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- Total Tests – 30 (12 Sectional + 12 full length + 6 Essay)
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- After prelims – 8 Full length (2 for each GS paper) + 2 Essay
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**1. KHIRKI MOSQUE**

- **Context:** The Archaeological Survey of India (Delhi Circle) of Ministry of Culture has discovered a hoard of 254 Copper Coins in the premises of Khirki Mosque during the course of conservation of the monument.

- *This mosque lies* on the southern periphery of the village Khirki. The mosque was *built by Khan-i-Jahan Junan Shah, the Prime Minister of Firoz Shah Tughluq* (1351-88), and is believed to be one of the seven mosques built by him.

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**2. HINDI DIWAS 2018**

- **Context:** National Hindi Divas or Hindi Day is observed every year on September 14 in India to promote Hindi as Matra Bhasha (mother tongue) of India. The day is a celebration of the Hindi language and its cultural heritage and values among the people of the country and abroad.

**Why do we celebrate National Hindi Diwas?**

- The Constituent assembly of India adopted Hindi as the official language of the country on September 14, 1949 under Article 343. It started being observed as Hindi Day after stalwarts like Beohar Rajendra Simha, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Kaka Kalelkar, Maithili Sharan Gupt and Seth Govind Das lobbied hard for the cause.

- Hindi language is spoken by as many as 250 million people as the original language and it is the fourth language of the world.

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**3. SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME**

**What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme, various circuits covered.

- **Context:** Two coastal tourism projects taken up under Swadesh Darshan scheme were recently inaugurated by the Vice-President.

- The first circuit includes beautification of Nellore tank and Pulicat Lake, facelift to Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, construction of a restaurant and development of Ubbala Madugu, Kotha Koduru, Mypadu, Rama Theertham, and Isukapalli project.

- The second coastal tourism circuit is aimed at developing Kakinada port, Hope Island, Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, construction of cottages and wooden huts at Passarlapudi, Aduru and S Yanam and development of Kotipalli project.
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About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:
- The Tourism Ministry had launched ‘Swadesh Darshan’ scheme with an objective to develop theme-based tourist circuits in the country. These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

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

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 1 Topic:** Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues.

1. **DAKSHINA BHARAT HINDI PRACHAR SABHA**

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: About the Sabha, its objectives, significance.
- **Context:** The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha on September 22, 2018.

About Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha:
- The organisation was **established by Annie Besant in 1918 with support from Mahatma Gandhi**, who became the founder president of the Sabha, who held the post till his death.
- In 1964, the institution was recognised by the Indian Government as one of **the Institutes of National Importance**.
- It was **established to propagate the study of Hindi** in the then Madras Presidency and princely states of Banganapalle, Cochin, Hyderabad, Mysore, Pudukkottai, Sanduru and Travancore.
- **The first Hindi class was taken by Gandhi's son Devdas Gandhi.**

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 1 Topic:** History of the world will include events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization, political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.- their forms and effect on the society.

1. **BATTLE OF HAIFA**

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Significance and features of Battle of Haifa.
- **Context:** The northern Israeli coastal city of Haifa, on September 6th, celebrated the centenary year of its liberation from Ottoman rule during World War I, honouring the brave Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in what is considered “the last great cavalry campaign in history”.

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Haifa day:

- The Indian Army commemorates September 23 every year as Haifa Day to pay its respects to the three Indian Cavalry Regiments – Mysore, Hyderabad and Jodhpur Lancers, that helped liberate Haifa following a dashing cavalry action by the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade of the then British Indian Army at the Battle of Haifa in 1918.

History and significance of Haifa war and its Indian Cemetery:

- Owing to its rail and harbour, Israeli port city of Haifa was a strategic supply base. In addition to Haifa, the Allied Forces also engineered a plan to annexe Nazareth and Damascus in present-day Israel and Syria.
  - On September 23, 1918, the 15th (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade comprising lancers from the regiments of princely states of Jodhpur and Mysore inflicted heavy assault on positions held by Ottoman Turks in and around the city of Haifa. Eventually, the Indian cavalry brigades fighting under the leadership of British General Edmund Allenby helped liberate Haifa from the clutches of the Turkish-German forces.
  - The victory was even more special as the Indian soldiers were armed only with lances (a kind of spear) and swords while the Turks had in their possession advance artillery and machine guns. The Indian troops displayed exemplary cavalry skills and valour during what was considered to be the last major cavalry campaign in military history.

Teen Murti memorial:

- The Teen Murti memorial was constructed in 1922 in the memory of the Indian soldiers from three princely states namely Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore who served present day
- Gaza strip, Israel and Palestine during the World War I under British India Army.

Sources: pib.

Paper 1 Topic: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

1. FAMILY LAW REFORM

What to study?

- For Prelims: Constitutional provisions related to Uniform Civil Code.
- For Mains: Overview of the consultation paper, suggestions made, UCC- need, concerns, challenges and is it suitable for India?

Context: Law Commission has released a Consultation Paper on Family Law Reform. This consultation on family law reforms in India, discusses a range of provisions within all family laws, secular or personal, and suggests a number of changes to in the form of potential amendments and fresh enactments.

Highlights:

- Reform family law: As general suggestions to reforming family law, the paper discusses the introduction of new grounds for ‘no fault’ divorce accompanied by corresponding changes to provisions on alimony and maintenance, rights of differently-abled individuals within marriage, the thirty-day period for registration of marriages under Special Marriage Act; uncertainty and inequality in age of consent for marriage, compulsory registration of marriage, bigamy upon conversion etc.
- Under Hindu law the paper among other issues discusses problems with provisions like restitution of conjugal rights, and further suggests the inclusion of concepts such as ‘community of property’ of a married couple, abolition of coparcenary, rights of illegitimate children et al. There are further suggestions for addressing self-acquired property of a Hindu female.
- Under Muslim law the paper discusses the reform in inheritance law through codification of Muslim law on inheritance, but ensuring that the codified law is gender just. The paper also discusses the rights of a widow, and the changes application to general laws such as introduction of community of (self-acquired) property after marriage, inclusion of irretrievable breakdown of marriage as a ground for divorce.
• **Under Parsi law** there are suggestions relating to protecting married women’s right to inherit property even if they marry outside their community.

• **Adoption process:** The paper also suggests the expansion of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015, to make it into a robust secular law that can be accessed by individuals of all communities for adoption. There are suggestions for amending the guidelines for adoption and also a suggestion to alter the language of the Act to accommodate all gender identities. The paper discusses lacunae within custody and guardianship laws, statutory or customary, and suggests that the ‘best interest of the child’ has to remain the paramount consideration in deciding matters of custody regardless of any prevailing personal law in place.

• **Special attention to North-East:** Although the sixth schedule provides exemptions and exemptions to states in the North East and tribal areas, it has suggested that efforts of women’s organisations in these areas be acknowledged and relied upon in this regard to suggest ways in which family law reform could be aided by the state even when direct intervention may not be possible. Since a number of these issues such as polygamy, nikah halala, settlement of a Parsi wife’s property for benefit of children, as well as the law on adultery among others is presently sub judice before the Supreme Court, they have been discussed in the paper.

**Views on Uniform Civil Code:**

- The Law Commission feels that a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is “neither necessary nor desirable at this stage.”

**Why is UCC is not desirable at this point?**

- Secularism cannot contradict the plurality prevalent in the country. Besides, cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for threat to the territorial integrity of the nation.

- The term ‘secularism’ has meaning only if it assures the expression of any form of difference. This diversity, both religious and regional, should not get subsumed under the louder voice of the majority. At the same time, discriminatory practices within a religion should not hide behind the cloak of that faith to gain legitimacy.

**What is needed now?**

- The way forward may not be UCC, but the codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and can be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the Constitution.

- By codification of different personal laws, one can arrive at certain universal principles that prioritise equity rather than imposition of a Uniform Code, which would discourage many from using the law altogether, given that matters of marriage and divorce can also be settled extra-judicially.

**Way ahead:**

- Difference does not always imply discrimination in a robust democracy. A unified nation does not necessarily need to have “uniformity.” Efforts have to be made to reconcile our diversity with universal and indisputable arguments on human rights.

**What is uniform civil code?**

- Uniform civil Code is a proposal to have a generic set of governing laws for every citizen without taking into consideration the religion.

**What the constitution says?**

- **Article 44 of the Constitution** says that there should be a Uniform Civil Code. According to this article, “The State shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India”. Since the Directive Principles are only guidelines, it is not mandatory to use them.

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**Paper 1 Topic:** Role of women and women’s organization, Women related issues

### 1. KRISHNA KUTIR

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Krishna Kutir, Swadhar Greh scheme.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme and various initiatives for the empowerment of women.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Context:** Union Ministry of Women and Child Development recently inaugurated widows’ home ‘Krishna Kutir’ at Vrindavan in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. The construction of the home was funded by Central Government and it will be managed by the Uttar Pradesh Government.

**Krishna Kutir:**
- Krishna Kutir is *a special home for 1000 widows set under Swadhar Greh scheme* and is the largest ever facility of its kind created by government organization. It was constructed to mitigate the plight of widows living in pathetic condition in Vrindavan.

**About Swadhar Greh Scheme:**
- The Swadhar Greh scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.
- The scheme provides shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need.
- The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.

**Implementation of the scheme:**
- The State Governments/UT Administration invite applications from eligible organizations and the proposals which fulfil the norms are placed before a Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) chaired by Secretary(WCD) of the State/UT concerned.

**As per guidelines of the Swadhar Greh Scheme, to seek financial assistance the agency should meet following requirements:**
- The agency should be either recognized by State/UT under existing law or should be well known with the experience or working in the field for at least 3 years and its work should be reported satisfactory by the State Govt./UT Administration concerned.
- It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women’s welfare/social welfare for a minimum period of two years.
- Its financial position should be sound.
- It should have facilities, resources, experience and personnel to undertake the management of such project.
- It should run Swadhar Greh on a no-profit basis.
- It should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc at Swadhar Greh.

Sources: The Hindu.

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2. INTERNATIONAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS SUMMIT

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: International Women Entrepreneurs Summit- key facts, SAWDF.
- For Mains: Significance and outcomes of the summit, Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.
- **Context:** The International Women Entrepreneurs Summit 2018 is being held in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- **It is organised by** the South Asian Women Development Forum.
- **Theme:** “Equality begins with Economic Empowerment”.
- **The main objective** of the summit is to bring together achievers, women business leaders, professionals, international service providers, resource organisations, experts, government representatives and other stakeholders with a focus on innovative economic transformation through discussions and collaborations.

**South Asian Women Development Forum (SAWDF):**
- SAWDF is an autonomous, nonprofit organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- It was granted the status of SAARC Recognized Body by 36th Session of SAARC Council Ministers at 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2014.
- It is first SAARC Recognized Body organisation working on women entrepreneurs issues.
3. SUPREME COURT BATS FOR MINOR RAPE SURVIVORS

What to study?
- For Prelims: About NALSA and its compensation scheme.
- For Mains: Need for compensation in this matter, measures needed to strengthen the system.
- **Context:** In support of minor survivors of rape or sexual assault, the Supreme Court of India has issued a slew of guidelines.

Highlights:
- Minor survivors of rape or sexual assault will get compensation on par with women victims. National Legal Services Authority’s (NALSA) compensation scheme for women rape and sexual assault survivors shall be extended to minor children.
- Special Judges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act should disburse compensation to minor victims of sex abuse as per the NALSA’s ‘Compensation Scheme for Women Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assault/Other Crimes-2018’.

The NALSA compensation scheme:
- The NALSA scheme provides a uniform payment of ₹ 5 lakh to a maximum ₹ 10 lakh for “loss of life” and to gang rape survivors in any part of the country. Similarly, in case of rape and unnatural sexual assault, the victim would get a minimum of ₹ 4 lakh and maximum of ₹ 7 lakh as compensation.
- Among other categories, if a victim suffers the loss of foetus, that is, by miscarriage as a result of assault or loss fertility, the NALSA scheme offers a compensation of ₹ 2 lakh to 3 lakh.
- The scheme provides a victim of acid attacks, in case of disfigurement of face, would get a minimum compensation of ₹ 7 lakh, while the upper limit would be ₹ 8 lakh. In acid attack cases, if the injury was more than 50%, a minimum compensation of ₹ 5 lakh would be given, while the maximum would be ₹ 8 lakh.

Way ahead:
- The NALSA scheme would be made applicable to minor victims from October 2 until the Centre frames compensation guidelines under the POCSO.

Background:
- The order is a product of the legal efforts undertaken by senior advocate Indira Jaising, who has lent her expertise in the case for uniform compensation for rape survivors.
- The case had begun in the Supreme Court with Ms. Jaising raising her voice against the dormant state of the Nirbhaya funds.
- She has argued that compensation for sex abuse survivors should be a source of financial solace for victims of sex crimes and acid attacks during court trial.

About NALSA:
- NALSA has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society.
- The aim is to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities.

**Important functions performed by NALSA:**
- NALSA organises Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- NALSA identifies specific categories of the marginalised and excluded groups and formulates various schemes for the implementation of preventive and strategic legal service programmes.
- Services provided by the agency include free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for the poor and marginalised people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer in any court or tribunal.
4. SWAYANGSIDDHA INITIATIVE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** To combat human trafficking, the West Bengal government has rolled out a scheme, *Swayangsiddha*, in its different districts.

Background:

- As per the NCRB data West Bengal has highest recorded case of trafficking among the States.

**Highlights of the scheme:**

- Swayangsiddha, which means self-reliance, will be executed by the West Bengal Police.
- The scheme aims to empower young boys and girls to make informed choices so that they are less vulnerable to trafficking and child marriage.
- Swayangsiddha Groups have been formed in schools and colleges with interested students. These groups were formed with students between the age group of 12 to 21 years.

**Objectives of the mission:**

- Raising awareness on human, gender and child rights and strengthening prevention of human trafficking and child marriage using a converging approach.
- Engaging youth from different schools and colleges to combat human trafficking and child marriage.
- Strengthening response mechanism in collaboration with Police and child protection committees to build safe community.
- Strengthening access to schemes and entitlements on education, training, livelihood and food security for vulnerable groups.

Sources: the hindu.

5. TRIPLE TALAQ ORDINANCE

What to Study?

- For Prelims: Highlights of the ordinance and the proposed Bill.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for a legislation on this.
- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved an ordinance making instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat a punishable offence carrying a jail term of up to three years.
- The step was taken after the government failed to pass the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, in the Rajya Sabha during the recent monsoon session.

**Background:**

- In August last year, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a law that allowed Muslim men to divorce their wives simply by uttering “talaq” three times in quick succession. In a landmark 3-2 verdict, the apex court found the practice un-Islamic and “arbitrary”, and disagreed that triple talaq was an integral part of religious practice.

**What are the provisions?**

- Triple talaq remains **cognizable** with a maximum of three years imprisonment and a fine.
- Triple talaq will be recognised as **a crime only when a woman or her blood relative files a complaint with the police.**
- **A compromise can be achieved only when the woman is willing** and says so to a magistrate. A magistrate can grant bail only after the wife’s consent.
The custody of children from the marriage will go to the woman.
The mother is entitled to maintenance determined by a magistrate.
The law doesn’t affect Jammu and Kashmir.

CURRENT EVENTS

BILL QUICK READS
The Union cabinet on Wednesday approved the instant triple talaq ordinance, making the practice a criminal act.

430 incidents of triple talaq have come to the government’s notice so far between January 2017 to 13 September 2019.
Out of these, 229 such cases came up before the Supreme Court judgement.
201 cases were after the SC judgement.

The ordinance makes provision for a woman or her blood relative to file a case before a police station to make the offence cognizable. A compromise can also be reached before a magistrate after the affected woman consents to it.

“I will again appeal to Sonia ji that this ordinance has been brought in the interest of the country to bring gender justice. I appeal to you to rise above vote bank politics and help pass it in the interest of justice for women.”

Ravi Shankar Prasad
Law minister

“Modi Government is using ‘Instant Triple Talaq’ as a ‘Political Football’ for ‘Fake Credit Seeking’!”
Randeep Singh Surjewala, Congress spokesperson

“’I welcome the centre’s decision to bring an ordinance to make triple talaq a penal offence. It is a huge step towards empowering Muslim women in the country.”
Ishrat Jahan, petitioner

What is instant triple talaq?
• Instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat is a practice that was challenged in the court. It is different from the practice of “talaq-ul-sunnat”, which is considered to be the ideal form of dissolution of marriage contract among Muslims.
• Under the latter form, once the husband pronounces talaq, the wife has to observe a three-month iddat period covering three menstrual cycles during which the husband can arbitrate and re-conciliate with the wife. In case of cohabitation between the couple, during these three months, the talaq is revoked. However, when the period of iddat expires and the husband does not revoke the talaq either expressly or by consummation, the talaq is irrevocable and final.
• In the practice of talaq-e-biddat, when a man pronounces talaq thrice in a sitting, or through phone, or writes in a talaqnama or a text message, the divorce is considered immediate and irrevocable, even if the man later wishes to re-conciliate.

Status in neighbouring countries:
• India and 22 other countries have banned triple talaq. India’s neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are among the countries that have banned the practice of instant triple talaq prevalent among Muslims for divorce.
• In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the law requires the man who wishes to divorce his wife to give the ‘arbitration council’ a written notice of his having done so, and supply a copy of the same to his wife.
• In Pakistan, triple talaq was abolished when it issued its Muslim Family Law Ordinance in 1961, according to Geo News. In Afghanistan, divorce through three pronouncements made in only one sitting is considered to be invalid. Sri Lanka’s Marriage and Divorce (Muslim) Act, 1951, amended up to 2006, also prohibits triple talaq.

Way ahead:
• India follows a secular approach with religious groups being allowed to manage their own affairs within the law, and most of these divorcees never see justice or even a chance at reconciliation with the husband. The move to criminalise instant divorce, therefore, is being touted as a step forward for the rights of Indian Muslim women.

Sources: the hindu.
6. PORTALS TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN SAFETY LAUNCHED

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key features of portals launched.
- For Mains: Issues and challenges involved in women safety.
- **Context:** The government has launched two portals to strengthen Women Safety:
  1. Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) portal to check objectionable online content.
  2. National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO) to aid in monitoring & investigation of sexual crimes.

Details:

1. **Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) portal:**
   - The portal will receive complaints from citizens on objectionable online content related to child pornography, child sexual abuse material, sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
   - The portal is convenient and user friendly that will enable complainants in reporting cases without disclosing their identity. This will not only aid the victims/complainants but also help the civil society organizations and responsible citizens to anonymously report complaints pertaining to child pornography, child sexual abuse material or sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
   - Complainants can also upload the objectionable content and URL to assist in the investigation by the State Police. The complaints registered through this portal will be handled by police authorities of respective State/UTs. There are other features such as a victim or complainant can track his/her report by opting for “report and track” option using his/her mobile number.
   - The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) will proactively identify such objectionable content and take up with intermediaries for its removal. For this NCRB has already been notified as the Government of India agency to issue notices under Section 79(3)b of IT Act.

2. **National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO):**
   - The National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO), which is accessible only to law enforcement agencies, will assist in effectively tracking and investigating cases of sexual offences.
   - It is a central database of “sexual offenders” in the country which will be maintained by the NCRB for regular monitoring and tracking by the State Police. The database is accessible only to the law enforcement agencies for investigation and monitoring purpose.
   - The database will include offenders convicted under charges of rape, gang rape, POCSO and eve teasing. At present the database contains 4.4 lakh entries.
   - The State Police have been requested to regularly update the database from 2005 onwards. The database includes name, address, photograph and fingerprint details for each entry. However, the database will not compromise any individual’s privacy.

Way ahead:
- The two portals launched are part of efforts in the direction of strengthening security of women and children. However, the field level challenges have to be overcome by the Police at the ground level to ensure speedy justice to the victims. The security agencies should fully utilize potential of the two portals and update the database regularly for greater effectiveness.
- There is also need for timebound completion of investigation in sexual crimes to instill deterrence among potential offenders.

Sources: pib.

7. SABARIMALA TEMPLE OPENS TO WOMEN OF ALL AGES

What to study?
- For Prelims: Location of Sabarimala temple.
- For Mains: Temple entry- ban, need for revival, question of FRs at stake and issues associated.
- **Context:** Condemning the prohibition as hegemonic patriarchy, the Supreme Court has lifted the centuries-old practice of prohibiting women to enter the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala in Kerala.
CURRENT EVENTS

What’s the issue?

- The legend has it that the temple deity Ayyappa followed celibacy all through his life. Therefore, women devotees of menstruating age are considered “impure” by supporters of the ban and are prohibited from entering the temple, on the pretext that they would disturb the celibacy of the deity.

Views of the court:

- On one side we pray to goddesses; on the other, women of a certain age are considered ‘impure’. This dualistic approach is nothing but patriarchy practised in religion.
- Exclusion on grounds of biological and physiological features like menstruation was therefore unconstitutional as it is violative of the right to equality and dignity of women.
- Hence, Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act of 1965, which mandates the prohibition in Sabarimala temple, ultra vires the Constitution. The Rule violated the fundamental right of a Hindu woman to offer worship at a place of her choice. Right to worship is equally available to men and women.

Dissenting views:

- Justice Indu Malhotra, the lone woman judge on the Constitution Bench, dissented from the majority opinion. She held that the determination of what constituted an essential practice in a religion should not be decided by judges on the basis of their personal viewpoints.
- She held that essentiality of a religious practice or custom had to be decided within the religion. It was a matter of personal faith. Constitutional morality in a pluralistic society gave freedom to practice even irrational or illogical customs and usages.
- Harmonization of fundamental rights with religion included providing freedom for diverse sects to practise their customs and beliefs. Therefore, the Judge held that there were strong, plausible reasons to show that Ayyappa devotees had attributes of a religious denomination.
- They have distinct names, properties. Besides, the Sabarimala temple was not funded out of the Consolidated Fund.

Significance of the verdict:

- The Supreme Court’s ruling establishes the legal principle that individual freedom prevails over purported group rights, even in matters of religion. Devotees of Lord Ayyappa do not constitute a separate religious denomination and that the prohibition on women is not an essential part of Hindu religion.
- Beyond the legality of the practice, the court has also sought to grapple with the stigmatisation of women devotees based on a medieval view of menstruation as symbolising impurity and pollution.
- The decision reaffirms the Constitution’s transformative character and derives strength from the centrality it accords to fundamental rights.

Way ahead:

- Devotion cannot be subjected to the stereotypes of gender. Stigma built around traditional notions of impurity has no place in the constitutional order, and exclusion based on the notion of impurity is a form of untouchability.
- Any rule based on segregation of women pertaining to biological characteristics is indefensible and unconstitutional.

Sources: the hindu.


1. MOBILISE YOUR CITY (MYC) PROGRAMME

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Significance and features of MYC programme, India’s association.
- Context: India and France have signed an implementation agreement on “MOBILISE YOUR CITY” (MYC) programme.
CURRENT EVENTS

- Based on a proposal made by AFD in 2015, the European Union has agreed to provide funds of Euro 3.5 million through the AFD to contribute to specific investments and technical assistance components within the Mobilise Your City (MYC) programme in India.

About Mobilise Your City (MYC):

- Mobilise Your City (MYC) is a **global climate initiative** for integrated urban mobility planning, and one of 15 international transport initiatives of the UN Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA).
  - Mobilise Your City (MYC) is **part of an international initiative** which is supported by the French and the German Governments and was launched at 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) meeting in December, 2015.
  - The MYC is **an initiative combining urban mobility objectives and climate considerations**. It aims at providing solutions in a fully integrated manner, analysing different modes of transportation within the urban fabric, with the objective of providing people long-term, sustainable, adequate, reliable and cost-efficient transportation opportunities.
  - **The project seeks to back 100 cities worldwide in three years**, which are engaged in sustainable urban mobility planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
  - In India, **the MYC aims at supporting three pilot cities** viz. Nagpur, Kochi and Ahmedabad in their efforts to reduce their Green House Gas (GHG) emissions related to urban transport by implementing urban mobility plans at local level and to help India at national level to improve their sustainable transport policy.
  - The three pilot cities selected under the programme as well as MoHUA will benefit from the Technical Assistance activities.

The main components of the proposed assistance are:

1. To support planning and implementation of sustainable urban transport projects.
2. Support to strengthening institutional capacity for regulating, steering and planning urban mobility.
3. Learning and exchange formats with other cities across India for exchanges on best practices.

Sources: pib.

2. ‘SWACHHATA HI SEVA’ MOVEMENT

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Basic facts on Swachhata Hi Seva movement and Swachh Bharat Mission.
- For Mains: Significance and performance of SBM, shortcomings and ways to address them.

**Context:** ‘Swachhata Hi Seva’ movement has been launched across the country on September 15, 2018.

**Aim:** Over the next two weeks leading to October 2 – Gandhi Jayanti – the Swachhata Hi Seva movement aims to ensure a high standard of cleanliness across the country, which was Mahatma Gandhi’s dream for the nation.

**Significance of the campaign:**

- The campaign for a Swachh Bharat or clean India, which began four years ago, was made into a nation-wide movement today.
- **October 2, 2018 will mark the beginning of the 150th year of Mahatma Gandhi’s birth**, and the government plans to realise his dream of a clean India.

**About the campaign:**

- The campaign is being coordinated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the convening Ministry for the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- The objective of the campaign is to mobilise people and reinforce the “Jan Aandolan” for sanitation to contribute to Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of a Clean India.
- It will see large scale mobilisation of people from all walks of life to undertake shramdaan for cleanliness and construction of toilets and to make their environments free from open defecation. There will be targeted cleaning of public and tourist places.
- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has made elaborate plans along with the State Governments to involve people from various walks of life and make this an unprecedented people’s campaign.
Current Events

- Reaching out to the poor and marginalised and providing them with sustainable sanitation services would be the hallmark of this campaign.

Background:
- Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is a campaign which was launched on 2 October 2014, and aims to eradicate open defecation by 2019, and is a national campaign, covering 4,041 statutory cities and towns.
- Its predecessors were the “Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan” and before that the “Total Sanitation Campaign”. The mission was divided into two parts — urban and rural.

Sources: pib.

3. Multidimensional Poverty Index 2018

What to study?
- For Prelims: MPI- key facts, India’s performance.
- For Mains: Key findings of the report, multidimensional poverty- global and country level challenges, concerns and ways to address them.
- Context: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) have released the 2018 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

About Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI):
- The MPI provides the most comprehensive view of the various ways in which 1.3 billion people worldwide experience poverty in their daily life.
- The MPI looks at the multifaceted nature of poverty. It identifies people’s deprivations across three key dimensions – health, education and living standards, lacking amenities such clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition or primary education. Those who are left behind in at least a third of the MPI’s components are defined as multidimensionally poor.

How is the global MPI2018 aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals?
- Rather than viewing challenges one by one, in silos, the MPI shows how deprivations related to SDGs 1,2,3,4,6,7, and 11 are concretely interlinked in poor people’s lives.
- Rather than providing only national headlines, the global MPI is disaggregated by subnational region, area, ethnicity, or age cohort.
- The indicators underlying the global MPI 2018 have been revised to better align with the SDGs.
Current Events

Performance of India:

- India has made giant strides in reducing multidimensional poverty, bringing down its poverty rate from 55% to 28% in ten years.
- Between 2005-06 and 2015-16, more than 271 million people have come out of the clutches of poverty in India. However, India still has the largest number of people living in multidimensional poverty in the world—around 364 million people. 156 million out of 364 million people who are MPI poor in 2015/2016 are children.
- India’s scale of poverty reduction has parallels with the phenomenal level of poverty reduction achieved in China a decade or so earlier. India’s scale of multidimensional poverty reduction over the decade from 2005/6 to 2015/16 – from 635 million poor persons to 364 million – can be compared to the speedy pace of China’s poverty reduction, which occurred over more than 20 years.
- Across nearly every state, poor nutrition is the largest contributor to multidimensional poverty. Not having a household member with at least six years of education is the second largest contributor. Insufficient access to clean water and child mortality contribute least.

State-wise data:

- Among states, Jharkhand had the greatest improvement, with Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland only slightly behind. However, Bihar is still the poorest state in 2015/16, with more than half of its population in poverty.
- In 2015/16, the four poorest states – Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh – were still home to 196 million MPI poor people – over half of all the MPI poor people in India. Delhi, Kerala and Goa have the lowest incidence of multidimensional poverty.

India’s relative performance:

- Among the South Asian countries, only Maldives boasts lower MPI of 0.007 than India (0.121). Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Afghanistan all boast higher incidences of multidimensional poverty.
- After India (364 million people), the countries with the largest number of people living in multi-dimensional poverty are Nigeria (97 million), Ethiopia (86 million), Pakistan (85 million), and Bangladesh (67 million).

Global performance:

- The global MPI covers 105 countries in total, home to 75% of the world’s population, or 5.7 billion people. Of this proportion, 1.3 billion are identified as multi-dimensionally poor, and half of them are younger than 18 years old.
- 83% of the world’s poor live in South Asia and Africa. The latest data further reveals the vast majority of the multidimensional poor – 1.1 billion people – live in rural areas around the world, where poverty rates are four times higher than among those living in urban areas.

4. EASE OF LIVING INDEX

What to study?

- For Prelims: Performance of various states.
- For Mains: Ease of Living index and its significance.
- **Context**: Ease of Living index has been released.
- Andhra Pradesh has topped Ease of Living Index rankings under AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation).
- It is followed by Odisha and Madhya Pradesh.

About the Ease of Living index:

- The index has been developed to allow city managers to get a grip on the city’s baseline and compare its performance across key indicators. The first edition of index released in January 2018 had ranked 111 Indian cities and was topped by Pune.
- The index **covers 116 cities** that are smart city contenders, capital cities, and cities with population of 1 million plus.

Sources: the hindu.
CURRENT EVENTS

- The index **captures the quality of life** based on the data collected from the urban local bodies on four parameters, which were further broken down into 15 categories.
- The **four parameters include** institutional (governance), social (identity, education, health, security), economic (economy, employment) and physical factors (waste water and solid waste management, pollution, housing/ inclusiveness, mixed land use, power and water supply, transport, public open spaces).
- Institutional and social parameters carry 25 points each, physical factors have a weightage of 45 points and economic factors five points totalling to a 100 mark scale on which cities were evaluated.

About AMRUT:

- AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).
  - It **adopts a project approach** to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.
  - Under this mission, **10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive** based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.
  - AMRUT will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above. It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.
  - Under this mission, **states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified cities** and in their execution and monitoring. States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects.
  - **Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.**
  - Under the mission, states will transfer funds to urban local bodies within 7 days of transfer by central government and no diversion of funds to be made failing which penal interest would be charged besides taking other adverse action by the centre.

Sources: pib.

**Paper 1 Topic:** Important Geophysical phenomena.

1. UN SEES 70% CHANCE OF EL NINO EVENT THIS YEAR

**What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: ENSO- El Nino and La Nia- causes, effects and impacts, global climate change and ENSO cycle.

  **Context:** The World Meteorological Organisation forecast “a 70% chance of an El Nino developing by the end of this year.” The warming phase of ENSO is called El Nino.

- The organisation sees increased odds of higher surface temperatures in most of Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, Africa and along much of South America’s coastline. Interior parts of South America, Greenland, many south Pacific islands and some in the Caribbean were identified as possible exceptions.

**What is ENSO?**

- ENSO is nothing but **El Nino Southern Oscillation.** As the name suggests, it is an irregular periodic variation of wind and sea surface temperature that occurs over the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean.

  ENSO affects the tropics (the regions surrounding the equator) and the subtropics (the regions adjacent to or bordering the tropics). The warming phase of ENSO is called El Nino, while the cooling phase is known as La Nina.

**What is El Nino?**

- El Nino is **a climatic cycle characterised by high air pressure in the Western Pacific and low air pressure in the eastern.** In normal conditions, strong trade winds travel from east to west across the tropical Pacific, pushing the warm surface waters towards the western Pacific.
The surface temperature could witness an increase of 8 degrees Celsius in Asian waters. At the same time, cooler waters rise up towards the surface in the eastern Pacific on the coasts of Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. This process called upwelling aids in the development of a rich ecosystem.

What causes El Nino?
- El Nino sets in when there is an anomaly in the pattern. The westward-blowing trade winds weaken along the Equator and due to changes in air pressure, the surface water moves eastwards to the coast of northern South America.
- The central and eastern Pacific regions warm up for over six months and result in an El Nino condition. The temperature of the water could rise up to 10 degrees Fahrenheit above normal. Warmer surface waters increase precipitation and bring above-normal rainfall in South America, and droughts to Indonesia and Australia.

What are El Nino's effects?
- El Nino affects global weather. It favours eastern Pacific hurricanes and tropical storms. Record and unusual rainfall in Peru, Chile and Ecuador are linked to the climate pattern.
- El Nino reduces upwelling of cold water, decreasing the uplift of nutrients from the bottom of the ocean. This affects marine life and sea birds. The fishing industry is also affected.
- Drought caused by El Nino can be widespread, affecting southern Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. Countries dependent on agriculture are affected.
- Australia and Southeast Asia get hotter.
- A recent WHO report on the health consequences of El Nino forecasts a rise in vector-borne diseases, including those spread by mosquitoes, in Central and South America. Cycles of malaria in India are also linked to El Nino.

Why is it a concern?
- The rise in sea surface temperature may be intensified by global warming. From the current study, we learn that El Nino can exacerbate global warming and hence the process could become a vicious circle.

What is La Nina?
- La Nina is a climate pattern that describes the cooling of surface ocean waters along the tropical west coast of South America. It is considered to have the opposite effect of El Nino.
- It brings greater than normal rainfall in Southeast Asia and Australia, and causes drier-than-normal conditions in South America and the Gulf Coast of the United States. La Nina events sometimes follow El Nino events.

How long does it last?
- An El Nino or La Nina episode lasts nine to 12 months. Some may prolong for years. Its average frequency is every 2 to 7 years. El Nino is more frequent than La Nina.

Sources: the hindu.
1. ETHICS COMMITTEE OF LOK SABHA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on Ethics Committee.
- **Context:** Senior BJP leader L K Advani has been renominated as Chairman of Ethics Committee of Lok Sabha by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan.

About Ethics Committee:

- The Ethics Committee of the Lok Sabha was constituted on 16 May 2000 as an adhoc committee. However, **in August 2015 it was given permanent Standing Committee status.**

Functions of the Committee:

- The Ethics Committee examines every complaint relating to unethical conduct of a member referred to it.
- It is also free to take up suo motu investigation into matters relating to ethics, including matters relating to unethical conduct by a member wherever felt necessary and make such recommendations as it may deem fit.

Sources: the hindu.

2. MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

What to study?

- For Prelims: Features of MCC, constitutional status.
- For Mains: Significance, need for reforms of MCC, committee constituted in this regard.
- **Context:** Election Commission (EC) has announced that Model Code of Conduct comes into force immediately in states where legislative assemblies have been dissolved prematurely.
- EC has also held that after dissolution caretaker government as well as the central government is barred from announcing new schemes in particular state from date of dissolution of legislative assembly till new House is elected.

Model Code of Conduct (MCC):

- **What is MCC?** These are the guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for conduct of political parties and candidates during elections mainly with respect to speeches, polling day, polling booths, election manifestos, processions and general conduct.
- **Aim:** To ensure free and fair elections.
- **When it comes into force?** So far, the Model Code of Conduct came into force immediately on announcement of the election schedule by the commission. The Code remains in force till the end of the electoral process.
- **Status:** The need for such code is in the interest of free and fair elections. However, the code does not have any specific statutory basis. It has only a persuasive effect. It contains what is known as “rules of electoral morality”. But this lack of statutory backing does not prevent the Commission from enforcing it.
- **Evolution:** The Commission issued the code for the first time in 1971 (5th Election) and revised it from time to time. This set of norms has been evolved with the consensus of political parties who have consented to abide by the principles embodied in the said code and also binds them to respect and observe it in its letter and spirit.
- **What it contains?** The salient features of the Model Code of Conduct lay down how political parties, contesting candidates and party(s) in power should conduct themselves during the process of elections i.e. on their general conduct during electioneering, holding meetings and processions, poll day activities and functioning of the party in power etc.

Sources: the hindu.
Paper 2 Topic: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

1. ARTICLE 161 OF THE CONSTITUTION

What to study?

- For Prelims: Article 161, differences in pardoning powers of President and Governor.
- For Mains: Significance of pardoning powers, role of cabinet and constitutional conundrum in such issues.

Context: After failing to get the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case released by exercising its statutory power to remit life sentences, the government in Tamil Nadu has taken recourse to a possible constitutional remedy. It has decided to invoke the Governor’s clemency power under Article 161 of the Constitution.

What’s the issue?

- In 2014, the Tamil Nadu government tried to invoke its remission powers under Section 432 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to release the convicts. The Centre opposed the move, arguing that since the case had been prosecuted by the Central Bureau of Investigation, the state first needed to take the Centre’s “concurrence” as required by Section 435 of the code.
- The dispute went to the Supreme Court, which decided in the Centre’s favour in 2015, ruling that the word “consultation” in Section 435 in spirit meant “concurrence”. In August this year, the Centre denied concurrence to Tamil Nadu on the grounds that releasing the people convicted of assassinating a former prime minister would have “international ramifications” for India.

What should the governor do now?

- Tamil Nadu Governor will now have to take a call on the advice of the State’s Council of Ministers and decide whether he is bound by it. He can either reject the proposal or seek its reconsideration. In either case, he will be mindful of the fact that his decision will be subject to judicial review.

Is the governor bound by the Cabinet’s advice?

- It is settled in law that except in matters where governor has discretion or enjoys independent powers, they are bound by the Cabinet’s decision. Governor does not have the option of returning a decision for reconsideration either since the Indian Constitution provides that recourse only for the President. However, governor’s decision, even if made on the aid and advice of the Cabinet, is subject to judicial review. Further, Supreme Court rulings on how governor should make decisions under Article 161 add to the complexity of the present case.
- In two separate judgements, the apex court has reiterated that governor’s power to pardon cannot be used mechanically. In Epuru Sudhakar, which involved a Congress leader in Andhra Pradesh, the court ruled that political considerations cannot be the basis for granting pardon, and set aside the governor’s clemency order.

Options before the governor:

- One, he can sit on the cabinet recommendation endlessly, as Article 161 of the Constitution does not prescribe any time limit for him to take a decision on the cabinet resolution.
- Two, he can return the resolution to the cabinet for clarification or reconsideration.
- Third, he can reject the resolution prompting the stake-holders to take the issue to courts, where it will be a time-consuming process.

Is concurrence of the Centre necessary?

- Since state’s executive power extends to all laws on the concurrent list, including the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, governor has the power to remit sentences handed down under such laws. In the particular matter of Rajiv Gandhi’s assassins, though, the point of concurrence was insisted upon as the case had been investigated by a central agency.
- But given that the exercise of governor’s power under Article 161 is constitutional, it does not require the Centre’s concurrence. The aid and advice of the state Cabinet is enough.
Why Centre’s intervention is necessary?

- There is a possibility that the Centre will challenge the governor’s order if he accepts the state Cabinet’s advice, not least because it will cause several legal and diplomatic complications.
- Since three of the convicts are Sri Lankan nationals, what will be their legal status after they are released? Will the Indian government be willing to let foreign nationals convicted of assassinating a former prime minister live in the country? Will it deport them to Sri Lanka, where they are bound to be arrested again? If they propose to move to another country, can India be expected to facilitate such a move?

Way ahead:

- An omnibus order of release clearly will not address the particularities in each case, or evaluate the gravity of their role in the crime and the effect on society of releasing them.
- **Moral issues:** In principle, the idea that convicts who have suffered prolonged incarceration require compassion cannot be faulted. The idea of locking away a person for life, without so much as a sliver of hope of freedom, is not in keeping with the ideals of a truly modern society.
- **What should not be ignored?** It is impossible to ignore the impact of such a decision on capital punishment. When lifelong imprisonment is regarded as a humane alternative to capital punishment, releasing life convicts may only strengthen the demand for the imposition of the death penalty — which would be retrograde. Although there are many political considerations behind the move to release the convicts, this case must be decided on the basis of legal principles alone.

What you need to know? Article 161:

- **Article 161** deals with Power of Governor to grant pardons, etc, and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.
- It states, the Governor of a State shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respite or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARDONING POWERS OF PRESIDENT AND GOVERNOR:

- The scope of the pardoning power of the President under Article 72 is wider than the pardoning power of the Governor under Article 161. The power differs in the following two ways:
  - The power of the President to grant pardon extends in cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial but Article 161 does not provide any such power to the Governor.
  - The President can grant pardon in all cases where the sentence given is sentence of death but pardoning power of Governor does not extend to death sentence cases.

Significance of pardoning powers:

- The pardoning power of Executive is very significant as it corrects the errors of judiciary. It eliminates the effect of conviction without addressing the defendant’s guilt or innocence.
- Pardon may substantially help in saving an innocent person from being punished due to miscarriage of justice or in cases of doubtful conviction.
- The object of pardoning power is to correct possible judicial errors, for no human system of judicial administration can be free from imperfections.

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 2 Topic:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1. DEPARTMENT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

What to study?

- For Prelims: Department of Official language, constitutional provisions related to official language.
- For Mains: Hindi as official language- issues associated, concerns and what needs to be done?
- **Context:** The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh recently chaired first review meeting of the Department of Official Language of MHA to discuss the functioning and issues related to implementation of Hindi language in official work.
CURRENT EVENTS

Department of Official Language:

- With a view to ensuring compliance of the constitutional and legal provisions regarding official language and to promote the use of Hindi for the official purposes of the Union, the Department of Official Language was set up in June 1975 as an independent Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Since then, this Department has been making efforts for accelerating the progressive use of Hindi for the official purposes of the Union.
- In accordance with the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, this Department has been entrusted with the following items of work:
  - Implementing the provisions of the Constitution relating to the Official Language and the provisions of the Official Languages Act, 1963 (19 of 1963), except to the extent such implementation has been assigned to any other Department.
  - Prior approval of the President for authorising the limited use of a language, other than English, in the proceedings in the High Court of a State.
  - Nodal responsibility for all matters relating to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union including Hindi Teaching Scheme for Central Government Employees and publication of magazines, journals & other literature related thereto.
  - Co-ordination in all matters relating to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union, including administrative terminology, syllabi, textbooks, training courses and equipment (with standardised script) required therefor.

Constitutional provisions:

- Part 17 of the constitution of India (Articles 343 to Article 351) makes elaborate provisions dealing with the official language of the Republic of India. The main provisions dealing with the official language of the Union are embodied in Articles 343 and 344 of the Constitution of India. The Official languages have been listed in the 8th schedule of Constitution of India.

Official language of union:

- Hindi written in Devanagari script is the Official Language of the Union. The original constitution provided that for a period of 15 years from the commencement of the constitution, English will continue to be used for all official purposes of the Union.
- The constitution made it clear that President may, during the said period, by order authorize the use of the Hindi language in addition to the English language and of the Devanagari form of numerals in addition to the international form of Indian numerals for any of the official purposes of the Union.
  - The constitution also makes it clear that even after 15 years, the Parliament by law may provide for the continued use of English for any specific purpose.
  - The constitution has put all authority in the hands of the central government both for formulating and implementing the language policy.
  - It is also special responsibility of the centre to develop and spread the official language (Hindi) of the union (art. 351).

Facts for Prelims:

- The department has developed a computer software called “Kanthasth” for translating the all kinds of official files from English to Hindi and vice versa to make the translation work simpler and quicker.
- An E-learning platform called the “Pravah” also being developed by the department for use in 16 Indian languages including English. Anybody can learn Hindi through his mother tongue with the help of this E-learning platform.

Sources: pib.

2. ANIMAL WELFARE BOARD OF INDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims: About AWBI.
- For Mains: Issues related to the welfare of animals in India.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Context:** Union Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi has locked horns with the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), accusing it of being lax in enforcement of rules that specify how wild animals can be depicted in films and television programmes.

What’s the issue?

- The minister has listed “blatant errors” by the AWBI subcommittee that screens applications from film-makers. She alleged that the committee did not seek details of the species being used, which were required to determine whether they were protected.
- It had even allowed their depiction in scenes that could promote cruelty to animals. This is against the Supreme Court’s orders.

About Animal Welfare Board of India:

- Established in 1962 under Section 4 of *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960*, the Animal Welfare Board of India is a statutory advisory body advising the Government of India on animal welfare laws, and promotes animal welfare in the country of India.
- Animal Welfare Board of India was *started under the stewardship of Late Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale*, well known humanitarian.
  - The Board was initially within the jurisdiction of the Government of India’s Ministry of Food and Agriculture. In 1990, the subject of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was transferred to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, where it now resides.
  - The Board consists of 28 Members, who serve for a period of 3 years.
  - It works to ensure that animal welfare laws in the country are followed and provides grants to Animal Welfare Organisations. The Board oversees Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs) by granting recognition to them if they meet its guidelines.

Sources: the hindu.

3. DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)

What to study?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** DAC- composition and functions, significance.
- **Context:** DAC has approved Procurement of Equipment Worth Rs 9,100 Crores.

**DAC has approved procurement of- Akash Missile systems and IUWBA:**

- **Akash Missile Systems:** The Missile to be procured is an upgraded version of the previously inducted Akash missiles and will include seeker technology, possess 360 degree coverage and will be of compact configuration with reduced signature. The upgraded Akash Weapon System is operationally critical equipment which will provide protection to vital assets.
- The DAC also accorded approval for progressing Design and Development of *Individual Under Water Breathing Apparatus (IUWBA)* for T 90 Tanks. Developed by DRDO Lab DEBEL, the IUWBA is used by the crew of Tanks as a safety gear and is required by the Tank crew for emergency escape when negotiating water obstacles while deep fording.

** Defence Acquisition Council (DAC):**

- **What is it?** To counter corruption and speed up decision- making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- **Objective:** The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
4. SOUTHERN ZONAL COUNCIL

What to study?
- For Prelims: Zonal Councils and their composition.
- For Mains: Zonal Councils and their significance.

**Context:** The 28th meeting of the Southern Zonal Council was recently held under the Chairmanship of the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh in Bengaluru.

The Council reviewed the progress of the implementation of the recommendations made at the last meeting relating to security to fishermen, introduction of peninsular tourism trains, uniformity in allocation of funds in proportion to population of SC/ST for scholarship for all the courses etc.

What are zonal councils?

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

There are 5 five Zonal Councils namely:

- **The Central Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- **The Eastern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.
- **The Western Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- **The Southern Zonal Council** is composed of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

**Composition:**

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

The main objectives of setting up of Zonal Councils are:

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

**Facts for Prelims:**

- **The North Eastern States** i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya (vii) Sikkim and (viii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the **North Eastern Council**, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.

Sources: pib.
5. ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

What to study?

• For Prelims and Mains: Composition, objectives, functions and significance of AEC.

• **Context:** The government has appointed renowned scientist Kamlesh Nilkanth Vyas as chairman of Atomic Energy Commission and secretary of Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). He will succeed Shekhar Basu.

About AEC:

• The Indian Atomic Energy Commission was first setup in August 1948 in the Department of Scientific Research.
• Later on, in accordance with a Government Resolution, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was established in the Department of Atomic Energy. The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) was setup on August 3, 1954 under the direct charge of the Prime Minister through a Presidential Order.
• According to the Resolution constituting the AEC, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Atomic Energy is ex-officio Chairman of the Commission.
• The other Members of the AEC are appointed on the recommendation of the Chairman, AEC and after approval by the Prime Minister.

**Important functions of the Atomic Energy Commission are:**

• To organise research in atomic scientists in the country.
• To train, atomic scientists in the country.
• To promote nuclear research in commission’s own laboratories as well as in India.
• To undertake prospecting of atomic minerals in India and to extract such minerals for use on industrial scale.

Sources: pib.

6. CHILD ADOPTION REGULATORY AUTHORITY (CARA)

What to study?

• For Prelims: Key facts on CARA.
• For Mains: Child adoption- guidelines, issues and ways to address them.

• **Context:** Child Adoption Regulatory Authority (CARA) has allowed individuals in a live-in relationship to adopt children from and within India.

• **Exception:** CARA has barred applicants in a live-in relationship from adopting a child on the ground that “the Authority would like the children to be placed only with a stable family and individuals in a live-in relationship cannot be considered as stable family.”

Eligibility:

• The eligibility criteria under Adoption Regulations, 2017, permit single women to adopt a child of any gender, while single men can adopt only boys.
• When a married couple seeks to adopt a child, it needs to give its consent for adoption and should be stable marriage for at least two years. Applicants have to be physically, mentally and financially stable to raise a child.

About CARA:

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

Sources: pib.
7. CENTRAL ZONAL COUNCIL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Zonal Councils- objectives, significance, composition and issues associated.

- **Context:** The 21st Central Zonal Council meeting was held in Lucknow and was chaired by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh.

- The Council discussed various issues including road transport, Pradhanmantri Gramin Sadak Yojna, measures to tackle Naxal violence, modernization of Police, infrastructure development of airports, minimum support price, National health mission and issues related to primary schools.

What are zonal councils?

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

There are 5 five Zonal councils namely:

- **The Northern Zonal Council,** comprising the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh.

- **The Central Zonal Council,** comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

- **The Eastern Zonal Council,** comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.

- **The Western Zonal Council,** comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

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- **Union Ministers** are also invited to participate in the meetings of Zonal Councils depending upon necessity.

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- Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate and exchange ideas and experiences.

- Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States for successful and speedy execution of development projects.

- **Facts for Prelims:** The North Eastern States i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya (vii) Sikkim and (viii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the **North Eastern Council Act, 1972.**

Sources: the hindu.

8. CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR DATA ANALYTICS (CEDA)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: CEDA- objectives, functions and significance.
**CURRENT EVENTS**

- **Context:** National Informatics Centre (NIC) and NIC Services Incorporated (NICS) have jointly set up a Centre of Excellence for data analytics.

**About CEDA:**
- The Centre aims to support Government departments to unlock the hidden potential of the data that they are generating as part of the governance processes and use it to improve the overall governance.
- It seeks to kick-start and fast track the adoption of advanced analytics and machine learning capabilities.

**Functions:**
- It shall provide quality data analytic services to government departments at all levels by identifying appropriate tools and technologies and deploying people with right expertise.
- As part of its service offerings, it will help the departments understand their business requirements and define their analytic needs, identify the data sets that are required to meet the analytic needs, determine access to the relevant data sources (both within as well as outside the government) and build the required data analytic solutions.
- It also seeks to integrate departmental data silos and deliver an integrated whole-of-government analytics for an integrated policy formulation.

*Sources: the hindu.*

**Paper 2 Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act.**

**1. DECRIMINALISATION OF POLITICS**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Salient features of RPA.
- For Mains: Criminalisation of politics- concerns, challenges and solutions.
- **Context:** The Supreme Court has asked the Parliament to make a law to prevent persons with serious criminal cases pending against them from entering legislature and be part of law making.

**Background:**
- A bunch of pleas had been filed raising questions whether lawmakers, who face criminal trial, can be disqualified from fighting elections at the stage of framing of charges against them.

**What did the court say?**
- The court observed that it cannot enter the legislative arena to provide disqualification of candidates, who are facing serious criminal cases against them. However, it asked the candidates to put in bold letter her/his criminal antecedents in the required affidavit.
- The SC said each political party will put on its website the criminal antecedents of each of its candidates so as to allow the voters to make an informed choice.

**What does the RPA say?**
- Currently, under the Representation of Peoples (RP) Act, lawmakers cannot contest elections only after their conviction in a criminal case.
- Section 8 of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1951 disqualifies a person convicted with a sentence of two years or more from contesting elections. But those under trial continued to be eligible to contest elections. The Lily Thomas case (2013), however, ended this unfair advantage.

**Criminals in Politics:**
- Protecting the parliamentary system from criminalisation has been the intention of the law from the beginning.

**Efforts by SC in this regard:**
- The SC has repeatedly expressed concern about the purity of legislatures.
- In 2002, it made it obligatory for all candidates to file an affidavit before the returning officer, disclosing criminal cases pending against them.
CURRENT EVENTS

- The famous order to introduce NOTA was intended to make political parties think before giving tickets to the tainted.
- In its landmark judgment of March 2014, the SC accepted the urgent need for cleansing politics of criminalisation and directed all subordinate courts to decide on cases involving legislators within a year, or give reasons for not doing so to the chief justice of the high court.

The trend:

- According to the ADR’s analysis of EC data, 187 MPs in the current Lok Sabha face criminal charges (that is, 34.4 per cent). Of them, 113 face serious criminal charges. The number has gone up from 162 (76 serious) charges in 2009 and 128 (58 serious) in 2004.

Main reasons for Criminalization:

- Corruption
- Vote bank.
- Lack of governance.

What is the way out?

- There are three possible options.
  1. One, political parties should themselves refuse tickets to the tainted.
  2. Two, the RP Act should be amended to debar persons against whom cases of a heinous nature are pending from contesting elections.
  3. Three, fast-track courts should decide the cases of tainted legislators quickly.

Suggested measure to curb criminalization of politics:

- Bringing greater transparency in campaign financing is going to make it less attractive for political parties to involve gangsters.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) should have the power to audit the financial accounts of political parties, or political parties’ finances should be brought under the right to information (RTI) law.
- Broader governance will have to improve for voters to reduce the reliance on criminal politicians.
- Fast-track courts are necessary because politicians are able to delay the judicial process and serve for decades before prosecution.
- The Election Commission must take adequate measures to break the nexus between the criminals and the politicians.
- The forms prescribed by the Election Commission for candidates disclosing their convictions, cases pending in courts and so on in their nomination papers is a step in the right direction if it applied properly.

Way ahead:

- Corruption and criminalisation of politics is hitting at the roots of democracy. Therefore, Parliament must take steps urgently to curb this menace. Candidates and political parties must give wide publicity to criminal cases pending against her/him in the local media, both print and electronic, after s/he files nomination to contest elections.

Sources: the hindu.

2. PUBLISHING POLL CANDIDATE’S PROPAGANDA IS PAID NEWS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key facts on ECI.
- For Mains: Paid news menace- concerns, challenges and solutions.

Context: Election Commission of India recently told the Supreme Court that repeated publication of propaganda lauding the achievements of a candidate in an election is nothing but “paid news”.

- The EC has asked the court to declare whether it amounts to “paid news” if widely circulated daily newspapers cover statements issued by, and in the name of, a candidate.
Concerns:

- Such news are not only laudatory of his or her record and achievements but also are a direct appeal to voters by the candidate. Therefore, politicians cannot say that it is part of their fundamental right to free speech to spew out “motivated propaganda”.
- If such motivated propaganda is allowed in the name of free speech during the election period, candidates with a strong network of connections will exploit their sphere of influence in society. This will have the unequal advantage of encashing such silent services.

Background:

- The commission has moved the court in appeal against a decision of the Delhi High Court to set aside the disqualification of a MP in Madhya Pradesh.
- ECI’s National Level Committee on Paid News found that five newspapers, with a wide circulation, had published 42 news items that were biased and one-sided and aimed at furthering the prospects of the leader. Some of the reports were advertisements in favour of him. The committee concluded that the items fitted the definition of “paid news”.

**Delhi HC order and why was it challenged?**

- The Delhi HC order had not only overturned the EC’s order on disqualification, but it also stated that the Commission’s remit is limited to election expenditure incurred by candidates and not content of speech.
- While the EC does not usually move court on its own, this was seen as a fit case as it was felt that the Delhi HC order had dealt a major blow to the fight against paid news.
- It was also felt that unless the legal position on the issue was corrected, the EC’s role and power to check paid news in elections will be irreparably undermined.
- Legal advice taken also weighed in favour of moving the Supreme Court.

**Paid news menace:**

- Over 600 paid news complaints were forwarded by EC to Press Council of India with reference to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the government had informed Parliament.
- EC has repeatedly been asking the law ministry to treat paid news as a cognisable offence and the 2015 Law Commission reports call for amendments in laws to check the menace. The UPA government had also set up a Group of ministers to examine the issue.

**Need of the hour:**

- The ECI has written to the Union government before, suggesting that paid news be made an electoral offence under the RPA. A Law Commission report from 2015 also recommends amending the RPA to this effect.

**Sources:** the hindu.

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

### 1. APPOINTMENT OF LOKPAL

**What to study?**

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

**Context:** Government has constituted eight-member search committee headed by former Supreme Court judge, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, to recommend names for posts of Lokpal chairperson and members. The selection process of Lokpal is underway as per guidelines of laid down in Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

**Committee’s Terms of Reference:**

- The search committee will start functioning soon. It will recommend names for Lokpal chairperson and members. It can also consider names other than those recommended by the search committee.
Highlights of the Lokpal Act of 2013:

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

Powers:

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

Sources: pib.

**Paper 2 Topic:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

1. **SECTION 377**

What to study?

- For Prelims: What is Section 377? Fundamental Rights under considerations.
- For Mains: Significance of the judgment and issues associated with Section 377.
- **Context:** The Supreme Court has pronounced its much-awaited verdict on a clutch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of section 377 of the IPC which criminalises consensual gay sex.

The verdict and its significance:

- **The Court said gay sex among consenting adults is not an offence.** The verdict assumes significance as in the earlier round of litigation in 2013 the Supreme Court had reversed the Delhi high court ruling decriminalising homosexuality or same sex relationship.
- However, **bestiality will continue as an offence.** Any kind of sexual activity with animals shall remain penal offence under Section 377 of the IPC.
- The judgement is based on the interpretation of Article 14 (Right to Equality); Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth); Article 19 (Freedom of Speech and Expression); and Article 21 (Right to Life and Right to Privacy) of the Indian Constitution.

The law:

- **Section 377 of IPC** – which came into force in 1862 – defines unnatural offences. It says, “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall also be liable to fine.”

Delhi HC legalises homosexuality:

- The Delhi high court had in July 2009 de-criminalised consensual homosexual acts in private by declaring as unconstitutional a part of Section 377 of IPC that criminalises unnatural sex, saying “the section denies a gay person a right to full personhood...”
SC re-criminalises homosexuality:

- The Supreme Court chose to reverse the verdict in December 2013.
- Upholding the constitutional validity of Section 377 IPC, an SC bench headed by Justice GS Singhvi (since retired), put the ball in the Parliament’s court, saying it was for the legislature to take a call on the desirability of the controversial provision.

Implications for heterosexuals:

- The case has implications for heterosexuals also, as consensual sexual acts of adults such as oral and anal sex in private are currently treated as unnatural and punishable under Section 377 IPC.

Background:

- Homosexuality is considered a taboo in a largely conservative Indian society which appears to be divided on the controversial issue.
- Freedom loving people (not necessarily belonging to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender or LGBT community) want homosexuality de-criminalised but many still consider it a “deviant behaviour” and not merely a question of one’s sexual orientation or preference.

International developments:

- There have been many positive developments in favour of LGBT community on the international front. In May 2015, Ireland legalised same-sex marriage. The country which had decriminalised homosexuality in 1993 became the first country to allow same sex marriage a national level by popular vote.
  - In June 2015, the US Supreme Court ruled that same sex marriages were legal. Near home, Nepal legalised homosexuality in 2007 and the new Constitution of the country too gives many rights to the LGBT community.
  - France, UK, Canada, United States, Australia and Brazil have de-criminalised homosexuality. Other countries like Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and Uruguay allow either same sex marriage or a civil union.
  - India currently stands with a host of countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Mauritania, Qatar and Pakistan which criminalises homosexuality.

Criticisms:

- **Child abuse and Section 377:** Many child rights activists had criticised the Delhi HC verdict de-criminalising homosexuality on the ground that Section 377 was needed to be on the statute book to tackle cases of child abuse. However, the enactment of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012 has removed the need to use Section 377 in child sexual abuse cases. POCSO is more child-friendly and much more stringent.
- **Law and morality:** Those against legalising gay sex argue that it is against the moral values of the society. However, activists arguing for it say what is forbidden in religion need not be prohibited in law. They argue that morality cannot be a ground to restrict the fundamental rights of citizens. A legal wrong is necessarily a moral wrong but vice versa is not correct. A moral wrong becomes a legal wrong only when its consequences are for society and not just the person/s committing it.

Challenges ahead:

- The Supreme Court judgment only deals with a narrow interpretation of Section 377. Besides decriminalising homosexuality, the judgment does not confer any further rights.
- **Gay marriages:** Marriages between same-sex partners are not recognised in India, but this can be changed by inserting a provision in the Special Marriage Act.
- **Adoption:** Law prohibits adoption of a child by a gay couple.
- **Inheritance:** One partner cannot inherit properties left behind by their same-sex partner, unless a will is drawn in favour of the person. A will, too, can be contested by family members of the partners.
- **On pending criminal cases:** The judgment will have a bearing on criminal cases pending trial, appeal or revision on disposed off cases. The judgment will have no bearing on disposed off cases and old cases cannot be reopened. It opens the flood gates for securing other civil rights.

Sources: the hindu.
2. ATAL PENSION YOJANA

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** Union Cabinet decided to indefinitely extended Atal Pension Scheme, which had lapsed in August 2018. It also has broadened its scope by keeping it open-ended. The extension was given by taking into consideration of mass participation.

New changes:
- To further incentivize people’s participation in the scheme, *age criterion for participation has been revised.* Earlier, people of age 18 to 60 years were entitled to enroll in this scheme. But now it has been relaxed further to 65 years, taking into consideration rise in average age expectancy,
- Also, *now the scheme will expand its focus to target individuals,* instead of households. Besides, all accounts opened after August 2018 will have accident insurance limit of Rs 2 lakh, double than earlier Rs 1 lakh limit. The overdraft facility of the scheme has also been increased from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000.

**Atal Pension Yojana (APY):**
- Under the APY, subscribers would receive a fixed minimum pension of Rs. 1000 per month, Rs. 2000 per month, Rs. 3000 per month, Rs. 4000 per month, Rs. 5000 per month, at the age of 60 years, depending on their contributions, which itself would vary on the age of joining the APY.
- *The Central Government would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum,* whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years, that is, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, to those who join the NPS before 31st December, 2015 and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not Income Tax payers.
- *The minimum age of joining APY is 18 years and maximum age is 40 years.* The benefit of fixed minimum pension would be guaranteed by the Government.

Sources: pib.

3. TRUST STATUS FOR BHARAT KE VEER

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Bharat Ke Veer- key facts and significance.
- **Context:** The government has granted the status of a trust to ‘Bharat Ke Veer’, a private initiative which aids families of paramilitary personnel killed in action. Akshay Kumar and former national badminton champion Pullela Gopichand have been included as trustees.

**Support by the government:**
- The initiative has now been *formalized into a registered trust* for providing a platform for all citizens to contribute and provide assistance to the families of martyred personnel.
- *The public can visit* the ‘Bharat Ke Veer’ application and website, *and contribute* to support the families of jawans who die in the line of duty.
- Contributions to Bharat Ke Veer have been *exempted from Income Tax.*

**About Bharat ke Veer:**
- **What is it?** It is a fund-raising initiative by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India on behalf of members of the Indian Armed Forces. It aims to enable willing donors to contribute towards the family of a braveheart who sacrificed his/her life in line of duty. This website is technically supported by National Informatics Centre (NIC) and powered by State Bank of India.
- **How it works?** It allows anyone to financially support the bravehearts of his choice or towards the “Bharat Ke Veer” corpus. The amount so donated will be credited to the account of ‘Next of Kin’ of those Central Armed Police Force/Central Para Military Force soldiers. To ensure maximum coverage, a cap of 15 lakh rupees is imposed and the donors would be alerted if the amount exceeds, so that they can choose to divert part of the donation to another braveheart account or to the “Bharat Ke Veer” corpus.
Who will manage the fund? “Bharat Ke Veer” corpus would be managed by a committee made up of eminent persons of repute and senior Government officials, who would decide to disburse the fund equitably to the braveheart’s family on need basis.

Sources: pib.

4. DISTRICT DISABILITY REHABILITATION CENTRE (DDRC)

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key features of DDRC.
- For Mains: Significance, objectives and roles of DDRC.

Context: The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment is organising a ‘National Conference of District Disability Rehabilitation Centres’.
- The participants in this one day conference include District Magistrates of 263 districts were DDRCs have been set up, Principal Secretaries Social Welfare, reputed NGOs, District Social Welfare officers, eminent Doctors etc.
- The conference is organized for taking the message of DDRCs further, which play a crucial and central role for the wellbeing of Divyangjan and to give clarification about the mechanism of schemes and disseminate its success stories.

About DDRC:
- District Disability Rehabilitation Centre (DDRC) provide comprehensive services to persons with disabilities and facilitate creation of infrastructure and capacity building at the district level for awareness generation, rehabilitation and training of rehabilitation professionals.
- The District Disability Rehabilitation Centres are set up under the Plan Scheme: “Scheme for implementation of Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 (SIPDA).” 310 districts have been identified and 263 DDRCs have been set up.

Objectives of the District Disability Rehabilitation Centres are as under:
- Awareness generation, early intervention and assessment of the need of assistive devices to divyangjans.
- Therapeutic services such as Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy etc. to divyangjans through rehabilitation professionals.
- Equipment for rehabilitation services.

Role of State Government:
- State Governments are expected to play a more pro-active role in the effective working of DDRCs. In order to ensure greater involvement of State/District Administration, the State Government may suitably supplement the honorarium and other requirements of the DDRCs for undertaking their various activities in an effective manner.
- State Governments may authorized District Collectors in their capacity as Chairperson of DMT, to make minor modifications for effective functioning of DDRCs, considering the ground realities within the broad stipulation of the DDRC Scheme.
- State Government may also authorize the District Collectors to make interim advances out of the local funds placed at their disposal to tide over the difficulties caused in the field due to procedural delays in release of central funds.

Sources: pib.

5. PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA (PMMVY)

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key features of PMMVY.
- For Mains: Significance of the mission and the need for it.
- Context: Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) recently marked the anniversary of the launch of scheme as Matru Vandana Saptah.
• National level achievement of the scheme post an year’s implementation on grounds is 48.11 Lakhs of women enrollment under the scheme till September 13, 2018, out of which 37.30 Lakhs have been paid the maternity benefit which accounts to a total fund disbursement of Rs1168.63 Crores.

About PMMVY:
• Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a maternity benefit rechristened from erstwhile Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY). The IGMSY was launched in 2010.
• The scheme is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first live birth.
• It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.
• Exceptions: The maternity benefits under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) are available to all Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers (PW&LM) except those in regular employment with the Central Government or State Government or Public Sector Undertaking or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.
• Funding: The scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40 while for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States; it is 90:10. It is 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

Need for special attention:
• Under-nutrition continues to adversely affect majority of women in India. In India, every third woman is undernourished and every second woman is anaemic. An undernourished mother almost inevitably gives birth to a low birth weight baby. When poor nutrition starts in-utero, it extends throughout the life cycle since the changes are largely irreversible.
• Owing to economic and social distress many women continue to work to earn a living for their family right up to the last days of their pregnancy. Furthermore, they resume working soon after childbirth, even though their bodies might not permit it, thus preventing their bodies from fully recovering on one hand, and also impeding their ability to exclusively breastfeed their young infant in the first six months.

Sources: pib.
6. DEENDAYAL ANTYODAYA YOJANA – NATIONAL RURAL LIVELIHOODS MISSION (DAY-NRLM)

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key features of DAY- NRLM.
- For Mains: Significance of the mission, need for empowerment of rural India.
- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the extension of timeline for implementation of the Special Package under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) for Jammu & Kashmir for another period of one year during 2018-19.
- The Cabinet also approved allocation of funds to the State under DAY-NRLM on a need basis for implementation of the Special Package without linking it with poverty ratio.

Impact:
- This will help in covering all the vulnerable rural households in the State (estimated at two thirds of the total number of households) within a definite time frame.
- It will ensure mobilization of households under the auto inclusion category and households with at least one deprivation category listed in the Socio Economic Caste Census – 2011.
- It will also ensure coverage of all the blocks in Jammu & Kashmir under DAY-NRLM and ensures social inclusion, social development, promotion of livelihoods leading to poverty alleviation in the State.

About Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM):
- The Government is implementing DAY-NRLM across the country in all States and Union Territories (except Delhi and Chandigarh).
- The financial support under the programme is mainly in the form of Revolving Fund and Community Investment Funds, given as grants to the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and their federations.
- DAY-NRLM also focuses on bank linkage of the institutions.
- The programme has a special focus on women empowerment including a dedicated component for promoting farm and non-farm based livelihoods for women farmers in rural areas.
- In addition, start-up enterprises at village levels are also supported to promote entrepreneurial activities in those areas.

Sources: pib.

7. ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key facts on Aspirational Districts Program.
- For Mains: Significance, challenges and potential of the program, need for such schemes.
- **Context:** In a bid to understand and address the challenges faced by the district administrations in implementing skill programs and help develop capacities, the government has approved a plan for visits of the senior officers of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurships to the ‘Aspirational Districts’ between October 2, 2018 and January 26, 2019.

The plan:
- The visit of officers of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurships will begin with a meeting with Districts Collector / CEO-Zila Parishad and other State level officers implementing the programs.
- The team will also have interactions with Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras, training providers, ITIs, Polytechnics and JSS administrations.
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- The team would also have conversation with students and industry present in these districts. This will enable a stock taking of the available skill ecosystem vis-à-vis the available data and provide good understanding of challenges to be addressed at the district level to make youth employable.

About Aspirational Districts Programme:
- Launched in January this year, the ‘Transformation of Aspirational Districts’ programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
- The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level ‘Prabhari’ Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan.
- With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

Focus of the programme:
- To enable optimum utilization of their potential, this program focuses closely on improving people’s ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy.
- Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure are this programme’s core areas of focus.

Significance of the scheme:
- If these districts are transformed, there would be tremendous improvement in the internal security environment of the country.
- If Prabhari officers can bring convergence in the development efforts of different Ministries and state Governments and the schemes specially launched by Home Ministry in these districts, it would serve as a great opportunity to ensure rapid development in the country.

Sources: pib.

8. ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJNA

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the programme.
- Context: The Employee’s State Insurance (ESI) has approved a scheme named ‘Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna’ for Insured Persons (IP) covered under the Employees’ State Insurance Act, 1948.

About Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna:
- Aim: It aims to financially support those who lost their jobs or rendered jobless for whatsoever reasons due to changing employment pattern.
- Its beneficiaries will be insured persons covered under Employees’ State Insurance Act, 1948 for period of two years continuously.

Key features:
- Cash assistance: Under the scheme, relief will be payable in cash directly to bank account of insured persons in case of unemployment. This financial assistance will be given to insured persons even while they search for new engagement. Beneficiary insured workers will be paid money, from their own contribution towards ESI scheme, in cash through bank account transfer.
- Under this scheme, workers will be able to draw 47% of their total contributions towards ESIC after remaining unemployed for at least three months from date of leaving their previous jobs. They can choose to receive the
cash at one go or in instalments. It will be applicable to all factories and establishments employing at least 10 workers.

**About ESI:**
- ESI is self-financing social security and health insurance scheme for Indian workers.
- It is autonomous corporation by statutory creation under Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India.
- It is managed by Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) according to rules and regulations stipulated there in the ESI Act 1948.

**9. ‘SPUTUM SAMPLE TRANSPORTATION’ PROJECT**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the project.
- **Context:** A pilot project for utilising services of Department of Post for transport of sputum specimen for TB Diagnosis was launched by the Health Ministry.

**What is Sputum?**
- Sputum is a thick fluid that is produced in the lungs and the airways leading to the lungs. A sample of sputum is usually collected by the person coughing.

**TB Sputum Test:**
- The sputum test is often the first TB test to be used in countries with a high rate of TB infection.
- Sputum microscopy is inexpensive and simple, and people can be trained to do it relatively quickly and easily.

**Need for and significance of postal transportation of Sputum:**
- Most of the patients are not diagnosed because the specimen does not reach the laboratory due to non-availability of specimen transport mechanisms.
- Transport of collected specimen also spares the patient’s from travelling to the reference laboratory. Prompt transport of specimen followed by efficacious testing will enable appropriate management of the TB patients and reduced disease transmission.

**Sources: the hindu.**

**10. AYUSHMAN BHARAT**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims and Mains: Ayushman Bharat- features, objectives and significance.
- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently rolled out the Centre’s flagship scheme — Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Abhiyaan, also known as Ayushman Bharat or the National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM).

**Significance of the project:**
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- This is the world’s largest health scheme which will serve a population that equals 27-28 European countries. The beneficiaries are almost equal to the population of Canada, Mexico and US put together.
- Meant to help the poor and the economically deprived, the scheme will be available for 10.74 crore beneficiary families and about 50 crore Indian citizens.

Ayushman Bharat:

- Ayushman Bharat is the National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore poor vulnerable families (around 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage of up to ₹5 lakh (per family per year) for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation.
- It will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes – Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).

Highlights of the scheme:

- **Coverage**: The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.
- **Target**: The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database. Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- **Role of state governments**: State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.
- **Council**: For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.

Who is eligible?

- It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.
- The different categories in rural area include families having only one room with kucha walls and kucharooft; families having no adult member between age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.
- Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.

Why Ayushman Bharat?

- According to health ministry officials, the 71st round of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) revealed that 85.9% of rural households and 82% of urban households have no access to healthcare insurance/assurance.
- More than 24% households in rural India and 18 per cent population in the urban area have met their healthcare expenses through some sort of borrowing. The Ayushman Bharat intends to change this status quo.

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 2 Topic**: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**1. DRAFT RULES FOR E PHARMACIES**

What to study?

- For Prelims: Highlights of the Draft.
- For Mains: Need for regulation and significance of e pharmacies.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Context:** Ministry of health and family welfare has issued a draft notification recently on the sale of drugs by E-Pharmacies. The notification is about the amendment of Drugs and Cosmetics Rules amendment to enable registration of the e pharmacies and monitoring of their functioning.

Significance of these rules:
- With this, Rs 3000 crore online pharma business will be regularised from the day of final notification.
- These rules have been proposed to ensure accessibility and availability of drugs to the people across India.
- After the rules are finalised, people will be able to get genuine drugs through these online pharmacies.

Highlights of the Draft:
- All the e-pharmacies have to be registered compulsorily with the Central Drugs Standard control organisation.
- Psychotropic substances, habit-forming medicines like cough syrup and sleeping pills, schedule X drugs will not be sold online.
- Apart from registration, the e pharmacies have to obtain a license from the State government to sell the medicines online.
- The application of registration of e-pharmacy will have to be accompanied by a sum of Rs 50,000 while asserting that an e-pharmacy registration holder will have to comply with provisions of Information Technology Act, 2000 (21 of 2000).
- The details of patient shall be kept confidential and shall not be disclosed to any person other than the central government or the state government concerned, as the case may be.
- The supply of any drug shall be made against a cash or credit memo generated through the e-pharmacy portal and such memos shall be maintained by the e-pharmacy registration holder as record.
- Both state and central drug authorities will be monitoring the data of sales and transactions of e pharmacies. Any violation of rules the registration of e-pharmacies will be suspended, and it can be cancelled too.
- The premises from which e-pharmacy is operated regular inspections will be conducted every two years by the central licencing authority.

Significance of the sector:
- Patients can order medicines by uploading the prescription, and they will be delivered at home by the e pharmacies. As there are no distribution costs involved and the e pharmacies procured directly from the manufacturers, the price may come down by 20 to 30% Maximum Retail Price.
- All the transaction will be done electronically which will encourage digital payments, and these bills can be tracked online for any misuse.
- Each E pharmacy shall appoint pharmacists with customer care which will create the additional jobs in addition to the existing offline pharmacists.

Sources: the hindu.

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2. SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights of the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and important circuits covered under the scheme, First tribal circuit under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Key features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme.

- **Context:** The Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned the project “Development of Rural Circuit: Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism Project” in Kerala under Swadesh Darshan Scheme for Rs. 80.37 Crores. The project focuses on development of water based thematic cruise experiences in and around Valapattanam and Kuppam Rivers of Kannur District.

- **First Tribal Circuit Project under Swadesh Darshan Scheme will be inaugurated in Chhattisgarh.** This is the second project under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme being inaugurated in the country.

**Tribal Circuit:**
- Development of Tribes and Tribal Culture is one of the prime area of focus for the Ministry of Tourism. The Ministry is carrying out an array of activities for development and promotion of tourism in the tribal region. The Ministry is developing the tourism infrastructure in the region under its schemes of Swadesh
CURRENT EVENTS

Darshan. Under the tribal circuit theme of the scheme the Ministry has sanctioned 4 projects to Nagaland, Telangana and Chhattisgarh for Rs. 381.37 Crores.

- The project covers thirteen sites in Chhattisgarh i.e. Jashpur, Kunkuri, Mainpat, Kamleshpur, Maheshpur, Kurdar, Saroddadadar, Gangrel, Kondagaon, Nathiya Nawagaon, Jagdalpur, Chitrakoot, Tirthgarh.
- Major components sanctioned include eco log huts, craft haats, souvenir shops/kiosk, tourist reception & facilitation centres, open amphitheatre, tribal interpretation centres, workshop centres, tourist amenities centres, last mile connectivity etc.
- These components are perceived to improve existing tourist facilities and enhance the overall tourist experience, therefore, help in getting more visitors which in return will increase job opportunities in the area.

The three thematic cruises developed under the project are as follows:

- **Malabari Cuisine and Culinary Cruise in Valapattanam River (Muthappan Cruise)** – Cruise starts from Valapattanam to Munambu Kadavu in Valapattanam River with an effective Cruise Length of 40 km.
- **Valapattanam River- Theyyam Cruise** – Cruise starts from Valapattanam to Pazhayangadi in Valapattanam River with an effective length of 16 km.
- **Mangrove Cruise in Kuppam River** – Cruise starts from Pazhayangadi to Kuppam in Kuppam River with an effective Cruise length of 16 km.

Background:

- Waterways have been an important mode of transport in Kerala from the time immemorial with its 44 Rivers and 7 Backwater regions.
- The total length of the navigation route in the Kerala is 1900 km. This is tune with the water based tourism which is getting prominence all over the world.

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

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

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

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

Sources: pib.

3. HISTORIANS OPPOSE MONUMENTS BILL

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the Bill.
- For Mains: Concerns and ways to address them, importance of monuments and their protection.
- **Context:** Historians have vociferously opposed changes to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. If the Act comes into force, they say it could have disastrous consequences for historical monuments, they fear.
CURRENT EVENTS

Concerns:
- The Act proposes to allow the construction of Centre-approved public infrastructure within a 100 metre radius of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected monuments. This is worrying because this could open the way for denigration of ancient monuments in the name of development.
- A 2013 report by CAG said that about 1/3rd of the National Monuments of the country have been encroached upon and a majority of them were poorly guarded due to the lack of manpower.
- The monuments which are already deteriorating due to pollution, human interference and development activities around are further put under direct threat with the proposed changes.
- Public works by central government are executed more often than other small infrastructure projects which may even cause disturbance to tourism. The construction methods and tools may cause great loss to some architecturally and structurally weak monuments, viz. vibrations, particulate pollutants. It will give people the wrong message of govt. giving priority to development over environment, deterring the public from being conscious about the environment.

The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment) Bill, 2017:
- **Construction in ‘prohibited areas’**: The Act defines a ‘prohibited area’ as an area of 100 meters around a protected monument or area. The central government can extend the prohibited area beyond 100 meters. The Act does not permit construction in such prohibited areas, except under certain conditions. The Act also prohibits construction in ‘prohibited areas’ even if it is for public purposes. The Bill amends this provision to permit construction of public works in ‘prohibited areas’ for public purposes.
- **Definition of ‘public works’**: The Bill introduces a definition for ‘public works’, which includes the construction of any infrastructure that is financed and carried out by the central government for public purposes. This infrastructure must be necessary for public safety and security and must be based on a specific instance of danger to public safety. Also, there should be no reasonable alternative to carrying out construction in the prohibited area.
- **Procedure for seeking permission for public works**: As per the Bill, the relevant central government department, that seeks to carry out construction for public purposes in a prohibited area, should make an application to the competent authority. If there is any question related to whether a construction project qualifies as ‘public works’, it will be referred to the National Monuments Authority. This Authority, will make its recommendations, with written reasons, to the central government. The decision of the central government will be final.
- **Impact assessment of proposed public works**: The Bill empowers the National Monuments Authority to consider an impact assessment of the proposed public works in a prohibited area, including its (i) archaeological impact; (ii) visual impact; and (iii) heritage impact. The Authority will make a recommendation, for construction of public works to the central government, only if it is satisfied that there is no reasonable possibility of moving the construction outside the prohibited area.

Sources: the hindu.

4. HIV/AIDS ACT, 2017

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key features of the Act.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for legislation on this.
- **Context**: The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has issued a notification for bringing the *Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017* in force from 10th September, 2018.
- The Act, safeguards the rights of people living with HIV and affected by HIV. The provisions of the Act address HIV-related discrimination, strengthen the existing programme by bringing in legal accountability, and establish formal mechanisms for inquiring into complaints and redressing grievances.

Highlights of the Act:
- **Provisions related to the role of governments**: As per the Act, central and state governments are obliged to provide for anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and management of opportunistic infections (infections that take advantage of weakness in the immune system and occur frequently). It also prohibits specific acts of discrimination by the state, or any other person, against HIV-positive people, or those living with such people.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Provisions related to discrimination:** It lays down penal provisions for any discrimination practised against a person with HIV/AIDS and breach of confidentiality. The protection mandated extends to the fields of employment, healthcare services, educational services, public facilities, property rights, holding public office, and insurance. It also provides for confidentiality of HIV-related information and makes it necessary to get informed consent for undertaking HIV tests, medical treatment and research.

- **Provisions related to ombudsman:** It also provides for an ombudsman. An ombudsman shall be appointed by each state government to inquire into complaints related to the violation of the Act and the provision of health care services. The ombudsman shall submit a report to the state government every six months stating the number and nature of complaints received, the actions taken.

- **Provisions related to guardianship:** Provisions related to guardianship are also specified. A person between the age of 12 to 18 years who has sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS affected family shall be competent to act as a guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age. The guardianship will apply in matters relating to admission to educational establishments, operating bank accounts, managing property, care and treatment, amongst others.

- **Role of courts:** Cases relating to HIV positive persons shall be disposed off by the court on a priority basis. In any legal proceeding, if an HIV infected or affected person is a party, the court may pass orders that the proceedings be conducted (a) by suppressing the identity of the person, (b) in camera, and (c) to restrain any person from publishing information that discloses the identity of the applicant. When passing any order with regard to a maintenance application filed by an HIV infected or affected person, the court shall take into account the medical expenses incurred by the applicant.

**Background:**

- There are approximately 21 lakh persons estimated to be living with HIV in India and the percentage of patients receiving anti-retroviral therapy (ART) treatment currently stands at a mere 25.82% as against the global percentage of 41%, according to the 2015 Global Burden of Diseases (GBD).

**Sources:** pib.

### 5. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

**What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of CDS.

**Context:** Cabinet approves continuation of **Capacity Development Scheme** for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20.

**About the Capacity Development Scheme:**

- The Capacity Development Scheme is an Ongoing **Central Sector Scheme of MoSPI**.

**The overall objective of the scheme is** to augment infrastructural, technical as well as manpower resources for making available credible and timely Official Statistics for policy makers and public at large.

**The major ongoing activities under the Capacity Development Scheme, include:**

- Augmenting resources for bringing out important statistical products, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Consumer Price Index (CPI), Index of Industrial Production (IIP), Statistical classifications, etc.
- Conducting various Socio-Economic surveys, capacity building and strengthening statistical coordination, and improving IT infrastructure.
- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), a continuous survey to assess quarterly labour data in urban areas and annual labour data for the whole country (urban and rural areas).
- For better statistical coverage of sectors/areas, three new surveys have been taken up under the Capacity Development Scheme, namely, Time Use Survey (TUS), Annual Survey of Service Sector Enterprises (ASSE), and Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE).

**The Capacity Development Scheme has two Sub-schemes:**

- **Economic Census:** listing of all non-agricultural establishments is undertaken periodically, which forms the basis for conducting detailed socio-economic surveys. The last (61) Economic Census was conducted during January, 2013 to April, 2014 and the Government now aims to conduct the Census once every three years in future.
6. NATIONAL WATER AWARDS

- **Context:** Union Ministry of Water Resources has instituted National Water Awards. The awards will be given for 13 categories.

**Key facts:**
- The objective of these awards is to encourage all stakeholders including NGOs, Gram Panchayats, Urban local bodies, water user associations, institutions, corporate sector, Individuals etc. for adopting innovative practices of ground water augmentation by rainwater harvesting and artificial recharge.
- It also seeks to encourage water use efficiency, recycling and reuse of water and creating awareness through people’s participation in targeted areas for ground water resources development, adequate capacity building etc.

7. MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT LOCAL AREA DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (MPLADS)

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Key facts on MPLADS.
- For Mains: Significance, performance analysis and need for monitoring of the scheme, demand for a legal framework.

**Context:** Noting that ₹12,000 crore of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds remains unspent, the Central Information Commission (CIC) has asked the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha Chairman to come out with a legal framework to ensure its transparency and hold parliamentarians and political parties accountable for their obligations under the scheme.

**Need for legal framework:**
- MoSPI report showed that in February 2018, funds allotted to MPLADS but unspent stood at ₹4,773.13 crore, while 2,920 instalments of ₹2.5 crore were yet to be released. That resulted in a total backlog of ₹12,073.13 crore.

**Structure of the proposed framework:**
- The framework should make transparency a legal obligation, with all MPs and parties required to present the public and Parliament with a comprehensive report on the number of applications received for their constituency, works recommended, works rejected with reasons, progress of works and details of beneficiaries.
- Liabilities for any breach of duties should also be imposed. Further, the framework should prohibit and prevent MPs using the funds for their private works, or diverting them to private trusts or to their own relatives.
- District administrations must provide regular information — work-wise, MP-wise, and year-wise details on progress — which are to be compiled by the MoSPI and made available to the public.

**About MPLAD scheme:**
- **What is it?** It was launched in December, 1993, to provide a mechanism for the Members of Parliament to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on locally felt needs.
- **Works under the scheme:** Works, developmental in nature, based on locally felt needs and always available for the use of the public at large, are eligible under the scheme. Preference under the scheme is given to works relating to national priorities, such as provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Funds:** Funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable. The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.

- **Execution of works:** The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme. They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government. The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.

- **Recommendation of works:** The Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies. The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected. Nominated members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select works for implementation anywhere in the country.

Sources: the hindu.

8. DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DRIP)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of DRIP.
- For Mains: Significance of the project and role of the project in disaster prevention.

- **Context:** The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the Revised Cost Estimate of Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) at the revised cost of Rs 3466 crore with the financial assistance of the World Bank to improve safety and operational performance of 198 Dams.

![ALL ABOUT DRIP](image)

**IN PHASE I** Tenders called for Almatti and Narayanpur dams in February 2105

**IN PHASE II** State submits proposal on 5 dams – Amarja and Bennethora in Kalaburagi district, KRS in Mandya, and Hidkal and Malaprabha in Belagavi district

**IN PHASE III**
- Project report on 10 dams to be submitted by June-end
- International Development Association funding the projects
- Repayment period is 30 years. Interest rate is 1%
- Central Water Commission is coordinating the project

**About DRIP:**

- The Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Government of India, with assistance from the World Bank, is implementing the DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DRIP), which would be a six-year project.

- The Central Dam Safety Organisation of Central Water Commission, assisted by a Consulting firm, is coordinating and supervising the Project implementation.

- Goals: The project originally envisaged the rehabilitation and improvement of about 223 dams within four states namely, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu and later Karnataka, Uttarakhand (UNVNL) and Jharkhand (DVC) joined DRIP and total number of dams covered under DRIP increased to 250. The project will also promote new technologies and improve Institutional capacities for dam safety evaluation and
implementation at the Central and State levels and in some identified premier academic and research institutes of the country.

- The project development objectives of DRIP are: (i) to improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner, and (ii) to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at central level.

Significance of the project:
- The project will improve the safety and operational performance of selected existing dams and mitigate risks to ensure safety of downstream population and property.
- The primary beneficiaries are both urban and rural communities dependent on reservoir and downstream communities, who are prone to risk associated with dam failure or operational failure.
- Through institutional strengthening component, effectiveness of Dam Safety Organisations will be increased to take the lead to make dams safe from structural and operational point of view through capacity building of staff and officials.

Sources: pib.

9. NATIONAL SPORTS AWARDS

- National Sports Awards 2018 have been announced.

Key facts:
- National Sports Awards are given every year to recognize and reward excellence in sports.
  - *Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award* is given for the spectacular and most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sportsperson over a period of four year.
  - *Arjuna Award* is given for consistency outstanding performance for four years.
  - *Dronacharya Award* for coaches for producing medal winners at prestigious International sports events.
  - *Dhyan Chand Award* for life time contribution to sports development.
  - *Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puruskar* is given to the corporate entities (both in private and public sector) and individuals who have played a visible role in the area of sports promotion and development.
  - *MAKA Trophy*: Overall top performing university in inter-university tournaments is given Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy.

10. INDIAN CULINARY INSTITUTE

What to study?
- For Prelims: Where is it located?
- For Mains: Need and significance of the institute.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Context:** Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) has been inaugurated at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. It is **promoted by Union Ministry of Tourism.**

**About ICI:**

- The main objective of setting up of the Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) is to institutionalize a mechanism to support efforts intended to preserve, document, promote and disseminate Indian Cuisine, meet the sectoral requirement of specialists specific to Indian Cuisine, as also of promoting Cuisine as a Niche Tourism product.  
- The ICIs will be Centres of Excellence which will offer structured regular programmes of study specific to culinary arts and culinary management leading to graduate and post graduate level degrees, promote research and innovation, organize demand driven certificate and diploma courses, document and create data base specific to Indian cuisine and commission studies and survey on cuisine.

**Need:**

- The need for ICI was felt as the formal education specific to Indian cuisine, a culinary art, with pan India sweep is conspicuous by its absence.  
- There is no regular credible institutional source at apex level for supply of cuisine specialists to the Sector. Also, there was no institutional mechanism to document and disseminate knowledge related to cuisine and gastronomy.

**Significance:**

- In India, at present, there is a dearth of state-of-the-art training ground to groom top-of-the-line chefs of international standards. To fill this void, the Indian Culinary Institute would provide the appropriate training platform at par with the elite “Chef Schools” functioning in different parts of the developed world.  
- This effort will facilitate building a super-speciality food production work-force to assure positions of culinary experts in the hospitality industry. The ICIs will also help the local youth to get trained in these streams as well as create entrepreneurs and make them self-sufficient.  
- The hotel and tourism industry in the proximity of these institutes will also get benefitted by getting the trained and skilled manpower which in turn will enhance their business.

Sources: the hindu.

**11. NATIONAL DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY-2018**

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Highlights of the Policy.  
- For Mains: Need and significance of the policy.  
- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the National Digital Communications Policy-2018 (NDCP-2018) and re-designation of the Telecom Commission as the “Digital Communications Commission”.

**Impact:**

- The NDCP-2018 envisions supporting India’s transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by fulfilling the information and communications needs of citizens and enterprises by establishment of a ubiquitous, resilient and affordable digital communications infrastructure and services.  
- The ‘Customer focused’ and ‘application driven’ NDCP-2018 shall lead to new ideas and innovations, after the launch of advanced technology such as 5G, IOT, M2M, etc. which shall govern the telecom sector of India.

**The key objectives of the policy are:**

- Broadband for all.  
- Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector.
- Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India’s GDP from ~ 6% in 2017.
- Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017.
- Enhancing India’s contribution to Global Value Chains.
- Ensuring Digital Sovereignty.
- These objectives are to be achieved by 2022.

### NDCP 2018 Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadband For All</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Positive Inflation Trade</td>
<td>4 Mn New Jobs</td>
<td>8 Mn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 50 in IDI</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India's Contribution to GDP</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Global Average</td>
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**The policy aims to:**

- Provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen.
- Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022.
- Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas.
- Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector.
- Train one million manpower for building New Age Skill.
- Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices.
- Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals.
- Facilitate India’s effective participation in the global digital economy.
- Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe.
- Secure digital communications infrastructure and services.

**The policy advocates:**

- Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority.
- Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects.
- Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for Common Rights of Way, standardization of costs and timelines.
- Removal of barriers to approvals.
- Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks.

**Background:**

- As the present world has entered the era of modern technological advancements in the Telecom Sector such as 5G, IoT, M2M etc., a need was being felt to introduce a ‘customer focused’ and ‘application driven’ policy for the Indian Telecom Sector, which can form the main pillar of Digital India by addressing emerging opportunities for expanding not only the availability of telecom services but also telecom based services.
- Accordingly, the new National Digital Communications Policy – 2018 has been formulated, in place of the existing National Telecom Policy-2012, to cater to the modern needs of the digital communications sector of India.

Sources: pib.
12. ORDINANCE TO SUPERCEDE MEDICAL COUNCIL OF INDIA

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of the National Medical Commission bill.
- For Mains: MCI- issues, performance, concerns and need for superseding.
- **Context:** An ordinance seeking to replace the existing body running the Medical Council of India or MCI with a government-appointed committee has been signed by President Ram Nath Kovind.
- The committee or the ‘Board of Governors’ has now been appointed by the government in “supersession of the MCI”. The Board members include persons of eminence in the medical field.

**Background:**

- Pending parliament’s approval to the bill, the government has chosen to go for the ordinance since the term of the existing committee running the MCI ends in November.
- A bill to replace the MCI with a National Medical Commission (NMC) has already been presented in parliament. A parliamentary standing committee has also made its recommendations, but due to time factor, the bill “has gone into an area of uncertainty.”

**National Medical Commission Bill:**

- The bill provides for the constitution of *four autonomous boards* entrusted with conducting undergraduate and postgraduate education, assessment and accreditation of medical institutions and registration of practitioners under the National Medical Commission.
- According to the draft bill, *the commission will have government nominated chairman and members*, and the board members will be selected by a search committee under the Cabinet Secretary. There will five elected and 12 ex-officio members in the commission.
- As per the Bill, the government, under the National Medical Commission (NMC), can dictate guidelines for fees up to 40% of seats in private medical colleges. This is aimed at giving students relief from the exorbitant fees charged by these colleges and is a standout feature of the bill.
- The bill also has a *provision for a common entrance exam and licentiate (exit) exam* that medical graduates have to pass before practising or pursuing PG courses. For MBBS, students have to clear NEET, and before they step into practice, they must pass the exit exam.
- Recognised medical institutions don’t need the regulator’s permission to add more seats or start PG course. This mechanism to reduce the discretionary powers of the regulator.
- Earlier, medical colleges required the MCI’s approval for establishment, recognition, renewal of the yearly permission or recognition of degrees, and even increase the number of students they admitted. Under the new bill, the powers of the regulator are reduced to establishment and recognition. This means less red tape, but also less scrutiny of medical colleges.

**Background:**

- The Medical Council of India was first established in 1934 under the Indian Medical Council Act, 1933. This Act was repealed and replaced with a new Act in 1956. Under the 1956 Act, the objectives of MCI include:
  - Maintenance of standards in medical education through curriculum guidelines, inspections and permissions to start colleges, courses or increasing number of seats.
  - Recognition of medical qualifications.
  - Registration of doctors and maintenance of the All India Medical Register.
  - Regulation of the medical profession by prescribing a code of conduct and taking action against erring doctors.

Sources: the hindu.
13. AADHAR VERDICT

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key features of Aadhar, Money Bill.
- For Mains: Features and significance of the verdict, Security concerns and ways to address them.
- **Context:** The Supreme Court has upheld the Aadhaar scheme as constitutionally valid. The court also upheld the passage of the Aadhaar Act as a Money Bill.
- The court ruled that the Aadhaar programme served the “larger public interest” in ensuring that the poor have access to resources. It found that the programme eliminated any chance of duplication and that enrolment was foolproof.
- However, the apex court’s five-judge constitution bench also struck down several provisions in the Aadhaar Act.

Where Aadhaar is not needed?
- Children cannot be denied any benefit due to not having Aadhaar. Hence, Aadhaar is not needed for school admissions.
- Compulsory linking of mobile phone numbers to Aadhaar.
- Aadhaar is not needed for opening a bank account and banking services.
- CBSE, NEET, UGC cannot make Aadhaar mandatory to appear in entrance examinations.
- No private entity can avail Aadhaar data which includes telecom companies and mobile wallets.

Where Aadhaar is mandatory?
- Linking of PAN with Aadhaar.
- Mandatory for filing of IT returns and allotment of Permanent Account Number.
- Aadhaar must for availing facilities of welfare schemes and government subsidies.

**Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act struck down:**
- Section 57 was used by the government to compel private companies to demand Aadhaar verification for services.
- The Court accepted the argument that no rationale exists for this power and declared it invalid.
- Consequently, the Court has struck downlinking of Aadhaar with mobiles and bank accounts. It has further directed that the data collected shall be deleted within six months.

What was the contention against Aadhaar before the Supreme Court?
- The main questions raised during the hearing on Aadhaar were:
  - Is the Aadhaar Act, 2016, constitutionally valid given that it was passed in Parliament as a Money Bill?
  - Why does every citizen need one identity proof — a unique identification number — to acquire government benefits? Can’t this be done using other documents, like ration card or passport?
  - Does Aadhaar take away our right to privacy — upheld as a fundamental right by a nine-judge Constitution bench of the court in August last year.
  - What happens if Aadhaar data becomes a tool for mass surveillance by the state, as the movement and activities of users can be tracked by collecting metadata?

What did the government argue in favour of Aadhaar?
- During the hearing, the government argued that Aadhaar would help weed out ghost beneficiaries of welfare schemes. The government argued that is using Aadhaar as an enabler of various facets of the right to life of teeming millions of Indian residents including their right to food, the right to livelihood, the right to receive pensions and other social assistance benefits like scholarships etc. by the genuine beneficiaries.”

The Supreme Court’s Right to Privacy verdict:
- On August 24, 2017, a nine-judge Bench ruled that the right to privacy is a fundamental right, a shot in the arm for the petitioners. However, the court had also ruled that “besides national security, the State may have justifiable reasons for the collection and storage of data. In a social welfare state, the government embarks upon programmes which provide benefits to impoverished and marginalised sections of society. There is a
vital State interest in ensuring that scarce public resources are not dissipated by the diversion of resources to persons who do not qualify as recipients.”

Justice B N Srikrishna report:
- The Justice B N Srikrishna panel was appointed to recommend a data protection framework to the government. It submitted its recommendations in July this year. The Srikrishna data protection report highlighted individuals’ constitutional rights over their data and said efforts need to be made to protect data at any cost. It recommended steps for protection of personal information, defining obligations of data processors as also rights of individuals, and mooting penalties for violation.

Way ahead:
- Stating that Aadhaar empowers the marginalised sections of society and gave them an identity, the SC asked the Central government to introduce a robust data protection law as soon as possible.
- Aadhaar will undoubtedly be a game changer for the poor and the country as a whole. Every technology has some risks. A mature society must take measures to mitigate risks and not abandon the technology.

Sources: the hindu.

14. SECTION 497 OF IPC

Differing viewpoints
Ahead of a Constitutional Bench hearing on Section 497, the Centre has objected to the dropping of adultery as an offence

WHAT IS SECTION 497?
It mandates that if a man has sexual intercourse with another’s wife without the husband’s consent or connivance, he is guilty of the offence of adultery and should be punished

CENTRE’S VIEW
Section 497 supports, safeguards and protects the institution of marriage

BENCH’S VIEW
The provision creates a dent in the individual, independent identity of a woman when the emphasis is laid on the connivance or consent of the husband

What to study?
- For Prelims: What is Section 497?
- For Mains: Why was it struck down and the significance of the verdict.
- Context: The Supreme Court has declared Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code as unconstitutional saying that the penal provision on adultery was manifestly arbitrary and dents the individuality of women.

Important observations made by the Supreme Court:
- Adultery might not cause of an unhappy marriage, but it could be result of an unhappy marriage.
- In case of adultery, criminal law expects people to be loyal which is a command which gets into the realm of privacy.
- Adultery can be ground for civil issues including dissolution of marriage but it cannot be a criminal offence.
- Any provision treating woman with inequality is not Constitutional.
- Mere adultery can’t be a crime, unless it attracts the scope of Section 306 (abatement to suicide) of the IPC.

Why strike it down?
- Section 497 perpetuates subordinate status of women, denies dignity, sexual autonomy, and is based on gender stereotypes. Section 497 based on women as chattel, seeks to control sexuality of woman, hits the autonomy and dignity of woman. Besides, Section 497 perpetrates subordinate nature of woman in a marriage.
Therefore, it should be struck down for violation of Articles 14, 21.

Here are the problems with Section 497 which the petitioners wanted to be addressed:

- The petitioners want the adultery law to be made gender neutral. This is because the law calls for the man to be punished in case of adultery, but no action is suggested for the woman.
- As per Section 497, a woman whose husband has had sexual intercourse with another woman cannot file a complaint because the law makes no such provision for her.
- Moreover, the adultery law in IPC reduces women to an object because no consent of the married woman is required for a man to have sexual intercourse with her. As per Section 497, if the woman’s husband agrees, the act is not a crime. This is the reason many have called this law an anti-women law.

What is Section 497?

- Section 497 of the 158-year-old IPC says, “Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery, and shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years, or with fine, or with both. In such case the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor.”

Past Supreme Court judgements on adultery:

- The adultery law had come up in court thrice in the past — in 1954, in 1985, and in 1988.
  - In 1954, the SC rejected that Section 497 violated the right to equality.
  - In 1985, it said that women didn’t need to be included in the law as a party which can make complaints.
  - In 1988, the Supreme Court said that the adultery law was a “shield rather than a sword”.

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 2 Topic:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### 1. POSHAN MAAH

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Poshan Maah and Poshan Abhiyan- key facts.
- For Mains: Significance of Poshan Abhiyan.
- **Context:** The Government is celebrating the month of September, 2018 as the National Nutrition Month under the Poshan Abhiyan.

**About Poshan Maah (National Nutrition Month):**

- The **primary objective** of the celebration of Poshan Maah is to take the messages of POSHAN to the grass root level.
- The programme- **an initiative of WCD Ministry and NITI Aayog** is supported by 18 line Ministries/Departments/Government Organizations.
- It **seeks to synergise all efforts** by leveraging technology and intends to take nutrition awareness to the level of Jan Andolan or People’s Movement.
- The programme **focuses on 8 themes** – Antenatal Care, Optimal Breastfeeding (Early & Exclusive), Complementary Feeding, Anemia, Growth Monitoring, Girls-education, diet, right age of Marriage, Hygiene & Sanitation, Food Fortification.

**About POSHAN Abhiyan:**

- POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) was launched on 8th March, 2018.
- **Objectives:** The programme through use of technology, a targeted approach and convergence strives to reduce the level of Stunting, Under-nutrition, Anemia and Low Birth Weight in Children, as also, focus on Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers, thus holistically addressing malnutrition.
- **Aims:** POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to ensure service delivery and interventions by use of technology, behavioural change through convergence and lays-down specific targets to be achieved across different monitoring parameters over the next few years.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Coverage**: To ensure a holistic approach, all 36 States/UTs and 718 districts will be covered in a phased manner by the year 2020.

Sources: pib.

2. DRAFT CHARTER OF PATIENTS’ RIGHTS

What to study?
- For Prelims: Highlights of the Draft.
- For Mains: Significance of the draft and the need for a charter on this.

**Context**: The draft *Charter of Patients’ Rights, prepared by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)*, has been released. The Ministry plans to implement the Charter of Patients’ Rights through State governments for provision of proper health care by clinical establishments.

Highlights of the draft:
- **The draft charter includes 17 rights** with description, draws upon all relevant provisions, inspired by international charters and guided by national level provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document.
- **The proposed Charter draws upon all the existing relevant provisions**, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document, thereby making them publicly known in a coherent manner.
- There is an expectation that this document will act as a guidance document for the *Centre and state governments to formulate concrete mechanisms* so that patient’s rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set-up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law.

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

Significance of the charter:
- If the draft Charter of Patients’ Rights released by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare comes into force, patients will not just have the right to emergency medical care and informed consent, but will also have the right to non-discrimination, seek a second opinion and choose alternative treatment options, if available.

Way ahead:
- Once adopted, the charter will have to be prominently displayed at all hospitals, clinics, pharmacies and diagnostic laboratories. Further, the Centre and state governments need to set-up a grievance redressal mechanism for patients.
- This charter is expected to act as a guidance document for the Union Government and State Governments to formulate concrete mechanisms so that Patients’ Rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law. The onus is now on the States to follow the charter effectively.

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

Sources: the hindu.
3. FIXED DOSE COMBINATION (FDC) DRUGS

What to study?
- For Prelims: What are FDCs?
- For Mains: Why ban them? How can they be regulated? Effects of FDCs on health.
- Context: The government has prohibited the manufacture, sale or distribution of 328 fixed dose combination (FDC) drugs for human use with immediate effect.
- The health ministry’s ban on FDCs included painkillers, anti-diabetic, respiratory and gastro-intestinal medicines, covering 6,000 brands.

What necessitated this?
- The expert panel probing the efficacy of 349 banned FDCs, after considering these drugs “irrational”, cited safety issues and lack of therapeutic justification, and recommended continuing the ban. It also found that many FDCs were formulated without due diligence, with dosing mismatches that could result in toxicity.

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

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

Is there a flipside to FDCs?
- Given that there is not much data available on drug-drug interaction and side-effects in FDC, India’s system for collecting data for problematic drug reactions is weak. When multiple drugs from the same therapeutic group, like antibiotics, are clubbed together, it may lead to resistance.
- A lot of FDCs sold in India are unapproved, given the lack of coordination between state and central regulators. A study published in the journal of Public Library of Science (PLOS) in May found that over 70% of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) combinations, which are used as painkillers, were being marketed in India without central government approval.

Sources: the hindu.

4. TAMIL NADU BANS E-CIGARETTES

- Tamil Nadu Government has issued order banning manufacture, sale and possession of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) or e-Cigarettes with immediate effect in the state.
- The ban covers distribution, trade, display, marketing, advertisement, use, import and possession of e-cigarettes as well.
- So far, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala, Mizoram, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar already have prohibited manufacture, import, sale and distribution of ENDS or e-cigarettes.

5. NATIONAL AIDS CONTROL ORGANIZATION (NACO)

What to study?
- For Prelims: NACO and highlights of the National AIDS Control Programme.
- For Mains: Significance and achievements of the programme, what else is needed to achieve the target?
CURRENT EVENTS

Key facts:
- The HIV Estimations 2017 is the 14th round in the series of HIV Estimations under National AIDS Control Programme (NACP).
- NACO undertakes HIV estimations biennially in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) – National Institute of Medical Statistics (NIMS).
- The first round of HIV estimation in India was done in 1998, while the last round was done in 2015.

Highlights of the report:
- As per the report, in 2017, India had around 21.40 lakh people living with HIV (PLHIV) with adult prevalence of 0.22%.
- Around 87.58 thousand new HIV infections and 69.11 thousand AIDS related deaths happened in 2017 while around 22,675 mothers needed Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.
- HIV Estimations 2017 corroborate the previous rounds in terms of characteristic of the HIV epidemic in India i.e. national prevalence and incidence remains low, but the epidemic is high in some geographical regions and population group.
- The rate of decline in annual new HIV infections has been relatively slower in recent years.
- The report concludes that, overall, the impact of the programme has been significant with more than 80% decline in estimated new infection from peak of epidemic in 1995. Similarly, estimated AIDS related death declined by 71% since its peak in 2005.

Need for data on this:
- The objective of HIV Estimations is to provide updated information on the status of HIV epidemic in India at national and State/UT level. Estimations of adult HIV prevalence, annual new infections (HIV incidence), AIDS-related mortality and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) needs are produced as outcomes of HIV estimations. The modelled estimates are needed because there is no direct reliable way of measuring these core indicators which are used to track the epidemic and monitor and evaluate the response in countries around the world.

Way ahead:
- The report highlights the significant achievement of National AIDS response on prevention as well as on treatment front but has also indicated that there is no place for complacency as country move forward on ambitious goal of attaining the ‘End of AIDS’ by 2030.

About National AIDS Control Organization:
- It is a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provides leadership to HIV/AIDS control programme in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies.
- In 1986, following the detection of the first AIDS case in the country, the National AIDS Committee was constituted in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- As the epidemic spread, need was felt for a nationwide programme and an organization to steer the programme. In 1992 India’s first National AIDS Control Programme (1992-1999) was launched, and National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) was constituted to implement the programme.

Sources: pib.

6. SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION

What to study?
- For Prelims: SAM- meaning, NTBN.
- For Mains: SAM- concerns, global challenges and ways to address.
• **Context:** The National Technical Board on Nutrition (NTBN) has approved guidelines proposed by WCD Ministry for severe acute malnutrition. The measures are part of the community-based health management of children suffering from SAM.

**Guidelines:**

• Severely malnourished children must be fed *freshly cooked food* prepared from locally available cereals, pulses and vegetables. This is to be distributed by anganwadi centres, as part of the country’s first-ever guidelines for nutritional management of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

• The guidelines outline the role of *anganwadi workers and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs)* in identifying severely wasted children. According to the recommendations, anganwadi workers have to provide modified morning snacks, hot cooked meals and take home ration for SAM children.

• They have to *segregate those with oedema or medical complications* and sending them to the nearest health facility or nutrition rehabilitation centres. The remaining children are enrolled into “community based management”. This includes provision of nutrition, continuous monitoring of growth, administration of antibiotics and micro-nutrients as well as counselling sessions and imparting of nutrition and health education.

• The morning snacks and hot-cooked meals, which are served at anganwadis to children between the age of three to six years, should be “prepared freshly and served at the centralised kitchen/ anganwadi centres. Locally available cereals, pulses, green leafy vegetables and tubers, vitamin C rich fruits, as well as fresh milk and 3-4 eggs every week” have also been prescribed.

• Importantly, the government has also revised the *method to be used to measure wasting and advised calculating weight based on the height of children* instead of the mid-upper arm circumference.

**What necessitated this?**

• The government had, till now, only put in place guidelines for the hospitalization of severely wasted children who develop medical complications.

**What is severe acute malnutrition?**

• Severe acute malnutrition is the most extreme and visible form of undernutrition. Its face is a child – frail and skeletal – who requires urgent treatment to survive.

  ➢ Children with severe acute malnutrition have very low weight for their height and severe muscle wasting. They may also have nutritional oedema – characterized by swollen feet, face and limbs. About two thirds of these children live in Asia and almost one third live in Africa.

  ➢ Severe acute malnutrition is a major cause of death in children under 5, and its prevention and treatment are critical to child survival and development.

  ➢ Across the globe, an estimated 16 million children under the age of 5 are affected by severe acute malnutrition. This number is staggering – most importantly, because children with severe acute malnutrition are nine times more likely to die than well-nourished children. These deaths are the direct result of malnutrition itself, as well as the indirect result of childhood illnesses like diarrhoea and pneumonia that malnourished children are too weak to survive.

  ➢ Severe acute malnutrition can increase dramatically in emergencies. But despite what we see in the headlines, the majority of cases occur in developing countries not affected by emergencies. These settings are plagued by chronic poverty, lack of education, poor hygiene, limited access to food and poor diets. The result is significant barriers to sustainable development in these nations.

**Sources:** the hindu.

### 7. STUDY ON SPENDING ON EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE BY VARIOUS COUNTRIES

**What to study?**

• For Prelims: Highlights of the study.

• For Mains: Performance of India- potential, concerns and ways to address them, India’s relative performance.

• **Context:** A study on spending on education and health care by various countries by various countries has been released. The study is based on analysis of data from sources, including government agencies, schools, and health care systems.
The study was conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the request of the World Bank.

It is the first of its kind to measure and compare the strength of countries’ “human capital”.

The study underscores that when a country’s human capital score increases, its economy grows.

India’s relative performance:

- **India ranks 158th** in the world for its investments in education and health care. The nation is placed behind Sudan (ranked 157th) and ahead of Namibia (ranked 159th) in the list.
- South Asian countries ranking below India in this report include Pakistan (164), Bangladesh (161) and Afghanistan (188).
- Countries in the region that have fared better than India in terms of human capital include Sri Lanka (102), Nepal (156), Bhutan (133) and Maldives (116).

Concerns:

- India has improved its performance from its position of 162 in 1990. However, India is falling behind in terms of health and education of its workforce, which could potentially have long-term negative effects on the Indian economy.

Global performance:

- The study places Finland at the top.
- The U.S. is ranked 27th, while China is at 44th and Pakistan at 164th.
- Turkey showed the most dramatic increase in human capital between 1990 and 2016.
- Asian countries with notable improvement include China, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.
- Within Latin America, Brazil stands out for improvement.
- All these countries have had faster economic growth over this period than peer countries with lower levels of human capital improvement.
- In addition, the greatest increase among sub-Saharan African countries was in Equatorial Guinea.

Significance of human capital:

- The findings show the association between investments in education and health and improved human capital and GDP which policy-makers ignore at their own peril.
- As the world economy grows increasingly dependent on digital technology, from agriculture to manufacturing to the service industry, human capital grows increasingly important for stimulating local and national economies.

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 2 Topic:** Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

### 1. SECTION 498A

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Section 498A- key facts.
- For Mains: Concerns over section 498A, reforms needed and views of Supreme Court.
- **Context:** Taking note of the ‘misuse’ of Section 498A, the Supreme Court has said that the accused can now seek anticipatory bail.

**Latest verdict:**

- The apex court, while modifying the verdict given by its two-judge bench, said that there is no scope for courts for constitutionally filling up gaps in penal law. The earlier order had provisions for setting up of a committee to deal with complaints of dowry harassment.
- Erasing role of NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) and NGOs, the apex court said courts are there to protect harassed husbands and their relatives, who are not remotely connected to matrimonial cruelty, by granting them anticipatory bail.
CURRENT EVENTS

Background:
- A batch of pleas were filed in the Supreme Court seeking revisiting of a judgement that had reduced the severity of the anti-dowry law on the offence of subjecting a married woman to cruelty by spouse and in-laws.
- A two-judge bench of the apex court in July last year had voiced concern over “abuse” of section 498 A (subjecting a married woman to cruelty) and passed a slew of directions, including that no arrest should “normally be effected” without verifying allegations as violation of human rights of innocents could not be brushed aside.

Section 498A:
- Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code deals with husband or relatives of husbands subjecting a woman to cruelty. Punishment under the Section is a maximum of three years and was so far a non-bailable offence.

What necessitated the court’s intervention?
- The anti-dowry law was enacted with the laudable object of punishing cruelty at the hands of husband or his relatives – particularly when such cruelty drives the wife to suicide. However, complaints are mounting up over the years alleging misuse of the anti-dowry harassment law – framed in 1983 following a spate of dowry-related deaths – by disgruntled wives. The law is also being misused.
- A growing trend is being observed among women involved in marital discord to abuse Section 498A of IPC to rope in their husbands’ relatives — including parents, minor children, siblings and grandparents — in criminal cases. Therefore, it is high time such frivolous cases which violate the human rights of innocent is checked.

Significance of this move:
- This is a shift from the dominant judicial conception of women as victims who would silently suffer injustice rather than bring disrepute to their family by taking domestic conflict outside the four walls of the home.
- Going by the popular portrait, it is only the worst victim of abuse among women who approach the court for redress. With its latest observations, the court broke away from the reigning perception to rule that in dowry cases, the account of the alleged victim need not be taken at face value.

Way ahead:
- Though Section 498A of the IPC was enacted to protect women from cruelty in matrimonial homes, its misuse to harass the other side too is causing social unrest.
- There should be gender justice for women as dowry has a chilling effect on marriage on the one hand. On the other hand, there is right to life and personal liberty of the man.

Sources: Indian express.

2. #LOOREVIEW CAMPAIGN

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the campaign.
- Context: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, under the aegis of Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban has partnered with Google to launch the Loo Review campaign.

About the Loo Review campaign:
- It is aimed to encourage all local guides in India to rate and review public toilets on Google Maps.
- This campaign will allow all citizens to locate public toilets in their cities on Google Maps, Search and the Assistant and also provide feedback on the same.
- Local Guides are people who share reviews, photos, and knowledge on Google Maps to help people explore the world.
**Significance:**

- The joint campaign to be run throughout October and November 2018 is an effort to increase the awareness and ease of locating public toilets across India. 500+ cities in India with more than 30,000 toilets with the name of “SBM Toilet” are currently live on Google Maps.
  - One of the objectives of the SBM- U is to provide sanitation coverage through public toilet facilities across cities in India for achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. There is now a need to ensure that the ODF status is sustained through continuous usage and proper maintenance of public toilets. The ‘Public toilets near me’ feature will benefit citizens, particularly women and senior citizens, who often find it difficult to find access to clean toilets in the public space.
  - The feedback provide by local guides through the Loo Review campaign will press upon the Urban Local Bodies to take proactive steps to improve public toilet facilities across the country.

_Sources: the hindu._

**Paper 2 Topic:** Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance-applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

### 1. E-AAROGYABHARATI (E-VBAB) NETWORK PROJECT

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Key features and significance of the project.
- **Context:** Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd (TCIL) have signed an Agreement for the [implementation of e-VidyaBharati and e-AarogyaBharati (e-VBAB) Network Project](https://www.insightsonindia.com). The project is hailed as a digital bridge of knowledge and health between India and Africa.

**About e-VBAB Network project:**

- E-VBAB Network Project is primarily a technological upgrade and extension of the Pan-African e-Network Project (Phase 1) which was implemented in 48 partner countries across Africa from 2009 till 2017. The Phase 1 of the Project successfully imparted tele-education and tele-medicine by linking educational institutions and hospitals in India with those from the participating African countries.
- Over the 5 years project duration, e-VBAB Network Project will provide free tele-education courses in various academic disciplines to 4000 students every year from African countries. The Project will also be utilized for providing free Continuing Medical Education (1000 every year) to African doctors/nurses/para-medical staff. Further, Indian doctors, through this project will provide free medical consultancy to those African doctors who seek such consultancy.
- In order to operationalise the e-VBAB Network Project, a Data Centre and Disaster Recovery Centre will be established in India along with Learning Centres in various African countries which decide to be part of the Project. There will be two separate platforms for e-Vidyabharati (tele-education) and e-AarogyaBharati (tele-medicine) which will link, through a web-based technology, various educational institutions and hospitals in India and the participating African countries.
- The e-VBAB Network Project will be completely funded by the Government of India for its entire duration and will be open for participation to all our partner countries in Africa. The Project will be another important milestone in our development partnership with Africa.

_Sources: the hindu._

### 2. ‘EXPORTING CORRUPTION REPORT’

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: Highlights of the report.
- For Mains: India’s position and reasons for its poor performance, what needs to be done?
- **Context:** The 2018 edition of the ‘Exporting Corruption Report’ has been released by anti-corruption organisation Transparency International. The classification of enforcement is based on the convention countries’ enforcement actions in the period 2014-2017.
CURRENT EVENTS

Highlights of the report:

- In this 2018 report, China, Hong Kong, India and Singapore — all with 2% or more of world exports, but not parties to the OECD (Anti-Bribery) Convention — are classified for the first time and all fall into the lowest level (little or no enforcement).
- This poor performance argues for these countries’ accession to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. They are, however, parties to the UN Convention against Corruption, which also calls for enforcement against foreign bribery. Transparency International urges them to join the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention.

Performance of India:

- India is among four countries with “no or little enforcement” mechanism to check foreign bribery.
- The report asks India to criminalise foreign bribery and introduce effective legislation to protect whistleblowers in the private sector.

The report notes that:

- The Indian government does not publish statistics on its foreign bribery enforcement and does not disclose such statistics on request.
- The authorities do not disclose any information about unpublished cases related to bribery of foreign public officials by Indians.
- India is also not clear whether the governmental enforcement and investigative agencies collect information related to foreign bribery, separately or not.
- There are also inadequacies in implementation of Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) Treaty. The translation of documents into foreign languages is a major factor slowing down the MLA process.

Challenges ahead:

- As foreign bribery is not yet criminalised in India, the adequacy of the enforcement system in relation to this specific offence cannot be assessed. However, certain shortcomings in the enforcement system, in particular those evident from current enforcement of domestic corruption, are also a concern for foreign bribery enforcement.
- In particular, while the Indian Penal Code and Prevention of Corruption Act prescribe criminal and civil liability for domestic corruption, the reality is that actions taken against the perpetrators have been few.

Concerns expressed by the report:

- If China, Hong Kong, India and Singapore do not enforce hard-won international standards for conducting business, competitors from countries that do enforce will find themselves disadvantaged.
- This may lead to a reduction in enforcement, destabilising the global marketplace. The real losers will be the global economy and people in countries affected by exported corruption, especially grand corruption.

OECD Anti-Bribery Convention:

- The OECD Anti-Bribery Convention was adopted in 1997 to address the supply side of international corruption.
  - Its aim is to create a level playing field between OECD countries by subjecting countries to the same criminal standards. Before the OECD Convention, the US was the only OECD country that prohibited its companies from bribing foreign officials. The OECD Convention does not address private (business-to-business) bribery.
  - There are now 44 parties to the convention, 36 of them members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

Highlights:

- **Criminalisation:** Prohibits the bribery of foreign officials.
- **Enforcement:** Includes an obligation to prosecute companies suspected of bribing public officials abroad.
- **Cooperation:** Encourages enhanced collaboration between the law enforcement agencies of signatory countries.
- **Tax Deductions:** Bans the tax deductibility of bribes to foreign public officials.
- **Whistleblowing:** Recommends the establishment of effective whistleblowing mechanisms.
- **Monitoring:** The OECD carries out rigorous peer-review examinations monitoring the level of implementation of the OECD Convention and OECD recommendations.

Sources: the hindu.
3. ‘E-SAHAJ’ PORTAL

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the portal.
- **Context:** The Government has launched an online ‘e-Sahaj’ portal for grant of Security Clearance. The portal will facilitate an applicant to submit application online and also to view the status of his application from time to time.

About Security clearances:

- MHA is the nodal Ministry for security clearances in certain sensitive sectors before issue of licence/permit, permission, contract etc, to companies/ bidders/individuals by the administrative Ministry.
- The objective of national security clearance is to evaluate potential security threats, including economic threats, and provide risk assessment before clearing investment and project proposals in key sectors.
- The aim is to strike a healthy balance between meeting the imperatives of national security and facilitating ease of doing business and promoting investment in the country.

Significance of the portal:

- With the introduction of online portal, the process has become standardized, resulting in a process which will be faster, transparent and easy to monitor. Various functionaries can access the application and documents online and take timely decisions.

Background:

- MHA has cleared about 1,100 cases of security clearance in the past one year. Although the given timeline is 90 days, MHA strives to decide Security Clearance cases in 60 days (average time per case in 2018 is 53 days), which is being reduced further. In 2016, there were 209 cases which were over 6 months old; in 2017, this came down to 154 cases and further down to 47 cases in 2018.

Sources: pib.

4. PRISON REFORMS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Committee constituted for the purpose.
- For Mains: Prison reforms- need, concerns, challenges and reforms suggested.
- **Context:** The Supreme Court has constituted a three-member committee to look into the problems of jails in India and suggest reform measures. The committee headed by former SC judge Justice Amitava Roy will look into the aspect of jail reforms across the country and suggest measures to deal with them.

Terms of reference:

- The committee’s duties will include looking into the problems of jails across the country including overcrowding in prisons, issue of human rights of prisoners and issues concerning women prisoners languishing in cells for years.
- After studying the problems, the committee would be required to suggest measures to deal with them.

Background:

- The Supreme Court had said on August 8, 2018 that it would constitute a committee under the chairmanship of its retired judge to look into the problems in jails, on a day-to-day basis and suggest measures to tackle the problems. The SC had expressed its displeasure saying that the government had collected a huge amount under the orders of the apex court but the funds were not being utilised properly.

Need for reforms:

- NHRC figures show that prisoners cut off from family and friends had a 50% more chance of committing suicide than those outside. The average suicide rate among the general public for this period is 11 (per 100,000)
whereas the average suicide rate in prison is 16.9 (per 100,000). In other words, the average suicide rate in prisons is over 50% more than in normal conditions.

- Indian prisons face three long-standing structural constraints: overcrowding, thanks to a high percentage of undertrials in the prison population, understaffing and underfunding. The inevitable outcome is sub-human living conditions, poor hygiene, and violent clashes between the inmates and jail authorities.
- Besides, while 33% of the total requirement of prison officials still lies vacant, almost 36% of vacancy for supervising officers is still unfulfilled. In the absence of adequate prison staff, overcrowding of prisons leads to rampant violence and other criminal activities inside the jails.

Way ahead:

- Indian jails have often been dubbed as a university for grooming criminals due to pathetic and inhumane conditions. In the absence of a robust Whistleblower Protection Act and structural changes to address the issues of overcrowding and understaffing, India’s prisons will continue to be heaven for politically connected criminals and hell for socio-economically disadvantaged undertrials, some regular media uproars notwithstanding.
- Fundamental rights of prisoners cannot be placed in the back-burner and the Centre and the states need to be more pro-active in sensitising staff about the need to treat prisoners as humanely as possible.

Sources: the hindu.

5. NATIONAL E-VIDHAN APPLICATION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the portal.
- **Context:** The government recently inaugurated the two-day National Orientation workshop on National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA). The government also launched a new website for NeVA.

About NeVA:

- NeVA is a member-centric, decentralized digital application that makes information available on digital platform about day to day functioning of Legislative Houses covering various businesses of the Houses.
- The application would host a secure page for each Member of the House for submitting Questions & other Notices.
- The mNeVA (NeVA-mobile app) is a device neutral and user friendly app that has made information on conduct of business in Legislatures accessible anytime, anywhere to everyone.
- It is a work-flow based app deployed in Cloud (Meghraj) which helps the Chair of the House to conduct the proceedings of the House smoothly and the members to carry out their duties in the House efficiently.
- NeVA has made live for Rajya Sabha in respect of Monsoon Session 2018 and information in respect of Lok Sabha is being updated.

**e-Vidhan Project:**

- e-Vidhan is a **Mission Mode Project** to digitize and make the functioning of State Legislatures paperless. This is **part of Digital India programme.** It is to be used by the Legislatures as well as all the Government Departments.

Sources: pib.

6. SUPREME COURT ALLOWS LIVE STREAMING OF CASES

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features of the pilot project and significance of the project.
- **Context:** Ushering in more transparency in the judiciary’s work, the Supreme Court has given its nod to **live-streaming of court proceedings**, saying this will bring more accountability and enhance the rule of law.
CURRENT EVENTS

Pilot project:

- As per the court’s order, the project must be implemented in a progressive, structured and phased manner, with certain safeguards to ensure that the purpose of live-streaming of proceedings is achieved holistically and that it does not interfere with the administration of justice or the dignity and majesty of the court hearing the matter and/or impinge upon any rights of the litigants or witnesses.
  - As a pilot project, only cases of constitutional and national importance being argued for final hearing before the Constitution Bench be live-streamed initially. For this, it said, permission of the court concerned will have to be sought in writing in advance.
  - Consent of parties to the proceedings must be insisted upon, and if there is no unanimity between them, the court concerned can take the appropriate decision inwe matter. The court concerned will also have the power to revoke permission at any stage of the proceedings.
  - There must be a reasonable time-delay (say 10 minutes) between the live court proceedings and the broadcast, in order to ensure that any information which ought not to be shown, as directed by the court, can be edited from being broadcast.
  - Till a full-fledged module and mechanism for live-streaming of the proceedings of the Supreme Court over the internet is evolved, it can be live-streamed in designated areas within the court via intranet.

What necessities this?

- Although courts in India are ordinarily open to all members of the public, sometimes they are denied the opportunity to witness the proceedings due to logistical issues and infrastructure restrictions. By providing ‘virtual’ access of live court proceedings to one and all, it will effectuate the right of access to justice or right to open justice and public trial, right to know the developments of law and including the right of justice at the doorstep of the litigants.
- It will “reduce the public’s reliance on second-hand narratives to obtain information about important judgments of the court and the course of judicial hearings”. Society will be able to view court proceedings first-hand and form reasoned and educated opinions about the functioning of courts. This will help reduce misinformation and misunderstanding about the judicial process.

Significance of the move:

- This is a giant step by the Supreme Court to move towards a regime of transparency.
  - Live streaming will deal head on with the problem of distance. Given that the court is located in New Delhi, many people cannot afford to be present physically in Supreme Court to follow the arguments, even if the case directly affects them in some way. In fact, even litigants are often unable to travel to court because of the cost and distance involved, leaving it entirely to their lawyers to run the case.
  - A live telecast of proceedings also has the potential to reduce unwarranted delays in the cases caused by the occasionally cavalier attitude of lawyers. With the client’s eye firmly on them, lawyers are likely to expedite cases. Further, this will provide an opportunity to young lawyers to showcase their talents to the world and has the potential to break the stranglehold of a select few over the legal profession.
  - Live streaming could act as a welcome check on the judiciary. With the public watching, there is every chance that there will be a reduction in the sometimes unnecessary oral comments that cause much controversy but have no judicial bearing.

What next?

- Supreme Court Rules, 2013, will have to suitably amended to provide for the regulatory framework to incorporate the changes.
- Besides, live telecast comes with some drawbacks. As seen in the Parliament, there is a tendency to grandstand among lawmakers, who want to show their electorate that they are indeed working hard. The court has to make sure proceedings are unaffected by the introduction of a new technology.

Sources: the hindu.
7. PRAGATI

- **Context:** The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, recently chaired his 29th interaction through PRAGATI – the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for **Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation**.

**About PRAGATI:**

- PRAGATI is a unique integrating and interactive platform. The platform is aimed at addressing common man’s grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

**Unique features:**

- The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- It also offers a unique combination in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground level situation. It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.
- It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
- Issues to be flagged before the PM are picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, ongoing Programmes and pending Projects.
- The system will ride on, strengthen and re-engineer the data bases of the CPGRAMS for grievances, Project Monitoring Group (PMG) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PRAGATI provides an interface and platform for all these three aspects.
- The system has been designed in-house by the PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).

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**Paper 2 Topic:** **Role of civil services in a democracy.**

1. POLICE FORCES IN 6 UTS MERGED

**What to study?**

- For Mains: Need and necessity of the move and its significance.

- **Context:** The Ministry of Home Affairs has notified the National Capital Territory of Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Chandigarh (Police Service) Rules 2018 amalgamating police forces in six Union Territories.

**Changes:**

- The rules effectively mean that officers who are not direct IPS recruits could be posted in any of the six UTs and will be at the disposal of the Ministry.
- There are around 533 posts that will be covered under the new rules; they include assistant commissioners of police and deputy superintendent of police.
- The Rules will come into effect upon the promotion or direct recruitment of Inspectors to the post of ACP. Half of the posts at the ACP rank will be filled through direct recruitment and the other half through promotion. Earlier these postings were decided by the respective UT administrators.
- The post/grade/service eligible for induction into the Entry Grade for the new service, according to the notification, would include personnel currently employed as inspectors in the Delhi Police, A&N Islands Police, Lakshadweep Police, Daman & Diu Police, Dadra and Nagar Haveli Police and Chandigarh Police.

**Significance:**

- This initiative is being viewed as the first step towards the creation of a central police cadre allowing for the posting of police personnel across the country irrespective of the force they are initially inducted into.
- A central pool allowing inter-transferability would also ensure that local police personnel do not fall prey to serving vested interests in their home services and ensure that they don’t become complacent.

**Sources:** the hindu.
1. INDUS WATER TREATY

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Indus Water Treaty- key facts.
- For Mains: Issues associated with the implementation of the treaty and their resolution.

**Context:** India and Pakistan have agreed to undertake the Indus Waters Treaty mandated tours by their Commissioners in the Indus basin on both sides to resolve issues on the various hydroelectric projects, including the Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai in Jammu and Kashmir.

- The recently concluded deliberations were held to further strengthen the role of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) for matters under the 1960 Treaty.

**About the treaty:**
- Signed in 1960 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and then Pakistan President Ayub Khan, the treaty allocates 80% of water from the six-river Indus water system to Pakistan.
- Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum from the Indus water system that flows from India to Pakistan. The Indus river basin spans parts of 4 countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and China) in an area that is more than 30% arid.
- Under the treaty, control over six north Indian rivers were divided between the two countries. India got control over the rivers Beas, Ravi and Sutlej whereas Pakistan got control over Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.
- This is a unique treaty involving a third party. It was brokered by the World Bank.
- A Permanent Indus Commission was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty. The Commission solves disputes arising over water sharing.
- The Treaty also provides arbitration mechanism to solve disputes amicably.

**Mechanism for cooperation:**
- The treaty sets out a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two countries regarding their use of the rivers. However, there have been disagreements and differences between India and Pakistan over the treaty.
- The water commissioners of Pakistan and India were required to meet twice a year and arrange technical visits to projects’ sites and critical river head works, but Pakistan had been facing a lot of problems in timely meetings and visits.

**Sources:** the hindu.

2. EAST ASIA SUMMIT

**What to study?**
- For Prelims and Mains: EAS- composition, objectives, significance for India and issues associated.
- **Context:** 6th East Asia Summit- Economic Ministers’ Meeting (EAS-EMM) was recently held in Singapore.
CURRENT EVENTS

Outcomes of the meeting:

- The 6th East-Asia Economic Ministers’ Meeting was attended by Economic Ministers from 10 ASEAN countries and their eight dialogue partners, Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.
- Acknowledging the potential for disruptions in the macro-economy that could affect overall market sentiments and global growth, the EAS-EMM forum expressed the hope that the economic linkages among the EAS members will enable them to address these challenges.
- The Ministers agreed to the importance of keeping markets open and fair as well as improving transparency and predictability of the business environment.
- The meeting recognized the importance of ongoing work to maximize the opportunities of, and address the challenges presented by, the digital economy and the rise of regional and global value chains, as part of their efforts to promote economic growth and integration in the region.

About East Asia Summit:

- The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a forum held annually by leaders of, initially, 16 countries in the East Asian, Southeast Asian and South Asian regions. Membership expanded to 18 countries including the United States and Russia at the Sixth EAS in 2011.
- EAS meetings are held after annual ASEAN leaders’ meetings. The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005.
- EAS is an initiative of ASEAN and is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN.
- EAS has evolved as a forum for strategic dialogue and cooperation on political, security and economic issues of common regional concern and plays an important role in the regional architecture.
- There are six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS. These are – Environment and Energy, Education, Finance, Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases, Natural Disaster Management, and ASEAN Connectivity. India endorses regional collaboration in all six priority areas.

Evolution of EAS:

- The concept of an East Asia Grouping was first promoted in 1991 by the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad. The final report of the East Asian Study Group in 2002, established by the ASEAN+3 countries (i.e. China, Japan and ROK), recommended EAS as an ASEAN led development limited to the ASEAN+3 countries.
- However, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) held in Vientiane on July 26, 2005 welcomed the participation of ASEAN, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, India and New Zealand, in the first EAS. USA and the Russian Federation were formally included as members of the EAS at the 6th EAS held in Bali, Indonesia on 19 November 2011.

Way ahead:

- EAS, representing nearly 50% of the world’s population and over 20% of global trade, is a mega gathering and is a testimony to the rise of Asia and how rapidly the world’s politico-economic equations are shifting.

Facts for Prelims:

- Following the 12th EAS in November 2017 in Manila, Philippines and following the adoption of the Manila Plan of Action, Maritime Cooperation has been identified as an important area of cooperation under the EAS.

Sources: pib.

3. ASEAN

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: ASEAN- composition, objectives, significance and criticisms.
- Context: 15th ASEAN Economic Ministers – India Consultation was recently held in Singapore. Singapore is currently holding the Chair of ASEAN.
CURRENT EVENTS

Outcomes of the meeting:

- The meeting attended by Economic Ministers from 10 ASEAN countries took stock of the current level of trade and economic engagement between India and ASEAN and reaffirmed the commitment to further strengthen ASEAN-India economic relations.
- It was also announced in the Singapore meeting that the next ASEAN-India Business Summit will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in November 2018 with the theme “Towards Building Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and India in the Era of the 4th IR and Digital Economy”.
- It will be followed by the 4th India-ASEAN Dialogue Partner Expo and Summit scheduled for 21-23 February 2019, in New Delhi.
- Issues related to promoting connectivity, collaboration on Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) development, blue economy, healthcare, and tourism as well as women and youth economic empowerment were discussed.

What is ASEAN?

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (more commonly known as ASEAN) is a political and economic organization aimed primarily at promoting economic growth and regional stability among its members.

There are currently 10 member states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Why was it set up?

- ASEAN was founded half a century ago in 1967 by the five South-East Asian nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. This was during the polarized atmosphere of the Cold War, and the alliance aimed to promote stability in the region. Over time, the group expanded to include its current 10 members.
- Regional cooperation was further extended with the creation of the ASEAN Plus Three forum in 1997, which included China, South Korea and Japan. And then the East Asia Summit, which began taking place in 2005 and has expanded to include India, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

How important is the region economically?

- If ASEAN were a country, it would be the seventh-largest economy in the world, with a combined GDP of $2.6 trillion in 2014. By 2050 it’s projected to rank as the fourth-largest economy.
- Home to more than 622 million people, the region has a larger population than the European Union or North America. It also has the third-largest labour force in the world, behind China and India.

Sources: pib.

4. CHABAHAR PORT

What to study?

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

Context: Iran will handover the strategic Chabahar port to an Indian company within a month for operation as per an interim pact.

Under the agreement signed between India and Iran earlier, India is to equip and operate two berths in Chabahar Port Phase-I with capital investment of $85.21 million and annual revenue expenditure of $22.95 million on a 10-year lease.

Where is Chabahar port?

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

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Location and significance of the corridor, issues involved in its construction.

- Context: Citing the strong sentiments Sikhs attach to the Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara in Pakistan, Punjab Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu has written to the Centre, asking for steps to realise a “Kartarpur Sahib corridor” for pilgrims.

What’s the issue?

- The visa wrangles have deprived numerous pilgrims of reaching this gurdwara over the years. The rift between the two neighbours, India and Pakistan, grew so much over the years that even visiting the historical gurdwaras at will became a problem.

The shrine:

- The gurdwara in Kartarpur stands on the bank of the Ravi, about 120 km northeast of Lahore. It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539.
- The shrine is visible from the Indian side, as Pakistani authorities generally trim the elephant grass that would otherwise obstruct the view. Indian Sikhs gather in large numbers for darshan from the Indian side, and binoculars are installed at Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak.

Access to gurdwaras in Pakistan:

- Sikh jathas from India travel to Pakistan on four occasions every year — for Baisakhi, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev.
- These Indian pilgrims are given access to all gurdwaras in Pakistan.

Complex issue:

- The “corridor” would bring Pak infrastructure right up to the Indian border. Over the past year, gurdwaras in Pakistan have been used for a pro-Khalistan campaign. Earlier this year, a gurdwara displayed posters and distributed pamphlets for the so-called “Sikh Referendum 2020”, and Pakistan denied permission to the Indian envoy and diplomats to visit it.
- Pakistan’s intent also remains suspect, and Indian officials are wary of the corridor being misused by both state and non-state actors in that country.

Sources: the hindu.
6. CHINA-Pakistan ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC)

What to study?

- For Prelims: Key features of CPEC.
- For Mains: India’s concerns, ways to address them and global implications of the project.

**Context**: Pakistan has invited Saudi Arabia to join the CPEC as the third “strategic partner”. Saudi participation in this mega project will ensure huge investment in Pakistan through this platform.

**Background**:

- Saudi Arabia has a history of bailing out Pakistan financially. In 2014, six months after Pakistan obtained its last IMF bailout, Saudi Arabia loaned it $1.5 billion that the government used to strengthen its rupee currency.

**About CPEC**:

- The CPEC is the flagship project of the multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a pet project of Chinese President Xi Jinping, aimed at enhancing Beijing’s influence around the world through China-funded infrastructure projects.
- The 3,000 km-long China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) consisting of highways, railways, and pipelines is the latest irritant in the India–China relationship.
- CPEC eventually aims at linking the city of Gwadar in South Western Pakistan to China’s North Western region Xinjiang through a vast network of highways and railways.
- The proposed project will be financed by heavily-subsidised loans, that will be disbursed to the Government of Pakistan by Chinese banking giants such as Exim Bank of China, China Development Bank, and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

**But, why is India concerned?**

- Many experts are not in favour of India supporting CPEC. This is so because any Indian participation would inextricably be linked to the country’s legitimate claims on PoK.
- CPEC rests on a Chinese plan to secure and shorten its supply lines through Gwadar with an enhanced presence in the Indian Ocean. Hence, it is widely believed that upon CPEC’s fruition, an extensive Chinese presence will undermine India’s influence in the Indian Ocean.
- It is also being contended that if CPEC were to successfully transform the Pakistan economy that could be a “red rag” for India which will remain at the receiving end of a wealthier and stronger Pakistan.
- Besides, India shares a great deal of trust deficit with China and Pakistan and has a history of conflict with both. As a result, even though suggestions to re-approach the project pragmatically have been made, no advocate has overruled the principle strands of contention that continue to mar India’s equations with China and Pakistan.

**Way ahead**:

- Only by respecting the sovereignty of countries involved, can regional connectivity corridors fulfil their promise and avoid differences and discord.
- China is a country which is very sensitive on matters concerning its sovereignty. So it is expected that they would have some understanding of other people’s sensitivity about their sovereignty.
- Meanwhile, India must uphold its specific reservations on the project and draft a strategy to revert suitably in case CPEC is offered formally through official channels.

**Sources**: the hindu.

**Paper 2 Topic**: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1. ASIA-EUROPE MEETING (ASEM)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on ASEM and significance of the grouping.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Context:** 3rd ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Conference on ‘Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons’ is being held in Seoul, Korea.

Aims and objectives of the conference:

- The Conference will reaffirm the universal value of the human rights of older persons, share information on discrimination against the elderly and exemplary cases of long-term and palliative care in Asia and Europe, and also discuss operation and tasks of the ASEM Global Ageing Centre as an implementing institution for mutual cooperation among ASEM members for the protection and promotion of the human rights of older persons.

ASEM:

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

Sources: pib.

2. COMPREHENSIVE NUCLEAR TEST BAN TREATY

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: CTBT- key facts.
- For Mains: Significance of the treaty and why India is not willing to sign the treaty, what needs to be done?

**Context:** UN chief Antonio Guterres recently reiterated his appeal to eight nations, including India and the US, to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, saying the failure to bring it into force undermines global efforts to ensure a world free of atomic weapons.

**Background:**

- Although more than 180 countries have signed the CTBT, and mostly ratified it, the treaty can only enter into force after it is ratified by eight countries with nuclear technology capacity, namely China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States.

**What is CTBT?**

- The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is the Treaty banning all nuclear explosions – everywhere, by everyone. The Treaty was negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It opened for signature on 24 September 1996.
Why is the CTBT so important?

- The CTBT is the last barrier on the way to develop nuclear weapons. It curbs the development of new nuclear weapons and the improvement of existing nuclear weapon designs.
- When the Treaty enters into force it provides a legally binding norm against nuclear testing. The Treaty also helps prevent human suffering and environmental damages caused by nuclear testing.

India and the CTBT:

- Since its inception, India has had a number of reservations about the CTBT. While it has stood by its demand for a nuclear weapons-free world, various principled, procedural, political, and security concerns have stood in the way of its support for the CTBT.
  - **India’s principled opposition drew from its emphasis on universal and complete nuclear disarmament in a time-bound manner.** India has traditionally believed this to be the end goal with the test ban just being a path to get there. But it did not insist on a complete disarmament clause in 1994, acknowledging that it was a “complex issue.”
  - **Another major concern was Article XIV, the entry-into-force (EIF) clause,** which India considered a violation of its right to voluntarily withhold participation in an international treaty. The treaty initially made ratification by states that were to be a part of the CTBT’s International Monitoring System (IMS) mandatory for the treaty’s EIF.

Need of the hour:

- CTBT has an essential role within the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. More than 20 years since its negotiation, the Treaty has yet to enter into force.
- Every effort must be made to bring about the immediate entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, CTBT. The failure to bring the treaty into force prevents its full implementation and undermines its permanence in the international security architecture.

Sources: the hindu.

3. WORLD HINDU CONGRESS (WHC)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on WHC and significance of these conferences, Parliament of World Religions in Chicago.
- **Context:** The second World Hindu Congress is being held in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.
- It is inspired by the Hindu principle, **Sumantrite Suvikrante or THINK COLLECTIVELY, ACHIEVE VALIANTLY.**
- On the eve of the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda’s historic address to the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, Hindus from around the world and of all backgrounds are invited to actively participate.

About WHC:

- The World Hindu Congress (WHC) is a global platform for Hindus to connect, share ideas, inspire one another, and impact the common good. It offers Hindus an opportunity to introspect towards improvement and tap into our collective resources to seek tangible solutions to the most pressing issues of our age.
  - **Held once every four years, WHC’s seven parallel conferences** showcase how the values, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit of the global Hindu community find expression in a variety of spheres, including economic, education, media, organizational, and political, as well as the unique leadership and contributions of Hindu women and youth.
  - WHC also serves as a platform to address critical issues impacting Hindus worldwide, including human rights, discrimination, and cultural assaults.
CURRENT EVENTS

Why World Hindu Congress?

- In the past, Hindus have held a number of forums and conferences intermittently. But the outcomes of resulting resolutions and implementation of action plans have been sporadic at best. Many of these events never covered dimensions critically important to Hindus such as education, media, politics, and economy with regularity. Moreover, not many of these events were cross-dimensional in nature.
- Hindus have both spiritual and secular needs. Unfortunately, many of the secular needs and challenges have been left for others to handle. The WHC seeks to fill in this very important gap.
- The World Hindu Congress is an informal organization organized by World Hindu Foundation. But it is dependent on the efforts of volunteers representing Hindu organizations from around the world. Each Congress will be held in a different part of the world. All Hindu organizations, associations, and institutions are encouraged to participate and invited to become partners in World Hindu Congress.

Sources: the hindu.

4. BIMSTEC MILITARY EXERCISE

What to study?

- For Prelims: BIMSTEC Military exercise and key facts on BIMSTEC.
- For Mains: Significance of the grouping, challenges faced by countries in the region, Criticisms and reforms needed.
- Context: The first BIMSTEC field training exercise is being held at Foreign Training Node at Aundh in Pune, Maharashtra. Armies of BIMSTEC members including India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Nepal will participate in it.
- The theme of exercise includes counter-terrorism in semi-urban terrain and cordon and search.
- The main aim of this military exercise is to promote strategic alignment among the member-states and to share best practices in the area of counter-terrorism.

Facts for Prelims:

- Nepal is not participating in the exercise. The withdrawal of the Nepal Army from the event comes in the wake of stringent criticism from the ruling and opposition parties in the country, warning Nepal Prime Minister K P Oli that the move would go against the country’s history of following a policy of keeping equal distance from its neighbours, without ever being part of a regional bloc militarily.

About BIMSTEC:

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising of seven member states in South Asia and Southeast Asia lying in littoral and adjacent areas of Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
- This sub-regional organisation came into being on June 6, 1997, through the Bangkok Declaration. It is headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- It comprises of seven member countries: five deriving from South Asia — including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka — and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.

Sources: the hindu.

5. 4TH WORLD SUMMIT ON ACCREDITATION (WOSA-2018)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: WOSA- Key facts, themes and significance of the summits.
- Context: 4th World Summit on Accreditation (WOSA-2018) is being held at New Delhi. It is being organized by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA).
- The theme of WOSA 2018 is “CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN OUTCOME BASED ACCREDITATION” and the sub-themes are:
  > Sub-Theme 1 – Achieving Excellence through Learning Outcomes.
CURRENT EVENTS

- Sub-Theme 2 – Role of Industry in Technical Education.
- Sub-Theme 3 – Ranking and Rating of Higher Education Institutions – Do they have a Role in Quality Improvement?
- Sub-Theme 4 – Linking Government Funding with Quality.
- Sub-Theme 5 – Use of ICT in Accreditation in Large Jurisdictions.

Significance of the summit:
- The Summit will facilitate exchange of information on various challenges being faced during the transition between input-output based accreditation to outcome based accreditation.
- The discussion and global participation in WOSA 2018 will bring about new ideas and help in establishing new trends of identifying opportunities and challenges in professional and technical education world-wide.

About World Summit on Accreditation:
- World Summit on Accreditation (WOSA) is a biennial Summit organised by National Board of Accreditation (NBA), which provides platform to stakeholders to share their knowledge and information on accreditation.
- NBA has already organised three Summits in 2012, 2014 and 2016 with the themes “Achieving Excellence through Accreditation”, “International Recognition of Education Qualifications” and “Quality Assurance through Outcome Based Accreditation” respectively.

About NBA:
- The National Board of Accreditation (NBA) is an autonomous organisation under Ministry of Human Resource Development engaged in quality assurance of the programs offered by the professional and technical institutions in India through accreditation.
- NBA has been accorded Permanent Signatory Status of Washington Accord since June, 2014.
- It has adopted internationally implemented outcome based assessment and accreditation, to ensure that the graduates of the MBA accredited programs are globally competent and relevant.

Sources: the hindu.

6. INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE OZONE LAYER

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key facts on Montreal protocol and Ozone day.
- For Mains: Significance of the Ozone layer and the need for protection.
- Context: The International Day for Preservation of Ozone Layer (or World Ozone Day) is observed every year on September 16 for the preservation of the Ozone Layer.

Significance of the day:
- In 1994, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 16 September the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, commemorating the date of the signing, in 1987, of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

What you need to know about the Ozone layer?
- The ozone layer absorbs most of the Sun’s ultraviolet light which is harmful to human life and other life forms. The layer absorbs about 97 to 99% of ultraviolet rays and maintain the ozone-oxygen cycle.
1. SPAIN OFFERS REFERENDUM ON GREATER CATALAN AUTONOMY

What to study?
- For Prelims: Geographical location of Spain and Catalonia.
- For Mains: Controversy and issues surrounding the demand for autonomy.
- **Context:** Spain’s prime minister has proposed a referendum on whether Catalonia should be given greater autonomy, in a bid to dampen tensions between Madrid and Barcelona.
- While stopping short of offering the wealthy region a vote on full independence, this proposal will still be seen as an olive branch for many in Catalonia who simply want to see more devolved regional powers.

Background:
- This comes in the wake of a political crisis last year when the Catalan government attempted a unilateral declaration of independence.

What’s the issue?
- Catalonia, which has its own distinct language, was granted autonomy under Spain’s 1978 Constitution adopted three years after the death of longtime dictator Francisco Franco.
  - In 2006, a statute granting even greater powers to the northwestern region, boosting its financial clout, was approved by the Spanish and Catalan parliaments. And in a referendum at the time, over 73% of voters in Catalonia approved it.
  - But in 2010 Spain’s Constitutional Court struck down several articles of the charter, among them attempts to place the distinctive Catalan language above Spanish in the region and a clause describing the region as a “nation”. The ruling sparked a rise in support for independence in Catalonia, which is home to some 7.5 million people and accounts for about one-fifth of the Spanish economy.

Where is Catalonia?
- Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain in the north-east end of the Iberian Peninsula, designated as a nationality by its Statute of Autonomy.
- It has four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. The capital and largest city is Barcelona, which is the second most populated city in Spain.
How would a secession affect the Spanish economy?

- The Catalan region has long been the industrial heartland of Spain, with textile and shipbuilding, and more recently, finance, services, and technology. Barcelona has a thriving start-up culture, and plays host to the annual Mobile World Congress, where the bleeding edge of technology is on display.
  - Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain. It accounts for 20.07% of the Spanish GDP. Secession would therefore cost Spain almost a fifth of its economic output, and trigger a row on how to carve up the €836 billion of national debt.
  - If Catalonia were to secede from Spain, it would have a GDP of $314 billion, according to calculations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That would make its economy larger than Singapore and South Africa, and on a par with Israel. Its GDP per capita would be $35,000, which would make the average citizen of the Catalanian state wealthier than his counterparts from South Korea or Italy.

Sources: the hindu.

2. COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: CPA- meaning, objectives and significance for India.
- **Context:** The World Bank Group (WBG) Board of Executive Directors has endorsed a new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for India.

Significance:

- The CPF aims to support India’s transition to a higher middle-income country by addressing some of its key development priorities — resource efficient and inclusive growth, job creation and building its human capital.
- The India CPF represents the largest country programme of the WBG, reflecting the strong collaboration between India and the Group’s institutions — The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). The WBG expects to deliver $25-30 billion during this CPF period, ending in FY22.

Potential:

- With a fast growing economy, global stature, and its unique experience of lifting the highest number of poor out of poverty in the past decades, India is well-positioned to become a high middle-income country by 2030.

Need of the hour:

- The future of India lies in the States of India. The country’s transition to high middle-income status will be determined in large part by the effectiveness of India’s federal compact.
- In this context, an important focus of the CPF will be to deepen engagement with India’s States and invest in the institutions and capabilities of the states and local governments to address their development priorities.

What is Country Partnership Framework (CPF)?

- The World Bank Group’s Country Partnership Framework (CPF) aims to make our country-driven model more systematic, evidence-based, selective, and focused on the Bank’s twin goals of ending extreme poverty and increasing shared prosperity in a sustainable manner.
- The CPF replaces the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). Used in conjunction with a Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD), the CPF guides the World Bank Group’s (WBG) support to a member country.
- **A Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD)** informs each new CPF. The aim of the SCD is to identify the most important challenges and opportunities a country faces in advancing towards the twin goals. This is derived from a thorough analysis, and informed by consultations with a range of stakeholders.

Way ahead:

- **The WBG will focus on three broad areas under the new CPF:** promoting a resource efficient growth path, particularly in the use of land and water, to remain sustainable; enhancing competitiveness and enabling job creation; and investing in human capital — in health, education, skills — to improve quality and efficiency of service delivery.
CURRENT EVENTS

• Within these, some areas of deeper WBG’s engagement will include addressing the challenge of air pollution, facilitating jobs for women, increasing the resilience of the financial sector and investing in early years of children’s development. Across the sectors, the WBG will invest in harnessing the impact of new technology.

Sources: the hindu.

3. IN NEWS- G4

What is G4?

• Formed in 2005, the G4 nations comprise Brazil, Germany, India and Japan. Unlike many inter-governmental bodies whose primary motives are economic and political, the G4’s aim is to ensure permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council.

Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

1. BIMSTEC SUMMIT

What to study?

• For Prelims: BIMSTEC- summits, themes, objectives and composition.
• For Mains: Significance of the BIMSTEC, criticisms and the need for reforms.
• Context: Fourth BIMSTEC summit was recently held in Nepal. The member states have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of a Bimstec Gird Interconnection to enhance energy cooperation among the member states.
• THEME OF BIMSTEC SUMMIT 2018: The theme of the fourth BIMSTEC summit is ‘Towards a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region’.

Kathmandu Declaration:

• The Fourth BIMSTEC Summit concluded with an 18-point Kathmandu Declaration. The declaration is expected to enhance the effectiveness of BIMSTEC Secretariat by engaging it in various technical and economic activities in the region.

Key highlights:

• The Kathmandu Declaration has underlined the importance of multidimensional connectivity as a key enabler to economic integration for shared prosperity of the region. The declaration also highlighted the importance of trade and investment as one of the major contributing factors for fostering economic and social development in the region.
• The declaration said the “fight against terrorism should target not only terrorists, terror organisations and networks but also identify and hold accountable States and non-State entities that encourage, support or finance terrorism, provide sanctuaries to terrorists and terror groups and falsely extol their virtues.”
• It asked all nations to devise a comprehensive approach which should include preventing financing of terrorists and terrorist actions from territories under their control, blocking recruitment and cross-border movement of terrorists, countering radicalisation, countering misuse of internet for purposes of terrorism and dismantling terrorist safe havens.
• It said that combating terrorism and transnational organised crimes require sustained efforts and cooperation and comprehensive approach involving active participation and collaboration of the Member States.
• The declaration also recognised that eradication of poverty is the greatest regional challenge in realising development objectives and expressed firm commitment to work together for implementing the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

WHAT IS BIMSTEC SUMMIT?

• The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising of seven member states in South Asia and Southeast Asia lying in littoral and adjacent areas of Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
WHEN WAS BIMSTEC ESTABLISHED?

- This sub-regional organisation came into being on June 6, 1997, through the **Bangkok Declaration**. It is headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Composition:

- It comprises of seven member countries: five deriving from South Asia — including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka — and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.

AMENDMENTS IN THE BIMSTEC ORGANISATION:

- Initially, the economic bloc was formed with four Member States with the acronym ‘BIST-EC’ (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- Following the inclusion of Myanmar during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok on December 22, 1997, the group was renamed ‘BIMST-EC’ (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- With the admission of Nepal and Bhutan at the 6th Ministerial Meeting in February 2004, the name of the grouping was changed to ‘Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation’ (BIMSTEC).

Objectives of BIMSTEC:

- BIMSTEC is a sector-driven cooperative organization. Technological and economic cooperation among South Asian and Southeast Asian countries along the coast of the Bay of Bengal is its main objective.
- Starting with six sectors-including trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries-for sectoral cooperation in late 1997, it expanded to embrace nine more sectors-including agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people to people contact and climate change-in 2008.

Sources: pib.

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2. WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR SOUTH-EAST ASIA

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Regional offices of WHO- significance, need and objectives.
- Context: 71st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia was recently held.

About Regional Committee for South-East Asia:

- The Regional Committee for South-East Asia is the World Health Organization’s governing body in the South-East Asia Region, with representatives from all 11 Member States of the Region.
- It meets in September every year to review progress in health development in the Region, formulate resolutions on health issues for the Member States, as well as to consider the regional implications of World Health Assembly resolutions, among others.

World Health Organization in South-East Asia:

- The South-East Asia Region of the World Health Organization, established in 1948, was the first of its six regions.
- Home to a quarter of the world population, WHO SEARO provides leadership on health matters, articulates evidence-based policy options, provides technical support to countries and monitors health trends.

WHO South-East Asia Countries:

- Bangladesh.
- Bhutan.
- Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.
- India.
- Indonesia
- Maldives
Facts for Prelims:

- WHO by a resolution, has delineated six geographic areas for regional organizations as follows:
  - Eastern Mediterranean.
  - Western Pacific.
  - South-East Asia.
  - Europe
  - Africa (South of the Sahara).
  - The Americas.

Sources: pib.

3. INTERNATIONAL AVIATION SUMMIT

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: International Aviation Summit- key highlights, IATA.

  Context: The International Aviation Summit is being held New Delhi.

- The summit has been jointly organised by the Airports Authority of India, Ministry of Civil Aviation and International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Background:

- The Indian Government is preparing for a massive air traffic surge to handle as many as 100 crore passengers in next 15-20 years, much above the 50 crore trips a year as predicted by IATA. According to IATA, India is expected to overtake Germany, Japan, Spain and the UK within the next ten years to become the world’s third largest air passenger market.

Challenges to growth of the sector:

- India’s aviation industry is showing contrast as on one hand there are infrastructural and economic issues plaguing the sector while on the other, airline companies are busy buying planes to meet the demand.
- With a surge in domestic air travel demand in India, the country’s airlines are gearing up for a rise and have ordered around 1,000 aircraft over the next eight years. But despite traffic growth, the financial outlook for domestic airlines has deteriorated dramatically since January.
- Imposing GST on international air tickets is being seen as a violation of international standards. The GST rate is 5% and 12% on economy and business class tickets respectively.

About IATA:

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

Sources: the hindu.
4. PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT (PISA)

What to study?
- For Prelims: PISA- Key facts.
- For Mains: Why India stayed away from PISA for years and issues associated.
- **Context:** Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) has officially decided to participate in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) after gap of nine years. It will send team of officers to Paris to negotiate India’s terms of participation in PISA 2021.

**Background:**
- India had taken part in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries.
- Then UPA government had boycotted PISA, blaming “out of context” questions for India’s dismal performance.

**About the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):**
- The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students’ reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years.
  - First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle.
  - PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving.
  - By design, PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.
- **PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),** an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries, and is **conducted in the United States by NCES.**
  Data collection for the most recent assessment was completed in Fall 2015.
- **In 2012 PISA test, schools of Shanghai in China topped reading, mathematics and science test, followed closely by Singapore. In 2015, Singapore, Japan and Estonia** were ranked as top three countries, in that order.

**PISA 2021:**
- PISA 2021 test is likely to be administered in schools in Union Territory of Chandigarh. Apart from schools in Chandigarh, HRD Ministry also suggested that all Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs), funded and run by Centre, shall take the test.
- **Why Chandigarh?** Chandigarh was selected for its compact area, students are taught in Hindi and English (Government wants to keep number of languages in which test has to be administered to minimum). Chandigarh has record of performing well in learning assessments.

Sources: the hindu.

5. COMCASA

What to study?
- For Prelims: Features of COMCASA, and a brief overview of other security agreements between India and the US.
- For Mains: Issues and criticisms over signing of these agreements, benefits for India.
- **Context:** India and the U.S. have signed the foundational or enabling agreement COMCASA on the side-lines of the inaugural 2+2 dialogue.

**What is COMCASA?**
- COMCASA stands for Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement and is one of the four foundational agreements that the U.S. signs with allies and close partners to facilitate interoperability between militaries and sale of high end technology.
CURRENT EVENTS

- COMCASA is an India-specific version of the Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA). It comes into force immediately, and is valid for a period 10 years.
- COMCASA allows India to procure transfer specialised equipment for encrypted communications for US origin military platforms like the C-17, C-130 and P-8Is. Currently, these platforms use commercially available communication systems.
- COMCASA is a “technology enabler” to help transfer high-tech avionics, encrypted communication and electronic systems to India as well as ensure secrecy of its C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems from leaking to other countries like Russia. This agreement would allow the interoperability of India and United States equipments.

**Benefits of this agreement:**
- The Comcasa provides the legal framework for the US to part with its sensitive communication equipment and codes to enable transfer of realtime operational information. This equipment is largely used for ground-to-air communication, on installed US-origin military aircraft, to enable best battle situation awareness.
- The US data link is considered the most secure communication platform, which will also allow India access to big data base of American intelligence, including real-time imagery.
- The Comcasa will allow both sides to operate on the same communication systems, enabling an “interoperable” environment for militaries. Without this agreement, the US cannot part with highly coded communication equipment with the military platforms they sell to India. India has to depend on commercially available less secure systems on, otherwise, high-end platforms like C-130Js and the P8I maritime surveillance aircraft, among others. COMCASA will change that. Now the US government will be able to give the go-ahead to install the best communication equipment on relevant platforms such as aircraft being sold to India.
- COMCASA will effectively mean India sharing the real-time American intelligence on military deployments by China and Pakistan.
- COMCASA will also help India obtain the armed version of the Sea Guardian drones. The US could not part with the weapon systems on the drone without COMCASA which will now allow installation of data and communication systems.

**What next?**
- India had signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002 and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016. The last one remaining is the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA).

Sources: the hindu.

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6. **MOVE, THE FIRST GLOBAL MOBILITY SUMMIT**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Highlights, theme and key facts on the summit.
- For Mains: Significance of the summit and issues associated with mobility including efficiency and public transit etc.

**Context:** NITI Aayog, in collaboration with various ministries and industry partners, is organising ‘MOVE: Global Mobility Summit’ in New Delhi. It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India.

**Aim of the Summit:** The summit aims to bring together stakeholders from across the sectors of mobility and transportation to co-create a public interest framework to revolutionize transport. The summit also aims to set the base for a transport system which is safe, clean, shared and connected, affordable, accessible and inclusive.

**The summit will deliberate on five themes:**
- Maximising asset utilisation and services.
- Comprehensive electrification and alternative fuels.
- Reinventing public transport.
- Goods transport and logistics.
- Data analytics and mobility.
Key features of the Summit:

- The summit will feature global political leaders from mobility space and will see the participation of over 2200 participants from across the world including government leadership, research organizations, academia, industry leaders, think tanks and civil society organisations.
- The conclave will see over 30 global CEOs, 100 state officials, and foreign delegates and 200 Indian CEOs participating in the event.
- International representation from embassies and the private sector will include the US, Japan, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, New Zealand, Austria, Germany, and Brazil.

Why Mobility?

- Mobility is what keeps the engine of life running. Whether it is personal mobility for work or leisure or mobility of goods across value chains, without the ability to traverse large distances in short time spans, civilization would not be where it is today. In an urbanizing world, mobility is integral to city design, facilitating the evolution of physical space for liveability. Ranging from pedestrian and personal transport to public transit and freight movement, mobility is a crucial piece of the development puzzle and the key to unlocking the potential of India’s economy and people.
- Across sectors, public and private expenditure is being invested in effective and efficient transport. The challenge lies in ensuring that these systems meet the needs of their users in a sustainable manner. It must be clean for environmental benefits, shared to maximize asset efficiency, and connected to meet user needs from end-to-end. Affordability of public transit is key for low-income users, and of freight for industry. Accessibility and inclusivity is crucial for remote and differently-abled users across geographies, with the philosophy of leaving no-one behind. Safe, energy-efficient and low-emission systems are necessary for India to meet its international commitments on climate change.

Way ahead:

- As mobility is what keeps the engine of life running, it is a key to unlock the potential of India’s economy and people.
- Affordability of public transit is crucial for low-income users and of freight for the industry. Accessibility and inclusivity are crucial for remote and differently-abled users across geographies, with the philosophy of leaving no-one behind. Safe, energy-efficient and low-emission systems are necessary for India to meet its international commitments on climate change.

Sources: pib.

7. UN INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE (UNIATF)

What to study?

- For Prelims: UNIATF- composition and objectives.
- For Mains: NCDs- concerns, spread and efforts to contain, at both national and global level.
- Context: Shri Manoj Jhalani, Additional Secretary & Mission Director (NHM), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has been conferred with the prestigious UN Interagency Task Force (UNIATF) Award for his outstanding contribution towards prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and related Sustainable Development Goals.

About UNIATF:

- A July 2013 resolution at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) formally established the UN Interagency Task Force on NCDs by expanding the mandate of the existing UN Ad Hoc Interagency Task Force on Tobacco Control.
  - The Task Force is convened and led by WHO, and reports to ECOSOC through the UN Secretary General.

Functions:

- UN Interagency Task Force (UNIATF) on the Prevention and Control of NCDs coordinates activities of relevant United Nations funds, programmes and specialised agencies and other intergovernmental organisations, to support the realisation of the commitments made in the UN Political Declaration on NCDs, in particular through the implementation of the WHO Global NCD Action Plan 2013-2020.
CURRENT EVENTS

- Following the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, UNIATF’s scope of work was expanded in 2016 to include “NCD related SDGs” – i.e. mental health, violence and injuries, nutrition, and environmental issues that impact on NCDs.

**What are NCDs?**

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

**Concerns:**

- Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 71% of all deaths globally.
- Each year, 15 million people die from a NCD between the ages of 30 and 69 years; over 85% of these “premature” deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.
- Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17.9 million people annually, followed by cancers (9.0 million), respiratory diseases (3.9 million), and diabetes (1.6 million).
- These 4 groups of diseases account for over 80% of all premature NCD deaths.
- Tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets all increase the risk of dying from a NCD.
- Detection, screening and treatment of NCDs, as well as palliative care, are key components of the response to NCDs.

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

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

Sources: pib.

8. NUCLEAR SUPPLIERS GROUP

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: NSG- key facts.
- For Mains: Why India should be given NSG membership, challenges involved and what needs to be done.

**Context:** The United States has asserted that it will continue to advocate for New Delhi’s membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group as it meets all the criteria. US has granted India the **Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA-1)** status. The status places India in the inner circle of America’s closest allies.

**What’s the issue?**

- India has been seeking entry into the 48-member elite nuclear club, which controls nuclear trade, but China has repeatedly stonewalled its bid.
- While India, which is backed by the US and a number of western countries has garnered the support of a majority of the group’s members, China has stuck to its stand that new members should sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), making India’s entry difficult as the group is guided by the consensus principle. India is not a signatory to the NPT.
What is NSG?

- Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a multinational body concerned with reducing nuclear proliferation by controlling the export and re-transfer of materials that may be applicable to nuclear weapon development and by improving safeguards and protection on existing materials.
- Interestingly, the NSG was set up in 1974 as a reaction to India’s nuclear tests to stop what it called the misuse of nuclear material meant for peaceful purposes.

Background:

- India sought membership of the NSG in 2008, but its application hasn’t been decided on, primarily because signing the NPT or other nuclear moratoriums on testing is a pre-requisite. However, India has received a special waiver to conduct nuclear trade with all nuclear exporters.
- India, Pakistan, Israel and South Sudan are among the four UN member states which have not signed the NPT, the international pact aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

Why India should be granted NSG membership?

- In this game of developing nuclear weapons India has not indulged in any dubious/clandestine activity and its programme has been developed solely by years of hard work indigenously. By this single act India has shown that developing a credible nuclear weapons programme through honest and civilian means is possible for any country having high-level scientific manpower and materials.
- Besides, by declaring a voluntary moratorium on further underground nuclear tests India has effectively acted in sense and spirit of NPT/CTBT provisions. By steering its programme only as a minimum deterrence and pledging NFU unless faced with an attack of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), India has established itself as a responsible nuclear state.

Benefits associated with NSG membership- Once admitted, an NSG member state gets:

- Timely information on nuclear matters.
- Contributes by way of information.
- Has confirmed credentials.
- Can act as an instrument of harmonization and coordination.
- Is part of a very transparent process.

Sources: the hindu.

9. INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION (ITU)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: ITU and related information.
- **Context**: The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has announced that it will establish its South Asia Area Office and Technology Innovation Centre at New Delhi.

About International Telecommunication Union (ITU):

- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is an agency of the United Nations (UN) whose purpose is to coordinate telecommunication operations and services throughout the world. Originally founded in 1865, as the International Telegraph Union, the ITU is the oldest existing international organization. ITU headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.

The ITU consists of three sectors:

- **Telecommunication Development (ITU-D)** — assists countries in developing and maintaining internal communication operations.
Membership:

- There are 193 Member States of the ITU, including all UN member states except the Republic of Palau, plus the Vatican City.
- Membership of ITU is open to only UN members, which may join the Union as Member States, as well as to private organizations like carriers, equipment manufacturers, funding bodies, research and development organizations and international and regional telecommunication organizations, which may join ITU as non-voting Sector Members.

Functions:

- The ITU sets and publishes regulations and standards relevant to electronic communication and broadcasting technologies of all kinds including radio, television, satellite, telephone and the Internet.
- The organization conducts working parties, study groups and meetings to address current and future issues and to resolve disputes. The ITU organizes and holds an exhibition and forum known as the Global TELECOM every four years.
- Another important aspect of the ITU’s mandate is helping emerging countries to establish and develop telecommunication systems of their own.
- Although the recommendations of the ITU are non-binding, most countries adhere to them in the interest of maintaining an effective international electronic communication environment.

Sources: the hindu.

10. WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION (UNWTO)

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: UNWTO and related key facts.
- Context: 7th UNWTO Global Summit on Urban Tourism is being held in Seoul, capital of South Korea.
- Organized by: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and Seoul Metropolitan Government and supported by Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korea and Seoul Tourism Organization.
- Significance: The summit provides unique platform to discuss key issues shaping future of urban tourism in the context of the 2030 Urban Agenda. It brings together high-level representatives from National Tourism Administrations, city authorities and related stakeholders, serving as platform to exchange experiences and expertise.

About UNWTO:

What is it?

- The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

Members:

- UNWTO’s membership includes 158 countries, 6 Associate Members and over 500 Affiliate Members representing the private sector, educational institutions, tourism associations and local tourism authorities.

What it does?

- As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide.
- UNWTO encourages the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, to maximize tourism’s socio-economic contribution while minimizing its possible negative impacts, and is committed to promoting tourism as an instrument in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), geared towards reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development worldwide.
11. GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY (GEF)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: GEF and FAO related key facts, and the projects associated.
- **Context:** The government along with United Nations body FAO has launched an agriculture project with $33.5 million grant from Global Environment Facility (GEF) that seeks to bring transformative change in the farm sector through conservation of biodiversity and forest landscapes.

Key facts:
- The project is being funded by the GEF and implemented by the government of India (agriculture and environment ministries) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- **Aim:** The project aims to transform agricultural production to generate global environmental benefits by addressing biodiversity conservation, land degradation, climate change mitigation and sustainable forest management.
- **The project, to be implemented in five landscapes** in Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, strives to bring harmony between conservation and development efforts of the country.

About GEF:
- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet’s most pressing environmental problems.
- It is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues.
- GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
- The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.
- **It is a FINANCIAL MECHANISM for five major international environmental conventions:** the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Sources: pib.

12. IAEA SAFEGUARDS

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: IAEA and safeguards- objectives, significance and their implementation.
- **Context:** India has decided to place four more reactors under the IAEA safeguards. Accordingly, two Russian-designed Pressurised Light Water Reactors and two Pressurised Heavy Reactors being built with Indian technology will be covered.
- With this, a total of 26 Indian nuclear facilities will be under the international nuclear energy watchdog.

IAEA safeguards:
- **What are they?** Safeguards are a set of technical measures applied by the IAEA on nuclear material and activities, through which the Agency seeks to independently verify that nuclear facilities are not misused and nuclear material not diverted from peaceful uses. States accept these measures through the conclusion of safeguards agreements.
13. GLOBAL MEDIA COMPACT TO RAISE AWARENESS OF SDGS

What to study?

• For Prelims: SDGs- overview, about Global Media Compact.
• For Mains: Need for awareness on SDGs, significance of SDGs.

Context: UN has announced Global Media Compact to raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. India’s ministry of information and broadcasting is part of it.

About SDG Media Compact:

• SDG Media Compact is an initiative marking a new drive to advance awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were unanimously adopted by all world leaders at the United Nations in 2015.
• The Compact seeks to inspire media and entertainment companies around the world to leverage their resources and creative talent to advance the Goals.
• The Compact is an initiative of the United Nations, in collaboration with the UN Foundation and with the support of FleishmanHillard.

Significance:

• The SDG Media Compact is inclusive and aims to embrace media companies from all regions and all platforms. Participating organizations will have the opportunity to create content partnerships with the United Nations, whereby the organization will increase its efforts to source and share high-value media content and newsworthy opportunities relating to the SDGs. Regular monitoring and review meetings will gauge engagement.
• Collectively, the founding members of the SDG Media Compact already comprise an audience in the billions spanning over 80 countries on 4 continents and many more companies are expected to join.

About the SDGs:

• The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by world leaders at the historic Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.
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- Encompassing everything from health, to gender equality, and education, the Goals will mobilize efforts around the world to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Sources: the hindu.

14. INDIAN OCEAN NAVAL SYMPOSIUM (IONS)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: IONS- key facts, objectives and significance.
- Context: In the series of meetings of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Working Group (IWG) on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), the 3rd meeting is being held at Headquarters Eastern Naval Command, Vishakhapatnam.

About IONS:
- IONS, the 21st century’s first significant international maritime security initiative launched in February 2008, provides a forum for discussion of regional maritime issues and promotes friendly relationships among member nations. It presently has 24 members and eight observer navies.
- It is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues and, in the process, endeavors to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.
- Under the charter of business adopted in 2014, the grouping has working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Information Security and Interoperability (IS&I) and anti-piracy now renamed as maritime security.

Sources: pib.

15. INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

- The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons is observed every year on 26 September across the world.

Aims:
- To provide an occasion for world community to reaffirm its commitment to global nuclear disarmament as high priority.
- To provide opportunity to educate public and their leaders about real benefits of eliminating such weapons, and the social and economic costs of perpetuating them.

Background:
- The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 2013 as follow-up to its high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament which was held on 26 September 2013, in New York, US.
- UNGA called for urgent commencement of negotiations in Conference on Disarmament of comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer and use or threat of use, and to provide for their destruction.

16. UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK (UNSDF)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: SDGs and UNSDF- key facts and significance.
What is UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF)?

- UNSDF 2018-2022 outlines development cooperation strategy between Union Government and United Nations Country Team in India in support of achievement of India’s key national development priorities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
  - It was framed following highly participative process, in consultation with government entities, civil society representatives, academia, and private sector.
  - Focus areas under it include poverty and urbanization, health, water, and sanitation, education, climate change, nutrition and food security, clean energy, and disaster resilience; skilling, entrepreneurship, job creation, gender equality and youth development.
  - UNSDF also includes set of UN flagship programs that are aligned with major government schemes. These flagship programs will be scalable innovative, multi-sectoral solutions to some of most pressing development challenges that India faces and also serve as catalysts for increased investment of development finance.
  - UNSDF programmes range from affordable housing for poor to increasing access to clean energy in rural off-grid areas, protecting all children from vaccine-preventable diseases, providing quality education for all children and skilling for young people, especially young girls and ending stunting to improving child sex ratio.

Support:

- Across these outcome areas, UN will support Union Government in south-south cooperation in partnership with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).
- The total planned budget outlay for implementation of UNSDF is approximately Rs. 11000 crore, of which 47% is planned to be mobilized through course of implementation from multiple sources, including private sector and government.

Targets:

- The programmatic work outlined in UNSDF targets seven low-income states viz. Bihar, Jharkhand, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and UP along with North-East region and aspirational districts identified by the NITI Aayog. It will work on improving lives of most marginalized, poor, and vulnerable communities and people in the country, especially women and girls.

Sources: pib.
1. PUBLIC CREDIT REGISTRY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: PCR- features, need, significance and the recommendations made by Deosthalee committee.

- **Context:** Recently, RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya made a case for setting up a Public Credit Registry (PCR), incorporating unique identifiers: Aadhaar for individual borrowers and Corporate Identification Number for firms.

About Public Credit Registry:

What is it?

- The PCR will be an extensive database of credit information for India that is accessible to all stakeholders.
- The idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower and, in particular, the borrower’s entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

Management of PCR:

- Generally, a PCR is managed by a public authority like the central bank or the banking supervisor, and reporting of loan details to the PCR by lenders and/or borrowers is mandated by law.
- The contractual terms and outcomes covered and the threshold above which the contracts are to be reported vary in different jurisdictions, but the idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower, in particular, the borrower’s entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

Need for a PCR:

- A central repository, which, for instance, captures and certifies the details of collaterals, can enable the writing of contracts that prevent over-pledging of collateral by a borrower. In absence of the repository, the lender may not trust its first right on the collateral and either charge a high cost on the loan or ask for more collateral than necessary to prevent being diluted by other lenders. This leads to, what in economics is termed as, pecuniary externality – in this case, a spillover of one loan contract onto outcomes and terms of other loan contracts.
- Furthermore, absent a public credit registry, the ‘good’ borrowers are disadvantaged in not being able to distinguish themselves from the rest in opaque credit markets; they could potentially be subjected to a rent being extracted from their existing lenders who enjoy an information monopoly over them. The lenders may also end up picking up fresh clients who have a history of delinquency that is unknown to all lenders and this way face greater overall credit risk.

Benefits of having a PCR:

- A PCR can potentially help banks in credit assessment and pricing of credit as well as in making risk-based, dynamic and counter-cyclical provisioning.
- The PCR can also help the RBI in understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working, and if not, where are the bottlenecks.
- Further, it can help supervisors, regulators and banks in early intervention and effective restructuring of stressed bank credits.
- A PCR will also help banks and regulators as credit information is a ‘public good’ and its utility is to the credit market at large and to society in general.

Task force on PCR:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had formed a high-level task force on public credit registry (PCR) for India. The task force was chaired by Y M Deosthalee.
2. DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNALS

What to study?
• For Prelims and Mains: All about DRTs.

Context: The central government has raised the pecuniary limit from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh for filing application for recovery of debts in the Debts Recovery Tribunals by such banks and financial institutions.

Implications:
• The move is aimed at helping reduce pendency of cases in the 39 DRTs in the country.
• As a result, no bank or financial institution or a consortium of banks or financial institutions can approach the DRTs if the amount due is less than Rs 20 lakh.

What are DRTs?
• Debt Recovery Tribunals were established to facilitate the debt recovery involving banks and other financial institutions with their customers. DRTs were set up after the passing of Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act (RDBBI), 1993.
  ➢ Section 3 of the RDBBI Act empowers the Central government to establish DRTs.
  ➢ Appeals against orders passed by DRTs lie before Debts Recovery Appellate Tribunal (DRAT).

Powers and functions:
• The Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) are fully empowered to pass comprehensive orders and can travel beyond the Civil procedure Code to render complete justice. A Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) can hear cross suits, counter claims and allow set offs.
• However, a Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) cannot hear claims of damages or deficiency of services or breach of contract or criminal negligence on the part of the lenders. In addition, a Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) cannot express an opinion beyond its domain, or the list pending before it.
• The Debts Recovery Tribunal can appoint Receivers, Commissioners, pass ex-parte orders, ad-interim orders, interim orders apart from powers to Review its own decisions and hear appeals against orders passed by the Recovery Officers of the Tribunal.

Other key facts:
• A DRT is presided over by a presiding officer who is appointed by the central govt. and who shall be qualified to be a District Judge; with tenure of 5 years or the age of 62, whichever is earlier.
• No court in the country other than the SC and the HCs and that too, only under articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution have jurisdiction over this matter.

3. GOVERNMENT MOVES TO STABILISE RUPEE

What to study?
• For Prelims: Reasons for fall in value of rupee against dollar.
• For Mains: Measures announced, need for such measures and long term measures necessary.

Context: The government has announced a plan to check "non-essential imports", boost exports and initiated five measures to attract dollar inflows into the country to trim the widening current account deficit that is seen as a factor behind the rupee’s sharp slide against the dollar.
The five measures include:

1. Mandatory hedging conditions for infrastructure loans through the external commercial borrowing (ECB) route will be reviewed.
2. 20 percent exposure limits of foreign portfolio investors’ corporate bond portfolio to a single corporate group, company and related entities will be removed, and 50 percent of any issue of corporate bonds will be reviewed.
3. Manufacturing sector entities will be permitted to avail external commercial borrowings up to $50 million with a minimum maturity of one year instead of the earlier period of three years.
4. Masala Bond issues done in the current financial year will be exempted from withholding tax.
5. Restrictions on Indian banks’ market making in Masala Bonds, including restrictions on underwriting of such bonds, will be removed.

Significance:

- These five concrete steps announced would help increase inflows by $8-10 billion. The measures are essentially on the capital account side where the aim is to infuse more dollars into the economy through routes like ECBs, FPI, Masala Bonds etc. There is intent to put some curbs on imports and give a push to exports. There can be no debate that all these measures are positive for the rupee as they attack the fundamentals of demand and supply for dollars.

What necessitated this?

- The pressure on rupee and the current account may not be a short-term phenomenon. That’s because of rising interest rates in the US, high crude oil prices and its impact on emerging markets and the trade war between the US and China. Therefore, the government’s intervention was necessary.

Will it help?

- The measures announced by the government will work if the primary reason is weaker fundamentals. In case it is a global phenomenon, then it may not really help to correct the fall though it could cause some reversal in the first two or three sessions.
- Also, it should be remembered that what the government has announced will take time to work through. There will be a review by companies on the hedging requirements for infra loans from global markets. For this to work, it will take time for companies to take such decisions.

Why Indian Rupee is Falling Against the US Dollar?

- **Turkish currency turmoil**: The Indian currency had plunged by Rs 1.08, or 1.57 per cent, to a record low of 69.91 against the US currency amid fears that Turkish currency turmoil could turn out into global financial crisis.
- **The Spike in oil prices** has pulled down the rupee, by pushing up dollar demand.
- **Global Trade war fears triggered by the US and China’s retaliatory import tariffs** have also weakened the Rupee.
- **The Chinese yuan** has fallen sharply in the last few sessions. This also has triggered a dollar flight from many emerging economies. The Spurt in dollar outflow has pulled down most Asian currencies, including the rupee.

Sources: the hindu.

**4. GOVT PROPOSES TO MERGE DENA BANK, VIJAYA BANK AND BANK OF BARODA**

What to study?

- For Prelims: Which three banks are being merged?
- For Mains: Merger- Significance, pros and cons, concerns.

**Context**: The Centre has proposed the amalgamation of state-owned Bank of Baroda, Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank to create India’s third largest bank as parts of reforms in the public sector banking segment.

- The proposal will now need the approval of the boards of these individual banks. The banks' boards will shortly meet and take up the decision.
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Background:
- The merger of these three state-owned banks is a part of the government's agenda of consolidation of public sector banks. The consolidation was proposed by the Alternative Mechanism.
- The Union Cabinet in August 2017 approved amalgamation of Public Sector Banks through Alternative Mechanism (AM) with an aim to facilitate consolidation among the Nationalised Banks to create strong and competitive banks.

Why merger is good?
- The merger benefits include getting economies of scale and reduction in the cost of doing business.
- Technical inefficiency is one of the main factors responsible for banking crisis. The scale of inefficiency is more in case of small banks. Hence, merger would be good.
- Mergers help small banks to gear up to international standards with innovative products and services with the accepted level of efficiency.
- Mergers help many PSBs, which are geographically concentrated, to expand their coverage beyond their outreach.
- A better and optimum size of the organization would help PSBs offer more and more products and services and help in integrated growth of the sector.
- The size of each business entity after merger is expected to add strength to the Indian Banking System in general and Public Sector Banks in particular.
- This will also end the unhealthy and intense competition going on even among public sector banks as of now. In the global market, the Indian banks will gain greater recognition and higher rating.
- The volume of inter-bank transactions will come down, resulting in saving of considerable time in clearing and reconciliation of accounts.
- The burden on the central government to recapitalize the public sector banks again and again will come down substantially. This will also help in meeting more stringent norms under BASEL III, especially capital adequacy ratio.
- A great number of posts of CMD, ED, GM and Zonal Managers will be abolished, resulting in savings of crores of Rupee. This will also reduce unnecessary interference by board members in day to day affairs of the banks.
- After mergers, bargaining strength of bank staff will become more and visible. Bank staff may look forward to better wages and service conditions in future. The wide disparities between the staff of various banks in their service conditions and monetary benefits will narrow down.
- Customers will have access to fewer banks offering them wider range of products at a lower cost. From regulatory perspective, monitoring and control of less number of banks will be easier after mergers. This is at the macro level.

Concerns associated with merger:
- Immediate negative impact would be from pension liability provisions (due to different employee benefit structures) and harmonisation of accounting policies for bad loans recognition.
- There are many problems to adjust top leadership in institutions and the unions.
- Mergers will result in shifting/closure of many ATMs, Branches and controlling offices, as it is not prudent and economical to keep so many banks concentrated in several pockets, notably in urban and metropolitan centres.
- Mergers will result in immediate job losses on account of large number of people taking VRS on one side and slow down or stoppage of further recruitment on the other. This will worsen the unemployment situation further and may create law and order problems and social disturbances.
- The weaknesses of the small banks may get transferred to the bigger bank also. New power centres will emerge in the changed environment. Mergers will result in clash of different organizational cultures. Conflicts will arise in the area of systems and processes too.
- When a big bank books huge loss or crumbles, there will be a big jolt in the entire banking industry. Its repercussions will be felt everywhere.
- Also, India right now needs more banking competition rather than more banking consolidation. In other words, it needs more banks rather than fewer banks. This does not mean that there should be a fetish about small-scale lending operations, but to know that large banks are not necessarily better banks.
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Way ahead:

- Merger is a good idea. However, this should be carried out with right banks for the right reasons. Merger is also tricky given the huge challenges banks face, including the bad loan problem that has plunged many public sector banks in an unprecedented crisis.
- Since mergers are also about people, a huge amount of planning would be required to make the consolidation process smoother. Piecemeal consolidation will not provide a lasting solution and what is required is an integrated approach from all stakeholders including the government.

Sources: pib.

**Paper 3 Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.**

1. NATIONAL MISSION ON GEM

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: About GeM and the National Mission on GeM.
- For Mains: Significance and the need for GeM.
- **Context:** The government has launched the National Mission on Government eMarketplace (GeM) for increasing awareness and accelerating the use of GeM.

**Highlights of the mission:**

- **The National Mission will cover** all central government departments, states and public sector undertakings in a mission mode.
- **It is aimed at creating awareness** about GeM, train the buyers and sellers, get them registered in GeM and increase the procurement through GeM.
- **It also aims to promote inclusiveness** by empowering various categories of sellers and service providers such as MSMEs, start-ups, domestic manufacturers, women entrepreneurs, and Self-Help Groups.
- **It will also Highlight and communicate the value addition** via transparency and efficiency in public procurement, including corruption-free governance in sync with the Central Government’s objective of ‘Minimum Government, Maximum Governance’.
- The mission also aims to give a boost to cashless, contactless, paperless transactions in line with Digital India objectives.

**About GeM:**

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

**Performance:**

- The e-marketplace completed two years in 2018 and on August 26, 2018, it crossed Rs 10,800 crore in terms of value and 6.96 lakh in terms of volume of transactions through the platform. The platform has more than 1.35 lakh sellers offering 4.43 lakh products and around 26,500 organisations as buyers.

Sources: pib.

**Paper 3 Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising out of it.**

1. INDIA POST PAYMENTS BANK

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: IPPB- features, all about payment banks.
- For Mains: Significance of Payment banks in financial structure of India.
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- **Context:** India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) has been launched. It will focus on providing banking and financial services to people in rural areas, by leveraging the reach of 1.55 lakh post office branches. The government aims to link all the 1.55 lakh post offices to the India Post Payments Bank system by 31 December, 2018.

**Background:**
- In 2015, RBI had granted ‘in-principle’ approval to 11 entities, including Department of Posts, to set up payments banks and proposed to give such licences ‘on tap’ basis in future.

**What is IPPB?**
- The India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) is a public sector company under the department of posts and ministry of communication with a 100 per cent equity of the government of India, and governed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

**Key facts:**
- It started operations on 30 January, 2017, by opening two pilot branches, one at Raipur and the other at Ranchi.
- India Post Payments Bank will offer 4 per cent interest rate on savings accounts.
- India Post Payments Bank will offer a range of products such as savings and current accounts, money transfer, direct benefit transfers, bill and utility payments, and enterprise and merchant payments.
- India Post Payments Bank has been allowed to link around 17 crore postal savings bank (PSB) accounts with its accounts.

**What are payment banks?**
- Payment banks are non-full service banks, whose main objective is to accelerate financial inclusion. These banks have to use the word ‘Payment Bank’ in its name which will differentiate it from other banks.

**Key facts:**
- **Capital requirement:** The minimum paid-up equity capital for payments banks is Rs. 100 crore.
- **Leverage ratio:** The payments bank should have a leverage ratio of not less than 3%, i.e., its outside liabilities should not exceed 33.33 times its net worth (paid-up capital and reserves).
- **Promoter’s contribution:** The promoter’s minimum initial contribution to the paid-up equity capital of such payments bank shall at least be 40% for the first five years from the commencement of its business.
- **Foreign shareholding:** The foreign shareholding in the payments bank would be as per the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy for private sector banks as amended from time to time.
- **SLR:** Apart from amounts maintained as Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) with the Reserve Bank on its outside demand and time liabilities, it will be required to invest minimum 75% of its “demand deposit balances” in Statutory Liquidity Ratio(SLR) eligible Government securities/treasury bills with maturity up to one year and hold maximum 25% in current and time/fixed deposits with other scheduled commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.

**What are the scopes of activities of Payment Banks?**
- Payments banks will mainly deal in remittance services and accept deposits of up to Rs 1 lakh.
- They will not lend to customers and will have to deploy their funds in government papers and bank deposits.
- The promoter’s minimum initial contribution to equity capital will have to be at least 40% for the first five years.
- They can accept demand deposits.
- Payments bank will initially be restricted to holding a maximum balance of Rs. 100,000 per individual customer.
- They can issue ATM/debit cards but not credit cards.
- They can carry out payments and remittance services through various channels.
- Distribution of non-risk sharing simple financial products like mutual fund units and insurance products, etc. is allowed.

Sources: pib.
### 2. OMBUDSMAN SCHEME

#### What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** The Reserve Bank of India has tightened the **banking ombudsman scheme** with the objective to strengthen the grievance redressal mechanism for customers.

#### New guidelines:
- The banking regulator has asked all commercial banks having 10 or more banking outlets to have an **independent internal ombudsman (IO)** to review customer complaints that are either partly or fully rejected by the banks.
- **The IO shall**, inter alia, examine customer complaints which are in the nature of deficiency in service on the part of the bank, that are partly or wholly rejected by the bank.
- As banks should internally escalate complaints that are not fully redressed to their respective IOs before conveying the final decision to the complainant, customers need not approach the IO directly.

#### Internal Ombudsman Scheme:
- **The Internal Ombudsman Scheme of 2018** mandates banks to grant a fixed term of three to five years, which cannot be renewed, to the IO.
- **The IO can be removed** only with prior approval from RBI. The remuneration would have to be decided by the customer sub-committee of the board and not by any individual.
- **The Ombudsman Scheme of 2018 covers** appointment/tenure, roles and responsibilities, procedural guidelines and oversight mechanism for the IO, among others.
- The implementation of IO Scheme 2018 will be **monitored by the bank’s internal audit mechanism** apart from regulatory oversight by RBI.

#### Who is a Banking Ombudsman?
- Banking ombudsman is a **quasi judicial authority**, created to resolve customer complaints against banks relating to certain services provided by them.
- The Ombudsman is a **senior official**, who has been appointed by the Reserve Bank of India to address grievances and complaints from customers, pertaining deficiencies in banking services.
- It **covers all kinds of banks** including public sector banks, Private banks, Rural banks as well as co-operative banks.

Sources: *the hindu.*

### 3. PRADHAN MANTRI JAN DHAN YOJANA

#### What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: PMJDY- features, significance and challenges.
- **Context:** The Union Government has decided to make the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) an open-ended scheme and added more incentives to encourage people to open bank accounts.

#### Under the new incentives:
- The overdraft limit for account holders has now been doubled to Rs 10000.
- The free accident insurance cover for those opening Jan Dhan accounts after August 28 too has been doubled to Rs 2 lakh.
- There will be no conditions attached for over-draft of up to Rs 2,000.
- The upper age limit for availing the facility has also been hiked to 65 from the earlier 60 years.

#### About PMJDY:
- The primary aim of this scheme is to provide poor people access to bank accounts.
  - The scheme **covers both urban and rural areas of India.** All bank accounts will be linked to a debit card which would be issued under the Ru-Pay scheme. RuPay is India’s own unique domestic card network.
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owned by National Payments Corporation of India and has been created as an alternative to Visa and Mastercard.

- Under the first phase of this scheme, every individual who opens a bank account becomes eligible to receive an accident insurance cover of up-to Rs 1 Lakh for his entire family.
- Life Insurance coverage is also available under PMJDY. Only one person in the family will be covered and in case of the person having multiple cards/accounts, the benefit will be allowed only under one card i.e. one person per family will get a single cover of Rs 30,000.
- The scheme also provides incentives to business and banking correspondents who serve as link for the last mile between savings account holders and the bank by fixing a minimum monthly remuneration of Rs 5000.

Sources: the hindu.

4. PRADHAN MANTRI MUDRA YOJANA

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMMY- key features.
- For Mains: Significance of the scheme and concerns raised over loans disbursed under the scheme, how can these loans be prevented from turning into NPAs.
- Context: Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan has cautioned that the next crisis in India’s banking sector could come from loans given to the unorganised micro and small businesses, called MUDRA loans, and credit extended through the Kisan credit card.
- He has also cautioned the government to refrain from setting ambitious credit targets or waiving loans. He also flagged the Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs, run by the Small Industries Development Bank of India, calling it “a growing contingent liability” that needs to be examined with urgency.

Background:

- A total of ₹6.37 lakh crore has been disbursed under the MUDRA scheme by public and private sector banks, regional rural banks and micro-finance institutions till date, as per data from the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) website.

Concerns:

- His warnings come at a time the Indian banking is reeling under an unprecedented bad loans problem. The NPAs of the 38 listed banks collectively crossed Rs 10.17 lakh crore in the fourth quarter of the last fiscal, with the 21 public sector banks (PSBs) accounting for the bulk of it.
- Besides, PSBs have collectively written-off over Rs 1,154 crore in NPAs in the last fiscal till December 31, which was a 103% jump from the amount written off in 2016-17.

About the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) scheme:

- The PMMY Scheme was launched in April, 2015. The scheme’s objective is to refinance collateral-free loans given by the lenders to small borrowers.
  - The scheme, which has a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore, can lend between Rs 50,000 and Rs 10 lakh to small entrepreneurs.
  - Banks and MFIs can draw refinance under the MUDRA Scheme after becoming member-lending institutions of MUDRA.
  - Mudra Loans are available for non-agricultural activities upto Rs. 10 lakh and activities allied to agriculture such as Dairy, Poultry, Bee Keeping etc, are also covered.
  - Mudra’s unique features include a Mudra Card which permits access to Working Capital through ATMs and Card Machines.

There are three types of loans under PMMY:

1. Shishu (up to Rs.50,000).
2. Kishore (from Rs.50,001 to Rs.5 lakh).
3. Tarun (from Rs.500,001 to Rs.10,00,000).
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Objectives of the scheme:

- **Fund the unfunded**: Those who have a business plan to generate income from a non-farm activity like manufacturing, processing, trading or service sector but don’t have enough capital to invest can take loans up to Rs 10 lakh.
- **Micro finance institutions (MFI) monitoring and regulation**: With the help of MUDRA bank, the network of microfinance institutions will be monitored. New registration will also be done.
- **Promote financial inclusion**: With the aim to reach Last mile credit delivery to micro businesses taking help of technology solutions, it further adds to the vision of financial inclusion.
- **Reduce jobless economic growth**: Providing micro enterprises with credit facility will help generate employment sources and an overall increase in GDP.
- **Integration of Informal economy into Formal sector**: It will help India also grow its tax base as incomes from the informal sector are non-taxed.

Sources: the hindu.

5. TOTAL EXPENSE RATIO

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: TER- meaning, significance and need for regulation.
- **Context**: Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has announced changes to total expense ratio (TER) of mutual funds.

What is total expense ratio and why is it important for investing in mutual funds?

- Mutual funds are investments where an investor entrusts his/her money with an investment manager (of an asset management company) to manage the money smartly and efficiently. This money management comes at a cost, which is usually charged as a percentage of the investment. The official regulator of mutual funds has laid down rules on how much an asset management company can charge an investor to manage their funds. For an investor this is important because it is a **charge (called total expense ratio or TER in short) levied on their investment**, and the money they get back from their investment is reduced by this figure.
- So, for an investor, TER is an important number to focus on since it has a direct impact on their returns. However, it is not the only number to look at and investors should evaluate funds based on various parameters such as consistency of performance and risk levels.

What are the changes made by SEBI now to TER?

- SEBI has, across the board, lowered the TER that a fund house can charge its investors. The reduction is higher for larger funds and lower for smaller funds — larger and smaller being a measure of how much money a fund manages.

Sources: the hindu.

6. FINANCIAL INCLUSION INDEX

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of FI.
- **Context**: Financial Inclusion Index has been launched.

Financial Inclusion Index:

- **Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance will release an Annual Financial Inclusion Index (FI)**. The single composite index gives a snapshot of level of financial inclusion that would guide Macro Policy perspective.
- The index will be a **measure of access and usage of a basket of formal financial products and services** that includes savings, remittances, credit, insurance and pension products.
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- The index will have three measurement dimensions:
  1. Access to financial services.
  2. Usage of financial services.
  3. Quality.

Utility of the Index:
- The various components of the index will help to measure financial services for use of internal policy making.
- Financial Inclusion Index can be used directly as a composite measure in development indicators.
- It enables fulfillment of G20 Financial Inclusion Indicators requirements.
- It will also facilitate researchers to study the impact of financial inclusion and other macro-economic variables.

7. PSBLOANSIN59MINUTES.COM

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the portal.
- **Context:** Finance and Corporate Affairs Ministry has launched a web portal which is a transformative initiative in MSME credit space. The web portal *psbloansin59minutes.com* will enable in principle approval for MSME loans up to Rs. 1 crore within 59 minutes from SIDBI and 5 Public Sector Banks (PSBs).

About the Portal “PSB Loans in 59 Minutes”:
- It is one of its kind platforms in MSME segment which integrates advanced fintech to ensure seamless loan approval and management. The loans are undertaken without human intervention till sanction and or disbursement stage.
- The Portal sets a new benchmark in loan processing and reduces the turnaround time from 20-25 days to 59 minutes. Subsequent to this in principle approval, the loan will be disbursed in 7-8 working days.
- The solution uses sophisticated algorithms to read and analyse data points from various sources such as IT returns, GST data, bank statements, MCA21 etc. in less than an hour while capturing the applicant’s basic details.
- The system simplifies the decision making process for a loan officer as the final output provides a summary of credit, valuation and verification on a user-friendly dashboard in real time.

Sources: pib.

8. GOODS AND SERVICES TAX NETWORK (GSTN)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: GSTN- key facts, objectives and significance.
- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to convert Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) into a government-owned company. The government will now own 100% of the IT backbone to the new indirect tax regime.

Background:
- Currently, the Centre and states together hold 49% stake in GSTN. The remaining 51% is held by five private financial institutions – HDFC Ltd, HDFC Bank Ltd, ICICI Bank Ltd, NSE Strategic Investment Co and LIC Housing Finance Ltd.

What necessitated this?
- GST, which subsumed over a dozen local taxes, was rolled out on July 1, 2017. Over 1.1 crore businesses are registered on the GSTN portal. With enhanced role of GSTN from just collecting taxes to data analytics, the government felt that it should now be the majority owner in the IT backbone provider.
What is GSTN?

- The GSTN was floated to aid the rollout of the new indirect tax regime. The company will provide information technology support to all stakeholders for smooth implementation of the new taxation regime across the country and will be the repository of all information related to taxation and entities registered under GST.

Sources: the hindu.

9. MOBILE APPLICATION “JAN DHAN DARSHAK”

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the app.
- **Context:** Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance and National Informatics Centre (NIC) has jointly developed a mobile app called Jan Dhan Darshak as a part of financial inclusion (FI) initiative.

About Jan Dhan Darshak app:

- As the name suggests, this app will act as a guide for the common people in locating a financial service touch point at a given location in the country.
- The app will be in a unique position to provide a citizen centric platform for locating financial service touch points across all providers such as banks, post office, CSC, etc. These services could be availed as per the needs and convenience of the common people.

Some of the salient features of this App are as follows:

- Find nearby Financial touch points, based on current location (Branches/ATM/Post offices).
- Search by place name.
- Search by place name also available with Voice Interface.
- Phone number of bank branches available in app, with the facility of call button for integrated dialing.
- Users’ feedback will go directly to the concerned bank for carrying out the necessary updation in data on financial touch points.

Sources: pib.

**Paper 3 Topic:** Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country.

1. POLICY ON ‘JHUM’ CULTIVATION

What to study?

- For Prelims: Meaning, benefits and effects of Jhum cultivation, different names of it.
- For Mains: Concerns, issues associated, need for a policy on this.
- **Context:** A recent NITI Aayog report has recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture should take up a “mission on jhum cultivation” to ensure inter-ministerial convergence.

Need of the hour:

- Various authorities often have divergent approaches towards shifting cultivation. This creates confusion among grass-roots level workers and jhum farmers said the report.
- Therefore, shifting cultivation fallows must be legally perceived and categorised as ‘regenerating fallows’ and credit facilities must be extended to those who practise shifting cultivation.
- Land for shifting cultivation should be recognised as “agricultural land” where farmers practise agro-forestry for the production of food rather than as forestland.

What is Jhum cultivation?

- Jhum cultivation, also known as the slash and burn agriculture, is the process of growing crops by first clearing the land of trees and vegetation and burning them thereafter. The burnt soil contains potash which increases the nutrient content of the soil.
- This practice is considered as an important mainstay of food production for a considerable population in North-East India.
Issues with Jhum Cultivation:
- The report notes that between 2000 and 2010, the land under shifting cultivation dropped by 70%. People are returning to fallow land left after shifting in a shorter span.
- Earlier the cultivators returned to fallows after 10-12 years, now they are returning in three to five years which has impacted on the quality of the soil.

Sources: The hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

1. TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES FOR COFFEE STAKEHOLDERS

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights of the services launched and their significance.
- Context: The government has launched Coffee Connect – India coffee field force app and Coffee Krishi Tharanga – digital mobile extension services for coffee stakeholders.

Coffee Connect:
- The mobile app Coffee Connect has been developed to ease the work of field functionaries and to improve the work efficiency.
  - This application provides solution by harnessing the power of mobility comprising the latest technology in easing the whole process of the field. This includes activities like digitization of Coffee Growers & Estates with Geo Tagging, collecting the Plantation details.
  - It will also help in transparency in the activities of the extension officers and officials, transparency in subsidy disbursement and real time report generation.

Coffee Krishi Tharanga:
- The Coffee KrishiTharanga services are aimed at providing customized information and services to increase productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability. NABARD has partly funded the Pilot project.
- The solution will help in to reach maximum growers in limited period, efficient, timely, customised advisory, improve the efficiency through digitization and leverage existing mobile reach for wider delivery of improved technology.

Coffee cultivation in India:
- Coffee is cultivated in India in about 4.54 lakh hectares by 3.66 lakh coffee farmers and 98% of them are small farmers. Its cultivation is mainly confined to Karnataka (54%), Kerala (19%) and Tamil Nadu (8%) which form traditional coffee tracts.
  - Indian coffee, grown mostly in southern states under monsoon rainfall conditions, is also termed as "Indian monsooned coffee".
  - The two well known species of coffee grown are the Arabica and Robusta. The first variety that was introduced in the Baba Budan Giri hill ranges of Karnataka in the 17th century was marketed over the years under the brand names of Kent and S.795.

Coffee Board of India:
- The Coffee Board of India is an organisation managed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the government of India to promote coffee production in India.
  - It was established by an act of Parliament in 1942.
  - Its duties included the promotion of the sale and consumption of coffee in India and abroad, conducting coffee research, financial assistance to establish small coffee growers, safeguarding working conditions for laborers, and managing the surplus pool of unsold coffee.

Sources: pib.
2. PRADHAN MANTRI ANNADATA AAY SANRAKSHAN ABHIYAN (PM-AASHA)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the project.
- **Context:** Giving a major boost to the pro-farmer initiatives of the Government and in keeping with its commitment and dedication for the Annadata, the Union Cabinet has approved a new Umbrella Scheme “Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan’ (PM-AASHA). The Scheme is aimed at ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers for their produce as announced in the Union Budget for 2018.

The umbrella scheme ‘PM-AASHA’ comprises three sub-schemes:
- Price Support Scheme (PSS).
- Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS).
- Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).

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

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

**Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS):**

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

**Background:**

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

3. “DAIRY PROCESSING & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND”

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: DIDF- key facts.
- For Mains: Significance of the fund and dairy sector in India.

**Context:** The government has handed over a Rs 440 crore cheque to the NDDB from the Dairy Processing and Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF), marking the formal launch of the fund set up to provide soft loans to modernise and raise capacity of dairy cooperatives.

**About DIDF:**

- NABARD has set up the DIDF with a corpus of Rs 8,004 crore to bring more dairy farmers into organised milk marketing through cooperatives. The fund is implemented through National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).

**The major activities of DIDF:**

- The project will focus on building an efficient milk procurement system by setting up of chilling infrastructure & installation of electronic milk adulteration testing equipment, creation/modernization/expansion of processing infrastructure and manufacturing facilities for Value Added Products for the Milk Unions/ Milk Producer Companies.

**Management of DIDF:**

- The project will be implemented by National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and National Dairy Development Cooperation (NCDC) directly through the End Borrowers such as Milk Unions, State Dairy Federations, Multi-state Milk Cooperatives, Milk Producer Companies and NDDB subsidiaries meeting the eligibility criteria under the project.
- An Implementation and Monitoring Cell (IMC) located at NDDB, Anand, will manage the implementation and monitoring of day-to-day project activities.
- The end borrowers will get the loan @ 6.5% per annum. The period of repayment will be 10 years with initial two years moratorium.
- The respective State Government will be the guarantor of loan repayment. Also for the project sanctioned if the end user is not able to contribute its share; State Government will contribute the same.
Benefits from DIDF:

- With this investment, 95,00,000 farmers in about 50,000 villages would be benefitted. Additional Milk processing capacity of 126 lakh litre per day, milk drying capacity of 210 MT per day, milk chilling capacity of 140 lakh litre per day, installation of 28000 Bulk Milk Coolers (BMCs) along with electronic milk adulteration testing equipment and value added products manufacturing capacity of 59.78 lakh litre per day of milk equivalent shall be created.

Employment Generation Potential:

- The implementation of DIDF scheme will generate direct and indirect employment opportunities for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manpower.
- Direct employment opportunities for about 40,000 people will be created under the scheme through project activities like expansion & modernisation of existing milk processing facilities, setting up of new processing plants, establishment of manufacturing facilities for value added products and setting up of Bulk Milk Coolers (BMCs) at village level.
- About 2 lakh indirect employment opportunities will be created on account of expansion of milk and milk product marketing operations from existing Tier I, II & III to Tier IV, V & VI cities/towns etc. This will lead to deployment of more marketing staff by Milk Cooperatives, appointment of distributors and opening of additional milk booths/retail outlets in urban/rural locations.
- With the increase in milk procurement operations of the Milk Cooperatives, there would be generation of additional manpower employment for supervision of increased milk procurement operations, transportation of milk from villages to processing units, and increased input delivery services like Artificial Insemination (AI) services, Veterinary Services, etc.
Conclusion:

- The dairy processing infrastructure of cooperatives needs modernisation and capacity enhancement, and with most cooperatives sharing their profits with milk producers, they need support.

Sources: pib.

4. PRADHAN MANTRI FASAL BIMA YOJNA (PMFBY)

What to study?

- For Prelims: PMFBY- key features.
- For Mains: PMFBY performance analysis, shortcomings and ways to address them.

Context: Government has modified operational guidelines for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY). The new operational guidelines come at the onset of the Rabi season, which starts from 1st of October.

Modified guidelines:

- **Provision of penalties for States and Insurance Companies** for the delay in settlement of insurance claims has been incorporated.
- There is a **Standard Operating Procedure** for evaluation of insurance companies and remove them from the scheme if found ineffective in providing services.
- The Government has also decided to **include perennial horticultural crops** under the ambit of PMFBY on a pilot basis.
- The scheme, as per the new operational guidelines provides **add on coverage for crop loss due to attack of wild animals**, which will be implemented on a pilot basis.
- **Aadhaar number will be mandatorily captured** to avoid duplication of beneficiaries.
- The insurance companies are given **a target of enrolling 10% more non-loanee farmers** than the previous corresponding season.
- The insurance companies will have to **mandatorily spend 0.5% of gross premium per company per season for publicity and awareness** of the scheme.

Significance:

- The new operational guidelines address the current challenges faced while implementing the scheme by putting forth effective solutions. The much demanded rationalization of premium release process has been incorporated in the new guidelines. As per this, the insurance companies need not provide any projections for the advance subsidy.

About PMFBY:

- In April, 2016, the government of India had launched Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) after rolling back the earlier insurance schemes viz. National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS), Weather-based Crop Insurance scheme and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).
- **Premium**: It envisages a uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for Kharif crops, and 1.5% for Rabi crops. The premium for annual commercial and horticultural crops will be 5%.
- **The scheme is mandatory** for farmers who have taken institutional loans from banks. It’s **optional** for farmers who have not taken institutional credit.

Objectives:

- Providing financial support to farmers suffering crop loss/damage arising out of unforeseen events.
- Stabilizing the income of farmers to ensure their continuance in farming.
- Encouraging farmers to adopt innovative and modern agricultural practices.
- Ensuring flow of credit to the agriculture sector which contributes to food security, crop diversification and enhancing growth and competitiveness of agriculture sector besides protecting farmers from production risks.

Sources: pib.
1. INLAND WATERWAYS AUTHORITY OF INDIA (IWAI)

What to study?
- For Prelims: IWAI- objectives, composition and significance, NW- 1.
- For Mains: Significance of Inland waterways, challenges involved therein.
- Context: Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has made public 13 standardised state-of-the-art ship designs suitable for large barge haulage on river Ganga (National Waterway-1).

Benefits of new designs:
- The specially designed vessels will navigate on low drafts with high carrying capacity and at the same time, environment friendly. For the shipbuilding industry, the new designs will translate into a savings of Rs 30-50 lakhs in the building of a vessel.
- The designs will remove ambiguity on the class and type of vessels that can sail on river Ganga with efficient manoeuvrability. They will help shipyards build vessels of standardised dimensions and capacity and make them available off the shelf besides developing the ‘sale and purchase’ market for inland vessels. The designs will lead to reduced fuel costs and in turn lesser logistics costs.
- These vessels will sail even in depths of about two metres carrying about 350 cars on a five deck car carrier. Some of the designs would enable movement of bulk cargo carriers with capacity of 2500 tonnes at three metres depth, thereby, removing almost 150 truckloads of pressure from the road or one full rail rake with the plying of just one such vessel.
- The new designs will obviate the dependence of Indian Ship builders on foreign ship designs for IWT and prove to be a boost to ‘Make in India’ initiative of the Government.

Way ahead:
- This marks attaining of a critical milestone in the growth of the country’s Inland Water Transport (IWT) sector as it will help overcome the unique navigation challenges river Ganga throws due to its complex river morphology, hydraulics, acute bends, shifting channels, meanders and current.
- It will serve as an enabler for domestic shipbuilding industry working on inland vessels and open huge possibilities for cargo and passenger movement on National Waterway-1.

About Jal Marg Vikas Project:
- What is it? The Jal Marg Vikas Project seeks to facilitate plying of vessels with capacity of 1,500-2,000 tonnes in the Haldia- Varanasi stretch of the River Ganga. The major works being taken up under JMVP are development of fairway, Multi-Modal Terminals, strengthening of river navigation system, conservancy works, modern River Information System (RIS), Digital Global Positioning System (DGPS), night navigation facilities, modern methods of channel marking etc.
- Implementation: The JMVP, which is expected to be completed by March, 2023, is being implemented with the financial and technical support of the World Bank. The project will enable commercial navigation of vessels with the capacity of 1500-2,000 tons on NW-1.
- Benefits of this project: Alternative mode of transport that will be environment friendly and cost effective. The project will contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country. Mammoth Infrastructure development like multi-modal and inter-modal terminals, Roll on – Roll off (Ro-Ro) facilities, ferry services, navigation aids. Socio-economic impetus; huge employment generation.

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

Facts for Prelims:
- NW 1: Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly river system from Allahabad to Haldia was declared as National Waterway No.1. States covered under NW-1: States: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal.

Sources: pib.
2. SINGAPORE’S TEMASEK TO INVEST IN NIIF’S MASTER FUND

What to study?

- For Prelims: Particulars of NIIF and funds under NIIF.
- For Mains: Significance of NIIF and the need for Infrastructure funding.

**Context:** Singapore’s Temasek has agreed to invest as much as $400 million in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), a fund set up by the government of India to boost infrastructure financing in the country.

- With this, Temasek joins government of India, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), HDFC Group, ICICI Bank Ltd, Kotak Mahindra Life Insurance and Axis Bank Ltd as investors in NIIF’s Master Fund.

About NIIF:

- The government had set up the ₹40,000 crore NIIF in 2015 as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable greenfield, brownfield and stalled infrastructure projects.
- The Indian government is investing 49% and the rest of the corpus is to be raised from third-party investors such as sovereign wealth funds, insurance and pension funds, endowments, etc.
- NIIF’s mandate includes investing in areas such as energy, transportation, housing, water, waste management and other infrastructure-related sectors in India.
- NIIF currently manages three funds each with its distinctive investment mandate. The funds are registered as Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

The three funds are:

- **Master Fund:** The Master Fund is an infrastructure fund with the objective of primarily investing in operating assets in the core infrastructure sectors such as roads, ports, airports, power etc.
- **Fund of Funds:** Fund of Funds anchor and/or invest in funds managed by fund managers who have good track records in infrastructure and associated sectors in India. Some of the sectors of focus include Green Infrastructure, Mid-Income & Affordable Housing, Infrastructure services and allied sectors.
- **Strategic Investment Fund:** Strategic Investment Fund is registered as an Alternative Investment Fund II under SEBI in India.

Sources: the hindu.

3. SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE TOWARDS AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION (SATAT) INITIATIVE

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: SATAT initiative- key objectives, significance and brief overview on CNG and CBG.

**Context:** The government has launched Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Initiative to set up Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) production plants and make available CBG in the market for use in automotive fuels.

About the initiative:

- The initiative is aimed at providing a Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) as a developmental effort that would benefit both vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs.
- Compressed Bio-Gas plants are proposed to be set up mainly through independent entrepreneurs. CBG produced at these plants will be transported through cascades of cylinders to the fuel station networks of OMCs for marketing as a green transport fuel alternative.
- The entrepreneurs would be able to separately market the other by-products from these plants, including biomanure, carbon-dioxide, etc., to enhance returns on investment.
- It is planned to roll out 5,000 Compressed Bio-Gas plants across India in a phased manner, with 250 plants by the year 2020, 1,000 plants by 2022 and 5,000 plants by 2025. These plants are expected to produce 15 million tonnes of CBG per annum, which is about 40% of current CNG consumption of 44 million tonnes per annum in the country.
CURRENT EVENTS

- At an investment of approx. Rs. 1.7 lakh crore, this initiative is expected to generate direct employment for 75,000 people and produce 50 million tonnes of bio-manure for crops.

There are multiple benefits from converting agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste into CBG on a commercial scale:

- Responsible waste management, reduction in carbon emissions and pollution.
- Additional revenue source for farmers.
- Boost to entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment.
- Support to national commitments in achieving climate change goals.
- Reduction in import of natural gas and crude oil.
- Buffer against crude oil/gas price fluctuations.

Significance:

- This move has the potential to boost availability of more affordable transport fuels, better use of agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste, as well as to provide an additional revenue source to farmers.
- The initiative holds great promise for efficient municipal solid waste management and in tackling the problem of polluted urban air due to farm stubble-burning and carbon emissions. Use of CBG will also help bring down dependency on crude oil imports.

Background:

- **Bio-gas** is produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste / bio-mass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc. After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has pure methane content of over 95%.

What is CBG?

- **Compressed Bio-Gas** is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential. With calorific value (~52,000 KJ/kg) and other properties similar to CNG, Compressed Bio-Gas can be used as an alternative, renewable automotive fuel. Given the abundance of biomass in the country, Compressed Bio-Gas has the potential to replace CNG in automotive, industrial and commercial uses in the coming years.

- **Compressed Bio-Gas can be produced from** various bio-mass/waste sources, including agricultural residue, municipal solid waste, sugarcane press mud, distillery spent wash, cattle dung and sewage treatment plant waste. The other waste streams, i.e. rotten potatoes from cold storages, rotten vegetables, dairy plants, chicken/poultry litter, food waste, horticulture waste, forestry residues and treated organic waste from industrial effluent treatment plants (ETPs) can be used to generate biogas.

Way ahead:

- The potential for Compressed Bio-Gas production from various sources in India is estimated at about 62 million tonnes per annum. Going forward, Compressed Bio-Gas networks can be integrated with city gas distribution (CGD) networks to boost supplies to domestic and retail users in existing and upcoming markets.
- Besides retailing from OMC fuel stations, Compressed Bio-Gas can at a later date be injected into CGD pipelines too for efficient distribution and optimised access of a cleaner and more affordable fuel.

Sources: pib.

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**Paper 3 Topic:** Different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage.

**1. HERITAGE TAG FOR 2 IRRIGATION FACILITIES IN TELANGANA**

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Particulars of ICID heritage tag and irrigation facilities that received this tag.

www.insightsias.com
1. APSARA – U REACTOR

What to study?

• For Prelims and Mains: Apsara and Apsara- U- Key features and significance of these reactors.

• Context: THE BHABHA Atomic Research Centre has recommissioned an upgraded version of ‘Apsara’, the country’s oldest research reactor that was decommissioned almost a decade ago. **Apsara is now operational as ‘Apsara-U’ on Trombay campus of Maharashtra.**

About Apsara Nuclear reactor:

• Apsara is the oldest of India’s research reactors. The reactor was designed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) and built with assistance from the United Kingdom (which also provided the initial fuel supply consisting of 80% enriched uranium).

• Apsara first went critical on 4 August 1956.

• Apsara is a light water swimming pool-type reactor with a maximum power output of one megawatt thermal (MWt).
CURRENT EVENTS

- The reactor burns enriched uranium in the form of aluminum alloyed curved plates. Fuel for the reactor is supplied under contract from the United Kingdom, provided that the fuel is safeguarded.
- The Apsara reactor is utilized for various experiments including neutron activation analysis, radiation damage studies, forensic research, neutron radiography, and shielding experiments.
- The reactor is also used for research and the production of radioisotopes.

Apsara- Upgraded:
- By virtue of higher neutron flux, this reactor will increase indigenous production or radio-isotopes for medical application by about fifty percent and would also be extensively used for research in nuclear physics, material science and radiation shielding.
- This development has re-emphasised the capability of Indian scientists and Engineers to build, complex facilities for health care, science education and research.

Sources: pib.

2. INDIA’S FIRST MISSILE TRACKING SHIP IS READYING FOR SEA TRIALS

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the ship.
- **Context:** Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) is gearing up to undertake sea trials of India’s first missile tracking ship by the first week of October.

Key facts:
- This will be the first of its kind ocean surveillance ship being built as part of the efforts to strengthen the country’s strategic weapons programme.
- Its induction will put India in the elite club of a few countries that have such a sophisticated ocean surveillance ship.
- It has the capacity to carry 300-strong crew with hi-tech gadgets and communication equipment, powered by two diesel engines, and a large deck capable of helicopter landing.

Sources: the hindu.

3. INDIA’S FIRST INDIGENOUS ANTI-NUCLEAR MEDICAL KIT

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Components and significance of the kit launched.
- **Context:** In a major shot in the arm for paramilitary and police forces, scientists at Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS) claim to have developed India’s first indigenous medical kit that may ensure protection from serious injuries and faster healing of wounds resulting from nuclear warfare or radioactive leakage.

- The kit has been developed for the armed, paramilitary and police forces only as they are the first ones likely to get exposed to radiation — be it during nuclear, chemical and biomedical (NCB) warfare or a rescue operation after a nuclear accident.

About the kit and its components:
- The kit has over 25 items, including radio-protectors that provide 80-90% protection against radiation and nerve gas agents, bandages that absorb radiation as well as tablets and ointments.
- Developed in India for the first time, it’s a potent alternative to similar kits that were till now being procured from strategically advanced nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices.
CURRENT EVENTS

The contents:

- **The contents include** an advanced form of Prussian blue tablets, highly effective in incorporating Radio Cesium (Cs-137) and Radio Thallium, among the most feared radioisotopes in nuclear bombs that destroy human body cells.
  - The kit also has **an Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) injection** that traps uranium in the guts and blood of victims during a nuclear accident or warfare. When EDTA is injected into the veins, it “grabs” heavy metals and minerals and removes them from the body.
  - The kit also has **Ca-EDTA Respiratory Fluid**, which is the inhalation formula for chelation, or grabbing, of heavy metals and radioactive elements deposited in lungs through inhalation at nuclear accident sites.
  - The kit also has **a radioactive urine/biofluid collector** which is cost-effective, easy to store and can safely dispose of the urine of a person affected by radiation. The collector has silk at its base, more than enough to jellify 500 millilitre of urine, which could be disposed of safely.
  - The kit has **anti-gamma ray skin ointment** that protects and heals the radiation damage on the skin.
  - Also part of the kit is the **amifostine injection**, a US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved conventional radiopharmaceutical that limits damage from gamma radiation.
  - Another medicine in the form of a tablet is **Indranil 150 mg**. It is being introduced as a reserve emergency drug for services, rescue workers and places where high acute exposures are expected and lives will be at stake.

**Significance of the kit:**

- During radioactive accidents thousands of patients may be rushed to hospitals. In several cases, if not most, they will also have traumatic, orthopaedic, surgical injuries or burns. The blood of such patients will have radioactive elements and will require wound dressing with significantly higher absorption capacity so that nothing leaks and infects others. Such highly absorptive dressings and gauze also make it safer for the medical staff to handle radioactive patients as the chance of their own contamination is reduced.
- The kit is a potential alternative to those being procured from nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices. Such medicines will help everyone and not just soldiers. This will also help the victims affected in terrorist attacks.

**Sources:** the hindu.

### 4. EYEROV TUNA

- **Context:** India’s first underwater robotic drone EyeROV TUNA was recently handed over to Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL) of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

**Key facts:**

- It has been designed and developed indigenously by Kochi-based start-up IROV Technologies Pvt Ltd (EyeROV).
- It is smart micro-ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) or underwater drone. This underwater drone will be used by NPOL for research and development activities which in turn would result in commercial product for defence purposes.
- It is designed to perform visual inspection and surveys of submerged structures up to depth of 100 metres.
- It is also equipped to perform variety of functions, including inspection of ship hulls, undersea cables or bridge moorings, fish farms, dams, port structure and bridge foundations and also in various underwater research operations. Its commercial use will eliminate need for costlier and riskier manual inspection by divers.
5. MAN PORTABLE ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE (MPATGM)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of MPATGM.
- **Context**: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) recently conducted first successful trials of indigenously developed third generation *Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile* (MPATGM).

**MPATGM (MAN-PORTABLE ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE)**

Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) is a 'Fire & Forget', 3rd Generation Anti-Tank missile with 'Top' attack and 'Direct' attack capabilities. It is intended for use by the Indian Battalions against armoured vehicles and is perceived as a replacement for 2nd Generation MILAN & KONKURS ATGMs.

**Brief Specifications:**
- **Missile:**
  - Weight: 14.5 kg
  - Length: 1.3 m
  - Diameter: 120 mm
  - Operational Range: 200 m to 2.5 km
  - Lock-On-Before-Launch (LOBL) Guidance with a passive homing IIR Seeker
  - High SSKP (Single Shot Kill Probability)
  - 'Soft' Launch Propulsion system for Gunner safety

**Launcher System:**
- Command Launch Unit (CLU) consisting of Target Acquisition System (TAS) & Command Control Unit (CCU)
- Weight: 14.25 kg

**Future Activities:**
- Ballistic Flight tests to prove 'Soft' Launch Propulsion, followed by Control Flight tests by the end of 2016.

**Other Projects Undertaken**
- QRSAM, NGARM, SFDR, SLCM and XRSAM.

**About MPATGM:**
- The MPATGM is a third-generation anti-tank guided missile (ATGM), which has been under development by DRDO in partnership with Indian defense contractor VEM Technologies Ltd. since 2015.
- Fitted with a high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead, the MPATGM reportedly boasts a top attack capability and has a maximum engagement range of about 2.5 kilometers.

**The demand:**
- The Indian Army needs over 40,000 missiles for its infantry and mechanised units. While it has rejected the US-built Javelin system, a formal decision on the procurement on the Israeli SPIKE system is awaited.

**Sources:** the hindu.

6. ISRO LAUNCHES TWO U.K. SATELLITES

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on satellites launched and PSLV, Significance of this launch.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **Context:** ISROs PSLV-C42 lifted off for the launch of two satellites from the United Kingdom – NovaSAR and S1-4 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. The two satellites, owned by Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd (SSTL) were placed in a circular orbit around the poles, 583 km from Earth.

- The commercial arm of ISRO, Antrix Corporation earned more than ₹220 crore on this launch.

- **This would be the 44th flight of the PSLV and the third launch by ISRO this year.** The PSLV-C-42 is the lightest version of the PSLV flying in its core-alone version without the six strap-on motors.

**Key facts:**

- The NovaSAR is a technology demonstration mission designed to test the capabilities of a new low cost S-band SAR platform. It will be used for ship detection and maritime monitoring and also flood monitoring, besides agricultural and forestry applications.

- The S1-4 is a high-resolution Optical Earth Observation Satellite, used for surveying resources, environment monitoring, urban management and for disaster monitoring.

Sources: the hindu.

7. WORLD’S FIRST HYDROGEN TRAIN

- Germany has rolled out the world’s first hydrogen-powered train, signalling the start of a push to challenge the might of polluting diesel trains with costlier but eco-friendly technology.

- **How they operate?** Hydrogen trains are equipped with fuel cells that produce electricity through a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, a process that leaves steam and water as the only emissions. Excess energy is stored in ion lithium batteries on board the train.

8. CYCLONE-30

**What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: Cyclotrons- key facts, Cyclone- 30- features and significance.

- **Context:** The country’s biggest cyclotron facility that will produce radioisotopes vital for diagnosis and treatment of cancer has become operational.

**Key facts:**

- **The machine – Cyclone-30** — is housed at the Kolkata-based Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and will start regular production by mid-next year after supporting nuclear systems are commissioned and regulatory clearances are obtained.

- This facility will provide for affordable radio isotopes and related radiopharmaceuticals for the entire country especially, for eastern India and also have export potential for Germanium-68 and Gallium-68 generator for in-situ production of Gallium-68 and Palladium-103 isotopes, used for breast cancer diagnosis and prostate cancer treatment, respectively.

**Significance:**

- With increasing number of Indians diagnosed with cancer every year, the cyclotron machine will produce radioisotopes for nuclear imaging specifically for cancer detection.

- At present, many radioisotopes are imported while some are produced in nuclear research reactors such as the Apsara at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), and remaining in cyclotrons facilities run by large private hospitals. The addition of Cyclone-30 will increase the availability of radioisotopes and bring down the cost of treatment.

**What are Cyclotrons?**

- Cyclotrons are used to produce radioisotopes for diagnostic and therapeutic use for cancer care. Radiations from these isotopes are used to destroy cancer cells.
9. MISSILE ‘PRAHAR’

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the missile.
- **Context:** Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight tested the indigenously developed surface-to-surface tactical missile ‘Prahar’, from Launch Complex-III, ITR, Balasore.

About Prahar:

- ‘Prahar’, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), is capable of filling the gap between the multi-barrel rocket system ‘Pinaka’ and medium-range ballistic missile ‘Prithvi’. It can also engage multiple targets in different directions.
- It has length of 7.3 meter, diameter of 420 mm and weighs 1,280 kg. It has operational range of 150 km and flight altitude of 35 km.
- It is a solid-fuelled short-range missile fitted with inertial navigation system.
- The missile is equipped with state-of-the-art navigation, guidance and electromechanical actuation systems with advanced on board computer.
- It is a quick-reaction, all-weather, all-terrain, highly accurate battlefield support tactical weapon system.

Sources: the hindu.

10. NASA BALLOON MISSION

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: NASA balloon mission- objectives, significance and achievements.
- **Context:** Scientists have begun to analyse the photos captured by the NASA balloon mission.
- The mission recently captured the images of **noctilucent clouds or polar mesospheric clouds (PMCs)**. These images may help scientists better understand turbulence in the atmosphere, as well as in oceans, lakes and other planetary atmospheres.

About the Mission:

- NASA’s polar mesospheric clouds (PMCs) Turbo mission launched a giant balloon on July 8 to study PMCs at a height of 50 miles above the surface. For five days, the balloon floated through the stratosphere from its launch at Esrange, Sweden, across the Arctic to Western Nunavut, Canada.
- During its flight, cameras on board the balloon captured six million high-resolution images filling up 120 terabytes of data storage — most of which included a variety of PMC displays, revealing the processes leading to turbulence.

Objectives of the mission:

- The mission aimed at studying atmospheric motions, such as airflow over mountains or the motions caused by thunderstorms, which can cause disturbances in the atmosphere which are generated through something called gravity waves.
- Besides, with this mission, scientists want to understand the processes of matter in near-Earth space, including how matter there interacts with Earth’s atmosphere and weather.

What are PMCs?

- Polar mesospheric clouds (PMCs) form 50 miles above the poles during summer. They’re mostly made up of ice crystals and appear like faint lines in the sky. The clouds are only visible during twilight, when the angle of the sun reflects off them and causes them to shine a bright electric blue or white colour.
CURRENT EVENTS

- These clouds are affected by what is known as atmospheric gravity waves – caused by the convecting and uplifting of air masses, such as when air is pushed up by mountain ranges.
- The waves play major roles in transferring energy from the lower atmosphere to the mesosphere.

Sources: the hindu.

11. DICKINSONIA

- What is it? It is the earliest animal on geological record — a strange oval creature with rib-like segments running along its body that lived on Earth 558 million years ago.
- Why in News? The fossils of this animal were recently discovered.
- Where? Researchers found the fossil in a remote area near the White Sea in the northwest of Russia.

Key facts:
- Dickinsonia grew up to 1.4 metres in length.
- It was part of the Ediacara Biota that lived on Earth 20 million years prior to the ‘Cambrian explosion’ of modern animal life.
- The ‘Cambrian explosion’ was when complex animals and other macroscopic organisms — such as molluscs, worms, arthropods and sponges — began to dominate the fossil record.

12. SCIENTISTS GROW HUMAN OESOPHAGUS IN LAB

What to Study?
- For Prelims: Oesophagus and Stem cells - key facts.
- For Mains: Significance of stem cells and potential applications.
- Context: In a first, scientists have successfully grown oesophageal organoids — miniature, functional versions of the human food pipe — using stem cells, paving the way for new ways to study and test drugs against gut disorders.
- The human oesophageal tissue was grown entirely from pluripotent stem cells (PSCs), which can form any tissue type in the body.

Significance:
- The research may lead to personalised diagnostic methods and focused in part on developing regenerative tissue therapies to treat or cure GI disorders.
- In addition to being a new model to study birth defects like oesophageal atresia, the organoids can be used to study diseases like eosinophilic esophagitis and Barrett’s metaplasia, or to bioengineer genetically matched esophageal tissue for individual patients.

What is Oesophagus?
- The oesophagus is a muscular tube that actively passes food from the mouth to the stomach.
- It is also called as gastro-intestinal tract (GI tract or gullet or food pipe).
- There are a number of lymph nodes close to the oesophagus.

The oesophagus has four layers:
- The mucosa – the inner layer, which is moist to help food pass smoothly into the stomach.
- The submucosa – this contains glands that produce mucus (phlegm), which keeps the oesophagus moist.
- The muscularis – the muscle layer, which pushes food down to the stomach.
- The adventitia – the outer layer, which attaches the oesophagus to nearby parts of the body.
Diseases associated:
- The organ can be affected by congenital diseases, such as oesophageal atresia — a narrowing or malformation of the oesophagus caused by genetic mutations.
- There are several diseases that can afflict people later in life. Some include oesophageal cancer, gastrooesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or a rare ailment called achalasia — a disease affecting the muscles of the lower oesophagus that prevents contraction of the organ and the passage of food.

Sources: the hindu.

13. PRITHVI DEFENCE VEHICLE (PDV) MISSION

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of PDV.
- Context: India successfully conducted an interceptor missile test off the Odisha coast, achieving a major milestone in developing a two-layer Ballistic Missile Defence system. The interceptor was launched from Abdul Kalam Island, earlier known as Wheeler Island of the Integrated Test Range (ITR).

About Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) mission:
- PDV mission is for engaging the targets in the exo-atmosphere region at an altitude above 50 km of the earth’s atmosphere DRDO.
- The PDV is slated to replace the existing Prithvi Air Defense (PAD)/Pradyumna Ballistic Missile Interceptor, which has a maximum interception altitude of 80 kilometers.
- The new two-stage solid-fueled PDV interceptor is fitted with an Imaging Infrared (IIR) seeker, developed by DRDO, to distinguish between incoming warheads and decoys.
- It is guided by high-accuracy Inertial Navigation System (INS) supported by Redundant Micro Navigation System for estimating point of interception.

Sources: the hindu.

14. ASTRA BVR AIR-TO-AIR MISSILE

Context: Astra, the indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM), was recently successfully test fired by the Indian Air Force from Su-30 aircraft.

Astra:
- It is the indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air
- It is an all-weather, state-of-the-art missile developed by DRDO and can engage and destroy enemy aircraft at supersonic speed (1.2 Mach to 1.4 Mach) in head-on (up to 80 km) and tail-chase (up to 20 km) modes.
- The 3.8 metre tall Astra is a radar homing missile and the smallest of the DRDO-developed missiles and can be launched from different altitudes.
- It can reach up to 110 km when fired from an altitude of 15 km, 44 km when launched from an altitude of eight km and 21 km when fired from sea level.

15. WAYU- AIR POLLUTION MITIGATION DEVICE

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Features, significance and utility of the device.
- Context: Air pollution control device WAYU (Wind Augmentation Purifying Unit) for traffic junctions was recently inaugurated in Delhi.
About WAYU (Wind Augmentation Purifying Unit):

- WAYU is developed by Council of Scientific and Industrial Research – National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI) as a part of Technology Development Project funded by Department of Science and Technology.
- The device has the capacity to purify air in an area of 500 meter square. The device consumes only half a unit of electricity for 10 hours of running and has a maintenance cost of only Rs. 1500 per month.

How it works?

- The device works on two principles mainly Wind generation for dilution of air pollutants and Active Pollutants removal.
- The device has filters for Particulate Matter removal and activated carbon (charcoal) and UV lamps for poisonous gases removal such as VOCs and Carbon Monoxide.
- The device has one fan and filter for sucking and removing Particulate Matter. There are two UV lamps and half kg of activated carbon charcoal coated with special chemical Titanium Dioxide.

Sources: pib.

**Paper 3 Topic:** Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1. **EMIRATES MARS MISSION – HOPE PROBE**

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights, objectives and significance of the scheme.
- **Context:** UAE has started its preparations for the upcoming Mars Mission named- HOPE.

Background:

- In July 2014, the UAE leadership announced the launch of the Emirates Mars Mission project by the President of the UAE. Subsequently, the President issued a decree establishing the UAE Space Agency.

HOPE Probe:

- The probe will be built by an Emirati team of engineers and experts and will be sent on a scientific voyage of discovery to the Red Planet.
- This will mark the Arab world’s entry into the era of space exploration and place the UAE among the major scientific countries that have begun programmes to explore Mars.
CURRENT EVENTS

- The probe will be sent to explore the Red Planet by 2020. Following a journey of several months, the probe is expected to enter the Red Planet’s orbit in 2021, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the formation of the UAE.

Scientific Objectives of the Probe Voyage:
- The Emirates Mars Mission project will answer scientific questions that have long puzzled scientists. These are questions about the Red Planet, which scientists have not been able to explain before because of the lack of data and information.
- The project will cover all aspects that have not been previously covered, whether scientific or knowledge-based, and it will work on drawing a clear and comprehensive picture of the Martian climate and the causes of the corrosion of its surface that has made it impossible for water to exist on the planet.
- The project will also provide insights about the weather on the Red Planet. It will observe weather phenomena such as dust storms and changes in temperature and how the atmosphere interacts with topography, from the highest volcano peaks to ice sheets to the vast deserts and the deepest canyons.

Sources: the hindu.

2. DRUG-RESISTANT SUPERBUG SPREADING

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

Context: Australian scientists have warned that *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, a superbug resistant to all known antibiotics that can cause “severe” infections or even death is spreading undetected through hospital wards across the world.

Researchers discovered three variants of the multidrug-resistant bug in samples from 10 countries, including strains in Europe that cannot be reliably tamed by any drug currently on the market.

Key facts:
- *The bacteria, known as Staphylococcus epidermidis*, is related to the better-known and more deadly MRSA superbug.
- Where it is found? It’s found naturally on human skin and most commonly infects the elderly or patients who have had prosthetic materials implanted, such as catheters and joint replacements.
- Who is more vulnerable? It can be deadly, but it’s usually in patients who already are very sick in hospital. it can be quite hard to eradicate and the infections can be severe.
- Concerns: Some strains of the bug can make a small change in DNA that can lead to resistance to two of the most common antibiotics.

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

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

Why is Antibiotic Resistance a Big Deal?
- The discovery of antibiotics less than a century ago was a turning point in public health that has saved countless lives.
- Although antibiotic resistance develops naturally with normal bacterial mutation, humans are speeding it up by using antibiotics improperly.
CURRENT EVENTS

- According to a research, now, 2 million people a year in the US develop antibiotic-resistant infections, and 23,000 of them die of those infections.

Why is the medical community worried?

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

What Can We Do?

- First step would be to limit antibiotic use. If a patient has a virus, for instance, an antibiotic won’t work, so doctors shouldn’t prescribe antibiotics even if the patient insists.
- And when patients do need antibiotics, it’s important to make sure they take the full course to kill off every last infection-causing germ. Otherwise the strong survive, mutate, and spread. As a society, curbing antibiotic use in healthy animals used in human food production is another important step.

Recent developments:

- According to few recent studies, nanotechnology holds the key to stopping antibiotic-resistant bacteria and the deadly infections they cause.
- Scientists have developed light-activated nanoparticles — each roughly 20,000 times smaller than the thickness of a single human hair and have shown in lab tests that these “quantum dots” are more than 90% effective at wiping out antibiotic-resistant germs like Salmonella, E. coli and Staphylococcus.
- With the emergence of this Colistin-resistant E.coli, the medical community is going to be working harder and faster to contain superbugs and develop new treatments for infections.

Way ahead:

- The global community needs to urgently address the indiscriminate use of antibiotics in an actionable manner, and fast-track research on the next generation of drugs.

Sources: the hindu.

3. JAPAN TO TEST MINI ‘SPACE ELEVATOR’

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on space elevator.
- Context: A Japanese team has developed a space elevator and will conduct a first trial this month, blasting off a miniature version on satellites to test the technology.

Key facts:

- The test equipment will hitch a ride on an H-2B rocket being launched by Japan’s space agency.
- The test involves a miniature elevator stand-in a box just 6 cm long, 3 cm wide, and 3 cm high. The mini-elevator will travel along the cable from a container in one of the satellites.
- If all goes well, it will provide proof of concept by moving along a 10-metre cable suspended in space between two mini satellites that will keep it taut.

Background:

- The idea was first proposed in 1895 by Russian scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky after he saw the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and was revisited nearly a century later in a novel by Arthur C. Clarke.
- But technical barriers have always kept plans stuck at the conceptual stage.

Sources: the hindu.
4. NASA’S CASSINI SPACECRAFT

What to study?
- For Mains: Significance and key objectives of the mission.

**Context:** Using data from NASA’s Cassini spacecraft, scientists have spotted a surprising feature emerging at Saturn’s northern pole as it nears summertime – a warming, high-altitude jet stream with a hexagonal shape.

**Key facts:**
- The vortex is akin to the famous hexagon seen deeper down in Saturn’s clouds. The edges of this newly-found vortex appear to be hexagonal, precisely matching a famous and bizarre hexagonal cloud pattern we see deeper down in Saturn’s atmosphere.
- The results suggest that the lower-altitude hexagon may influence what happens above, and that it could be a towering structure hundreds of miles in height.
- This warm vortex sits hundreds of miles above the clouds, in the stratosphere.

**About Cassini Mission:**
- Launched in 1997, the Cassini mission — *a cooperation between NASA, the European Space Agency and the Italian Space Agency* — has sent back thousands of stunning images and made numerous discoveries about the ringed planet and its moons.
- **Cassini–Huygens is an unmanned spacecraft sent to the planet Saturn.** Cassini is the fourth space probe to visit Saturn and the first to enter orbit. Its design includes a Saturn orbiter and a lander for the moon Titan. The lander, called Huygens, landed on Titan in 2005. The spacecraft was launched on October 15, 1997. This was the first landing ever accomplished in the outer Solar System.

**Objectives of the mission:**
- Determine the three-dimensional structure and dynamic behavior of the rings of Saturn.
- Determine the composition of the satellite surfaces and the geological history of each object.
- Determine the nature and origin of the dark material on Iapetus’s leading hemisphere.
• Measure the three-dimensional structure and dynamic behavior of the magnetosphere.
• Study the dynamic behavior of Saturn’s atmosphere at cloud level.
• Study the time variability of Titan’s clouds and hazes.
• Characterize Titan’s surface on a regional scale.

Sources: the hindu.

5. KEPLER SPACE TELESCOPE

What to study?

• For Prelims and Mains: Features, significance and objectives of Kepler’s Mission and TESS.
• Context: NASA’s planet hunting Kepler space telescope — which has led to the discovery of over 2,300 planets so far — has woken up from sleep mode and has restarted its scientific operations. NASA has been closely monitoring the probe since it is expected to run out of fuel soon.
• The Kepler team is planning to collect as much science data as possible in its remaining time and beam it back to Earth before the loss of the fuel-powered thrusters that would make it difficult to aim the spacecraft for data transfer.

Background:

• The space telescope, originally launched in March 2009, has had a tumultuous year. The team placed Kepler into hibernation in July, as their new planet-hunter, the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), began testing for its own mission.
• The hibernation-like state was to ensure that the data from Kepler’s 18th mission, stored onboard the spacecraft, would be able to make its way back to Earth.

Accomplishments:

• In total, the Kepler mission has confirmed the existence of 2,652 exoplanets and 30 of those exist within the Small Habitable Zone, the area of space surrounding a star where a planet could theoretically support a surface of liquid water (and potentially extraterrestrial life).

About Kepler Mission:

• Launched in 2009, the Kepler mission is specifically designed to survey our region of the Milky Way galaxy to discover hundreds of Earth-sized and smaller planets in or near the habitable zone and determine the fraction of the hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy that might have such planets.

About TESS mission:

• The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is a NASA mission that will look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth’s sky. It was led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with seed funding from Google.
• Mission: The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets. TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure of solar systems outside of our Earth, and provide insights into how our own solar system formed.
• Orbit: TESS will occupy a never-before-used orbit high above Earth. The elliptical orbit, called P/2, is exactly half of the moon’s orbital period; this means that TESS will orbit Earth every 13.7 days. Its closest point to Earth (67,000 miles or 108,000 kilometers) is about triple the distance of geosynchronous orbit, where most communications satellites operate.
• How it works? It will use transit method to detect exoplanets. It watches distant stars for small dips in brightness, which can indicate that planet has passed in front of them. Repeated dips will indicate planet passing in front of its star. This data has to be validated by repeated observations and verified by scientists.

Sources: the hindu.
6. MODEL INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSFORMATIVE AI (ICTAI)

What to study?
- For Prelims: Objectives and features of ICTAI.
- For Mains: AI- need, concerns, potential and need for legislation.

**Context:** NITI Aayog, Intel, and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) are collaborating to set up a Model International Center for Transformative Artificial Intelligence (ICTAI) towards developing and deploying AI-led application-based research projects.

- This initiative is part of NITI Aayog’s ‘National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence’ Discussion Paper that focuses on establishing ICTAI in the country through private sector collaboration.

**Aims of ICTAI:**
- Based in Bengaluru, the Model ICTAI aims to conduct advanced research to incubate AI-led solutions in three important areas – healthcare, agriculture and smart mobility – by bringing together the expertise of Intel and TIFR.
- It aims to experiment, discover and establish best practices in the domains of ICTAI governance, fundamental research, physical infrastructure, compute and service infrastructure needs, and talent acquisition.

**Goals and objectives:**
- Through this collaborative effort, the model ICTAI is chartered to develop AI foundational frameworks, tools and assets, including curated datasets and unique AI algorithms.
- The intent is to develop standards and support policy development related to information technology such as data-storage, information security, privacy, and ethics for data capture and use.
- The model Centre also plans to develop AI foundational technologies to promote applied research that can scale for national impact and will lead to the creation of a vibrant and self-sustaining ecosystem.
- Another key area of its focus will be collaboration with industry leaders, startups, and AI services and product companies to productize technologies and IP that are developed at the model ICTAI. And finally, the goal is to support skilling and talent development for world-class AI talent.
- The learning and best practices developed through this model ICTAI will be used by NITI Aayog to set up the future ICTAIs across country.

**What is artificial intelligence (AI)?**
- Artificial Intelligence comes from computer systems that have been programmed to — or have learnt to — do tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence.
- Many apps and software are already making mundane work easier by doing a certain part of it for us, based on acquired intelligence.

**Concerns associated:**
- Automation threatens 69% of the jobs in India, while it’s 77% in China, according to a World Bank research. The transition is expected to happen in a decade, according to experts.
- Therefore, if automation is not planned well and addressed holistically, it is a disaster in the making.

**New opportunities:**
- While there is a risk to jobs due to these trends, the good news is that a huge number of new jobs are getting created as well in areas like cybersecurity, cloud, big data, machine learning and AI.
- The new job roles that will dominate the IT workforce are within digital domains such as big data, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing and cybersecurity.
- It is clearly a time of career pivot for IT professionals to make sure they are where the growth is.

**Policy on AI:**
- The Union ministry of electronics and information technology, in October 2017, set up an internal committee to advise the government on a policy on artificial intelligence (AI).
- The expert committee will advise the IT ministry on the most apt technologies for India. The government’s main focus is to reduce cyber attacks with AI.
Need for a policy on AI:

- The artificial intelligence market is estimated to touch $153 billion in 2020 and expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 45.4% from 2016 to 2022. However, AI is widely seen as a major challenge in generation of employment as many companies are likely to depend more on it to cut down on human resources.
- Globally too, there is a growing interest in AI. In 2016, the White House initiated work on Preparing for the future of artificial intelligence; in the UK, the House of Commons committee on S&T looked at robotics and artificial intelligence while in 2017, the State Council of China started work on the next generation artificial intelligence development plan.

Seven- point strategy:

- The government has recently drawn up a seven-point strategy that would form the framework for India’s strategic plan to use AI.
- The strategy includes developing methods for human machine interactions; ensuring safety and security of AI systems; creating a competent workforce in line with AI and R&D needs, understanding and addressing the ethical, legal and societal implications of AI, measuring and evaluating AI technologies through standards and benchmarks, among others.

Way ahead:

- AI is a complex subject; it would be simplistic to look at it as all bad or all good.
- But robots and AI taking away middle-class, manufacturing jobs in the not-so-distant future is a very real prospect that will have to be addressed by governments sooner than they probably think.

Sources: pib.

7. BLOCK CHAIN TECHNOLOGY

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Blockchain technology- what is it? How it operates? Concerns and potential.
- Context: Cabinet has approved MoU on Collaborative Research on Distributed Ledger and Block Chain Technology in the context of Development of digital economy by Exim Bank under BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism.

Major Impact:

- Distributed Ledger/Block chain technology holds potential for solutions to various challenges being faced in the financial sector space of the BRICS nations.
- The MoU intends to enhance understanding of Distributed Ledger/Block Chain technology, through the joint research efforts to identify areas within respective business operations where it may have the potential for applications aimed at enhancing the operational efficiencies.

Background:

- The Xiamen Declaration signed in China on digital economy by the BRICS leaders had highlighted the importance of the digital economy and how the BRICS nations could leverage the thriving and dynamic digital economy that will foster global economic development and benefit everyone.
- Accordingly, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Collaborative Research on Distributed Ledger and Block chain Technology in the Context of the Development of the Digital Economy was suggested to be inked by all member banks.

The BRICS interbank cooperation mechanism:

- In order to develop and strengthen economic ties and investment cooperation between BRICS countries, in 2010 state financial institutions for development and export support of the BRICS nations entered into a Memorandum on cooperation, thus creating the BRICS interbank cooperation mechanism.
- One of the main purposes of cooperation is to set up a scheme designed to provide financing and banking services for future investment projects that could be beneficial for the economic development of the BRICS countries.
On the basis of agreements that have been signed within the framework of the BRICS interbank cooperation mechanism, the member banks have taken steps towards developing multilateral financial cooperation within the BRICS countries and created basic mechanisms for settling payments and financing investment projects in local currencies.

What are Blockchains?

- Blockchains are a new data structure that is secure, cryptography-based, and distributed across a network. The technology supports cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, and the transfer of any data or digital asset. Spearheaded by Bitcoin, blockchains achieve consensus among distributed nodes, allowing the transfer of digital goods without the need for centralized authorisation of transactions.
- The present blockchain ecosystem is like the early Internet, a permissionless innovation environment in which email, the World Wide Web, Napster, Skype, and Uber were built.

How this operates?

- The technology allows transactions to be simultaneously anonymous and secure, peer-to-peer, instant and frictionless. It does this by distributing trust from powerful intermediaries to a large global network, which through mass collaboration, clever code and cryptography, enables a tamper-proof public ledger of every transaction that’s ever happened on the network.
- A block is the “current” part of a blockchain which records some or all of the recent transactions, and once completed, goes into the blockchain as permanent database. Each time a block gets completed, a new block is generated. Blocks are linked to each other (like a chain) in proper linear, chronological order with every block containing a hash of the previous block.

Benefits of blockchain technology:

- As a public ledger system, blockchain records and validate each and every transaction made, which makes it secure and reliable.
- All the transactions made are authorized by miners, which makes the transactions immutable and prevent it from the threat of hacking.
- Blockchain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.
8. NASA’S ORION SPACECRAFT

What to study?
• For Prelims and Mains: All about the Orion Spacecraft and the Mission.
• Context: NASA has successfully completed the final test to qualify Orion’s space capsule’s parachute system for flights with astronauts, ahead of its mission to send humans to the Moon and beyond.
• The parachute system is the only system that must assemble itself in mid-air and must be able to keep the crew safe in several failure scenarios, such as mortar failures that prevent a single parachute type to deploy, or conditions that cause some of the parachute textile components to fail.

About Orion:
• NASA’s Orion spacecraft is built to take humans farther than they’ve ever gone before. Orion will serve as the exploration vehicle that will carry the crew to space, provide emergency abort capability, sustain the crew during the space travel, and provide safe re-entry from deep space return velocities. Orion will launch on NASA’s new heavy-lift rocket, the Space Launch System.
• Orion will first fly with astronauts aboard during Exploration Mission-2, a mission that will venture near the Moon and farther from Earth than ever before, launching atop NASA’s Space Launch System rocket — which will be the world’s most powerful rocket.

9. ICESAT

What to study?
• For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the mission.
• Context: NASA is preparing to launch its $1 billion (about Rs. 7,210 crores) ICESat-2 mission, using advanced lasers to uncover the true depth of the melting of Earth’s ice sheets. The satellite mission, called ICESat-2, should provide more precise information on how these frozen surfaces are being affected by global warming.

Background:
• As the name suggests, ICESat-2 is a follow-on project. The original spacecraft flew in the 2000s and pioneered the laser measurement of the height of polar glaciers and sea-ice from space.
• But the mission was plagued by technical problems that limited its observations to just a couple of months in every year.

About ICESat-2 mission:
• ICESat-2 will measure the average annual elevation change of land ice covering Greenland and Antarctica to within the width of a pencil, capturing 60,000 measurements every second.
• ICESat-2’s Advanced Topographic Laser Altimeter System (ATLAS) measures height by timing how long it takes individual light photons to travel from the spacecraft to Earth and back.

The satellite mission has four science objectives:
• Measure melting ice sheets and investigate how this effects sea level rise.
• Measure and investigate changes in the mass of ice sheets and glaciers.
• Estimate and study sea ice thickness.
• Measure the height of vegetation in forests and other ecosystems worldwide.

How it works?
• ATLAS will fire 10,000 times each second, sending hundreds of trillions of photons to the ground in six beams of green light. With so many photons returning from multiple beams, ICESat-2 will get a much more detailed view of the ice surface than its predecessor.
As it circles Earth from pole to pole, ICESat-2 will measure ice heights along the same path in the polar regions four times a year, providing seasonal and annual monitoring of ice elevation changes. Beyond the poles, ICESat-2 will also measure the height of ocean and land surfaces, including forests.

Significance of the mission:
- ICESat-2 will improve upon NASA’s 15-year record of monitoring the change in polar ice heights. It started in 2003 with the first ICESat mission and continued in 2009 with NASA’s Operation IceBridge, an airborne research campaign that kept track of the accelerating rate of change.
- The new observational technologies of ICESat-2 will advance the knowledge of how the ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica contribute to sea level rise.

Why is this mission important?
- Antarctica and Greenland lose billions of tonnes of ice every year – the result largely of warm water being able to melt land glaciers where they meet the ocean. This wastage is slowly but surely pushing up sea-levels worldwide.
- In the Arctic, the seasonal floes have also been in retreat. Sea-ice in the far north is thought to have lost two-thirds of its volume since the 1980s. And although this has no direct impact on the height of the oceans, the reduced ice-cover is working to amplify temperature rises in the region.

Sources: the hindu.

10. THE CASE FOR MAKING PLUTO A PLANET AGAIN

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key facts on Pluto.
- For Mains: Demand for Planetary status- analysis.

Context: Scientists are arguing that denying Pluto planetary status is invalid and erroneous. A team of scientists is indicating that the basis on which Pluto was rejected as a planet does not have any support in research literature.

Background:
- When Pluto was discovered in 1930, it was the ninth planet in the solar system based on an overestimation of its size. However, Pluto seemed to look out of place among the other larger planets after the discovery of swarms of ice dwarfs – icy rocks in the Kuiper Belt, at the very edge of the solar system billions of miles from the sun. Due to this, some astronomers suggested that Pluto could be just another Kuiper Belt Object (KBO) and not a planet.

How is a planet defined?
- In 2006, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) laid out some guidelines for a celestial body to be called a planet.
- The IAU said that there were three conditions that must be fulfilled for a celestial body to be termed as a planet: 1) it must be round; 2) it must orbit the sun; and 3) it must have “cleared the neighbourhood” of its orbit.

Why was Pluto rejected?
- According to the IAU’s definition, Pluto does not meet the criteria, as Neptune’s gravity influences it, and Pluto shares its orbit with frozen gases and objects in the Kuiper belt.

Pluto downgraded to “dwarf planet”:
- After several years of intense debate, astronomers finally reached a consensus in August 2006. They decided to demote Pluto in an extreme redefinition of planethood that seemed to favour scientific reasoning over historic and cultural influences. The decision meant that Pluto will not be a planet anymore.
- Pluto stood apart from the other discovered planets. Not only because of its small size, but because its elongated orbit was tilted with respect to other planets, and it goes insider Neptune’s orbit as part of its 248-year journey around the sun.
Key facts:

- Pluto has five known moons, the largest of which is Charon. Charon is about half the size of Pluto itself, making it the largest satellite relative to the planet it orbits in our solar system.
- Pluto orbits the Sun about 3.6 billion miles (5.8 billion km) away on average.
- A year on Pluto is 248 Earth years. A day on Pluto lasts 153 hours, or about 6 Earth days.
- Pluto has a thin atmosphere of nitrogen, methane and carbon monoxide. The atmosphere has a blue tint and distinct layers of haze.

Sources: the hindu.

11. TRANSITING EXOPLANET SURVEY SATELLITE

What to study?

- For Prelims: TESS- key features.
- For Mains: Scientific objectives and significance of the mission.

**Context:** Nasa’s Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite, better known as TESS, has discovered “super-Earth” and “hot Earth” planets in solar systems at least 49 light-years away, marking the satellite’s first discovery since its April launch.

Key findings:

- The two newly discovered planets are **Pi Mensae c**, a “super-earth” planet 60 light-years away orbiting its sun every 6.3 days and **LHS 3844 b**, a “hot-earth” planet 49 light-years away that orbits its sun every 11 hours.

About TESS mission:

- The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is a NASA mission that will look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth’s sky. It was led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with seed funding from Google.
- **Mission:** The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets. TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure of solar systems outside of our Earth, and provide insights into how our own solar system formed.
**Orbit:** TESS will occupy a never-before-used orbit high above Earth. The elliptical orbit, called P/2, is exactly half of the moon’s orbital period; this means that TESS will orbit Earth every 13.7 days. Its closest point to Earth (67,000 miles or 108,000 kilometers) is about triple the distance of geosynchronous orbit, where most communications satellites operate.

**How it works?** It will use transit method to detect exoplanets. It watches distant stars for small dips in brightness, which can indicate that planet has passed in front of them. Repeated dips will indicate planet passing in front of its star. This data has to be validated by repeated observations and verified by scientists.

**Significance of the mission:**

- TESS is designed to build on the work of its predecessor, the Kepler space telescope, which discovered the bulk of some 3,700 exoplanets documented during the past 20 years and is running out of fuel.
- Nasa expects to pinpoint thousands more previously unknown worlds, perhaps hundreds of them Earth-sized or “super-Earth” sized – no larger than twice as big as our home planet.
- Those are believed the most likely to feature rocky surfaces or oceans and are thus considered the best candidates for life to evolve. Scientists have said they hope TESS will ultimately help catalog at least 100 more rocky exoplanets for further study in what has become one of astronomy’s newest fields of exploration.

**Sources:** toi.

### 12. HAYABUSA 2

**What to study?**

- For Prelims and Mains: Objectives and significance of the mission, Asteroid Ryugu.
- **Context:** Hayabusa2, a Japanese space probe has released a pair of exploring rovers towards an egg-shaped asteroid- the Ryugu asteroid, to collect mineral samples that may shed light on the origin of the solar system.

**The mission:**

- If the mission is successful, the rovers will conduct the world’s first moving, robotic observation of an asteroid surface.
- Taking advantage of the asteroid’s low gravity, they will jump around on the surface — soaring as high as 15 metres and staying in the air for as long as 15 minutes — to survey the asteroid’s physical features with cameras and sensors.
About Hayabusa 2:
- Hayabusa 2 is an unmanned explorer. It was launched in 2014 aboard Japan’s main H-IIA rocket from Tanegashima Space Centre for its six-year mission to bring back mineral samples from the asteroid.
- The probe will also release a French-German landing vehicle named Mobile Asteroid Surface Scout (MASCOT) for surface observation.
- Hayabusa2, about the size of a large fridge and equipped with solar panels, is the successor to JAXA’s first asteroid explorer, Hayabusa — Japanese for falcon.
- If all goes well, soil samples will be returned to Earth in late 2020.

13. REMOVEDEBRIS

What to study?
- For Prelims: RemoveDebris.
- For Mains: Space junk menace - threats and missions in this regard.
- **Context:** RemoveDebris system has successfully completed its capture test.

Background:
- Back in June, the RemoveDEBRIS system was deployed from the International Space Station. On September 16th, the group began to proceed with in-space testing.
- Operating over 186 miles (300 km) above the Earth, the RemoveDEBRIS system set out to capture a tiny satellite known as a CubeSat. With a net shooting off at around 44 MPH (20 meters per second) and a vision based navigation including cameras and LiDAR, the net was able to quickly capture the runaway CubeSat.

About RemoveDebris mission:
- RemoveDebris is an EU (European Union) research project to develop and fly a low cost in-orbit demonstrator mission that aims to de-risk and verify technologies needed for future ADR (Active Debris Removal) missions.
- RemoveDebris is aimed at performing key ADR technology demonstrations (e.g., capture, deorbiting) representative of an operational scenario during a low-cost mission using novel key technologies for ADR. The project is based on and aimed at contributing to global/European ADR roadmaps.

How it works?
- A microsatellite called here RemoveSAT, will release, capture and deorbit two space debris targets, called DebrisSats, in sequence using various rendezvous, capture and deorbiting technologies thus demonstrating in orbit, key ADR technologies for future missions in what promises to be the first ADR technology mission internationally.

Background:
- Space junk is an ever-growing problem with more than 7,500 tonnes of redundant hardware now thought to be circling the Earth. Ranging from old rocket bodies and defunct spacecraft through to screws and even flecks of paint – this material poses a collision hazard to operational missions.
- The rising population of space debris increases the potential danger to all space vehicles, but especially to the International Space Station (ISS), space shuttles, satellites and other spacecraft.

14. NASA’S MAVEN SPACECRAFT

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Maven mission- objectives, significance and achievements.
- **Context:** NASA’s MAVEN spacecraft has beamed back a selfie to mark its four years orbiting Mars and studying the upper atmosphere of the red planet.
CURRENT EVENTS

- **MAVEN completed its primary mission in November 2015** and has been operating in an extended mission since that time, continuing its investigation of Mars’ upper atmosphere and exploring additional opportunities for science that the new relay orbit will bring.

**Accomplishments:**
- The MAVEN mission was launched on November 18, 2013, and went into orbit around Mars on September 21, 2014.
- During its time at Mars, the spacecraft has acquired compelling evidence that the loss of atmosphere to space has been a major driver of climate change on Mars.
- It also discovered two new types of Martian auroras — diffuse aurora and proton aurora. Neither type has a direct connection to the local or global magnetic field or to magnetic cusps, as auroras do on Earth.
- MAVEN has demonstrated that the majority of the carbon dioxide (CO2) on the planet has been lost to space and that there is not enough left to terraform the planet by warming it, even if the CO2 could be released and put back into the atmosphere.

**About MAVEN mission:**
- Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution (MAVEN) mission was developed by NASA to study the Martian atmosphere while orbiting Mars. MAVEN was launched aboard an Atlas V launch vehicle.
- Mission goals include determining how the planet’s atmosphere and water, presumed to have once been substantial, were lost over time.

**MAVEN mission has four primary scientific objectives:**
- Determine the role that loss of volatiles to space from the Martian atmosphere has played through time.
- Determine the current state of the upper atmosphere, ionosphere, and interactions with the solar wind.
- Determine the current rates of escape of neutral gases and ions to space and the processes controlling them.
- Determine the ratios of stable isotopes in the Martian atmosphere.

Sources: toi.

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15. **AGMARK ONLINE SYSTEM**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims and Mains: Key features of Agmark and Agmark online system.
- **Context:** The government has launched an online platform for processing applications related to quality certification mark ‘Agmark’ for agricultural products.

**Key facts:**
- It is being implemented across the country to conduct quality control functions.
- It will be available 24×7.
- It will make process of application simple, quick, transparent.
- Through this online system, certificate of authorisation (domestic), permission of laboratories (domestic), permission of printing press and services related to laboratory information management system will be provided online.

**Significance:**
- The online system will make processes easy, reliable and cost effective. It also has provisions for online receipt of fees from the applicants as payments can be received in digital mode through bharatkosh.gov.in website.

**What is Agmark?**
- Agmark is certification mark that assures conformity to set of standards approved by Government agency Directorate of Marketing and Inspection.
- It is legally enforced by Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act of 1937 (and amended in 1986).
- The present AGMARK standards cover quality guidelines for 205 different commodities spanning variety of cereals, pulses, vegetable oils, essential oils, fruits & vegetables, and semi-processed products like vermicelli.

Sources: pib.
16. FIGHTING FAKE DRUGS THROUGH BLOCKCHAIN

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Blockchain- meaning, operation, significance, concerns and potential applications.
- Context: NITI Aayog has signed an agreement with cloud services provider Oracle, hospital chain Apollo Hospitals, and pharmaceutical manufacturer Strides Pharma Sciences to curb the distribution of fake drugs using new technologies like blockchain.

Use of technology and its significance:

- The partners will pilot a real drug supply chain using blockchain decentralized ledger and IoT software. By piloting a real drug supply chain using blockchain and IoT software, they can support governments and healthcare experts to quickly detect fake drugs. These will aid authorities to enforce penalties on wrongdoers with easy, proof-based data.

How it works?

- Oracle’s blockchain software permanently registers a drug’s record in the manufacturer’s drug supply chain (serial number, labelling, scanning), leaving no scope for record tampering.
- At every point of hand change, it records the drug’s movement — from manufacturer to logistics, from stockist to hospital, or from pharmacy to consumer. In case of a fake drug, the software will detect irregularity and notify the concerned nodal point.

Background:

- The Indian pharmaceutical industry is the third largest in the world in volume, accounting for 10% of the world’s production.
- However, a recent report by World Health Organisation estimates 20% of all drugs sold in India are fake. Also, as the largest producer of generic drugs in the world, India is reported to be the source of 35% of all counterfeit drugs sold worldwide.

What are Blockchains?

- Blockchains are a new data structure that is secure, cryptography-based, and distributed across a network. The technology supports cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, and the transfer of any data or digital asset.
- Spearheaded by Bitcoin, blockchains achieve consensus among distributed nodes, allowing the transfer of digital goods without the need for centralized authorisation of transactions.
- The present blockchain ecosystem is like the early Internet, a permission less innovation environment in which email, the World Wide Web, Napster, Skype, and Uber were built.

Sources: pib.

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Paper 3 Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. CONSERVATION OF WESTERN GHATS

What to study?

- For Prelims: Western Ghats- Key geographical and environmental facts.
- For Mains: Issues related to the conservation of the region, overview of Gadil and Kasturirangan committee reports.
- Context: The six Western Ghats States, including Kerala, have been restrained by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) from giving environmental clearance to activities that may adversely impact the eco-sensitive areas of the mountain ranges.

Important directions issued by the NGT:

- The extent of Eco-Sensitive Zones of Western Ghats, which was notified by the Central government earlier, should not be reduced in view of the recent floods in Kerala.
- Any alteration in the draft notification of zones may seriously affect the environment, especially in view of recent incidents in Kerala.
Background:

- The Western Ghats Ecological Expert Panel had earlier proposed “much larger areas for being included in the eco-sensitive zone” though the Kasturirangan-led High Level Working Group, also appointed by the MoEF to look into the WGEFP report, had reduced it.
- The Ministry had accepted the Kasturirangan report and issued the draft notifications on ecologically sensitive zones.

Need of the hour:

- Western Ghats region is under serious stress. The region is one of the richest biodiversity areas which needed to be conserved.

Why was the Gadgil Committee set up?

- Environment Ministry set up the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel under Gadgil.
- The panel was asked to make an assessment of the ecology and biodiversity of the Western Ghats and suggest measures to conserve, protect and rejuvenate the entire range that stretches to over 1500 km along the coast, with its footprints in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

What did the Gadgil Committee say?

- It defined the boundaries of the Western Ghats for the purposes of ecological management.
- It proposed that this entire area be designated as ecologically sensitive area (ESA). Within this area, smaller regions were to be identified as ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ) I, II or III based on their existing condition and nature of threat.
- It proposed to divide the area into about 2,200 grids, of which 75 per cent would fall under ESZ I or II or under already existing protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries or national parks.
- The committee proposed a Western Ghats Ecology Authority to regulate these activities in the area.

Important recommendations of Madhav Gadgil Committee:

- Ban on the cultivation of genetically modified in the entire area.
- Plastic bags to be phased out in three years.
- No new special economic zones or hill stations to be allowed.
- Ban on conversion of public lands to private lands, and on diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes in ESZ I and II.
- No new mining licences in ESZ I and II area.
- No new dams, thermal power plants or large-scale wind power projects in ESZ I.
- No new polluting industries in ESZ I and ESZ II areas.
- No new railway lines or major roads in ESZ I and II areas.
- Strict regulation of tourism.
- Cumulative impact assessment for all new projects like dams, mines, tourism, housing.

Why was Kasturirangan committee to set up?

- None of the six concerned states agreed with the recommendations of the Gadgil Committee, which submitted its report in August 2011.
- In August 2012, then Environment Minister constituted a High-Level Working Group on Western Ghats under Kasturirangan to “examine” the Gadgil Committee report in a “holistic and multidisciplinary fashion in the light of responses received” from states, central ministries and others.
- Its report revealed that of the nearly 1,750 responses it had examined, 81% were not in favour of the Gadgil recommendations. In particular, Kerala had objected to the proposed ban on sand mining and quarrying, restrictions on transport infrastructure and wind energy projects, embargos on hydroelectric projects, and inter-basin transfer of river waters, and also the complete ban on new polluting industries.

Way ahead:

- Kerala flood is a lesson worth of learning for India’s disaster management system. India, having more than 7500 km of coastline, should have a strong disaster early warning and management system.
- Cooperation between the states can create an expert and integrated national structure, to manage any kind of natural disaster.

Sources: the hindu.
2. PLAN TO SAVE HIMALAYAN SPRINGS

What to study?

- **For Prelims**: What are springs and why are they important?
- **For Mains**: Threats to Himalayan Springs and efforts to save them.
- **Context**: A NITI Aayog constituted group of experts has urged the government to set up a dedicated mission to salvage and revive spring water systems in the country’s Himalayan States.
- In this context, it has released a report titled *Inventory and Revival of Springs in the Himalayas for Water Security.*

Significance of spring water systems for the region:

- Himalayan spring water systems are important as a source of water for both drinking and irrigation for the region’s inhabitants. Spanning States across the country’s north and northeast and home to about 50 million people, the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) has been heavily reliant on these natural groundwater sources.
- Also, with almost 64% of the cultivable area in the Himalayas fed by natural springs, they are often the only source of irrigation in the region.

Concerns:

- Almost half of the perennial springs have already dried up or have become seasonal and tens of thousands of villages are currently facing acute water shortage for drinking and other domestic purposes.
- Almost 60% of low-discharge springs that provided water to small habitations in the Himalayan region have reported clear decline during the last couple of decades.
- The extent of the crisis plaguing the mountainous region was recently evident when more than half a dozen districts of Himachal Pradesh and the State capital Shimla faced a severe drinking water crisis this May after major water sources either went fully or partially dry.

Threats:

- These water sources today are under increasing threat from the urbanisation caused by a constant push for development and climate change.
- There are also multiple sources of pollution in springs and these were due to both geogenic, or ‘natural’ causes and anthropogenic, or man-made, ones.
- Microbial content, sulphates and nitrates were primarily because of anthropogenic reasons and contamination from fluoride, arsenic and iron was mainly derived from geogenic sources.

Distribution of springs:

- Meghalaya with 3,810 villages with springs has the highest number of these water sources in the Eastern Himalayan States.
  - **Sikkim has the greatest density** with 94% of its villages having a spring.
  - In the Western Himalayas, Jammu & Kashmir had both the highest number of villages with springs at 3,313 and the greatest density of 50.6%.

What needs to be done?

- A multidisciplinary, collaborative approach of managing springs that will involve building upon the existing body of work on spring water management is needed. The programme could be designed on the concept of an action-research programme as part of a hydrogeology-based, community-support system on spring water management.

A long-term plan:

- The task force moots an 8-year programme to overhaul spring water management. This includes: preparing a digital atlas of the country’s springsheds, training ‘para-hydrogeologists’ who could lead grassroots conservation and introduction of a ‘Spring Health Card.’

Sources: the hindu.
3. INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITATS

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the umbrella scheme.
- **Context:** The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved continuation of the *Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH)* beyond the 12th Plan period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

About Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats:

- **The Scheme consists of Centrally Sponsored Scheme** of Project Tiger (CSS-PT), Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-DWH) and Project Elephant (CSS-PE).
- The **implementation of the schemes** would be done through the respective States in designated Tiger Reserves, Protected Areas and Elephant Reserves.
- The **activities covered** under the scheme include the staff development and capacity building, wildlife research and evaluation, anti-poaching activities, wildlife veterinary care, addressing man-animal conflicts and promoting eco-tourism.
- **Financial assistance is also provided** to States for relocation of communities from within protected areas to other areas.

The scheme has following three components:

- Support to Protected Areas (National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves).
- Protection of Wildlife Outside Protected Areas.
- Recovery programmes for saving critically endangered species and habitats.

Significance and benefits of the scheme:

- A total of 18 tiger range States, distributed in five landscapes of the country would be benefitted under the Project Tiger scheme. Similarly, for other two schemes, the coverage is entire country in case of Development of Wildlife Habitats (DWH) and 23 elephant range States for Project Elephant. It would foster wildlife conservation in general with specific inputs for tiger in Project Tiger area and elephant in Project Elephant area.
- Besides immense environmental benefits and effective implementation of tiger conservation inputs in and around tiger reserves under Project Tiger, wildlife conservation inputs in Protected Areas & nearby areas under Development of Wildlife Habitats and Elephant conservation inputs in Project Elephant areas, the schemes would result in overall strengthening/ consolidation of tiger, elephant and wildlife conservation in the country.
- The schemes would address the human wildlife conflict effectively. Besides, the communities opting for voluntary relocation from the Core/Critical Tiger Habitat (6900 families) would be benefitted under Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger (CSS-PT) and 800 families under Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Development of Wildlife Habitat.
- These schemes would generate employment opportunities resulting in economic upliftment of people in and around tiger reserves/ Protected Areas besides leading to reduction in natural resource dependency with substitution by clean energy use. People living in vicinity would also get indirect benefits. Local populace would get opportunities to serve as guides, driver, hospitality personnel and in other ancillary jobs. These schemes would foster imparting various skills towards making people self-dependent through various eco-development projects, thereby enabling them to go for self-employment.
- These schemes would result in resource generation through tourist visits, thereby fostering in securing tiger source areas and other areas important for wildlife conservation, besides being helpful in sustaining life support systems as well as ensuring the food, water and livelihood security.

Sources: pib.
4. NEW GANGA CLEAN-UP LAW

What to study?

- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of the plan and the need for stringent measures to save Ganga.
- **Context:** With an aim to clean the river Ganga, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation has prepared a draft bill. The draft bill has provisions for several stringent measures.

Highlights of the Draft Bill:

- **Constitution of an armed Ganga Protection Corps (GPC):** The draft seeks to constitute GPC whose personnel will have the authority to arrest those who pollute the river. The offenders may face a prison term of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh. GPC will follow Code of Criminal Procedure.
- **Its personnel** will be provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs and will be deployed by National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority.
- The draft bill lays down **provision for a National Ganga Council and a National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority** to enforce the law and protect the river which flows over 2500 km.
- **Among the cognizable offences**, there are “Construction activities causing obstruction in the river; withdrawal of ground water for industrial or commercial consumption from the land fronting the river and its tributaries; commercial fishing or aquaculture in the river and its tributaries; discharging untreated or treated sewage into the river”.
- **No person or municipal authority will establish or take any steps to set up any industrial or residential or commercial premises or structure** which may result in discharge of any sewage or trade effluent into the Ganga, otherwise he may face a five-year prison term or a fine of Rs 50,000 per day or both.

Background:

- In July 2016, a committee was constituted under retired judge of the Allahabad High Court Justice Girdhar Malviya who had submitted a draft Bill last year named The National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill, 2017.
- Subsequently, a four-member committee was set up by the Ministry to examine that and the Ministry has circulated a Cabinet note which includes a revised version of that draft Bill.

Sources: IE.

5. EIGHT AVIAN SPECIES DECLARED “EXTINCT” IN NEW STUDY

- **Scientists have declared eight species of birds to be extinct** in what are being seen as the first avian extinctions of the 21st century.
- **The study was conducted by non-profit “BirdLife International”**. It assessed 51 species judged “critically endangered” on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) “Red List” by using a new statistical method.

Key facts:

- The species gone extinct include Spix’s macaw, the Alagoas foliage-gleaner, the cryptic treehunter, the Pernambuco pygmy-owl, the poo-ul, or black-faced honeycreeper and the glaucous macaw.
- Five of these new extinctions have occurred in South America and have been attributed by scientists to deforestation. Four out of the eight species declared extinct belong to Brazil.

**About Birdlife International:**

- BirdLife International (formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation) is a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with
people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. It is the world’s largest partnership of
conservation organisations, with over 120 partner organisations.
➢ BirdLife International publishes a quarterly magazine, World Birdwatch, which contains recent news and
authoritative articles about birds, their habitats, and their conservation around the world.
➢ BirdLife International is the official Red List authority for birds, for the International Union for
Conservation of Nature.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs):
• The IBAs are “places of international significance for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity” and are
“distinct areas amenable to practical conservation action,” according to BirdLife International.
• Declaring a site as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area does not ensure that the site gets legal protection
or becomes inaccessible to people. Instead BirdLife International encourages national and State governments
to recognise the areas as sites of vital importance for conservation of wildlife and to empower local
community-based conservation initiatives.

Sources: toi.

6. BONNETHEAD SHARK

• What is it? It is the first known omnivorous shark species identified by scientists recently.

Key facts:
• 60% of its diet consists of seagrass. The species graze upon
  seagrass, in addition to eating bony fish, crabs, snails and shrimp.
• The bonnethead shark is abundant in the shallow waters of the
  Western Atlantic, and the Gulf of Mexico.
• Though small by shark standards, adult females — the larger of the
  sexes — can still reach an impressive five feet long.
• Lacking the kind of teeth best suited for mastication, the shark may
  rely on strong stomach acids to weaken the plants’ cells so the enzymes can have their digestive effects.

7. SNOW LEOPARD

• Officials from Himachal State Wildlife Department have spotted snow leopard in Lippa-Asra wildlife sanctuary
  in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. This finding indicates that snow leopards are inhabiting new areas.

Key facts:
1. They are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN
   Red List of Threatened Species.
2. They inhabit alpine and subalpine zones at
   elevations from 3,000 to 4,500 m (9,800 to
   14,800 ft). In the northern range countries,
   they also occur at lower elevations.
3. The snow leopard is the state animal of
   Uttarakhand and the National Heritage
   Animal of Pakistan.
4. Their habitat extends through twelve
   countries: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India,
   Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal,
   Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
   China contains as much as 60% of all snow
   leopard habitat areas.
5. In India, their geographical range encompasses a large part of the western Himalayas including the states of
   Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern
   Himalayas.
6. The snow leopard, like all big cats, is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), which makes trading of animal body parts (i.e., fur, bones and meat) illegal in signatory countries. It is also protected by several national laws in its range countries.
7. Global Snow Leopard Forum, 2013: 12 countries encompassing the snow leopard’s range (Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).
8. Bishkek Declaration: To protect the species and its environment.
9. Global Snow Leopard and Eco-system Protection Programme: It is a joint initiative of range country governments, international agencies, civil society, and the private sector. Goal — secure the long-term survival of the snow leopard in its natural ecosystem.

8. PONDICHERRY SHARK

- **Context:** Researchers recently spotted ‘Pondicherry shark’, an endangered species protected under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, in the East Godavari River Estuarine Ecosystem region.

**Key facts:**
- Scientifically known as Carcharhinus hemiodon, it belongs to the Carcharhinidae family with a growth of 3.3 feet.
- Known as ‘Pala Sora’ in the local parlance, the Pondicherry Shark is on the verge of extinction even according to the conventional fishermen.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has listed the Pondicherry shark as Critically Endangered.
- The shark is among the 25 “most wanted lost” species that are the focus of Global Wildlife Conservation’s “Search for Lost Species” initiative.

9. ETHANOL BLENDED PETROL PROGRAMME

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Ethanol blended petrol programme, National Policy on Bio-fuels.
- For Mains: Ethanol blending- significance, potential, challenges and solutions.

- **Context:** Cabinet approves on Fixation/Revision of ethanol price derived from B heavy molasses / partial sugarcane juice and 100% sugarcane juice under Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme for Ethanol Supply Year 2018-19.

**Impact:**
- The decision will serve multiple purposes of reducing excess sugar in the country, increasing liquidity with the sugar mills for settling cane farmer’s dues and making higher ethanol available for Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme.
- All distilleries will be able to take benefit of the scheme and large number of them are expected to supply ethanol for the EBP programme. Remunerative price to ethanol suppliers will help in reduction of cane farmer’s arrears, in the process contributing to minimizing difficulty of sugarcane farmers.
CURRENT EVENTS

- Ethanol availability for EBP Programme is expected to increase significantly due to higher price being offered for procurement of ethanol from B heavy molasses / partial sugarcane juice and 100% sugarcane juice for first time.
- Increased ethanol blending in petrol has many benefits including reduction in import dependency, support to agricultural sector, more environmental friendly fuel, lesser pollution and additional income to farmers.

Benefits of ethanol blending:

- Increased ethanol blending in petrol has many benefits including reduction in import dependency, support to agricultural sector, more environmental friendly fuel, lesser pollution and additional income to farmers.

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme:

- It was launched by the Government in 2003 on pilot basis which has been subsequently extended to the Notified 21 States and 4 Union Territories to promote the use of alternative and environmental friendly fuels.
- It aims at blending ethanol with petrol, thereby bringing it under the category of biofuels and saving millions of dollars by cutting fuel imports.
- Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme is being implemented by the Ministry or Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).
- This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependency for energy requirements and give boost to agriculture sector.

Concerns and challenges:

- There has been a consistent shortfall in supply of ethanol in the past, mainly on account of the cyclical nature of the sugarcane harvests in the country. There is “lack of an integrated approach in the EBP across its value chain.”

Way ahead:

- The National Policy on Bio-fuels has set a target of 20% blending of biofuels, both for bio-diesel and bio-ethanol. This will require an integrated approach in the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP). The time is ripe for a cogent and consistent policy and administrative framework in the program implementation for the success of EBP.

Sources: pib.

10. CHILLER STAR LABELLING PROGRAM

What to study?

- For Prelims: What are Chillers, salient features of the programme.
- For Mains: Significance of the programme and the importance of energy efficiency.

Context: Ministry of Power, Government of India launched Chiller Star Labelling Program, an ambitious program to encourage the deployment of Energy Efficient chiller systems in the country.

Highlights:

- The Chiller Star Labelling Program has been formulated by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).
- The program envisages providing star rating in terms of its energy performance. Initially, the program is launched on voluntary basis and will be valid upto 31st December 2020.
- This initiative will promote advancement technology for central HVAC (Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems and will also facilitate energy efficient solutions for the large commercial and industrial applications.

What are Chillers?

- Chillers are used extensively for space conditioning of buildings and for industrial process cooling applications. The size of Indian chiller market which stood at 1 Million Tonne per year at 2017, is projected to grow at a CAGR of 3.6% fuelled by a growth in the retail, hospitality and infrastructure projects.
- Chillers, being energy intensive system, contribute more than 40% of the total energy consumption in commercial buildings. Therefore, it is important to optimize energy performance of chillers and create awareness amongst the end users to adopt transition towards energy efficient chillers.

Sources: pib.
11. NAHARGARH BIOLOGICAL PARK

Rajasthan’s first lion safari has been inaugurated at Nahargarh Biological Park.

- The park is located on Delhi-Jaipur National Highway in the Aravalli foothills, nearly 12 kilometers from state capital Jaipur.
- Lions in this park were brought from Junagarh, Gujarat under an exchange programme.
- The park will serve for breeding lions and also centre of attraction for tourists. It will provide new habitat to lions and also add tourism venue to the Pink City.

12. CPCB REPORT ON RIVER POLLUTION

What to study?
- For Prelims: Key facts on CPCB.
- For Mains: River pollution- concerns, challenges and ways to address them.
- Context: The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has released a report on the extent of pollution in rivers in India.

Background:
- Based on the recommendations of the National Green Tribunal, the CPCB last month apprised the States of the extent of pollution in their rivers.

Key findings:
- **Increase in numbers:** The number of polluted stretches of the country’s rivers has increased to 351 from 302 two years ago, and the number of critically polluted stretches — where water quality indicators are the poorest — has gone up to 45 from 34.
- Several of the river’s stretches — in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — are actually far less polluted than many rivers in Maharashtra, Assam and Gujarat. **These three States account for 117 of the 351 polluted river stretches.**
- **The most significant stretches of pollution** highlighted by the CPCB assessment include the **Mithi river** — from Powai to Dharavi — with a BOD (Biochemical Oxygen Demand) of 250 mg/l; the Godavari — from Someshwar to Rahed — with a BOD of 5.0-80 mg/l; the Sabarmati — Kheroj to Vautha — with a BOD of 4.0-147 mg/l; and the Hindon — Saharanpur to Ghaziabad — with a BOD of 48-120 mg/l.

Background:
- The CPCB, since the 1990s, has a programme to monitor the quality of rivers primarily by measuring BOD, which is a proxy for organic pollution — the higher it is, the worse the river.
- The health of a river and the efficacy of water treatment measures by the States and municipal bodies are classified depending on BOD, with a BOD greater than or equal to 30 mg/l termed ‘priority 1,’ while that between 3.1-6 mg/l is ‘priority 5.’
- The CPCB considers a BOD less than 3 mg/l an indicator of a healthy river.

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB):
- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), statutory organisation, was constituted in September, 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.
- Further, CPCB was entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

Functions:
- To promote cleanliness of streams and wells in different areas of the States by prevention, control and abatement of water pollution.
- To improve the quality of air and to prevent, control or abate air pollution in the country.
CURRENT EVENTS

Biochemical oxygen demand (BOD):
- Biochemical oxygen demand is the amount of oxygen required for microbial metabolism of organic compounds in water.
- BOD value is most commonly expressed in milligrams of oxygen consumed per litre of sample during 5 days of incubation at 20 °C.
- BOD can be used as a gauge of the effectiveness of wastewater treatment plants.

Sources: the hindu.

13. INDIA COOLING ACTION PLAN (ICAP)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Highlights and significance of ICAP.
- **Context:** MoEFCC has released the draft India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP). ICAP has been prepared by the ministry after extensive deliberations and multi-stakeholders engagement in public domain for receiving comments.

Significance:
- **India is the first country in world to develop such a document (ICAP),** which addresses cooling requirement across sectors and lists out actions which can help reduce the cooling demand.
- The overarching goal is to provide sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all while securing environmental and socio-economic benefits for the society.

The goals emerging from the suggested interventions stated in ICAP are:
- Reduction of cooling demand across sectors by 20% to 25 % by year 2037-38.
- Reduction of refrigerant demand by 25% to 30% by year 2037-38.
- Reduction of cooling energy requirements by 25% to 40% by year 2037-38.
- Training and certification of 100,000 servicing sector technicians by the year 2022-23, in synergy with Skill India Mission.

The broad objectives of the India Cooling Action Plan include:
- Assessment of cooling requirements across sectors in next 20 years and the associated refrigerant demand and energy use.
- Map the technologies available to cater the cooling requirement including passive interventions, refrigerant-based technologies and alternative technologies such as not-in-kind technologies.
- Suggest interventions in each sector to provide for sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all.
- Focus on skilling of RAC service technicians.
- Develop an R&D innovation ecosystem for indigenous development of alternative technologies.

Sources: pib.

14. ECO-SENSITIVE AREA (ESA)

What to study?
- For Prelims: Meaning of ESA, highlights of Kasturirangan and Gadgil report.
- For Mains: ESA- concerns, significance and issues associated.
- **Context:** The centre will soon issue a fresh draft notification declaring Western Ghats as an eco-sensitive area (ESA) with all but one of the six affected states on board.
- Karnataka is set to reject the notification as “it will adversely affect the state’s economy.” Karnataka is not in favour of declaring the Western Ghats as an ESA.

What’s the issue?
- A draft notification regarding ecologically sensitive areas, issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF), has been delayed for over a year due to on-going negotiations between the Centre
and the states. The initial draft, in March 2014, which was to be finalised in 545 days or by September 2015, has been repeatedly pushed.

- The notice earmarked 60,000 square kilometres, or 37 per cent of the Ghats, as ecologically sensitive. However, it was protested by the states, especially Kerala, as ESAs restrict developmental activity. The Centre has since decided to accept recommendations from each state government.

What are ESAs?

- An ecologically sensitive area is one that is protected by the government given the sheer number of species, plants and animals endemic to the region. According to the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the government can prohibit industrial operations such as mining, sand quarrying and building thermal power plants in sensitive areas.

  ✓ **The definition offered by the MoEF**: “An ecological sensitive area is a bio-climatic unit (as demarcated by entire landscapes) in the Western Ghats wherein human impacts have locally caused irreversible changes in the structure of biological communities (as evident in number/ composition of species and their relative abundances) and their natural habitats.”

  ✓ **To categorise an area as ecologically sensitive**, the government looks at topography, climate and rainfall, land use and land cover, roads and settlements, human population, biodiversity corridors and data of plants and animal species.

**DEFINITION:**

Eco sensitive areas are **ecologically and economically important**, but vulnerable even to mild disturbances, and hence demand careful management. These areas are critical to the maintenance of productive and diverse plant and wildlife populations.

**FEATURES OF ECO SENSITIVE AREAS:**

- Biologically and ecologically rich, valuable or unique
- Largely irreplaceable if destroyed
- High value to human societies
- Maintain the ecological stability of the area
- Conserves biological diversity

**CONTENTS OF ESA:**

- Sacred forests protecting origins of rivers (e.g. Bhimashankar in Pune District)
- Important breeding habitats (e.g. Kokkre – Bellur Pelicanary in Mandya District, Karnataka)

The Kasturirangan committee report:

- The MoEF notification is based on findings of a High-Level Working Group, also known as the Kasturirangan committee. The government-appointed committee had said that the natural landscape of the Ghats constitutes only 41 per cent, or which 90 percent or 60,000 square kilometres were identified as ecologically sensitive.
- The committee suggested phasing out current mining projects within five years, or when mining leases were about to expire. It recommended that infrastructure and development projects be subject to environmental clearance, and that villages in ESA be involved in decision making regarding future projects.
- The notification was deemed too environmentally friendly by stakeholder states.

Significance of Western Ghats:

- The Western Ghats was included as a ‘World Natural Heritage Site’ by UNESCO in 2012. According to the organisation, the Ghats, which are older than the Himalayas, are home to at least 325 globally threatened flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish species. It has been recognised as one of the world’s eight ‘hottest hotspots’ of biological diversity.
15. NEELAKURINJI PLANTS

- **Context**: Tamil Nadu government has announced a novel scheme for the protection of the exotic Neela kurinji (Strobilanthes kunthianus) plants that flower only once in 12 years.

**Neelakurinji**:
- Kurinji or Neelakurinji (Strobilanthes kunthianus) is a shrub that is found in the shola forests of the Western Ghats in South India.
- Nilgiri Hills, which literally means the blue mountains, got their name from the purplish blue flowers of Neelakurinji that blossoms only once in 12 years.
- Some Kurinji flowers bloom once every seven years, and then die. Their seeds subsequently sprout and continue the cycle of life and death.
- The Paliyan tribal people living in Tamil Nadu used it as a reference to calculate their age.

16. WORLD WILDLIFE FOUNDATION’S (WWF) ‘TX2’ PROGRAMME

**What to study?**
- For Prelims and Mains: Key highlights and significance of the Tx2 programme.
- **Context**: Nepal is set to become the first country in the world to double its tiger population as part of the World Wildlife Foundation’s (WWF) ‘Tx2’ programme which aims to double the number of tigers all over the world.
- The government of Nepal recently announced that there are now an estimated 235 wild tigers in the nation, nearly double the number from around 121 in 2009.

**Significance:**
- The success of Nepal in doubling tiger numbers has been largely attributed to the country’s political commitment and the adoption of innovative tools and approaches towards tiger conservation.
- **Nepal was the first country to achieve global standards in managing tiger conservation areas**, an accreditation scheme governed by the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CA|TS).

**About ‘Tx2’ programme:**
- The World Wildlife Foundation had launched its ambitious TX2 programme at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010. The programme aims to double the world tiger population by 2022, which is the year of the tiger in the Chinese calendar.

**WHAT IS WWF’S ROLE?**
- WWF remains a major driving force behind Tx2. It aims at:
  - Driving political momentum to ensure tigers remain a top priority for world leaders.
  - Professionalising wildlife protection by training rangers, developing conservation standards (CA|TS) and technology (SMART) to achieve Zero Poaching.
  - Tackling the illegal wildlife trade through our partnership with TRAFFIC.
  - Focusing efforts in key tiger landscapes.
  - Ensuring there is space for both tigers and people in the future.

**WHO ARE THE TIGER RANGE COUNTRIES?**
- Wild tigers are found in a variety of habitats across Asia. There are currently 13 tiger range countries; Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Viet Nam.
1. IOWAVE18

- **Context:** Indian Ocean Wave Exercise 2018 (IOWave18) is being held in the Indian Ocean.

**Key facts:**
- India along with 23 other nations is participating in this major Indian ocean-wide tsunami mock drill which involves evacuation of thousands of people from coastal areas in over half a dozen coastal states.
- This tsunami warning exercise is being *organised by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.* It was the IOC that coordinated the setting up of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) in the aftermath of December 2004 tsunami.

**Objective:**
- Besides testing the standard operating procedure (SOP) and communication links at all levels of the warning chain, a primary objective of IOWave18 exercise is to enhance tsunami preparedness at community level.
- The purpose of exercise is to increase tsunami preparedness, evaluate response capabilities in each state and improve coordination throughout the region.

**Significance:**
- Exercise IOWave18 will simulate Indian Ocean countries being put in a tsunami warning situation and require the respective National Tsunami Warning Centres and the Disaster Management Offices in each country to implement their Standard Operating Procedures.
- IOWave18 will also provide an opportunity for Member States to test the indicators of Indian Ocean Tsunami Ready (IOTR) programme in pilot communities. IOTR is a community performance-based programme that facilitates a structural and systematic approach in building tsunami preparedness.

**About the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC):**
- UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) promotes international cooperation and coordinates programmes in marine research, services, observation systems, hazard mitigation, and capacity development to understand and manage the resources of the ocean and coastal areas.
- The Commission aims to improve the governance, management, institutional capacity, and decision-making processes of its Member States with respect to marine resources and climate variability.
- IOC coordinates ocean observation and monitoring through the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) which aims to develop a unified network providing information on the oceans.
- IOC also coordinates and fosters the establishment of regional intergovernmental tsunami warning and mitigation systems in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in the North East Atlantic, Mediterranean and Caribbean seas.

Sources: the hindu.

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2. ‘SMART FENCE’ PILOT PROJECT

- **Context:** India’s first ‘smart fence’ pilot project has been launched along the India-Pakistan International Border in Ploura, Jammu and Kashmir.

**Key facts:**
- The pilot project involves deploying of laser-activated fences and technology-enabled barriers to plug vulnerable gaps along the frontiers.
- The smart fencing uses a number of devices for surveillance, communication and data storage.
CURRENT EVENTS

- The innovative system provides for round-the-clock surveillance on the border, even in different weather conditions be it dust storm, fog or rain.
- It also reportedly comprises automated surveillance technology and alarm detection systems.

Significance:
- The smart fence pilot project is expected to be a massive boon for monitoring security situations in border areas. It is a technological solution devised to make the security system at the borders more strong and effective.
- The system will virtually make it impossible for terrorists to infiltrate into the Indian side of the border.

Sources: the hindu.

3. WHAT CAUSED THE FLOODS IN KERALA?

What to study?
- For Mains: What caused floods in Kerala? Road ahead in disaster mitigation.
- Context: A recent study has found that a combination of four factors led to extreme flooding across Kerala this year. Union government had declared the Kerala floods a “calamity of severe nature”.

The four factors that led to the disaster:
- Above normal seasonal (May-August) rainfall: The summer monsoon rainfall in Kerala from May to August this year was 2,290 mm, which was 53% above normal. The average rainfall during the summer monsoon period (June-September) is about 1,619 mm. This makes 2018 Kerala’s third wettest year in the last 118 years (1901-2018); 1924 and 1961 were the wettest years with about 3,600 mm of annual rainfall.
- Extreme rainfall events occurring almost across the State during the season: Till August 21, the State witnessed few extreme rainfall events covering almost the entire State. These extreme rainfall events have very low probability of recurrence in any given year.
- Over 90% reservoir storage even before the onset of extreme rainfall events: Kerala received 1634.5 mm rainfall during the period May 1 to August 7, which is more than the average rainfall (1619.37 mm) during the summer monsoon period (June-September). As a result, six of the seven major reservoirs in the State had over 90% storage before August 8, well before Kerala received the unprecedented extreme rainfall events.
- Unprecedented extreme rainfall in the catchment areas of major reservoirs in the State: The catchment areas of major reservoirs in the State received extreme rainfall never before witnessed in the State. The role of other factors such as changes in how infrastructure has grown at the expense of vegetation and drainage remains to be studied.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Money laundering and associated issues.

1. ASIA/PACIFIC GROUP ON MONEY LAUNDERING

What to study?
- For Prelims: APG- objectives, composition and functions, FATF, grey list.
- For Mains: Performance of various countries including Pakistan, Money laundering- global concerns.
- Context: Almost three months after Pakistan was placed on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list for failing to curb terror funding, Pakistan’s recent action against terror financing, particularly on the “legal” front, was found to be “unsatisfactory”, according to a review by the Asia Pacific Policy Group (APPG).

Reasons for the poor performance:
- Not much has been achieved by Pakistan, especially on the legal side (like freezing of assets, attachment of funds, militant groups infrastructures etc).

What next?
- Another review for Pakistan will be held in December this year following which a final evaluation report will be prepared. For Pakistan, the first deadline is January 2019 failing which they may face more heat.
CURRENT EVENTS

- By then, Pakistan will have to publish updated lists of persons and entities proscribed under the Anti-Terrorism Act and the UN-designated entities.

About APG:
- It is the FATF-style regional body for the Asia-Pacific region.
- It is an inter-governmental organisation founded in 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Composition:
- The APG consists of 41 member jurisdictions and a number of observer jurisdictions and international/regional observer organisations.
- Under the APG’s Terms of Reference (updated 2012) membership is available for jurisdictions with a presence in the Asia-Pacific region who commit to the policy objectives of the organisation including undergoing a mutual evaluation (peer review) to determine the level of compliance of the member with the international standards against money laundering and terrorist financing.
- Observer status is available to any jurisdiction in the Asia-Pacific region interested in becoming a member or any other jurisdiction which supports the goals and work of the APG.
- International organisations which support the work of the APG may also join as supporting observers.

Role of members:
- Jurisdictions that join the APG, either as members or as observers, must commit to implement the international standards against money laundering, the financing of terrorism and proliferation financing (WMD), in particular the Recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- These standards were substantially updated in 2012 and are supplemented by a complex assessment methodology in 2013 which forms the benchmark for mutual evaluations.

The APG has five primary functions:
- Mutual evaluations: The APG assesses the levels of compliance by its member jurisdictions with the global AML/CFT standards through a mutual evaluation (peer review) programme;
- Technical assistance and training: The APG Secretariat coordinates bi-lateral and donor-agency technical assistance and training in the Asia/Pacific region for its member jurisdictions in order to improve compliance with the global standards;
- Typologies research: Research and analysis into money laundering and terrorist financing methods and trends is a key function of the APG to assist policy and law makers as well as law enforcement agencies and the general public to identify and respond to new and emerging trends, methods, risks and vulnerabilities;
- Global engagement: The APG contributes to international AML/CFT policy development and actively engages with the global network of FSRBs. The APG also participates in a number of FATF working groups and in its plenary meetings; and
- Private sector engagement: Private sector engagement is critical to the APG’s overall objectives. The APG actively engages with financial and non-financial institutions, NPOs, training centres and universities in the Asia-Pacific to better inform the general public and specialists about global issues relating to money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing.

Sources: toi.

Paper 3 Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

1. UMBRELLA SCHEME OF BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT (BIM)

What to study?
- For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of the scheme, challenges in border areas.
- Context: The Centre has approved ₹8,606 crore for 60 projects being implemented under the umbrella scheme of Border Infrastructure and Management (BIM) to meet special development needs of people living in those areas.
CURRENT EVENTS

Highlights of the scheme:

- The projects are being implemented in 17 states having the international borders with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The projects are implemented in 111 border districts to meet special development needs of border population with focus on people living within 50 kms of the international border.
- The schemes include construction of roads, schools, primary health centres, promotion of rural tourism, border tourism, promotion of sports activities, cleanliness mission, protection of heritage sites, supply of drinking water, community centres, connectivity, drainage, to enable sustainable living in border areas.
- Construction of helipads in remote and inaccessible hilly areas which do not have road connectivity, skill development training to farmers for the use of modern and scientific technique in farming, organic farming are some of the other areas where the projects are being implemented.

Key facts for Prelims:

- India shares borders with Pakistan (3,323 km), China (3,488 km), Nepal (1,751 km), Bhutan (699 km), Myanmar (1,643 km) and Bangladesh (4,096 km).

Sources: pib.
Facts for Prelims

1. PAKAL DUL AND LOWER KALNAI HYDROPOWER PROJECTS

- **Context:** India has invited Pakistani experts to visit the sites of its two hydropower projects on the Chenab river next month to address its concerns.

- **Pakal Dul:** The 1,000 megawatt Pakal Dul hydroelectric power project on Marusadar River, a tributary of Chenab River, in Jammu and Kashmir will provide 12% free power to the state. The project will not only be the largest hydroelectric power project in the state but also the first storage unit.

- **Lower Kalnai hydroelectric power plant project** involves the construction of a 48MW (2x24MW) hydroelectric power plant. It will include the construction of a dam, tunnel, powerhouse, and substations and installation of generators and transformers and the laying of transmission lines.

2. CHINA-MALDIVES FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE

- **Context:** China-Maldives Friendship Bridge has been officially opened for traffic.

- **Key facts:** The bridge is an iconic project of the Maldives and China in co-building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The 2-km bridge connects capital Male and neighboring Hulhule island where the Maldives’ main international airport is located.

- **Significance:** The bridge has made it possible for locals and tourists to transit between the two islands on land within five minutes. The China-Maldives Friendship Bridge has the power to unlock Malé’s economy, and position China as a leading investor in Maldives’ transport and trade for years to come.

3. EXERCISE KAKADU

- **Context:** Exercise Kakadu 2018 will be held in Australia. KAKADU 2018 is the 14th edition of the exercise.

Key facts:

- Exercise KAKADU, which started in 1993, is the premier multilateral regional maritime engagement exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and supported by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

- The exercise is held biennially in Darwin and the Northern Australian Exercise Areas (NAXA).

- Exercise KAKADU derives its name from Kakadu National Park, which is a protected area in the northern territory of Australia, 171 km south-east of Darwin.

- During the exercise, professional exchanges in harbour and diverse range of activities at sea, including complex surface, sub-surface and air operations would enable sharing of best practices and honing of operational skills.

4. MAGSAYSAY AWARD

- **Context:** Two Indians Bharat Vatwani and Sonam Wangchuk are among six who have been declared winners of 2018 Ramon Magsaysay Award.

About Ramon Magsaysay Award:

- It is Asia’s highest honour and is often regarded as the region’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

- It was established in 1957 by trustees of the New York City based Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Philippine government in the memory of Philippines’ third President Ramon Magsaysay.

- It is awarded annually to individuals or organizations from Asia region for their altruistic and philanthropic service.

- It carries Medallion bearing the likeness of the late President Ramon Magsaysay, cash prize and a certificate.
5. RAXAUL-KATHMANDU RAILWAY LINE

- **Context:** India and Nepal have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on preliminary engineering-cum-traffic survey of the proposed Raxaul-Kathmandu railway line.
- The MoU is the first step forward in the ambitious rail connectivity initiative between the two countries announced in April this year.
- India’s Konkan Railway has been asked to conduct a preliminary engineering-cum-traffic survey of the new rail line in consultation with the Nepalese government.

6. MARALAL CAMEL DERBY

- **What is it?** The Maralal Camel Derby is an annual event, held midyear just outside of Maralal town. This is Kenya’s best known and most prestigious camel race, attracting both local and international competitors. The event is a major draw for spectators as well as racers.

- **Why in News?** The 2018 edition of this race was held recently in Kenya.

7. FRANCE BANS SMARTPHONE USE IN SCHOOLS

- **Context:** France has banned the use of smartphones in schools.

**Details:**
- Lawmakers decided that students under the age of 15 must leave their cellphones at home, or at least have them turned off during the school day. French high schools will be allowed to decide whether they implement the ban in their classrooms.
- The measure prohibits the use of tablets, computers, and other internet-connected devices as well. There are exceptions in place for students with disabilities and for the educational use of devices in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities.

8. FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AYURVEDA CONGRESS (IAVC)

- **Context:** Fourth IAvC was recently held in Leiden, Netherlands.
- It was jointly organized by International Maharishi Ayurveda Foundation, Netherlands; All India Ayurvedic Congress, New Delhi and International Academy of Ayurveda, Pune in association with Indian Embassy in Netherlands.
- **Focus:** The congress focused on promotion and propagation of Ayurveda in Netherlands and its neighboring countries of Europe.

9. MAURITIUS REMAINS TOP SOURCE OF FDI

- As per the latest data by RBI, **Mauritius was the top source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India in 2017-18 followed by Singapore.** The total FDI in FY 18 stood at $37.36 billion in financial year which was marginal rise over $36.31 billion recorded in the previous fiscal 2016-17.

10. EXERCISE RAPID TRIDENT

- **What is it?** Rapid Trident logoRapid Trident is an annual, multinational exercise that serves as the validation for Ukraine’s Ministry of Defence unit.
- **Context:** Exercise Rapid Trident 2018 is being held in Ukraine, involving approximately 2,270 personnel from 14 nations.

11. KAZIND 2018

- **What is it?** It is a joint military exercise between India and Kazakhstan. The aim of the exercise is to build and promote bilateral Army to Army relations and exchange skills and experiences between Kazakhstan Army and
CURRENT EVENTS

14. YUDH ABHYAS 2018

As part of the ongoing Indo-US defence cooperation, a joint military training Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 will be held at Chaubattia in Uttarakhand. This will be the 14th edition of the joint military exercise hosted alternately by both countries.

The joint exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 will simulate a scenario where both nations will

12. KENDRIYA HINDI SAMITI

- **Context**: 31st meeting of the Central Hindi Committee was recently held in New Delhi under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

**About Kendriya Hindi Samiti**:

- The Kendriya Hindi Samiti was constituted in the year 1967. Chaired by PM, it is the apex policy making body which lays the guidelines for the propagation and progressive use of Hindi as official language of the union.

13. SLINEX-2018

- **Context**: India, Sri Lanka joint naval exercise SLINEX-2018 was recently held at Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

**About SLINEX**: SLINEX exercise started in 2005 was previously held once in two years and now it has been converted to annual event this year onwards.

- SLINEX exercise is continuation of ongoing operational interaction between both navies wherein regular ships visits are being undertaken between the two countries.

- SLINEX 2017 was held at Visakhapatnam in September 2017 wherein two ships SLNS participated from Sri Lanka Navy.

14. IN A FIRST IN ASIA, BENGALURU AIRPORT SET TO USE FACE RECOGNITION AS ‘BOARDING PASS’

- Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) in Bengaluru is set to become the first airport in Asia next year to use face recognition as the boarding procedure for passengers to board flights and move across different sections of the airport.

**Key facts:**

- This is the first end-to-end face recognition-based walk through experience in Asia and the largest in the world.

- The project will be implemented by Vision Box, a Portuguese software firm.

- The goal of the programme is to simplify the journey by making it paperless from registration to boarding. Biometric technology will identify passengers by their face as they move across the airport, avoiding stops and the repeated presentation of boarding passes, passports or other physical identity documents.

15. INDO – MONGOLIAN JOINT EXERCISE: NOMADIC ELEPHANT

- **Context**: INDO-MONGOLIA joint exercise Nomadic Elephant-2018 is being held in Ulanbaatar, Mongolia.

- **What is it?** Exercise Nomadic Elephant is an annual, bilateral exercise since 2006 which is designed to strengthen the partnership between Indian Army and Mongolian Armed Forces. The exercise will see them improve their tactical and technical skills in joint counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations in rural and urban scenario under United Nations mandate.

**About Mongolia**:

- Mongolia is a landlocked unitary sovereign state in East Asia.

- It is sandwiched between China to the south and Russia to the north.

- It is also the world’s second-largest landlocked country behind Kazakhstan and the largest landlocked country that does not border a closed sea.
work together in counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment in mountainous terrain under United Nation charter.

17. RAIL SAHYOG
- Union Ministry of Railways has launched Rail Sahyog web portal (www.railsahyog.in).

Key features:
- It will provide platform for Corporates and PSUs to fund creation of amenities at railway stations through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds.
- This portal will allow companies to register their requests for contributing to create amenities at railway stations through their CSR funds. These requests will be processed by Railway officials and based on principle of first come first serve, requests will be shortlisted.
- Selected applicants will be intimated to deposit the funds with Railways or its nominated agencies like RITES or RAILTEL etc. The nominated agency will get the work executed thereafter.
- It will provide opportunity for industry, companies, associations to collaborate with Indian Railways. Fund utilized for creation of amenities will be beneficial for passengers and for neighbourhood of railway vicinity.

18. PARYATAN PARV
- **Context:** The second edition of ‘Paryatan Parv’ of the Ministry of Tourism has begun across the country.

What is Paryatan Parv?
- The Paryatan Parv will showcase the cultural diversity of the country, with cultural performances, crafts bazaar, food court showcasing folk and classical dance & music, handicrafts & handlooms and cuisine from all regions and States of the country.
- The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments and Stakeholders is organizing “Paryatan Parv” across the country.
- The programme is being organized with the objective of drawing focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing the cultural diversity of the country and reinforcing the principle of “Tourism for All”.

19. PACIFIC ASIA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION GOLD AWARDS
- **What?**
  - Kerala Tourism has won two prestigious gold awards of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) for its innovative marketing campaigns.
  - These awards were won by Kerala Tourism’s Yalla Kerala print campaign and Live Inspired Posters under PATA’s Travel Advertisement Print and Travel Poster categories respectively.
  - Both campaign and posters were developed and designed by Stark Communications which is advertising agency of Kerala Tourism.

- **About PATA awards:**
  - These awards are given by PATA and are sponsored by Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO).
  - The Awards are presented to outstanding entries in four principal categories: Marketing; Education and Training; Environment, and Heritage and Culture.
  - These awards are presented every year in recognition of the achievements of 25 separate organisations and individuals.

20. JHARKHAND GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES ELECTRIC CARS FOR OFFICIAL USE
- The state government of Jharkhand has introduced electric vehicles for official use. With the development, Jharkhand has become the fifth state of India and the first state in eastern India to procure the eco-friendly vehicles for government use.

21. MAHARASHTRA TO SET UP CYBER VARSITY
- The Maharashtra Government has taken the first step towards setting up a varsity dedicated to mitigating cyber threats. It has set aside ₹80 crore for the first round of its funding and the proposal for the project will be tabled in the State cabinet’s consideration in the first week of October.

Role and functions:
- The new Cyber University will train 3,000 professionals to fight online space cyber attacks, internet crimes, and conduct cyber forensics. It will also impart training in 15 other
Internet of Things (IoT) areas such as Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

- The varsity will provide for and prepare internet professionals on the lines of the Microsoft Certified Professional Program. The courses will cost less than ₹5 lakh for courses in data analytics, cloud computing, blockchain, AI, cyber forensics and cyber investigations.

22. EXERCISE AVIAINдра-18

- **What is it?** Exercise Aviaindra is an Air Force level exercise between India and the Russian Federation. First Aviaindra was conducted in 2014 and has been planned as a bi-annual exercise.
- **Context:** Exercise Aviaindra 18 is being conducted at Lipetsk, Russia.
- **Significance:** The aim of the exercise is focused towards anti-terrorist operations in a bi-lateral scenario. The exercise would further enhance the co-operation and understanding each other’s Concept of Operations.

23. INDIA-BANGLADESH FRIENDSHIP PRODUCT PIPELINE PROJECT

- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina have jointly launched the construction of India-Bangladesh Friendship Product Pipeline Project through video conferencing.

**Key facts:**

- It is first such pipeline through which refined diesel will be supplied to Bangladesh from India.
- The project involves construction of 130-kilometre long pipeline that will connect Siliguri in West Bengal and Parbatipur in Dinajpur district of Bangladesh.
- Of the total stretch, six-kilometre will be in Indian side and remaining 124 kilometres will in Bangladesh.

24. INDIA CONTRIBUTES $1 MN TO UN SOLAR PROJECT

- **Context:** India has contributed USD 1 million for the installation of solar panels on the roof of the imposing UN building at the world body’s headquarters in New York. The contribution will help reduce carbon footprint and promote sustainable energy. This contribution makes India first responder to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ call for climate action.

25. SIKKIM’S FIRST-EVER AIRPORT INAUGURATED

- Sikkim’s first-ever airport was recently inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra at Pakyong. The airport was constructed by the Airports Authority of India.

**Significance:**

- The Pakyong Airport, the country has hit a century of airports. Until now, Sikkim was the only state in India remaining without a functional airport. The development not only eases connectivity to the Himalayan state but also brings it on the air-map of the world.
- The airport’s location makes it strategically relevant from the country’s security point of view. The Indian Air Force (IAF) will find this airport convenient for the landing and taking off of its aircrafts.
- The airport is not only India’s 100th functional airport but also one of the country’s five highest airports.

26. SIRHIND AND RAJASTHAN FEEDERS

- **Context:** Cabinet approves financial assistance worth Rs.825 Crore for relining of Sirhind Feeder Canal and relining of Rajasthan Feeder Canal. The project would mitigate water logging problem and enhance the flows/ water availability in the two canals.

**Key facts:**

- Sirhind and Rajasthan Feeders take off upstream of Harike Head works and flow through Punjab before crossing over to Rajasthan.
• The twin canals have a common bank and were constructed in the 1960s as lined (brick) channels to convey water to command areas in Punjab and Rajasthan.

27. PARAKRAM PARV

• What is it? To showcase the courage, valour and sacrifice of Armed Forces during Surgical Strikes conducted in 2016, ‘Parakram Parv’ is being observed from 28-30 September 2018.

• Indian Army conducted surgical strikes in 2016 which had strategic ramifications and were aimed to dissuade inimical adversary from adopting the path of violence and to ensure an environment of peace for the Nation.