a blot on the face of a country, which stakes claim to be one of the rising powers among the developing world. On one hand, the country is breaking new frontiers in space and on the other people are dying inhuman deaths in insanitary pits. The govt should take urgent measures to eradicate this practice from the country and accord basic human dignity that is the right of every individual.

Extra Mile

SC Judgement

In 2014, a three-judge SC Bench comprising Chief Justice P. Sathasivam and Justices Ranjan Gogoi and N.V. Ramana, directed all the States to abolish manual scavenging and take steps for rehabilitation of such workers.

Directives

- A compensation of Rs. 10 lakh should be given to the family of every person who has died while doing the work of a manual scavenger.
- Railways should take time-bound strategy to end manual scavenging on the tracks.
- Safai karamchari women should be provided support for dignified livelihood in accordance with their choice of livelihood schemes.
- Children of manual scavengers should be entitled to scholarships as per the relevant scheme of the Central or state governments.
- At least one member of their family shall be given training in livelihood skill and be paid monthly stipend.
- At least one adult member shall be given subsidy and concessional loan for taking up an alternative occupation on sustainable basis.

8. In the latest monetary policy review the RBI has kept its repo rate unchanged and continued with its accommodative stance. Discuss RBI's decision in the current economic context.

Answer

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has kept its repo rate unchanged at 5.15 per cent and continued with its accommodative stance for supporting the Indian economy.
- When it comes to monetary policy, the RBI's most important mandate is to maintain price stability. To this end, the RBI is required by law to maintain retail inflation — which is based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) — at the 4% level, with a band of variation of 2 percentage point.
- But, another key concern for the RBI is the overall economic growth in the economy.

Reasons For Not Cutting The Repo Rate

- More often than not, retail inflation and economic growth tend to rise and fall at the same time — because higher growth implies higher demand for goods and as such a spike in prices.
- However, at the current juncture in the Indian economy, economic growth has decelerated sharply even as inflation has sped up. So, the challenge before the RBI was to balance the concerns of boosting growth while making sure that inflation does not spiral out of control.
- Furthermore, the RBI is worried about the rise in inflation, which is the primary issue that the RBI is mandated to control.

Status quo

The RBI has retained the repo rate (rate at which the central bank lends to commercial banks) at 5.15%. It had reduced the rate at five consecutive policy meetings till October



- The RBI has already cut repo rates by 135 bps, but only about 44 bps have been passed on to the consumers of new loans. Typically, a rate cut takes at least a couple of quarters to show impact and RBI believes that with more time, the monetary transmission will deepen.
- Moreover, the RBI believes that the market already has surplus liquidity, that is, there is money in the market if one wants to borrow but credit off-take has been weak and it is unlikely to improve by another rate cut.
- Also, the RBI pointed towards the forthcoming Union Budget for fiscal efforts to boost growth.

Reasons For Not Raising The Repo Rate

- Under normal circumstances, the RBI would have raised repo rates when faced with such high headline retail inflation. But the current circumstances are more complicated, as the reason for the rise in inflation is the spike in food prices, which are expected to be a transient factor.
- As agriculture recovers from the unexpected weather shocks such as unseasonal rains towards the end of the kharif crop, food prices are expected to moderate and so is the headline inflation.
- The economic growth slowdown is a significant worry for all policymakers and a hike in repo rate at this time will make matters considerably worse for the revival of economic growth.

Way Ahead

- Although the MPC has maintained an accommodative stance leaving room for future policy rate interventions, mere policy manoeuvrability will not be enough to reverse the economic slowdown.
- The focus will have to be on kick-starting the consumption cycle, bolster private investment and expenditure and improve the financial health and credibility of lending institutions. Hence, the priority will need to be on adopting a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to tackle the structural and cyclical challenges facing the Indian economy.

Extra mile

Growth Forecast

- The central bank has sharply revised its **GDP growth forecast for 2019-20 to 5 % from 6.1 %** it had projected in its previous policy meeting in October. Data shows that this is the sharpest cut in GDP projection by the central bank, in at least a decade.
- Further, economic growth is **expected to stay below 6% in the coming 12 months** — that is till September 2020.

Inflation forecast

- From a retail inflation forecast of just 3.6% in the second half of the current financial year, the **RBI has now raised the forecast to as high as 5.1%**.
- However, in the **first quarter of the next financial year**, that is April to June, inflation is **expected to moderate**.

9. The Cabinet has recently decided to restructure the railway services by creating a new Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS). Highlight the proposed changes while delineating the concerns emanating from the said move.

Answer

- The Union Cabinet has approved the restructuring of the Railway Board, including reduction in the Board strength as well as merger of the different cadres into a central service called the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).

- Unification of services has been recommended by various panels for reforming railways, including the Prakash Tandon Committee (1994), Rakesh Mohan Committee (2001), Sam Pitroda Committee (2012) and Bibek Debroy Committee (2015).
- While the government has been seeking to restructure railways for over five years now, it has been hobbled by inter-service rivalry. A case in point being Train 18, where the electrical and mechanical cadres were at loggerheads, delaying the launch.

Changes In The Offing

- Currently, the board comprises eight members, each representing their service, with the chairman being the first among equals. The chairman will also have the CEO tag attached and will be the final authority on all issues.
- The Board will now consist of five members – Chairman, along with four members responsible for infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock and finance. There will also be a DG (HR) under the Chairman.
- In addition, the board will have independent members, who will be experts in fields such as finance, industry and management, much like independent directors on corporate boards.
- The modalities and unification of the services will be worked out by the Ministry of Railways in consultation with DoPT in order to ensure fairness and transparency.
- The IRMS will be in place in the next recruitment year and now the newly recruited officers will come from engineering and non-engineering disciplines as per need and posted considering their aptitude and specialisation.
- Further, selection for the general management positions shall be through a merit-based system unlike the present norm of seniority.

Benefits

- The new structure of the leaner railway board — the apex decision-making body — is intended to streamline operations and improve decision-making.
- The unification of services will end departmentalism, promote smooth working of railways, expedite decision making, create a coherent vision for organisation and promote rational decision making and set Railways on a path of a high growth trajectory.

Concerns Emanating From The Move

- Those protesting the govt's decision say that the merger is unscientific and against established norms, because it proposes to merge two fundamentally dissimilar entities, with multiple disparities.
- There are worries about railways turning into a service of engineers, like the central public works department, where the intake is limited to engineering services unlike the current system where "generalists" handle traffic, accounts and personnel.
- Further, there may be some difficulty in the initial days as electrical engineers may be asked to deal with mechanical issues or a civil engineer may find himself tackling electrical problems.
- The civil servants are of the opinion that if all present cadres are merged and even higher departmental posts become open to all, engineers, being in larger numbers and of a certain age profile, may end up occupying most posts, if not all.
- There could be huge dissatisfaction among different cadres unless the top officials emerge as good leaders to take care of the interest of people who have come from different services.

- The government clarified that the reform will have no impact on the promotion of officers. It also said that currently there are 10 secretary level posts in the railway board and now another 27 general manager level officers will also get the apex grade pay.
- But there is a huge chunk of officers who are in the joint secretary and additional secretary level. If they are dissatisfied, then it would be a big problem to deal with.

Way Ahead

- The current demand is for two distinct services instead of one — a civil services, and one that encompasses all engineering specialisations. The logic is that functionally, departments will continue to exist through various technical and non-technical specialisations, so merging them will not end departmentalism per se.
- It is important that the government takes heed of the said concerns and addresses them to lay the foundations of a nimble and modern organisation which is not hobbled by bureaucratic hurdles and keeps passenger comfort and safety as its highest priority.

10. The government has recently launched the National Broadband Mission. Delineate the objectives of the Mission while highlighting the significance of the Mission.

Answer

- The government has launched the National Broadband Mission, aimed at providing broadband access in all villages in the country by 2022.
- The mission, which is a part of the **National Digital Communications Policy, 2018**, will address policy and regulatory changes required to accelerate the expansion and creation of digital infrastructure and services.

Objectives

- The objectives of the Mission are based on the principles of **Universality, Affordability and Quality**.
- The government plans to lay incremental 30 lakh route km of Optical Fiber Cable, while also increasing tower density from 0.42 to 1 tower per thousand of population by 2024.
- It envisages stakeholder investment of \$100 billion (₹7 lakh crore), including ₹70,000 crore from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) in coming years.
- Additionally, a Broadband Readiness Index will be developed to measure the availability of digital communications infrastructure within a State/UT.
- It will develop innovative implementation models for Right of Way (RoW) and work with States/UTs for having consistent policies pertaining to expansion of digital infrastructure including for RoW approvals required for laying of OFC.
- Further, it will also create a digital fiber map of the Digital Communications network and infrastructure, including Optical Fiber Cables and Towers, across the country.

Significance

- As the Indian economy accelerates towards achieving its goals, it will require all the critical resources at its disposal for efficient, productive & sustainable development.
- Amongst the most basic resources that the nation needs to make available to ensure that forward movement is uniform and homogeneous access to broadband services provided over state-of-the-art

efficient networks, to connect a large proportion of un-served and serve large volume subscriber traffic.

- The importance of broadband cannot be overstated, and the transformative potential of the technology has far reaching implications for the society, industry, Government and the economy.
- Further, enabling broadband connectivity across the country is essential to bridge the digital divide between rural-urban and rich-poor and promote socio-economic development. This will also promote e- governance, transparency, financial inclusion and ease of doing business.
- However, much needs to be done, as several challenges delay the roll out of broadband services to the unserved, underserved, rural and remote regions of the country.
- The current overall broadband connections cover around 45% of the population as compared to 70%-80% in a well-connected nation. The rural broadband connections are at around 27%, thereby clearly indicating the need to enhance broadband infrastructure to serve the rural citizens.

To achieve the above objectives, it is imperative that multiple stakeholders and agencies-the Central Ministries and Departments and States, coordinate and work in alignment to achieve the said objectives of the Mission. If the Mission is able to do so, it will go a long way in fulfilling the aspirations of the people and will be able to fulfill its potential of becoming a universal platform for equitable and inclusive growth across the country.

11. After large scale hue and cry over Delhi Pollution level many experts have suggested a shift to electrical vehicle. In this light discuss the benefits arising from their introduction and challenges posed thereunder.

Answer

The future of mobility in India is based on **7Cs i.e. common, connected, convenient, congestion free, charged, clean and cutting edge**. In fulfilling these commitments electrical vehicle has a major role. The vehicle pollution currently contributes 35% of total PM 2.5 emission. In this background it will be worthwhile to note the benefits of the e-vehicle:

- Electrical vehicle will make Indian automobile industry a leading **global hub for design, manufacture and export of pure electric vehicles** and at same time boost **Make in India Initiative**.
- A vehicle powered by low-carbon electricity rather than coal will help in **keeping total global warming below 2 degrees Celsius**. Thus, help fighting climate change robustly.
- It will also help **India achieve INDC target i.e.** India can save 64% of energy demand from the road sector for passenger mobility and 37% of carbon emissions in 2030.
- Electrical vehicle will also **decrease oil import bill**, as per estimate reduction in import of crude oil will roughly save **Rs. 3.9 lakh crore by 2030**.
- According to **Bloomberg New Energy Finance**, electric cars would become cheaper than conventional cars without government subsidies between 2025 and 2030. Thus, they are more **cost effective** than conventional vehicles.

However, there are also concerns in relation to the introduction of e-vehicle such as follows:

- Electrical Vehicles requires **huge investment** initially. But when Automobile manufacturer are already under pressure due to implementation of **Bharat Stage VI** norms, banks in India are cautious in granting loans due to increasing NPA's.

- The other issue is in relation to **high cost of batteries** i.e. it costs around 40-50% of a typical mass segment electric vehicle.
- Concern is also in relation to **available infrastructure** i.e. plug in point for charging are the electric vehicle in country.
- Further, charging an electrical vehicle is a **time-consuming process** than it does to refuel a conventional car at the pump.
- Further, **heavy-duty truck transportation and aviation** will remain difficult to electrify without drastic advances in battery technology.
- Lastly, there are also concern in relation to possible **chemical pollution** due to lack of eco-friendly disposal facilities of batteries in India.

To resolve the above concern the following steps must be taken:

- There is a need for **tapping green fund** like Soft Bank of Japan provide cheaper loans for eco-friendly projects.
- Step must also be taken to **improve infrastructure facility** likes better charging facilities, efficient electric transmission infrastructure and integration of renewable energy into electricity grid.
- Further, there is a need for **encouraging local manufacturing** to become world class manufacturer with a competitive strength in terms of scale, quality, cost and technology for electric vehicles and their critical components.
- The suggestions of **NITI Aayog** like **battery swapping** (to save the precious charging time) and providing **fiscal incentive** must also be adopted.
- Finally, focus must also be on **increasing public awareness** as there is a direct correlation between knowledge of electric vehicles and its adoption.

Extra Mile

Government Initiative For Electric Vehicles

- **India's Electric Vehicle (EV) Mission 2030:** Government plans to have an all-electric fleet of vehicles by 2030.
- **National Electric Mobility Mission:** It aims to achieve national fuel security by promoting hybrid and electric vehicles in the country. It also targets 6-7 million sales of hybrid and electric vehicles year on year from 2020 onwards.
- **FAME-India (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (hybrid &) Electric vehicles in India) scheme:** To support the hybrid/ electric vehicles market development and its manufacturing eco-system to achieve self-sustenance by subsidizing electric vehicle purchases on an annual basis. The scheme has four focus areas viz. technology development, demand creation, pilot projects and charging infrastructure.
- **Automotive Mission Plan 2026:** It aimed at bringing the Indian Automotive Industry among the top three of the world in engineering, manufacture and exports of vehicles & components; growing in value to over 12% of India GDP and generating an additional 65 million jobs.

12. Ahead of Tokyo Olympics, Japan is gearing up to put on its roads thousands of vehicles based on a hydrogen cell technology, also known as 'fuel cells'. What are Fuel Cell Electric vehicles? Highlight the pros and cons of Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles.

Answer

- A fuel-cell electric vehicle is essentially a hybrid electric vehicle wherein the internal combustion engine is replaced with a fuel-cell stack. The onboard sources of power include hydrogen as well as an advanced battery system.
- The hydrogen, stored in its pure form in high-pressure tanks, is sent through the fuel-cell wherein it is combined with oxygen, resulting in the production of water (H₂O) and electricity by an electrochemical process.
- The electricity produced is used directly to drive the vehicle with water being the waste and the only emission through the tail-pipe.
- Like conventional batteries under the bonnets of automobiles, hydrogen fuel cells too convert chemical energy into electrical energy.

Advantages

- Unlike a battery-electric vehicle, which needs to be charged from external sources, a fuel-cell electric vehicle produces its electricity onboard. This drastically reduces the battery capacity and hence the dead-weight which an FCEV needs to carry.
- Battery-electric vehicle (BEV) these days have 30-50 kWh battery packs, enabling them to average a driving range of approximately 400 km on a single charge. In comparison, an FCEV can travel a distance of up to 650 km with a battery pack of less than 2 kWh.
- Also, unlike the charge stored in a battery, which tend to discharge within a short duration of time (hours-days), hydrogen, which is the make source of power in an FCEV, can be stored for longer durations (days-seasons).
- Also, refuelling of hydrogen tank takes just 2-3 minutes, much like filling the car with petrol/diesel, unlike charging a BEV which could still, with even the latest technologies, warrants at the least 30 minutes if connected to a fast-charger.
- Fuel cells have strong advantages over conventional combustion-based technologies currently used in many power plants and cars, given that they produce much smaller quantities of greenhouse gases and none of the air pollutants that cause health problems.
- From a long-term viability perspective, FCEVs are billed as vehicles of the future, given that hydrogen is the most abundant resource in the universe.

Disadvantages

- While FCEVs do not generate gases that contribute to global warming, the process of making hydrogen needs energy — often from fossil fuel sources. That has raised questions over hydrogen's green credentials.
- Also, there are questions of safety as hydrogen is more explosive than petrol. Opponents of the technology cite the case of the hydrogen-filled Hindenburg airship in 1937. But the Japanese auto industry argues that the comparison is misplaced because most of the fire was attributed to diesel fuel for the airship's engines and a flammable lacquer coating on the outside.
- The other major hurdle is that the vehicles are expensive, and fuel dispensing pumps are scarce. But this should get better as scale and distribution improves.

Given the advantages of the technology over BEVs and combustion-based technologies and its potential in significantly reducing environmental pollution, it is important that countries across the world invest in research to fast track the technological development and aid wider adoption of the same.

- Japanese PM Shinzo Abe declared in Davos in 2019 that Japan “aims to reduce the production cost of hydrogen by at least 90 per cent by the year 2050, to make it cheaper than natural gas”.
- Further, hydrogen can be produced through a number of sources, be it thermal, wind, solar, CNG, LNG and the likes. But the most feasible sources of hydrogen, which is also available in surplus, is biomass and India has huge biomass reserve.
- Apart from livestock dung, agriculture and forest residual and sewage sludge are also CO₂ free sources from which hydrogen can be obtained.
- Similarly, by virtue of electrolysis, hydrogen can be produced from the 40 per cent excess electricity available through renewable resources such as wind, water, solar and Geothermal. India's vast coal reserves can also be used for the due process.

13. The Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019 was recently introduced in the Lok Sabha. Highlight the pros and cons of data localisation, while delineating the various provisions of data storage and processing in the bill.

Answer

The bill was prepared by a high-level expert committee headed by **Justice B.N. Srikrishna** on line of **European Union's General Data Protection regulation (GDPR)**.

- Data is any collection of information that is stored in a way so computers can easily read them. It usually refers to information about messages, social media posts, online transactions, and browser searches.
- To be considered useful, data has to be processed, which means analysed by computers. Data is collected and handled by entities called data fiduciaries. While the fiduciary controls how and why data is processed, the processing itself may be by a third party, the data processor.
- This distinction is important to delineate responsibility as data moves from entity to entity. For example, in the US, Facebook (the data controller) fell into controversy for the actions of the data processor — Cambridge Analytica.

Arguments For Data Localisation

- A common argument from government officials has been that data localisation will help law-enforcement access data for investigations and enforcement. As of now, much of cross-border data transfer is governed by individual bilateral mutual legal assistance treaties — a process that almost all stakeholders agree is cumbersome.
- In addition, proponents highlight security against foreign attacks and surveillance, harkening notions of data sovereignty.
- Many economy stakeholders say localisation will also increase the ability of the Indian government to tax Internet giants.
- Many domestic-born technology companies, which store most of their data exclusively in India, support localisation arguing that data regulation for privacy and security will not be strong enough without localisation, calling upon models in China and Russia.

Arguments Against Data Localisation

- The provisions could prove **detrimental to the country's start-up and innovation ecosystem** since smaller companies or foreign application providers may not be able to afford the additional costs and compliance burden.
- Data localization requirements are contrary to the **goals of promoting a Digital India**, as global data transfer is critical to cloud computing and data analytics.
- Moreover, it will **increase cyber security risks** since cross border flow of data can lead to better fraud analysis.
- The Bill leaves the **definition of critical personal data** to the government so may leave scope for misuse and arbitrary action.
- The Data Protection authority is to determine whether a **data breach needs to be reported to the affected individuals or not**. Further, the draft Bill **does not specify any timeline** for notification once the breach is identified. In the case of GDPR, for instance, it is **72 hours** once the breach is identified.
- The principal shortcoming is that it does not detail a legal framework for regulating **state infringement of privacy by Intelligence agencies**.
- The bill leaves the procedure of selection and tenure of the adjudicating officer entirely up to the central government. It is likely that this regulator will **never be sufficiently independent** to enforce rights against the government.
- Moreover, some lawyers contend that security and government access are not achieved by localisation. Even if the data is stored in the country, the encryption keys may still be out of reach of national agencies.
- Many are concerned with a fractured Internet (or a “splinternet”), where the domino effect of protectionist policy will lead to other countries following suit.

With increasing significance of data, it has become an important source of profits for companies but also has a potential avenue for invasion of privacy as it can reveal extremely personal aspects, hence the legislative process of the bill should be mindful that future's economy and law enforcement will be predicated on the regulation of data, surrounding the issues of national sovereignty.

Extra Mile**Various Provisions Of The Bill**

- The Bill governs the processing of personal data by **government, companies incorporated in India and foreign companies dealing with personal data** of individuals in India.
- The Bill trifurcates personal data. Some types of personal data are considered sensitive personal data (SPD), which the Bill defines as financial, health, sexual orientation, biometric, genetic, transgender status, caste, religious belief, and more. Another subset is critical personal data. The government at any time can deem something critical, and has given examples as military or national security data.
- The bill also imposes certain **obligation on data fiduciary** like personal data can be processed only for **specific, clear and lawful purpose**. Additionally, all data fiduciaries must undertake certain transparency and accountability measures.
- The Bill sets out certain **rights of the individual or data principal**. These include the right to obtain confirmation from the fiduciary on whether their personal data has been processed, seek

correction of inaccurate, incomplete, or out-of-date personal data, have personal data transferred to any other data fiduciary etc.

- The Bill generally allows processing of data by fiduciaries only if consent is provided by the individual. However, in certain circumstances, **personal data can be processed without consent** like for providing benefits to the individual, legal proceedings, to respond to a medical emergency etc.
- The Bill sets up a **Data Protection Authority** which may take steps to protect interests of individuals, prevent misuse of personal data and ensure compliance with the Bill.
- **Sensitive personal data** may be transferred outside India for processing if explicitly consented to by the individual and after the approval of a Data Protection Agency (DPA).. However, such sensitive personal data should continue to be stored in India. Certain personal data notified as **critical personal data** by the government can only be processed in India.
- Further, the **Central government can exempt any of its agencies** from the provisions of the Act in interest of security of state, public order, sovereignty and integrity of India and friendly relations with foreign states etc.
- Offences under the Bill include, processing or transferring personal data in violation of the Bill, punishable with a fine of **Rs 15 crore or 4% of the annual turnover** of the fiduciary; failure to conduct a data audit, punishable with a fine of **five crore rupees or 2% of the annual turnover** of the fiduciary etc.

Decoding the data protection bill

WHAT IT MEANS FOR CONSUMERS

- **DATA** can be processed or shared by any entity only after consent.
- **SAFEGUARDS**, including penalties, introduced to prevent misuse of personal data.
- **ALL** data to be categorized under three heads—general, sensitive and critical.

THE GOVERNMENT & REGULATORY ROLE

- **GOVT** will have the power to obtain any user's non-personal data from companies.
- **THE** bill mandates that all financial and critical data has to be stored in India.
- **SENSITIVE** data has to be stored in India but can be processed outside with consent.

WHAT COMPANIES HAVE TO DO

- **SOCIAL** media firms to formulate a voluntary verification process for users.
- **SHARING** data without consent will entail a fine of ₹15 crore or 4% of global turnover.
- **DATA** breach or inaction will entail a fine of ₹5 crore or 2% of global turnover.

14. Recently, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has pulled up 270 tyre pyrolysis units in 19 States for employing technology that is polluting and harmful to the health of the workers employed. In this light discuss the problems posed by waste to energy plants (WTE) and suitable solution overcome the problems.

Answer

As per the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests about **1.43 lakh tonnes per day (TPD)** of municipal solid waste (MSW) is generated across the country. Of this, 1.11 lakh TPD (77.6%) is collected and 35,602 TPD (24.8%) processed. Further, MSW generation will reach **4.5 lakh TPD by 2031** and **11.9 lakh TPD by 2050**. There are number of WTE plants like **incineration, refuse derived fuel-based combustion** or conversion technologies such as **pyrolysis and gasification**.

However, the use of use of WTE poses many challenges such as:

About Pyrolysis

- Pyrolysis refers to a technique of breaking down waste in absence of oxygen at temperatures between **250°C and 500°C**.
- Pyrolysis leaves fine carbon matter, pyro-gas and oil as residue. Inadequate management of these by-products poses health risks.

- The fundamental reason for the inefficiency of these plants is the poor quality of waste *i.e.* **low calorific value and high moisture content**.
- In the **absence of adequate feedstock** of non-compostable and nonrecyclable waste, it becomes necessary to use auxiliary fuel, adding to the cost of operating the plants.
- The latest research has found out that WTE plants using **inadequately segregated municipal waste** as feedstock, are highly dangerous because of the toxic gases and particulates they produce.
- The presence of chlorinated hydrocarbons like PVC in feedstock results in the release of **dioxins and furans** when the waste is burnt at less than 850-degree C.
- Dioxins and furans are known to be **carcinogenic** and can lead to impairment of immune, endocrine, nervous and reproductive systems.
- The plants are being **operated without the adequate use of activated charcoal** to filter out dioxins, furans and mercury from the emissions.
- WTE plants in India are also **inefficient in generating energy** as municipal waste in India has a very high biodegradable (wet) waste content (60 and 70 per cent of the total), compared with 30 per cent in the West.
- Moreover, the plants are expensive because they produce power at nearly Rs. 7 per unit, which is more than the Rs. 3-5 offered by thermal as well as solar sources.
- Lastly, in India there is **poor regulatory and monitoring capacity** to ensure their safe operations.

Considering the aforementioned challenges following steps must be adopted:

- A crucial element of enforcement will be to first ensure that the **waste is not mixed at the source of generation**. Even where outsourcing contracts clearly specify that handling must be in unmixed streams, there should be strict penalties for non-compliance.
- There is also a need for **citizens participation** and creation of **ecological awareness** among general public. This must also be supplemented **by involvement of informal sector** such as rig pickers *etc.*
- Further, effort should be made to **India specific study on characterisation of MSW** to design adequate processing method.
- Overall India need to evolve and empower Urban Local bodies (ULBs) along with focus of **Swachh Bharat Mission** to achieve sustainable solutions.

15. The Shipping Ministry recently gave approval for the development of Loktak Inland Water ways improvement project in Manipur. However, many groups have criticised the project due to its harmful impact on the Loktak wetland. In this light discuss the importance of the project vis-à-vis threat faced by wetland in general.

Answer

Union Ministry of Shipping has approved the long pending demand of Manipur government for the development of **Loktak Inland Waterways project** (wetland) under the **central sector scheme** at the estimated cost of Rs 25.58 crore.

It is believed that the project will give a boost to the **development of inland water transport** connectivity in the North-eastern states and will also **boost the tourism** sector. Further, it will **reduce the geographical isolation** of the region, currently connected through a narrow **chicken neck corridor**.

However, many expert groups have criticised the project due to its environmental implications. In this light, it is necessary to highlight the threats faced by wetland in general:

- **Draining of wetlands** to make space for agriculture or construction work is one of the biggest threats to such areas. The reason behind the same is wrong belief that wetlands are wastelands.
- The **introduction of invasive species** can also damage the wetland ecosystem as might lead to a misbalance in the existing system.
- Further, **pollution of wetland** is also responsible for killing the flora and fauna of wetlands i.e. its natural ecosystem.
- Additionally, like all other habitats, wetlands are also suffering from **climate change-induced alteration** in the environment. Thus, wetlands are getting lost both due to higher and lower water levels induced by the varying effects of climate change.
- Lastly, the **construction of a dam has altered the natural flow of a river**. Such alterations create great disturbances in the ecosystems dependent on the river like swamps, marshes etc.

To resolve the above issues/ challenges following steps must be adopted:

- A **database of wetland** needs to be created to control the encroachment of wetland.
- There is also a need to adopt **carrot and stick policy** to conserve and preserve existing wetland.
- Further, **stakeholder participation and capacity building** must be used as an important instrument for better management of wetlands.
- Lastly, the **ecosystem service** provided by wetland must be valued in terms of quantification of its benefits.

Extra Mile

- Loktak Lake is the **largest freshwater lake** in Northeast and is famous for the **phumdis** (degraded vegetation) floating over it. The lake is located at Moirang in Manipur.
- Lake is also listed as a **wetland of international importance** under the **Ramsar Convention**.
- It was also listed under the **Montreux Record** (a record of Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur).

16. Amidst the chaos of CoP-25 in Madrid, the European Commission published its European Green Deal that has climate focussed action plan. Discuss its salient feature and also analyse its provisions.

Answer

The European Green Deal aims to be a comprehensive strategy document which puts the European Union (EU) on a trajectory toward **no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050** and where **economic growth is decoupled from resource use**. The year **2020 is a critical year to raise climate ambition**, the year in which parties to the **Paris Agreement** have to submit their second round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

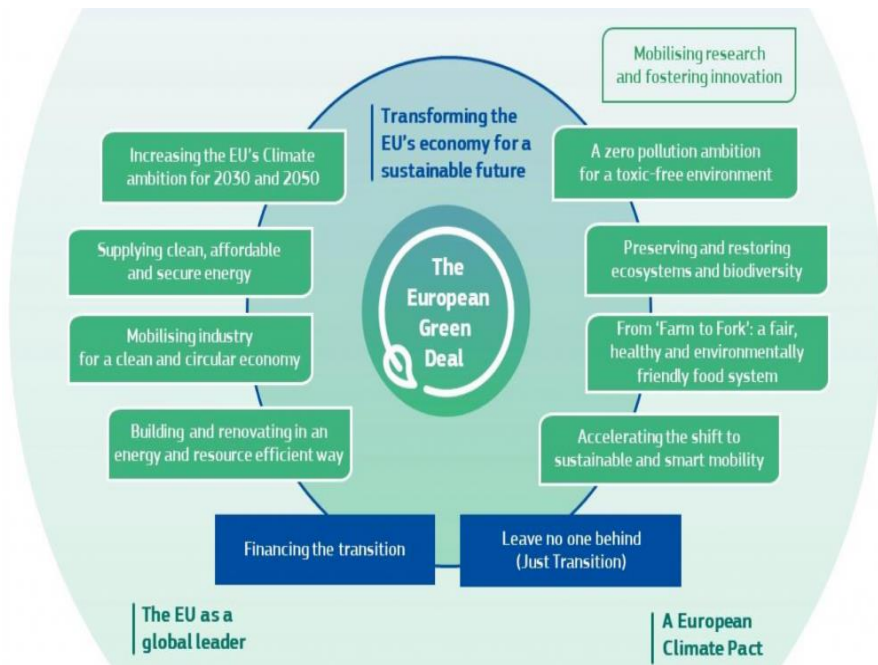
Some of the salient features of European Green Deal are as follows:

- Proposal on a **European Climate Law** enshrining the **2050 climate neutrality objective**.
- Comprehensive plan to **increase the EU 2030 climate target** to at least 50 per cent and towards 55 per cent in a responsible way.
- Renewed focus and strategy on **offshore wind plants**.

- Initiatives to stimulate/ lead markets for **climate neutral and circular products** in energy intensive industrial sectors.
- The deal also has the proposal to support **zero carbon steel-making** processes by 2030

The analysis of the Deal provision in light of present context is as follows:

- The EU's NDC under the Paris Agreement binds it to reduce its emissions by **40 per cent between 1990 and 2030**. In that sense, the Green Deal announcement is an improvement to reduce emissions by **at least 50 per cent between 1990 and 2030**.
- While, this ambition increase is being celebrated, some context is needed. Firstly, the EU's current NDC is **rated insufficient by Climate Action Tracker**, which takes into account historic emissions, capability and equality to determine each country's fair share of mitigation effort.
- Further, there is a lot of uncertainty around whether the EU is on track to achieve its earlier NDC. **UN Environment's Emissions Gap Report** considered that it was, while the European Environment Agency reported that it was not.



Climate neutrality, sometimes also expressed as a state of net-zero emissions, is achieved when a country's emissions are balanced by absorptions and removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Absorption can be increased by creating more carbon sinks like forests, while removal involves technologies like carbon capture and storage.

- The **demand of equity** dictate that the EU decarbonise much faster. **Climate Action Tracker** considers that its fair share would mean hitting net zero by 2030. The European Commission's Green Deal is nowhere near this required level of ambition.
- Moreover, the intention stated in the Green Deal document is to have a comprehensive plan to increase the **EU 2030 climate target** by summer 2020. But with Poland already deciding that it doesn't consider itself bound by the EU's timeline. Thus, the prospects for improving this deal look dim.
- Furthermore, as long as many international partners do not share the same ambition as the EU, there is a **risk of carbon leakage**, either because production is transferred from the EU to other countries with lower ambition for emission reduction or because EU products are replaced by more carbon-intensive imports.
- However, EU being the **third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases** in the world after China and the United States. Therefore, the announcement is as a major step forward.

17. In spite of all the obstacles posed by the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign, the Russia-China-Iran trilateral convergence is growing. Discuss the various factors responsible for this convergence.

Answer

- Recently Iran conducted **joint naval exercises** with Russia and China, the first of such exercise in the volatile Middle East. Since the withdrawal of USA from Iranian nuclear deal, Moscow and Beijing have maintained regular business ties with Tehran.
- This naval drill come after a tense summer in which Gulf tankers and Saudi oil facilities were hit by a series of mysterious attacks that the US blamed on Iran.
- The exercise **aims to deepen** the exchanges and cooperation between the navies of the three countries and **demonstrating the goodwill** and ability of the three parties to jointly maintain world peace and maritime security.

Factors Responsible

These events highlight the growing convergence between China, Russia and Iran. Like many other arrangements, this axis represents the **outgrowth of the combination of existing links** between the three countries and recent convergences due to various trends and developments.

- **Growing Opposition to the United States** - All the three countries maintain a hostile relationship with the United States which has risen further under President Donald Trump.
- Sanctions imposed after **Crimean war** alienated Russia while **aggressive posture of US in Indo-Pacific region** is threatening China. Hence, these countries are increasingly willing to take cooperative actions in the security realm to illustrate their own capabilities.
- **Ensuring Maritime Security** – In order to **safeguard shipping in the Persian Gulf waters**, the region has witnessed increased military activity. Against this backdrop, the trilateral axis would ensure 'collective security' in the sea while delivering the message to the world that any kind of security at sea must include the interests of all concerned countries.
- **Growing Disarray in Middle East Policy of US**– It has created a void in the region and has posed questions regarding guarantor of security for the vast quantities of hydrocarbons produced and shipped from the region. Russia and China want to step into a role as part of its expanding influence in the region.
- **Importance of Iran** - China sees strategically located Iran as an important link in the OBOR initiative that could connect it to Europe. Oil from Middle East is also vital for Chinese energy security. Many major Russian entities are already subject to U.S. sanctions. This provides Moscow an incentive to explore Iranian market.
- **Business Opportunities** – In 2018, USA withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and re-imposed sanctions. Major European businesses responded by fleeing Iran. However, China and Russia moved to fill the void and capitalize on the business opportunities. They are heavily investing in energy and infrastructure.

Analysis

- Iran probably wants to send multiple messages through this exercise. **First**, to show that **it has the support of China and Russia if attacked by the United States**. Washington had declared it would send more forces and missile defense capabilities to Saudi Arabia (following the strikes on the Aramco oil facilities, which was attributed to Iran).

- **Second**, Iran is also trying to **reassert its presence in the waters** with help of the Chinese and Russians (*Washington had declared that it is forming a naval mission with the other regional countries including Saudi Arabia and UAE*).

Several Challenges To This New Axis (Russia-China- Iran)

- China and Russia are also partners of Saudi Arabia and Israel as well. They are not happy with Iran's harassing of the kingdom and its verbal attack on Israel.
- Chinese do not seem happy with Iran's actions in the waters and its alleged attack on Aramco, because that will cause a remarkable increase in the oil price.

Conclusion

- **Trump's manufactured crisis** in the Persian Gulf after his unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the policy of economic strangulation against Tehran is being seen as a major factor that has pushed these three countries together.
- So far, India is closely observing this development. India might get worried if Pakistan joins the alliance.
- Also, if China, Russia and Iran continue to develop their ties to protect their strategic interests in the Indian Ocean they will form a powerful trio which is not a good sign from Indian perspective.

Extra Mile

Different Military Activities in Persian Gulf to Safeguard the Shipping Activities:

- The United States conducted a naval operation in Bahrain in November to safeguard shipping in the Persian Gulf waters.
- It is planning to initiate an **International Maritime Security Construct** in the Gulf, with the participation of Australia, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the U.K.
- Other actors are also stepping in, with France declaring that a **European-led maritime surveillance initiative**, stationed at the French naval base in Abu Dhabi, UAE, will be engaged in maintaining a watch on the Gulf waters.
- Iran has its own plan to pursue a "**Hormuz Peace Endeavor**" called **HOPE** which will be a coalition of regional states.

18. Many developments, which have altered the market dynamic significantly both from a retail and a technological perspective, were not envisaged in the Consumer Protection Act 1986. Hence, there was an urgent need to revise existing regulations and formulate a restructured mechanism that can be aligned with the modern nature of markets. Comment.

Answer

The Consumer Protection Act 1986 was enacted to safeguard the interests of consumers in a right based manner. Its implementation can be viewed as a success. However, the Act had come into force at a time when the country's economic landscape and the level of consumer awareness were at an infancy stage.

Need To Revise Existing Regulation

- **Globalisation** has resulted in a **convergence of markets** all across the world. Consumer relationships with businesses have become more complex since the opening up of the Indian economy in 1991. Therefore, the laws to protect them have to be commensurately adjusted.

- With the coming of the internet age, online transaction systems gained acceptance giving **rise to the phenomenon of e-marketplaces**. There is a lack of clarity around the after sales services like refunds and returns in the 1986 act.
- Penal steps can be taken only through a judicial process before the State or District Consumer Redressal Forums, which are overburdened. As a result, consumers are being made to suffer for an average of five years to get their grievances redressed. There is **no focus on time bound justice delivery** in the present act.
- The 1986 act **does not provide ways** to settle the disputes **through alternate dispute resolution mechanisms**.
- The need was felt to have a Central Authority, which will act as a national regulator for the protection of consumer rights and will take suo moto action against companies indulging in unfair trade practices to the detriment of consumers.
- In the **absence of provisions for class law suit**, the 1986 act failed to compensate group of people with the same or similar injuries caused by the same product or action. The individual law suits have to be filed to avail the compensation.

Conclusion

- It is necessary for India to ensure that its consumer's interests are protected since high level of consumer confidence in an economy allows them to experiment and support new businesses, thus boosting competition and encouraging growth.
- In this context, the government has passed the Consumer Protection Act 2019, which has provisions to deal with the fast changing technological and market dynamics, e-commerce being the latest.

Extra Mile

- Consumer Protection Act, 1986 provides six rights to the consumers. These are:
 - Right to Safety
 - Right to be Informed
 - Right to Choose
 - Right to be heard
 - Right to seek Redressal
 - Right to Consumer Education.
- These rights under the Act flow from the rights enshrined in Articles 14 to 19 of the Constitution of India. Also, the Right to Information Act (RTI) has far reaching implications for consumer protection.

For detailed discussion on consumer protection in India, please refer the topic "*Consumer Protection Act, 2019: A New Milestone in Empowering Consumers*" from summary of Yojana Magazine (December 2019).

Brainstorming

Q) In this age of capitalism and globalization, the main objective of businesses is to maximize the profit. Thus in order to save from being cheated, it is necessary for the consumers to be aware. Discuss.

19. Economic growth of India is the single biggest determinant of its national security. Comment.**Context:**

- The GDP of India continued its downward spiral for the seventh consecutive quarter, falling to 4.5 per cent in the second quarter (July-September) of the year 2019-20. It was 5% in Q1.
- GDP growth in Q2 of 2018-19 was 7.1%.
- While the **economic and political fallout** of the sharp fall in economic growth is often debated and discussed vehemently, **foreign and security policy dimension of this sallow down fails to grab much attention.**

Answer

- National security of any nation stands on three important pillars: human resources, science and technology, and money. Money is the most important of the three pillars as the other two cannot be adequately developed without the third.
- For a country of India's size and aspirations, national security is not merely about homeland security. It is also about influencing events in the immediate and extended neighbourhood, and with major powers, to our advantage.
- National security and economic strength are inextricably linked and China has shown this so effectively in recent years.

Economic Growth: Single Biggest Determinant of National Security

- **Impact on military and political might** - India's economy is the foundation of its military and political power, and boosting growth helps relieve the downward pressure on defense and foreign-affairs budgets that reduces India's ability to shape international events.
- **Impact on strategic autonomy** - An economically unstable India would be put under extra pressure from global powers, especially China, if it needs to be bailed out from another macroeconomic crisis. In more stark terms, it will be asked why a country that cannot manage its finances should be trusted to manage its nuclear arsenal. This will compromise our strategic autonomy.
- **Ability to win friends and influence people** – From making common cause with countries like the United States in the Indo-Pacific to engaging with neighbours like Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka to protect India's interests, Indian government has been able to push the envelope because of a strong Indian economy.
- **Impact on many decisions and initiatives of the government** – Many of the recent decisions of government were predicted on a robust economy. For example - the constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir, aggressive policy towards terrorism emanating from Pakistan etc.
- **Impact on internal social peace** - The sharp slowdown in the Indian economy will lead to rise in inequality, unemployment and hence will increase the social tension. Not only that, it will act as a fertile ground for the growth of insurgency and terrorism.

Conclusion

- The health of a nation's economy is the single most important determinant in its ability to protect itself, the single most important determinant in its ability to project power, the single most important determinant in its national security.

- The bottomline is that a weak economy exposes India to external pulls and pressures as well as creates threats for internal security. Worse, it makes India vulnerable to adventurism from adversaries because paucity of resources impacts on defence preparedness and modernisation.

20. The use of drones by terrorists to ship arms and ammunition across the international border highlights the threats posed by it to India's internal security. Discuss.

Context:

1. Dunzo, Throttle get nod to test long-range drone

- Google-backed delivery app Dunzo and Bengaluru-based drone start-up Throttle Aerospace have got Directorate General of Civil Aviation's permission to **test long-range autonomous drone flight**.
- The long range drones has potential to **enhance logistic services** in Indian hinterland, which in turn will have a multiplier effect on economy.
- These permissions are part of the authority's **experimental Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) programme**. The BVLOS programme was notified in May 2019 with an aim to boost the use of drones in surveillance, mapping and deliveries.
- Currently, drone operators are allowed to run line of sight operations only.

2. Drones to be deployed to destroy hidden marijuana plantations

- Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to deploy drones to destroy marijuana plantations before the crop is harvested.
- Farmers of some states illegally grow marijuana crops along with other crops to conceal the prohibited activities.
- Now the Centre has decided to use satellites to detect marijuana crops by penetrating the lighter foliage. Once detected, drones will subsequently destroy the plants.
- The focus is on northeastern states, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Haryana.
- Legal cultivation of limited crop of marijuana **for medical and scientific purposes** is **licensed under Section 10** of the Narcotics, Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and mainly used in alternative medicine such homeopathy and ayurveda.
- On the other hand, **illegal cultivation is an offence under Section 20 of the NDPS Act**.

The issue of increasing cannabis farming:

- As per data, 9,500 acres of cannabis crop was destroyed across the country during 2017-18.
- The crop season commences around September and it is harvested around February or March. It is estimated that one acre of cannabis fetches Rs 2 to 2.50 lakh in the market.
- According to Narcotic Control Bureau report 2018, seizure of narcotic drugs like opium, heroin and cannabis in the country has increased by more than 300 per cent in the last five years with 2017 witnessing an all-time high recovery of over 3.6 lakh kg of narcotics.

3. Also in News Due to:

- Recently, the police in the Indian state of Punjab unmasked a terror network using **drones to ferry arms and ammunition** across the international border (IB) from Pakistan.
- A large of number of AK-47 assault rifles, explosives, and satellite phones were dropped with an intent to **foment trouble in the state of Jammu and Kashmir**.

Answer

Recently there was news about the use of drones by Pakistan-based entities to airdrop arms and ammunition in Punjab. Shocking seizure of armaments, fake currency and heavy ammunition by Punjab police have highlighted the issue of threat posed by drones.

Drones: Threat to India's Internal Security

- **Transfer of weaponry to terrorists** – Drones are capable to ferry arms and ammunition across the international border. The recent seizure by Punjab police highlights the intent of non-state actors to foment trouble in the state of Jammu and Kashmir
- **Attack on critical infrastructure** – In September 2019, the Saudi Arabia's largest oil field was attacked using a swarm of drones highlighting the capability of drone in carrying out pinpointed attack on critical infrastructure of a nation.
- The approach followed by Pakistan's intelligence agencies to counter the abrogation of article 370, similar attack on Indian infrastructure can not be ruled out.
- **Intelligence gathering** – Drones have proved its usefulness in intelligence gathering and surveillance. If we closely analyse the pattern of drone detection on Indo Pak borders, we can say that drones are widely being used to gather information.
- **Supports Organised Crime** - The use of drones, especially by the **drug cartels**, is not a new modus operandi. These methods are frequently used by the Mexican drug cartels on the US Mexico border for smuggling of drugs and other contrabands.
- **Challenge to anti-terror operations** - Police and security forces, trained in conventional methods to counter-terrorism, find themselves clueless when confronting unmanned aerial vehicles. As per reports, there are at least five to six incidents of the drone being detected every day on Indo-Pak border and security forces are not able to do much.

Conclusion

- The almost insane proliferation of drones in the open market has added to the woes of the security establishment of every country. While its use in operations other than war is noteworthy, the misuse of its capability can have enervating effects on a nation's security.
- India can afford to take it easy on the drone drops in Punjab at its own peril. So far, India has focused only on acquiring drones for both external and internal security. Due attention must be **given to defending against drone attacks**.

Extra Mile**Factors explaining why terror outfits are turning towards drones:**

- If spreading terror is the principal aim, drones offer a **cheap and precise method**. Recruiting, training, and handling of human terror operatives is far more costly, and complex compared to operating drones.
- When designed to **inflict damage on critical infrastructure** or highly symbolic targets, drones present a very attractive option for terror outfits.

- Using drones can help terrorist organisations to **avoid an attrition of cadres** as terror operations can be conducted from safe havens across international borders. Given the ubiquity of drone technology, locating the provenance of such attacks is always a challenge.

Use of Drones by India

- In the last decade or so, the use of drones by Indian security forces have increased dramatically. India now employs UAVs, primarily obtained from **Israel and the US**, for both external and internal security.
- India's defence forces have availed drone systems such as **Searchers and Heron** for intelligence and surveillance along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, and the Line of Actual Control along the border with China.
- India's DRDO has made some investments in **anti-drone technologies** such as the **ADITYA Directed Energy Weapon (DEW) and laser dazzles**, but these are yet to be fully developed.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

PRELIMS MCQs

1. Which of the following companies has partnered with NASSCOM to launch the Future Skills platform?

- a.) Google
- b.) IBM
- c.) Wipro
- d.) Facebook

Answer: C

Explanation

- Wipro Ltd has partnered with the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) to launch the 'Future Skills' platform for 10,000 students from over 20 engineering colleges in India.
- This is a part of Wipro's Corporate Social Responsibility programme, TalentNext which aims to enhance the quality of engineering education by preparing faculty and academic leaders to train students.
- The programme has now been extended to students directly through 'Future Skills', which is a new age platform built to bridge the industry-academia skill gap and help students keep pace with the emerging technologies — Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Cloud Computing, Cybersecurity and Internet of Things, to make them future ready.

National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM)

- NASSCOM, a not-for-profit industry association, is the apex body for the 180-billion-dollar IT BPM industry in India, an industry that had made a phenomenal contribution to India's GDP, exports, employment, infrastructure and global visibility.
- Established in 1988, its primary role is to make sure that service quality and enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights have been properly implemented in the Indian software and BPO industry.
- It is focused on building the architecture integral to the development of the IT BPM sector through policy advocacy, and help in setting up the strategic direction for the sector to unleash its potential and dominate newer frontiers.

2. Consider the following statements about Measles

- 1. Measles is caused by a virus
- 2. Measles is a contagious disease
- 3. India has the highest number of children who are not vaccinated against measles.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 and 2 only
- b.) 2 and 3 only
- c.) 1 and 3 only
- d.) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A

Explanation

- According to Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), measles caused an estimated 10 million cases and 1,42,000 deaths globally in 2018.
- The estimated cases and deaths are much more than what countries have reported to the World Health Organization and UNICEF. The number of measles cases reported in 2018 was only 3,53,000.
- The report shows that measles cases more than doubled in 2018 compared to 2017. While final data for 2019 is not yet available, reports indicate that the number of measles cases continues to be dangerously high.

Measles

- Measles is a viral disease that can spread rapidly. Also known as rubeola or morbilli, it is an endemic disease, meaning it is continually present in a community, and many people develop resistance.
- After a bout of measles, a person gains immunity for the rest of their life and they are very unlikely to contract measles a second time.
- It can be prevented by a highly-effective Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccine. The WHO recommends 95% coverage using two doses of measles vaccine to prevent outbreaks.
- Though vaccine coverage with first and second dose has increased globally since 2000, it has not reached anywhere near 95%.

Immunisation Pathway In India

- The first dose of measles vaccine was introduced as part of the national immunisation programme in the 1990s. Based on WHO's recommendation, India introduced the second dose from 2010 onwards. India was one of the last countries to add a second dose of measles vaccine as recommended by the WHO.
- In India, the first dose of measles vaccine is given at 9-12 months of age and the second dose is given at 16-24 months of age through the national immunisation programme.
- But it appears that millions of children in India do not receive measles vaccine through routine immunisation activities.

High Numbers Of Unvaccinated Children

- In 2018, only 86% of children globally received the first dose through routine immunisation. In the case of second dose, the coverage globally is just 69%.
- The number of children who are not vaccinated against measles is alarmingly high in six countries. At 2.3 million, India has the second highest number of children who are not vaccinated against measles. With 2.4 million, Nigeria has the most number of unvaccinated children. The other four countries are Pakistan, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Philippines.
- In some cases, conflict, security or a breakdown in services are making it hard to reach children in remote or hard-to-reach areas. In others, parents are not vaccinating their children due to complacency, mistrust or misinformation about vaccines.
- Poor vaccination coverage and large pockets of unvaccinated children have resulted in devastating measles outbreaks in many parts of the world.

Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

- The Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report is a weekly epidemiological digest for the United States published by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- CDC is the leading national public health institute of the United States. It is a United States federal agency under Department of Health and Human Services and is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia
- Its main goal is to protect public health and safety through the control and prevention of disease, injury, and disability in the US and internationally.

3. Consider the following statements about Mission Antyodaya

1. It is a mission mode project envisaged by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
2. It is envisaged as a state led initiative with Gram Panchayat as the basic unit of planning.
3. It intends to ensure convergence of programmes/schemes targeted towards development of rural areas.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation

- Tamil Nadu's Molugamboondi has topped the 2019 rankings of gram panchayats in the country, scoring high on implementation of development and infrastructure programmes under the Mission Antyodaya scheme.
- The second rank has gone to Bambhaniya GP of Bhavnagar in Gujarat while four more Gujarat panchayats are tied for third ranking. One in Maharashtra, two each of Punjab and Tamil Nadu, and five Gujarat panchayats are tied at fourth ranking.
- As many as 269 panchayats from just 15 states are ranked in the top 10 places. Gujarat has the maximum entries with 99, followed by Punjab with 66, Kerala with 69 and Tamil Nadu with 21.
- In contrast, large states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana have just one panchayat each in top 10 places, while Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have two panchayats each.
- While in 2017 and 2018, the villages were ranked on the basis of 46 parameters, the scale has been widened to include 112 parameters for 2019. The 2019 rankings are provisional as the process of assessing the panchayats is still on. A total of 2.4 lakh panchayats are to be ranked, with around 2.1 lakh completed.

Survey Under Mission Antyodaya

- Annual survey in Gram Panchayats across the country is an important aspect of Mission Antyodaya framework. The basic unit of the Survey is GPs/ villages.
- It is carried out coterminous with the People's Plan Campaign (PPC) of Ministry of Panchayat Raj and its purpose is to lend support to the process of participatory planning for Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).
- The questionnaires designed for Mission Antyodaya survey are classified as Part A and Part B. Part A deals primarily with the availability of the infrastructures under 29 subjects mentioned in the 11th schedule of the Constitution. Whereas, Part B deals with the services availed by the rural poor under sectors like health, nutrition, social security, water management and efficiency for a decent living.

- Data on 29 transferred subjects at GP-level are used for generating GP-wise ranking and Gap Reports. While the ranking exercise would provide some understanding over the relative success of convergent planning at GP-level, the Gap Reports serves as critical inputs for the GPDP planning.

Mission Antyodaya

- Mission Antyodaya was adopted in Union Budget 2017-18, to realise the vision of poverty-free India by 2022. It is a mission mode project envisaged by the Ministry of Rural Development.
- It is a convergence and accountability framework aiming to bring optimum use and management of resources allocated by 27 Ministries/ Department of the Union Government under various programmes for the development of rural areas.
- It is envisaged as a state-led initiative with Gram Panchayats as focal points of convergence efforts.

Objectives

- Ensuring effective use of resources through convergence of various Government Schemes with Gram Panchayats as the basic unit of planning.
- Work with a focused micro plan for sustainable livelihood for every deprived household.
- Conduct an annual survey on measurable outcomes at Gram Panchayat level to monitor the progress in the development process across rural areas.
- Supporting the process of participatory planning for Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), which will improve service delivery, enhance citizenship, create pace for an alliance of people's institutions and groups and improve governance at the local level.
- Encourage partnerships with network of professionals, institutions and enterprises to further accelerate the transformation of rural livelihoods.

4. Consider the following about National Rural Livelihood Mission

1. Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana is a sub component of NRLM.
2. NRLM is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.
3. Swarnajayanti Grameen Swarojgar Yojana was remodelled in 2011 to form NRLM.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

Answer: C

Explanation:

- The **Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD)** has been implementing Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) by making systematic investments to enhance women's participation and productivity.
- A total central allocation of Rs 847.5 crore has been made towards implementation of the approved projects. Under MKSP, 36.06 lakh mahila kisans have been benefited through 84 projects in 24 states/UTs in the country.

- Women farmers from MP have been the biggest beneficiaries under MKSP (6.46 lakh), while Maharashtra had the second highest beneficiaries (5.18 lakh) followed by Odisha (4.61 lakh).

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana

- MKSP is a sub-component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission, which aims to improve the status of women in agriculture. It recognizes the identity of “Mahila” as “Kisan” and strives to build the capacity of women in the domain of agro-ecologically sustainable practices.
- The focus of MKSP is on capacitating smallholders to adopt sustainable climate resilient agro-ecology and eventually create a pool of skilled community professionals.
- The program is being implemented by DAY-NRLM in partnership with State Rural Livelihood Missions/ Community Based Organizations (CBOs)/NGOs, as implementing partners (PIAs) across the country. These agencies are expected to support and nurture scalable livelihood models in the MKSP intervention areas.
- Besides providing help under the MSKP scheme, the government has been giving additional support and assistance to women farmers, over and above male farmers, under various schemes. These schemes include the Agri-Clinic & Agri-Business Centre, Integrated Schemes of Agricultural Marketing, Sub-Mission of Agricultural Mechanisation and National Food Security Mission.

National Rural Livelihood Mission

- NRLM is a poverty alleviation project implemented by Ministry of Rural Development. The scheme is focused on promoting self-employment and organization of rural poor. The basic idea behind this programme is to organize the poor into SHGs and make them capable for self-employment.
- In 1999 after restructuring Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Ministry of Rural Development launched Swarnajayanti Grameen Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) to focus on promoting self-employment among rural poor.
- SGSY was remodelled in 2011 to form NRLM, thereby plugging the shortfalls of SGSY programme. It was later succeeded by Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana in September 2015.

5. Consider the following statements about Good Governance Index (GGI)

1. It is launched by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
2. GGI helps in assessing the impact of interventions undertaken by governments across all states and UTs.
3. Among big states, Gujarat got the highest score on the Index.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A

Explanation:

- Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, recently launched the Good Governance Index (GGI). The index has been scientifically designed to reflect various parameters of governance.

- GGI is a uniform tool that will help in assessing the status of governance and the impact of interventions undertaken by governments across all states and UTs.

Objectives of GGI

- To provide quantifiable data to compare the state of governance in all states and UTs.
- Enable states and UTs to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving governance and
- Shift to result oriented approaches and administration.

Performance Measurement

- The states and UTs have been grouped into three categories: Big states, Northeast and hill categories, and UTs.
- The index will consider 10 sectors viz. agriculture and allied sectors, commerce and industries, human resource development, public health, public infrastructure and utilities, economic governance, social welfare and development, judicial & public security, environment, and citizen-centric governance.
- These sectors will be assessed on the basis of over 50 indicators, which have been assigned different weights. Scores will be summed up to reach composite scores.

Findings Of The Index

- On the index, Tamil Nadu has got the highest score (5.62), followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh. Jharkhand and UP are among the big states that have fared poorly in the rankings.
- Among Northeastern and hill states, Himachal Pradesh is at the top with a score of 5.22, followed by Uttarakhand, Tripura, and Mizoram. Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland are the least performing states.
- Similarly, among Union Territories, Pondicherry, Chandigarh, and Delhi lead the ranking, with Lakshwadeep at the bottom.

Tamil Nadu's Performance

- Tamil Nadu achieved excellence in the public infrastructure sector, which measures indicators like access to potable water, Open Defection Free (ODF) towns, connectivity to rural habitations, access to clean cooking fuel (LPG/PNG), 24×7 power supply etc.
- The state has also fared well in judicial and public security, which factors in indicators like conviction rate, availability of police personnel, the proportion of women police personnel, disposal of court cases, etc.
- However, the state was found languishing in sectors like agriculture and allied sectors, commerce and industries, social welfare and development.

6. Consider the following about Human Development Report (HDR) and Human Development Index (HDI):

1. HDR is released by the World Bank.
2. HDR was first launched by Mahbub ul Haq in 1990.
3. HDI is a composite index of life expectancy, education, and per capita income.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only

d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation:

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has released the Human Development Report (HDR) 2019. It is a statistic composite index of life expectancy, education, and per capita income indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of human development.

About HDR

- The Human Development Report (HDR) is an annual report published by the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- The report was first launched in 1990 by the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.
- Its goal was to place 'people' at the center of the development process in terms of economic debate, policy and advocacy.

Global Findings

- Norway, Switzerland, Ireland occupied the top three positions in that order. Germany is placed fourth along with Hong Kong, and Australia secured the fifth rank on the global ranking.
- Among India's neighbours, Sri Lanka (71) and China (85) are higher up the rank scale while Bhutan (134), Bangladesh (135), Myanmar (145), Nepal (147), Pakistan (152) and Afghanistan (170) were ranked lower on the list.
- South Asia was the fastest growing region in human development progress witnessing a 46% growth over 1990-2018, followed by East Asia and the Pacific at 43%.
- The report also highlights that new forms of inequalities will manifest in future through climate change and technological transformation which have the potential to deepen existing social and economic fault lines.

Ups and downs

Among India's neighbours Sri Lanka moved up five rungs on the HDI ladder while Maldives fell three ranks. While Pakistan slipped two spots, Bangladesh moved up one

Source: Human Development Report, UN

Country	2017 Rank	2018 Rank
India	130	129
Brazil	79	79
China	86	85
Russia	49	49
South Africa	113	113
Pakistan	150	152
Afghanistan	168	170
Sri Lanka	76	71
Bhutan	134	134
Nepal	149	147
Bangladesh	136	135
Maldives	101	104

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

- The report also puts out a Gender Inequality Index that reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions - reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity.
- It notes that group-based inequalities persist, especially affecting women and girls and no place in the world has gender equality.
- It states that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 as per the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Further, it may take 202 years to close the gender gap in economic opportunity — one of the three indicators of the GII.
- India has a GII value of 0.501, ranking it 122 out of 162 countries in the 2018 index. Neighbours China (39), Sri Lanka (86), Bhutan (99), Myanmar (106) were placed above India.

Findings Related To India

- India ranks 129 out of 189 countries on the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI) — up one slot from the 130th position last year.

- India's HDI from 1990 to 2018 shows a rise of 50% (0.431 to 0.647) with life expectancy at birth increasing by 11.6 years and Gross National Income per capita increasing by over 262% in this 28 year period. In terms of education, mean years of schooling increased by 3.5 years and expected years of schooling increased by 4.7% in the same period.
- The overall HDI value places India above the average (0.634) for countries in the medium human development group and also above the average (0.642) for other south Asian countries.
- While India has lifted 271 million out of poverty from 2005-06 to 2015-16, HDR also draws attention to the fact that 28% of the 1.3 billion multidimensional poor are still in India.
- Gender Development Index data from India
 - India is only marginally better than the south Asian average on Gender Development Index (0.829 versus 0.828).
 - India's GDI for 2018 shows that life expectancy at birth for males was 68.2 and for females it was 70.7.
 - Expected years of schooling in case of females was 12.9 and males it was 11.9.
 - Mean years of schooling for males was 8.2 and for females it was 4.7.
 - GNI per capita for females was Rs 2,625 and for males it was 10,712.

Gender Social Norms Index

- The HDR report presents a new index indicating how prejudices and social beliefs obstruct gender equality.
- The multidimensional gender social norms index that takes into account four dimensions - political, educational, economic and physical integrity, shows that only 14% of women and 10% men worldwide have no gender social norm bias.
- This indicates a backlash to women's empowerment as these biases have shown a growth especially in areas where more power is involved, including in India.
- At home women do more than three times as much unpaid care work as men. The higher the power, the larger the gap from parity, rising to 90% in the case of heads of state and government.

7. Consider the following statements about India State Level Disease Burden Report:

1. The report describes the distribution and trends of diseases and risk factors for every state of India from 1990.
2. As per the study, more men than women suffered from depression in 2017.
3. Disability-adjusted life year (DALY) is a measure of overall disease burden, expressed as the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: C

Explanation:

The first comprehensive estimates of disease burden attributable to mental health from 1990, prepared by the India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative, has been published in the Lancet Psychiatry.

India State-Level Disease Burden

- The India State-level Disease Burden Initiative was launched in Oct' 2015 to address this crucial knowledge gap with support from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of India.
- The report describes the distribution and trends of diseases and risk factors for every state of India from 1990 to 2016.
- It is a collaborative effort between the Indian Council of Medical Research, Public Health Foundation of India, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, and experts and stakeholders from about 100 institutions across India.

Findings Of The Study

- According to the study, 197 million Indians (14.3% of the total population) were suffering from mental disorders in 2017. These include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, idiopathic developmental intellectual disability, conduct disorders, and autism.
- Of 197 million, 46 million people had depression and 45 million had anxiety disorders. The prevalence of depression is the highest in older adults.
- The study also found that more women than men suffered from depression (3.9% women vs 2.7% men), anxiety (3.9% of women vs 2.7% men) and eating disorders (0.3% in women vs 0.1% in men).
- While the prevalence of conduct disorder (1% men vs 0.6% women), autism spectrum disorders (0.5% in men vs 0.2 in women), and Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (0.6% in men and 0.2% in women) were substantially higher in males than in females.
- The prevalence of adult mental disorders is higher in the southern states and that of childhood onset mental disorders is higher in the northern states.
- Stress is a leading cause of both depression and anxiety disorders. While, among children, bullying mainly led to the two mental disorders.
- Further, because of the changing social milieu mechanism to cope with these illnesses is also affected. Earlier, in joint families, much of the stress and anxiety was relieved because there were people to share one's problems with. But now most families are nuclear.

Disability Adjusted Life Year (DALY)

- Mental disorders were the leading contributor in India to years lived with disability (YLDs), contributing 14.5% of all YLDs in 2017.
- Importantly, the contribution of mental disorders to the disability adjusted life year (DALY) — the sum of total years of life lost and years lived with disability — has doubled between 1990 and 2017 increasing from 2.5% to 4.7%.
- In Delhi, life years lost to death or lived with disability due to depressive disorders and anxiety disorders was calculated to be 459 years & 321 years, respectively, in an average of 1,00,000 years.
- Mental disorders were the second leading cause of disease burden in terms of years lived with disability (YLDs) and the sixth leading cause of disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) in the world in 2017.

State-wise Analysis

- In its State-wise analysis, the study divides different States into **three categories** on the basis of their socio-demographic index (SDI), i.e low, medium and high SDI States.

- The SDI is a composite measure of *per-capita income*, *mean education*, and *fertility rate* in women younger than 25 years and is calculated on a scale of one.
- Prevalence of depressive disorders was highest in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa and Telangana in the high SDI State group and Andhra Pradesh in the middle SDI State group.
- Similarly, anxiety disorders were found to be more common in Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Maharashtra in the high SDI State group and Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, and West Bengal in the middle SDI State group.

Way Ahead

- Given the significant contribution of mental disorders to the disease burden in India, further research should continue to track the changing trends of mental disorders in different parts of the country.
- The significant association of suicide with depression emphasises the need to identify and deal with depression through wider efforts in the community and in the health system.
- There is an urgent need to strengthen mental health services, integrate these with general healthcare, and remove barriers such as stigma and access to treatment.

8. Global Gender Gap Index 2020 was recently released. Consider the following about the report
1. The Global Gender Gap Index is released by the World Economic Forum.
 2. India's rank is the lowest among all South Asian countries.
 3. It benchmarks countries on their progress towards gender parity based on Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: C

Explanation:

- The annual Global Gender Gap Index for 2020, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), has been released.
- Now in its 14th year, the Report benchmarks countries on their progress towards gender parity in four dimensions: ***Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment***.
- The Report aims to serve as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics. Through this annual yardstick, stakeholders within each country are able to set priorities relevant in each specific economic, political and cultural context.

Global Findings

- While Iceland, Norway, and Finland occupy the top three spots, Yemen is ranked the worst (153rd), while Iraq is 152nd and Pakistan 151st.

- Globally, the average (population-weighted) distance completed to gender parity is at 68.6%, which is an improvement since last edition. The improvement can largely be ascribed to a significant increase in the number of women participating in politics. The political gender gap will take 95 years to close, compared to 107 years last year.
- Worldwide, women now hold 25.2% of parliamentary lower-house seats and 21.2 per cent of ministerial positions, compared to 24.1% and 19%, respectively last year.
- However, the economic opportunity gap has worsened, widening to 257 years, compared to 202 years last year. Economic opportunities for women are extremely limited in India (35.4%), Pakistan (32.7%), Yemen (27.3%), Syria (24.9%) and Iraq (22.7%).
- Projecting current trends into the future, the overall global gender gap will close in 99.5 years, on average, across the 107 countries covered continuously since the first edition of the Report.

Indian Findings

- India has moved down to 112th position from its 108th position last year on the index of 153 countries to rank below countries like China (106th), Sri Lanka (102nd), Nepal (101st), Brazil (92nd), Indonesia (85th) and Bangladesh (50th).
- India is now ranked in bottom-five in terms of women's health and survival and economic participation.
- It has slipped to 150th rank on health and survival, to 149th in terms of economic participation and opportunity and to 112th place for educational attainment.
- The report also named India among countries with very low women representation on company boards (13.8%), while it was even worse in China (9.7%).
- India's rank has improved on the political empowerment front to 18th place. India ranks high on the political empowerment subindex, largely because the country was headed by a woman for 20 of the past 50 years.
- But, female political representation today is low as women make up only 14.4% of Parliament (122nd rank globally) and 23% of the cabinet (69th).

9. Consider the following about Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) Scheme

1. Airports already developed by AAI will not be eligible for Viability Gap Funding under the scheme
2. The scheme is jointly funded by the central government and state governments
3. UDAN plans to develop new airports and increase the number of operational airports for scheduled civilian flights

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 and 2 only
- b.) 2 and 3 only
- c.) 1 and 3 only
- d.) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation

- The government has launched the fourth round of the ude desh ka aam nagrik (UDAN) scheme. The scheme has seen mixed success until now, where in the first three phases 688 routes were awarded but only 232 of them have become operational.
- The focus of regional connectivity scheme UDAN-4 is on enhancing connectivity in remote and regional areas of the country — northeast India, hilly states, J&K, Ladakh and the islands. Faizabad — nearest airport for Ayodhya — has also been offered for operators to fly to this pilgrim town.
- Non schedule operators of helicopter and seaplanes will be allowed to bid in this round, paving the way for water aerodromes.

Viability Gap Funding

- Airports that have already been developed by AAI would be given higher priority for award of VGF under the scheme, followed by other airports.
- Given the focus areas, an attempt has been made to promote air travel on short haul routes and the provision of VGF would be restricted for routes with stage length up to 600 km.
- The aviation ministry informed that the viability gap funding cap has been revised in the fourth round of the scheme. The provision of VGF for over 20-seater aircraft has been enhanced for operation of RCS flights in priority areas.
- The VGF has also been increased in Union Territories of Ladakh and J&K; Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, northeastern states; Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar.

UDAN

- UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) is a regional airport development and "Regional Connectivity Scheme" (RCS) of the Union Government. It is a key component of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) which was released by the Ministry of Civil Aviation (India) in June 2016.
- The scheme is jointly funded by the central government and state governments.
- The objective of the scheme is to make air travel affordable and widespread, to boost inclusive national economic development, job growth and air transport infrastructure development of all regions and states of India.
- The scheme has two components. The first component is to develop new airports and enhance the existing regional airports to increase the number of operational airports for scheduled civilian flights.
- The second component is to add several hundred financially-viable, capped-airfare, new regional flight routes to connect more than 100 underserved and unserved airports in smaller towns by using "Viability Gap Funding" (VGF) where needed.

10. Consider the following statements about Power Sector in India:

1. Under UDAY scheme, state governments can take over 75% of the debt of their discoms.
2. Under UDAY scheme, discoms can issue bonds for the amount of debt not taken up by the States.
3. AT&C losses in the power sector include both energy loss and commercial loss.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D

Explanation

Four years after it was launched, UDAY (Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana)— the path breaking reform to revive electricity distribution companies (discoms) — is falling apart. The UDAY scheme now seems to be charting the same course as the earlier two unsuccessful attempts to set right the distribution sector. The scheme had some positives, though, of the 28 states that implemented it, 10 have shown either reduced losses or profits in FY '19.

UDAY Scheme

- UDAY scheme was launched in November 2015, under which state governments took over 75 per cent of the debt of their discoms, issuing lower-interest bonds to service the rest of the debt.
- In return, discoms were given target dates (2017-19) to meet efficiency parameters like reduction in power lost through transmission, theft and faulty metering.
- The scheme's objectives are financial turnaround, operational improvement, development of renewable energy, reducing the cost of generating power and energy efficiency and conservation.
- The Ministry of Power has maintained that UDAY was different from the earlier attempts as it factored in interventions in coal, generation and transmission sectors as well, instead of just focusing on distribution.
- However, the rebound in discom losses in FY '19 alongside the increase in discom dues to generators, has prompted the possibility of a recast of the scheme.

Mounting Losses Under UDAY

- According to data updated till September-end this year, book losses of discoms, which had reduced from Rs 51,562 crore in FY '16 to Rs 15,132 crore in FY '18, have nearly doubled this financial year to Rs 28,036 crore.
- According to a senior government official, the gap between the cost of power supply for discoms and the bills they realise from consumers was pegged at close to Rs 1.5 lakh crore.
- This was despite states providing support of close to Rs 85,000-90,000 crore to distribution utilities. The gap leads to further stresses and forces discoms to default on payments.

ACS-ARR Gap

- The data also points to discoms lagging behind in eliminating the gap between the average cost of supply and realisable revenue (ACS-ARR gap).
- As on 17th December 2019, only four states — Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka — had recorded an ACS-ARR below 0, while the rest recorded gaps ranging from Rs 0.01/unit to Rs 2.13/unit.
- A major reason for discoms being unable to bridge this gap is delayed tariff hikes by states.

Missed AT&C Loss Target

- Transmission & Distribution losses do not capture losses on account of non-realisation of payments. Hence, the concept of Aggregate Technical & Commercial losses provides a realistic picture of loss situation in the context it is measured.
- AT&C Loss is the actual measure of overall efficiency of the distribution business as it is a combination of energy loss (Technical loss + Theft + inefficiency in billing) and commercial loss (Default in payment + inefficiency in collection).

- Discoms have also missed the FY '19 UDAY target to bring down their aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses to 15%.
- Only around seven states had recorded losses of less than this amount.

Why Has UDAY Failed

- The problem with UDAY, and any other scheme like this, is that one can achieve (certain targets) in the short term by doing some financial engineering and providing some financial package.
- But, in order to sustain that improvement, efficiency gains have to be built in that system. This means the AT&C losses need to go down, and billing and collection efficiencies should go up.
- Hence, the primary reason for failure, is the failure of discoms to collect the full cost that they pay for power — the same issue that had led to the floundering of the previous two schemes.

Impact on State Finances

- There's yet another issue, which would come up after the scheme winds up in March 2020.
- Given that the coupon rate on UDAY bonds are at a premium over those on SDL (state development loans) bonds, the cost of debt servicing has gone up for the UDAY states.
- The impact on state finances is likely to continue much beyond the terminal year due to interest payment on UDAY bonds and redemption of these bonds — a grim prospect for most states combating a tight fiscal situation amid a continuing slowdown.
- While the impact of UDAY on state finances from interest payments and redemptions is predictable, the impact of future losses is uncertain, as it is dependent upon the realised financial performance of discoms. The subpar performance of the scheme now deepens that uncertainty.

New Scheme In The Pipeline

- A new scheme is now being readied as a replacement for UDAY. The broad idea in the revised scheme is that discoms can only remain in the public sector if they get to a situation where their deficit is under control or else states will be asked to implement different models involving the private sector, like the franchise or PPP models.
- The Centre is also likely to back up the new scheme by providing some grant support, which it did not do in UDAY.

11. Consider the following about Bharat Bond ETF:

1. Bharat Bond ETF is the first corporate bond ETF in India.
2. Bharat Bond ETF will be listed on the stock exchange.
3. ETFs can contain stocks, commodities, bonds, or a mixture of investment types.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D

Explanation

The Union Cabinet has approved the government's plan to create and launch Bharat Bond ETF.

ETFs

- Exchange Traded Funds are essentially Index Funds. They are in many ways similar to mutual funds, however, they are listed on exchanges and ETFs trade throughout the day just like ordinary stock.
- ETF is a type of security that involves a collection of securities—such as stocks—that often tracks an underlying index. It can contain many types of investments, including stocks, commodities, bonds, or a mixture of investment types.
- The ETFs trading value is based on the net asset value of the underlying stocks that it represents.

Details of Bharat Bonds

- Bharat Bond ETF is the first corporate bond ETF in the country. It will comprise a basket of bonds issued by the CPSEs, CPSUs, CPFIs, and other government organisations and all will be initially AAA-rated bonds.
- Each Bharat bond ETF will be priced at Rs 1,000 and will also be listed on the exchanges. Accordingly, investors can buy or sell shares using three methods— via stock exchange, through the market makers or directly through the AMC.
- Each ETF will have a fixed maturity date and initially they will be issued in two series, of three years and 10 years.
- In case the Bharat Bond ETF is sold within 3 years, it will be considered as short term and short term capital gains income slab will be applicable. If sold after 3 years, it will be considered as long term and LTCG of 20% with indexation will be applicable.

Significance

- Bond ETF will provide safety (underlying bonds are issued by CPSEs and other government-owned entities), liquidity (tradability on exchange) and predictable tax efficient returns.
- Bond ETFs will provide tax efficiency as compared to bonds, as coupons (interest) from the bonds are taxed depending on the investor's tax slab.
- The low unit value of ₹1,000, would help deepen India's bond market as it will encourage the participation of those retail investors who are currently not participating in bond markets due to liquidity and accessibility constraints.
- On the issuer side, the bond ETFs are expected to offer CPSEs, CPSUs, CPFIs and other government organisations an additional source of meeting their borrowing requirements, apart from bank financing.
- It will expand their investor base through retail and HNI [high net worth individual] participation, which can increase demand for their bonds.
- With increase in demand for their bonds, these issuers may be able to borrow at reduced cost thereby reducing their cost of borrowing over a period of time.

12. Consider the following statements about Payment Systems in India:

1. It is mandatory for business establishments with annual turnover of more than 50 crore to offer digital modes of payment to their customers.
2. Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system developed by Reserve Bank of India.
3. National Payments Corporation of India is a Not for Profit Company.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: C

Explanation:

In a bid to promote digital payments, the Finance Minister has announced that digital transactions made using RuPay credit cards, or UPI QR codes will not face additional charges for merchants or customers from the beginning of next year.

Background

- In the budget speech in July, the Finance Minister had listed “BHIM UPI, UPI-QR Code, Aadhaar Pay, certain Debit cards, NEFT, RTGS, etc.” as the low-cost digital modes of payment which could be offered without the imposition of MDR.
- At that time, the Payments Council of India — an industry lobby group — had said an MDR waiver would hurt companies in the payments system.
- It argued that the cost should be borne by the government instead of banks, which would have no incentive to promote digital payments without MDR revenues.

Details Of The Announcement

- Department of Revenue (DoR) will soon notify RuPay and UPI as the prescribed mode of payment for digital transactions without any Merchant Discount Rate (MDR).
- Accordingly, all shops, business establishments and companies with a turnover of Rs 50 crore or more will be mandated by DoR to provide the facility of payment through RuPay Debit card and UPI QR code to their customers.
- RBI and banks will absorb these costs from the savings that will accrue to them on account of handling less cash as people move to these digital modes of payment.
- Further, all banks will start a campaign to popularise RuPay Debit card and UPI in order to strengthen the digital payment eco-system and move towards less-cash economy.

Impact

- The step will help the government in its aim to promote digital payments and a less-cash economy.
- It will help the acquirers to focus and invest in the expansion of the acquiring infrastructure and lead to expansion of payments.
- Further, indigenously developed digital payment mediums like RuPay and BHIM UPI will now have an edge over the payment gateway promoted by foreign companies, including VISA and MasterCard.

Unified Payments Interface

- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system developed by National Payments Corporation of India facilitating inter-bank transactions.
- The interface is regulated by the Reserve Bank of India and works by instantly transferring funds between two bank accounts on a mobile platform.

Background of Rupay

- In 2009, RBI had asked the Indian Bank Association to create a non-profit payment solutions company which will design an indigenous payment card.
- RBI in its vision paper 2009–12 on payment systems in India had said that the need for such a system arises from the absence of a domestic price setter, as 90% of credit card transactions and almost all debit card transactions are domestic in India.
- This absence caused the Indian banks to bear the high cost for affiliation and the connection with international card associations like Visa and Mastercard, resulting in the need for routing even domestic transactions through a switch located outside the country.
- The solution was expected to offer state-of-the-art technology that is secure, robust, scalable, simple and cost effective meeting the requirements of having domestic, open, multilateral system of payments.

Rupay

- RuPay was conceived and launched by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), as an Indian card scheme, in March 2012.
- It facilitates electronic payment at all Indian banks and financial institutions. Further, NPCI maintains ties with Discover Financial, JCB to enable RuPay card scheme to gain international acceptance.
- The cost per transaction is low with RuPay compared to the foreign card schemes viz. Visa and Mastercard.

NPCI

- National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- It is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India.
- Considering the utility nature of the objects of NPCI, it has been incorporated as a "Not for Profit" Company with an intention to provide infrastructure to the entire Banking system in India for physical as well as electronic payment and settlement systems.

13. Consider the following statements about Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)

1. Its goal is to provide functional household tap connections to all rural households by 2024.
2. JJM is an initiative under the Ministry of Rural Development.
3. The National Rural Drinking Water Programme has been subsumed into JJM.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: C

Explanation:

- The PM has released operational guidelines for Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) issued by the drinking water department, which primarily implements the “**Har Ghar Jal**” scheme. The National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) has been restructured and subsumed into Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

55 LITRE PER PERSON PER DAY

➤ Currently 3.3 crore rural households out of 17.9 crore have tap connection

➤ Reverification & baseline data to be ready by March 2020

➤ Complying with BIS standard, scheme to ensure 55 litre per person per day drinking water

➤ At least **80%** of

households in a village has to accept the scheme for its implementation and contribution towards it

➤ Total investment: **₹3.6 lakh cr** (₹2.09 lakh cr by Centre & ₹1.51 lakh cr by states)

➤ Panchayat/paani samiti to decide user fee per household

- The PM also flagged a provision under the mission where the government will send money directly into the account of village-level special committee once the plan gets implemented in the village.
- Jal Jeevan Mission is a central government initiative under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, which aims to implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, and rain water harvesting.
- Based on a community approach to water, the mission will include information, education and communication as key components. The mission is meant to create a people's movement for water, making it everyone's priority.

Har Ghar Jal Scheme

- The Har Ghar Jal Scheme under JJM aims to provide all households in rural India safe and adequate water through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs) by 2024.
- For proper use of water, reducing water wastage and improving ease of living of women and girls, three taps may be provided, viz. at kitchen, washing and bathing area and in the toilet.
- There is a precondition to take at least 80% households in a village on board for implementation. They will also be required to accept their financial contribution for the scheme.
- This is being done as the community and local people will have to play a key role in managing the water supply system and for maintenance of the infrastructure including the source of water. Following the Swachh Bharat Mission model, the government will also have a centralised dashboard for live updates of the coverage.
- Further, there will be different sub-schemes for implementation of the massive programme. The first will be retrofitting of completed rural water supply schemes to make them Har Ghar Jal compliant.
- The other two methodologies will be single village scheme (SVS) in villages where adequate groundwater or surface water source is available and multi village scheme where water grids/ regional water supply scheme has to be rolled out.

Institutional Mechanism

- To implement the JJM, there will be institutional mechanism at four levels - national, state, district and at gram panchayat or its sub-committees.
- The scheme will be driven by panchayats, village water and sanitation committee (VWSC), paani samitis or user groups in villages to ensure that little over 81% rural households get 55 litres per person per day (LPCD) within the deadline.
- The paani samiti or the user group will decide about the user fee for sustainability of the scheme. To ensure women play a bigger role considering that the responsibility of fetching water is usually on them, the policy guideline said 50% of the members of these samitis will have to be women.
- There will be equal representation of elected panchayat members and representatives from SC/ST community for rest 50% of the members in the committee.

14. Consider the following statements about Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY):

1. It aims to strengthen the institutional framework for participatory groundwater management.
2. ABY will be implemented in all the States.
3. 50% of the total outlay of the scheme will be in the form of World Bank Loans.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Atal Bhujal Yojana (ATAL JAL) is a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Jal Shakti to improve ground water management through community participation. The scheme will be implemented over a period of 5 years (2020-21 to 2024-25).
- Ministry of Jal Shakti is adopting a mix of 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches in identified ground water stressed blocks, representing a range of geomorphic, climatic and hydrogeologic and cultural settings.
- The scheme will be implemented in about 8,350 water stressed gram panchayats in 78 districts of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- The scheme has been designed with the principal objective of strengthening the institutional framework for participatory ground water management and bringing about behavioral changes at the community level for sustainable ground water resource management.
- It envisages to undertake this through various interventions, including awareness programmes, capacity building, convergence of ongoing/new schemes and improved agricultural practices etc
- The scheme is aimed at contributing towards the goal of doubling farmers' incomes, promoting participatory ground water management, improving water use efficiency on a mass scale, improving cropping pattern and promoting efficient and equitable use of ground water resources.

Financial Outlay

- Of the total outlay of ₹6,000 crore to be provided from 2020-21 to 2024-25, 50% will be in the form of World Bank loan to be repaid by the Central government. The remaining part will be made available via Central assistance from regular budgetary support.
- The entire World Bank's loan component and the Central assistance will be passed on to the States as grants. To incentivise gram panchayats, those with better performance would be given more allocation under the scheme.

15. Which of the statements given below is/are correct?

1. Meteor is a surface to air missile
2. Storm Shadow is a tactical military transport aircraft

- a.) Only 1
- b.) Only 2

- c.) Both 1 and 2
d.) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: A

Explanation:

- India has asked France to arm the first four Rafale fighters with the top-notch Meteor air-to-air missiles, which, with a strike range of 120 to 150-km, can outgun any missile that can be unleashed by Pakistani or Chinese jets. The first Rafale fighters will touch down at the Ambala airbase in May 2020.
- The Meteor missiles are arguably the best in the world for air combat duels, with “a greater no-escape zone” for hostile fighters than any comparable BVR weapon.
- As per IAF, the operational dynamics for achieving air dominance will change with the induction of the Rafales armed with the greater-range Meteor missiles.
- It will give India the firepower to take on US supplied AMRAAMs used by the Pakistan Air Force to target its fighter jets the day after the Balakot airstrikes in February. Pakistan and China do not currently have any missile of this class in their combat inventories.
- The Indian Rafale jets will also get the **SCALP** stand-off missiles that are designed to hit high value, strongly protected targets deep inside enemy territory.
- This ‘stand-off’ capability is becoming central to the Indian defence strategy, with the air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles being supplemented with the S-400 anti-air system being procured from Russia that will have the ability to take down airborne targets over the entire Pakistani airspace, if the need arises.

Meteor Missile

- Meteor is an active radar guided beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) developed by MBDA.
- It offers a multi-shot capability against long range manoeuvring targets, jets, UAVs and cruise missiles in a heavy electronic countermeasures (ECM) environment.
- Solid-fueled ramjet motor allows missile to cruise at a speed of over mach 4 and provides the missile with thrust and mid-way acceleration to target intercept
- A two-way datalink enables the launch aircraft to provide mid-course target updates or retargeting if required, including data from off-board third parties.

SCALP missile

- Storm Shadow / SCALP is the air-launched long range, conventionally armed, deep strike weapon, designed to meet the demanding requirements of pre-planned attacks against high value fixed or stationary targets.
- It is a fire and forget missile, programmed before launch. Once launched, the missile cannot be controlled or commanded to self-destroy and its target information cannot be changed.
- The missile has a range of approximately 560 km (300 nautical miles), and is powered by a turbojet at Mach 0.8.
- Storm Shadow is the British name for the weapon; in French service it is called SCALP EG.

16. Which of the following are satellite navigation systems?

1. GLONASS
2. Beidou
3. QZSS
4. Galileo

- a.) 1 and 4 only
- b.) 2 and 3 only
- c.) 1, 2 and 4 only
- d.) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The US Congress has consented to designate India's NAVIC as its “allied” navigational satellite system along with the Galileo of the European Union and Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS) of Japan.
- Approved as part of the conference report of National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2020, it designates Russia's GLONASS and Chinese Beidou as a “non-allied system”. It means that US satellite navigation system will not co-operate or exchange data with these two satellite navigation systems.
- The conference report now needs formal approval by the House and the Senate before it can be sent to the White House for the President to sign into law.
- The designation of India's NAVIC as an “allied system” is part of the American effort to develop a prototype program for multi-global navigation satellite system receiver development.
- The receiver would be capable of receiving covered signals to increase the resilience and capability of military position, navigation, and timing equipment against threats to the Global Positioning System.
- Such a system would deter the likelihood of attack on the worldwide Global Positioning System by reducing the benefits of such an attack.

NAVIC

- Indigenously developed, NAVIC is an autonomous regional satellite navigation system that can provide accurate real-time positioning and timing services to users in India and the region, extending up to 1,500 km from its boundary, which is its Primary Service Area.
- An Extended Service Area lies between the primary service area and a rectangle area enclosed by the 30th parallel south to the 50th parallel north and the 30th meridian east to the 130th meridian east, 1,500–6,000 km beyond borders
- The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) consists of seven satellites, three of which are in Geostationary orbit and the remaining four are in Geosynchronous orbit.
- NAVIC will provide two levels of service, the standard positioning service, which will be open for civilian use, and a restricted service (an encrypted one) for authorised users (including the military).
- The IRNSS has a position accuracy better than 20 metres in the primary service area. It can help in terrestrial, aerial and marine navigation; disaster management; vehicle tracking and fleet management; integration with mobile phones; precise timing; mapping and geodetic data capture; terrestrial navigation aid for hikers and travellers; visual and voice navigation for drivers.

17. Consider the following statements about Microdot Technology:

- 1. A microdot is a text or an image.**
- 2. Microdots give vehicles a unique identification.**
- 3. Microdots can be identified with an ultraviolet light source.**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 and 2 only**
- b.) 2 and 3 only**
- c.) 1 and 3 only**
- d.) 1, 2 and 3**

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The government has notified rules for fixation of microdots identifiers on motor vehicles and their parts. As per the Road Transport and Highways Ministry, microdots will enhance the security of vehicles.
- A microdot is text or an image substantially reduced in size to prevent detection by unintended recipients. Microdot technology involves spraying the body and parts of the vehicle or any other machine with microscopic dots, which give a unique identification.
- The invisible microdots will now come affixed on vehicles and their parts to prevent theft as well as to check fake spare parts.
- The permanent and nearly invisible microdots can be read physically with a microscope and identified with an ultra violet light source.

18. Consider the following statements about Government Instant Messaging System (GIMS):

- 1. GIMS employs end to end encryption for one to one messaging.**
- 2. GIMS is developed by the National Informatics Centre.**
- 3. The server hosting GIMS is installed within the country.**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only**
- b) 2 and 3 only**
- c) 1 and 3 only**
- d) 1, 2 and 3**

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The government is testing a prototype of an Indian equivalent of popular messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, for secure internal use.
- Codenamed GIMS or Government Instant Messaging System, the platform is in the pilot testing stage across some states, including Odisha — and is learnt to have been released to the Indian Navy to be tried out on trial basis.

- Designed and developed by the Kerala unit of National Informatics Centre (NIC), GIMS is being packaged for employees of Central and state government departments and organisations for intra and inter organisation communications.
- A GIMS Portal is also being simultaneously developed for administration and monitoring of the platform.

Need for GIMS

- The launch of the new app comes amid the recent controversy over the WhatsApp breach wherein some Indian users' mobile devices were targeted through a spyware called Pegasus.
- According to WhatsApp, the Pegasus spyware was developed by Israel-based NSO Group and it attempted to breach mobile phones of a possible 1,400 users globally, including 121 from India.
- It is being developed as a secure Indian alternative without the security concerns attached with apps hosted abroad or those owned by foreign entities. Like WhatsApp, GIMS employs end-to-end encryption for one-to-one messaging.
- GIMS is being touted as a safer bet as the platform has been developed in India, the server hosting it is installed within the country and the information stored would be in government-based cloud — NIC-operated data centres that are only meant for captive use by the government and its departments.
- Besides one-to-one messaging and group messaging, there are specific provisions in GIMS for documents and media sharing in keeping with the hierarchies in the government system.

19. Consider the following statements about Biosimilar Medicines:

1. Biosimilars are produced from biological sources rather than synthesised chemicals.
2. Biosimilars to biologic drugs are what generics are to chemical drugs

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that it had for the first time approved a “biosimilar” medicine, **trastuzumab**, to make breast cancer treatment affordable to women globally.
- The Trastuzumab drug has shown high efficacy in curing early stage breast cancer and in some cases more advanced forms of the disease. But the annual cost of the original drug is an average of \$20,000. A price that puts it out of reach of many women and healthcare systems in most countries. However, the biosimilar version of trastuzumab is generally 65% cheaper than the original.
- A few bio-similars of trastuzumab have come on the market in recent years, but none had previously been pre-qualified by WHO. WHO pre-qualification gives countries the assurance that they are purchasing quality health products.

Biosimilar Medicines

- A biosimilar is a biologic medical product which is almost an identical copy of an original product that is manufactured by a different company. The cheaper but equally effective bio-therapeutic medicines are produced from biological sources such as cells rather than synthesised chemicals.
- Biosimilars to biologic drugs are what generics are to chemical drugs. Biosimilars are officially approved versions of original "innovator" products, and can be manufactured when the original product's patent ends.
- The availability of bio-similars has decreased prices, making even innovative treatments more affordable and hopefully available to more people.
- Unlike generic medicines, the complex molecular structure of biosimilar drugs means pharmaceutical companies have to invest in additional research to prove that the efficacy of their versions is similar to the original.
- According to a recent report by Morgan Stanley, as many as nine drugs in the biologics category have either gone off patent or will do so by 2025. Their total revenue was \$62 billion (around Rs 4.3 lakh crore) in 2018. This creates a major opportunity for their respective biosimilars.
- According to a report by Associated Chambers of Commerce of India (Assocham), the global market for biosimilars will be \$240 billion and the Indian market will be over \$35 billion by 2030.
- A lot will however depend upon factors such as access to critical technology, regulatory guidelines and the price difference between biosimilars and the underlying biologics.

20. Consider the following statements about 'Pinaka' in the context of Indian security:

1. Pinaka is a multi barrel rocket launch system, jointly developed by India and Russia.
2. The navigation of Pinaka is aided by the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System.
3. Pinaka has a maximum range of 40 km for Mark-I and 75 km for Mark-II.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation:

- The upgraded version of Pinaka guided rocket system was recently successfully test-fired from Odisha coast. The mission achieved all the objectives including enhancing the range, accuracy and sub-system functionality.
- Named after the bow of Lord Shiva, the idea of Pinaka was first conceived in 1981, as an answer to the Indian Army's requirement for a long range artillery system. It is an indigenous multi-barrel rocket launch (MBRL) system, which has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation.
- The initial version of weapon system was called Mark I, which had a range of 40 km. The upgraded version or Pinaka Mark II has an extended range of 75 km.

- The complete MBRL system of Pinaka is comprised of six launcher vehicles, each having 12 rockets with six loader-replenishment vehicles, two command post vehicles with fire control computer and a DIGICORA MET radar.
- Each launcher has the ability to fire all the rockets in one go or only a few - in a different direction than others with the help of its control computer. The Pinaka launcher can operate in different modes — autonomous, standalone, remote and manual.
- The Pinaka Mk-II rocket is modified as a missile by integrating with the navigation, control and guidance system to improve the end accuracy and enhance the range. The navigation system of the missile is also aided by the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) also called as NAVIC.

21. Consider the following statements about Jnanpith Awards

1. The Jnanpith Award is a literary award conferred by the Ministry of Culture
2. It is bestowed only on Indian writers
3. It is bestowed only to literary works written in languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) 1 and 3
- d) 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Eminent Malayalam poet Akkitham has been chosen for the 55th Jnanpith Award for the year 2019.
- Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri, popularly known as Akkitham is one of the most revered names in Malayalam poetry. Apart from poetry, his literary excellence has footprints in genre like drama, reminiscence, critical essays, children literature, short stories and translations.

Jnanpith Award

- The Jnanpith Award is an Indian literary award presented annually by the Bharatiya Jnanpith to an author for their "outstanding contribution towards literature".
- It is the highest literary award in India and can only be conferred upon an Indian citizen.
- Instituted in 1961, the award is bestowed only on writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and English, with no posthumous conferral. English language was added to the list of languages for consideration after the 49th Jnanpith Award.
- The first recipient of the award was the Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup who received the award in 1965 for his collection of poems, Odakkuzhal (The Bamboo Flute), published in 1950.

22. Consider the following statements about Doorstep Delivery of Public Services Scheme of Delhi Government:

1. It is made available to only people who are below poverty line.

2. The high success rate in doorstep delivery is due to mobile Sahayaks's intervention who ensure that all documents are complete and attached in the right order along with the applications.

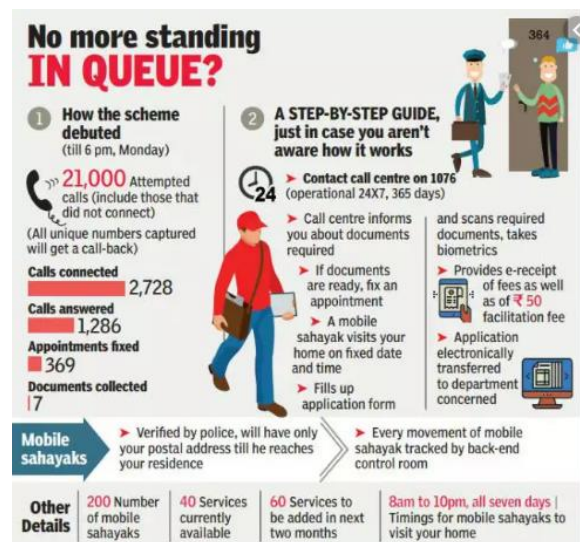
Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 only
b.) 2 only
c.) Both 1 and 2
d.) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Delhi government has decided that it will provide **30 new services** under its **Doorstep delivery of public services scheme**. Thus, will now cover **100 services of 14 Delhi government departments**. The scheme was launched in September 2018.
- The scheme is being implemented by the **administrative reforms department** of the Delhi government.
- As per the records, of **2.89 lakh calls** for availing various public services, **over 2.64 lakh were disposed of** in a period of one year and three months.
- Thus, now there are **three ways** to get things done at the government offices in Delhi i.e. **by visiting government offices**, where the success rate is 57% and 43% of the applications get rejected; **by applying online**, wherein 45% of the applications get cleared while 55% get rejected; and **doorstep delivery**, where the success rate is 91% and only 9% of the applications get rejected.
- This is due to the involvement of **mobile sahayaks**, who ensure that all documents are complete and attached in the right order, along with the applications.
- Moreover, the scheme help people avoid queues, touts, bribery and multiple visits to government offices.



23. Consider the following facts in relation to “Run through Files” mechanism started by Haryana government:

- It aims that these most important files do not suffer due to conflicting hierarchical and departmental priorities.
- Clearance of the files shall be personally reviewed by the Chief Minister.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 only
b.) 2 only
c.) Both 1 and 2

d.) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation:

- To ensure that important government matters don't get delayed owing to conflicting hierarchical and departmental priorities, the Haryana government has introduced a "Run through Files" mechanism.
- It involves using Centralised File Movement and Tracking Information System (CFMS).
- Every file marked as RTF has to be cleared on priority greater than that is currently being accorded to the files marked top priority. A system generated SMS and email will automatically be sent on each downward or upward movement of the file.
- The movement of these files and time taken in clearing the file shall be personally reviewed by the Chief Minister and only he will be able to mark and close the file as Run Through File.

24. Consider the following statements about Operation Clean Art:

1. The aim of the initiative was to recover the stolen heritage art from across the world and bring it back to India.
2. It is launched by Ministry of Culture in collaboration with UNICEF.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 only
- b.) 2 only
- c.) Both 1 and 2
- d.) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: A

Explanation:

- It is the first pan India operation to crackdown on the **smuggling of mongoose hair** in the country. Currently, there are **six species** of mongoose found in India.
- The operation is conceived by **Wildlife crime control bureau (WCCB)** with the singular aim of ensuring that the mongoose hair brush trade should be closed down across the country. Most of these animals were poached by hunting communities across the country.
- The mongoose is listed in **Schedule II Part 2** of the Wildlife Protection Act and any smuggling or possession of its body part is a **non-bailable offence**.

25. Consider the following statements about Gangetic dolphin

1. The International Union for Conservation of Nature has listed the Gangetic dolphin as an endangered species in India.
2. The main threat to the Gangetic dolphin is the creation of dams and irrigation projects.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 only
- b.) 2 only

- c.) Both 1 and 2
d.) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The Gangetic river dolphins were **officially discovered in 1801** and are one of the oldest creatures in the world along with some species of turtles, crocodiles and sharks, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).
- They once lived in the **Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems** of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh, but are now mostly extinct from many of its early distribution ranges, as per WWF.
- In 2009, the Gangetic dolphins were declared **India's National Aquatic animal** during the first meeting of the erstwhile National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) and it is placed under the **endangered category** by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). As per WWF estimates, they number somewhere between **1200-1800**.
- The Gangetic dolphin has been notified by the Assam government as the state aquatic animal, too.
- The Gangetic river dolphins can only live in freshwater, are blind and catch their prey in a unique manner, using **ultrasonic sound waves**. As per WWF, they are distributed across **seven states** in India i.e. Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- Their numbers have dwindled in the last few decades mainly because of **direct killing, habitat fragmentation by dams and barrages and indiscriminate fishing**.
- Some of the efforts made to preserve and increase the numbers of these dolphins include the setting up of the **Conservation Action Plan for the Gangetic Dolphin (2010-2020)**..

26. Consider the following statements

1. **The levels of oxygen in oceans fell by around 2 per cent from 1960 to 2010.**
2. **As oceans lose oxygen, they become more acidic that has resulted in shellfish having their shells degraded or dissolved**

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a.) 1 only
b.) 2 only
c.) Both 1 and 2
d.) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: A

Explanation:

- A new report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reveals that ocean oxygen levels have decreased by **about 2 percent** since the middle of the 20th century, and continued deoxygenation will put wildlife and human survival in danger.

- Both the **climate crisis and nutrient pollution** cause ocean deoxygenation. Nutrient pollution includes nitrogen from fossil fuels and run-off from agriculture and sewage. This depletes oxygen by encouraging too much algae growth.
- Scientists have also realized that **rising ocean temperatures** is also responsible for about half of the oxygen loss in the ocean's top 1,000 meters, which is the highest in biodiversity.
- Larger fish are especially threatened by dropping ocean oxygen levels. Changing oxygen levels have already pushed them closer to the surface, where they face **greater risk of overfishing**.

27. Consider the following statements about Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI):

- It is released by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in Collaboration with United Nations.
- India for the first time ranks among the top ten countries in the 2020 released index.

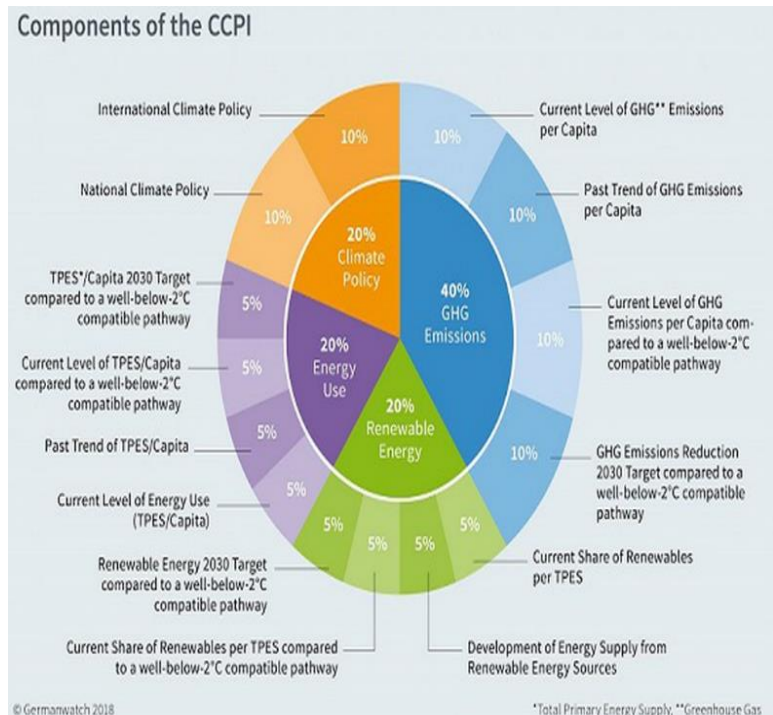
Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: B

Explanation:

- India for the **first time** ranks among the **top ten countries** in the CCPI, which is released annually after analysing **four parameters** i.e. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, renewable energy, climate policy and energy use. The country has, in fact, improved its ranking from 11th last year to ninth this year.
- The top three performers are **Sweden (fourth), Denmark (fifth) and Morocco (sixth)**. The CCPI is a ranking of **57 countries** and the **European Union (EU)**, collectively responsible for about 90% of the global GHG emissions.
- The CCPI 2020, **released by three international NGOs** - Germanwatch, New Climate Institute and Climate Action Network, on side-lines of UN climate change conference (COP25).
- The **EU collectively (22nd) and China (30th) rank** below India in the list, whereas the second largest global emitter, the **USA, figure at the bottom**. While only two G20 countries United Kingdom (7th) and India (9th) are



ranked in the high categories, eight figures in the worst category of the Index.

- Referring to India, the CCPI report noted that the current levels of per capita emissions and energy use are still comparatively low in the country. The **low per capita emissions** and energy use along with **ambitious 2030 targets** result in high ratings of the country in these two parameters.
- Despite an overall high rating for its **Climate Policy performance**, experts point out that the India has **yet to develop a roadmap for the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies** that would consequently reduce the country's high dependence on coal.
- The new Climate Change Performance Index shows signs of **a global turnaround in emissions**, including declining coal consumption. However, several large countries are still trying to resist this trend, above all the US.

28. National Ganga Council is headed by which of the following:

- a) Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
- b) Minister of Jal Shakti
- c) Prime Minister
- d) Chief Minister of Ganga States on rotation basis

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Recently, the **National Ganga Council (NGC)**, which is headed by Prime Minister met for the first time at Kanpur with the proposal to **save and enhance the population of the Gangetic Dolphin**, to discuss the **concept of River Cities** and an action plan to provide **sewer connection** to every household in towns along the Ganga and its tributaries.
- There is an expectation that at the meeting a programme called **Project Dolphin**, along the lines of **Project Tiger** will be cleared to enhance the population of these dolphins.

About the National Ganga Council

- The **council consists of** chief ministers from five states along the Ganga *i.e.* Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Bihar and Jharkhand along with nine Union ministers and NITI Aayog vice-chairman.
- The **central objective of the council** is to work on the protection, prevention, control and abatement of environmental pollution in River Ganga and its rejuvenation to its natural and pristine condition and to ensure continuous adequate flow of water. The council is supposed to meet every year, but since its inception in 2016, no meeting has taken place.

29. Which of the following personalities has recently been appointed as Cuba's first prime minister in more than four decades?

- a.) Manuel Marrero Cruz
- b.) Miguel Diaz-Canel
- c.) Arturo Lopez-Levy
- d.) Osvaldo Dorticos

Answer: A

Explanation

- In Cuba, **President Miguel Díaz-Canel** has appointed **Manuel Marrero Cruz as the country's first prime minister** in more than 40 years.
- Cruz was named prime minister for a five-year term. Earlier, he had served as Cuban tourism minister for 16 years.

Background

- The **post of prime minister was scrapped in 1976** by the then-revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. In December 1976, Fidel Castro took the title of president of the State Council, which replaced the posts of president and prime minister.
- It was reinstated under the rules of a new constitution for the communist-run island passed earlier in 2019.

New Constitution of Cuba

- It was **approved in February 2019** which replaced Soviet-era charter enacted under Fidel Castro.
- It reinstated the post of Prime Minister while creating the post of Deputy prime minister. It also has provision for the appointment of other members of the Council of Ministers.
- Despite all the changes, the new constitution ensured that the **Communist Party still remains the only political party allowed in Cuba.**
- Diaz-Canel remains head of state and Raul Castro remains the first secretary of Communists and the **real power remains in the hand of the two.**

30. Which of the following has become the first Country to recognise Indian Pharmacopoeia?

- a.) Bhutan
- b.) Nepal
- c.) Afghanistan
- d.) Sudan

Answer: C

Explanation

- Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP) has been recognized formally by the **Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.**
- Afghanistan has become the first country to recognize IP pursuant to the efforts of Dept. of Commerce and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

About IP:

- IP is an officially recognized book of standards as per the Drugs and Cosmetic Act, 1940 and rules 1945 thereunder.
- It specifies the standards of drugs manufactured and marketed in India in terms of their identity, purity and strength.
- In order to ensure the quality of the medicinal products, the legal and scientific standards are provided by the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia.

About Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC):

- It is an **autonomous institution** under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
- The IPC's mission is to promote public and animal health India by bringing out authoritative and officially accepted standards for quality of drugs.

31. Which of the following places has been selected as the world's leading Sports tourism Destination in 2019?

- a.) Dubai
- b.) Abu Dhabi
- c.) Tokyo
- d.) Shanghai

Answer: B

Explanation:

- **Abu Dhabi** was selected as the **World's Leading Sports Tourism Destination** at the 26th edition of the World Travel Awards (WTA) held in Muscat.
- This was the **seventh time** in a row that Abu Dhabi got this coveted award.
- Abu Dhabi shined as a premium destination once again for sports tourism in 2019.
- Earlier it had hosted some of the world's top sporting events, such as the FIFA Club World Cup 2017 and 2018, the first edition of the UAE Tour, the AFC Asian Cup 2019, the Special Olympics World Games 2019, the UFC 242 showdown and the Brazil vs South Korea international friendly match.
- The emirate has also recently won the rights to host the **FINA Short Course World Championship in 2020**.
- **About WTA:** It was established in 1993 to acknowledge, reward and celebrate excellence across all key sectors of the travel, tourism and hospitality industries.

32. 'Iron Union 12' is a joint military exercise between

- a.) USA and Israel
- b.) USA and Vietnam
- c.) USA and India
- d.) USA and UAE

Answer: D

33. Consider the following statements regarding the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA):

1. APEDA is established under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
2. It is mandated to promote export of agricultural and processed food products from India.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a.) 1 Only
- b.) 2 Only

- c.) Both 1 and 2
d.) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Explanation

- APEDA is an **organization under Ministry of Commerce & Industry**, Government of India and is responsible for promoting exports of Agriculture and Processed Food Products from India.
- Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has sent the first trial shipment of **fresh vegetables by sea route from Varanasi to Dubai**.
- This was done in an endeavor to promote exports from agriculture produce rich regions of India.
- Varanasi Region **comprising of 5 districts** namely, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Chandauli, Mirzapur and SantRavidas Nagar, has **immense potential of production of fruits and vegetables**.
- Considering this, APEDA is in the process of **setting up Agri export hubs** in these 5 districts of the Varanasi region.

34. Which of the following countries has announced to set up the Gandhi Citizenship Education Award?

- a.) Portugal
b.) South Africa
c.) Britain
d.) Rwanda

Answer: A

Explanation

- The **Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa** announced the Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize to help promote Mahatma Gandhi's ideals.
- This announcement was made while addressing the **second meeting of the National Committee** for Commemoration Mahatma Gandhi's 150th Birth Anniversary.
- It will be given out **every year inspired by the thoughts** and quotes of Mahatma Gandhi.
- The **first edition** of the education prize will be **dedicated to animal welfare** since Gandhi used to say that the way animals were treated in a nation was indicative of its greatness.

About The National Committee To Remember Mahatma Gandhi:

The Indian government created **two committees** to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi –

- A. A **National Committee which is headed by the President**, and includes the Vice President, Prime Minister, all the state Chief Ministers, political representatives, Gandhians and other eminent personalities from all fields.
- **Portuguese PM is the only foreign Prime Minister** to be a part of the National Commission.
 - Other foreigners include Tulsi Gabbard, Desmond Tutu, Bernie Meyer (also known as the American Gandhi), former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, Kofi Annan etc.

- B. An **Executive Committee (EC)** headed by the **Prime Minister** of India - The role of the EC was to lay down the guidelines, and plan the programmes and activities for the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

35. **Chillai Kalan**, often seen in news recently, is
- The 40-day harshest winter period in Kashmir
 - Cultural Festival of Ladakh celebrated during winter
 - Tribal festival of tribes of Chhatisgarh
 - None of the above

Answer: A

Explanation

- In Jammu & Kashmir, the 40-day period of extreme cold, known as 'Chilai-Kalan', began on December 21. It will end on January 30.
- During these 40 days, Kashmir remains in the grip of intense cold with high chances of snowfall and rain. The night temperatures, during this period, mostly stay below freezing point.
- The 40-day 'Chilai Kalan' is followed by a **20-day long 'Chilai-Khurd'** (small cold) and a **10-day long 'Chilai-Bachha'** (baby cold).

36. Consider the following statements regarding International Astronomical Union (IAU):

- It is a body governing international professional astronomical activities worldwide, with headquarters in Paris.
- The IAU holds a general assembly every three years in varying parts of the world.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- 1 Only
- 2 Only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

- The International Astronomical Union (IAU) named a **white yellow star in Sextans constellation** and a its Jupiter like **exo-planets** as Bibha and Santamasa respectively.
- The star and its planet were hitherto named **HD 86081 and 86081b**.
- The star has been named in honour of a **pioneering Indian woman scientist Dr Bibha Choudhury**, who discovered subatomic particle, pi-meson.
- Bibha means "**a bright beam of light**" in Bengali. Santamasa is the Sanskrit term for "**clouded**".

About Bibha Star and Santamasa

- Bibha is an **ageing star**, 6.210 billion years old. It is as hot as the sun, 1.55 times bigger, 1.21 times massive, and 1.75 times brighter.

- It is so far away that light from it takes 310.93 years to reach Earth and hence it is visible only with a telescope.
- '**Santamasa**', which is its only planet, is estimated to **have a mass of 1.5 times** that of Jupiter, going around the central star in a nearly circular orbit just in 2.1375 days.

About IAU

- It is the senior body governing international professional astronomical activities worldwide, with **headquarters in Paris**.
- It was established in 1919 as the first of a series of international unions for the advancement of specific branches of science.
- Its professed mission is to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects through international cooperation.
- The IAU **holds a general assembly every three years** in varying parts of the world at which professional astronomers meet to discuss research, new cooperative ventures, and similar matters of professional interest.

37. Consider the following statements regarding The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

1. UNHCR is the principal organ of United Nation with the mandate to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.
2. UNHCR played an effective role in assisting the Palestinian refugees.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: D

Explanation

- The **first ever Global Refugee Forum** was held in **Geneva**, Switzerland from 17-18 December 2019.
- Hosted by - **United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)** along with Government of Switzerland.

Key Highlights

- **Aim of the forum** - To give impetus to efforts to **achieve compact's objectives** and **translate international solidarity into concrete action**.
- **Thematic Areas** on which the Forum will focused - Arrangements for burden and responsibility-sharing, Solutions, Energy and Infrastructure, Protection Capacity, Jobs and Livelihoods and Education.
- A stock-taking meeting will take place in two years, and the **second Global Refugee Forum is scheduled for late 2023**.

Background

- The Forum is a key element of the **Global Compact on Refugees**, which the international community signed in December 2018.

- It calls for Global Refugee Forums to be held **every four years**.

About UNHCR:

- It is a **United Nations agency** (not a principal organ of United Nation) with the mandate to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people, and assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.
- It was created in 1950, during the aftermaths of World War II.
- Its **headquarters are in Geneva**, Switzerland and it is a member of the United Nations Development Group.
- The UNHCR has won **two Nobel Peace Prizes**, once in 1954 and again in 1981.
- UNHCR's mandate **does not apply to Palestinian refugees**, who are assisted by UNWRA.

Global Compact for Migration

- The **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)** was agreed upon at an intergovernmental conference in Marrakech, Morocco. It is considered as a **blueprint for helping millions of migrants** worldwide achieve a life of safety and dignity.
- It is a **non-binding agreement**, which aims to better manage migration at local, national, regional and global levels, including reducing the risks and vulnerabilities the migrants or refugees face at different stages of their journey.
- The compact is **comprised of 23 objectives**. These include : collecting adequate data; ensuring all migrants have legal proof of identity; saving lives and establishing coordinated international efforts on missing migrants; strengthening the transnational response to smuggling and trafficking; managing borders in an integrated manner; and giving migrants access to basic services.
- The compact also includes a follow-up and review mechanism.
- While acknowledging **states' shared responsibilities**, the compact reaffirms their sovereign right to determine their national migration policies and to govern migration within their jurisdictions.
- It also stresses that the compact's implementation will account for different national realities, capacities and levels of development; and will respect national policies and priorities.

38. Consider the following statements regarding the World Design Organization (WDO):

1. It is an international non-governmental organization that promotes the profession of industrial design.
2. WDO has United Nations Special Consultative Status.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

- The **World Design Organization** is all set to launch its **new global programme World Design Protopolis** in Bengaluru.
- This will be aimed at implementing holistic progress in mega cities across the world and making them sustainable.
- The project also aims to **measure the progress of the city**, attract investments and solve the problems so that the city becomes a better place for the citizens.
- The announcement in this regard was made at the three-day **Kochi Design Week, India's largest design conclave**.

About WDO:

- The World Design Organization (WDO) was formerly known as the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (Icsid).
- It is an international non-governmental organization that promotes the profession of industrial design and its ability to generate better products, systems, services.
- WDO has United Nations Special Consultative Status.

39. Consider the following statements regarding the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA):

1. WADA works under the International Olympic Committee.
2. NADA works under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
3. While decisions of WADA for doping rule violations is final and binding, the decisions of NADA is not final and can be appealed at WADA.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 and 2 Only
- b) 2 and 3 Only
- c) 1 and 3 Only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation**WADA imposes 4-year ban on Russia**

- The Russian flag and national anthem were banned by WADA from Tokyo Olympics 2020 and other major sports events for four years.
- WADA recommended these sanctions as punishment for state authorities **tampering with a Moscow laboratory database**.
- According to WADA investigators, Russian authorities **tampered with a Moscow laboratory database to hide hundreds of potential doping cases** and falsely shift the blame onto whistleblowers.
- Russian officials have decided to lodge an appeal with the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport

What the Ban Means for Russia

OUT OF 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo	OUT OF 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing	OUT OF 2022 football World Cup in Qatar
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May also be stopped from hosting matches in the UEFA Euro 2020 football championships next summer

Barred from bidding to host any major championships during the four-year period, extending to include the 2032 Summer Olympics

About WADA

- WADA is an international independent agency which was **established in 1999** by a collective initiative led by the International Olympic Committee.
- The **First World Conference** on Doping in Sport held, in Lausanne, Switzerland, produced the **Lausanne Declaration on Doping in Sport**. This declaration paved the way for establishment of WADA.
- **HQ** - Montreal, Canada
- Its **key activities** include **scientific research, education, development of anti-doping capacities, and monitoring of the World Anti-Doping Code (Code)** – the document harmonizing anti-doping policies in all sports and all countries.
- **Decision of WADA for doping rule violations is final and binding.**

About NADA

- Bollywood actor **Suniel Shetty** has been appointed as brand **ambassador of National Anti Doping Agency**.
- It was set up as registered society in 2005 with a mandate for **Dope free sports in India**.
- The primary objectives are to implement anti-doping rules as per WADA code, regulate dope control programme, to promote education and research and creating awareness about doping and its ill effects.
- It works **under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**.
- Decision of NADA and its governance structure is not final and can be appealed at WADA

40. India's first maritime museum is proposed at

- a) Mumbai
- b) Andaman & Nicobar
- c) Cochin
- d) Lothal

Answer: D

Explanation

- The government has decided to **establish a National Maritime Heritage Museum at Lothal, a Harappan site** on the Saurashtra coast in Gujarat.
- The museum will also be an independent research centre of underwater archaeology for reconstruction of maritime history, archaeology of boat building and materials traded.
- It will have on display salvaged material from shipwreck sites in the Indian Ocean waters.
- It is being set up with technical help from the **Portuguese Maritime Heritage Museum**.
- Underwater archaeology is a specialized branch of archaeology that involves recovering submerged remains such as ports, shipwrecks and studying proxy records of maritime activity from archaeological excavations as well as archival and historical records.

41. Who among the following has been named as Plogging Ambassador of India?

- a) Ripu Daman Bevli
- b) Dipa karmakar
- c) Sunil Chhetri
- d) Akshay Kumar

Answer: A

Explanation

- **Ripu Daman Bevli**, popularly known as **Plogman of India**, has been named as Plogging Ambassador of India by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.
- **Nation-wide Plogging Ambassador Mission** has also been launched. Under this, Indians who have been running and cleaning their cities/ towns/ districts, will be nominated as Plogging Ambassadors of their region.
- **Plog Run**: A unique way of picking up garbage while jogging is called Plog Run. The Plog Run integrates three earlier programs introduced by the central government — Fit India, Clean India and Plastic-free India.

42. Consider the following statements regarding the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL):

1. CFSL is a wing under the Ministry of Science and Technology, which fulfills the forensic requirements in the country.
2. There are seven Central Forensic Science Laboratories functioning in the country all of which work under the administrative control of Directorate of Forensic Science Services.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: D

Explanation

- An **advanced DNA Analysis Centre** was inaugurated at **Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL)**, Chandigarh.
- This lab has been **set up under the Nirbhaya Fund scheme** and has a capacity of examining around 2,000 cases per year.
- This center will provide facility for sexual assault and homicide unit, paternity unit, human identification unit and mitochondrial DNA unit.

About Central Forensic Science Laboratories:

- CFSL is the established premier scientific laboratory under the direct administrative control of Directorate of Forensic Science Services (DFSS), New Delhi, under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- There are seven CFSs functioning in the country out of which Six CFSs are under Directorate of Forensic Science Services. These are situated at Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), Chandigarh, Guwahati (Assam), Hyderabad (Telangana), Pune (Maharashtra) and Kolkata (West Bengal).

43. Consider the following pairs:

Name of Exercise	Participants
1. Apharan	- Indian Navy
2. Hand in Hand	- India & China
3. INDRA	- India & France
4. Mitra Shakti	- India & Nepal

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- a) 1 and 2 Only
- b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3 Only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: A

Explanation

Apharan

- **The Indian Navy**, in collaboration with Indian Coast Guard, conducted a large scale **Anti Hijacking Exercise** off the Port of Kochi.
- The Exercise code named 'Apharan' was aimed at streamlining the response mechanism/preparedness to thwart any attempt by anti-national elements to hijack a merchant vessel.
- It was conducted under the aegis of Southern Naval Command.

Hand in Hand

- The **8th India-China** joint training exercise 'HAND-IN-HAND 2019' was conducted at Umroi, Meghalaya.
- The major objective of joint military exercise is to promote mutual cooperation in fight against terrorism.
- This exercise was started in the year 2007 in Kunming (China), its second edition was held in Belgaum, Karnataka.
- But it was stopped for the next few years. Later, in 2013, the practice resumed after five years.

INDRA 2019

- Exercise INDRA 2019 a **joint, tri services exercise** between **India and Russia** was conducted simultaneously at Babina (near Jhansi), Pune, and Goa.
- The INDRA series of exercise began in 2003 and the **First joint Tri Services Exercise was conducted in 2017.**

SURYA KIRAN 2019

Exercise SURYA KIRAN-XIV, a joint military training exercise between **India and Nepal** was conducted at Nepal Army Battle School (NABS), Salijhandi, Rupendehi district of Nepal.

Mitra Shakti

- The seventh edition of Exercise MITRA SHAKTI- 2019, between armies of **India and Sri Lanka**, was conducted at Aundh Military Station, Pune.
- The Mitra Shakti exercise was started in 2013 and is conducted annually.

44. Pacific Air Chiefs' Symposium 2019 was held at

- a) Gurugram
- b) Hawaii
- c) Andaman & Nicobar
- d) None of the Above

Answer: B

Explanation

- Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria Chief of the Indian Air Force participated in the **Pacific Air Chiefs' Symposium 2019 (PACS 2019) at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.**
- **Theme** - 'A Collaborative Approach to Regional Security'
- **Objective** – To provide perspectives on common challenges faced and on shared mutual interests while focusing on relevant topics like 'Regional Security', 'Domain Awareness', 'Multi-Domain Awareness', 'Interoperability' and 'HADR'

Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme

- The Union Cabinet has approved a partial credit guarantee scheme for public sector banks (PSBs). PSBs can purchase high-rated pooled assets from financially sound Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)/Housing Finance Companies (HFCs).
- The scheme is announced to address temporary liquidity/cash flow mismatch issues of otherwise solvent NBFCs/HFCs without them having to resort to distress sale of their assets for meeting their commitments and enable them to continue contributing to credit creation and providing last mile lending to borrowers, thereby spurring economic growth. It will also protect the financial system of the country from any adverse contagion effect that may arise due to the failure of such NBFCs/HFCs.
- The scheme would cover NBFCs/HFCs that may have slipped into SMA-0 category during the one year period prior to August 1, 2018, and asset pools rated "BBB+" or high.
- SMA-0 accounts are the special mention accounts (SMA) against which the principal or interest or any other amount wholly or partially is overdue between 1-30 days.
- The window for one-time partial credit guarantee offered by government will remain open till 30th June, 2020 or till such date by which Rs 1,00,000 crore assets get purchased by the banks, whichever is earlier.

Rohtang Pass Tunnel Named After Atal Bihari Vajpayee

- The government has named the strategic tunnel under Rohtang Pass in Himachal Pradesh after former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in a tribute to him on his 95th birth anniversary.
- The historic decision to construct the strategic tunnel below the Rohtang Pass was taken in 2000 when Vajpayee was the prime minister. The construction of the Rs 4,000-crore tunnel will be completed by 2020.
- The 8.8-km-long tunnel will be the world's longest above an altitude of 3,000 metres. Once thrown open, the tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to remote border areas of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh which otherwise remain cut off from rest of the country for about 6 months during winters.
- The project is being implemented by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). The BRO had to overcome major challenges due to difficult terrain and weather in laying the most difficult stretch of the 587-metre in the Seri Nalah Fault Zone.

Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2018-19

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released its Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2018-19. Some of the highlights from the report are discussed below.

Declining Bank NPAs

- After rising for seven years, non-performing assets reported by banks are showing a decline. The gross NPAs declined to 9.1% in March 2019 from 11.2% in March 2018 as recognition of bad loans neared completion.
- Decline in the slippage ratio as well as a reduction in outstanding GNPA's helped in improving the GNPA ratio. While a part of the write-offs was due to aging of loans, recovery efforts received a boost from the IBC.

- The report showed that all bank groups recorded an improvement in asset quality, with PSBs experiencing a drop both in the GNPA and in the net NPA ratios.
- However, the deteriorating asset quality of private banks in terms of the GNPA ratio is due to the reclassification of IDBI Bank as a private bank effective January 21, 2019. If IDBI Bank is excluded as a private bank, GNPA ratio of these banks showed a decline.
- Gross non-performing assets ratio of the non-banking financial company (NBFC) sector jumped to 6.1 per cent in 2018-19 from 5.3 per cent in 2017-18, reflecting the default crisis triggered by IL&FS.

Recovery Of Stressed Assets

- Recovery of stressed assets improved during 2018-19 mainly because of resolutions under the IBC, which contributed more than half of the total amount recovered.
- However, recoveries made by banks, through other routes such as Lok Adalats, Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRT), and the SARFAESI Act, continued to perform dismally.
- Cases referred for recovery under various mechanisms grew over 27% in volume and tripled in value during the year, leading to a pile-up of bankruptcy proceedings. This highlights the need to strengthen and expand the supportive infrastructure.

Muted Credit Growth

- Credit growth stayed markedly weak in recent months, with year-on-year growth in bank credit being in single digits, with industrial credit lagging retail lending.
- Despite the RBI cutting rates and abundant liquidity with the banking system, a quick turnaround in credit growth is not expected as consumer and business confidence remain weak, while banks adopt a cautious stance.

Status of Cooperative Banks

- As more and more cooperative banks fail, their combined assets nearly halved to 10.6 per cent of the assets of commercial banks in FY19 from 19.4 per cent in FY05. However, the combined balance sheet of urban and rural cooperative banks saw robust expansion in FY19.
- As of March 2019, there were 1,544 urban co-operative banks, and 96,248 rural co-operative banks in the country. The latter accounted for 64.7 per cent of the total assets of the co-operative sector.
- Despite their large numbers, urban cooperatives account for just 3.6 per cent of the total assets of commercial banks as most of them are single branch entities, with limited avenues to raise capital.
- Deposits, which account for 89.5 per cent of their resource base, revived in FY19 after a deceleration in FY18. Nonetheless, their deposit growth remains well-below the average of 13.9 per cent achieved between FY08 and FY17.
- On the asset quality front, the cooperatives performed badly with their gross NPAs rising to 7.1 per cent from 6.7 per cent but the net NPA ratio improved to 2.6 from 2.8, while the provision coverage ratio improved to 65.6 from 63.4.

Progress report



- Asset quality of scheduled commercial banks turns around after 7 years
- Sector returned to profitability on declining provisioning need in H1 FY20
- Recapitalisation helped PSBs shore up

capital ratios

- Capital infused by government in PSBs 'just enough' to meet regulatory minimum
- To sustain credit growth, capital must be maintained well above regulatory minimum
- PSBs' financial health must be assessed by ability to access capital markets

Increase In Number Of New Branches

- For the first time in three years, the pace of opening of new branches witnessed growth as the scheduled commercial banks opened 4,518 branches in FY19 as against 3,938 branches in FY18.
- Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities led to the rise in additional branches last year and those in Tier-5 and Tier-6 continued to witness a decline in the pace of addition of new branches.
- This is consistent with the banks' policy of opening branches in high population density areas where they are likely to be more commercially viable, while relying on BCs to enhance their outreach in other centres.
- The report added, that the revised guidelines on rationalisation of branch authorisation policy introduced in May 2017 has provided banks autonomy to decide their business strategy in facilitating financial inclusion.

ATM Figures

- The number of ATMs operated by scheduled commercial banks declined from 2,07,052 at the end of March 2018 to 2,02,072 at the end of March 2019.
- However, the number of white labelled ATMs increased from 15,195 in FY'18 to 19,507. RBI said the growth in white label ATMs has been boosted by policy changes introduced in March, 2019, to enhance the financial viability of WLAs.
- It allowed their operators to source cash directly from the Reserve Bank, offer non-bank services, and advertise non-financial products in their premises.

Way Ahead

- The growth slowdown of the country intensified with GDP growth for the second quarter of the current financial year dipping to a six-year low of 4.5%.
- Hence, while the Indian banking sector's financial parameters such as bad loans and capital adequacy have shown an improvement in recent times, the overall health of banking sector will depend on revival in economic growth.
- Recapitalisation helped PSBs shore up capital ratios. However, capital infused by government in PSBs is just enough to meet regulatory minimum. To sustain credit growth, capital must be maintained well above regulatory minimum.

CII Report on Mining Industry

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) recently released a study, 'Towards a Globally Competitive Minerals and Mining Industry' at the Mining Summit 2019.
- The study has a vision for the sector, to contribute 3.0% of India's GDP by 2024-25, in a socially, environmentally, safe and commercially viable manner, taking cognizance of the country's interest.

Significance Of Mining Industry

- Given India's rich mineral reserves, clearly, there is significant potential for growth and the minerals and mining industry, is core to India's growth ambition of a USD 5 trillion economy.
- With around 72% of India's current power being generated through coal, the mining industry plays a pivotal role from an energy security standpoint. Further, minerals are the basic building blocks of manufactured products and many agri-inputs.

Status Of Mining Industry

- Despite its obvious importance, the mining industry in India has not done well, as evident from its declining contribution to GDP, foreign investment and employment.
- The mining industry has had a fairly liberalised investment policy for a while. However, this has not resulted in large volumes of foreign investment, primarily due to a weak enabling eco-system.
- The industry's share in India's GDP (in real terms) is a low 2.6% in 2018-19, down from 3.0% in 2011-12. Further, FDI inflow in the sector declined from 2.1% of India's total FDI inflow in 2014-15 to 0.5% in 2018-19.
- From a trade perspective, barring iron-ore, India exhibits a trade deficit in many of the key minerals despite having adequate availability of these minerals to comfortably meet the import requirements.
- For instance, around half the coal imports (in volume terms) during 2018-19 were on account of thermal coal to non-coastal users, which are substitutable by domestically produced coal.

Recommendations By The Study

The report identifies various areas which must be addressed so as to develop and boost the Indian mining industry -

1. Incentives For Exploration

Incentivising Exploration For Non-Bulk Minerals

- Introduce a seamless transition from exploration to mining license, with stand-alone exploration rights being awarded only in exceptional cases.
- Permit sale of license at any stage, at the sole discretion of the concessionaire, with the government having the right to match the price accepted by the concessionaire. The government must revert within one month otherwise the concessionaire can go ahead with the private player.

Financing Of Exploration

- Direct SEBI to examine providing special dispensation for prospecting companies.
- Leverage the NMET fund to finance exploration for critical and strategic minerals.
- All expenditure on exploration and development in the preceding 10 years before the commencement of commercial production should be allowed for deduction in mining operations.

2. The Auction Approach

Allotment Approach

- Institute an efficient, equitable and fair allotment process (the process is already transparent).
- Continue to adopt the auction route.
- Streamline the auction process for situations where there may be less than three parties interested in bidding for a concession.

Commercially Viable Bidding

- Shift to a single-stage sealed bid. Publicly share a 3 – 5 year roadmap of mining assets.
- Auction documents should contain, where possible, the international and domestic price trend of the mineral to facilitate moderation in bidding.

3. Scale Of Mines

- Ensure blocks mining leases are of at least optimal size to enable commercially viable scientific mining and use of state-of-art technology.
- Permit acquisition or lease of adjoining land for non-mining activity.

- Encourage smaller players to form consortia to ensure they are not unable to bid due to lack of resources.

4. Processes And Clearances

- In-principle clearances to be obtained prior to offering a block for concession.
- Governmental agencies should commit and adhere to timelines. Share best practises between states.
- Streamline the process of obtaining EC and FC clearances, by reducing duplication in stages and data provision between EC and FC.
- Clarify that violations of mining plan, EC and FC will not be treated as 'illegal mining'.
- Develop a database of forest areas in mining regions; segregate the forest areas into 'low density', 'medium density' and 'high density' so that the time taken for obtaining clearance is related to the forest type.
- Develop a database of land for compensatory afforestation. Further, permit (in-practise) private mining companies to offer payment for compensatory afforestation, if such land is unavailable in the concerned state or permit mining companies to undertake compensatory afforestation in another state.
- Institute clear processes and guidelines for land acquisition permit lease of land for mining. States should ensure availability of all relevant land related documentation.
- Strengthen the Social Impact Assessment to enhance effectiveness.

5. Financial Levies

- Reduce royalty rates in line with international benchmarks; fast-track implementation of the Royalties Study Group which has made specific mineral-wise royalty rate recommendations.
- Evolve a system for regular sampling of mineral to ascertain its grade to ensure that the appropriate royalty rate is applied, for mines adopting continuous rake loading.
- Eliminate state mining taxes into the other charges.
- Exempt underground mining from carbon cess.
- Review the penal interest rates structure.

6. Transfer of Concessions

- Reduce transfer fees on transfer of non-coal mines, not obtained by the auction route.
- Distinguish between intra-group and third-party transfer: exempt transfer charges for transfer within the group companies.
- Align transfer process with the NCLT approved merger process.

7. Associated Infrastructure

- Encourage mining majors to create their own last-mile connectivity infrastructure.
- In the short-term, develop select 3 – 5 routes aimed at assisting SME miners.
- Encourage alternate modes of transport: slurry pipelines and close loop conveyors.
- Encourage sharing of Right of Way for pipelines.
- Facilitate acquisition of Right of Way for ease of logistic access.

9. Data Availability

- Create a digital, updated and credible national inventory of mineral resources.

- Create a digital on-line mineral atlas, showing mineral titles on a spatial map; later, to also indicate inviolate areas for mining.

10. Preference For Public Sector

- Accord preferential treatment to the public sector only in select cases.
- Subject public sector enterprises to all other requirements, even when accorded preferential treatment.
- Utilise land reserved for mining by the public sector, but currently lying unused.

11. Perception Of The 'Mining' Industry

- Create norms for sustainable mining, which companies voluntarily and proactively adopt to build trust.
- Share best-practises between industry players; companies should offer to voluntarily and proactively adopt these practises.
- Showcase positive success stories, in sustainable and responsible mining.

12. Institutional Set Up

- Encourage all states to accord industry status to mining
- Strengthen institutional machinery in line with the skills and expertise required to govern a new-age mining industry

Nirav Modi Declared A Fugitive Economic Offender

- A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act court has declared diamond trader Nirav Modi, an accused in the Punjab National Bank scam case, **a fugitive economic offender**.
- Nirav Modi is the second person to be declared a fugitive economic offender, under the new Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, after liquor baron Vijay Mallya. Both Mallya and Nirav Modi are in the United Kingdom, and **fighting extradition to India**.
- The court will now **begin the proceedings to confiscate his assets**. It served notice to all parties and adjourned the matter to January 10.

Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act, 2018

- The FEO Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha in March, 2018, and passed by Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in July. The Act replaced The Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance, 2018, which was promulgated in April 2018.
- The FEO Act aims to **provide for measures to deter fugitive economic offenders from evading the process of law in India** by staying outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts. In doing so, it intends to **preserve the sanctity of the rule of law in India** for matters specified in the act.
- A Fugitive Economic Offender is **defined by The Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act, 2018**.
- As per the act, an FEO is **any individual against whom a warrant for arrest** in relation to a scheduled offence **has been issued by any court in India** and
 - The person has **left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution** or
 - While being abroad, **refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution**

Other Provisions For Economic Offences

- Economic offences relate to fraud, counterfeiting, money-laundering, tax evasion, etc.

- Among the laws available for prosecuting these offences are The Prevention of Money-Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, The Benami Properties Transactions Act, 1988, and The Companies Act, 2013.
- Sections of The Indian Penal Code, 1860 and The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, also cover offences such as forgery and cheating.

Why Was The FEO Law Required?

- In 2017, Finance Ministry released a draft Bill to address cases of high-value economic offenders fleeing the country to avoid prosecution.
- It observed that **existing civil and criminal laws did not contain specific provisions to deal with such offenders**, and that a new legal framework was needed to prosecute them.
- The ministry also argued that **procedures under these laws were time-consuming, led to roadblocks in investigation and impacted the financial health of banks.**
- In March 2018, the Ministry of External Affairs stated that over 30 businessmen, under investigation by the CBI and the ED, had absconded to avoid facing prosecution before Indian courts.

Process Of Declaring An Individual An FEO

- Under the Act, **an application must be filed in the special court** asking that a particular individual may be declared an FEO.
- The application must be accompanied by
 - **Reasons for the belief** that an individual is a fugitive economic offender.
 - Any information available as to the **whereabouts of the fugitive economic offender.**
 - **A list of properties or the value of such properties** believed to be the proceeds of crime.
- The special court may then **issue notice to the individual to appear at a specified place**, and drop the proceedings if the individual complies.
- If, however, the special court is satisfied that an individual is an FEO, it may, declare the person an FEO. The court may then **order the confiscation of the properties** of the accused individual in India or abroad.

SDG India Index 2019

- NITI Aayog has released the second edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index, which comprehensively documents the progress made by India's States and Union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets.
- The Index has been developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), United Nations in India, and Global Green Growth Institute.
- NITI Aayog has the twin mandate to oversee the implementation of SDGs in the country and promote competitive and cooperative federalism among States and UTs.
- The Index is available on an online dashboard, which has cross-sectoral relevance across policy, civil society, business and academia. It is designed to function as a tool for focused policy dialogue, formulation and implementation, and moving towards development action pegged to globally recognizable metrics.
- It highlights crucial gaps related to monitoring SDGs and the need for improving statistical systems at the National/State/UT levels. Further, the Index highlights the need for improvements in data collection, reporting and methodology.

- The 2019 Index is more robust than the first edition on account of wider coverage of goals, targets, and indicators with greater alignment with the NIF. The Index spans 16 out of 17 SDGs with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17. This marks an improvement over the 2018 Index, which covered only 13 goals.
- A composite score was computed in the range of 0–100 for each State/UT based on its aggregate performance across 16 SDGs, indicating the average performance of every State/UT towards achieving 16 SDGs and their respective targets.
- If a State/UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies it has achieved the 2030 national targets. The higher the score of a State/UT, the closer it is towards achieving the targets.
- The classification criteria is, **Aspirant: 0–49; Performer: 50–64; Front Runner: 65–99 and Achiever: 100.**

Highlights Of The Index

- The maximum gains have been made in **Goal 6** (clean water and sanitation), **Goal 9** (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) and **Goal 7** (affordable and clean energy).
- All three states that were in the Aspirant category —Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Assam—have graduated to the Performer category.
- Five states—Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Goa, and Sikkim—moved up from the Performer category to the Front Runner category.
- Kerala achieved the first rank in the composite Index with a score of 70, followed by Himachal Pradesh at 69. Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu ranked at the third position with the score of 67.
- The biggest improvers since 2018 are UP (which has moved from the 29th position to the 23rd), Orissa (23rd to 15th), and Sikkim (15th to 7th).

Provisions To Deal With Destruction Of Property, Rioting And Vandalism

- While agreeing to hear petitions on alleged police excesses on students in Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University, a Supreme Court Bench expressed displeasure over rioting and destruction of public property.
- Despite a law against the destruction of property, incidents of rioting, vandalism, and arson have been common during protests across the country

Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984

- The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 punishes anyone who commits mischief by doing any act in respect of any public property with a jail term of up to five years and a fine or both. Provisions of this law can be coupled with those under the Indian Penal Code.
- Public property under this Act includes any building or property used for the production, distribution or supply of water, light, power or energy; any oil installation; any sewage works; any mine or factory; any means of public transportation or of telecommunications.

Committees Set Up By Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has on several earlier occasions found the law inadequate, and has attempted to fill the gaps through guidelines. In 2007, the court took suo motu cognizance of various instances where there was large scale destruction of public and private properties in the name of agitations, bandhs and hartals and had set up two Committees in past - Justice K T Thomas Committee and Fali Nariman Committee.

A. Thomas Committee - Burden of proof

- The Thomas Committee recommended reversing the burden of proof against protesters. Accepting the suggestion, the court said that the prosecution should be required to prove that public property had been damaged in direct action called by an organisation, and that the accused also participated in such direct action.
- From that stage, the burden can be shifted to the accused to prove their innocence, the court said. It added that the law must be amended to give the court the power to draw a presumption that the accused is guilty of destroying public property, and it would then be open to the accused to disprove such presumption.
- Such a reversal of the burden of proof is applicable in cases of sexual violence, among others. Generally, the law presumes that the accused is innocent until the prosecution proves its case.

B. Nariman Committee - Extracting Damages For Destruction

- The Nariman Committee's recommendations dealt with extracting damages for destruction. Accepting the recommendations, the court said the rioters would be made strictly liable for the damage, and compensation would be collected to "make good" the damage.
- Apart from holding rioters liable and imposing costs, the court also issued guidelines including directing High Courts to order suo motu action, and to set up a machinery to investigate the damage caused.
- The guidelines also directed High Courts to award compensation wherever mass destruction to property takes place due to protests.

Final Analysis

- Like the law, the guidelines too, had a limited impact. This is because the identification of protesters remains difficult, especially in cases where there is no leader who gave the call to protest.
- Further, the issue of compensation is ticklish as evident from the case in 2017, wherein, a petitioner who claimed he was forced to spend more than 12 hours on the road on account of an ongoing agitation, moved SC seeking implementation of the 2009 guidelines. In its verdict in *Koshy Jacob vs Union Of India*, the court reiterated that the law needed to be updated, but it did not grant the petitioner any compensation since the organisers of the protest were not before the court.

Odisha's Jaga Mission

- Odisha recently won the 'World Habitat Award', global recognition for its ambitious initiative -- Jaga Mission.
- This award is given by World Habitat, a UK-based organization, in partnership with United Nation (UN)-Habitat, every year, in recognition of innovative, outstanding, and revolutionary ideas, projects, and programmes from across the world.
- Under JAGA, as many as 52,682 families have been granted land rights certificates while 1,725 slums were surveyed using drones and GIS technology. The state also adopted state-of-the-art technology combined with extensive community participation resulting in dispute and litigation-free implementation of the programme.
- JAGA aims at transforming the slums into liveable habitat with all necessary civic infrastructure and services at par with the better off areas within the same urban local body (ULB) and to continuously improve the standard of the infrastructure and services and access to livelihood opportunities.

- This Mission also aims at leveraging and converging various schemes/ programs/ funding opportunities by strengthening collaboration among various Departments, Urban Bodies, Non-Government Organisations, International Agencies and other Stakeholders.
- It also provides advisory support to the Government of Odisha to examine options for policy reforms required for the sustainable transformation of lives of urban poor.

Every 5th Fire Death In World Is In India

According to a 195-nation analysis by Global Burden of Diseases published in The BMJ Injury Prevention journal, India recorded 1.6 million fires and 27,027 deaths in 2017.

Findings Of The Study

- Around 9 million fire incidents and 1.2 lakh deaths were recorded across the globe that year and with 27,027 deaths, every fifth fire-related death in the world in 2017 took place in India.
- The Indian deaths were 2.5 times the figures in China, where 10,836 people died in fires in 2017. India, along with seven countries, including Pakistan, accounted for over half the deaths due to fires.
- The study identified gender violence as a cause for the high death rate in India; it also cited a study from Karnataka that showed synthetic saris worn by women was a cause.
- The study said kids under five and adults above 60 are the biggest fire victims — a trend seen in urban India as well. Earlier women used to be the largest fire victims.
- This “epidemiological shift” is mainly due to societal changes such as increased longevity and financial independence among women. Women have jobs, meaning children are either taken care of by elderly at home or at a creche.
- Further, deaths due to fire, heat and hot substances have registered a drop in most countries. In India, deaths decreased by around 30% between 1990 and 2017.

Inadequate Healthcare Facilities

- Inadequate healthcare facilities in India further add to deaths due to fires. Burns management needs manpower, as six people are needed each time a burns patient has his or her bandages changed.
- But the public hospitals, where most victims go for treatment, have poor doctor/nurse-patient ratio. While, the private sector rarely offers burns treatment as it needs heavy investment but doesn't earn enough.
- In Mumbai, only two private hospitals have burns wards, but every public hospital has to treat burns even though only a handful have adequate facilities.
- An ICU stay in the private sector could cost Rs 25,000-50,000. Burns patients need to stay in hospital for a long time, but the bill could be well over Rs 18 lakh a month, which not many in India can afford.
- Hence, prevention should be the first priority in reducing intolerable number of injuries and deaths

Global Burden of Disease

- GBD is a collaboration of over 1,800 researchers from 127 countries and is based out of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Beginning in 1990 as a single World Bank-commissioned study, the project quantified the health effects of more than 100 diseases and injuries for eight regions of the world, giving estimates of morbidity and mortality by age, sex, and region.

Infrastructure Investment Trusts

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to set up infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs) to monetize highway assets.
- This will enable NHAI to monetize completed national highways that have a toll collection track record of at least one year and NHAI reserves the right to levy toll on the identified highway.
- InvITs are investment schemes similar to mutual funds that allow investment from individuals and institutional investors in infrastructure projects to earn a portion of the income as return.
- NHAI's InvIT will be a Trust established by NHAI under the Indian Trust Act, 1882 and Securities and Exchange Board of India (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014.
- In October 2017, the government had launched **Bharatmala Pariyojana**, which is the flagship highway development programme for development of 24,800 km of roads with a total investment of Rs. 5,35,000 crore.
- Given the magnitude of the Bharatmala program, NHAI would need adequate funds to complete the Projects within the prescribed timelines. As a part of this exercise, a workable option is to monetize the completed and operational NH assets to unlock their value and offer attractive schemes to private players to invest in construction of National Highways.
- It will help in attracting patient capital (for say 20-30 years) to the Indian highway market, as these investors are averse to construction risk and are interested in investment in assets which provide long-term stable returns.
- Besides, mutual funds and institutes like Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) can also invest in infrastructure space through InvITs.

International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019

- The Parliament has passed the International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019. The Bill provides for the establishment of an Authority to develop and regulate the financial services market in the International Financial Services Centres in India.
- It will be applicable to all International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) set up under the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005.

Need For The Bill

- An IFSC enables bringing back the financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centres by Indian corporate entities and overseas branches/subsidiaries of financial institutions (FIs) to India by offering business and regulatory environment that is comparable to other leading international financial centres in the world like London and Singapore
- IFSCs are intended to provide Indian corporates with easier access to global financial markets, and to complement and promote further development of financial markets in India
- Currently, the banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in IFSC are regulated by multiple regulators such as RBI, SEBI and IRDAI. The dynamic nature of business in the IFSCs necessitates a high degree of inter-regulatory coordination. It also requires regular clarifications and frequent amendments in the existing regulations governing financial activities in IFSCs.
- The development of financial services and products in IFSCs requires focused and dedicated regulatory interventions. Hence, a need was felt for having a unified financial regulator for IFSCs in India to provide world class regulatory environment to financial market participants.

Structure of IFSCA

- The International Financial Services Centres Authority will consist of nine members, appointed by the central government.
- They will include, apart from the chairperson of the authority, a member each from RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, and PFRDA; and two members from the Ministry of Finance.
- In addition, two other members will be appointed on the recommendation of a Search Committee. All members of the IFSC Authority will have a term of three years, subject to reappointment.

Functions

- The Authority will regulate financial products such as securities, deposits or contracts of insurance, financial services, and financial institutions which have been previously approved by any appropriate regulator such as RBI or SEBI, in an IFSC.
- Among the other functions of the Authority, the PRS note says, are the regulation of any Apart from regulating all financial services and products, the authority can also recommend any other financial products to the central government.

Independent Director's Databank

- In order to strengthen the institution of Independent Directors under the Companies Act, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has launched the **Independent Director's Databank**.
- The Databank, is an initiative to provide an easy to access & navigate platform for the registration of existing Independent Directors as well as individuals aspiring to become independent directors.
- The portal, which has been developed and will be maintained by the Indian Institute for Corporate Affairs (IICA), will provide for a wide array of e-learning courses on various topics including the Companies Act, Securities laws, basic accountancy, board practices, board ethics and board effectiveness.
- Companies also may register themselves with the databank to search, select and connect with individuals who possess the right skills and attitude for being considered for appointment as Independent Directors.
- As per the rules, all existing Independent Directors are required to register themselves in the databank within 3 months from 01 December 2019.
- They are also required to pass a basic online proficiency self-assessment test which will available from March 2020 onwards within 12 months thereafter.

Independent Directors

- An independent director is a non-executive director who does not have any pecuniary relationship with the company, its promoters, senior management or affiliate companies, is not related to promoters or the senior management, and/or has not been an executive with the company in the three preceding financial years.
- Independent directors act as a guide to the company. Their roles broadly include improving corporate credibility and governance standards functioning as a watchdog, and playing a vital role in risk management. They also play an active role in various committees set up by company to ensure good governance.

Guidelines For On-Tap Licensing Of Private Sector Small Finance Banks

- The RBI has released the final guidelines for on-tap licensing of private sector small finance banks.
- Existing rules do not allow payments banks to lend and the deposits are capped at ₹1 lakh per customer. If these entities get the licence of small finance banks, it will give them access to more deposits and boost their profitability, which is at present under pressure.
- SFBs offer basic banking services, such as accepting deposits and lending to un-served and underserved sections, including small businesses, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries, and the unorganized sector.

Guidelines

- Payments banks can apply for conversion into small finance banks (SFBs) after five years of operation, provided they meet the eligibility criteria.
- The promoter of a payments bank is eligible to set up an SFB, provided that both banks come under the non-operating financial holding company (NOFHC) structure.
- The central bank has also raised the minimum paid-up capital requirement for SFBs from ₹100 crore to ₹200 crore.
- The promoter should hold a minimum of 40% of the paid-up voting equity capital for five years. If the initial promoter shareholding is above 40%, it should be brought down to 40% within a period of five years, 30% within 10 years, and 15% in 15 years.
- Whether a promoter ceases to be a promoter or could exit from the bank, after completing the lock-in period of five years, would depend on the RBI's regulatory and supervisory comfort and discomfort and SEBI regulations
- SFBs should be listed within three years of reaching a net worth of ₹500 crore and they will be given scheduled bank status immediately upon commencement of operations, and will have general permission to open banking outlets from the date of commencement of operations.

Eligibility

- The RBI also allowed primary urban cooperative banks to convert into SFBs, provided they comply with the on-tap licencing guidelines. The minimum net worth of such SFBs will be ₹100 crore and has to be increased to ₹200 crore within five years from commencement of business.
- Resident individuals and professionals (Indian citizens), singly or jointly, each having at least 10 years of experience in banking and finance at a senior level and companies and societies in the private sector, that are owned and controlled by residents and having successful track record of running their businesses for at least a period of five years, will be eligible as promoters to set up SFBs.
- Existing NBFCs, micro finance institutions and local area banks in private sector, controlled by residents and having successful track record of running businesses for at least a period of five years, can also opt for conversion into SFBs

Wifi Calling

- Telecom company Bharti Airtel has launched its voice over Wi-Fi service – 'Airtel Wi-Fi Calling', a first for India.
- Wi-Fi Calling is aimed especially for areas where cellular networks are not strong. It uses high speed Internet connection, available via broadband, to make and receive high definition (HD) voice calls. Users don't have to pay extra for these calls as it is using a Wi-Fi network.

- This is not much different from a voice call using WhatsApp or any other over-the-top messaging platform, but here the call is from one number to another, and not using an app.
- Since these calls use stable Wi-Fi connections, call drops are not expected to be a problem. Keeping VoLTE switched on will help in seamless voice calling, but this is not essential.
- At the moment the service is limited to Delhi-NCR users with compatible devices but will be rolled out across the country in coming days.

Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) Successfully Flight Tested

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight-tested indigenously developed QRSAM system from Chandipur off the Odisha coast. The developmental trials of the weapon system are successfully completed and the weapon system is expected to be ready for induction by 2021.

QRSAM

- It is a missile developed by the DRDO in association with Bharat Electronics Limited and Bharat Dynamics Limited for the Indian Army.
- It is an all-weather, all-terrain surface-to-air missile equipped with electronic counter measures against jamming by aircraft radars and has a range of 25-30 km.
- The single-staged missile utilized by the system is propelled using solid propellants. The missile is equipped with a midcourse inertial navigation system with a two-way data link and a terminal active seeker.
- The weapon system, which operates on the move, comprises fully automated command and control system, active array battery surveillance radar, active array battery multi-function radar and launcher.
- Both radars are four-walled having 360-degree coverage with search-on-move and track-on-move capability. While, the system is compact with a minimum number of vehicles for a firing unit.

National Children's Science Congress (NCSC)

- The 27th edition of the National Children's Science Congress was held in Thiruvananthapuram.
- Theme: "Science, Technology and Innovation for a Clean, Green and Healthy Nation".
- NCSC is the flagship programme of National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science & Technology (DST), that started in 1993.
- The seeds of this programme were planted in Madhya Pradesh by an NGO called Gwalior Science Centre. It was later adopted by the NCSTC, DST for extending it to the national level.
- The primary objective of the NCSC is to make a forum for the children of 10-17 years age group, both from formal school system as well as from out of school.
- The basic approach of NCSC is the principle of learning through doing on the issues of children's immediate environment, which significantly carries the spirit and mandate of education for sustainable development (ESD) of UNESCO, National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) and Right to Education (RTE, 2009).
- It caters to the five pillars of learning of education for Sustainable Development vividly, viz. learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to transform oneself and society.

Central Equipment Identity Register

- To allow users to protect their data, the Telecom Ministry has launched a web portal that allows users to blacklist their mobile phones once stolen or lost. The services that were launched in Maharashtra back in September 2019, will now also be operational in Delhi soon.
- The project is backed by the Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) system, which was undertaken by the telecom department for addressing safety and security of phones, given the country's technological strides and digital prowess.

Details of the Project

- The launch of the portal will facilitate requests for blocking of stolen or lost mobile phones by customers, allowing services to other existing customers having mobile phones with the same International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number, sharing of traceability data with police authorities, as well as unblocking of recovered phones.
- Moreover, because of the centralised nature of the register or database, all the operators can block the particular stolen or lost device across the country even though the phone is being serviced by one particular operator.
- Users whose phone is stolen or lost can simply log in to the portal and register a complaint, along with a copy of the police report and their ID proof. Once submitted, the lost mobile phone will be blocked. In addition, the mobile can also be traced and recovered through tower signals
- However, tracing the phone depends on whether the phone is being used after it has been stolen. If someone does not use it, it cannot be traced, but it can certainly be blocked and they won't be able to sell it.
- The IMEI is the unique identity of a mobile phone device. Since the IMEI number is programmable, miscreants and criminals reprogramme the 15-digit unique number, which results in cloning of IMEI. The result is multiple phone devices, at times even hundreds of numbers, with same IMEI number.
- If such IMEI is blocked, a large number of mobile phones stand the risk of being blocked (as they are handsets with the same IMEI number) causing inconvenience to genuine customers. The software that has been developed now allows an individual phone to be blocked even if it is on a cloned IMEI number.

Equipment Identity Register

- The Ministry Of Telecom has been compiling a list of International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI), 15-digit unique serial number for mobile phones, under Equipment Identity Register (EIR) since 2017.
- EIR is a database where all the numbers are collected and categorised in three lists — white, grey and blacklist. The white list comprises mobile phones which are permitted for use, whereas the grey list is composed of devices that do not conform to the standards but can be permitted to connect under supervision.
- The blacklist compiles all the IMEI numbers/mobile numbers that have been denied permission due to various reasons. These numbers are denied from having access to any mobile network, making the device redundant.

FrogPhone

- Researchers have developed a device named FrogPhone, that will allow scientists to monitor frogs in the wild. It is described as the world's first solar-powered remote survey device that can be installed at any frog pond and can receive a 3G or 4G cellular network.

- With FrogPhone, researchers can simply “call” a frog habitat and after a call is made to one of the FrogPhones already on a site, the device will take three seconds to receive it.
- During these few seconds, the device’s temperature sensors will get activated, and environmental data such as air temperature, water temperature and battery voltage will be sent to the caller’s phone via a text message.
- Because frogs are most active during night, researchers are usually required to make nightly observations in order to monitor them on site. The FrogPhone will allow researchers to dial these devices remotely, and analyse the data later.
- Further, it will reduce costs and risks, including the negative impact of human presence on the field site. It will also allow for monitoring of local frog populations more frequently than before, which is important because these populations are recognised as indicators of environmental health.

RailWire

- Railways has successfully completed the work of providing free public Wi-Fi at 5500 stations across the country. The Wi-Fi being provided under the brand name of RailWire is one of the largest Wi-Fi networks of the world.
- To transform the Railway stations into the hub of Digital inclusion, Indian Railways mandated RailTel, a Miniratna PSU under Ministry of Railways, to provide free high-speed Wi-Fi at the Railway stations.
- The project started in January 2016 from the financial capital of India - Mumbai Central station and in a span of 46 months Railways has successfully provided Wi-Fi at 5500 stations across the country.
- RailTel, has tied up with firms such as PGCIL, Google and Tata Trust for some parts of the project and has also received funding from Department of Telecom USOF for 200 stations.

Longest Spacewalk

- Recently, US astronaut Christina Koch set the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman when she reached and crossed 289 days in her current mission at the International Space Station (ISS). The previous record for women was set by another American, Peggy Whitson, in 2016-2017.
- Koch is also set to extend that record. Having reached the ISS in March 2019, she is expected to spend a total of 328 days on board before returning to Earth in February 2020.
- Missions are typically six months, but NASA announced in April that it was extending her mission. Koch has already made history once in her stay aboard the ISS. In October, she was part of the first all-female spacewalk, together with Jessica Meir.

Head On Generation Technology

- Premium passenger trains fitted with air-conditioned coaches and running traditionally on the End-on-Generation (EOG) system contribute significantly towards air and noise pollution.
- Hence to deal with the said issues, Indian Railways has cumulatively converted over 500 trains into Head on Generation (HOG) complaint trains between April 2018 and November 2019.
- EOG trains use 2 diesel power cars for feeding power to air-conditioning and lighting load in the passenger coaches which produce an unbearable noise of around 100dB. Further, these power cars guzzle on an average 3000 liters of diesel per trip per train contributing to the pollution in the cities.

- Whereas, in HOG complaint trains, power supply is tapped from overhead power lines and distributed to train coaches.

Advantages of HOG system

- HOG complaint trains will lead to significant reduction in cost of power from Rs 22 per unit in EOG trains to Rs 6 per unit.
- Further, it will lead to huge savings in operational costs to the tune of over Rs.1100 crores per annum due to reduced diesel consumption.
- It will also lead to reduction in carbon emissions by 700 MT per year per train, along with making the operation noiseless from the current levels of 100dB noise in EOG trains.
- More than four lakh additional berths will be available to railway passengers every day, as HOG complaint trains will allow power generation cars to be replaced with sleeper coaches.

RISAT-2BR1 Launched

- ISRO has recently placed a **spy satellite**, RISAT-2BR1, and nine customer satellites in orbit on the 50th mission of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, PSLV-C48.
- First flown in 1993, PSLV is India's longest-serving carrier rocket and has been used for two-thirds of the country's total orbital launches to date.
- The other satellites include six from the United States, and one each from Japan, Italy and Israel; their applications range from remote sensing to earth imaging.
- RISAT-2BR1 is an all-weather radar reconnaissance satellite, able to image the Earth in both daylight and at night, regardless of any clouds obscuring the surface.
- RISAT-2BR1 carries a synthetic aperture radar (SAR) payload, which transmits radio signals towards the Earth's surface and records how they are reflected back towards the satellite. Processing echoes detected from the original signal allows the satellite to build up a profile of the ground below it.
- Because RISAT uses radio waves – transmitted from the satellite – instead of visible light from the Sun to illuminate the Earth, it can collect images even when it is night in the location to be observed.
- Apart from being used for military purposes, RISAT-2BR1 has applications in fields such as agriculture and disaster management support and has a mission life of five years.

RISAT Series

- The RISAT spacecraft complement India's optical imaging satellites, such as the Cartosat series. Within the RISAT program, there are two separate series of satellites. RISAT-2 (and now 2B) spacecraft carry X-band payloads. The original RISAT-2 satellite was launched in April 2009.
- The current launch followed the launch of the first RISAT-2B series satellite, simply named RISAT-2B, in May 2019.
- RISAT-1 satellites, by contrast, operate in the lower-frequency C-band. RISAT-1 was launched in April 2012 but failed after four and a half years on orbit. A replacement, RISAT-1A, is due to launch next year.
- After the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, the RISAT 2 launch was fast tracked over RISAT 1 for only reason – its X Band Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) whose main application is "defence intelligence" and "homeland defence".

Haryana Police Launches Trakea

- Haryana Police has adopted a unique barcoding software — Trakea — to ensure that thousands of forensic reports that form the backbone of the criminal investigation system and subsequent trials in the courts of law are not tampered with.
- According to the police, Trakea is different from traditional methods that the state police force has been following for decades.

The Traditional System

- As per the conventional practice all over the country, the crime exhibits (samples/parcels) are labeled with complete details, including the case FIR number; the police station; and the names and addresses of the victim, accused, medical officers, etc. With these details available, the crime exhibits can be easily traced and tracked by virtually anyone.
- The crime exhibits could include DNA samples, documents, and reports of ballistics examinations, serology, biology, toxicology, lie-detection, etc. From the time the sample is collected to the time when forensic experts draw their final conclusion, there are multiple stages where the accused can use their influence to tamper with the sample in order to get a favourable forensic report.

Trakea

- Trakea is aimed at ensuring security and a tamperproof tracking system for forensic reports. It streamlines the functioning of Forensic Science Laboratories.
- Essentially, it is a forensic evidence management system that helps in automation of the entire procedure, right from the stage when forensic experts collect vital samples from the scene of crime to conducting analysis of the samples, followed by tracking casewise forensic reports electronically through barcodes.
- Due to the unique barcoding, only the authorised investigating officers and forensic science experts shall be able to track the crime exhibits and scientific examination reports, reducing the chances of tampering/leakage of the report at any stage.

ASI Discovers Earliest Epigraphic Evidence For Saptamatrikas

- In a significant find, the Epigraphy Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India has discovered the earliest epigraphic evidence so far for the Saptamatrika cult.
- Saptamatrikas are a group of seven female deities worshipped in Hinduism as personifying the energy of their respective consorts. They are Brahmani (wife of Brahma), Maheshvari (wife of Shiva), Kaumari (wife of Kumara), Vaishnavi (wife of Vishnu), Varahi (wife of Varaha, or the boar, an avatar [incarnation] of Vishnu), Indrani (wife of Indra), and Chamunda, or Yami (wife of Yama).
- The inscription is in Sanskrit and in Brahmi characters and was issued by Satavahana king Vijaya in 207 A.D. It is also the earliest Sanskrit inscription to have been discovered in South India as on date.
- So far, the Nagarjunakonda inscription of Ikshavaku king Ehavala Chantamula issued in his 11th regnal year corresponding to the 4th century A.D. was considered the earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India.
- The inscription records the construction of a prasada (temple), a mandapa and consecration of images on the southern side of the temple by a person named Kartika for the merit of the king at the temple of Bhagavathi (Goddess) Saktimatruka (Saptamatrika) at Tambrapē; Tambrapē being the ancient name of Chebrolou.

- There are references of Saptamatrika worship in the early Kadamba copper plates and the early Chalukyas and Eastern Chalukya copper plates. But the new discovery predates them by almost 200 years.
- The place also yielded another inscription which is in Prakrit language and of Brahmi characters and belongs to the 1st century A.D.
- This is the earliest epigraphic reference to Mutts and records the gift of a cloister mandapa and chaitya to the bhavatho (Lord) of the Gadasa Mutt by a person hailing from Tabaava.

Satavahanas

- The Satavahanas, also referred to as the Andhras in the Puranas, were an ancient Indian dynasty based in the Deccan region.
- Most modern scholars believe that the Satavahana rule began in the late second century BCE and lasted until the early third century CE, although some assign the beginning of their rule to as early as the 3rd century BCE based on the Puranas, but uncorroborated by archaeological evidence.
- The Satavahana kingdom mainly comprised the present-day Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. At different times, their rule extended to parts of modern Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. The dynasty had different capital cities at different times, including Pratishthana (Paithan) and Amaravati (Dharanikota).
- The dynasty reached its zenith under the rule of Gautamiputra Satakarni and his successor Vasisthiputra Pulamavi. The kingdom fragmented into smaller states by the early 3rd century CE.
- The Satavahanas were early issuers of Indian state coinage struck with images of their rulers. They formed a cultural bridge and played a vital role in trade and the transfer of ideas and culture to and from the Indo-Gangetic Plain to the southern tip of India.
- They supported Brahmanism as well as Buddhism, and patronised Prakrit literature.

Hornbill Festival

- The Hornbill Festival also called the 'Festival of Festivals', is a celebration held every year from 1 to 10 December, in Nagaland.
- The 10-day festival, which also coincides with the Statehood Day of Nagaland, is an annual tourism promotional event to showcase Nagaland's rich cultural heritage in all its ethnicity, and diversity.
- Nagaland attained statehood with the enactment of the State of Nagaland Act in 1962 by Parliament and the state of Nagaland was formally inaugurated on December 1, 1963.
- The festival is a tribute to the great Hornbill, which is the most admired and revered bird for the Nagas for its qualities of alertness and grandeur.
- The majestic bird is closely identified with the social and cultural life of the Nagas as reflected in tribal folklore, dances and songs.
- The festival is a cultural extravaganza to revive, protect and preserve the richness and uniqueness of the Naga heritage, while for the visitors to this event it is a means to comprehensively understand the Naga people, their land and culture.

126th Constitutional Amendment Bill

Parliament has passed the Constitutional 126th Amendment Bill, extending reservation for SC/STs but doing away with the provision for nomination of Anglo Indians to Lok Sabha and some state Assemblies.

About Anglo-Indians

- The Anglo-Indian community in India traces its origins to an **official policy of the British East India Company** to encourage marriages of its officers with local women. The term Anglo-Indian first appeared in the **Government of India Act, 1935**.
- In the present context, **Article 366(2)** of the Constitution Of India states that an Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein.

Legislative/ Constitutional Provisions In Relation To Anglo Indians:

- Provision for nomination of two Anglo-Indians to Lok Sabha is made under **Article 331** of the Constitution. It says that notwithstanding anything in **Article 81**, the President may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community is not adequately represented in the House of the people, nominate not more than **two members** of that community to the House of the People.
- **Article 333** deals with representation of the Anglo-Indian community in Legislative Assemblies. It says that notwithstanding anything in **Article 170**, the Governor of a State may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community needs representation in the Legislative Assembly of the State and is not adequately represented therein, **nominate one member** of that community to the Assembly.
- Currently **14 Assemblies** have one Anglo-Indian member each. However, the 126th Amendment does away with this as well.
- Further, according to the **10th Schedule of the Constitution**, Anglo-Indian members of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies can take the membership of any party **within six months of their nomination**. But, once they do so, they are bound by their party whip.
- The Anglo-Indian members **enjoy the same powers** as others, but they **cannot vote in the Presidential election** because they are nominated by the President.

CONTESTED COUNT

296 Number of people who identified themselves as belonging to the sect Anglo Indian, according to 2011 Census data cited by the All India Anglo Indian Association. The Association asserts that there are many more Anglo-Indians in the country.

STATE-WISE ENUMERATION

West Bengal	9
Odisha	4
Chhattisgarh	3
Maharashtra	16
Andhra Pradesh	62
Karnataka	9
Kerala	124
Tamil Nadu	69

(Source: All India Anglo Indian Association)

Rule 12: Transaction of Business Rules

To revoke President's Rule in Maharashtra, the government had used a special Rule 12 in the Union government's Transaction of Business Rules, 1961.

About Rule 12

- It allows for **revocation of President's Rule without Cabinet approval**, if the Prime Minister deems it necessary. The Cabinet can subsequently give **post-facto approval** for any decision taken under Rule 12.
- **Rule 12** is usually not used to arrive at major decisions by the government. However, it has been used in matters such as withdrawal of an office memorandum or signing of MoUs in the past.
- The last big decision taken through the invocation of Rule 12 was **re-organisation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir** into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Impeachment of USA President

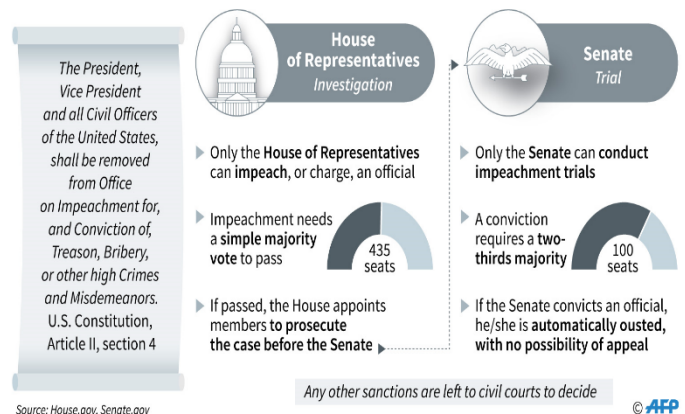
- Recently, the US House of Representatives (lower house) impeached President Donald Trump. With this he has become the third US President to be impeached. The first was Andrew Johnson in 1868 and then Bill Clinton in 1998. However, till date, no US president has been removed from office as a result of impeachment.
- The real challenge lies ahead, when the Senate, which has a composition of 53 Republicans and 45 Democrats and two Independents.
- The House of Representatives has impeached Trump on two counts, both of which are related to the Ukraine scandal. The charges are: obstruction of Congress and pressuring Ukraine's President to open an investigation against Trump's political rival and former Vice-President Joe Biden (Democrat's Presidential candidate for 2020 election).

About Impeachment

- According to the US Constitution, while the House of Representatives has the sole power of impeachment, the Senate (Upper House) has the sole power to try all impeachments.
- The President can be removed from office for treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanours. What constitutes these 'high crimes' and 'misdemeanours', however, is not clearly spelt out.
- The New York Times has explained that the expression 'high crimes and misdemeanours' essentially means an abuse of power by a high-level public official. This does not necessarily have to be a violation of an ordinary criminal statute. Historically, in the US, it has encompassed corruption and other abuses, including trying to obstruct judicial proceedings.
- It begins with an investigation by a House committee. If they find that there is enough evidence of wrongdoing, it will refer the matter to the full House.
- When the full House votes, if one or more of the articles of impeachment gets a majority vote, the President is impeached. Next, the proceedings move to the Senate.
- The Senate holds a trial, overseen by the Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. A team of lawmakers from the House, known as managers, play the role of prosecutors. The President has defence lawyers, and the Senate serves as the jury. If at least two-thirds of the Senators present find the President guilty, he is removed and the Vice President takes over as President.

The US impeachment process

Under the US Constitution, a federal official suspected of serious wrongdoing can be prosecuted by Congress



Suspension Of Members From Legislature

- During, the last session of the Parliament, Lok Sabha Speaker suspended two Congress members after unruly scenes in the House.
- In February 2014, then Speaker Meira Kumar had suspended 18 MPs from (undivided) Andhra Pradesh following pandemonium/ chaos in the House. The suspended MPs were either supporting or opposing the creation of the separate state of Telangana.

Rules In Relation To Suspension Of Members

- **Rule 378** of the Rules for the Conduct of Business states that the Speaker shall preserve order and shall have all powers necessary for the purpose of enforcing own decisions.
- Further, **Rule 373** says that the Speaker, if is of the opinion that the conduct of any member is grossly disorderly, may direct such member to withdraw immediately from the House, and any member so ordered to withdraw shall do so forthwith and shall remain absent during remainder of the day's sitting.
- Similarly, according to **Rule 374A** in the event of grave disorder occasioned by a member coming into the well of the House or abusing the Rules of the House persistently and wilfully obstructing its business by shouting slogans or otherwise, such member shall, on being named by the Speaker, stand automatically suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less.
- In December 2018, Lok Sabha's Rules Committee recommended automatic suspension of members who entered the well of the House or wilfully obstructed business by shouting slogans despite being repeatedly warned by the Chair.
- However, rules aside, it is often expediency rather than principles, which shapes the stand of a party on the issue. The ruling party of the day invariably insists on the maintenance of discipline and the opposition on its right to protest. And their positions change when their roles flip.

Misuse of RTI Act

Recently, CJI S.A. Bobde called for a **filter to check abuse of the Right to Information (RTI) Act** as it has created a paralysis and fear in bureaucracy.

Issues In Relation To RTI

- The Act may be used to **blackmail public functionaries** which makes them unable to take decisions objectively.
- Large number of **frivolous RTI applications** are being filed affecting efficiency of governance.
- The Act poses **threat to national security** as anybody, without establishing their locus, can ask questions on sensitive issues such as missile programs and international relations.

Related Studies And Facts

- However, two national studies carried out by the **RTI Assessment and Advocacy Group (RaaG)** in collaboration with the **National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information (NCPRI)** has noted following facts:
 - a.) Less than **1% applications are frivolous**.
 - b.) Majority of applicants sought basic information about actions of government, functioning of public authorities & use of public resources.
 - c.) A **little over 1% applications only require vast information**, which could divert time.
 - d.) **70% of the information** sought should have been **made public proactively**.
 - e.) Moreover, **Section 8** of the Act that clearly spells out the exceptions can be used in matters of national importance.

Green Good Movement

- It is a **societal movement** launched by the **Union Ministry for Environment, Forest & Climate Change** to protect environment and promote good living in the country.
- The movement has also been **accepted by the BRICS group** in its various meetings.
- The movement was formally launched with the nation-wide campaign in **January 2018**.
- It is a societal movement where **small positive actions** are to be performed by **individuals or organisations** to strengthen the cause of environmental protection.
- The Ministry has drawn up a list of **over 500 Green Good Deeds** and asked people to alter their behaviour to Green Good Behaviour to fulfil their **Green Social Responsibility**.
- Moreover, these small, positive actions, to be performed by individuals or organisations to strengthen the cause of environmental protection have been put up on a mobile App named '**Dr Harsh Vardhan**'.

Global Climate Risk Index, 2020

India is the **fifth most vulnerable country globally** to climate change, according to Global Climate Risk Index, 2020. Moreover, as per the Index, India has also recorded the **highest number of fatalities** due to climate change and the **second highest monetary losses** from its impact in 2018.

About The Index

- The **Global Climate Risk Index 2020** is published by **environmental think tank Germanwatch** which assessed **181 countries** and quantified impacts of climate change through economic losses, losses to GDP and fatalities to arrive at a ranking.
- The Index is based on data from the **Munich Re NatCatSERVICE**, one of the largest databases on natural catastrophes.

		 Climate Risk Index 2020					
Ranking 2018 (2017)	Country	CRI score	Death toll	Deaths per 100 000 inhabitants	Absolute losses (in million US\$ PPP)	Losses per unit GDP in %	Human Development Index 2018 Ranking
1 (36)	Japan	5.50	1 282	1.01	35 839.34	0.64	19
2 (20)	Philippines	11.17	455	0.43	4 547.27	0.48	113
3 (40)	Germany	13.83	1 246	1.50	5 038.62	0.12	5
4 (7)	Madagascar	15.83	72	0.27	568.10	1.32	161
5 (14)	India	18.17	2 081	0.16	37 807.82	0.36	130
6 (2)	Sri Lanka	19.00	38	0.18	3 626.72	1.24	76
7 (45)	Kenya	19.67	113	0.24	708.39	0.40	142
8 (87)	Rwanda	21.17	88	0.73	93.21	0.34	158
9 (42)	Canada	21.83	103	0.28	2 282.17	0.12	12
10 (96)	Fiji	22.50	8	0.90	118.61	1.14	92

Other Points In Relation To The Report

- Index has found **Japan to be the most vulnerable** followed by **Philippines, Germany, Madagascar and India**.
- The **southwest monsoon in 2018** severely affected India, Kerala was especially impacted where 324 people died because of drowning or being buried in the landslides set off by the flooding.
- Further, as per the Index, over 2,20,000 people had to leave their homes, 20,000 houses and 80 dams were destroyed due to climate change.
- The Index has **another set of ranking for the period 1999-2018**, which is based on **average values over a twenty-year period**. In the 1999 to 2018 period **Puerto Rico is the most vulnerable** followed by Myanmar, Haiti, Philippines and Pakistan. **India is ranked 17th** under long term vulnerability.

Blue Flag Certification For 13 Beaches

- Union Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change has embarked upon a programme for **Blue Flag certification** for select beaches in the country.

- For the same, **13 pilot beaches** have been identified for the certification, in consultation with concerned coastal states and Union Territories.
- These beaches are as follows- **Ghoghala beach** (Diu), **Shivrajpur beach** (Gujarat), **Bhogave** (Maharashtra), **Padubidri and Kasarkod** (Karnataka), **Kappad beach** (Kerala), **Kovalam beach** (Tamil Nadu), **Eden beach** (Puducherry), **Rushikonda beach** (Andhra Pradesh), **Miramar beach** (Goa), **Golden beach** (Odisha), **Radhanagar beach** (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and **Bangaram beach** (Lakshadweep).
- Recently, the **Chandrabhaga beach** in Orissa was Asia's first to get 'Blue Flag' tag.

About Blue Flag Certification

- This certification is accorded by an international **agency 'Foundation for Environment Education, Denmark'**.
- The certification is based on **33 stringent criteria** under **four major heads** i.e. Environmental Education and Information; Bathing Water Quality; Environment Management and Conservation and; Safety and Services in the beaches.
- The 'Blue Flag' beach is an **eco-tourism model** endeavouring to provide to the tourists/beach goers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, safe and healthy environment and sustainable development of the area.
- **Spain has the highest number** of blue flag beaches followed by **Greece and France**.

IUCN Says Species Under Increasing Threat From Climate Change

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in its updated **Red List of threatened species report** says that the world is already facing the threat of habitat destruction, hundreds of plant and animal species are now under further pressure from manmade climate change.
- IUCN has added **1,840 new species** to its catalogue of plants and animals that risk extinction. The list now contains more than **30,000 species** under threat of disappearing.
- Further, as per the report more than **one million species** are now at risk of vanishing as insatiable human demand puts them in danger of habitat loss, overexploitation, pollution and climate change. Moreover, rising temperatures have already contributed to the declines of several freshwater fish and sharks.
- The latest updated report also showed that 37 percent of Australia's freshwater fish species were threatened with extinction. **For ex.-** Stocks of the **Short-tail nurse shark** have declined around 80 percent in the last 30 years. Its shallow water habitat is being degraded as the ocean warms.
- The report, however highlight a small handful of conservation successes, including the **recovery of the Guam Rail**, a bird previously listed as extinct in the wild.

IUCN Red List Categories:

- The IUCN Red List has **nine categories** extend from Not Evaluated to Extinct.
- The IUCN system uses a set of **five quantitative criteria** to assess the extinction risk of a given species i.e. the rate of population decline; the geographic range; whether the species already possesses a small population size; whether the species is very small or lives in a restricted area and whether the results of a quantitative analysis indicate a high probability of extinction in the wild.

Government Mulls Initiating National Coastal Mission

- The Central government is contemplating setting up a **National Coastal Mission** under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)** to address the impact of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems.
- Through the mission, the government aims to **protect shorelines and communities in coastal areas** against extreme weather conditions.
- **NAPCC is a comprehensive action plan**, which outlines measures on climate change-related adaptation and mitigation while simultaneously advancing development.

About The Proposed Mission

- The Mission aims to address impact of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems, infrastructure and communities in coastal areas through a **combination of adaptation and mitigation measures**.
- Some of these **measures may include** strengthening natural shields against extreme weather conditions to protect shorelines, adaptation, improved employment generation opportunities for coastal communities to reduce pressure on coastal and marine ecosystems and enhancing productivity of coastal and marine ecosystems in a sustainable manner.
- Earlier, the government had launched **Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project** in 2010 to conserve, protect and manage coastal and marine ecosystems, pollution abatement and livelihood security of the coastal communities with the assistance of the World Bank.
- Impacts due to rise in sea level include, *inter alia* increased beach erosion, saltwater intrusion into groundwater, adverse impact on marine and coastal biodiversity, flooding of coastal habitats.

CoP 25

- The **annual climate change conference i.e. COP25** held in **Madrid** amid fresh warnings that the world has not been doing enough to save itself from catastrophic impacts of climate change.
- A series of reports from the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** and other agencies have been reiterating through the year that unless countries scale up their actions significantly, there is little hope of keeping **average global temperatures within 2°C** higher than pre-industrial trends.

Issues at CoP 25

- The CoP in Madrid with the prime objective of **completing the rule-book to the 2015 Paris Agreement** so that it starts getting implemented from next year.
- The **rulebook will contain** the processes, mechanisms and institutions through which the provisions of the Paris Agreement would be implemented, had been finalised in Katowice last year. But some of the issues had remained unresolved and had left for negotiators to settle in Madrid CoP. The most important one relates to the **tussle over new carbon markets** to be created under the Paris Agreement.
- Besides this the other pending issues in Madrid are like those related to **ensuring transparency in the processes and methods of reporting information**.
- Developing countries also tried to ensure that there is greater appreciation and recognition of the **issue of loss and damage**. They are trying to institute a mechanism to compensate countries that suffer major losses due to climate change-induced events like cyclones or floods.

- Lastly, the issue relating to the **demand for enhanced climate actions** also dominated the talks.

About Carbon Market

- A **carbon market** allows countries, or industries, to earn carbon credits for emission reductions they make in excess of what is required of them. These **credits can be traded to the highest bidder** in exchange of money.
- The **buyers of carbon credits** can show the emission reductions as their own and use them to meet their own emission reduction targets.
- A carbon market already existed under the **1997 Kyoto Protocol**. In the last one decade, as several countries walked out of the Kyoto Protocol and no one was feeling compelled to meet their emission reduction targets and thus the **demand for carbon credits had waned**. As a result, developing countries like India, China and Brazil had accumulated huge amounts of carbon credits. These credits are now in danger of getting redundant.

Opposite Views On Carbon Credit

- **Brazil has been arguing** that these accumulated carbon credits should remain valid under the new carbon market to be instituted. India, which has **accumulated 750 million certified emission reductions (CERs)**, is backing Brazil's position on this.
- But the **developed countries have been resisting** this, claiming that the weak verification mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol had allowed dubious projects to earn credits.

Final Analysis

- After two weeks of negotiations (COP25 was the longest Conference of Parties ever) the meet was a **spectacular failure**.
- The failure of the talks **underlined starkly the massive gap** between what scientists say the world's nations need to do on climate change and what the most powerful political leaders on the planet are prepared to even discuss, let alone actually do.
- Further, it is entirely appropriate for countries such as India to insist on not taking on an even more unfair share of the global mitigation burden unless developed countries deliver on the minimal parameter of fulfilling their existing promises.
- Thus, it is crucial that **India should continue to push developed countries** for taking active steps to combat climate change as the entire global climate action framework has been put in jeopardy by the inaction of big polluters.

Space Force: A New US Military Service

President Donald Trump has officially funded a Pentagon force focused on warfare in space - the US Space Force. The new military service, the first in more than 70 years, **falls under the US Air Force**.

Key Highlights

- The Space Force would comprise around 16,000 Air Force and civilian personnel.
- It will be led by Air Force General Jay Raymond, who currently runs SpaceCom.
- It will protect US assets in space - such as the hundreds of satellites used for communication and surveillance.
- It comes as US military chiefs see China and Russia making advancements in the military final frontier.

Why India Need a Space Security Policy?

- Several recent trends are impacting the security and sustainability of outer space activities.
- These include: the massive growth in the number and diversity of actors operating in outer space, including governments and the private sector; the proliferation of hazardous space debris; and increasing dependence on outer space in the civilian, government and military sectors.
- Hence, there exists a possibility of intentional tampering with such assets and the associated ground setup, either by state or non-state actors.
- The threat to space assets is directly proportional to degree of nation's dependence on the assets. Higher the dependence the greater will be threat and the vulnerability.
- The rapidly changing global space order makes it important that India formulates an effective policy to secure its interests in space.

*[For further discussion on topics such as **India's Adherence to Space Norms, Mission Shakti** etc. please refer the mains Q&A section of **The Recitals for the month of July 2019**]*

Distinction Between Militarisation and Weaponisation of Space

- A distinction must be made between “**militarisation of space**” and the “**weaponisation of space**”. These terms are sometimes used as if they were interchangeable, but they are not.
- While there are no specifically deployed weapons in space yet, there are satellites that could be manoeuvred to act as weapons to disable or destroy the space assets of others.
- Therefore, when considering questions of space security, it must be recognised that though space has not yet been specifically weaponised, it is already heavily militarized.

International Treaty to Combat Cybercrime

Context:

- The United Nations General Assembly has **approved a resolution** that aims to **create a new international convention on cybercrime**.
- The resolution was approved over **objections from both the European Union and the United States**.

Key Highlights:

- It was a **Russian-sponsored** resolution. It was approved by a 79-60 vote with 33 abstentions.
- The resolution creates a committee of experts representing all regions of the world.
- The committee thus formed will elaborate a comprehensive international convention on **countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes**.
- The committee is scheduled to meet in August 2020 to agree on an agenda for its upcoming activities.

Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

- It is the first international treaty which seeks to address cybercrime by harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations.
- It was drawn up by the **Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France**.
- Countries like **India and Brazil have not adopted** the convention on the grounds that they did not participate in its drafting.
- Russia opposes the Convention, stating that adoption would violate Russian sovereignty.

Why EU And U.S Opposed The Resolution

- They fear that the language in the resolution will **allow for crackdowns** on expression.

- According to them, this resolution will **undermine international cooperation** to combat cyber-crime at a time when enhanced coordination is essential.
- Representatives of EU and USA pointed out that the **existing expert group on cybercrime was already discussing whether a new treaty was needed**.
- Hence, it is wrong to make a political decision on a new treaty before these cybercrime experts can give their advice.
- USA suggested that the world should **expand the accord on existing 2001 Budapest Convention**.

Fear Expressed Over the Resolution By Other Civil Society Organizations:

- "Use of ICT for criminal purposes" is **not defined** in the resolution. Keeping the term undefined **opens the door to criminalising ordinary online behaviour** that is protected under international human rights law.
- There is only **one reference of to human rights in the draft resolution** which simply reaffirms the importance of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the use of ICTs. Many analysts believe that this **reference is insufficient to safeguard human rights while countering cybercrime**.
- Many experts, however, are **not convinced that** there is a need for a **new international convention on cybercrime**. Building on and improving existing instruments is more desirable and practical.
- There is no need to divert already scarce resources into the pursuit of a new international framework, which is likely to stretch over many years and unlikely to result in consensus.
- Countering cybercrime is **necessarily a multi-stakeholder endeavour**. It requires government officials and experts, members of the technical community, civil society, the private sector, and scientific and research institutions.
- The **establishment of an ad hoc intergovernmental committee** of experts to address the issue of cybercrime would exclude key stakeholders, which in turn will defy the objective.

Eight West African Countries Renamed Common Currency

- Eight West African countries have announced a new common currency to end French dominance from the region. This new currency will come into circulation in 2020.
- The new common currency has been named as "Eco". The currently prevalent currency in these countries was '**CFA franc**'.
- The CFA franc, created in 1945, was seen by many as a **sign of French interference** in its former African colonies even after the countries became independent.
- **The Eight countries are** - Mali, Niger, Senegal, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Ivory Coast.

CFA franc:

- The CFA franc was **initially pegged to the French franc**. Later, **CFA franc's value was moored to the euro** after its introduction two decades ago, at a **fixed rate of 655.96 CFA francs to one euro**.
- The Bank of France holds half of the currency's total reserves, but France does not make money on its deposits stewardship, annually paying a ceiling interest rate of 0.75 percent to member states.
- The arrangement guarantees unlimited convertibility of CFA francs into euros and facilitates inter-zone transfers.

- CFA notes and coins are printed and minted at a Bank of France facility in the southern town of Chamalieres.

Ethiopia Launches First Satellite

- Ethiopia has launched its first satellite from a space station in China.
- A Chinese Long March 4B rocket hoisted the **first Ethiopian Remote Sensing Satellite (ETRSS-1)** aloft from the Taiyuan space base in northern China.
- The satellite was developed by the Chinese Academy of Space Technology with the help of 21 Ethiopian scientists.
- The launch makes **Ethiopia the eleventh African country** to have a satellite into space. **Egypt was the first in 1998.**

China-Brazil Earth Resource Satellite-4A (CBERS-4A)

- An Earth observation satellite jointly developed by China and Brazil was launched into space.
 - The **China-Brazil Earth Resource Satellite 4A** was launched on a Long March 4B rocket in the northern Chinese province of Shanxi.
 - The CBERS 4A will support the **Brazilian government's monitoring of the Amazon rainforest** and changes in the country's environment.
 - The satellite was the **sixth developed under the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) programme** that began in 1988. The satellites are designed for Earth observation from orbit for non-military use.
- BRICS nations have been in talks on a framework agreement to **create a constellation of satellites for Earth remote-sensing and share data** obtained by each others' satellites.
 - CBERS programme can serve as a **template for broader cooperation among BRICS nations.**

World's Newest Nation: Bougainville

- The South Pacific region of Bougainville has voted overwhelmingly to gain independence from Papua New Guinea. Around 98% of eligible voters voted to get independent from Papua New Guinea.
- It is largest island of the Solomon Islands Archipelago. It has a huge reserve of minerals especially Copper and Gold.

What Next?

- The referendum is nonbinding, and independence would then need to be negotiated between leaders from Bougainville and Papua New Guinea.
- The final say would then go to lawmakers in the Papua New Guinea Parliament. The process of becoming a separate nation could take years to achieve.
- However, the scale of the victory for the pro-independence side will heap pressure on Port Moresby to recognise the result.

Background:

- The violence in Bougainville began in the late 1980s, triggered by conflict over an enormous opencast copper mine at Panguna.

- The mine was a huge export earner for Papua New Guinea, but many in Bougainville felt they received no benefit and resented the pollution and disruption of their traditional way of living.
- Later in 2001 a peace agreement was signed that ended a civil war between separatists and Papua New Guinea security forces. The referendum is linked to that agreement.

Process of Becoming a Country

- **Declare independence** - To establish a new country, the country must first satisfy the international laws rules that all free countries generally acknowledge and follow set forth by the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, adopted in 1933.
- **Gain recognition** - In order to be legitimate, a new country must be recognized by existing states within the international community. Each existing state bestows recognition at its own discretion, and several entities (including Taiwan, Palestine and Kosovo) are recognized as legitimate states by some countries, but not by others.
- **Join the United Nations** - The United Nations asserts that, because it itself is not a country, it **does not possess any authority to recognize** a state or government. However, being admitted into the U.N. goes a long way toward a new country becoming recognized by the international community.

Montevideo Convention

- The convention lists the criteria for a country to become independent and declare its sovereignty.
- It **strictly prohibits the use of military force to gain sovereignty**.

Ukraine And Russia Agree To Implement Ceasefire

- Ukraine and Russia have agreed to implement a **"full and comprehensive" ceasefire** in eastern Ukraine by the end of 2019.
- This decision was taken at Paris Summit which was mediated by Germany and France.

What Was Agreed?

- The countries agreed to the release and exchange of all "conflict-related detainees" by the end of the year.
- They also pledged to disengage military forces in three additional regions of Ukraine by the end of March 2020, without specifying which regions would be affected.
- Ukraine and Russia **failed to agree on a timetable for elections** in eastern Ukraine.

What Triggered The Deadly Conflict?

- Pro-Russian separatists **seized control of large swathes of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in April 2014**, just after Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.
- It was an insurgency **against the new pro-Western authorities** in the capital Kyiv, who had ousted the pro-Russian President, Viktor Yanukovych, in street protests dubbed the **"Maidan Revolution"**.

Background:

- The Paris meeting aimed to get a **2015 peace agreement** signed by Ukraine and Russia **in Minsk** back on track.
- Brokered with help from France and Germany, the accord called for the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the restoration of Kyiv's control over its borders, and wider autonomy and local elections for the separatist regions.

- The last time the four national leaders gathered in the so-called **Normandy format** was in 2016.

Long March-5

- China has successfully launched its largest new carrier rocket Long March-5. The rocket has carried payload **Shijian-20**, an eight-ton technological demonstration satellite, into geostationary orbit.
- The Long March-5 is the China's most powerful rocket and can carry a maximum payload of 25 tonnes into low Earth orbit and 14 tonnes into geosynchronous orbit.
- The successful launch is a major step forward for China's planned **mission to Mars in 2020**.

Palestine-India Techno Park

India has released third tranche of funding, worth \$3 million, for the construction of a Palestine-India Techno Park.

Background:

- India and Palestine had signed a MoU for setting up a Palestine-India Techno Park in Ramallah in October 2016.
- Under this, India had made a commitment of investing over \$12 million with payment of \$3 million each on half-yearly basis for two years.
- In 2017, the park became a member of the **International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP)**, a global network of science and technology parks.

About The Palestine-India techno park:

- The park will be located next to the Birzeit University Academic Campus.
- It is meant to create a national business environment and culture "that will enable **knowledge-based and creative enterprises** as well as technology clusters to successfully operate locally, regionally and globally".
- Once completed, the Techno park will **serve as an IT hub in Palestine** with complete IT facilities offering a one-stop solution to all IT-related service requirements.

India's Stand on Palestine

- In 1988, India was **one of the first countries to recognise** the state of Palestine after the Palestinian National Congress declared independence.
- At that time, India maintained its support for the **two-state solution and championed a "sovereign, independent, united" Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem**.
- In 1996, India **opened its Representative Office** to the State of Palestine in Gaza, which was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.
- In July 2017, Prime Minister **Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Palestine**.

Reasons for India's Pro-Palestine Policy

- India has a considerable number of Muslim Population, which has been always sympathetic to the Muslim population in Palestine.

- Many Indian are working in Arab countries which are a good source of foreign remittances. India does not want to jeopardise the interest of its citizens working in these countries.
- India's energy security largely depends on the oil imported from Arab countries.
- India's imperative to counter Pakistan with the support of Arab nations was another reason for our pro-Palestine policy.

Second India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

Context

- **Defence Minister** Rajnath Singh and **External Affairs Minister** Dr S Jaishankar met **US Secretary of Defense** Dr Mark T Esper and **Secretary of State** Michael R Pompeo in Washington for the **second annual India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**.
- The **inaugural round** held in September 2018 between then-Ministers of External Affairs and Defence Sushma Swaraj and Nirmala Sitharaman, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and then-Secretary of Defence James Mattis.

About 2+2 Dialogue

- This 2+2 Ministerial is the **highest-level institutional mechanism** between the two countries.
- It provides for a **review of the security, defence and strategic partnership** between India and the United States.

Key Highlights

- Both sides reiterated their commitment to advancing a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.
- Both sides also committed to further **deepen military-to-military cooperation**, including between the Indian Navy and the US Navy Fleets under US Indo-Pacific Command, Central Command, and Africa Command and intend to expand similar cooperation between their respective Armies and Air Forces.
- The two sides also applauded the establishment of the new tri-service, amphibious exercise – TIGER TRIUMPH. The Ministers decided to **hold TIGER TRIUMPH annually**, in formats to be decided mutually.
- The two sides concluded the **Industrial Security Annex (ISA)** during the visit. ISA will facilitate the **exchange of classified military information** between Indian and the U.S. defense industries.
- Priority initiatives have been identified for execution under the **Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) programme**.
- The two sides also concluded a **standard operating procedure** for setting forth implementation guidelines for projects under **DTTI and the Industry-to-Industry Framework**.
- These measures are expected to provide momentum to collaboration between the private defence industries of both India and the US.
- The Ministers applauded **growing exports of U.S. LNG**, crude oil, and other energy products to India, totaling \$6.7 billion to date.
- Memorandum of Understanding was signed between **India's Ministry of Jal Shakti and the U.S. Geological Survey** to promote technical cooperation in areas such as water quality and management.

Analysis

- **Finalization of Industrial Security Annex (ISA)** would enable US arms manufacturers to **transfer sensitive technologies** to entities beyond the Indian public sector, to even corresponding partners in the private sector.
- The ISA will go a **long way in actualising the DTTI** – set up in 2015 under the Barack Obama administration to move New Delhi and Washington **from a traditional “buyer-seller” dynamic to one of co-production and co-development**.
- Actualising US-India DTTI would give a **fillip to the ‘Make in India’ projects** in the defence sector “collectively worth over Rs 3.5 lakh crore”.
- These projects are either stuck or still meandering through different stages, without the final contracts to launch production being inked.

India-China Border Talks

- Indian and Chinese representatives met in Delhi to discuss the international boundary between the two countries.
- This was the **22nd round of Special Representative-level (SR)** Indo-China border talks.
- During the 21st round of talks - held at Chegndu in China last year - both sides resolved to **“intensify” and “advance” dialogue** for an early settlement of the boundary dispute.
- SR talks are the **highest official-level forum** with a mandate to discuss not only solutions to the boundary issue but also **those for other issues concerning the two countries**.
- The India-China border dispute covers 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of southern Tibet, something India fiercely contests.

India, Afghanistan and Iran Discussion on the Chabahar Agreement

Context

- The **second meeting** of the Follow-up Committee for implementation of the trilateral Chabahar Agreement between India, Afghanistan and Iran was held in New Delhi.
- The Third Follow-up Committee meeting will be held in India in the first half of 2020 followed by the 2nd Coordination Council meeting.

Key Highlights

- It was agreed to include Mormugoa and New Mangalore Port from India; in addition to JNPT, Mundra, Kandla and Cochin as part of designated route under the Chabahar Agreement.
- A study will be conducted by Federation of Freight Forwarders’ Associations in India (FFFAI) to **streamline cargo transit through Shahid Beheshti Port, Chabahar**.
- It was agreed to **finalise the protocol to harmonise** transit, roads, customs and consular matters. Till that time, the **TIR Convention will continue** to be used for cargo movement.

Background

- India Ports Global Ltd company took over of the port operations at Shaheed Beheshti Port at Chabahar in December 2018.

- Since then, the port has handled 5 lakh tons of cargo. It includes exports from Afghanistan from the port that began in February 2019.
- India Ports Global Pvt. Ltd is a joint venture between Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and Kandla Port Trust.

[For detailed discussion on Chabahar port, please refer the topic "**India-Iran**" from the Yellow Book on International Relation]

Lahore-Wagah Train Service Resumes Operation

- The shuttle train service between Lahore and Wagah railway station resumed operation after a gap of 22 years.
- The train service was operation till 1997 but was closed due to certain operational & security reasons.
- The service would provide hassle-free commute to hundreds of visitors intending to witness the flag hoisting and lowering ceremony at Wagah or visiting Jallo Park.

11th Delhi Dialogue & 6th Indian Ocean Dialogue

- The **Ministry of External Affairs** hosted the **6th Indian Ocean Dialogue** and **Delhi Dialogue XI** at the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra in New Delhi on December 13 and 14, 2019.
- For the first time, these **two Track 1.5 dialogues**—which are key elements of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the India-ASEAN calendars respectively—**was held consecutively, and on similar, Indo-Pacific themes.**
- **Theme for Indian Ocean Dialogue** (organized with the assistance of the Indian Council for World Affairs) - "*Indo-Pacific: Re-imagining the Indian Ocean through an Expanded Geography*"
- **Theme for Delhi Dialogue XI** (organized with the assistance of the Research and Information System (RIS) for Developing Countries) - "*Advancing Partnership in Indo-Pacific*"

- **Track 1** is official.
- **Track 1.5** dialogue is unofficial and involves government staff as well as external experts.
- **Track 2** does not involve government at all.

India Expands Indo-Pacific Policy

- India is increasing the area covered by its Indo-Pacific policy to include the western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea.
- This means that ASEAN is not only the heart of the Indo-Pacific, but includes the Gulf States and Africa.
- It was announced by the External Affairs Minister of India at the end of the recently held Indian Ocean Dialogue in New Delhi.
- Since there is a multiplicity of views on the Indo-Pacific, there was merit in taking the idea outward with all stakeholders of the larger region.
- Indo-Pacific is a US construct that includes regions between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

6th Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) Between India And Maldives

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and Foreign Minister of Maldives Abdulla Shahid co-chaired the **6th JCM between India and Maldives**.

Key Highlights

- MoU Signed:
 - MoU on cooperation between the Election Commissions of India and Maldives
 - MoU on cooperation between the Financial Intelligence Units of India
 - Exchange of Instrument of Ratification for the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters
- Both sides agreed to **expand their maritime security and boost their anti-terror cooperation** in order to deal with the common challenges in Indian Ocean Region.
- India-Maldives defence cooperation includes **key infrastructure projects** such as **construction of the Composite Training Centre (CTC)** for the MNDF, and **Ministry of Defence Building**, and the setting up of the **Coastal Surveillance Radar System (CSRS)**, as well as training programmes for MNDF officials in India, joint exercises, medical camps, etc.
- Both sides reviewed the progress achieved in implementing the USD 1.4 billion economic package announced by India in December 2018.
- Noting with appreciation the training programmes being conducted by BCCI for development of cricket in Maldives, the **JCM reviewed the progress in the development of the cricket stadium in Hulhumale**.
- The **restoration of Hukuru Miskiiy / Friday Mosque** was identified as a priority and the JCM welcomed the fact that an Indian technical team is already in Male for its conservation.
- Both sides also discussed the organizing of the Festival of India in Maldives in 2020.

India, Japan Hold First 'Two-Plus-Two' Dialogue

- India and Japan held their **inaugural foreign and defence ministerial dialogue**.
- The dialogue was aimed to give further momentum to their special strategic partnership, particularly in the maritime domain.
- This **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue is an upgrade** of meeting between foreign and defence secretaries of two countries, which was taking place since 2010 between these two countries.
- The talks under the new framework are taking place following a decision taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe **during the 13th India-Japan annual summit** held in October 2018.

Key Highlights

- The two sides reiterated their commitment to advancing bilateral security cooperation **based on the 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation** and the **2009 Action Plan to advance Security Cooperation**.
- The Ministers emphasized the need to further strengthen the defence equipment and technology cooperation and looked forward to productive discussions in the **fifth Joint Working Group on Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation (JWG-DETC)**.

- The Japanese side appreciated India's announcement of "**Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**" at the recent 14th EAS to create a safe, secure, stable, prosperous and sustainable maritime domain.

Pact Between India-Japan in Steel Sector

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between the governments of India and Japan to constitute the '**India-Japan Steel Dialogue**'.
- The 'India-Japan Steel Dialogue' envisages **enhancement of mutual understanding to secure sustainable growth in the steel sector**.
- It aims to examine all aspects of cooperation in steel sector including **promotion of investment in high grade steel-making** and finding new avenues of steel usage in India.
- The MoC will help in **capacity building for high grade steel** manufacturing in India.

India & Sweden

Context

- King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of the **Kingdom of Sweden** paid a State Visit to India from 1-6 December 2019.
- This was his third visit to India, the earlier visits being in the years 1993 and 2005.
- Bilateral relations between India and Sweden are friendly and based on principles of democracy and transparency, right to freedom, and rule of law.
- India and Sweden have a bilateral trade turnover of US \$ 3.37 billion (2018) and cumulative investments of about US \$ 2.5 billion (since year 2000).

Key Highlights

- During the visit, both sides signed **three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)** and agreements for cooperation in the fields of polar science and maritime sphere.
- This will ensure **cooperation between the countries in both Arctic and Antarctic regions**.
- The Swedish King and Indian Prime Minister chaired the **India-Sweden High-Level Policy Dialogue on Innovation Policy**.
- This year marks 10 years of India-Sweden cooperation in healthcare. This year also marks **Sweden-India Year of Health**.
- Both sides also joined hands to **set up a healthcare innovation centre** to promote research, broadly in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and help scale-up Indian start-ups in the sector.
- This cooperation will strengthen India's efforts in finding innovative solutions for "affordable and accessible healthcare in India".

India & Australia Hold Third 2+2 Dialogue

- The third India-Australia Secretary-level 2+2 dialogue was held in New Delhi.
- India, Australia, Japan and the US had decided to upgrade their interactions in the "Quadrilateral" format to the ministerial level in September.
- This year's dialogue was held against this background and hence assumed more significance.
- The main focus of the dialogue was on the bilateral outcomes for Prime Minister Scott Morrison's visit in January 2020.

- The Indo-Pacific and the situation in the South China Sea also found prominence.
- Both sides also discussed issues related to bilateral defense engagements, areas towards enhancing cooperation in field of defense technology.

India, France To Carry Out Joint Patrolling In Indian Ocean

- India and France has decided to launch a **joint naval patrolling mission** in the Indian Ocean Region to protect their strategic interests and to check large-scale illegal fishing.
- This mission will **start in 2020** and assumes significance as China is expanding its naval influence in the region.
- The navies from the two countries will also ink a pact to **share classified information for better operational cooperation in the region**. This would be a rare occasion for France to have such an arrangement with a non-Nato country.
- With the two countries sharing the same political objectives in the IOR, the Indian and French navies have expanded the level and scope of their joint exercise to feature aircrafts carriers, submarines and amphibious warships on a regular basis.

U.S. Shuts Down WTO Appeals Court

The appellate branch of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body, sometimes called the supreme court of world trade, has stopped functioning from December 11, 2019.

Reason

- USA has blocked the appointment of new judges, leaving it **without the quorum of three needed to hear cases** due to mandatory retirements.
- The terms of two of the last three judges on the WTO's appellate body neared their end on the said date.

Possible Impact Of This Step

- Many analysts fear that losing its ultimate umpire would affect the process of final resolution of disputes at the World Trade Organization.
- The WTO's lower court — its dispute settlement body — can hear cases. But its decisions will **go nowhere if the loser appeals to a higher court** that is no longer functioning.
- Without having to worry about rebukes from the WTO, countries could use **tariffs and other sanctions to limit imports**. This would **promote protectionism and uncertainty** in global trade.
- Many believe that the very idea of a **rules based multilateral trading system** is at stake, as it would **push the system into power-based economic relationships**.
- Among the disputes **left in limbo are seven cases** that have been brought against Trump's decision of 2018 to **declare foreign steel and aluminum a threat to U.S. national security** and to hit them with import taxes. Analysts believe that US will be the biggest beneficiary of this step.

Criticism Of WTO's System For Settling Trade Disputes

- USA argues that the trade organization **constrains America's ability to counter unfair trading practices by China** and other countries.
- Critics say that **cases take too long to resolve**, that the panel often overreaches in its rulings.

- They also claim that the **Geneva-based agency is ill-equipped** to deal with the challenge posed by the Chinese economy's **unconventional blend of capitalism and state control**.
- Reforming WTO is a way out but it is hard to achieve, as it requires consensus from its 164 member countries.

Background

- The panel, originally, was supposed to have seven judges. However, United States, under Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, kept on blocking new appointments to show its discontent over the WTO's ruling.
- As a result, the seven-member body was cut down to a 3-member body in 2018.

SIPRI Report on Sales of Arms Worldwide

Context

- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has recently **released a report about sales of arms worldwide**.
- New data from SIPRI's Arms Industry Database form the basis of this report. The database, however, **excludes Chinese companies** due to the lack of data to make a reliable estimate.

Key Highlights

- Sales of arms and military services by the **sector's largest 100 companies** (excluding those in China) **totalled \$420 billion in 2018**, marking an **increase of 4.6 per cent** compared with the previous year.
- **US companies dominate the Top 100** - For the first time since 2002, the **top five spots in the ranking** are held exclusively by arms companies based in the United States: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and General Dynamics.
- **Russia stands second** in the ranking of the top arms producing countries, followed by the UK and France.

India Specific Findings

- The combined sales of **three public sector Indian defence companies** that figure among the world's 100 top arms suppliers dropped by 6.9 per cent to stand at \$5.9 billion in 2018.
- These three Indian companies are **Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL)** ranked 38, the **Indian Ordnance Factories** ranked 56 and **Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL)** ranked 62.
- Together, they accounted for 1.4 per cent of the arms sales of the top 100 companies.
- The report highlighted that **all three are state-owned** and are almost **entirely dependent on domestic demand**.

EChO Network Launched

- EChO Network - A national program to provide a **template for cross-disciplinary leadership** in India.
- Specific focus on - increasing research, knowledge, and awareness of Indian ecology and the environment.
- It will address the issue of trained scientists with interdisciplinary skills and collaborative mindset.

Centenary Celebrations of ASSOCHAM

- The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) has celebrated its **Centenary Foundation Celebration Day**, on 20th December, 2019.
- ASSOCHAM is one of the apex trade associations of India. It was **established in 1920** by promoter Chambers, representing all regions of India.
- It has emerged as the **fountainhead of Knowledge for Indian industry**, which is all set to redefine the dynamics of growth and development in the technology driven cyber age of 'Knowledge Based Economy'.
- ASSOCHAM members represent the following sectors:
 - Trade (National and International)
 - Industry (Domestic and International)
 - Professionals (e.g. CAs, lawyers, consultants)
 - Trade and Industry Associations and other Chambers of Commerce

36th International Geological Congress

- India will host the 36th International Geological Congress (IGC) in New Delhi during the first week of March 2020.
- Theme of the forthcoming conference - '**Geosciences: The Basic Science for a Sustainable Development**'
- The **event is being funded by** the Ministry of Mines (MoM) and Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) with the support of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) and the national Science Academies of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
- **Geological Survey of India** is the **nodal agency** for organizing the event
- India is the **only Asian country to host the event twice**. In 1964, India had hosted it for the first time, which was the 22nd IGC.

International Seminar on Climate Smart Farming Systems

- The three day '**International Seminar on Climate Smart Farming Systems**' for BIMSTEC countries organized in New Delhi.
- **Organised by** - Department of Agricultural Research & Education, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmer's Welfare and Indian Council of Agricultural Research
- **Participants** - All the **Seven BIMSTEC Countries** viz. Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand

About The Seminar

- The seminar was organized as a **Gol initiative** as announced earlier by the PM of India at the 4th BIMSTEC Summit at Kathmandu in August 2019.
- The **objective** of this International Seminar is to have experience sharing to enable improvement of tropical smallholder farming systems for greater productivity and resilience to climate change through ecological approaches.

About Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA)

- CSA is an approach that helps to guide actions needed to transform and reorient agricultural systems to effectively support development and **ensure food security in a changing climate**.
- CSA aims to tackle **three main objectives**: *sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes; adapting and building resilience to climate change; and reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions, where possible.*

[For detailed discussion on BIMSTEC, please refer Q&A section of the magazine for the month of May 2019]

Scientists Develop New Ink Formulation for Security Printing

Researchers from Council of Scientific and Industrial Research- National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL) have developed an ink that may help in combating the problem of counterfeiting of currency notes, fake printing of passports and pharmaceuticals.

Principle:

- The formulation is based on unexplored combinatory concept of the **fluorescence and phosphorescence phenomenon**.
- Both fluorescence and phosphorescence are **spontaneous emissions of electromagnetic radiation**.
- The glow of fluorescence stops right after the source of excitatory radiation is switched off, but in the case phosphorescence afterglow continues for duration ranging from fraction of a second to hours.

Counterfeiting of currency notes

- According to the RBI annual report 2018-19, the new Rs 500 and Rs 2,000 notes introduced after demonetisation are at the risk of duplication.
- According to the report, the duplication of a new design of Rs 500 notes is accounted to be 121 per cent and of Rs 2,000 notes to be 21.9 per cent during 2018-2019.
- The report also stated that about 12,728 counterfeit notes of the Rs 200 currency note, introduced in 2017, were detected.

Working

- The advanced security feature of the ink comes from its **change of pigment colour**. Currently, the currency notes display only a single colour with the emission of wavelength.
- In the ambient light, the ink showcases white colour. When exposed to UV (ultraviolet) light at 254 nm, it changes the colour to red and when the UV source is switched off, it turns green. The colors can be seen through naked eyes.
- This technique of dual emissive luminescent pigment for security purposes is the **first-of-its-kind** and **never used for printing of notes** or confidential documents.

18th National Maritime Search and Rescue Board Meeting

- **Organised by** - Indian Coast Guard (ICG)
- **Aim** - to discuss policy issues, formulate guidelines & procedures and assess the efficacy of National Search and Rescue Plan.
- There are three Maritime Rescue Coordination centers at Mumbai, Chennai and Andaman & Nicobar Islands established by ICG.
- Indian Coast Guard is the **nodal agency** for Maritime Search and Rescue
- Award given –

- **MV Asia Emerald III** – Awarded SAR (search and rescue) award for Merchant Vessel for saving 06 lives from a distressed fishing boat.
- **SAR Award for Fisherman** was awarded to **Shri Anand A Ambhire** from Maharashtra for saving 11 lives from a sinking fishing boat.
- **SAR Award for Government Owned SAR Unit** was awarded jointly to **Indian Coast Guard Ships Sujoy and Vikram** for saving 46 lives from ROSV Sagar Sampada off New Mangalore.

India Gets First Chief Of Defence Staff

- General Bipin Rawat has become the **country's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)**.
- The **other countries** that hold Chief of Defence Staff in the world includes **Italy, France, China, Spain, UK, Canada and Japan**.

Role of CDS:

- The CDS will act as the **Principal Military Adviser** to the defence minister on tri-service matters. The three service chiefs will continue to advise the defence minister on matters exclusively concerning their respective forces.
- The CDS will handle all tri-Service issues and push for greater jointness among the Army, Navy and IAF.
- Though a **four star general** like the three chiefs, the CDS will be the 'first among equals' in the hierarchy. But the Army, Navy and IAF chiefs will have operational command of their forces.

What Next?

- Now the country's defence establishment will also **need to focus on setting up unified or theatre commands** – with all military assets in a region under a single operational commander – for greater offensive punch.
- At present, India has 17 single service commands and only two tri-service commands in the shape of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, a theatre or regional command, and the Strategic Force Command, which handles the nuclear weapons.
- Apart from being much more cost effective, theatre commands are required for the conduct of synergized land-air-sea operations with unity of command in modern day warfare.

[For detailed discussion on Chief of Defence Staff, please refer August issue of the Current Affairs magazine]

Indian Coast Guard Gets More Teeth

- The Indian Coast Guard has been given powers under the Coast Guard Act. Now they can board, search any vessel and arrest people for offences within the maritime zone of the country.
- The notification in this regard has been issued by the Ministry of Defence.
- Earlier, the maritime security agency **did not have the power to board** any vessel passing through India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- Hence, in order to carry out these operations, the Coast Guard used provisions of the Customs Act and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and other relevant acts.

Rafale Jets to Have Tail Numbers with BS initials

- The Indian Air Force has decided to put tail numbers in 30 Rafale jets with 'BS' initials.
- This has been decided in **recognition of Air Chief Marshal (retd) B S Dhanoa's unrelenting backing for the Rafale deal.**
- India is purchasing **36 Rafale jets from French** aerospace major Dassault Aviation. Out of 36 Rafale jets, 30 will be **fighter jets** and **six will be trainers**. The trainer jets will be twin-seater and they will have almost all the features of the fighter jets.
- The Rafale jets will have the most advanced weapons package comprising Meteor and Scalp missiles which will provide the IAF deep strike capability and air dominance in the region.

Nagaland Government Extends ILP To Dimapur District**Context:**

- The Nagaland government has extended the **inner line permit (ILP) regulations** to the **whole of Dimapur district** with immediate effect.
- This step has been taken to **exempt the entire district from the purview of the Citizenship Amendment Act.**
- Till now, Dimapur was Nagaland's only district where the ILP was not enforced.

Exemption provided in Citizenship Amendment Act:

- The Centre has exempted the **states protected by the ILP** and areas in the Northeast which **fall under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution** from the ambit of Act.
- ILP System is prevailed in **Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram.**
- The Sixth Schedule contains special provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the four north-eastern states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.**

ILP and Sixth Schedule in NE

- The **entire state** of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland is under ILP.
- Sixth schedule covers 70% of total geographical area of Tripura.
- Except Shilong, entire Meghalaya is covered under Sixth schedule.
- In Assam, 3 autonomous district councils are under sixth schedule.

About ILP System:

- ILP is an **official travel document** issued by the respective State Government to allow travel of an Indian citizen into an inward (protected/restricted) area for a limited period.
- The ILP system derives its genesis from **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act (BEFR), 1873** which was enacted by British to protect **their interests from the hill tribals who used to invade the British subjects.**

NAVARMS-19

- The **fourth edition** of International Seminar cum Exhibition on Naval Weapon Systems 'NAVARMS - 2019' was organized in New Delhi.
- **Theme** - 'Make in India - Fight Category: Opportunities and Imperatives'
- Organised by - Indian Navy in association with Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)
- It is being **organized since 2007**. The past three editions of NAVARMS were organised in 2007, 2010 and 2013.

Important Dates

1. **World AIDS Day** – December 1 (**Theme for 2019** - “Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Community by Community”). This day was first observed in 1988.
2. **National Pollution Control Day** - observed on **2 December** (On this day the unfortunate incident of Bhopal Gas Tragedy that occurred on this day in 1984)
3. **International Day for the Abolition of Slavery** – Observed on 2 December (On this day in 1949, the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others was passed by the UN).
4. **International Day of Persons with Disabilities** – Observed on **December 3** (2019 **Theme** - *Promoting the participation of persons with disabilities and their leadership: taking action on the 2030 Development Agenda*)
5. **International Anti-Corruption Day** – Observed on **December 9** (2019 **Theme** - “United Against Corruption - Take action - Lead the change - Be the change”)
6. **Human Rights Day** - Observed every year on **10 December** (2019 **Theme**: *Youth Standing Up for Human Rights*). On this day in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR).
7. **International Universal Health Coverage Day** – Observed on **12 December** (it is being celebrated since December 2017). On this day, in 2012, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed a resolution urging countries to accelerate progress toward universal health coverage (UHC).
8. **Minorities Rights Day** - Observed on **18 December**. On this day, in 1992, the United Nations promulgated the “*Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*” to strengthen the cause of the minorities.
9. **International Migrants Day** – Observed on December 18 to protect the rights of the migrants (2019 **Theme**: *Social Cohesion, Celebrating the integration of migrants into communities around the world*)

Persons in News

1. **Sanna Marin** - Finland's **Sanna Marin** has become the world's **youngest prime minister** at the age of 34. Finland now has a female prime minister and four party leaders in the ruling coalition are also women.
2. **Pritivirajsing Roopun** – He has become the president of the island nation of Mauritius. His predecessor **Ameenah Gurib-Fakim** resigned in March 2018 after being embroiled in a scandal over her use of a credit card to buy luxury personal items. In Mauritius, the **prime minister is head of the government** and holds most political power while the president is head of state but has no executive role and is considered the guardian of the constitution.
3. **Greta Thunberg** - Greta Thunberg, the Swedish schoolgirl who inspired a global movement to fight climate change, has been named Time magazine's Person of the Year for 2019. The 16-year-old is the youngest person to be chosen by the magazine in a tradition that started in 1927.
4. **Anoop Mishra** - Indian Army officer Major Anoop Mishra has developed a bulletproof jacket (named ‘**Sarvatra Kavach**’) that can effectively stop bullets from sniper rifles. For this, he has been awarded with prestigious **Army Design Bureau (ADB) Excellence Award**. Sarvatra Kawach provides protection from neck to ankle and upper arms.
5. **Manoj Mukund Naravane** - General Manoj Mukund Naravane has taken charge as the **Chief of Army Staff**, succeeding General Bipin Rawat. He will be the **28th Chief** of Army Staff.

6. **B P Raju** - CBI officer B P Raju has won the '**India Cyber Cop of the Year 2019**' award by NASSCOM-DSCI for cracking a fraud case in an online entrance exam conducted by an engineering college in Rajasthan.
7. **Air Marshal D Choudhury** – He has taken charge as Commandant of National Defence College. The National Defence College, established on 27th April 1960, is a premier Institution under the Ministry of Defence and is the highest seat of Strategic Education of the Nation.