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INDIAN
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE

TOP 100
RANKS, SINCE 2014

3 LOCATIONS
BENGALURU, DELHI, HYDERABAD

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GENERAL STUDIES – 1

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

1. Gottiprolu

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: About the site, findings and significance.

Context: Excavation by Archaeological Survey of India in Gottiprolu, Andhra Pradesh indicate it as a Trade Centre of Early Historic Period.

Where is it?
Gottiprolu lies on the right bank of a distributary of river Swarnamukhi about eighty kilometers from Tirupati and Nellore.

What has been unearthed?
1. Among many other antiquities unearthed are one life size Vishnu sculpture and a wide variety of pottery of the early centuries of current era.
2. The excavation revealed the presence of brick-built structures in different sizes and forms.
3. The available brick sizes are comparable with the Satavahana / Ikshvaku period structures in Krishna valley.
4. On the basis of the brick size and associated findings they can be placed anywhere between 2nd – 1st century BCE or little later (nearly 2000 years old).
5. Other interesting antiquity retrieved is the molded female terracotta figurine with two hands lifted upwards.
6. Other major retrieved antiquities unearthed are copper and lead coins, iron spear head, stone celts, terracotta beads, ear stud in semi precious stone and hopscotches.

What do they indicate?
1. The proximity of the site to the seacoast suggests that the site could have served as a strategic settlement involved in maritime trade.
2. These settlements could have been an important trade centre as indicated by the presence of imitated amphorae wares that were mostly used to transport liquid commodities.
3. The findings of assorted stone tools of Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods from secondary contexts suggest that prehistoric people also occupied this area.
4. A series of broken terracotta pipes fitted into one another revealed about the civic amenities maintained by the occupants of this site. The drainage system pattern is understood by the exposed remains of the drainage at the site.

Sources: pib.

2. Lala Lajpat Rai

What to study?
For Prelims: Key contributions of lal rai and related facts.
For Mains: Significance of his contributions.

Context: November 17 is the death anniversary of Lala Lajpat Rai, the firebrand Indian nationalist leader affectionately called ‘Punjab Kesari’.

His contributions, achievements and related key facts:

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1. Rai is remembered for his role during the Swadeshi movement and for his advocacy of education.
2. Born in 1865, he became a follower of Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, and went on to become one of the society’s leaders.
3. In 1881, he joined the Indian National Congress at the age of 16.
4. He also helped found the Punjab National Bank.
5. In 1885, Rai established the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School in Lahore and remained a committed educationist throughout his life.
7. He founded the Indian Home Rule League of America in New York City in 1917.
8. He was elected President of the Indian National Congress during its Special Session in Kolkata in 1920, which saw the launch of Mahatma Gandhi’s Non-cooperation Movement.
9. The patriot died at Lahore in 1928 after he was attacked by police during a protest rally against the Simon Commission.

The significance of his views for the freedom struggle are as follows:
1. His views helped recognize the importance of a united front against British.
2. The British efforts to divide India on communal lines as seen in the Acts of 1909 and 1919 was made clear to Indian leadership.
3. His thoughts of cultural diversity were given post independence by Nehru as ‘Unity in Diversity’.
4. His idea of people of all religions as true citizens of India, combined with Gandhi’s ideas of inclusive fight against British led to Non-Cooperative movement linked with the Khilafat movement.
5. Rai’s understanding of the societal issues led him to form various social organizations like All India Trade Union Congress, Punjab National Bank which are still flourishing in India.

Sources: pib.

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

1. Third Battle of Panipat

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Battles that took place in panipat- overview, causes and outcomes.

Context: The trailer for the upcoming Hindi film ‘Panipat’, directed by Oscar-nominated filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker, was recently released. The title refers to the Third Battle of Panipat, fought in 1761.

Background: Two other major battles had been fought on the Panipat plains:
1. The First Battle of Panipat, in 1526, laid the foundation of the Mughal Empire in India after its first ruler, Babur, ended the Delhi Sultanate, which at the time was led by the Lodi dynasty.
2. The Second Battle of Panipat, in 1556, cemented Mughal rule when Akbar fought off a threat from the king Hemu ‘Vikramaditya’.

What was the Third Battle of Panipat all about?
Fought between Maratha forces and invading armies of Afghan general Ahmed Shah Abdali of Durrani Empire in 1761.
Abdali was supported by two Indian allies—the Rohillas Najib-ud-daulah, Afghans of the Doab region and Shuja-ud-Daula-the Nawab of Awadh.

How it started?
1. After the death of Mughal Emperor **Aurangzeb**, there was a sudden rise of the Marathas. The Marathas reversed all his territorial gains in the Deccan and conquered a considerable part of India.

2. The decline was hastened by the invasion of India by **Nader Shah**, who also took away **Takht-i-Taus (the Peacock Throne)** and the **Kohinoor Diamond in 1739**.

3. **Abdali** planned to attack the Marathas when his son was driven out of Lahore.

4. By the end of 1759, Abdali with his **Afghan tribes** reached Lahore as well as Delhi and defeated the smaller enemy garrisons.

5. The two armies fought at Karnal and Kunjpura where the entire Afghan garrison was killed or enslaved.

6. The massacre of the Kunjpura garrison infuriated Durrani to such an extent that he ordered for crossing the river at all costs to attack the Marathas.

7. Smaller battles continued through months and forces from both the sides amassed for the final assault. But food was running out for the Marathas.

**Outcomes:**

1. The Marathas were defeated in the battle, with 40,000 of their troops killed, while Abdali’s army is estimated to have suffered around 20,000 casualties.

2. It marked a loss of prestige for the Marathas, who lost their preeminent position in north India after this war, paving the way for British colonial power to expand here.

3. The Marathas lost some of their most important generals and administrators, including Sadashivrao and heir-apparent Vishwasrao of the Peshwa household, Ibrahim Khan Gardi, Jankojirao Scindia, and Yashwantrao Puar.

Sources: Indian Express.

---

**2. Rani Lakshmibai**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and mains: Rani Lakshmibai- legacy and related facts, What is Doctrine of Lapse?*

**Context:** 19th November 2019 marks the 191st birth anniversary of Rani Lakshmibai.

**About Rani Lakshmibai:**

- Born on **November 19, 1828**, as **Manikarnika Tambe** in Varanasi.
- Rani was married to the **King of Jhansi, Raja Gangadhar Newalkar in 1842**.

**The war between the British and Rani Lakshmibai:**

- She had a son **Damodar Rao**, who died within four months of his birth. Following the death of the infant, her husband adopted a cousin’s child **Anand Rao**, who was renamed **Damodar Rao** a day prior to the death of the Maharaja.
- **Lord Dalhousie** refused to acknowledge the child and applied the **Doctrine of Lapse**, and annexed the state. However, the Rani refused to accept the Lord Dalhousie’s decision.
- This led to a fight between the two. The Rani of Jhansi gave a tough fight to the British during the two weeks siege of the city.
- The queen died while fighting a squadron of the 8th Hussars under **Captain Heneage**, on June 18, 1858, in **Kotah-ki-Serai near the Phool Bagh of Gwalior**.

**What was the Doctrine of Lapse?**

The Doctrine of Lapse was an annexation policy followed widely by **Lord Dalhousie** when he was India’s Governor-General from 1848 to 1856.

- According to this, any princely state under the direct or indirect (as a vassal) control of the East India Company where the ruler did not have a legal male heir would be annexed by the company.
- As per this, any adopted son of the Indian ruler could not be proclaimed as heir to the kingdom. This challenged the Indian ruler's long-held authority to appoint an heir of their choice.

Sources: pib.

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
3. Who was Udham Singh?

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Udham Singh- legacy.

Context: A BJP MP recently mentioned about Udham Singh in Parliament.

Who was Udham Singh?
1. Born in Sunam in Punjab’s Sangrur district in 1899.
2. He was a political activist who got associated with the Ghadar Party while in the US.
3. In 1934, Singh made his way to London with the purpose of assassinating O’Dwyer, who in 1919 had been the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab and unsurprisingly, Singh considered O’Dwyer to be responsible for the massacre.
4. Instead of Dyer, who instructed his men to open fire at the crowd gathered in Jallianwala Bagh, O’Dwyer is considered to be the actual perpetrator, since Dyer could not have executed it without his permission.
5. On March 13, 1940 Singh shot O’Dwyer at a meeting of the East India Association and the Royal Central Asian Society at Caxton Hill.
6. He was sentenced to death and was hanged on July 31, 1940 at Pentonville Prison.

What is Ghadar Party?
The multi-ethnic party was believed to have communist tendencies and was founded by Sohan Singh Bhakna in 1913. Headquartered in California. It was committed to the ouster of the British from India.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors /contributions from different parts of the country.

1. Rashtriya Ekta Diwas

What to study?
For Prelims: Role and contributions of Sardar Patel in India’s freedom struggle.
For Mains: Impact and outcomes of his actions pre and post independence.

Context: Rashtriya Ekta Diwas was observed on 31st October across the nation. It marks the occasion of the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Background:
The government, in 2014, decided to observe Sardar Patel Jayanti Day as Ekta Diwas. This occasion provides an opportunity to re-affirm the inherent strength and resilience of the nation to withstand the threats to its unity, integrity and security.

About Sardar Vallabhai Patel:
Sardar Patel is credited with uniting all 562 princely states in pre-independent India to build the Republic of India.
Role in the Indian National Movement:

1. **1917**: Elected as the **Secretary of the Gujarat Sabha**, the Gujarat wing of the Indian National Congress.
2. **1918**: Led a massive “No Tax Campaign” that urged the farmers not to pay taxes after the British insisted on tax after the floods in Kaira. His effort to bring together the farmers of his area brought him the title of ‘Sardar’.
3. Supported the **non-cooperation Movement** launched by Gandhi and Patel toured the nation with him.
4. **1928**: When the lands of farmers were seized after they refused to pay the extra tax to the government, Patel helped the farmers by striking a deal between the government and farmers’ representatives.
5. **1930**: Imprisoned for participating in the famous Salt Satyagraha movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi.
6. **1931**: Elected as the **President of Indian National Congress in its Karachi session** where the party deliberated its future path.
7. Patel was also compelled to use coercion by launching ‘Operation Polo’ to liberate and integrate Hyderabad after the Nizam of Hyderabad entertained false hopes of either joining Pakistan or remaining independent.

Sources: pib.

**Topics: Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.**

1. **Swachh – Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan**

   **What to study?**
   
   **For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the campaign.**

   **Context:** The Environment Ministry is undertaking a mass cleanliness-cum-awareness drive in 50 identified beaches under the “Swachh – Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan”.

   **About Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan:**
   
   1. **Launched by** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)
   2. **Aim:** To make beaches clean and create awareness amongst citizens about the importance of coastal ecosystems – in Beaches across 10 states / UTs.
   3. The campaign will be organized in the beaches after consultation with the state governments.
   4. **Environment Education Division and Society of Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM)** under the Environment Ministry will be responsible for its implementation.
   5. At end of the drive, the best three beaches will be suitably awarded along with a certificate of appreciation for all the participating eco-clubs.
   6. The implementation of the drive will be monitored by the MoEF&CC officials.

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

1. How Lightning Strikes?

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: What is lightning, and how does it strike?

Context: As per IMD, With 9 lakh lightning strikes between April 1 and July 31 this year, Odisha recorded the highest number of lightning strikes in the country, while Jammu and Kashmir recorded the least with about 20,000 strikes.

Significance:
This is the first time the weather monitoring body has released the data on total lightening strikes across the country. The date for the months of April till July was compiled by IMD’s Climate Resilient Observing Systems Promotion Council (CROSPC).
The report was prepared as part of a three-year study period under Lightning Resilient India campaign.

Key findings:
1. Most number of deaths due to lightning strikes were reported from Uttar Pradesh.
2. The highest intensity lightning strikes were observed in Chhotanagpur plateau in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. The area also received the maximum number of strikes for a district.
3. The number of lightning days (number of days when lightning strikes happened) across India has been increasing every month. July witnessed the highest number of lightning days, especially in the latter half due to the onset of monsoon.

What is lightning?
It is a very rapid — and massive — discharge of electricity in the atmosphere, some of which is directed towards the Earth’s surface. These discharges are generated in giant moisture-bearing clouds that are 10-12 km tall.

How does it strike?
1. The base of these clouds typically lies within 1-2 km of the Earth’s surface, while their top is 12-13 km away. Temperatures towards the top of these clouds are in the range of minus 35 to minus 45 degrees Celsius.
2. As water vapour moves upward in the cloud, the falling temperature causes it to condense. Heat is generated in the process, which pushes the molecules of water further up.
3. As they move to temperatures below zero degrees celsius, the water droplets change into small ice crystals. They continue to move up, gathering mass — until they are so heavy that they start to fall to Earth.
4. This leads to a system in which, simultaneously, smaller ice crystals are moving up and bigger crystals are coming down.
5. Collisions follow, and trigger the release of electrons — a process that is very similar to the generation of sparks of electricity. As the moving free electrons cause more collisions and more electrons, a chain reaction ensues.
6. This process results in a situation in which the top layer of the cloud gets positively charged, while the middle layer is negatively charged. The electrical potential difference between the two layers is huge — of the order of a billion to 10 billion volts. In very little time, a massive current, of the order of 100,000 to a million amperes, starts to flow between the layers.
7. An enormous amount of heat is produced, and this leads to the heating of the air column between the two layers of the cloud. This heat gives the air column a reddish appearance during lightning. As the heated air column expands, it produces shock waves that result in thunder.

How does this current reach the Earth from the cloud?
While the Earth is a good conductor of electricity, it is electrically neutral. However, in comparison to the middle layer of the cloud, it becomes positively charged. As a result, about 15%-20% of the current gets directed towards the Earth as well. It is this flow of current that results in damage to life and property on Earth. There is a greater probability of lightning striking tall objects such as trees, towers or buildings. Once it is about 80-100 m from the surface, lightning tends to change course towards these taller objects. This happens because air is a poor conductor of electricity, and electrons that are travelling through air seek both a better conductor and the shortest route to the relatively positively charged Earth’s surface.

Sources: the Hindu.
GENERAL STUDIES – 2

Topics: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.


What to study?
For Prelims: Key changes.
For Mains: Impact, significance and challenges ahead.

Context: Jammu and Kashmir is no more a state; it has been divided into two Union Territories. The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 also comes into effect from 31st October 2019.

Here is what has changed in Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh:
2. The Union Territory of J&K will have a legislature while the UT of Ladakh will have no legislature.
3. Both the Union Territories will have Lieutenant Governors as administrators who will be appointed by the President of India. Their tenure will be determined by the President.
4. Four sitting members of the Council of States representing the existing state of Jammu and Kashmir shall be deemed to have been elected to fill the seats allotted to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Legislative assembly of J&K:
2. The Election Commission may conduct the elections to the House of the People for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir as per the allocation of seats specified in the Delimitation of Parliamentary Constituencies Order, 1976 as amended by this Act.
3. The provisions which are applicable to "Union territory of Puducherry" shall also apply to the "Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
4. The total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir to be filled by persons chosen by direct election shall be 107.
5. Seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
6. There shall be a Council of Ministers consisting of not more than ten per cent of the total number of members in the Legislative Assembly, with the Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Lieutenant Governor in the exercise of his functions in relation to matters with respect to which the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws.

Abolition of legislative council:
- On the abolition of the Legislative Council, every member thereof shall cease to be such members.
- All Bills pending in the Legislative Council immediately before the appointed day shall lapse on the abolition of the Council.

Powers of Lieutenant Governor:
- The Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh shall be assisted by advisor(s) to be appointed by the Central Government.
- Lieutenant Governor of Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir may nominate two members to the Legislative Assembly to give representation to women, if in his opinion, women are not adequately represented in the Legislative Assembly.
- The Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and the other Ministers shall be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister.
- The Ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Lieutenant Governor and the Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly.
Before a Minister enters upon his office, **the Lieutenant Governor shall administer to him the oaths of office and of secrecy according to the forms set out for the purpose in the Fourth Schedule.**

**High Court:**
- The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir **shall be the common High Court for the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union territory of Ladakh.**
- The Judges of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir for the existing State of Jammu and Kashmir holding office immediately before the appointed day shall become on that day the Judges of the High Court.
- The expenditure in respect of salaries and allowances of the Judges of the common High Court shall be **allocated amongst the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union territory of Ladakh on the basis of population ratio.**

**All India Services officials:**
- The members of the cadres of Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service and Indian Forest Service for the existing State of Jammu and Kashmir, on and from the appointed day, shall continue to function on the existing cadres.
- The centre will be in direct control of the Jammu and Kashmir police and law and order matters.

Sources: the Hindu.

**2. Office of Profit**

What to study?
*For Prelims: What is office of profit and how is it determined?*
*For Mains: Criticisms and controversies surrounding, ways to address them.*

**Context:** President Ram Nath Kovind has rejected a petition demanding disqualification of 11 Delhi MLAs belonging to Aam Aadmi Party for allegedly holding **office of profit.** The decision of the President rejecting the plea is based on an opinion rendered by the Election Commission.

**What’s the issue?**
1. In March 2017, a petition was filed before the President seeking disqualification of the lawmakers claiming that they were enjoying office of profit by being co-chairpersons of district disaster management authorities in 11 districts of Delhi.
2. The issue was referred to Election Commission which gave an opinion in August this year that holding the office of co-chairperson of a district disaster management authority does not attract disqualification as MLA since there is no remuneration by way of salary and allowances.
3. As per law, the President accepts the opinion of the Election Commission in cases of office of profit.

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

**What are the basic criteria to disqualify an MP or MLA?**
Basic disqualification criteria for an MP are laid down in Article 102 of the Constitution, and for an MLA in **Article 191.**
They can be disqualified for: a) Holding an office of profit under government of India or state government; b) Being of unsound mind; c) Being an undischarged insolvent; d) Not being an Indian citizen or for acquiring citizenship of another country.

**What is the underlying principle for including ‘office of profit’ as criterion for disqualification?**
Makers of the Constitution wanted that **legislators should not feel obligated to the Executive in any way,** which could influence them while discharging legislative functions. In other words, an MP or MLA should be free to carry
out her duties without any kind of governmental pressure. The intent is that there should be no conflict between the duties and interests of an elected member.

The office of profit law simply seeks to enforce a basic feature of the Constitution - the principle of separation of power between the legislature and the executive.

**Reason for controversies:**

1. The expression “office of profit” has not been defined in the Constitution or in the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
2. It is for the courts to explain the significance and meaning of this concept. Over the years, courts have decided this issue in the context of specific factual situations.
3. But, articles 102 (1) and 191(1) which give effect to the concept of office of profit prescribe restrictions at the central and state level on lawmakers accepting government positions.

**Role of Judiciary in defining the ‘office of profit:’**

The Supreme Court in Pradyut Bordoloi vs Swapan Roy (2001) outlined the four broad principles for determining whether an office attracts the constitutional disqualification.

1. First, whether the government exercises control over appointment, removal and performance of the functions of the office
2. Second, whether the office has any remuneration attached to it
3. Third, whether the body in which the office is held has government powers (releasing money, allotment of land, granting licenses etc.).
4. Fourth, whether the office enables the holder to influence by way of patronage.

The Supreme Court, while upholding the disqualification of Jaya Bachchan from Rajya Sabha in 2006, had said that for deciding the question as to whether one is holding an office of profit or not, what is relevant is whether the office is capable of yielding a profit or pecuniary gain and not whether the person actually obtained a monetary gain.

Sources: the hindu.

**Mains Question:** Explain the concept of ‘office of profit’. Discuss the underlying principle for including ‘office of profit’ as criterion for disqualification.

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**3. Ayodhya Verdict**

**What to study?**

For Prelims: Details of the case and the judgment.

For Mains: Implications of the judgement and significance of the precedent it has set.

**Context:** A bench led by CJI Ranjan Gogoi delivered the Ayodhya verdict alongside CJI designate S.A. Bobde, and Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, Ashok Bhushan and S.A. Nazeer. The verdict was unanimous.

**What was the issue?**

At the centre of the issue is the belief among sections of Hindus that the Babri Masjid, named after Mughal emperor Babur, was built in Ayodhya after destroying a Ram Temple that marked the birthplace of the deity. The Hindu parties wanted the land to themselves, contending that Lord Ram was born at a spot on which later the central dome of the mosque was built. The Muslim parties, however, contended that the mosque was constructed in 1528 by Mir Baqi, a commander of Babur's army, without demolishing any place of worship and since the land rights had not been transferred to any other party, the space was rightfully theirs.

**The verdict:**

1. The Hindus would get the entire disputed 2.77 acres in Ayodhya where the demolished Babri Masjid once stood.
2. Possession of disputed 2.77 acre land will remain with the Central government receiver.
3. The Muslims will get alternate five acres of land either in the surplus 67 acres acquired in and around the disputed structure by the central government or any other "prominent" place.
4. A trust will be formed in 3 months to build a temple on the disputed land. The court held that the Nirmohi Akhara is not the shebait or devotee of the deity Ram Lalla but will get to be a member of the Trust.

What is Article 142, invoked by SC to give land for a mosque?
The Supreme Court, implicitly referring to the demolition of the Babri Masjid at the disputed site, said that it was invoking Article 142 "to ensure that a wrong committed must be remedied".

Article 142(1) states that "The Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it, and any decree so passed or order so made shall be enforceable throughout the territory of India in such manner as may be prescribed by or under any law made by Parliament and, until provision in that behalf is so made, in such manner as the President may by order prescribe".

This was the first time that the court invoked this power in a case involving a civil dispute over an immovable property, involving private parties.

Who are the travellers quoted in Ayodhya judgment?
In its judgment, the Supreme Court relied in part on centuries-old travelogues, gazetteers and books to provide an account of the faith and belief that the Hindus placed in the Janmasthan. The travelogues that the court took note of included, among others, those by the European travellers Joseph Tieffenthaler, William Finch, and Montgomery Martin — these being written before the building of the grill-brick wall in front of the mosque during British rule.

1. **Tieffenthaler** was an 18th-century missionary who travelled in India for 27 years, and wrote his travelogue titled “Description Historique et Geographique De l’Inde". In India, he was commissioned at the famous observatory of Sawai Jai Singh, the Raja of Jaipur, and was later attached at the Jesuit College in Agra which was built with the patronage of Akbar.
2. **William Finch’s** account has been recorded in the 1921 book ‘Early Travels in India (1583-1619)’ by the historiographer Sir William Foster.
3. Originally from Dublin in Ireland, **Martin** was an Anglo-Irish author and civil servant. He practised medicine in Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka), East Africa and Australia. Martin then went on to work in Kolkata where helped found the paper ‘Bengal Herald’. He wrote the three-volume work ‘History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India’.

What is adverse possession, the Muslim claim SC rejected?
One of the questions before the Supreme Court was whether the Sunni Wakf Board had acquired the title of the disputed land by adverse possession.

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Adverse possession is hostile possession of a property – which has to be continuous, uninterrupted and peaceful. The Muslim side had claimed that the mosque was built 400 years ago by Babar – and that even if it is assumed that it was built on the land where a temple earlier existed, Muslims, by virtue of their long exclusive and continuous possession – beginning from the time the mosque was built, and up to the time the mosque was desecrated – they had perfected their title by adverse possession. This argument has now been rejected by the Supreme Court.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Pardoning Powers of President

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of pardoning powers of President and Governor.
For Mains: Concerns and issues associated.

Context: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has sent a letter to the Punjab government to commute the death sentence of Balwant Singh Rajoana, convicted for the assassination of former Chief Minister Beant Singh.

- The MHA took an “in principle” decision to commute the sentence as a “humanitarian gesture” ahead of the 550th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.
- Based on the replies received by the Centre, the President can commute the death sentence under Article 72 of the Constitution.

Clemency powers of the President under article 72:
It says that the President shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence.

1. Pardon – A pardon completely absolves the offender from all sentences and punishment and disqualifications and places him in the same position as if he had never committed the offence.
2. Commutation – Commutation means exchange of one thing for another. In simple words to replace the punishment with less severe punishment. For example for Rigorous imprisonment-simple imprisonment.
3. Reprieve – Reprieve means temporary suspension of death sentence. For example- pending a proceeding for pardon or commutation.
4. Respite – Respite means awarding a lesser punishment on some special grounds. For example- the Pregnancy of women offender.
5. Remissions – Remission means the reduction of the amount of sentence without changing its character, for example, a sentence of 1 year may be remitted to 6 months.

The President can exercise these powers:

1. In all cases where the punishment or sentence is by a court martial;
2. In all cases where the punishment or sentence is for an offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the Union extends;
3. In all cases where the sentence is a sentence of death.

The pardoning power of President is wider than the governor and it 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.

Key facts:
- This power of pardon shall be exercised by the President on the advice of Council of Ministers.
- The constitution does not provide for any mechanism to question the legality of decisions of President or governors exercising mercy jurisdiction.
- But the SC in Epuru Sudhakar case has given a small window for judicial review of the pardon powers of President and governors for the purpose of ruling out any arbitrariness.

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5. Sabarimala Case

What to study?
For Prelims: Particulars of the case, location of Sabarimala and surroundings.
For Mains: Concerns and challenges, and the need for a larger bench.

Context: The Supreme Court has referred to a 7 judge-bench a clutch of review petitions challenging its September 2018 verdict allowing entry of women of all age groups into the Sabarimala temple.

Background:
- The verdict was given by a 5-judge bench.
- In 3:2 majority verdict, two judges stuck to their earlier stand of quashing the custom which barred entry of women between the ages of 10 and 50 years. The split decision came on 65 petitions - 56 review petitions, four fresh writ petitions and five transfer pleas - which were filed after the apex court verdict of September 28, 2018 sparked violent protests in Kerala.

Observations made by the court:
1. Restrictions on women in religious places are not limited to Sabarimala alone and are prevalent in other religions too. The issue of entry of women into mosques and Agiyari could also be taken by the larger bench.
2. Both sections of the same religious group have a right to freely profess, practise and propagate their religious beliefs as being integral part of their religion by virtue of Article 25 of the Constitution of India.

Questions before the larger bench:
1. Whether a court can probe if a practice is essential to a religion or should the question be left to the respective religious head?
2. Should “essential religious practices” be afforded constitutional protection under Article 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs)?
3. What is the “permissible extent” of judicial recognition a court should give to PILs filed by people who do not belong to the religion of which practices are under the scanner?

Constitutional vs Cultural dimensions:
The case has constitutional as well as cultural dimensions. Displaying great cultural sensitivity, a division Bench of the Kerala High Court had, back in 1991, pointed out that “age regulation” in Sabarimala is not unconstitutional.
In Sabarimala, the deity is worshipped in the form of Naishtika Brahmacarior a celibate, as pointed out by the Kerala High Court.
The supporters of Temple ban say that:
1. This particular deity system is Tantric in nature and not Vedic.
2. In the Tantric system, the temple is not a prayer hall but an energy centre; the deity is not God who is omnipresent, but a source of energy (chaithanya) in a particular spiritual space.
3. Uniqueness is the soul of every temple. Lakhs of women congregate in Sabarimala every year. There is only one limitation: they should not be between 10 and 50, because of the specific nature of the Prathishtha(idol) and the vow celibacy associated with the idol.
4. The restriction finds its source in the legend that the Sabarimala temple deity – Swami Ayyappa – is a ‘Naishtika Brahmachari’ – and should not be disturbed.

Why does preventing women’s entry to the temple discriminatory in nature?
 Preventing women’s entry to the Sabarimala temple with an irrational and obsolete notion of “purity” clearly offends the equality clauses in the Constitution. In any civilised society, gender equality is to be treated as one of the core values.

- It denotes a patriarchal and partisan approach.
- The entry prohibition takes away the woman’s right against discrimination guaranteed under Article 15(1) of the Constitution.
- It curtails her religious freedom assured by Article 25(1).
- Prohibition of women’s entry to the shrine solely on the basis of womanhood and the biological features associated with womanhood is derogatory to women, which Article 51A (e) aims to renounce.
- The classification based on age is an act of discrimination based on sex.

Way ahead:
This issue raises serious questions about faith and practices of a religious denomination or sect. Therefore, it is time to evolve a judicial policy to do substantial and complete justice.

Sources: the Hindu.

Mains Question: Supreme Court ending the Sabarimala ban is a triumph of constitutional morality over regressive social and religious practices. Critically examine.

6. President of Sri Lanka- Election process

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Election, eligibility and procedure.

Context: Sri Lanka’s former wartime defence chief Gotabaya Rajapaksa, part of the country’s most powerful political dynasty, has been elected president.

The government structure:
Sri Lanka’s government operates under a semi-presidential system, where the president holds widespread executive authority but governs in partnership with a prime minister they appoint and a cabinet recommended by the prime minister.

Election of the President:
The president is directly elected for a five-year term, through a version of instant-runoff voting in which electors rank up to three candidates, and limited to only two rounds in total.
If no candidate wins a majority in the first round of voting, second and third preferences from ballots whose first preference candidate has been eliminated are used to determine the winner.

Eligibility:
The Constitution sets the following qualifications for holding the presidency:
1. If he/she is a citizen having been nominated as a candidate for such office by a recognized political party or elected member of the legislature.
2. No person who has been twice elected to the office of President by the People shall be qualified thereafter to be elected to such office by the People.
7. Citizenship (Amendment) Bill

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the Bill, Citizenship Act 1955, Citizenship- acquisition and types available.
For Mains: Issues over the Bill, why NE States oppose to this bill?

Context: With political positions on the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) largely unchanged, the government, which is hoping to move a new version of it during the winter session of Parliament, faces tough negotiations.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill:
1. It seeks to allow illegal migrants from certain minority communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship by amending the Citizenship Act of 1955.
2. It seeks to grant citizenship to people from minority communities — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians — after 6 years of stay in India even if they do not possess any proper document. The current requirement is 12 years of stay.
3. The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.

The Bill, however, does not extend to illegal Muslim migrants. It also does not talk about other minority communities in the three neighbouring countries, such as Jews, Bahais etc.

However, the bill is being criticised for the following reasons:
1. It violates the basic tenets of the Constitution. Illegal immigrants are distinguished on the basis of religion.
2. It is perceived to be a demographic threat to indigenous communities.
3. The Bill makes illegal migrants eligible for citizenship on the basis of religion. This may violate Article 14 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to equality.
4. It attempts to naturalise the citizenship of illegal immigrants in the region.
5. The Bill allows cancellation of OCI registration for violation of any law. This is a wide ground that may cover a range of violations, including minor offences.

Need for Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016:
1. There are thousands of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Christians and Parsis who have entered India after facing religious persecution in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan without any valid document.
2. These refugees have been facing difficulty in getting Long Term Visa (LTV) or Citizenship.
3. The existing Citizenship law does not allow anyone granting Indian nationality if he or she can not show proof of documents on country of birth and therefore they have to stay at least 12 years in India.
4. Those Hindus who are persecuted due to religion has no other place to go except India.

Concerns, issues and consequences of these changes:
- Introduced religion as a new principle into the citizenship law: By marking out Muslims as a residual category, it reiterates the narrative of partition, without incorporating the principles of inclusion which were present in both the constitution of India and the Citizenship Act of 1955 at its inception.
- While religious persecution is a reasonable principle for differentiation, it cannot be articulated in a manner that dilutes the republican and secular foundations of citizenship in India, and goes against constitutional morality.

Special concerns of NE indigenous people:
1. The Bill has not been sitting well with the Assamese as it contradicts the Assam Accord of 1985, which clearly states that illegal migrants heading in from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, would be deported.
2. Mizoram fears Buddhist Chakmas and Hindu Hajongs from Bangladesh may take advantage of the Act.
3. Meghalaya and Nagaland are apprehensive of migrants of Bengali stock.
4. Groups in Arunachal Pradesh fear the new rules may benefit Chakmas and Tibetans.
5. Manipur wants the Inner-line Permit System to stop outsiders from entering the state.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. Constitution Day of India

What to study?
For prelims: Meaning and significance of the day, historical background.
For Mains: Overview of the constitution, key features and important amendments.

What is Constitution day?
Constitution day which is also known as the **Samvidhan Divas** is celebrated every year on November 26 to mark the day on which the Constitution of India was adopted. While the adoption of the Constitution took place on November 26, 1949, it came into effect on January 26, 1950. The draft of the constitution was prepared by the drafting committee under BR Ambedkar’s aegis. According to the government notification, the Constitution Day was also a tribute to Ambedkar. Earlier, this day was commemorated as National Law Day, after a resolution by the Supreme Court Bar Association, a lawyers’ body, in 1979.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

### 1. Private member’s Bill

**What to study?**
- For prelims: Private Member’s Bill - introduction and procedure followed.
- For mains: Issues associated and why are they not taken into account seriously.

**Context:** 28 private member’s Bills introduced in Lok Sabha.

**Who is a Private Member?**
Any MP who is not a Minister is referred to as a private member.

**Admissibility of a private member’s Bill:**
The admissibility is decided by the Chairman for Rajya Sabha and Speaker in the case of Lok Sabha. The procedure is roughly the same for both Houses:

1. The Member must give at least a month’s notice before the Bill can be listed for introduction.
2. The House secretariat examines it for compliance with constitutional provisions and rules on legislation before listing.

**Is there any exception?**
While government Bills can be introduced and discussed on any day, private member’s Bills can be introduced and discussed only on Fridays.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

### 1. SC Strikes Down Finance Act Rules for Appointments to Judicial Tribunals

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: All about tribunals and money bill.
- For Mains: Issues and controversies over the passage of this act.

**Context:** The Supreme Court has passed an interim order that said the appointments to tribunals shall be on the basis of existing statutes and not the rules framed under the Finance Act of 2017.

**What has the court said?**
1. The government should reframe the rules and ordered that until then, the existing laws will govern the tribunals.
2. The Ministry of law should conduct an impact study and submit report to the apex court.
3. Validity of passage of Finance Act 2017 as Money Bill should be decided by a larger bench.

**What’s the issue?**
The Finance Act had given the Centre the power to govern appointments, removal and service conditions of the members of judicial tribunals like National Green Tribunal, Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, National Company Law Appellate Tribunal. The petitioners had challenged the Finance Act, 2017, particularly Part XIV on various grounds. The Part XIV had repealed provisions relating to the administration of 26 Tribunals established under diverse central laws. The central government was given the powers to frame rules by virtue of Section 184. The challenge to the Finance Act, 2017, was on the grounds that it was passed as a Money Bill. The petitioners had argued that the passage of the Finance Act in the form of a Money Bill amounted to a fraud on the Constitution since they can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha.

What is a Money bill?
A money bill is defined by Article 110 of the Constitution, as a draft law that contains only provisions that deal with all or any of the matters listed therein. These comprise a set of seven features, broadly including items such as the imposition or regulation of a tax; the regulation of the borrowing of money by the Government of India; the withdrawal of money from the Consolidated Fund of India; and so forth. In the event a proposed legislation contains other features, ones that are not merely incidental to the items specifically outlined, such a draft law cannot be classified as a money bill. Article 110 further clarifies that in cases where a dispute arises over whether a bill is a money bill or not, the Lok Sabha Speaker’s decision on the issue shall be considered final.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Contempt of Court

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

Context: The Supreme Court has held former Ranbaxy promoters Malvinder and Shivinder Singh guilty of contempt for violating its order that had asked them not to divest their shares in Fortis Healthcare Limited.

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

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

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

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

Constitutional Background:
- Article 129: Grants Supreme Court the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- Article 142(2): Enables the Supreme Court to investigate and punish any person for its contempt.
- Article 215: Grants every High Court the power to punish for contempt of itself.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Review Petition

What to study?
For Prelims: Types of petitions and related facts.
For Mains: need for and significance of review of the SC order, procedure to be followed.

Context: Petitioners plan to seek review of the recently delivered Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi and telecom revenue verdicts. Besides, the Supreme Court itself agreed to review its Sabarimala verdict but refused to do so in the Rafale case.

So, let us understand what a review petition means.

What is a review petition and when can it be filed?
Under Article 137, the Supreme Court has the power to review any of its judgments or orders.

Scope for review:
When a review takes place, the law is that it is allowed not to take fresh stock of the case but to correct grave errors that have resulted in the miscarriage of justice.

The court has the power to review its rulings to correct a “patent error” and not “minor mistakes of inconsequential import”.

- In a 1975 ruling, Justice Krishna Iyer said a review can be accepted “only where a glaring omission or patent mistake or like grave error has crept in earlier by judicial fallibility”.

In a 2013 ruling, the Supreme Court has laid down three grounds for seeking a review of a verdict it has delivered:
1. The discovery of new and important matter or evidence which, after the exercise of due diligence, was not within the knowledge of the petitioner or could not be produced by him.
2. Mistake or error apparent on the face of the record.
3. Any other sufficient reason. It means a reason that is analogous to the other two grounds.

In 2013 Union of India v. Sandur Manganese & Iron Ores Ltd case, the court laid down nine principles on when a review is maintainable.

Who can file a review petition?
As per the Civil Procedure Code and the Supreme Court Rules, any person aggrieved by a ruling can seek a review. However, the court exercises its discretion to allow a review petition only when it shows the grounds for seeking the review.

Time- period within which a review petition should be filed?
1. As per 1996 rules framed by the Supreme Court:
   - A review petition must be filed within 30 days of the date of judgment or order. While a judgment is the final decision in a case, an order is an interim ruling that is subject to its final verdict.
2. In certain circumstances, the court can condone a delay in filing the review petition if the petitioner can establish strong reasons that justify the delay.
The procedure to be followed:

1. The rules state that review petitions would ordinarily be entertained without oral arguments by lawyers. It is heard “through circulation” by the judges in their chambers.
2. Review petitions are also heard, as far as practicable, by the same combination of judges who delivered the order or judgment that is sought to be reviewed.
3. If a judge has retired or is unavailable, a replacement is made keeping in mind the seniority of judges.
4. In exceptional cases, the court allows an oral hearing. In a 2014 case, the Supreme Court held that review petitions in all death penalty cases will be heard in open court by a Bench of three judges.

What if a review petition fails?
As the court of last resort, the Supreme Court’s verdict cannot result in a miscarriage of justice.
In Roopa Hurra v Ashok Hurra (2002), the court itself evolved the concept of a curative petition, which can be heard after a review is dismissed to prevent abuse of its process.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. Chhattisgarh panchayats to have disabled quota

What to study?
For Prelims: About the amendments.
For Mains: Need for and significance, implications for other states.

Context: The Chhattisgarh Cabinet has approved an amendment to the State Panchayati Raj Act, 1993, which makes mandatory the presence of a person with disabilities in all panchayats across the state. This will make it the only State to have such members in all panchayats.

Key facts:
1. Every panchayat will now have differently abled members, either elected or nominated.
2. If differently abled members are not elected through the electoral process, then one member, either male or female, would be nominated as a panch.
3. And as for janpads and zilla panchayats, the State government would nominate two such members, one male and one female, to them.

Constitutional rights of the disabled:
Under the Constitution the disabled have been guaranteed the following fundamental rights:
1. The Constitution secures to the citizens including the disabled, a right of justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and of opportunity and for the promotion of fraternity.
2. Article 15(1) enjoins on the Government not to discriminate against any citizen of India (including disabled) on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
3. Article 15 (2) States that no citizen (including the disabled) shall be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition on any of the above grounds in the matter of their access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment or in the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of government funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.
4. There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens (including the disabled) in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
5. No person including the disabled irrespective of his belonging can be treated as an untouchable. It would be an offence punishable in accordance with law as provided by Article 17 of the Constitution.
6. Every person including the disabled has his life and liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

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

1. Governor’s Role when no party has staked claim to form a government

What to study?
For Prelims: Role if governor in case of a hung assembly.
For Mains: Implications and challenges involved.

What is the Governor’s role in such circumstances?
The Governor would be expected to go as per an order of preference set out in the Sarkaria Commission recommendations, which have also been ratified by the Supreme Court. By the order of preference, the Governor can invite:
1. A pre-poll alliance of parties.
2. Invite the single largest party which stakes a claim to form government.
3. Invite a post-poll alliance of parties, with all the partner in the coalition joining the government.
4. Invite a post-poll alliances of parties, with some becoming part of the government and some supporting from outside.

The Governor can only summon the new House for the first sitting only after a new government is sworn in and the Cabinet has suggested a suitable date. The process of swearing-in of the newly elected members and appointment of the new Speaker can be held thereafter.

What after swearing in?
1. Once any formation is sworn in, it will need to pass the floor test, which will reveal whether the executive enjoys the confidence of the legislature as mandated by the Constitution.
2. In the floor test, the person sworn in as the CM has to prove that s/he enjoys the confidence of the House. If the confidence motion fails, the Chief Minister has to resign.
3. If more than one person stake claim to form the government and the majority is not clear, the Governor has the powers to call a special session to assess who has the majority.
4. The date for the floor test is decided by the Governor in consultation with the new government.

If no government can be formed, is President’s rule likely?
Article 356 of the Constitution provides for the imposition of President’s Rule in a state in “case of failure of the constitutional machinery in the state”. As per the constitutional stipulation, it can be imposed in cases where the President, on receipt of report from the Governor of the state or otherwise, is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

In Maharashtra’s case, if the Governor is satisfied that no party or alliance can form a stable government would he recommend imposition of President’s rule.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. President’s Rule in the Indian Context

Article 356 of the Constitution of India gives President of India the power to suspend state government and impose President’s rule of any state in the country if “if he is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution”.

1. Upon the imposition of this rule, there would be no Council of Ministers. The Vidhan Sabha is either dissolved or prorogued.
2. The state will fall under the direct control of the Union government, and the Governor will continue to be head the proceedings, representing the President of India – who is the Head of the State.
3. The imposition of the President’s rule requires the sanction of both the houses of Parliament.
4. If approved, it can go on for a period of six months. However, the imposition cannot be extended for more than three years, and needs to be brought before the two houses every six months for approval.

How does it affect the people of the state?
While day to day operations of the state will not be affected, President’s rule would mean that for the next six months no major government decisions will be made. No projects will be sanctioned, and no major policy decisions including subsidies and others will be made — keeping the progress in a can until the next government is formed.

**Revocation:**
1. A proclamation of President’s Rule may be revoked by the President at any time by a subsequent proclamation. Such a proclamation does not require parliamentary approval.
2. This happens, in case, the leader of a party produces letters of support from a majority of members of the Assembly, and stakes his claim to form a government.

**What’s the issue in Maharashtra?**
In the recent elections to the 288-member Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, the BJP got 105 seats, the Shiv Sena got 56, NCP 54 and the Congress 44 seats. Although the BJP and Shiv Sena had fought the election as an alliance, after the results, the alliance fell apart on the issue of who will be the chief minister. No single party got a majority in the House, and no alliance could be formed claiming a majority. Hence the governor of the state recommended President’s Rule, which was imposed.

**Why is the governor’s move being criticised?**
When the governor of Maharashtra could not find any party or combination of parties that appeared to have a majority in the Assembly, before recommending imposition of President’s Rule, he should have sent a message to the House under Article 175(2), after summoning it under Article 174(1), asking the House to assemble, deliberate and then inform him within a reasonable period of time in whom it has confidence, so that he could be appointed chief minister.

In Bommai’s case, it was held that imposition of President’s Rule was a very serious step, and is a last option, to be resorted to only when all other recourses have failed. Hence without resorting to the options available, recommending imposition of President’s Rule straightaway is clearly seen as unconstitutional.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. Maharashtra floor test plea and Supreme Court’s demands

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Meaning and implications of Rule 12.*
*For Mains: Significance and concerns associated.*

**Context:** The Supreme Court had put on hold a plea for ordering a floor test in the Maharashtra Assembly till it examined records that might shed light on what led Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari to invite BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis to form the government and later swear him in as the Chief Minister on November 23.

The Supreme Court gave the government time until 10.30 am on Monday (November 25) to produce:
1. The letter written by Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari recommending the revocation of President’s Rule and inviting Devendra Fadnavis to form the government.
2. The letter that Fadnavis submitted to the Governor to demonstrate that he has majority support among the MLAs.

**Under what rule, has the President’s rule been revoked?**
To revoke President’s Rule, the government has used a special Section in the Union government’s Transaction of Business Rules (Rule 12), which allows for revocation of President’s Rule without Cabinet approval if the Prime Minister “deems it necessary”.

- **Rule 12** of the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961, allows the Prime Minister to depart from laid down norms at his discretion.
- It says, “The Prime Minister may, in case or classes of cases permit or condone a departure from these rules, to the extent he deems necessary.”
- The Cabinet can subsequently give post-facto approval for any decision taken under Rule 12.

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Under what circumstances is Rule 12 used?
The rule is usually not used to arrive at major decisions by the government. However, it has been used in matters such as withdrawal of an office memorandum or signing of MoUs in the past.

When was it used?
The last big decision taken through the invocation of Rule 12 was re-organisation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh on October 31.
- The proclamations issued by the President that day, dividing various districts between the two Union Territories, were issued under Rule 12.
- The Cabinet gave post-facto approval to the same on November 20.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Equal representation to all States in Rajya Sabha sought

What to study?
For Prelims: Rajya Sabha - elections, composition and functions.
For Mains: Need for issues, challenges and solutions.

Context:
On the occasion of its 250th session, Rajya Sabha MPs have made the following suggestions:
1. Giving all States, irrespective of their population and size, an equal number of seats in the Rajya Sabha.
2. All members, irrespective of their parties’ strength in the House, the same amount of time to speak in debates.

Need for Rajya Sabha:
1. The Upper House of the Indian Parliament traces its direct history to the first bicameral legislature introduced in British India in 1919 as a consequence of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.
2. Unlike the US Senate which ensures equal representation for all federal units (each state having two representatives), India’s Rajya Sabha does have more members from populous states.
3. Even though Indian states are ‘mere administrative units’ which don’t enjoy a constitutionally-assured permanence, their continued existence over all these years and the constitutional separation of power has given them the nature of autonomous units in their own spheres. Therefore, the ‘state-wise’ identity cannot be ruled out completely.
4. India’s Rajya Sabha has equal powers to the Lok Sabha except for money bills, where it has no jurisdiction.

Is the Rajya Sabha essential?
1. The contemporary argument against it comes from two primary angles:
2. The first one suggests that a Lok Sabha that has representation from several regional parties more than adequately represents a federal country.
3. The second argument charges that the Rajya Sabha has become a haven for losers in elections, crony capitalists, compromised journalists and party fundraisers.

What can be done?
It is virtually impossible to abolish the Rajya Sabha without adopting a new Indian Constitution. The bicameral nature of the Indian Parliament is likely to be interpreted as a “basic structure” of the Indian Constitution, rendering it incapable of being amended. Even if this were to be tested, it would be ensnared in a judicial process for a very long time. It is much more practical to try and reform the Rajya Sabha than seeking to abolish it.

Reforms needed:
1. Have members of the Rajya Sabha be directly elected by the citizens of a state. This will reduce cronyism and patronage appointments.
2. This step should be combined with equal representation for each state (say, five members) so that large states do not dominate the proceedings in the House.
3. This streamlined Rajya Sabha should remain deliberative, but there should be deadlines set for responding to bills initiated in the Lok Sabha.

Sources: the Hindu.

Mains Question: Discuss the constitutional status of Rajya Sabha with respect to Lok Sabha.

5. Gram Sabha

What to study?
For Prelims: Constitution, composition and functions of Gram Sabha. 
For Mains: Issues associated with their functioning, need for more powers.

Context: The Haryana Cabinet has taken an in-principle decision to bring an amendment in Section 31 of the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, allowing devolution of powers to the Gram Sabha to ban liquor within the local area of a Gram Panchayat.
- The quorum of the Gram Sabha meeting for passing such a resolution shall be one-tenth of its members.

What is Gram Sabha?
The term Gram Sabha is defined in the Constitution of India under Article 243(b). Gram Sabha is the primary body of the Panchayati Raj system and by far the largest. It is a permanent body.
The power to annul a decision of the Gram Sabha rests with the Gram Sabha only.

Composition:
1. Persons, those who are above 18 years of age.
2. Living in the village.
3. Whose names are included in the electoral rolls for the Panchayat at the village level.

Powers and functions:
Constitution mentions that Gram Sabha exercises such powers and performs such functions at the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide.

Important and specific functions of Gram Sabha:
1. To help implementation of the development programmes and schemes of the Panchayat.
2. To identify beneficiaries for different programmes and schemes. However, if the Gram Sabha fails to identify such beneficiaries within a reasonable time, the Gram Panchayat shall identify the beneficiaries.
3. To solicit support — in cash or kind or both and voluntary labour — from the public for community welfare programmes.
4. To support the programmes of mass education and family welfare.
5. To promote unity and harmony among all sections of the society in the village.
6. To seek clarification from the Mukhiya, Up-Mukhiya and other members of the Gram Panchayat about any particular activity, scheme, income and expenditure.
7. To discuss and recommend appropriate action with regard to reports of the Vigilance Committee.
8. Other related matters brought to the notice of the Gram Sabha.
9. To consider levy of taxes, rates, rents & fees & enhancement of rates thereof.
10. To consider all such matters as may be referred by the Gram Panchayat for its decision.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Rules for the Conduct of Business

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of various rules discussed below.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the Code of conduct for MPs and MLAs.

Context: The suspension of two Congress members by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla after unruly scenes in the House has brought back focus on the conduct of MPs, and related issues.

Powers of Speaker under the Rules for the Conduct of Business:

Rule 378 of the Rules for the Conduct of Business states: “The Speaker shall preserve order and shall have all powers necessary for the purpose of enforcing own decisions.”

Rule 373 says: “The Speaker, if is of the opinion that the conduct of any member is grossly disorderly, may direct such member to withdraw immediately from the House, and any member so ordered to withdraw shall do so forthwith and shall remain absent during the remainder of the day’s sitting.”

For recalcitrant members, Rule 374 says:

1. The Speaker may, if deems it necessary, name a member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the House by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business thereof.
2. If a member is so named by the Speaker, the Speaker shall, on a motion being made forthwith put the question that the member (naming such member) be suspended from the service of the House for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session: Provided that the House may, at any time, on a motion being made, resolve that such suspension be terminated.
3. A member suspended under this rule shall forthwith withdraw from the precincts of the House.

Rule 374A:

1. Notwithstanding anything contained in rules 373 and 374, in the event of grave disorder occasioned by a member coming into the well of the House or abusing the Rules of the House persistently and wilfully obstructing its business by shouting slogans or otherwise, such member shall, on being named by the Speaker, stand automatically suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less: Provided that the House may, at any time, on a motion being made, resolve that such suspension be terminated.
2. On the Speaker announcing the suspension under this rule, the member shall forthwith withdraw from the precincts of the House.

Need of the hour:

1. Political parties should have a code of conduct for their MPs and MLAs to help monitor their behaviour in Parliament and state legislatures.
2. Political parties could include such a code in their election manifestos that would help enable voters to make their judgement before voting.
3. The code of conduct should include stipulations that members would not enter the well of the house, nor resort to sloganeering and disruptions or any other unruly behaviour such as tearing of papers and throwing them in the House.
4. There is also a need for more coordination between the ruling party and the opposition, both inside and outside Parliament, that could help bring about consensus on important legislations.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. What are Starred Questions?

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Difference between Starred and unstarred questions.

Context: As many as 20 starred questions were taken up during Question Hour in one day, a record since 1972.

Background:
The number of starred questions was fixed at 20 per Question Hour from the fourth session of the fifth Lok Sabha in 1972.
**Type of Questions:**
Members have a right to ask questions to elicit information on matters of public importance within the special cognizance of the Ministers concerned. The questions are of four types:

1. **Starred Questions:** A Starred Question is one to which a member desires an oral answer from the Minister in the House and is required to be distinguished by him/her with an asterisk. Answer to such a question may be followed by supplementary questions by members.

2. **Unstarred Questions:** An Unstarred Question is one to which written answer is desired by the member and is deemed to be laid on the Table of the House by Minister. Thus it is not called for oral answer in the House and no supplementary question can be asked thereon.

3. **Short Notice Questions:** A member may give a notice of question on a matter of public importance and of urgent character for oral answer at a notice less than 10 days prescribed as the minimum period of notice for asking a question in ordinary course. Such a question is known as ‘Short Notice Question’.

4. **Questions to Private Members:** A Question may also be addressed to a Private Member (Under Rule 40 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha), provided that the subject matter of the question relates to some Bill, Resolution or other matter connected with the business of the House for which that Member is responsible. The procedure in regard to such questions is same as that followed in the case of questions addressed to a Minister with such variations as the Speaker may consider necessary.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. **MLA’s Citizenship revoked for hiding foreign visits**

   **What to study?**
   For Prelims and mains: Particulars of the Citizenship act, procedure for granting and revocation of citizenship.

   **Context:** The home ministry has revoked the citizenship of Telangana MLA Ramesh Chennamaneni on the ground of misrepresentation of facts at the time of applying for citizenship in 2008.

   **What’s the issue?**
   Ramesh, who had been living in Germany since 1993, applied for Indian citizenship on March 31, 2008 and was granted the same on February 4, 2009.
   When the MLA applied for Indian Citizenship, he was holding Germany’s citizenship and never stayed in India for more than 12 months as required for a foreign national in the Foreigners Act.

   **What does the Citizenship Act of 1955 say on this?**
   Sections 5(1)(f) and 10(2) of the act deal with grant of citizenship and the authority of the government to cancel the same.
   According to Section 5(1)(f), “the Central Government may, on an application made in this behalf, register as a citizen of India any person if a person of full age and capacity who, or either of his parents, was earlier citizen of independent India, and has been residing in India for one year immediately before making an application for registration.”
   Section 10(2) says: “Subject to the provisions of this section, the Central Government may, by order, deprive any such citizen of Indian citizenship, if it is satisfied that the registration or certificate of naturalisation was obtained by means of fraud, false representation or the concealment of any material fact.”
   Protection against arbitrary action: Section 10(3) of the Act says, “The Central Government shall not deprive a person of citizenship under this section unless it is satisfied that it is not conducive to the public good that person should continue to be a citizen of India.”

Sources: the Hindu.
2. Registration of political parties under Section 29A of the RP Act, 1951

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Registration of political parties and provisions governing them, benefits of registration.

Context: Jannayak Janta Party of Haryana has been granted the status of a recognised State party by the ECI.

Registration of political parties:
Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

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

To be eligible for a ‘State Political Party,’ the Election Commission has set the following criteria:
For any political party to be eligible for recognition as a State Party in a state, it has to satisfy any of the five conditions listed below:
1. Secure at least 6% of the valid vote & win at least 2 seats in an Assembly General Election.
2. Secure at least 6% of the valid vote & win at least 1 seats in a Lok Sabha General Election
3. Win at least 3% of the seats or at least 3 seats , whichever is more, in an Assembly General Election
4. Win at least 1 out of every 25 seats from a state in a Lok Sabha General Election
5. Secure at least 8% of the total valid vote in an Assembly or a Lok Sabha General Election.

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

Sources: pib.

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

1. GST Council

What to study?
For Prelims: About GST Council- composition, functions and related key facts, overview of GST.
For Mains: Issues associated with GST, need for reforms and various measures announced in this regard.

Context: Chairman of the 15th finance commission N.K. Singh has called for symmetry in the working of the GST council and the finance commission.

Need for symmetry?
While the finance commission looks at the projections of expenditure and revenue, the issue of GST rates exemptions, changes and implementation of the indirect taxes are within the domain of the GST council. This leads to unsettled questions on the ways to monitor, scrutinise and optimise revenue outcomes. Therefore, coordination among the two is necessary.
Why do we need a GST Council?
- The GST council is the key decision-making body that will take all important decisions regarding the GST.
- The GST Council dictates tax rate, tax exemption, the due date of forms, tax laws, and tax deadlines, keeping in mind special rates and provisions for some states.
- The predominant responsibility of the GST Council is to ensure to have one uniform tax rate for goods and services across the nation.

How is the GST Council structured?
The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is governed by the GST Council. Article 279 (1) of the amended Indian Constitution states that the GST Council has to be constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of the Article 279A.

Composition:
According to the article, GST Council will be a joint forum for the Centre and the States. It consists of the following members:
1. The Union Finance Minister will be the Chairperson
2. As a member, the Union Minister of State will be in charge of Revenue of Finance
3. The Minister in charge of finance or taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State government, as members.

GST Council recommendations:
Article 279A (4) specifies that the Council will make recommendations to the Union and the States on the important issues related to GST, such as, the goods and services will be subject or exempted from the Goods and Services Tax.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. National Registry of Voluntary Organ Donors

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features of the act, recommendations made by the committee and issues associated with organ transplants.

Context: The Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the Centre and the states of Punjab and Haryana, as well as the Union Territory of Chandigarh, to implement ‘The Transplant of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994’ in letter and spirit, and to also consider the recommendations of an Expert Committee set up to give suggestions for an effective implementation of the law.

Background:
The 1994 Act governs the transplantation of human organs and tissues in India, including the donation of organs after death.
In May 2019, the PGIMER was asked to constitute a committee of doctors for deliberations over the subject, and to submit a report containing measures to promote cadaver donations.

Key Recommendations made by the committee:
1. Create a National Registry of Donors, and a biometrics-based authentication of donors and recipients.
2. A database of all surgeons and medical experts sanctioned for the transplantation should also be maintained.
3. It recommended that the identity of the donor and the recipient be verified through a biometric system of authentication to prevent fabrication of identity or other fraud in the process.
4. All hospitals engaged in transplantation procedures must invest in a biometric system linked to the national database of Aadhaar and PAN numbers.
5. Mandatory informed consent should be taken in case of live donors after explaining to them the risks involved in donation surgery.
6. A right be given to the donor to withdraw consent any time before the surgery.
7. It has suggested a ‘wait period’ or cooling period to allow rethinking on the part of the live donor.
8. A lumpsum monetary reimbursement should be given to the donor towards expenses related to the transplantation, and suggested a payment of at least Rs 50,000 at the time of discharge.
9. It has also called for a system to provide for medical insurance of the donor, and also for their post surgical needs.

What has the Committee said about government institutions and awareness process?
Stating that the process of organ donation and consent involves religious beliefs, social taboos and certain apprehensions by the relatives, the Committee has said there needs to be the involvement of certified NGOs and religious bodies to create positive awareness.
It has said that government hospitals and transplant centres should be given priority attention to improve the deceased organ donation, and that measures should be taken to prevent the trend of employing visiting surgeons at private centres in violation of practice registration norms.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Why govt is encouraging Ethanol Production?

What to study?
For Prelims: ethanol production and benefits.
For Mains: Need for blending and the demand for increased production?

Context: The Ministry of Environment and Forests announced that mills would not require separate environmental clearance to produce additional ethanol from B-heavy molasses.
- The proposals to undertake additional ethanol production from B-heavy molasses/sugarcane juice/sugar syrup/sugar would be considered under the provisions of the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) notification, 2006, by an expert appraisal committee for granting environmental clearance.

What are ethanol and molasses?
Ethanol, or ethyl alcohol, is a liquid that has several uses. At 95% purity, it is called rectified spirit and is used as the intoxicating ingredient in alcoholic beverages. At 99%-plus purity, ethanol is used for blending with petrol.
- Both products are made from molasses, a byproduct of sugar manufacturing. For making sugar, mills crush sugarcane which typically has a total fermentable sugars (TFS) content of 14%.
- The TFS component consists of sucrose along with the reducing sugars glucose and fructose. Most of this TFS component gets crystallised into sugar, and the remaining part is called molasses.

Molasses stages:
The molasses go through three stages — A, B, and C, the last one being where the molasses are most un-crystallised and non-recoverable.
- The ‘C’ molasses roughly constitute 4.5% of the cane, and have a remaining TFS of 40%.
- After C-molasses are sent to the distillery, ethanol is extracted from them. Every 100 kg of TFS yields 60 litres of ethanol.
- Thus, from one tonne of cane, mills can produce 115 kg of sugar (at 11.5% recovery) and 45 kg of molasses (18 kg TFS) that gives 10.8 litres of ethanol.

How more ethanol can be produced?
Mills can also produce only ethanol from sugarcane, without producing sugar at all. In this case, the entire 14% TFS in the cane is fermented. Here, a mill can make 84 litres of ethanol and zero kg of sugar.
• In between the two extreme cases, there are intermediate options as well, where the cane juice does not have to be crystallised right till the final ‘C’ molasses stage. The molasses can, instead, be diverted after the earlier ‘A’ and ‘B’ stages of sugar crystal formation. Mills, then, would produce some sugar, as opposed to fermenting the whole sugarcane juice into ethanol.
• If ethanol is manufactured using ‘B’ heavy molasses (7.25% of cane and with TFS of 50%), around 21.75 litres will get produced along with 95 kg of sugar from every 1 tonne of cane.

Why focus on more ethanol?
Mills currently have all-time-high stocks of sugar, and they have been at loggerheads with farmers over non-payment of dues.
Mill owners insist that the reason behind their woes is excess production of sugar and fall in its price.
Under the circumstances, ethanol is the only real saviour — both for mills and cane growers.
  1. In September this year, the government approved an increase in the price of ethanol to be procured by public sector oil marketing companies from sugar mills for blending with petrol for the 2019-20 supply year from December 1.
  2. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs also allowed conversion of old sugar into ethanol, which again is expected to help mills deal with the current overproduction in the sweetener and make timely payments to farmers for the cane delivered by them.
  3. Ethanol production has been additionally facilitated with the government mandating 10% blending of petrol with ethanol.

Sources: Indian Express.

3. Steel Scrap Recycling Policy

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the Scrapping policy and National Steel Policy.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the policy.

Context: In a bid to ensure quality scrap for the steel industry, the government has come out with a Steel Scrap Recycling Policy that aims to reduce imports, conserve resources and save energy.
• The policy resulted from the Indian government’s National Steel Policy of 2017, in which the country is expected to have 300 million mt/year of steel production capacity by 2030.

Key features of the policy:
  1. The policy aims to promote circular economy in the steel sector", besides promoting "a formal and scientific collection, dismantling and processing activities for end of life products.
  2. It envisages a framework to facilitate and promote establishment of metal scrapping centres in India, which will ensure scientific processing and recycling of ferrous scrap generated from various sources and a variety of products.
  3. It also aims to decongest the Indian cities from reuse of ferrous scrap, besides creating a mechanism for treating waste streams and residues produced from dismantling and shredding facilities in compliance to Hazardous & Other Wastes (Management & Trans boundary Movement) Rules, 2016 issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
  4. The policy is based on "6Rs principles of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, Redesign and Remanufacture through scientific handling, processing and disposal of all types of recyclable scraps including non-ferrous scraps, through authorized centers / facility".

Need for a policy in this regard:
• The country’s steel scrap imports were valued at Rs 24,500 crore in 2017-18, while the deficit was to the tune of 7 MT.
• The scrap policy will ensure processing and recycling of products in an organised, safe and environment friendly manner, besides evolving a responsive ecosystem and producing high quality ferrous scrap for quality steel production minimising the dependency on imports.
And the gap between demand and supply of scrap can be reduced in the future and the country may be self-sufficient by 2030.

The scrapping policy shall ensure that quality scrap is available for the steel industry.

**Use of scrap and benefits associated:**
1. Scrap is an important input for the electric furnaces. If quality scrap is provided as the charge to the electric furnaces, then the furnaces can produce high grade steel. High grade steel scrap shall not have the impurities if processing is done with the scrap processing centres and by shredders etc.
2. There is a worldwide trend to increase steel production using scrap as the main raw material as recycling of scrap helps in conservation of vital natural resources besides other numerous benefits.
3. The use of every tonne of scrap shall save 1.1 tonne of iron ore, 630 kg of coking coal and 55 kg of limestone. There shall be considerable saving in specific energy consumption also.

**Concerns:**
The policy has raised several market concerns ranging from a surge of mixed metal (unprocessed) scrap flowing into the country to challenges of setting up recycling centers.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. Study moots lowering the age of consent

**What to study?**

*For prelims and mains: Laws in this regard, need for change.*

**Context:** A new study calls for a need to distinguish between self-arranged marriages among older adolescents and forced child marriages to protect teens from social stigma, parental backlash and punitive action.

**Key findings:**
1. The study makes a case for an age of consent that is lower than the age of marriage to decriminalise sex among consenting older adolescents to protect them from the misuse of law for enforcing parental and caste controls over daughters.
2. It also demanded uniform age for marriage.
3. The study also records that while girls face restrictions on their mobility, premarital relations and sexuality, the same was not true for boys of the same social milieu who enjoyed greater freedom.
4. The study again provides evidence of the misuse of POCSO, which raised the age of consent from 16 to 18 years. Activists have long argued that this would result in adolescents being wrong.

**What the law says?**

- Currently, the law prescribes that the minimum age of marriage is 21 and 18 years for men and women respectively.
- The minimum age of marriage is distinct from the age of majority, which is gender-neutral.
- An individual attains the age of majority at 18 as per the Indian Majority Act, 1875.
- For Hindus, Section 5(iii) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom. Child marriages are not illegal but can be declared void at the request of the minor in the marriage.
- In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid under personal law.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 also prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.

**Why have a minimum age for marriage?**
The law prescribes a minimum age of marriage to essentially outlaw child marriages and prevent abuse of minors. Personal laws of various religions that deal with marriage have their own standards, often reflecting custom.

**Need for uniformity:**
1. The different legal standards for the age of men and women to marry has been a subject of debate.
2. In a consultation paper of reform in family law in 2018, the Law Commission argued that having different legal standards “contributes to the stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands”.
3. Women’s rights activists too have argued that the law perpetuates the stereotype that women are more mature than men of the same age and therefore can be allowed to marry sooner.
4. The Law Commission paper recommended that the minimum age of marriage for both genders be set at 18. For the difference in age for husband and wife has no basis in law as spouses entering into a marriage are by all means equals and their partnership must also be of that between equals.

**Two Supreme Court rulings could be significant to the context of this argument:**
1. In 2014, in National Legal Services Authority of India v Union of India, the Supreme Court while recognising transgenders as the third gender said that justice is delivered with the “assumption that humans have equal value and should, therefore, be treated as equal, as well as by equal laws.”
2. In 2019, in Joseph Shine v Union of India, the Supreme Court decriminalised adultery and said that “a law that treats women differently based on gender stereotypes is an affront to women’s dignity.”

Sources: the Hindu.

## 5. FCRA and Foreign Funding

**What to study?**

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

**Context:** More than 1,800 NGOs and academic institutes found to be violating laws pertaining to foreign funding have been banned by the government from receiving overseas funds this year.

**Regulation of Foreign Funding:**

*The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010* and rules framed under it (the “FCRA” or “Act”) regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) in India. Since the Act is internal security legislation, despite being a law related to financial legislation, it falls into the purview of Home Ministry and not the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

**Scope and objective of FCRA:**

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

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

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

**Definition of foreign contribution:**

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

**Acceptance of foreign funds:**

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.

Registration and prior approval under FCRA:

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

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

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

Reporting requirement:

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

How to ensure transparency?

A National Accreditation Council consisting of academicians, activist, retired bureaucrats should be made to ensure compliance by NGOs. There should be better coordination between Ministries of Home Affairs and Finance in terms of monitoring and regulating illicit and unaccounted funds.

A regulatory mechanism to keep a watch on the financial activities of NGOs and voluntary organizations is the need of the hour.

Citizens today are keen to play an active role in processes that shape their lives and it is important that their participation in democracy go beyond the ritual of voting and should include promotion of social justice, gender equity, inclusion etc.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar River Link Project

What to study?

For Prelims: ILR- approved projects and their brief overview.
For Mains: Need for and significance of interlinking of rivers.

Context: The Kerala State government is saying that it is taking all precautions to prevent the implementation of the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar river link project.

What’s the issue?

Kerala is not allowing Pamba-Achankovil to be connected with the Vaippar river in Tamil Nadu under the interlinking of rivers project. Kerala asserts that there is no excess water in rivers in the state.
Background:
The river link proposal is listed among the river linking projects of the NWDA. It envisages diversion of 634 cubic millimeters of water from the Pamba and Achankovil rivers in Kerala to the Vaippar basin in Tamil Nadu.

Need for interlinking of rivers:
The interlinking project aims to link India’s rivers by a network of reservoirs and canals that will allow for their water capacities to be shared and redistributed. According to some experts, this is an engineered panacea that will reduce persistent floods in some parts and water shortages in other parts besides facilitating the generation of hydroelectricity for an increasingly power hungry country.

Benefits and significance of interlinking:
Enhances water and food security of the country and it is essential for providing water to drought prone and water deficit areas.

Proper utilization: River interlinking projects envisage that the surplus water available in Himalayan Rivers is transferred to the areas where water supply is not adequate in the Peninsular India. Also, huge quantities of water from several Peninsular rivers drain unutilized into the sea, and river interlinking projects help transfer this water to water deficit areas of Peninsular India.

Boost to agriculture: The main occupation of rural India is agriculture and if monsoon fails in a year, then agricultural activities come to a standstill and this will aggravate rural poverty. Interlinking of rivers will be a practical solution for this problem, because the water can be stored or water can be transferred from water surplus area to deficit.

Disaster mitigation: The Ganga Basin, Brahmaputra basin sees floods almost every year. In order to avoid this, the water from these areas has to be diverted to other areas where there is scarcity of water. This can be achieved by linking the rivers. There is a two way advantage with this – floods will be controlled and scarcity of water will be reduced.

Transportation: Interlinking of rivers will also have commercial importance on a longer run. This can be used as inland waterways and which helps in faster movement of goods from one place to other.

Employment generation: Interlinking also creates a new occupation for people living in and around these canals and it can be the main areas of fishing in India.

Concerns associated:
• Interlinking of rivers will cause huge amount of distortion in the existing environment. In order to create canals and reservoirs, there will be mass deforestation. This will have impact on rains and in turn affect the whole cycle of life.
• Usually rivers change their course and direction in about 100 years and if this happens after interlinking, then the project will not be feasible for a longer run.
• Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas and this will cause a serious threat to the marine life system and will be a major ecological disaster.
• Due to the creation of Canals and Reservoirs, huge amount of area which is occupied by the people will be submerged leading to displacement of people and government will have to spend more to rehabilitate these people.
• The amount required for these projects is so huge that government will have to take loans from the foreign sources which would increase the burden on the government and country will fall in a debt trap.

Sources: the Hindu.
7. Rules notified to bring financial firms under IBC

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the new rules and IBC.
For Mains: Need for and significance of inclusion of other firms.

Context: The Centre has issued rules that provide a framework for bringing ‘systemically important financial service providers’ under the purview of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).
- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified the Insolvency and Bankruptcy (Insolvency and Liquidation Proceedings of Financial Service Providers and Application to Adjudicating Authority) Rules, 2019.
- These rules aim to provide a generic framework for insolvency and liquidation proceedings of systemically important FSPs other than banks.

Background: Section 227 of the [Insolvency and Bankruptcy] Code enables the Central government to notify, in consultation with the financial sector regulators, financial service providers (FSPs) or categories of FSPs for the purpose of insolvency and liquidation proceedings, in such manner as may be prescribed.

The new rules:
- As per the new rules, only a regulator will be allowed to refer a non-bank lender or housing financier to a bankruptcy tribunal, unlike in the case of companies that can approach a tribunal on their own, or can be dragged into one either by lenders or operational creditors such as material suppliers.
- The bankruptcy tribunal will appoint an administrator who will try to stitch together a turnaround plan.
- The administrator will be nominated by the regulator, such as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the case of non-bank lenders and housing financiers.
- The registration or the licence of the financial services provider will not be suspended or cancelled during the bankruptcy resolution process.
- In case a turnaround of the financial institution is not possible, before deciding to liquidate it, the tribunal will listen to the views of the regulator.

Significance:
The introduction of an interim framework for resolution of financial service providers under the IBC is a timely and important step for resolution of financial service providers permitting an interplay between regulators, creditors and the NCLT (National Company Law Tribunal) for appropriate actions. These rules are likely to help out distressed shadow banks and housing financiers, which have been battling a liquidity crunch for a year.

Sources: The Hindu.

8. Regulation on Cooperative Banks soon

What to study?
For Prelims: Cooperative banks- composition, functions and regulations.
For Mains: The issue of dual regulation and ways to address it.

Context: The government will, in the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament, seek to make amendments in certain laws so as to bring the banking activities carried out by cooperative societies under the purview of the Banking Regulation Act.
The government is also planning to increase the amount of deposits in banks that are insured, from the current ₹1 lakh.

What are co-operative banks?
Co-operative banks are financial entities established on a co-operative basis and belonging to their members. This means that the customers of a co-operative bank are also its owners. These banks provide a wide range of regular banking and financial services. However, there are some points where they differ from other banks.
Structure of co-operative banks in India:

Broadly, co-operative banks in India are divided into two categories - urban and rural.

Rural cooperative credit institutions could either be short-term or long-term in nature.

- Short-term cooperative credit institutions are further sub-divided into State Co-operative Banks, District Central Co-operative Banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.
- Long-term institutions are either State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs) or Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs).

Urban Co-operative Banks (UBBs) are either scheduled or non-scheduled. Scheduled and non-scheduled UCBs are again of two kinds - multi-state and those operating in single state.

Who oversees these banks?

In India, co-operative banks are registered under the States Cooperative Societies Act. They also come under the regulatory ambit of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under two laws, namely, the Banking Regulations Act, 1949, and the Banking Laws (Co-operative Societies) Act, 1955.

They were brought under the RBI's watch in 1966, a move which brought the problem of dual regulation along with it.

Dual Regulation of Urban Cooperative Bank:

Urban Co-operative Banks are regulated and supervised by State Registrars of Co-operative Societies (RCS) in case of single-State co-operative banks and Central Registrar of Co-operative Societies (CRCS) in case of multi-State co-operative banks and by the RBI.

1. The RCS exercises powers under the respective Co-operative Societies Act of the States with regard to incorporation, registration, management, amalgamation, reconstruction or liquidation and in case of UCBs that have multi-State presence, are exercised by the CRCS.
2. The banking related functions such as issue of license to start new banks/branches, matters relating to interest rates, loan policies, investments and prudential exposure norms are regulated and supervised by the Reserve Bank under the provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. Mizoram revokes Forest Rights Act

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of FRA.
For Mains: Why Mizoram revoked? Concerns associated.

Context: The Mizoram government has passed a resolution revoking the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA).

Special powers Under Article 371 (G):

Under Article 371 (G) of the Constitution, Mizoram has a special provision which makes it mandatory for all legislations of Parliament pertaining to land ownership and transfer to be first passed by the state’s assembly through a resolution before it can be implemented in the state.

The state government used this provision of the Constitution to pass a resolution to revoke FRA from the state.

What is the concern now?

The revocation is being seen as a misuse of Article 371 (G) by the state government.

According to the 2017 State of Forest Report by the Forest Survey of India, around 20% of the total 5,641 square kilometres of the forest land in Mizoram is “Unclassed Forest” which is under Autonomous District Councils. The area of unclassed forest is lowest in Mizoram, among all North Eastern states. This also means that the potential for FRA implementation is also the highest in the state.

With a major portion of the geographical area of states like Mizoram under forest cover, and communities having ownership on those lands, revoking FRA can be seen as a means to keep the forest land with the forest departments for later diversion.
About Forest Rights Act (FRA):
- The act was passed in December 2006.
- It deals with the rights of forest-dwelling communities over land and other resources.
- The Act grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws.

Rights under the Act:
1. Title rights — Ownership to land that is being farmed by tribals or forest dwellers subject to a maximum of 4 hectares; ownership is only for land that is actually being cultivated by the concerned family, meaning that no new lands are granted.
2. Use rights — to minor forest produce (also including ownership), to grazing areas, to pastoralist routes, etc.
3. Relief and development rights — to rehabilitation in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement; and to basic amenities, subject to restrictions for forest protection.
4. Forest management rights — to protect forests and wildlife.

Eligibility:
Eligibility to get rights under the Act is confined to those who “primarily reside in forests” and who depend on forests and forest land for a livelihood. Further, either the claimant must be a member of the Scheduled Tribes scheduled in that area or must have been residing in the forest for 75 years.

Process of recognition of rights:
1. The Act provides that the gram sabha, or village assembly, will initially pass a resolution recommending whose rights to which resources should be recognised.
2. This resolution is then screened and approved at the level of the sub-division (or taluka) and subsequently at the district level.
3. The screening committees consist of three government officials (Forest, Revenue and Tribal Welfare departments) and three elected members of the local body at that level. These committees also hear appeals.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. National Register of Citizens (NRC)

What to study?
For Prelims: Particulars of NRC.
For Mains: Update of NRC- issues associated including ethical concerns.

Context: Union home minister Amit Shah has said that India shall soon introduce a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC).

How it would be carried out?
Details of how such an exercise will be carried out are not yet known.
In the case of Assam, there was a cut-off date — March 25, 1971 — after which all foreigners as per the Assam Accord were to be “detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law”.
Presumably, the Centre will come out with a cut-off for the nationwide NRC, but it will be an arbitrary one.

Why this is worrisome?
Assam’s example: This is an exercise fraught with risks, as the example of Assam shows. The process in the state has been mired in inaccuracies, with low but worrying odds of legal citizens being declared illegal residents in their own country.

Need of the hour:
1. Any such exercise demands a robust process that minimizes data infirmities.
2. This would mean a complete rehaul of the methods used in Assam.
3. Also, those who don’t make it to the list should get adequate legal recourse.

What is NRC?
The NRC is the list of Indian citizens and was prepared in 1951, following the census of 1951. The process of NRC update was taken up in Assam as per a Supreme Court order in 2013. In order to wean out cases of illegal migration from Bangladesh and other adjoining areas, NRC updation was carried out under The Citizenship Act, 1955, and according to rules framed in the Assam Accord.

Sources: the Hindu.

11. Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key provisions in the Bill and its significance.

Context: Parliament has passed the Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019. The Bill seeks to amend Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Act, 1951 to change provisions related to composition of Trustees of memorial and termination of trustee.

Background: Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Act, 1951 provided for the erection of a National Memorial in memory of those killed or wounded on April 13, 1919, in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar. The 1951 Act also provided for a Trust to manage the National Memorial.

Composition: The Trust as per the 1951 Act included the Prime Minister, as Chairperson, (ii) the President of the Indian National Congress, (iii) the Minister in-charge of Culture, (iv) the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, (v) the Governor of Punjab, (vi) the Chief Minister of Punjab, and (vii) three eminent persons nominated by the central government.

Changes:
1. The 2019 amendment bill removes the President of the Indian National Congress as a Trustee.
2. It clarifies that when there is no Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, the leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha will be the Trustee.
3. The 1951 act provided that the three eminent persons nominated by the central government will have a term of five years and will be eligible for re-nomination. The 2019 bill added a clause to allow the central government to terminate the term of a nominated trustee before the expiry of his term without assigning any reason.

Sources: pib.

12. Labour Code on Industrial Relations 2019
What to study?
For Prelims: The labour code- key features.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the code.

Context: The Union cabinet has approved the Labour Code on Industrial Relations 2019. The code will combine Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Trade Unions Act, 1926, and the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946.

Key features of the bill:
1. It seeks to allow companies to hire workers on fixed-term contract of any duration.
2. The code has retained the threshold on the worker count at 100 for prior government approval before retrenchment, but it has a provision for changing 'such number of employees' through notification.
3. It also provides setting up of a **two-member tribunal** (in place of one member) wherein important cases will be adjudicated jointly and the rest by a single member, resulting speedier disposal of cases.

4. It has vested **powers with the government officers for adjudication of disputes involving penalty as fines**.

**Implications:**
While this means workers can be hired seasonally for six months or a year it also means that **all workers will be treated at par with regular workers for benefits**.

**Background:**
The industrial relations code is **the third out of four labour codes that have got approval from the cabinet**. The Labour Code on Wages has already been approved by Parliament in August while the Labour Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions has been referred to the standing committee of labour.

Sources: pib.

13. **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)**

**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:** RBI Deputy Governor MK Jain has expressed concerns over growing non-performing assets (NPAs) in Mudra category.

**Why the concern?**
- Non-performing assets ratio or bad loans as a percentage of MUDRA loans were at 2.68% in 2018-19, up 16 basis points from 2.52% in the previous year. These loan NPAs were at 2.89% in 2016-17.
- Of the 182.60 million MUDRA loans sanctioned, 3.63 million accounts defaulted as on 31 March.

**Need of the hour:**
1. Banks need to focus on repayment capacity at the appraisal stage and monitor the loans through the lifecycle much more closely.
2. The application of technology in finance has its own share of risks and challenges for regulators and supervisors. Early recognition of these risks and initiating action to mitigate the related regulatory and supervisory challenges is key to harnessing the full potential of these developments.
3. Microfinance institutions must broaden their client outreach to reduce the concentration risk in their own interest and to serve a wider clientele base. From a financial inclusion perspective they should also critically review their operations so other regions don’t remain underserved.

**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).

**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.

14. **Automotive Mission Plan**

**What to study?**
**For Prelims:** Overview of AMP 2006 and 2016.
**For Mains:** Challenges before the automotive sector and reforms necessary.

**Context:** The Automotive Mission Plan (AMP) 2006-16 has been successful in its endeavour to lay down the roadmap for development of the industry.

**Key achievements:**
1. India has attracted significant quantum of investments from global and local original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) as well as component manufacturers, exceeding the target of Rs. 1,57,500 crore.
2. The Automotive industry has achieved the target of incremental employment creation of 25 million jobs over the period.
3. India has now emerged from just an automobile producing hub to designing and development hub as well.

**AMP 2026:**
AMP 2026 is the collective vision of the government of India and the automotive industry on where the various segments of the automotive industry and auto component industry need to be by 2026 in terms of size and contribution to the overall Indian economy.

**The objective of the Automotive Mission Plan 2026 includes:**
1. To propel the Indian Automotive industry to become the engine of the “Make in India” programme.
2. To make the Indian Automotive Industry a significant contributor to the “Skill India” programme.
3. Promote safe, efficient and comfortable mobility for every person in the country, with an eye on environmental protection and affordability through both public and personal transport options.
4. To seek increase of net exports of the Indian Automotive industry several fold.
5. Promote comprehensive and stable policy dispensation for all regulations impacting the industry.
Targets:
The AMP 2026 is aimed at bringing the Indian Automotive Industry among the top three of the world in engineering, manufacture and exports of vehicles & components; growing in value to over 12% of India GDP and generating an additional 65 million jobs.

Sources: pib.

15. Industrial Relations Code Bill, 2019

What to study?
For Prelims: The labour code- key features.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the code.

Context: The bill has been introduced in Lok Sabha.

Key facts:
- It is the third out of four labour codes that have got approval from the cabinet.

The Bill:
1. Seeks to allow companies to hire workers on fixed-term contract of any duration.
2. Has retained the threshold on the worker count at 100 for prior government approval before retrenchment, but it has a provision for changing ‘such number of employees’ through notification.
3. Provides setting up of a two-member tribunal (in place of one member) wherein important cases will be adjudicated jointly and the rest by a single member, resulting speedier disposal of cases.
4. Has vested powers with the government officers for adjudication of disputes involving penalty as fines.
5. Introduces a feature of ‘recognition of negotiating union’ under which a trade union will be recognized as sole ‘negotiating union’ if it has the support of 75% or more of the workers on the rolls of an establishment.
6. As several trade unions are active in companies, it will be tough for any one group to manage 75% support, hence taking away their negotiating rights. In such a case, a negotiating council will be constituted for negotiation.
7. Underlines that fixed-term employees will get all statutory benefits on a par with the regular employees who are doing work of the same or similar nature.
8. Under the code, termination of service of a worker on completion of tenure in a fixed-term employment will not be considered as retrenchment.
9. Proposes setting up of a “re-skilling fund” for training of retrenched employees. The retrenched employee would be paid 15 days’ wages from the fund within 45 days of retrenchment.

Significance:
The Indian economy grew at 5% in the June quarter, a six-year low, while the country’s factory output shrank for the second straight month at 4.3% in September, recording its worst show since the present series was launched in April 2012. The ease of compliance of labour laws will promote the setting up of more enterprises, thus catalysing the creation of employment opportunities in the country.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Skills Build Platform

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the programme.
Context: **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship** launches **Skills Build platform** in Collaboration with IBM.

**Key facts:**
- Launched by **Directorate General of Training (DGT), under the aegis of Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE).**
- As part of the programme, a **two-year advanced diploma in IT, networking and cloud computing**, co-created and designed by IBM, will be offered at the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) & National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs).
- The platform will be extended to train ITI & NSTI faculty on building skills in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

**Significance of the programme:**
- The digital platform will provide a personal assessment of the cognitive capabilities and personality via MyInnerGenius to the students.
- They will then learn foundational knowledge about digital technologies, as well as professional skills such as resume-writing, problem solving and communication.
- Students will also receive recommendations on role-based education for specific jobs that include technical and professional learning.
- This initiative is part of IBM’s global commitment to create a job-ready workforce and to build the next generation of skills needed for new collar careers.

Sources: pib.

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2. **One Stop Centre Scheme**

**What to study?**

**For prelims and mains: key features, need for and significance of the scheme.**

**Context:** The Government of India is implementing **One Stop Centre (OSC) scheme** for setting up One Stop Centre since 1st April 2015 to support women affected by violence.

**About the scheme:**
Popularly known as **Sakhi**, Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has formulated this **Centrally Sponsored Scheme.**

It is **a sub – scheme of Umbrella Scheme for National Mission for Empowerment of women** including Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana.

Under the scheme, **One Stop Centres** are being established across the country to **provide integrated support and assistance** under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in phased manner.

**Target group:** The OSC will support all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.

**The Centres will be integrated with a Women Helpline to facilitate access to following services:**
1. Emergency response and rescue services.
2. Medical assistance.
3. Assistance to women in lodging the FIR.
4. Psycho- social support and counselling.
5. Legal aid and counselling.
6. Shelter.
7. Video conferencing facility.

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

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

1. All visitors to Meghalaya must first register

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Changes introduced and overview of MRSS Act, ILP- features, significance and issues.

Context: Meghalaya has brought an ordinance that makes registration on entry mandatory for visitors who intend to spend more than 24 hours in the state.

- An amendment to the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act, 2016 has been passed to include this provision amid demands for an inner line permit (ILP) system to stop illegal immigration into the state.
- Exemption: Central and state government employees are exempt from the new entry rule.

Rationale behind this move:
The amendment comes in the backdrop of demands by civil society and political leaders, that people excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam might try to enter Meghalaya.

Background:
Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act (MRSSA) 2016 aims to ensure the security of the tenants as well as the safety and security of the citizens of the state.

- It provides for verification and regulation the tenants residing in rented houses in the state.
- It also establishes District Task Force and Facilitation Centres for effective enforcement of various laws for the safety and security of the citizens.

What is an ILP?
Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document required by Indian citizens residing outside certain “protected” states while entering them. The ILP is issued by the Government of India and is obligatory for all those who reside outside the protected states. With the ILP, the government aims to regulate movement to certain areas located near the international border of India.

Origin of ILP:
ILP’s origin dates back to the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873, which protected the British Crown’s interest in tea, oil and elephant trade.

It prohibited “British subjects” or Indians from entering into these protected areas.

After independence, in 1950, the word “British subjects” was replaced by Citizens of India and the focus of the ban on free movement was explained as a bid to protect tribal cultures in northeastern India.

Currently, the Inner Line Permit is operational in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. It can be issued for travel purposes solely.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Draft Social Security Code

What to study?
For Prelims: Highlights of the draft.
For Mains: need for and significance of the code.

Context: The draft code on social security, which subsumes eight existing laws covering provident fund, maternity benefits and pension, is being further worked upon after a recent round of public consultations.

Objectives of the draft:

1. To amalgamate a clutch of existing laws and proposes several new initiatives including universal social security for unorganized sector workers and, insurance and health benefits for gig workers.
2. To Corporatize of existing organizations like EPFO and ESIC headed by people other than the labour minister.

**Key highlights of the draft:**

1. **Insurance, PF, life cover for unorganized sector employees:** Central Government shall formulate and notify, from time to time, suitable welfare schemes for unorganised workers on matter relating to life and disability cover; health and maternity benefits; old age protection; and any other benefit as may be determined by the central government.

2. **Corporatization of EPFO and ESIC:** The pension, insurance and retirement saving bodies including EPFO and ESIC will be body corporate. Labour minister, labour secretary, the central PF commissioner and Director General of ESIC may not be by default the head of such organizations.

3. **Benefits for Gig workers:** “Central Government may formulate and notify, from time to time, suitable social security schemes for gig workers and platform workers” and such schemes would encompass issues like “life and disability cover”, “health and maternity benefits”, “old age protection” and “any other benefit as may be determined by the Central Government”.

4. **Maternity Benefit:** Subject to the other provisions of this Code, every woman shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for, the payment of maternity benefit at the rate of the average daily wage for the period of her actual absence, that is to say, the period immediately preceding the day of her delivery, and any period immediately following that day.


Sources: the Hindu.

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3. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and mains: Key Highlights of the PMMVY, funding and beneficiaries, challenges present and ways to address them.*

**Context:** As per a survey, the PMMVY has been able to reach **less than a third of the eligible beneficiaries.**

**Key concerns:**

1. The scheme has failed to reach at least 49% of all mothers who would have delivered their first child (an estimated total of 123 lakh for 2017 according to the researchers).

2. Given the stipulated conditions, the scheme brings under its ambit 23% of all births and pays full benefits to a mere 14% of all births, which was at 270.5 lakh for 2017.

3. Only 66% of pregnant women and 69% of nursing women knew about the scheme. Only 8% of pregnant women and 23% of nursing mothers received some benefits.

**Hurdles in implementation:**

1. An application form of about 23 pages, a slew of documents such as mother-child protection card, Aadhaar card, husband’s Aadhaar card and bank passbook aside from linking their bank accounts with Aadhaar.

2. The requirement to produce the husband’s Aadhaar card results in excluding women who may be living with men they are not married to, single mothers and those who may be staying at their natal home.

3. Women must also have the address of their marital home on their Aadhaar card, which often results in newly weds being either left out or forced to go from door-to-door when pregnant and needing rest and care.

**About PMMVY:**
Pradhan Mantri Matru 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. 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. They receive a cash benefit of Rs. 5,000 in three instalments on fulfilling the respective conditionality, viz. early registration of pregnancy, ante-natal check-up and registration of the birth of the child and completion of first cycle of vaccination for the first living child of the family. The eligible beneficiaries also receive cash incentive under Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY). Thus, on an average, a woman gets Rs. 6,000.

Exceptions: The maternity benefits 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. 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: the Hindu.

4. New Code on Wages
What to study?
For prelims and mains: Key features of the new code, need, significance, need for uniform wage across the country.

Context: The Centre will soon notify the rules that will create the mechanisms to fix a floor wage that would then undergird the minimum wages for different categories of workers — unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and highly skilled — that the States and Central government would have to set and enforce. This is in accordance with the Code on Wages, 2019.

Overview of the new code:
The new code will amalgamate the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
1. Coverage: The Code will apply to all employees. The central government will make wage-related decisions for employments such as railways, mines, and oil fields, among others. State governments will make decisions for all other employments.
2. Wages include salary, allowance, or any other component expressed in monetary terms. This does not include bonus payable to employees or any travelling allowance, among others.
3. Floor wage: According to the Code, the central government will fix a floor wage, taking into account living standards of workers. Further, it may set different floor wages for different geographical areas. Before fixing the floor wage, the central government may obtain the advice of the Central Advisory Board and may consult with state governments.
4. **The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments must be higher than the floor wage.**
   In case the existing minimum wages fixed by the central or state governments are higher than the floor wage, they cannot reduce the minimum wages.

5. **Payment of wages:** Wages will be paid in (i) coins, (ii) currency notes, (iii) by cheque, (iv) by crediting to the bank account, or (v) through electronic mode. The wage period will be fixed by the employer as either: (i) daily, (ii) weekly, (iii) fortnightly, or (iv) monthly.

6. **Deductions:** Under the Code, an employee’s wages may be deducted on certain grounds including: (i) fines, (ii) absence from duty, (iii) accommodation given by the employer, or (iv) recovery of advances given to the employee, among others. These deductions should not exceed 50% of the employee’s total wage.

7. **Gender discrimination:** The Code prohibits gender discrimination in matters related to wages and recruitment of employees for the same work or work of similar nature.

8. **Advisory boards:** The central and state governments will constitute advisory boards. The Central Advisory Board will consist of: (i) employers, (ii) employees (in equal number as employers), (iii) independent persons, and (iv) five representatives of state governments. State Advisory Boards will consist of employers, employees, and independent persons. Further, one-third of the total members on both the central and state Boards will be women. The Boards will advise the respective governments on various issues including: (i) fixation of minimum wages, and (ii) increasing employment opportunities for women.

**Significance:**
- This is expected to effectively reduce the number of minimum wage rates across the country to 300 from about 2,500 minimum wage rates at present.
- Codification of labour laws will remove the multiplicity of definitions and authorities, leading to ease of compliance without compromising wage security and social security to workers.
- It is expected to provide for an appellate authority between the claim authority and the judicial forum which will lead to speedy, cheaper and efficient redressal of grievances and settlement of claims as that of earlier.

**Need for a national minimum wage:**
One argument for a national minimum wage is to ensure a uniform standard of living across the country. At present, there are differences in minimum wages across states and regions. Such differences are attributed to the fact that both the central and state governments set, revise and enforce minimum wages for the employments covered by them. The introduction of a national minimum wage may help reduce these differences and provide a basic standard of living for all employees across the country.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. **Arundhati Swarna Yojana**

**What to study?**
For Prelims: Overview of the scheme.
For Mains: Need for and significance of such schemes.

**Context:** The Assam government has announced the launch of 'Arundhati Swarna Yojana'.

**Key features of the scheme:**
- Under the scheme, the state government will offer **10 grams of gold as a gift to every adult bride who has completed at least 10th standard and has registered her marriage.**
- **Note:** The government will not give the gold directly but Rs. 30,000 to purchase 10 gms of gold.

**Eligibility:**
- The annual income of the bride's family must be less than five lakh rupees to avail the scheme.
- Minimum age should be 18 years and 21 years for the bride and bridegroom respectively.
- The family has to register their marriage under the Special Marriage (Assam) Rules, 1954.
Minimum education should be 10th standard. However, minimum educational qualification criteria have been relaxed for the tribes and workers of tea gardens.

The eligible bride and bridegroom must apply for the scheme before the date of their wedding.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Global Housing Technology Challenge

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: GHTC- key facts, PMAY- U- Key features.*
*For Mains: Significance of the scheme and its role in achieving the “Housing for All” target, implementational challenges and measures necessary.*

**Context:** The Union Government has launched the Credit-linked Subsidy Services Awas Portal (CLAP) for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Housing for All (Urban).
- The portal was launched along with the signing of agreements between the Union Housing Affairs Ministry and state governments for the construction of LightHouse projects under GHTC-India.

**Key features of the Global Housing Technology Challenge (GHTC) are:**
- GHTC aims to fast-track the construction of affordable housing and meet the target of constructing 1.2 crore houses by 2022.
- GHTC focuses on identifying and mainstreaming proven demonstrable technologies for lighthouse projects and spotting potential future technologies for incubation and acceleration support through ASHA (Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators) — India.

**Objectives:**
1. To enable adoption of construction techniques for housing that are affordable and takes minimum time as less as three months instead of the conventional three years for construction.
2. Bring a paradigm shift in technology transition using large-scale construction under the PMAY-U as an opportunity to get the best available construction technologies across the globe.

**About Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban (PMAY-U):**
It is being implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA).
It seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme components:
- In-situ Rehabilitation of existing slum dwellers using land as a resource through private participation.
- Credit Linked Subsidy (Implemented as a Central Sector Scheme).
- Affordable Housing in Partnership.
- Subsidy for Beneficiary-led individual house construction/enhancement.

**Why is it important?**
Today, while developers in India’s metropolitan cities are sitting on lakhs of unsold residences costing upwards of ₹50 lakh, the country is estimated to have a shortage of nearly 20 million housing units needed by the rural and urban poor, at far lower price points of ₹5-15 lakh.
- The PMAY aims to address this shortfall. With the increase in subsidised loan amount, the scheme is expected to cover a higher proportion of the urban poor.
- The PMAY will hopefully incentivise India’s construction and realty sector to reduce its traditional obsession with affluent home buyers in the cities.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Transgender Rights Bill

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Definitions included and key features of the bill.*
*For Mains: Significance of the bill, criticisms and the need for a comprehensive review.*
Context: The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 has been passed by Parliament, with the Rajya Sabha passing it after a motion to refer it to a select committee was defeated.

Impact:
The Bill will benefit a large number of transgender persons, mitigate the stigma, discrimination and abuse against this marginalized section and bring them into the mainstream of society. This will lead to inclusiveness and will make the transgender persons productive members of the society.

Need for legislation:
- Transgender community is among one of the most marginalized communities in the country because they don’t fit into the stereotypical categories of gender of ‘men’ or ‘women’.
- Consequently, they face problems ranging from social exclusion to discrimination, lack of education facilities, unemployment, lack of medical facilities and so on.

New definition:
According to the new definition, a transgender person is somebody “whose gender does not match the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-men or trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons having socio-cultural identities such as kinnar, hijras, aravani, and jogta”.

Highlights of the Bill:
1. Aims to stop discrimination against a transgender person in various sectors such as education, employment, and healthcare. It also directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes for them.
2. The Bill states that a person will be recognised as transgender on the basis of a certificate of identity issued through the district screening committee. This certificate will be a proof of identity as transgender and confer rights under this Bill.
3. Going by the bill, a person would have the right to choose to be identified as a man, woman or transgender, irrespective of sex reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy.
4. It also requires transgender persons to go through a district magistrate and “district screening committee” to get certified as a transperson.
5. The committee would comprise a medical officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, a government official, and a transgender person.

Criticisms:
1. The Bill is silent on granting reservations to transgender persons.
2. The bill has prescribed punishments for organised begging. However, the Bill doesn’t provide anything to better to condition in those areas.
3. It does not mention any punishments for rape or sexual assault of transgender persons as according to Sections 375 and 376 of the Indian Penal Code, rape is only when a man forcefully enters a woman.

Need of the hour:
The Bill must recognise that gender identity must go beyond biological; gender identity is an individual’s deep and personal experience. It need not correspond to the sex assigned at birth. It includes the personal sense of the body and other expressions such as one’s own personal inducing proceeds.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Programme for International Students 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 Human Resource Development Minister recently reviewed *preparations for PISA 2021*. He *instructed all the Deputy Commissioners to work hard to make India successful in this examination.*

Background:
Cabinet has already given *ex-post facto approval to the Agreement between India and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)* for participating in the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), which will be conducted by the OECD in 2021. The Agreement was signed on 28th January 2019.

*India’s participation in PISA:*
- India had taken part in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries.
- Then UPA government had boycotted PISA, blaming “out of context” questions for India’s dismal performance.
- Later, the HRD Ministry, under the NDA-II government, revisited this decision in 2016 and the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) had set up a committee to review the matter and submitted its report in December 2016.
- The report recommended for participation in test in 2018. However, *India missed the application deadline for the 2018 cycle.*

*About the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):*
1. It is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students’ reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years.
2. First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle.
3. PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving.
4. 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.

*Top performers:*
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.

*What makes PISA unique?*
PISA is *the only international education survey to measure the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds*, an age at which students in most countries are nearing the end of their compulsory time in school.

*PISA is also unique in the way it looks at:*
1. Public policy issues.
2. Literacy.
3. Lifelong learning.

*What might have gone wrong for India in 2009?*
India performed very poorly – ranking 73rd out of 74 countries that participated in that round, *finishing ahead of only Kazakhstan.*
1. The result was so shocking that many people assume that it must have been an aberration.
2. Some feel that the students may not have been prepared for the test. Others believe that the students may have been tested in English, which they were not proficient in (actually, all students were tested in their medium of instruction.)
3. Still, others feel that the performance must have been poor because only government schools were tested – our private school students would have done much better.
4. But a well-publicized study by Education Initiatives (EI) in 2006 and repeated in 2012 established that even students of our top schools would perform well below the international average in grade 4.

**Why assessments like the PISA turn out to be difficult for most Indian students?**
1. The mentality that questions can be only from the textbook.
2. Very poor reading ability.
4. When Indian students encounter PISA-type questions, many of them freeze at the first sign of the unfamiliar and decide that they have not ‘learnt this question type’ and cannot solve it.
5. Low understanding of processes or concepts and even comprehension skills.

**Way ahead:**
- Each of the above represents an entrenched, yet solvable problem in the Indian education system.
- Though there are no quick-fix solutions, there are key levers available to create change:
  - Changing the pattern of Board Exam questions – and teacher training starting with teachers from grade 5 or so are two strong levers in our control.

Sources: pib.

2. **Lymphatic filariasis**

**What to study?**
For Prelims and Mains: Lymphatic filariasis- key facts, global concern on the disease, Triple-drug therapy.

**Context:** National Symposium on Lymphatic Filariasis was held in India on the theme ‘United to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis’.

**Lymphatic filariasis:**
Also called as **elephantiasis**, it is Caused by infection with **parasitic worms** living in the lymphatic system. The larval stages of the parasite (microfilaria) circulate in the blood and are **transmitted from person to person by mosquitoes.**
May Cause abnormal enlargement of body parts, and leading to severe disability and social stigmatization of those affected.
The parasites are transmitted by four main types of mosquitoes: Culex, Mansonia, Anopheles and Aedes.

**Triple drug therapy:**
The World Health Organization (WHO) is recommending **three drug treatment** to accelerate the global elimination of lymphatic filariasis.
- The treatment, known as IDA, **involves a combination of ivermectin, diethylcarbamazine citrate and albendazole.**
- The plan is to administer **these drugs for two consecutive years.** The life of the adult worm is hardly four years, so it would die a natural death without causing any harm to the person.

**Need for and significance of the therapy:**
- Lymphatic filariasis poses a grave threat to India.
- Over 40% of worldwide cases are found in India.
• Since 2004, two drug therapy for lymphatic filariasis has been in place but the addition of the third drug now will give a boost to the overall campaign.

• **India has missed earlier deadlines to eradicate the disease by 2015 and 2017.**
• The **global deadline now is 2020** and the three drug approach may help the country get there.

**Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis:**
It is an alliance of partners from 72 LF endemic national country programmes, NGOs, private sectors, academic and research institutes and international development agencies that assists WHO’s Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis.

Sources: the hindu.

### 3. National Health Profile, 2019

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Key findings, key areas of improvement.*
*For Mains: Concerns raised, challenges ahead and measures needed.*

**Context:** National Health Profile, 2019 has been released by the **Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI)**. This is the 14th edition.

**What is NHP?**
Prepared by the **Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI)**.
Covers **comprehensive information on demographic, socio-economic health status, health finance indicators, health infrastructure and health of human resources in the country.**

**Objective:** To create a versatile database of health information and making it available to all stakeholders in the healthcare sector.

**The NHP highlights substantial health information under major indicators:**
1. Demographic indicators (population and vital statistics).
2. Socio-economic indicators (education, employment, housing and amenities, drinking water and sanitation).
3. Health status indicators (incidence and prevalence of common communicable and non-communicable diseases and RCH), etc.
4. The health finance indicators provides an overview of health insurance and expenditure on health, both public and Out of Pocket Expenditure (OOP), etc.
5. Human resources provides an overview of availability of manpower working in the health sector.
6. Health infrastructure section provides details of medical and dental colleges, AYUSH institutes, nursing courses and paramedical courses, etc.

**Key findings:**
• **Life expectancy** in India has increased from 49.7 years in 1970-75 to 68.7 years in 2012-16. life expectancy for females is 70.2 years and 67.4 years for males.
• **Diabetes and hypertension** rate are high among Indians while dengue and chikungunya are a cause of great concern to public health.
• **Highest population density** of 11,320 people per square kilometre was reported by the **National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT)** whereas **Arunachal Pradesh** reported the lowest population density of 17.
• **High incidence** in the young and economically active population.

There has been **consistent decrease in the birth rate, death rate and natural growth rate in India since 1991 to 2017:**
• As on 2017, India has registered birth rate of 20.2 per population of 1,000 and death rate of 6.3 while the natural growth rate was 13.9 per population of 1,000.
• The birth rate in rural areas was higher than in the urban.
• The death rate and natural growth rate were also higher in rural areas as compared to the urban.
• The population, however, continues to grow, as the decline in the birth rate is not as rapid as the decline in the death rate.
• The infant mortality rate (IMR) has declined considerably (33 per 1,000 live births in 2016), however differentials of rural (37) and urban (23) are still high.
• The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for the country was 2.3 whereas in rural areas it was 2.5 and 1.8 in urban areas during 2016 as per the latest available information.

Sources: pib.

4. China proposes to treat Alzheimer’s with new drug

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: All about Alzheimer’s, treatment and concerns.

Context: China recently announced that a new drug, meant to potentially treat Alzheimer’s disease, will be available to Chinese patients by the end of this year. Called GV-971 or “Oligomannate”, it is a seaweed-based drug, administered orally.

What is Alzheimer’s?
• It is a progressive brain disorder that typically affects people older than 65. When it affects younger individuals, it is considered early onset.
• The disease destroys brain cells and nerves, and disrupts the message-carrying neurotransmitters.
• Eventually, a person with Alzheimer’s loses the ability to perform day-to-day activities.

Symptoms include memory loss, difficulty in completing familiar tasks, confusion with time or place, problems in speaking and writing, decreased or poor judgment, and changes in mood and personality. Alzheimer’s disease is also the most common cause of dementia — which is a syndrome and not a disease in itself, and whose symptoms include loss of memory, thinking skills, problems with language, changes in mood and deterioration in behaviour.

Treatment:
There is no cure for Alzheimer’s, because its exact causes are not known. Most drugs being developed try to slow down or stop the progression of the disease.
• There is a degree of consensus in the scientific community that Alzheimer’s involves two proteins, called beta amyloids and tau. When levels of either protein reach abnormal levels in the brain, it leads to the formation of plaque, which gets deposited between neurons, damaging and disrupting nerve cells.
• Most existing drugs for Alzheimer’s try to target these proteins to manage some of the symptoms of Alzheimer’s.

Sources: Indian Express.

5. Chhattisgarh moots law to protect journalists

What to study?
For Prelims: Key provisions in the draft.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the law.

Context: A draft bill has been prepared by a committee to safeguard media persons in Chhattisgarh from harassment, intimidation and violence.
• The committee was set up in March to draft a law to foster an atmosphere wherein journalists could perform their work fearlessly.

The draft Chhattisgarh Protection of Mediapersons Act:
1. It proposes that within 30 days of enactment of the law: “the government shall constitute a Committee for the Protection of Mediapersons to deal with complaints of harassment, intimidation or violence, or unfair prosecution and arrests of media persons”.

www.insightsonindia.com 59 InsightsIAS
2. **Composition:** The State-level committee would comprise a police officer not below the rank of the Additional Director General of Police, Head of the Department of Public Relations, three media persons of at least 12 years’ standing each, at least one of whom should be a woman.

3. **Punishment:** In case an official wilfully neglects duties stipulated by the Act, he could be punished with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to one year. And the offences, cognizable but bailable, would be investigated by a police officer not below the rank of a Deputy Superintendent of Police.

4. At the district-level, the Collector would head a Risk Management Unit. On receipt of a complaint, a member would have to immediately relay it to the Collector or the Superintendent of Police. **Emergency protection measures** would be put in place and within 24 hours, the unit would decide on further protection measures based on the threat perception.

5. According to the draft Bill, “**Person Who Requires Protection**” means all registered media persons facing threats of harassment, intimidation or violence and includes other persons facing such threats on account of their connection with the registered media person.

**Why do we need a law to protect journalists?**

According to the not-for-profit organization, **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ),** between 1992 and 2017, 28 journalists were murdered in a premeditated or spontaneous act in direct relation to their work in India. These figures do not include those killed in military crossfire or while covering deadly assignments such as violent demonstrations.

- Among the major economies of the world belonging to the G-20 group, **India has witnessed the fourth highest number of such killings related to journalistic work,** behind Mexico (38), Russia (38), and Brazil (37).
- More worryingly, **India features in the list of 13 high impunity countries where an overwhelmingly large proportion of such murders have remained unsolved, according to a 2016 CPJ report.** Keeping India company in this list are countries such as Somalia, Iraq, and Pakistan. Most journalists who have been murdered for their work covered politics and corruption.

**Need of the hour:**

To stop the assaults on journalists and writers, and to ensure justice when such assaults do take place, the country requires legal and institutional reforms as well as measures to plug weaknesses in policing. But above all, this requires greater political commitment to protect free speech and the freedom of the press.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**6. World Pneumonia Day**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and mains: the disease- burden, symptoms, spread, vulnerability and treatment.*

**Context:** Since 2009, **November 12 has been observed as World Pneumonia Day** to raise awareness about the infection.

**About Pneumonia:**

*The World Health Organisation (WHO)* identifies pneumonia is the single largest cause of death in children worldwide.

Every year, it kills an estimated 1.4 million children under the age of five years, accounting for 18% of all deaths of children under five years old worldwide, according to the WHO. This, despite pneumonia being preventable and treatable.
How is it spread?
Infectious agents may include bacteria, viruses and fungi.
*Streptococcus pneumoniae* is the most common cause of bacterial pneumonia in children, and *Haemophilus influenzae type b* (Hib) is the second most common cause of bacterial pneumonia. *Respiratory syncytial virus* is the most common viral cause of pneumonia.

Air sacs in an infected individual's lungs (alveoli) become inflamed due to deposits of fluid and pus, making it painful and difficult for them to breathe. **Children and the elderly above the age of 65 years are especially vulnerable.**

What are the symptoms of infection?
Symptoms include high fever and chills, cough with phlegm, physical weakness and a feeling of being unwell, shortness of breath and rapid breathing, and a racing pulse.

How can it be prevented and treated?
Preventive measures include maintaining hygiene and getting vaccinations against certain pneumonia causing bacteria.
Saving a child from pneumonia requires urgent treatment, that usually involves the administration of antibiotics, which typically do not cost much. On average, treatment lasts for about five to seven days.

What is the burden of the disease?
According to UNICEF, a child dies of pneumonia every 39 seconds, which translates to roughly 8,00,000 children every year, and over 2,200 every day, including 1,53,000 newborns.

Sources: the Hindu.

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7. Nadu Nedu Programme

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the programme.
For Mains: Need for and significance of English education, challenges present and ways to address them.

Context: ‘Nadu-Nedu’ programme has been launched in Andhra Pradesh.
The programme seeks to transform government schools into vibrant and competitive institutions.

Key features of the programme:
- **Aim:** to transform all government schools with required infrastructure and up-gradation of skills besides setting up English labs.
- It also seeks to provide basic amenities such as clean water, furniture, compound wall, toilets etc.
- Teachers would be imparted training to effectively implement the decision to introduce English medium from Classes 1 to 6 in government schools from the next academic year.
- The parent committees and locals would be involved to make it an inclusive system.

Criticisms:
A language war has erupted in Andhra Pradesh. In this age of rapid globalization, the detractors, primarily the Opposition, has argued that the state should stick to Telugu to protect itself from cultural degradation, else it would endanger the regional language’s survival.

Need for English education:
Language is a means of communication. Today English is a global language, but our vernacular languages are where our thoughts form. At the same time, English is needed to reach out to people at a global level.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. Rajasthan’s free medicine scheme ranked first

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features and significance of the scheme.
For Mains: Can it be implemented at the national level? Challenges therein and ways to address them.

Context: Rajasthan’s flagship free medicine scheme, launched in 2011-12, has once again secured the first rank from the National Health Mission.

Background:
The State registered 94.59% of online free medicine distribution at counters in public health facilities and 84.76% use of the drugs and vaccine distribution management system at primary health centres.

About the Scheme:
Rajasthan Mukhyamantri Nishulk Dava Yojana was launched on 2nd October 2011.
It has 2 components:
1. **Free Medicines:** To provide commonly-used essential medicines free of cost to patients visiting government healthcare institutions (introduced on 2nd October 2011), and
2. **Free Tests:** To provide free tests (introduced on 7th April 2013).

For the successful implementation of the same, Rajasthan Medical Services Corporation Limited (RMSCL) was incorporated as a Public Limited Company.
Since 2011, it has benefitted around 67 crore patients, and a record number of 712 medicines are covered under it.

How are these schemes ranked?
National Health Mission under its Free Drug Service Initiative, started giving rankings to the states, in order to encourage them to provide free drugs to their patients coming to public health facilities.

Aim: to reduce out of pocket expenditure of patients suffering from cancer, heart and kidney-related diseases, and other severe ailments.

Implemented by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare in order to support the states.

The performance of the states was assessed by NHM on the basis of 10 parameters including: The stock of drugs, Value of drugs about to expire, and Effective compliance with the Drugs and Vaccine Distribution Management System (DVDMS), etc.

Need:
- Rewarding the states will act as a catalyst for ensuring the inclusive accessibility and affordability of health care services to the most downtrodden and the poorest sections of our society.
- This will also promote the spirit of co-operative and competitive federalism, whereby other states can take the lead and follow similar successful initiatives.

Sources: the Hindu.


What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.

Context: NISHTHA- National Initiative for School Heads’ and Teachers’ Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA) has been launched in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
Key features of the scheme:

- It is a Mission aimed at improving learning outcomes at Elementary level through integrated Teacher Trainings.
- This Mission aims to build the capacities of 42 lakh participants covering all teachers and Heads of Schools at elementary level in all Government Schools across the country, faculty members of SIEs/SCERTs, DIETs etc.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. Essar Steel Verdict

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the IBC.
For Mains: Insolvency process- issues involved, concerns and ways to address them.

Context: In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court has upheld the supremacy of the Committee of Creditors comprising the financial creditors of the bankrupt firms over the distribution of claims.

1. The verdict:
The Supreme Court quashed the earlier NCLAT order which brought parity between financial and operational creditors of Essar Steel in matters of distribution of proceeds.

2. The two set of creditors will be treated differently during the insolvency proceedings and taking over of a debt-ridden firm by another company. There is no principal of equality between secured and unsecured creditors.

3. The Court has done away with the 330-day mandatory deadline for the resolution of insolvency and bankruptcy cases after which liquidation will be invoked. The mandatory nature of the 330-day mark as a violation of Article 14 (right to equal treatment) of the Constitution and an “excessive and unreasonable restriction on the litigant’s right to carry on business under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution”.

What was the issue?
In its judgment in July this year, the NCLAT placed financial (secured and unsecured) and operational creditors on the same footing, setting aside the categorisation by the resolution plan. Peeved with the NCLAT ruling, the financial creditors had approached the apex court saying that the NCLAT order exceeds the scope of the IBC.
They also argued that secured creditors have the first right over funds.

Way ahead:
The order will finally pave the way for resolution of Essar Steel, one of the oldest cases in the IBC process. It was one of the original Dirty Dozen referred by the RBI to NCLT for Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process under the IBC Code.
With the Supreme Court finally upholding CoC’s primacy over distribution of funds, a major area of concern has been addressed.

**Basics:**

**What is the purpose of enactment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016?**

- To consolidate and amend the laws relating to reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals in a time bound manner for maximization of value of assets of such persons, to promote entrepreneurship, availability of credit and balance the interests of all the stakeholders including alteration in the order of priority of payment of Government dues and to establish an Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India, as a regulatory body for Insolvency and Bankruptcy law.

**Who shall be termed as creditor under the Code?**

A Creditor means any person to whom a debt is owed and includes a financial creditor, an operational creditor, a secured creditor, an unsecured creditor and a decree holder.

**What is the difference between Financial Creditor and Operational Creditor?**

- **Financial creditor** is any person to whom a financial debt is owned and includes a person to whom such debt has been legally assigned or transferred to.
- **Operational creditor** is any person to whom operational debt is owned and includes a person to whom such debt has been legally assigned or transferred to. They are suppliers of good or services to any company or operational debtor.

Sources: the Hindu.

**11. Social Awareness and Action to Neutralise Pneumonia Successfully (SAANS)**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the programme.*

**Context:** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched a campaign in Gujarat named **Social Awareness and Action to Neutralise Pneumonia Successfully (SAANS).**

**Aims:**

1. To reduce child mortality due to pneumonia, which contributes to around 15% of deaths of children under the age of five annually.
2. To mobilise people to protect children from pneumonia, and train health personnel and other stakeholders to provide prioritised treatment to control the disease.

**Key features of the programme:**

- A child suffering from pneumonia will be treated with a **pre-referral dose of antibiotic amoxicillin** by Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers.
- **Pulse Oximeter (device to monitor oxygen saturation)** will be used at the Health and Wellness Centre for identification of low oxygen levels in the blood of child and if required, the child can be treated by the use of oxygen cylinders.
- **A mass awareness campaign** will be launched about **the effective solutions for pneumonia prevention** like breastfeeding, age-appropriate complementary feeding and immunization etc.

**To know more about Pneumonia:**


Sources: pib.
12. Plague
What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Plague- causes, symptoms and prevention.

Context: Two people in Beijing were recently diagnosed with the pneumonic plague, which is known to be the most deadly version of the disease.

What is the plague?
The plague is a disease caused by the bacteria Yersinia pestis, which is found in animals, particularly rodents. It can be transmitted to humans through infected animals and fleas.
In the Middle Ages (5th-15th century), plague was also known as the ‘Black Death’ as it was responsible for the deaths of millions of people in Europe.

There are three types of plague:

1. Bubonic plague: This infects a person’s lymphatic system (which is a part of their immune system), causing inflammation in the lymph nodes. If left untreated, the bubonic plague can also convert into either pneumonic or septicemic plague. Its symptoms include fever, chills, weakness and headaches.

2. Pneumonic plague: According to WHO, pneumonic plague is the ‘most virulent form of plague’ and can be fatal within 24 to 72 hours. It occurs when the bacteria infects the lungs. It is the only type of plague that can be transmitted from human to human. Symptoms are chest pain, fever and cough. It is highly contagious and transmissible merely by coughing.

3. Septicemic plague: This is when the bacteria enters the blood stream and multiplies there.

If left untreated, pneumonic and bubonic plague can lead to septicemic plague. A person infected by septicemic plague may also notice their skin turning black.

How to treat and control plague?
The plague is a life-threatening disease but if caught early, can be treated with antibiotics. However, without prompt treatment, the disease can lead to serious illnesses and even death.
At times, antibiotics alone are not enough — additionally intravenous fluids and extra oxygen are required to treat a person.
Since it is highly contagious, those who are infected with pneumonic plague are kept in isolation.
And people in close contact with the person infected are given a dose of antibiotics as a preventive measure.
Other preventive measures to curb a plague outbreak are to keep the rodent population in control with pest control measures, ensuring that surrounding areas are clear of stacks of wood that rodents feed on among others.

Sources: the Hindu.

13. Smart Safety Surveillance, or 3S, programme
What to study?
For Prelims: What is 3S programme?
For Mains: Need for implementation in India, significance, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: The central government is planning to expand the reach of the Smart Safety Surveillance, or 3S, programme.
This is being done to optimize post-marketing surveillance of priority drugs and vaccines, and ensure the vaccines distributed under the universal immunization programme are safe.

What is 3S project?
The 3S project was recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), considering the limited safety data on vaccines introduced in India.
As part of the 3S project, India is evaluating the recently-introduced rotavirus vaccines. It is also trying to strengthen the collaboration among key stakeholders, such as ministry of health and Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), to ensure high levels of vigilance.

Need for and significance of this programme for India:
- According to the ministry of health and family welfare, new medical products often enter the market with limited safety data from clinical trials, which evaluate small controlled populations. Therefore, for immunization programmes, post-marketing safety surveillance is essential to monitor the risk-benefit profile of a product in the wider population.
- WHO has been prodding countries to adopt the 3S programme, with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to strengthen pharmacovigilance systems in developing nations.

Sources: the Hindu.


What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the programme.

Context: Microsoft rolls out its K12 Education Transformation Framework more widely in India.

Key features of the framework:
1. The Framework provides a holistic framework to facilitate a comprehensive digital transformation of schools.
2. The framework is a flexible platform based on the latest research and input from hundreds of academics, experts, and policymakers.
3. It comprises four pillars — leadership and policy, modern teaching and learning, intelligent environments and technology blueprint.

Background:
Education leaders in more than 50 countries have already adopted the Microsoft K-12 Education Transformation Framework to help plan their learning strategies in partnership with Microsoft.

Sources: the Hindu.

15. In News- Intensified Mission Indradhanush

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the programme.

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

Goal of Mission Indradhanush: The ultimate goal of Mission Indradhanush is to ensure full immunization with all available vaccines for children up to two years of age and pregnant women.

Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI):
To further intensify the immunization programme, the government launched the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) on October 8, 2017.
- Aim: To reach each and every child up to two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme/UIP.
- Coverage: Low performing areas in the selected districts (high priority districts) and urban areas. Special attention will be given to unserved/low coverage pockets in sub-centre and urban slums with migratory population.

IMI 2.0:
www.insightsonindia.com
To ensure that not a single child in the country misses out on vaccination, the government has launched the 'Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0' with a special focus on improving coverage in areas with “low” immunisation.

**Key facts:**
- Through 'IMI 2.0', the health ministry aims to reach each and every child below the age of two years and all pregnant women still uncovered/partially covered in 271 districts of the country and 652 blocks of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
- IMI 2.0 will include four rounds of vaccination, with each round involving a seven-day immunisation drive to be conducted each month from December 2 onwards.
- The IMI programme is supported by 12 ministries and departments and is being monitored by the cabinet secretary at the national level.

**Existing gaps:**
The current national full immunisation coverage rate stands at 87 per cent. According to government data, 260 lakh children are born every year and an estimated 31 lakh out of them would not receive complete rounds of vaccination in the first year of their life due to various reasons.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**16. QS University Rankings**

**What to study?**
- **For Prelims**: Indicators and top performers.
- **For Mains**: Significance of the rankings and ways to improve the higher education system.

**Context:** qs world university rankings for Asia has been released. The National University of Singapore is ranked Asia’s best for the second consecutive year. It is followed by Nanyang Technological University, which has risen from 3rd to 2nd; and the University of Hong Kong.

**Performance of Indian Institutes:**
1. 96 Indian institutions rank among 550 for the continent.
2. India does not yet have a university among the top 30.
3. The best performing institution from India is IIT Bombay, which drops one place to 34th position. It is followed by IIT Delhi at 43rd place and IIT Madras at 50th.

**Way ahead:**
The Indian higher education system has grown exponentially over the past decade. The number of universities has nearly doubled, and the number of colleges has grown by 50 per cent. The sheer scale of this development is awe-inspiring. Nevertheless, the domestic demand for tertiary education of its young population — which is estimated to become the world’s largest by 2030 — is growing more rapidly than the expanded provision.

Sources: Indian Express.

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

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**1. Electoral Bond Scheme**

**What to study?**
- **For Prelims**: Key features of Electoral Bonds and highlights of the scheme.

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For Mains: Significance of the scheme, benefits and concerns associated.

Context: Electoral bonds worth ₹232 crore were sold in October, taking the total number of bonds sold from March 2018 till October 2019 to 12,313 and the total value to ₹6,128 crore, according to data shared by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)

Mumbai had the highest amount of bonds at ₹1,880 crore, followed by Kolkata at ₹1,440 crore, Delhi at ₹919 crore and Hyderabad at ₹838 crore, while all other cities accounted for ₹1,051 crore from March 2018 till October 2019.

About Electoral bonds:

What are electoral bonds? Bonds that allow donors to pay political parties using banks as an intermediary.

Key features:
1. Although called a bond, the banking instrument resembling promissory notes will not carry any interest.
2. It will be a bearer instrument.
3. It will not carry the name of the payee.
4. It can be bought for any value, in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh or Rs 1 crore.

Eligibility:
- May be purchased by a citizen of India, or entities incorporated or established in India.
- A person being an individual can buy electoral bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- Only the registered Political Parties which have secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last Lok Sabha elections or the State Legislative Assembly are eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds.

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

How will the Bonds help?
- Encourage political donations of clean money from individuals, companies, HUF, religious groups, charities, etc.
- After purchasing the bonds, these entities can hand them to political parties of their choice, which must redeem them within the prescribed time.

Why is there a controversy?
- The introduction of the electoral bond scheme is part of what appears to be a growing trend away from transparency and accountability, two values which were already sparse in relation to Indian political parties.
- Opponents to the scheme allege that since the identity of the donor of electoral bonds has been kept anonymous, it could lead to an influx of black money.
- Others allege that the scheme was designed to help big corporate houses donate money without their identity being revealed.

Sources: pib.

2. India Justice Report (IJR)

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key findings and concerns expressed by the report and ways to address them.

Context: India Justice Report (IJR) has been released.
It has been prepared by Tata Trusts in collaboration with Centre for social Justice, Common Cause, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Daksh, TISS-Prayas and Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.
It is India’s first-ever ranking of states on justice delivery.
Performance of various states:
1. The list is topped by Maharashtra.
2. Maharashtra is followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Key Issues highlighted:
1. **Vacancy** was an issue across the pillars of the police, prisons, and the judiciary, with only about half the states having made the effort to reduce these over a five-year period.
2. The country as a whole has about 18,200 judges with about 23 per cent sanctioned posts vacant.
3. **By 2017, women are also poorly represented** in these pillars.
4. **The prisons in the country were over occupied** at 114 per cent, where 68 per cent are undertrials awaiting investigation, inquiry or trial.
5. Nationally, **high vacancies in the justice system**.
6. **Only two states have met the 80 per cent of SC/ST/OBC reservation** required to be followed and that there are high vacancies in prison staff.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. HS Code

**What to study?**
For Prelims and mains: Meaning and significance of HS code.

**Context:** The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has allocated a separate Harmonised System (HS) code for Khadi. Khadi is India’s signature handspun and handwoven cloth that was made iconic by Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle.

**What does this mean for Khadi?**
The move is expected to boost Khadi exports in the coming years. Earlier, Khadi did not have its exclusive HS code.

**What does the HS code mean?**
The Harmonised System, or simply ‘HS’, is a six-digit identification code. Of the six digits, the first two denote the HS Chapter, the next two give the HS heading, and the last two give the HS subheading.
Developed by the World Customs Organization (WCO).
Called the “universal economic language” for goods.
It is a multipurpose international product nomenclature.
The system currently comprises of around 5,000 commodity groups.

HS code are used by Customs authorities, statistical agencies, and other government regulatory bodies, to monitor and control the import and export of commodities through:
1. Customs tariffs
2. Collection of international trade statistics
3. Rules of origin
4. Collection of internal taxes
5. Trade negotiations (e.g., the World Trade Organization schedules of tariff concessions)
6. Transport tariffs and statistics
7. Monitoring of controlled goods (e.g., wastes, narcotics, chemical weapons, ozone layer depleting substances, endangered species, wildlife trade)
8. Areas of Customs controls and procedures, including risk assessment, information technology and compliance.

**Need for and significance:**
Over 200 countries use the system as a basis for their customs tariffs, gathering international trade statistics, making trade policies, and for monitoring goods.
The system helps in **harmonising of customs and trade procedures**, thus reducing costs in international trade.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. Chief Justice of India's office under RTI Act

**What to study?**
- *For Prelims:* RTI- features and exemptions.
- *For Mains:* Implications and outcomes of the verdict.

**Context:** *The Supreme Court* has held that office of the **Chief Justice of India is a public authority under the transparency law, the Right to Information Act.**

The landmark judgment was pronounced by **five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi.**

**Background:**
Previously, the Delhi High Court judgment which ruled that office of the Chief Justice comes under the purview of RTI.

A plea filed was filed by Supreme Court Secretary-General challenging Delhi High Court’s order. **The concept of judicial independence is not judge’s personal privilege but responsibility cast on the person,** the HC had said in its ruling.

**The verdict:**
1. The Supreme Court is a **“public authority” and the office of the CJI is part and parcel of the institution.** Hence, if the Supreme Court is a public authority, so is the office of the CJI.
2. **The judiciary cannot function in total insulation** as judges enjoy a constitutional post and discharge public duty.
3. However, **Right to Privacy is an important aspect and has to be balanced with transparency** while deciding to give out information from the office of the Chief Justice of India.
4. **RTI cannot be used as a tool of surveillance** and that judicial independence has to be kept in mind while dealing with transparency.

**Key observations made by the court:**
- Transparency doesn’t undermine judicial independence.
- Confidentiality and right to privacy have to be maintained and that RTI can’t be used for as a tool of surveillance.

**What RTI act says?**
Under the RTI Act, 2005, **every public authority has to provide information to persons requesting for the information under the Act.**

**Public Authority** includes the body constituted by or under the Constitution. *Article 124* of the Constitution deals with the establishment of the Supreme Court of India.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

#### 1. East Asia Summit

**What to study?**
- *For Prelims and Mains:* EAS- composition, objectives, significance for India and issues associated.

**Context:** The latest edition of **the East Asia Summit (EAS)** is being held in **Bangkok.**

**About East Asia Summit:**
- EAS is an **initiative of ASEAN and is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN.**
It is *a forum held annually by leaders of 18 countries in the East Asian, Southeast Asian and South Asian regions.*

EAS meetings are held *after annual* ASEAN leaders’ meetings.

The *first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia* on 14 December 2005.

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.

**Potential:**

- EAS, representing *nearly 50 per cent of the world’s population and over 20 per cent of global trade,* is a mega gathering and is a testimony to the rise of Asia.
- EAS is a region of strong and fast growing economies. *It is considered the third pole of world economy after the US and Europe.* Its four major economic players namely Japan, China, India and Korea are among the twelve largest ranking global economies.
- *Financial and monetary cooperation between ASEAN+6 or EAS countries* could be an area of fruitful cooperation in view of the fact that their combined foreign exchange reserves exceed $3 trillion.

**Significance for India:**

- For India, *EAS acts as an alternative to the APEC in which India doesn’t enjoy the membership.*
- India’s membership to the EAS is a recognition of its *fast growing economic and political clout.*
- **Act East policy of India:** In order to build multi-faceted relations with ASEAN and other multilateral nations and strengthen bilateral relations India has emphasised upon its Act East Policies for which EAS will prove crucial.
- China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea and the nature of its growing investments has led the *ASEAN countries to view India as a potential power that could balance a rising China.*
- India’s strength lies in service sector and information-technology and Japan has a sound capital base. Thus *there are complementarities in trade and production structures of the EAS members.*
- India’s deep cultural and civilizational links with the EAS countries are widely known. *India can play a major role in cultural and people to people cooperation with the region,* which can reinforce the economic momentum for community building.

**Sources:** pib.

**2. Kalapani Territory**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: Location of Kalapani.*

*For Mains: The dispute and ways to address them.*

**Context:** Nepal government has strongly objected to the inclusion of ‘Kalapani’ under the Indian Territory as per the newly released political map of India.

**What’s the issue?**

In the latest map, India included *Kalapani into the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand.* Nepal government says that *Kalapani is an integral part of the country* and that talks are still on between New Delhi and Kathmandu over this "unresolved" area.

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Foreign secretaries of both countries have been assigned the responsibility to resolve the remaining border-related issues between India and Nepal.

Where is it located?
Kalapani is located at an altitude of 3600m on the Kailash Manasarovar route.
It borders Uttarakhand in India and Sudurpashchim Pradesh in Nepal.
Since the Indo-China war of 1962, Kalapani is controlled by India’s Indo-Tibetan Border Police.
Nepal claims that the river located towards the west of the territory is the main Kali river and thus it falls in its territory, India claims a ridgeline towards the east of the Kalapani territory and hence, includes it in the Indian Union.

Genesis of the dispute:
• Under the treaty of Sugauli signed between Nepal and the British East India Company in 1816, the Kali River was located as Nepal's western boundary with India. It, however, made no mention of a ridgeline and subsequent maps of the areas drawn by British surveyors showed the source of the Kali river at different places.
• This discrepancy has led to the boundary disputes between India and Nepal, with each country producing maps including the territory in their own area to support their claims. The exact size of the Kalapani territory also varies in different sources.

Way ahead:
While the two countries have made a lot of headway in ties, sensitive issues such as border need to be handled carefully and New Delhi has to be mindful of Nepal's concerns.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Quad Countries

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

Context: Quad countries recently reviewed situation in Indo-Pacific region.
The participants also supported an ASEAN-led mechanisms for the regional architecture for the region.

Background:
The 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is considered one of the most influential groupings in the region and India and several other countries including the US, China, Japan and Australia are its dialogue partners.

What is Quad grouping?
The quadrilateral formation includes Japan, India, United States and Australia.
All four nations find a common ground of being the democratic nations and common interests of unhindered maritime trade and security.
The idea was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. However, the idea couldn’t move ahead with Australia pulling out of it.
It was revived in 2017 and is being viewed as response to increased Chinese economic and military power.

Significance of the grouping:
Quad is an opportunity for like-minded countries to share notes and collaborate on projects of mutual interest.
Members share a vision of an open and free Indo-Pacific.
It is one of the many avenues for interaction among India, Australia, Japan and the US and should not be seen in an exclusive context.

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

Sources: the Hindu.

4. India’s Free Trade Agreements with Asean

What to study?
For Prelims: India and it’s FTA with Asean.
For Mains: An analysis and ways to address the concerns.

Context: A report, analysing the benefits of India’s free trade agreements with Asean has been released. The report has been prepared by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Background:
Asean compromises 10 countries including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
India had signed an FTA in goods with the regional bloc in 2009, known as the Asean–India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA). In 2014, an FTA in services was also included.

Key findings:
1. Overall, India failed to benefit from free trade agreements (FTAs) with the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean).
2. In fact, India’s trade deficit had increased ever since the country entered into FTAs with Asean.
3. India’s net exports to countries without a trade agreement were only marginally lower than its net exports to countries with FTAs.
4. The imports from countries with trade agreements were substantially higher, pushing India into a trade deficit.

What changed after the signing of these agreements?
India’s imports from Asean countries increased sharply in comparison to its exports to them after signing these agreements.

India’s experience with other FTAs:
India’s past experience with FTAs has not been encouraging.
India had recorded a trade deficit in all major trade agreements other than the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

Need of the hour:
India needs to work on its manufacturing sector to benefit from any FTA.
India should not consider entering into FTAs without preparing the agriculture and manufacturing sectors adequately.

Sources: Down to earth.
5. 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: The US has warned that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would only benefit Beijing and inflict heavy debt burden on Islamabad. The US observed that the CPEC was not an aid to Pakistan but a form of financing that guaranteed profits for Chinese enterprises, with little benefits for Islamabad.

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) consists of highways, railways, and pipelines.
- 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?
1. It passes through PoK. Any Indian participation would inextricably be linked to the country’s legitimate claims on PoK.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of RCEP.
For Mains: Why India refused to sign?

Context: In the recently held Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit in Thailand, India decided not to finalize the RCEP trade deal. India has expressed its concerns over lowering and elimination of tariffs on products from other countries, as it would negatively affect the domestic agricultural and industrial sector.

Why India didn’t sign?
1. Domestic industry and dairy farmers had strong reservations about the trade pact.
2. India’s trade deficit with the RCEP nations is $105 billion, of which China alone accounts for $54 billion.
3. The worry is also over Chinese manufactured goods and dairy products from New Zealand flooding Indian markets, hurting domestic interests.
4. The trade agreement was also seen as being detrimental to the government’s Make in India initiative. India was looking for specific rules of origin to ensure the trade pact wasn’t abused by non-partner countries and an auto-trigger mechanism to protect it from a surge in imports. Ecommerce and trade remedies were among other key areas of concern that failed to find satisfactory redressal.
5. India was also worried about keeping 2014 as the base year for tariff reductions.

Why Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) called for signing of RCEP?
Trade within RCEP nations would increase. And India can leverage advantage in areas such as ICT, IT-enabled services, healthcare and education services.
It also provides an opportunity for India to tap large and vibrant economies and increase its exports. As the RCEP progresses and favourable tariffs and Rules of Origin (ROOs) kick in, India could become a major hub for coordinating regional value chains through itself.
India could serve not only as a major market for final markets but also as a base for third-country exports, primarily to West Asia, Africa and Europe.

Why farmers were opposed to this?
Trade tariffs: Farmers fear that the RCEP will permanently bring down import duties on most agricultural commodities to zero which will lead to countries looking to dump their agricultural produce in India which would lead to a drastic drop in prices.
This will aggravate the agrarian crisis even as the input prices in India are heavily taxed and farmers are not given profitable prices, resulting in substantial losses and farmer debts.
The dairy sector and plantations sector are going to be hit very hard. It is because New Zealand and Australia being part of RCEP will invariably lead to the dumping of their dairy products into India.
The southeast Asian countries have larger and cheaper production of plantation crops like rubber, coconut, palm oil as compared to India and opening up of the markets will lead to a large inflow of these products given their price competitiveness.
The IPR clauses are likely to seriously impinge on farmers’ seed freedoms. Seed companies will get more powers to protect their Intellectual Property Rights, and farmers would be criminalized when they save and exchange seeds.
India’s food sovereignty would be at stake. Opening up of the markets will lead to dependence on foreign imports. Any differences in the future might impact the food import supply.

What is the RCEP?
The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is a free trade agreement originally devised to consist of 16 countries across the Asia-Pacific region. The pact looks to drop tariffs and duties between the members so that goods and services can flow freely between them.
At the RCEP’s administrative core is ASEAN: an intergovernmental grouping of 10 Southeast Asian countries – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. It was proposed that the ASEAN bloc will be joined with six dialogue partners: China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support (ARLS)
What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features, need for and significance of ARLS.
Context: India and Russia are finalising a defence agreement that will simplify interoperability and enable military platforms to receive support and supplies across bases in both nations. Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support (ARLS).

What is Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support (ARLS)?
It is an arrangement that will allow access to India and Russia, to each other’s military facilities for supplies and fuel, expanding the logistics support and operational turnaround of the Indian military.

Benefits and mutual significance:
1. This will be beneficial for the Indian Navy, which has a large number of Russian origin ships, that will get access to Russian ports for supplies and refueling. It would be crucial for joint exercises.
2. The air force too will benefit by finding it easier to deploy aircraft for the same purpose.
3. This access will also be for ports in the Russian part of the Arctic, allowing access to energy resources there.
4. Russia, on the other hand, will be able to access Indian ports and air bases.
5. Russia has also assured India access to energy resources in the vast Arctic region.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. BIMSTEC

What to study?
For prelims and mains: BIMSTEC- members, objectives, significance and need for reforms.

Context: First ever ‘BIMSTEC Ports’ Conclave will be held at Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

Significance:
- The Conclave will explore the possibility of increasing economic cooperation by furthering EXIM trade and coastal shipping.
- It will also discuss various investment opportunities, best practices adopted for productivity and safety at Ports.

What is BIMSTEC?
In an effort to integrate the region, the grouping was formed in 1997, originally with Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and later included Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. BIMSTEC, which now includes five countries from South Asia and two from ASEAN, is a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia. It includes all the major countries of South Asia, except Maldives, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Why the region matters?
1. The Bay of Bengal is the largest bay in the world. Over one-fifth (22%) of the world’s population live in the seven countries around it, and they have a combined GDP of $3.5 trillion (2018).
2. Despite economic challenges, all the countries in the region have been able to sustain average annual rates of economic growth between 3.4% and 7.5% from 2012 to 2016.
3. The Bay also has vast untapped natural resources. One-fourth of the world’s traded goods cross the Bay every year.

India’s stake:
1. As the region’s largest economy, India has a lot at stake. BIMSTEC connects not only South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.
2. For India, it is a natural platform to fulfil our key foreign policy priorities of ‘Neighborhood First’ and ‘Act East’.
3. For New Delhi, one key reason for engagement is in the vast potential that is unlocked with stronger connectivity. Roughly one-quarter of India’s population, live in the four coastal states adjacent to the Bay of Bengal (Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal). And, about 45 million people, who live...
in landlocked Northeastern states, will have the opportunity to connect via the Bay of Bengal to Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, opening up possibilities in terms of development.

4. From the strategic perspective, the Bay of Bengal, a funnel to the Malacca straits, has emerged a key theatre for an increasingly assertive China in maintaining its access route to the Indian Ocean.

5. Besides, as China mounts assertive activities in the Bay of Bengal region, with increased submarine movement and ship visits in the Indian Ocean, it is in India’s interest to consolidate its internal engagement among the BIMSTEC countries.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Feni River and its Significance

What to study?
For Prelims: Feni river, origin and tributaries.
For Mains: Significance and the need for MoU.

Context: The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Bangladesh on the withdrawal of 1.82 cusecs (cubic feet per second) of water from the Feni river by India for a drinking water supply scheme for Sabroom town in Tripura.

Feni river:
The Feni river forms part of the India-Bangladesh border. It originates in the South Tripura district, passes through Sabroom town on the Indian side, and meets the Bay of Bengal after it flows into Bangladesh.

The dispute:
There has been no water-sharing agreement between the countries on the Feni previously. The dispute over the sharing of the river water has been long-standing. It was taken up between India and Pakistan (before the independence of Bangladesh) in 1958 during a Secretary-level meeting in New Delhi.

Recent developments and significance of the MoU:
In August 2019, India and Bangladesh held a water secretary-level meeting of the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) in Dhaka, where it was agreed to collect data and prepare water-sharing agreements for seven rivers — Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla, Dudhkumar, and Feni. The MoU stands to benefit Sabroom town on the southern tip of Tripura. The present supply of drinking water to Sabroom town is inadequate. The groundwater in this region has high iron content. Implementation of this scheme would benefit over 7000 population of Sabroom town.

Sources: Indian Express.

5. International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the treaty. These sessions are held biennially, (PPV&FR) Act- key features.

Context: The eighth session of the Governing Body of International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) is being held in Rome, Italy. During the session, informed the delegates about the uniqueness of Indian legislation “Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers’ Rights (PPV&FR) Act” to protect Farmers’ Rights and breeder’s rights.

About the treaty:
The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture was adopted by the Thirty-First Session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on 3 November 2001.
• It is also known as Seed Treaty as it is a comprehensive international agreement for ensuring food security through the conservation, exchange and sustainable use of the world’s Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA).

The Treaty aims at:
1. recognizing the enormous contribution of farmers to the diversity of crops that feed the world;
2. establishing a global system to provide farmers, plant breeders and scientists with access to plant genetic materials;
3. ensuring that recipients share benefits they derive from the use of these genetic materials with the countries where they have been originated.

Main Provisions:
Multilateral system: The treaty puts 64 of our most important crops – crops that together account for 80 percent of the food we derive from plants – into an easily accessible global pool of genetic resources that is freely available to potential users in the Treaty’s ratifying nations for some uses.

Access and benefit sharing: The Treaty facilitates access to the genetic materials of the 64 crops in the Multilateral System for research, breeding and training for food and agriculture. Those who access the materials must be from the Treaty’s ratifying nations and they must agree to use the materials totally for research, breeding and training for food and agriculture. The Treaty prevents the recipients of genetic resources from claiming intellectual property rights over those resources in the form in which they received them.

Farmers’ rights: The Treaty recognizes the enormous contribution farmers have made to the ongoing development of the world’s wealth of plant genetic resources. It calls for protecting the traditional knowledge of these farmers, increasing their participation in national decision-making processes and ensuring that they share in the benefits from the use of these resources.

Sustainable use: Most of the world’s food comes from four main crops – rice, wheat, maize and potatoes. However, local crops, not among the main four, are a major food source for hundreds of millions of people and have potential to provide nutrition to countless others. The Treaty helps maximize the use and breeding of all crops and promotes development and maintenance of diverse farming systems.

The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers’ Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001:
• Enacted by India in 2001 adopting sui generis system.
• It is in conformity with International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV), 1978.
• The legislation recognizes the contributions of both commercial plant breeders and farmers in plant breeding activity and also provides to implement TRIPs in a way that supports the specific socio-economic interests of all the stakeholders including private, public sectors and research institutions, as well as resource-constrained farmers.

Rights under the Act:
Breeders’ Rights: Breeders will have exclusive rights to produce, sell, market, distribute, import or export the protected variety. Breeder can appoint agent/licensee and may exercise for civil remedy in case of infringement of rights.

Researchers’ Rights: Researcher can use any of the registered variety under the Act for conducting experiment or research. This includes the use of a variety as an initial source of variety for the purpose of developing another variety but repeated use needs prior permission of the registered breeder.

Farmers’ Rights:
1. A farmer who has evolved or developed a new variety is entitled for registration and protection in like manner as a breeder of a variety;
2. Farmers variety can also be registered as an extant variety;
3. A farmer can save, use, sow, re-sow, exchange, share or sell his farm produce including seed of a variety protected under the PPV&FR Act, 2001 in the same manner as he was entitled before the coming into
force of this Act provided farmer shall not be entitled to sell branded seed of a variety protected under
the PPV&FR Act, 2001;
4. Farmers are eligible for recognition and rewards for the conservation of Plant Genetic Resources of land
races and wild relatives of economic plants;
5. There is also a provision for compensation to the farmers for non-performance of variety under Section
39 (2) of the Act, 2001 and
6. Farmer shall not be liable to pay any fee in any proceeding before the Authority or Registrar or the
Tribunal or the High Court under the Act.
Sources: pib.

6. ADMM-Plus
What to study?
For Prelims and mains: ADMM-Plus composition, objectives and significance.

Context: The latest ADMM-Plus meeting where Defence Ministers of ASEAN countries and eight other nations
would gather and discuss the way forward for security cooperation, is being held in Bangkok.

About the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus):
Consistent with the ADMM guiding principles of open and outward looking, the 2nd ADMM in Singapore in 2007
adopted the Concept Paper to establish the ADMM-Plus. The ADMM-Plus is a platform for ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners to strengthen security and defence cooperation for peace, stability, and development in the region.
Agreed five areas of practical cooperation under this new mechanism, namely maritime security, counter-
terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations and military medicine. In 2013, a
new priority area of humanitarian mine action was agreed.

Objectives:
1. To benefit ASEAN member countries in building capacity to address shared security challenges, while
cognisant of the differing capacities of various ASEAN countries.
2. To promote mutual trust and confidence between defence establishments through greater dialogue and
transparency.
3. To enhance regional peace and stability through cooperation in defence and security, in view of the
transnational security challenges the region faces.
4. To contribute to the realisation of an ASEAN Security Community which, as stipulated in the Bali Concord
II, embodies ASEAN’s aspiration to achieve peace, stability, democracy and prosperity in the region.
5. To facilitate the implementation of the Vientiane Action Programme, which calls for ASEAN to build a
peaceful, secure and prosperous ASEAN, and to adopt greater outward-looking external relation
strategies with our friends and Dialogue Partners.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Recycling of Ships Bill, 2019
What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of Recycling of Ships Bill and HKC-features and significance.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for enactment of Recycling of Ships Bill, 2019 and
accession to the Hong Kong International Convention for Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships,
2009.

Key features of the bill:
1. It restricts and prohibits the use or installation of hazardous material, which applies irrespective of
whether a ship is meant for recycling or not.
2. For new ships, such restriction or prohibition on use of hazardous material will be immediate, that is, from the date the legislation comes into force, while existing ships shall have a period of five years for compliance.

3. Restriction or prohibition on use of hazardous material would not be applied to warships and non-commercial ships operated by Government.

4. Ships shall be surveyed and certified on the inventory of hazardous material used in ships.

5. Under the Bill, ship recycling facilities are required to be authorized and ships shall be recycled only in such authorized ship recycling facilities.

6. It also provides that ships shall be recycled in accordance with a ship-specific recycling plan.

7. Ships to be recycled in India shall be required to obtain a Ready for Recycling Certificate in accordance with the HKC- Hong Kong International Convention for the safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships.

What is Hong Kong convention?
The Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009 (the Hong Kong Convention), was adopted at a diplomatic conference held in Hong Kong, China in 2009.

1. It was adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 2009.

2. The Convention is aimed at ensuring that ships, when being recycled after reaching the end of their operational lives, do not pose any unnecessary risks to human health, safety and to the environment.

3. It also addresses concerns raised about the working and environmental conditions at many of the world’s ship recycling locations.

4. The Convention is yet to come into force because it has not been ratified by 15 nations, representing 40 per cent of the world merchant shipping by gross tonnage (capacity) and a maximum annual ship recycling volume of not less than 3 per cent of the combined tonnage of the countries.

Implications:
1. The Bill, when enacted by the Parliament, requires ship recycling facilities to obtain authorisation to operate and only authorised yards will be permitted to import ships for recycling.

2. Ship-specific Ship Recycling Plans (SRPs) will need to be prepared for incoming vessels and incoming ships will need to obtain a “Ready for Recycling Certificate” in accordance with the HKC.

3. When India accedes to the IMO’s treaty, after the approval by the Parliament, it will become the 14th contracting state to ratify the Convention.

Need for legislation:
India is the leader in the global ship recycling industry, with a share of over 30% of the market.

- As per UNCTAD report on Review of Maritime Transport, 2018, India had demolished 6323 tonnes in 2017, of known ship scrapping across the world.

- The ship-recycling industry is a labour-intensive sector, but it is susceptible to concerns on environmental safety.

Sources: pib.

8. Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR–RC)

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Meaning, significance and the need for CBDR- RC.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved India’s approach for the 25th Conference of Parties (COP) scheduled to be held in Spain.

India’s approach will be guided by principles and provisions of the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement particularly the principles of Equity and Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capability (CBDR-RC).

What is CBDR- RC?
Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR–RC) is a principle within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It acknowledges the different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries in addressing climate change. Reflecting CBDR-RC, the Convention divided countries into “Annex I” and “non-Annex I,” the former generally referring to developed countries and the latter to developing countries. Under the Convention Annex I countries have a greater mitigation role than non-Annex-I countries. CBDR-RC and the annex classifications were codified in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, and Annex I country emissions reductions were legally bound.

Sources: pib.

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

1. Iran Nuclear Deal

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

Context: Iran has taken further steps away from its crumbling nuclear deal with world powers by announcing it is doubling the number of its advanced centrifuges, calling the move a direct result of the United States' withdrawal from the agreement last year.

What next?
By doing so, Iran is trying to increase the pressure on Britain, France and Germany in particular to find some arrangement that will allow them to sell the oil they were buying when Iran was not under sanctions. That requires some level of US support to waive sanctions against European firms by the United States. So far, the US has no agreed to do that.

What's happening?
Iran is now operating 60 IR-6 advanced centrifuges. Such a centrifuge can produce enriched uranium 10 times as fast as the first-generation IR-1s allowed under the accord.
By starting up these advanced centrifuges, Iran further cuts into the one year that experts estimate Tehran would need to have enough material for building a nuclear weapon - if it chose to pursue one.

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

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

Why has US pulled out of the deal now?
Trump and opponents to the deal say it is flawed because it gives Iran access to billions of dollars but does not address Iran’s support for groups the U.S. considers terrorists, like Hamas and Hezbollah. They note it also doesn’t curb Iran’s development of ballistic missiles and that the deal phases out by 2030. They say Iran has lied about its nuclear program in the past.
Impact of escalated tension between Iran and the US:
1. Iran can make things difficult for the U.S. in Afghanistan as also in Iraq and Syria.
2. The U.S.’s ability to work with Russia in Syria or with China regarding North Korea will also be impacted.
3. And sooner or later, questions may be asked in Iran about why it should continue with other restrictions and inspections that it accepted under the JCPOA, which would have far-reaching implications for the global nuclear architecture.
4. Coming after the rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris climate change accord and the North American Free Trade Agreement, President’s decision further diminishes U.S. credibility.

Implications for India:
Oil and Gas: The impact on world oil prices will be the immediately visible impact of the U.S. decision. Any increase in prices will hit both inflation levels as well as the Indian rupee.
It would impact the development of Chahbahar port.
INSTC: New U.S. sanctions will affect these plans, especially if any of the countries along the route or banking and insurance companies dealing with the INSTC plan also decide to adhere to U.S. restrictions on trade with Iran.
Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: China may consider inducting Iran into the SCO. If the proposal is accepted by the SCO, which is led by China and Russia, India will become a member of a bloc that will be seen as anti-American, and will run counter to some of the government’s other initiatives like the Indo-Pacific quadrilateral with the U.S., Australia and Japan.
Rules-based order: By walking out of the JCPOA, the U.S. government has overturned the precept that such international agreements are made by “States” not just with prevailing governments or regimes.

What role does the U.N. Security Council play in this crisis?
The Security Council adopted a resolution in 2015 that endorsed the nuclear agreement and ended U.N. sanctions against Iran. The resolution, 2231, includes what is known as a “snapback” provision that could reinstate those sanctions if other parties to the agreement complained that Iran was cheating. Such a step would likely doom the agreement.

Global Implications:
1. Down trends in global economy.
2. Fuel prices would reach high points.
3. Iran may block Strait of Hormuz which is a strategic choke point which in turn would affect global trade.
4. Giant economy like India, China and Russia will suffer.
5. US has cancelled airlines from US to India because they pass over Iran which would affect airspace industry.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. US Exiting the Paris Agreement
What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the Paris agreement.
For Mains: Concerns and issues over US exit, it’s implications.

Context: United States initiated the process of leaving the Paris Agreement, notifying the United Nations of its withdrawal from the landmark climate deal. The withdrawal will take effect one year from delivery of the notification.
After it leaves, the US will be the only country left out of the global protocol. Syria and Nicaragua, the last remaining countries who were earlier holding out, also became signatories in 2017.

What is the Paris Agreement?
The Paris Agreement of 2016 is a historic international accord that brings almost 200 countries together in setting a common target to reduce global greenhouse emissions in an effort to fight climate change.
- The pact seeks to keep global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels, and to try and limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
To this end, each country has pledged to implement targeted action plans that will limit their greenhouse gas emissions. The Agreement asks rich and developed countries to provide financial and technological support to the developing world in its quest to fight and adapt to climate change.

How does a country leave the Agreement?
Article 28 of the Paris Agreement allows countries to leave the Paris Agreement and lays down the process for leaving.
- A country can only give a notice for leaving at least three years after the Paris Agreement came into force.
- This happened on November 4, 2016. Therefore, the US was eligible to move a notice for leaving on November 4 this year, which it did.
- The withdrawal is not immediate, however. It takes effect one year after the submission of the notice. It means the United States will be out of Paris Agreement only on November 4 next year.

But why does the United States want to leave a deal on which literally the whole world agrees?
During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump had said the Paris Agreement was “unfair” to US interests. He had promised to pull out of the Agreement if he was elected.
The United States is the world’s second largest emitter of greenhouse gases. If it does not reduce its emissions befitting its status as the second largest emitter, it could seriously jeopardise the world’s objective of keeping the global temperature rise to within 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial times.
As part of its commitment to the Paris Agreement, the United States had promised to reduce its emissions by 26 per cent to 28 per cent by the year 2025 from 2005 levels.
- The United States plays a preeminent role in mobilising financial resources globally, and its absence from the scene could seriously hamper that effort.
- Under the Paris Agreement, developed countries are under obligation to mobilise at least $100 billion every year from the year 2020 in climate finance meant for the developing world. This amount has to be revised upwards after five years. As it is, countries are struggling to reach this amount by next year.
- The US was opposed to this move.

Implications of this move:
1. While exiting the Paris Agreement does not automatically mean the abandonment of this target or of any future action by the United States on climate change, it would no longer be committed to these actions.
2. But the biggest impact of the exit of the United States from the Agreement might be on the financial flows to enable climate actions.

Is it possible that the US returns to the Paris Agreement at a later date?
1. It can indeed, return. There is no bar on a country rejoining the Paris Agreement.
2. It is also possible that the United States does a rethink and actually never leaves the Paris Agreement. It has one full year to reconsider its decision.

But assuming the US finally walks, will it mean the end of its entire association with the war on climate change?
- No, the US will not be entirely missing from the climate negotiations.
- While it is pulling out of the Paris Agreement, it remains part of the UNFCCC, the mother agreement that was finalised in 1994.
- The Framework Convention was the first international agreement to identify and acknowledge the problem of climate change.
- It had laid down the principles and guidelines to achieve the objective of stabilising the greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to levels that would cause least damage to climate system.
- The Paris Agreement is an instrument of the Framework Convention to achieve that objective.
- The United States will be out of the Paris Agreement, but by virtue of being a signatory to the UNFCCC would continue to be a part of the other processes and meetings under the Framework Convention.

Sources: the Hindu.
3. West Bank and issues associated

What to study?
For Prelims: Geographical locations of Gaza, Golan Heights, Sinai and Dead Sea.
For Mains: Issues associated, what do international laws say about this? What is the way out?

Context: The United States has told that it no longer thinks Israeli settlements in the West Bank violate international law. The new US view is different from that of most countries’ on this issue. Previously, in 1978 and 1981, the US had taken opposite stands.

Where is West Bank?
It is a landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north. The West Bank also contains a significant section of the western Dead Sea shore.

What is the dispute settlements here? Who lives there?
The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since.
It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.
Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.

Are these settlements illegal?
The United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the International Court of Justice have said that the West Bank settlements are violative of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power “shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.
Under the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes, as does the “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.

What about the Jerusalem?
Under the Oslo Accords of the 1990s, both Israel and the Palestinians agreed that the status of settlements would be decided by negotiations. But the negotiations process has been all but dead for several years now. Israel walked into East Jerusalem in 1967, and subsequently annexed it. For Israel, Jerusalem is non-negotiable. The Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. Most of the world’s nations look at it as occupied territory.

Fact for prelims:
In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel captured the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. Uighur Detention Camps
What to study?
For Prelims: Who are Uighurs and why are they unhappy with the Chinese government.
For Mains: Ethnic conflicts in China and its relevance for the world.

Context: For some months now, international concern has been growing about what China is doing to its Uighur population. Reports have emerged of China 'homogenising' the Uighurs.

What’s the issue now?
Around a million Uighurs, Kazakhs and other Muslims have been bundled into internment camps, where they are allegedly being schooled into giving up their identity, and assimilate better in the communist country dominated by the Han Chinese.
China resolutely denies all such allegations, claiming the camps to be ‘educational centres’ where the Uighurs are being cured of “extremist thoughts” and radicalisation, and learning vocational skills.

Who are Uighurs?
Uighurs are a Muslim minority community concentrated in the country’s northwestern Xinjiang province. They claim closer ethnic ties to Turkey and other central Asian countries than to China, by brute — and brutal — force.

Why is China targeting the Uighurs?
Xinjiang is technically an autonomous region within China — its largest region, rich in minerals, and sharing borders with eight countries, including India, Pakistan, Russia and Afghanistan.
- Over the past few decades, as economic prosperity has come to Xinjiang, it has brought with it in large numbers the majority Han Chinese, who have cornered the better jobs, and left the Uighurs feeling their livelihoods and identity were under threat.
- This led to sporadic violence, in 2009 culminating in a riot that killed 200 people, mostly Han Chinese, in the region’s capital Urumqi. And many other violent incidents have taken place since then.
- Beijing also says Uighur groups want to establish an independent state and, because of the Uighurs’ cultural ties to their neighbours, leaders fear that elements in places like Pakistan may back a separatist movement in Xinjiang.
- Therefore, the Chinese policy seems to have been one of treating the entire community as suspect, and launching a systematic project to chip away at every marker of a distinct Uighur identity.

Facts for Prelims:
Xinjiang shares borders with Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Sources: Indian Express.

5. New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty)

What to study?
For prelims and mains: Key features, significance, targets and the need for the treaty, overview of INF treaty.

Context: Russia has observed that there was no longer enough time left for Moscow and Washington to negotiate a full-fledged replacement for the New START nuclear arms control treaty before it expires in February 2021.

Background:
The New START accord is the last major nuclear arms control treaty between the world’s two biggest nuclear powers and limits the number of strategic nuclear warheads they can deploy. The fate of the accord has been in the spotlight since Washington in August pulled out of another landmark strategic arms accord, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), citing violations by Russia that Moscow denies.
About New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty):

- It is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation with the formal name of Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.
- Signed on 8 April 2010 in Prague, and, after ratification entered into force on 5 February 2011.
- Replaced the Treaty of Moscow (SORT), which was to expire in December 2012.

Its name is a follow-up to the START I treaty, which expired in December 2009, the proposed START II treaty, which never entered into force, and the START III treaty, for which negotiations were never concluded.

Under terms of the treaty:

1. Number of strategic nuclear missile launchers will be reduced by half.
2. A new inspection and verification regime will be established, replacing the SORT mechanism.
3. The number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads is limited to 1,550.
4. Number of deployed and non-deployed inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers, submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments to 800 will be limited.

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

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty:

- Under the INF Treaty, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. agreed to eliminate within three years all ground-launched-missiles of 500-5,500 km range and not to develop, produce or deploy these in future.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. The dispute between Britain and Mauritius over Chagos islands

What to study?
For prelims: location of chagos islands, countries involved in the dispute.
For mains: what is the controversy all about, ICJ observations and the need of hour.

Context: Mauritius called the UK an “illegal colonial occupier”, after it ignored a UN mandated deadline to return the Chagos Islands, a small archipelago in the Indian Ocean, to Mauritius.

Background:
The United Nations had given UK six months to process the transfer, a move the UK and the US have bitterly resisted.

What’s the issue?
Britain detached the Chagos Islands from Mauritius in 1965, three years before Mauritian independence.

1. From 1967 to 1973, some 1,500 Chagos islanders were gradually forced to leave their homes so that the largest island, Diego Garcia, could be leased to the US for a strategic airbase. Today, Diego Garcia hosts a major US military base.
2. In 2016, after several judicial challenges, Britain extended Diego Garcia’s lease until 2036 and declared that the expelled islanders would not be allowed to go back.
3. In 2017, Mauritius successfully petitioned the United Nations to seek an ICJ advisory opinion on the legality of the separation.
4. Mauritius claims it was forced to give up the islands — now a British overseas territory – in 1965 in exchange for independence, which it gained in 1968.

What the ICJ said?
The UK should end its control of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean as rapidly as possible. The islands are not lawfully separated from the former colony of Mauritius.

Arguments by Mauritius:
Britain has illegally occupied this region and only Mauritius has sovereignty over the archipelago.

Against the right of self-determination:
The separation of the islands from Mauritius was in clear breach of UN resolution 1514, also known as the Colonial Declaration. Passed in 1960, it enshrined the right of self-determination for colonial peoples and specifically banned the breakup of colonies prior to independence. This was intended to keep borders stable, and to prevent colonial powers from simply absorbing colonial territory into their overseas territory so as to retain their sovereignty.
Yet in spite of this resolution, a number of states (including France and the UK) kept possession of parts of their former colonies following the decolonisation process.

What happens now after UK missed the UN deadline to return Chagos Islands?
The UK is slowly finding itself more diplomatically isolated after its failures at the UN General Assembly concerning Chagos Islands. The shambles that is Brexit has also alienated the UK to a certain degree in terms of its relations with other EU members.
For now, the UK might possibly be searching for reassurance in the fact that the ICJ ruling is not binding and no immediate sanctions or adverse actions will be taken against it.
The next step at the UN General Assembly in 2020 would be the question of resettlement of and potential compensation for the displaced Chagos Islanders who faced homelessness, poverty and associated hardships after being forcefully removed from their homeland by the UK and the US.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Global Migration Report 2020

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Concerns and challenges posed by Migration and ways to address them.

Context: ‘Global Migration Report 2020’ has been released by International Organisation for Migration’s (IOM).

Key findings- India specific:
India accounts for the highest share with 17.5 million Indians living outside the country.
India is the leading recipient of remittances. International remittances in 2018 (2020 report) reached $689 billion, out of which India received $78.6 billion from the 17.5 million living abroad.
Remittances received by India have consistently increased between the 2005 and 2020.
The top migration corridors for Indians are the United Arab Emirates, the US and Saudi Arabia.
Highest number of migrants entering India come from Bangladesh.

Global scenario:
As compared to the 2000 Global Migration Report, the number of international migrants has nearly doubled in the 2020 report, from 150 million to 272 million.
India is followed by Mexico (11.8 million) and China (10.7 million).
Roughly two-thirds of international migrants are labour migrants.

_The United States was the top remittance-issuer_, at $68 billion, followed by the United Arab Emirates ($44.4 billion) and Saudi Arabia ($36.1 billion).

_The top destinations for international migrants is the US where_, as of September 2019, there were 50.7 million international migrants.

The US is followed by Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russian Federation and the UK.

_The proportion of female international migrants has only marginally changed_ between the two reports, from 47.5% in 2000 to 47.9%.

_The share of international migrants who were children has dropped from 16% in 2000 to 13.9%._

_Oceania_ is the region with the highest proportion of international migrants.

_The UAE is the country with the highest proportion of international migrants._

More than half of all international migrants (141 million) live in Europe and North America.

Reasons for migration:

1. Economic conditions.
2. Ongoing conflicts and violence.
3. Impact of climate and weather disasters.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. **SCOJTEX- 2019**

_What to study?_

_For prelims and mains: SCO- objectives, members, functions, significance, various organs and issues associated, SCOJTE._

_What is it?_ Shanghai Cooperation Organization Joint Exercise on Urban Earthquake Search & Rescue. The latest edition is being held in India.

_Key facts:_

- Hosted by NDRF.
- Aim to rehearse the disaster response mechanism, share knowledge, experience, technology & also for mutual coordination, etc.
- _The participants of all 08 member countries_ namely China, India, Kazakhastan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan shall be participating in this exercise.
- Main focus shall be to test the region’s preparedness and resilience towards effective activation of Intergovernmental interaction for immediate response.
About SCO:
What is it? The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also known as the Shanghai Pact, is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai.
Founding members: China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The cooperation was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation after Uzbekistan joined the organisation in 2001.
The SCO’s main goals are: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.
Presently, the SCO comprises eight member states, namely the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan;
The SCO counts four observer states, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Mongolia.
The SCO has six dialogue partners, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Green Climate Fund
What to study?
For Prelims: About GCF and its funding.
For Mains: India’s observations on funding pattern, need for review and clarity on the issue.

Context: In a move that may positively impact over 10 million people living on the coastline, India has kicked-off a USD 43 million project to boost climate resilience in three coastal states in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
The project is funded by the Green Climate Fund.

Details:
- The six-year project will build climate-resilient livelihoods for 1.7 million people in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha.
- It seeks to offset 3.5 million tonnes of carbon, protect vulnerable ecosystems, and benefit another 10 million people with improved shoreline protection.
- The project will work with communities in restoring ecosystems and promoting climate-resilient livelihood options, such as the sustainable farming of mud crabs.

About GCF:
The GCF was set up in 2010 under the UNFCCC’s financial mechanism to channel funding from developed countries to developing countries to allow them to mitigate climate change and also adapt to disruptions arising from a changing climate.
How it helps?
The Green Climate Fund will support projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing country Parties using thematic funding windows.

- It is intended to be the centrepiece of efforts to raise Climate Finance of $100 billion a year by 2020.
- The Fund will promote the paradigm shift towards low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways by providing support to developing countries to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change, taking into account the needs of those developing countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.
- The Fund will strive to maximize the impact of its funding for adaptation and mitigation, and seek a balance between the two, while promoting environmental, social, economic and development co-benefits and taking a gender-sensitive approach.

Who will govern the Fund?
The Fund is governed and supervised by a Board that will have full responsibility for funding decisions and that receives the guidance of the Conference of Parties (COP). The Fund is accountable to, and functions under the guidance of, the COP.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. UNESCO World Heritage Week

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: WHS- selection and significance, what are endangered sites?

Context: World Heritage Week is celebrated by UNESCO between November 19, 2019 and November 25, 2019. The Objective of celebrating World Heritage Week is to increase awareness among people about safety and preservation of cultural heritages and monuments. There are 38 World Heritage Sites located in India. These include 30 cultural sites, seven natural sites and one mixed site. India has the sixth largest number of sites in the world.

UNESCO world heritage site:
- It is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.
- The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.
- Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.

Selection of a site:
To be selected, a World Heritage Site must be an already classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area). It may signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of our intellectual history on the planet.

Legal status of designated sites:
UNESCO designation as a World Heritage Site provides prima facie evidence that such culturally sensitive sites are legally protected pursuant to the Law of War, under the Geneva Convention, its articles, protocols and customs, together with other treaties including the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and international law.

What are endangered sites?
• A site may be added to the List of World Heritage in Danger if there are **conditions that threaten the characteristics for which the landmark or area was inscribed on the World Heritage List**. Such problems may involve armed conflict and war, natural disasters, pollution, poaching, or uncontrolled urbanization or human development.
• This danger list is intended to increase international awareness of the threats and to encourage counteractive measures.
• Review: The state of conservation for each site on the danger list is reviewed on a yearly basis, after which the committee may request additional measures, delete the property from the list if the threats have ceased or consider deletion from both the List of World Heritage in Danger and the World Heritage List.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. Kimberley Process

**What to study?**

*For prelims: About the Kimberly process, previous chair, conflict diamonds.*  
*For mains: How does the Kimberley Process work?*

**Context:** The Plenary meeting of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) is being hosted by India. **India is the present Kimberley Process (KP) Chair.** The plenary is being hosted in New Delhi in November 2019.

**What is the Kimberley Process?**
The Kimberley Process is an international certification scheme that regulates trade in rough diamonds. It aims to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds, while helping to protect legitimate trade in rough diamonds. The **Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)** outlines the rules that govern the trade in rough diamonds. The KP is not, strictly speaking, an international organisation: it has no permanent offices or permanent staff. It relies on the contributions — under the principle of ‘burden-sharing’ — of participants, supported by industry and civil society observers. **Neither can the KP be considered as an international agreement from a legal perspective, as it is implemented through the national legislations of its participants.**

**What are Conflict diamonds?**
“Conflict Diamonds” means rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance conflict aimed at undermining legitimate governments. It is also described in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

**Who is involved?**
The **Kimberley Process (KP)** is open to all countries that are willing and able to implement its requirements. The KP has 55 participants, representing 82 countries, including the European Union and its Member States counting as a single participant. KP members account for approximately 99.8% of the global production of rough diamonds. In addition, the **World Diamond Council**, representing the international diamond industry, and civil society organisations, such as Partnership-Africa Canada, participate in the KP and have played a major role since its outset.

**How does the Kimberley Process work?**
1. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) imposes extensive requirements on its members to enable them to certify shipments of rough diamonds as ‘conflict-free’ and prevent conflict diamonds from entering the legitimate trade.
2. Under the terms of the KPCS, participating states must put in place national legislation and institutions; export, import and internal controls; and also commit to transparency and the exchange of statistical data.
3. Participants can only legally trade with other participants who have also met the minimum requirements of the scheme, and international shipments of rough diamonds must be accompanied by a KP certificate guaranteeing that they are conflict-free.
Rough diamond trading under the KPCS:
As per the Scheme, each shipment of rough diamonds being exported and imported by crossing an international border be transported in a tamper proof container and accompanied by a validated Kimberley Process Certificate. The shipment can only be exported to a co-participant country in the KPCS. No uncertified shipments of rough diamonds are permitted to enter a participant country.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. UNDP Accelerator Labs
What to study?
For Prelims and mains: features, need for and significance.

Context: UNDP launches Accelerator Lab in India, to work on pollution, water issues.
The laboratory that will be housed in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office here has partnered with Indian government’s Atal Innovation Mission to achieve the objectives.

What is it?
The Accelerator Lab is an innovative new initiative by the UNDP, Germany and Qatar, to find 21st century solutions to today’s complex new challenges.

Four key approaches sit at the core of the Labs’ work:
1. Building on locally-sourced solutions, finding things that work and expanding on them.
2. Rapid testing and iteration to implement what works and go beyond the obvious solutions.
3. Combining the best understanding, ideas and expertise to generate collective knowledge.
4. Accelerating progress by bringing expertise, creativity and collective intelligence to bear.

Need for:
• The impact of artificial intelligence on unemployment. The potential for disinformation to spread on social media. The need for policies that keep up with and drive innovation, while protecting human rights.
• Many of these challenges are growing exponentially. The speed, dynamics and complexity of today’s social, economic and environmental problems are fundamentally different from previous eras in history.

The Accelerator Labs are UNDP’s new way of working in development. They will work together with national and global partners to find radically new approaches that fit the complexity of current development challenges.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s (NATO)
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: About NATO- formation, members, objectives, significance and issues associated, latest members.

Context: The U.S. contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s (NATO) operating budget has been cut down at the cost of an increase in Germany’s payments to the alliance. This move comes after repeated criticism of European members of the organisation by the U.S.

Impact:
Previously the US provided some 22% of NATO’s direct funding, which covers the cost of maintaining the NATO headquarters, joint security investments and some combined military operations.
It’s a largely symbolic move as NATO’s direct budget is relatively small, at about $2.5 billion, and is separate from national defense budgets that NATO recommends should stand at 2% of GDP.

About North Atlantic Treaty Organization:
It is an intergovernmental military alliance.
Established by Washington treaty.
**Treaty** that was signed on 4 April 1949.

**Headquarters** — Brussels, Belgium.

**Headquarters of Allied Command Operations** — Mons, Belgium.

**Significance:** It constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.

**Objectives:**

**Political** – NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.

**Military** – NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO’s founding treaty — Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organisations.

Sources: the hindu.
GENERAL STUDIES – 3

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

1. CMIE Report on Joblessness

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings of the report.
For Mains: Concerns, reasons for rise in unemployment, challenges ahead and ways to address them.

Context: The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has released a report on Unemployment in India.

Key findings:
1. India’s unemployment rate in October rose to 8.5%, the highest level since August 2016.
2. Urban unemployment rate at 8.9%, is more than the rural unemployment rate of 8.3%.
3. Highest unemployment rate in Tripura and Haryana, at more than 20%.
4. Lowest in Tamil Nadu at 1.1%.

Why this is a cause for concern?
1. CMIE findings are in line with the findings of the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey, which had estimated an unemployment rate of 6.1% between July 2017 and June 2018, the worst in 45 years.
2. The data also comes on the back of other indicators showing a downturn in the economy, including the core sector output in September posting its worst contraction in at least 14 years.
3. Another research estimates that between 2011-12 and 2017-18, employment declined by an unprecedented nine million jobs (a 2% drop), with agricultural employment declining by 11.5%. In the same period, employment in the service sector increased by 13.4%, while manufacturing employment dipped by 5.7%.
4. While employment has been declining, the number of working age people who are “Not in Labour Force, Education and Training” has continued to increase — from about 84 million in 2011-12, it has now crossed 100 million.

What causes this?
Most of the decline in employment has happened due to the fall in the number of workers in agriculture and a sharp fall in the absolute number of female workers.
While the trend of workers moving out of agriculture is seen since 2004-05 and is welcome, it also points to the rising vulnerability of farm production.

Way ahead:
No doubt, the problem is not new and even earlier governments are to be blamed for the mess that the economy is in. Unfortunately, blaming the data or earlier governments does not make people who are looking for jobs vanish from the country. Stagnant wages and jobless growth are not just indicators of a weakening economy, but also a recipe for political instability and a crisis in the countryside. The least that is expected of the government is an acknowledgement of the extent of the problem and then try to address it.

Need of the hour:
Falling manufacturing employment and decelerating construction employment growth are bad news for the economy.
To sustain the growth of income, improve standard of living, and to reduce poverty, employment opportunities in manufacturing and construction (although a transitory sector) is necessary.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Global Microscope on Financial Inclusion Report

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings, about the report.  
For Mains: Challenges for India and ways to address them.


India-specific observations:
1. India is among top nations with most conducive environment for financial inclusion in terms of allowing non-banks to issue e-money, proportionate customer due diligence and effective consumer protection.  
2. The overall environment for financial inclusion has improved globally with India, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay and Mexico having the most favourable conditions for inclusive finance.  
3. Within the overall framework for promoting digital financial inclusion, the report identified four basic enablers - allowing non-banks to issue e-money, presence of financial service agents, proportionate customer due diligence and effective financial consumer protection.  
4. India was among the top countries that safeguard e-money via some sort of deposit insurance or protection.

Efforts by India:
1. In India, the Reserve Bank has prepared a draft National Strategy for Financial Inclusion to deepen financial services’ coverage in the country.  
2. The long-awaited strategy is expected to be finalised in 2019 and will cover a five-year period.  
3. The RBI has set up a high-level committee to review the existing status of digitisation and devise a medium-term strategy for increasing digital payments.  
4. In August 2019, the RBI released the Enabling Framework for Regulatory Sandbox (RS), which creates the basis for a regulatory sandbox that will allow fintech start-ups to live-test innovative products and services.

About the report:
Produced by Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the research and analysis division of The Economist Group. Created in 1946 and is the world leader in global business intelligence. The Microscope report was first published in 2007 and was originally developed for countries in Latin American and Caribbean regions but in 2009 it was expanded into a global study. The report is a benchmarking index that assesses enabling environment for financial access in 55 countries across 5 categories.

Five parameters across which countries are assessed:
2. Products and Outlets.  
3. Stability and Integrity.  
5. Infrastructure.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. What is Trade Deficit?  
What to study?  
For Prelims: Meaning and impact.  
For Mains: Concerns and impact of trade deficits.

Context: India decided that it won’t sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Participation agreement. A key reason that India forwarded for declining to sign on was the existence of trade deficits with many of the constituents of the RCEP.
How RCEP would have affected India?
India was concerned that joining the RCEP trade pact could lead to Chinese goods flooding the Indian markets, and India’s trade deficit ballooning against most of the RCEP members. This, India argued, would have led to several sectoral producers such as those in the dairy and steel sector being dominated by foreign competition.

What is trade deficit?
Simply put, the trade “balance” of a country shows the difference between what it earns from its exports and what it pays for its imports.
- If this number is in negative – that is, the total value of goods imported by a country is more than the total value of goods exported by that country – then it is referred to as a “trade deficit”.
- If India has a trade deficit with China then China would necessarily have a “trade surplus” with India.

What does a trade deficit signify?
A trade deficit means broadly can mean two things:
1. The demand in the domestic economy is not being met by the domestic producers.
2. Many a time a deficit signifies the lack of competitiveness of the domestic industry.

More often than not, the trade deficit of a country is due to a combination of both these main factors.

Is a trade deficit a bad thing?
Not necessarily. No trade is ever balanced. That’s because all countries have different strengths and weaknesses. Trade typically enhances wellbeing all across the world by forcing countries to do what they can do most efficiently and procure (import) from the rest of the world what they cannot produce efficiently. Another way to look at trade deficits is to look at the outcome of trade agreements on consumers instead of producers. For instance, if cheaper and better quality milk or steel was to come into India, Indian consumers would benefit as their health improves and their cars become more affordable. Of course, Indian producers of steel and milk will cry foul but then if they are not efficient, they should be producing something else.

Way ahead:
Trade doesn’t have elements that compromise a country’s strategic interests and that is why there are some commodities in which every country wants to maintain self-sufficiency. But merely levying higher tariffs or not choosing to trade do not bring about self-sufficiency. For attaining self-reliance, a country’s domestic industry has to improve and the best of this happening is when one learns from the competition.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. Core Investment Companies (CICs)
What to study?
For prelims and mains: CICs- significance, challenges and their regulation.

Context: RBI panel proposes stricter rules for core investment companies. The recommendations were made by the Working Group to Review Regulatory and Supervisory Framework for Core Investment Companies set up by the central bank on 3 July and headed by Tapan Ray, former secretary of the corporate affairs ministry.

These include:
1. Core investment companies (CICs) will have to form board level committees, appoint independent directors and conduct internal audits.
2. Prepare consolidated financial statement and ring-fence the boards of CICs by excluding employees or executive directors of group companies from its board.
3. Step-down CICs may not be permitted to invest in any other CIC, but can invest freely in other group companies.

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4. The capital contribution by a CIC in a step-down CIC, can be over and above 10% of its owned funds. It should be deducted from its adjusted net worth, as applicable to other NBFCs.
5. The number of layers of CICs in a group should be restricted to two and any CIC within a group shall not make investment through more than a total of two layers of CICs, including itself.

**What are Core Investment Companies (CICs)?**
CICs are non-banking financial companies with asset size of ₹100 crore and above which carry on the business of acquisition of shares and securities, subject to certain conditions.

CICs, which are allowed to accept public funds, hold not less than 90% of their net assets in the form of investment in equity shares, preference shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in group companies. **Investments of CIC in the equity shares** (including instruments compulsorily convertible into equity shares within a period not exceeding 10 years from the date of issue) in group companies constitutes not less than 60% of its net assets as mentioned in clause.

**Exemption:** CICs having asset size of below Rs 100 crore are exempted from registration and regulation from the RBI, except if they wish to make overseas investments in the financial sector.

**What do the term public funds include? Is it the same as public deposits?**
Public funds are not the same as public deposits. Public funds include public deposits, inter-corporate deposits, bank finance and all funds received whether directly or indirectly from outside sources such as funds raised by issue of Commercial Papers, debentures etc. However, even though public funds include public deposits in the general course, it may be noted that CICs/CICs-ND-SI cannot accept public deposits.

**Need:**
This Concept was originated in order to safeguard NBFCs which are formed for group investments from stringent RBI procedures.

Experts have been seeking a review of CIC guidelines ever since defaults by **Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services Ltd (IL&FS)**, a large systemically important core investment company.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 5. Moody’s Ratings

**What to study?**

**For Prelims and mains:** What does the downgrade mean for India? Implications and what needs to be done?

**Context:** Global ratings agency Moody’s Investors Service has cut its outlook on the Government of India’s ratings to negative from stable, but affirmed the Baa2 foreign-currency and local-currency long-term issuer ratings. Moody’s also affirmed India’s Baa2 local-currency senior unsecured rating and its P-2 other short-term local-currency rating.

**What this means for India?**
1. The decision to change the outlook to negative reflects *increasing risks that economic growth will remain materially lower than in the past*, partly reflecting *lower government and policy effectiveness at addressing long-standing economic and institutional weaknesses* than Moody’s had previously estimated, leading to a *gradual rise in the debt burden from already high levels*.
2. *Reduction in outlook is the first step towards an investment downgrade*, as India is now just a notch above the investment grade country rating. *An actual downgrade in country ratings can lead to massive foreign fund outflows*.

**Why has Moody’s cut rating?**
1. Moody’s projected fiscal deficit of 3.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the year through March 2020, a breach of the government’s target of 3.3 per cent, as slower growth and a surprise corporate-tax cut curbs revenue.
2. India’s growth outlook has deteriorated sharply this year, with a crunch that started out in the non-
banking financial institutions (NBFIIs) spreading to retail businesses, car makers, home sales and heavy
industries.
3. Moody’s said the outlook partly reflects government and policy ineffectiveness in addressing economic
weakness, which led to an increase in debt burden which is already at high levels.
4. India’s economy grew by 5 per cent between April and June, its weakest pace since 2013, as consumer
demand and government spending slowed amid global trade frictions.

What does the government say?
Noting Moody’s concerns, the Finance Ministry said that India continues to be among the fastest growing major
economies in the world, and India’s relative standing remains unaffected.
The Government said it has undertaken series of financial sector and other reforms to strengthen the economy
as a whole.
It has also proactively taken policy decisions in response to the global slowdown. These measures would lead to
a positive outlook on India and would attract capital flows and stimulate investments.
The fundamentals of the economy remain quite robust with inflation under check and bond yields low. India
continues to offer strong prospects of growth in near and medium term.

What are different general credit ratings?
AAA: Highest credit quality that denotes the lowest expectations of default risk.
AA+/AA/AA-: Very high credit quality. ‘AA’ ratings denote expectations of very low default risk. They indicate very
strong capacity for payment of financial commitments.
A+/A/A-: High credit quality that denotes expectations of low default risk. The capacity for payment of financial
commitments is considered strong, however, vulnerability to adverse business or economic conditions exists.
BBB+/BBB/BBB-: Good credit quality that indicates that expectations of default risk are currently low. The
capacity for payment of financial commitments is considered adequate, but adverse business or economic
conditions are more likely to impair this capacity.
BB+/BB/BB-: This rating indicates an elevated vulnerability to default risk, particularly in the event of adverse
changes in business or economic conditions over time; however, business or financial flexibility exists that
supports the servicing of financial commitments.
B+/B/B-: This rating indicates that material default risk is present, but a limited margin of safety remains.
Financial commitments are currently being met; however, capacity for continued payment is vulnerable to
deterioration in the business and economic environment.
CCC+/CCC/CCC-: Substantial credit risk exists in this rating, where the default is a real possibility.
CC: This rating shows a very high level of credit risk with a possibility of defaults.
C: This rating shows that a default or default-like process has begun, or the issuer is in a standstill.
DDD/RD/SD/DD/D: This indicates that the issuer has entered into bankruptcy filings, administration, receivership,
liquidation or other formal winding-up procedure or has ceased business.

Sources: Indian Express.

6. IMD World Talent Ranking- 2019

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Significance and concerns highlighted by the report.

Context: The 2019 World Talent Ranking has been released.
• It is released by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD). IMD is a business
education school based in Switzerland.
• The ranking is based on the performance in three main categories -- investment and development,appeal and readiness.

Performance of countries:
The top of the table is still led by European small and mid-size economies. These countries all share high levels of investments in education and a superior quality of life.

Switzerland in the first and Denmark in the second position firmly lead the ranking for the seventh year in a row, followed by Sweden, Austria and Luxembourg.

Performance of India:
1. India has slipped 6 places to 59 rank.
2. This is due to low quality of life and expenditure on education.
3. India is also lagging behind fellow BRICs countries - China ranked 42nd on the list, Russia (47th) and South Africa (50th).
4. India also witnessed one of the sharpest declines among Asian economies owing to low quality of life, negative impact of brain drain, and the low priority of its economy on attracting and retaining talents.
5. The drop is a combination of several factors including expenditure on education (per student) and the quality of education which may be linked to the GDP growth.
6. There are other issues such as the effectiveness of the health system and women’s participation in the labour force.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. What is Deposit Insurance?

What to study?
For Prelims: What is Deposit Insurance? How is it regulated?
For Mains: Reforms needed.

Context: With the failure of the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank reigniting the debate on the low level of insurance for deposits held by customers in banks in India, the central government now plans to raise the cover. A legislation in this regard is likely in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

What is deposit insurance? How is it regulated in India?
Deposit insurance is providing insurance protection to the depositor’s money by receiving a premium. The government has set up Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) under RBI to protect depositors if a bank fails.
Every insured bank pays premium amounting to 0.001% of its deposits to DICGC every year.

What happens to depositors’ money when a bank fails?
When a bank is liquidated, depositors are entitled to receive an insurance amount of ₹1 lakh per individual from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (DICGC). The ₹1 lakh insurance limit includes both principal and interest dues across your savings bank accounts, current accounts, fixed deposits and recurring deposits held with the bank.

What is the procedure for depositors to claim the money from a failed bank?
The DICGC does not deal directly with depositors.
1. The RBI (or the Registrar), on directing that a bank be liquidated, appoints an official liquidator to oversee the winding up process.
2. Under the DICGC Act, the liquidator is supposed to hand over a list of all the insured depositors (with their dues) to the DICGC within three months of taking charge.
3. The DICGC is supposed to pay these dues within two months of receiving this list.
In FY19, it took an average 1,425 days for the DICGC to receive and settle the first claims on a de-registered bank.

Who are insured by the DICGC?
The corporation covers all commercial and co-operative banks, except in Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Lakshadweep and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Besides, Only primary cooperative societies are not insured by the DICGC.
The DICGC does not include the following types of deposits:
1. Deposits of foreign governments.
2. Deposits of central/state governments.
3. Inter-bank deposits.
4. Deposits of the state land development banks with the state co-operative bank.
5. Any amount due on account of any deposit received outside India.
6. Any amount specifically exempted by the DICGC with previous approval of RBI.

Reforms necessary?
1. Enhance the insurance cover and the insured amount.
2. Allow private players to provide insurance cover.
3. Reduce the time delay in settling claims.

Sources: Indian Express.

8. What is AGR?

What to study?
For Prelims: What is AGR? How is it calculated?
For Mains: What is the impact of latest ruling? Issues and ways to address them.

Context: Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea have filed a petition in the Supreme Court to review its October 24 judgment on the Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) issue. The petitions challenge the inclusion of notional incomes in the AGR.

Background:
Last month, the Supreme Court upheld the definition of Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) calculation as stipulated by the Department of Telecommunications. This means that telecom companies will have to pay up as much as Rs 92,642 crore to the government.

What is AGR?
Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) is the usage and licensing fee that telecom operators are charged by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). It is divided into spectrum usage charges and licensing fees, pegged between 3-5 percent and 8 percent respectively.

How is it calculated and what’s the contention?
As per DoT, the charges are calculated based on all revenues earned by a telco – including non-telecom related sources such as deposit interests and asset sales. Telcos, on their part, insist that AGR should comprise only the revenues generated from telecom services.

What’s the issue now?
1. In 2005, the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) challenged the government’s definition for AGR calculation.
2. Later in 2015, the TDSAT said AGR included all receipts except capital receipts and revenue from non-core sources such as rent, profit on the sale of fixed assets, dividend, interest and miscellaneous income, etc.
3. The regulator has also included forex adjustment under AGR apart from ruling that licenses fee will not be charged twice on the same income. It, however, exempted bad debt, foreign exchange fluctuations, and sale of scrap to be calculated for AGR.
4. The government has also raised the issue of under-reporting of revenues to duck charges. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) called out telcos for understating revenues to the tune of Rs 61,064.5 crore.
5. Later, the Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) upheld the DoT’s definition of AGR (factors against which the license fee is payable) with certain exemptions.
6. The DoT, however, filed an appeal before the Supreme Court, citing that the TDSAT had no jurisdiction on the validity of terms and conditions of licenses.
Impact of the ruling:
1. Clearly this judgment has significantly damaging implications for India’s telecom industry, which is already reeling under huge financial stress and is left with only four operators.
2. Significant investment of several billion dollars has been made in creating world class networks. This order has huge impact on two private operators while most of the other impacted operators have exited the sector.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. India to be a $5 trillion Economy

What to study?
For Prelims: Meaning of $5 trillion economy, about GDP.
For Mains: Challenges, concerns and ways to achieve the target.

Context: The road to a $5 trillion economy by 2025 is beset with many speed-breakers, the NITI Aayog has warned the government.

What is a $5-trillion economy?
Essentially $5-trillion economy is the size of an economy as measured by the annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

What it needs?
1. Apart from the monetary definition, a $5 Trillion Economy calls for pulling all the economic growth levers—investment, consumption, exports, and across all the three sectors of agriculture, manufacturing and services.
2. It also means improving all three sectors of the economy, India will more likely achieve its ambitious Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs).

Present state:
In 2014, India’s GDP was $1.85 trillion. Today it is $2.7 trillion and India is the sixth-largest economy in the world.

Are Indians the sixth-richest people in the world?
No. That India is the sixth-largest economy does not necessarily imply that Indians are the sixth-richest people on the planet.

GDP per capita gives a better sense of how an average resident of an economy might be fairing. It reveals a very different, and indeed a more accurate picture of the level of prosperity in the respective economies.

For instance, on average, a UK resident’s income was 21 times that of an average Indian in 2018. Still, the richest 1% of Indians own 58.4% of wealth. The richest 10% of Indians own 80.7% of the wealth.

Can India achieve the target by 2024?
The answer would depend essentially on the assumption about economic growth.

If India grows at 12% nominal growth (that is 8% real GDP growth and 4% inflation), then from the 2018 level of $2.7 trillion, India would reach the 5.33 trillion mark in 2024. India must keep growing at a rapid pace to attain this target.

How will GDP per capita change when India hits the $5-trillion mark?
If by 2024 India’s GDP is $5.33 trillion and India’s population is 1.43 billion (according to UN population projection).
India’s per capita GDP would be $3,727. This would be considerably more than what it is today, still it will be lower than Indonesia’s GDP per capita in 2018.
Challenges that need to be addressed:
1. Under-employment and the disguised employment.
2. Slowdown in agriculture.
3. Slow pace of infrastructure development in the last decade.
4. Funding issues.
5. Exports issues.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. Exchange Traded Funds

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: What are ETFs, benefits and significance?

Context: The centre is planning to launch India’s first fixed income Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) comprising debt securities of large central public sector enterprises (PSUs).

Features and significance:
1. The ETF is expected to have a size of Rs 15,000 crore to Rs 20,000 crore.
2. The fund will comprise only AAA-rated papers of the PSU companies.
3. It provides a new option to conservative investors to own securities of government-owned companies along with the facility of overnight liquidity as ETF units will be listed on exchanges.
4. Compared with bank fixed deposits that generate a post-tax return of around 5.5 per cent, this product could generate a return of over 7 per cent for the investors.
5. It can comprise corporate debt securities in the form of bonds, credit-linked note, debentures, promissory notes as underlying instruments.

What are ETFs?
Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) are mutual funds listed and traded on stock exchanges like shares. Typically, an ETF mirrors a particular index, which means the group of stocks in the ETF would be similar to those in the index that it is benchmarked to.

Usually, ETFs are passive funds where the fund manager doesn’t select stocks on your behalf. Instead, the ETF simply copies an index and endeavours to accurately reflect its performance. In an ETF, one can buy and sell units at prevailing market price on a real time basis during market hours.

Benefits and significance of ETFs:
1. ETFs are cost efficient. Given that they don’t make any stock (or security choices), they don’t use services of star fund managers.
2. They allow investors to avoid the risk of poor security selection by the fund manager, while offering a diversified investment portfolio.
3. The stocks in the indices are carefully selected by index providers and are rebalanced periodically.
4. They offer anytime liquidity through the exchanges.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

1. Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)

What to study?
For Prelims: About the newly announced fund, AIF- key features.
For Mains: Significance and the need for AIFs.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the creation of an Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) of Rs. 25,000 crore to provide last-mile funding for stalled affordable and middle-income housing projects across the country.

Key features:

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1. The fund size will initially be Rs. 25,000 crore with the government providing Rs. 10,000 crore and the State Bank of India and the Life Insurance Corporation providing the balance.
2. The funds will be set up as Category-II Alternative Investment Fund registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India and will be managed by SBICAP Ventures Limited.
3. The open-ended fund is expected to swell over time. The government is also in talks with sovereign bonds and pension funds to put in money in AIF further.
4. The Cabinet also approved the establishment of a ‘Special Window’ to provide priority debt financing for completion of stalled housing projects in the affordable and middle-income housing sector.

What are AIFs?

As defined in Securities and Exchange Board of India (Alternative Investment Funds) Regulations, 2012, AIFs refer to any privately pooled investment fund, (whether from Indian or foreign sources), in the form of a trust or a company or a body corporate or a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP).

- AIF does not include funds covered under the SEBI (Mutual Funds) Regulations, 1996, SEBI (Collective Investment Schemes) Regulations, 1999 or any other regulations of the Board to regulate fund management activities.
- Hence, in India, AIFs are private funds which are otherwise not coming under the jurisdiction of any regulatory agency in India.

Categories:

As per SEBI (AIF) Regulations, 2012, AIFs shall seek registration in one of the three categories:

1. Category I: Mainly invests in start-ups, SME’s or any other sector which Govt. considers economically and socially viable.
2. Category II: These include Alternative Investment Funds such as private equity funds or debt funds for which no specific incentives or concessions are given by the government or any other Regulator.
3. Category III: Alternative Investment Funds such as hedge funds or funds which trade with a view to make short term returns or such other funds which are open ended and for which no specific incentives or concessions are given by the government or any other Regulator.

Sources: the Hindu.

**Topics: Government Budgeting.**

1. 'Supplementary Grants'

**What to study?**

For Prelims and mains: Meaning, features and significance of these grants.

**Context: Finance Minister** Sitharaman recently tabled the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants for the financial year 2019-20 in both the Houses of Parliament saying of the total spend, cash outgo will be about 19,000 crore.

**Background:**
Supplementary, additional or excess grants and Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants are mentioned in the Constitution of India 1949.

**Article 115:** Supplementary, additional or excess grants.

**Article 116:** Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants.

**Definition:**
Supplementary grants are the additional grant required to meet the required expenditure of the government.

**The demand for excess grants:**
When grants, authorised by the Parliament, fall short of the required expenditure, an estimate is presented before the Parliament for Supplementary or Additional grants. These grants are presented and passed by the Parliament before the end of the financial year.

When actual expenditure incurred exceeds the approved grants of the Parliament, the Ministry of Finance and
Ministry of Railways presents a Demand for Excess Grant. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India bring such excesses to the notice of the Parliament.

The Public Accounts Committee examines these excesses and gives recommendations to the Parliament. The Demand for Excess Grants is made after the actual expenditure is incurred and is presented to the Parliament after the end of the financial year in which the expenses were made.

Other grants:
Additional Grant: It is granted when a need has arisen during the current financial year for supplementary or additional expenditure upon some new service not contemplated in the Budget for that year.
Excess Grant: It is granted when money has been spent on any service during a financial year in excess of the amount granted for that year. The demands for excess grants are made after the expenditure has actually been incurred and after the financial year to which it relates, has expired.
Exceptional Grants: It is granted for an exceptional purpose which forms no part of the current service of any financial year
Token Grant: It is granted when funds to meet proposed expenditure on a new service can be made available by re-appropriation, a demand for the grant of a token sum may be submitted to the vote of the House and, if the House assents to the demand, funds may be so made available.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

1. Polavaram Project

What to study?
For Prelims: Key facts on Polavaram project.
For Mains: Significance and issues associated with the project.

Context: Work on the mega Polavaram irrigation project was recently resumed by the new contractor, Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd.

About the Polavaram project: It is a multi-purpose irrigation project.
- The dam across the Godavari River is under construction located in West Godavari District and East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh state and its reservoir spreads in parts of Chhattisgarh and Orissa States also.
- The project is multipurpose major terminal reservoir project on river Godavari for development of Irrigation, Hydropower and drinking water facilities to East Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, West Godavari and Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The Polavaram project was accorded national status in 2014 in the Andhra Pradesh Bifurcation Act and its design was changed.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Fall Armyworm (FAW)

What to study?
For prelims and mains: FAW- causes, effects, concerns and measures needed.
Context: Proper precaution and timely management by the state agriculture department and awareness among farmers have succeeded in thwarting an attack by the Fall Armyworm (FAW) on maize crop in Odisha.

Background:
Odisha produces over 7 lakh tonnes maize every year. The coverage of maize has increased to 2.40 lakh hectares in 2019-20 from 2.28 lakh ha a year ago.

What is FAW?
It is a native of the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the Americas. First detected in the African continent in 2016. Since then, it has spread to other countries such as China, Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The pest can attack at least 80 types of crops including bajra, jawar, ragi, paddy, wheat and vegetables.

In India: It was reported in India for the first-time in Karnataka. Within a span of only six months, almost 50 per cent of the country, including Mizoram, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal, has reported FAW infestations.

What makes FAW dangerous?
1. It is the polyphagous (ability to feed on different kinds of food) nature of the caterpillar and the ability of the adult moth to fly more than 100 km per night.
2. Given its ability to feed on multiple crops — nearly 80 different crops ranging from maize to sugarcane — FAW can attack multiple crops.
3. Similarly, it can spread across large tracts of land as it can fly over large distances. This explains the quick spread of the pest across India.

How FAW affects output?
1. Till date, India has reported FAW infestation on maize, sorghum (jowar) and sugarcane crops. Maize has been the worst affected as most maize-growing states in southern India have been affected by the pest.
2. FAW infestation and drought has led to a shortfall of nearly 5 lakh tonnes in output, prompting the central government to allow import of maize under concessional duty. Maize is the third most important cereal crop grown in the country and the infestation, if not checked in time, can wreck havoc.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: The scheme-features, significance, need and potential?

Context: As per the latest data, over 18 Lakh Farmers are registered under PM KISAN MAAN DHAN YOJANA.

About the scheme:
Aim: To improve the life of small and marginal farmers of the country.

Salient features of the scheme:
- The scheme is voluntary and contributory for farmers in the entry age group of 18 to 40 years.
- A monthly pension of Rs. 3000/- will be provided to them on attaining the age of 60 years.
- The spouse is also eligible to get a separate pension of Rs.3000/- upon making separate contributions to the Fund.
- Initial contribution: The farmers will have to make a monthly contribution of Rs.55 to Rs.200, depending on their age of entry, in the Pension Fund till they reach the retirement date i.e. the age of 60 years.
- The Central Government will also make an equal contribution of the same amount in the pension fund.
- The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) shall be the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out.
- If there is no spouse, then total contribution along with interest will be paid to the nominee.
• If the farmer dies after the retirement date, the spouse will receive 50% of the pension as Family Pension.
• After the death of both the farmer and the spouse, the accumulated corpus shall be credited back to the Pension Fund.
• The beneficiaries may opt voluntarily to exit the Scheme after a minimum period of 5 years of regular contributions.
• In case of default in making regular contributions, the beneficiaries are allowed to regularize the contributions by paying the outstanding dues along with prescribed interest.

Need for and Significance of the scheme:
It is expected that at least 10 crore labourers and workers in the unorganised sector will avail the benefit of the scheme within next five years making it one of the largest pension schemes of the world.

Sources: pib.

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

1. NBFC Liquidity Norms

What to study?
For Prelims: about the new norms.
For Mains: Need for and significance of these norms.

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced ‘liquidity management framework’ for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).
The guidelines are applicable to all non deposit-taking NBFCs with an asset size of ₹100 crore and above, systemically important Core Investment Companies and all deposit-taking NBFCs irrespective of their asset size.

Why this was necessary?
This has come following liquidity crunch among some NBFCs in meeting their recent repayment obligations after the collapse of the Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) group.
This was necessary to strengthen their asset-liability management following the liquidity crisis faced by these firms in the past year.

What’s changed?
Specific cap on negative asset liability mismatches for particular liquidity buckets.
NBFCs are mandated to maintain liquidity coverage ratios (LCR). LCR will promote resilience of NBFCs to potential liquidity disruptions by ensuring that they have sufficient High Quality Liquid Assets (HQLA) to survive any acute liquidity stress scenario lasting for 30 days.
Net cumulative mismatches for 1-7 days, 8-14 days, and 15-30 days shall not exceed 10%, 10% and 20% of the cumulative cash outflows in the respective time buckets.
NBFCs should monitor their cumulative mismatches [running total] across all other time buckets up to one year by establishing internal prudential limits with the approval of the board.
Binding: The LCR requirement will be binding on NBFCs from December 1, 2020, with the minimum HQLAs to be held being 50% of the LCR, progressively reaching up to the required level of 100% by December 1, 2024.
Exemption LCR norms: Core Investment Companies, Type 1 NBFC-NDs, Non-Operating Financial Holding Companies and Standalone Primary Dealers.

Who is to blame for the non-bank lending sector crisis?
NBFC crisis is being held up as one of the culprits of the current slowdown.
There is a near consensus that this crisis was triggered by the collapse of Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services Ltd (IL&FS) and the unfolding of the problems of Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL).
Besides, Raising capital adequacy limits and liquidity margins for NBFCs might have tempered their profitability and hurt their valuations.
**Facts for prelims:**
*High Quality Liquid Assets (HQLAs)* mean liquid assets that can be readily sold or immediately converted into cash at little or no loss of value, or used as collateral to obtain funds in a range of stress scenarios.

*Type I - NBFC-ND (non-deposit taking) entities* are those which do not accept public funds and do not have customer interface and do not intend to engage in such activities.

*LCR* refers to the proportion of highly liquid assets held by companies to ensure their ongoing ability to meet short-term obligations.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**2. Currency Swap Arrangement**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, significance and implications of Currency swap.*

**Context:** With an objective to strengthen financial stability and economic cooperation, the Reserve Bank of India has revised the framework on currency swap arrangement for SAARC countries till 2022.

**As per the new framework:**
1. RBI will continue to offer swap arrangement within the overall corpus of $2 billion.
2. RBI would enter into bilateral swap agreements with SAARC central banks, who want to avail swap facility.
3. The drawals can be made in US dollar, euro or Indian rupee.
4. The currency swap facility will be available to all SAARC member countries, subject to their signing the bilateral swap agreements.

**What is this Currency Swap Arrangement (CSA)?**

This is an arrangement, between two friendly countries, which have regular, substantial or increasing trade, to basically involve in trading in their own local currencies, where both pay for import and export trade, at the pre-determined rates of exchange, without bringing in third country currency like the US Dollar.

In such arrangements no third country currency is involved, thereby eliminating the need to worry about exchange variations.

**Significance of the agreement:**
1. The currency swap agreement is an important measure in improving the confidence in the Indian market and it would not only enable the agreed amount of capital being available to India, but it will also bring down the cost of capital for Indian entities while accessing the foreign capital market.
2. The swap arrangement should aid in bringing greater stability to foreign exchange and capital markets in India. With this arrangement in place, prospects of India would further improve in tapping foreign capital for country’s developmental needs. This facility will enable the agreed amount of foreign capital being available to India for use as and when the need arises.

Sources: the Hindu.

**Topics: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.**

**1. 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:** SATAT initiative has the potential of addressing environmental problems arising from stubble burning. The viability is based on techno commercial factors.

**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.

**How it works?**

- 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 bio-manure, carbon-dioxide, etc., to enhance returns on investment.
- 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:**

1. Responsible waste management, reduction in carbon emissions and pollution.
2. Additional revenue source for farmers.
3. Boost to entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment.
4. Support to national commitments in achieving climate change goals.
5. Reduction in import of natural gas and crude oil.

**What is Bio-Gas?**

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.

**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: the Hindu.

**Topics: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.**

### 1. Navic

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: Navic and its key features.*

*For Mains: Significance, applications and potential of Navic.*

**Context:** Antrix, the commercial arm of ISRO has recently floated two separate tenders to identify industries that can develop dedicated NavIC-based hardware and systems.

**What is NAVIC?**

**Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) is an independent regional navigation satellite system** designed to provide position information in the Indian region and **1500 km around the Indian mainland.**

**Services provided:**

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
IRNSS would provide **two types of services**, namely Standard Positioning Services available to all users and Restricted Services provided to authorised users.

**Its applications include:**
2. Disaster Management.
3. Vehicle tracking and fleet management.
4. Integration with mobile phones.
5. Precise Timing.
7. Terrestrial navigation aid for hikers and travellers.
8. Visual and voice navigation for drivers.

**How many satellites does NAVIC consist of?**
It is a regional system and so its constellation will consist of **seven satellites**. Three of these will be **geostationary over the Indian Ocean**, i.e., they will appear to be stationary in the sky over the region, and **four will be geosynchronous** – appearing at the same point in the sky at the same time every day. *This configuration ensures each satellite is being tracked by at least one of fourteen ground stations at any given point of time, with a high chance of most of them being visible from any point in India.*

**Why it is necessary to have indigenous global navigation system?**
Having a global navigation system bolsters the ability of a nation to serve as a *net security provider*, especially through the guarantee of such assurance policies. It can also play a significant role in relief efforts post disasters such as the tsunami in the Indian Ocean region in 2004 and the Pakistan-India earthquake in 2005.

Sources: the Hindu.

**2. Atal Tinkering Labs**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims:* AIM, ATL and their important features.

*For Mains:* Various initiatives to promote innovation and their significance.

**Context:** *Atal Tinkering Lab Marathon* is being organised by the *Atal Tinkering Labs of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and the NITI Aayog* in an effort to identify India’s best student innovators.

**Key facts:**
- It is a six-month-long nationwide challenge across six different thematic areas, namely, clean energy, water resources, waste management, healthcare, smart mobility and agriculture-tech.
- This is open to all students under the age of 18 years.
- Students of top 30 innovations will be trained on business and entrepreneurship skills, including intellectual property, effective communication, making an elevator pitch, etc.

**What are ATLS?**
With a vision to ‘*Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators*’, Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India.

**Objective:** The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing etc.

**Financial Support:** AIM will provide grant-in-aid that includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and operational expenses of Rs. 10 lakh for a maximum period of 5 years to each ATL.
Eligibility: Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.

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

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Reverse Osmosis (RO)

What to study?
For Prelims: What is Osmosis and RO? TDS in water.
For Mains: Why was it banned? Issues and alternatives available.

Context: The Supreme Court has refused to stay the May 2019 order of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) that banned the use of reverse osmosis (RO) systems where drinking water supply had total dissolved solids (TDS) less than 500 mg per litre.

What is the issue?
In May, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) asked MoEF to frame rules for the use of RO filters and also banned the use of RO purifiers in locations where TDS was low. According to NGT, RO purifiers lead to the wastage of almost 70-80 percent water during the purification process. It had asked the RO manufacturers to ensure that they are able to recover about 75 percent of the water. Following this, the Water Quality India Association moved the SC to seek a stay on the RO ban. However, the apex court refused to give a stay.

Osmosis and RO:
Osmosis involves ‘a solvent (such as water) naturally moving from an area of low solute concentration, through a membrane, to an area of high solute concentration.
A reverse osmosis system applies an external pressure to reverse the natural flow of solvent and so seawater or brackish water is pressurised against one surface of the membrane, causing salt-depleted water to move across the membrane, releasing clean water from the low-pressure side’.

What are the problems with RO plants?
Deposition of brine (highly concentrated salt water) along the shores.
Affects fauna and flora: Hyper salinity along the shore affects plankton, which is the main food for several of these fish species. The high pressure motors needed to draw in the seawater end up sucking in small fish and life forms, thereby crushing and killing them — again a loss of marine resource.
Construction of the RO plants required troves of groundwater. Freshwater that was sucked out and is replaced by salt water, rendering it unfit for the residents around the desalination plants.
Cost and time: On an average, it costs about ₹900 crore to build a 100 MLD-plant and, as the Chennai experience has shown, about five years for a plant to be set up.
Energy needed: To remove the salt required, there has to be a source of electricity, either a power plant or a diesel or battery source. Estimates have put this at about 4 units of electricity per 1,000 litres of water. It is estimated that it cost ₹3 to produce 100 litres of potable water.

Is RO water healthy?
There are concerns that desalinated the RO water may be short of vital minerals such as calcium, magnesium, zinc, sodium, potassium and carbonates. Most RO plants put the water through a ‘post-treatment’ process whereby salts are added to make TDS around 300 mg/l.
Are there technological alternatives?

Low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technique works on the principle that water in the ocean 1,000 or 2,000 feet below is about 4º C to 8º C colder than surface water. So, salty surface water is collected in a tank and subject to high pressure (via an external power source). This pressurized water vaporises and this is trapped in tubes or a chamber. Cold water plumbed from the ocean depths is passed over these tubes and the vapour condenses into fresh water and the resulting salt diverted away.

Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion: It will draw power from the vapour generated as a part of the desalination process. This vapour will run a turbine and thereby will be independent of an external power source. While great in theory, there is no guarantee it will work commercially. For one, this ocean-based plant requires a pipe that needs to travel 50 kilometres underground in the sea before it reaches the mainland.

Sources: down to earth.

4. Coalbed Methane (CBM)

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: What is CBM? Potential, uses and challenges.

Context: Ministry of Coal has asked the state-run coal miner Coal India Limited (CIL) to produce 2 MMSCB (million metric standard cubic metres) per day of coalbed methane (CBM) gas in the next 2 to 3 years.

CBM potential:
- India has the fifth-largest coal reserves in the world, and CBM has been looked at as a clean alternative fuel with significant prospects.
- India’s CBM resources are estimated at around 92 trillion cubic feet (TCF), or 2,600 billion cubic metres (BCM).
- The country’s coal and CBM reserves are found in 12 states of India, with the Gondwana sediments of eastern India holding the bulk.
- The Damodar Koel valley and Son valley are prospective areas for CBM development.

What is coalbed methane (CBM)?
It is an unconventional form of natural gas found in coal deposits or coal seams. CBM is formed during the process of coalification, the transformation of plant material into coal.

CBM can be used
1. In Power generation.
2. As Compressed natural gas (CNG) auto fuel.
3. As feedstock for fertilisers.
4. Industrial uses such as in cement production, rolling mills, steel plants, and for methanol production.

Challenges and concerns:
1. Methane is a greenhouse gas emitted through CBM extraction. Global methane emissions from coal mines are projected to account for approximately 8 percent of total global methane emissions.
2. Disturbance of lands drilled and its effect on wildlife habitats results in ecosystem damage.
3. CBM production behavior is complex and difficult to predict in the early stages of recovery.
4. Another concern is the effect water discharges from CBM development could potentially have on downstream water sources.
5. Disposal of the highly salinized water that must be removed in order to release the methane creates a challenge, as its introduction into freshwater ecosystems could have adverse effects.

Sources: the Hindu.
5. FASTags
What to study?
For Prelims: Key features and overview of the scheme.
For Mains: Benefits, challenges in implementation and significance of the scheme.
Context: Government extends deadline for mandatory FASTags to December 15

Implications:
The objective is to remove bottlenecks and capture all toll electronically.
All 560-odd plazas under the control of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) will collect toll without human intervention, and vehicles need not stop to pay toll.

How does FASTag work?
The device employs Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology for payments directly from the prepaid or savings account linked to it. It is affixed on the windshield, so the vehicle can drive through plazas without stopping.
It is valid for five years, and can be recharged as and when required.
The payment method is a part of the National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) programme. The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) collects the payments.

Why do we need this scheme?
• According to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), these devices will make passing through tolls considerably smoother since drivers will no longer have to carry cash or stop to make a transaction.
• Cameras at toll booths will take photos of passengers in a vehicle, which will be useful for the Ministry of Home Affairs as there will be a record of a vehicle’s movement.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Awareness in space.

1. NASA’s Voyager 2 Spacecraft
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key features, objectives and accomplishments of Voyager 1 and 2.

Context: NASA’s Voyager 2 has exited heliosphere and has entered interstellar space. It is now at 11 billion miles from the earth.

Accomplishments so far:
Voyager 2 is the only probe ever to study Neptune and Uranus during planetary flybys. It is the second man-made object to leave our planet.
Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to have visited all four gas giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — and discovered 16 moons, as well as phenomena like Neptune’s mysteriously transient Great Dark Spot, the cracks in Europa’s ice shell, and ring features at every planet.

What is Interstellar space?
Scientists use the heliopause to mark where interstellar space begins, although depending on how you define our solar system it can stretch all the way to the Oort Cloud, which begins 1,000 times farther away from the sun than Earth’s orbit.

**The Heliosphere:**
The heliosphere is a bubble around the sun created by the outward flow of the solar wind from the sun and the opposing inward flow of the interstellar wind. That heliosphere is the region influenced by the dynamic properties of the sun that are carried in the solar wind—such as magnetic fields, energetic particles and solar wind plasma. The heliopause marks the end of the heliosphere and the beginning of interstellar space.

**About Voyager mission:**
1. Launched in the 1970’s, and the probes sent by NASA were only meant to explore the outer planets – but they just kept on going.
2. Voyager 1 departed Earth on 5 September 1977, a few days after Voyager 2 and left our solar system in 2013.
3. The mission objective of the Voyager Interstellar Mission (VIM) is to extend the NASA exploration of the solar system beyond the neighborhood of the outer planets to the outer limits of the Sun’s sphere of influence, and possibly beyond.
4. The Voyager spacecraft are the third and fourth human spacecraft to fly beyond all the planets in our solar system. Pioneers 10 and 11 preceded Voyager in outstripping the gravitational attraction of the Sun but on February 17, 1998, Voyager 1 passed Pioneer 10 to become the most distant human-made object in space.

Sources: the hindu.

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**Isro PSLV-C47 Launched**

**What to study?**
**For Prelims and mains:** Overview of the PSLV-C47 launch, about Cartosat series, different orbits and difference between GSLV and PSLV.

**Context:** India’s Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, PSLV-C47 has launched Cartosat-3 and 13 commercial nanosatellites into Sun Synchronous orbit from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota.

**Key facts:**
1. This is the first commercial order to put into orbit 13 American nanosatellites for NewSpace India, which was formed only in March 2019.
2. PSLV-C47 is the 21st flight of PSLV in ‘XL’ configuration (with 6 solid strap-on motors).
3. This will be the 74th launch vehicle mission from SDSC SHAR, Sriharikota.

**What is Cartosat-3?**
It is a third-generation agile advanced earth observation satellite with high-resolution imaging capability. Developed by the Indian Space Research Organization (Isro), it will replace the IRS series. It will be placed in an orbit of 509 km at an inclination of 97.5 degree.
Till date, eight Cartosats have been launched by ISRO.

**Significance:**
Cartosat-3 has a panchromatic resolution of 0.25 metres making it the imaging satellite with highest resolution and Mx of 1 metre with a high-quality resolution, which is a major improvement from the previous payloads in the Cartosat series.

**Applications:**
Cartosat-3 could be potentially used for weather mapping and cartography. It aims to address the increased demands for large scale urban planning, rural resource and infrastructure development, coastal land use and land cover.
What is PSLV?
Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle is an indigenously-developed expendable launch system of the ISRO.
It comes in the category of medium-lift launchers with a reach up to various orbits, including the Geo Synchronous Transfer Orbit, Lower Earth Orbit, and Polar Sun Synchronous Orbit.
All the operations of PSLV are controlled from the Satish Dhawan Space Center, Sriharikota.

Difference between PSLV and GSLV:
India has two operational launchers- Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).
1. PSLV was developed to launch low-Earth Orbit satellites into polar and sun synchronous orbits. It has since proved its versatility by launching geosynchronous, lunar and interplanetary spacecraft successfully.
2. On the other hand, GSLV was developed to launch the heavier INSAT class of geosynchronous satellites into orbit. In its third and final stage, GSLV uses the indigenously developed cryogenic upper stage.

Different orbits:
There are three main types of Earth orbits- high Earth orbit, medium Earth orbit and low Earth orbit. Which orbit a particular satellite is placed in depends on its function.
1. When satellites are about 36,000 km from the Earth’s surface, they enter what is called the high Earth orbit. Here, it orbits in sync with the Earth’s rotation, creating the impression that the satellite is stationary over a single longitude. Such a satellite is said to be geosynchronous.
2. Just as the geosynchronous satellites have a sweet spot over the equator that allows them to stay over one spot on Earth, polar-orbiting satellites have a sweet spot that allows them to stay in one time. This orbit is a Sun-synchronous orbit, which means that whenever and wherever the satellite crosses the equator, the local solar time on the ground is always the same.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1. Kerala Fibre Optic Network Project
What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the project.
For Mains: Significance and the need for the project, challenges present and ways to address them.

Context: The Kerala Cabinet has approved a Rs 1,548-crore fiber-optic network project.
To be completed by December 2020, the project seeks to fulfil the government’s aim of making internet access a ‘citizen’s right’.

About the fiber-optic network project:
- Objective: To provide free high-speed internet connection to around 2 million families in the state.
- Aims to provide free high-speed internet to over 20 lakh below poverty line (BPL) households.
- It is a collaborative initiative of the state’s power utility Kerala State Electricity Board and Kerala State IT Infrastructure Ltd.
- Internet service providers and cable television operators can also join the optic-fibre network project to provide their services.
- As many as 30,000 government offices and schools would be linked through the high-speed network, said the state government.

Significance:
The project is expected to help the country’s IT industry and open major opportunities in the fields of artificial intelligence, blockchain, and startups. It is also expected to help in better management of the transport sector.

Sources: the Hindu.
2. BHIM UPI goes International

What to study?
For Prelims: About UPI, BHIM and NPCI.
For Mains: Cashless economy- need, significance, challenges and role of BHIM in furthering this.

Context: BHIM app has gone international with a pilot demo of BHIM UPI QR-based payments beginning at the ongoing Singapore FinTech Festival 2019.
- This QR code-based system would allow anyone with a BHIM app to scan the SGQR at NETS terminals for payments in Singapore.
- The project is being jointly developed by NPCI and NETS of Singapore. It is targeted to go live by Feb 2020.

What is BHIM?
Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) is a UPI based payment interface.
- Developed by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- Allows real time fund transfer.
- Launched in December, 2016.

What is UPI?
Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.
It also caters to the “Peer to Peer” collect request which can be scheduled and paid as per requirement and convenience.
Each Bank provides its own UPI App for Android, Windows and iOS mobile platform(s).

Why UPI is outperforming e-wallets?
People are changing the way they transact, choosing bank-to-bank methods such as the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) over other instruments such as e-wallets. This is because UPI is completely interoperable and as such, it is unique in the world, where you have an interoperable system on the ‘send’ and ‘receive’ side.
The rapid growth of UPI is accompanied by a reasonably strong growth in the value of transactions done using e-wallets, but the latter’s growth has not taken off much following the fillip it received in the aftermath of demonetisation in November 2016.

The BHIM apps has three levels of authentication:
1. For one, the app binds with a device’s ID and mobile number.
2. Second a user needs to sync whichever bank account (UPI or non-UPI enabled) in order to the conduct transaction.
3. Third, when a user sets up the app they are asked to create a pin which is needed to log into the app. The UPI pin, which a user creates with their bank account is needed to go through with the transaction.

UI – Benefits to the Ecosystem participants:
Benefits for banks:
1. Universal Application for transaction.
2. Leveraging existing infrastructure.
3. Safer, Secured and Innovative.
4. Payment basis Single/ Unique Identifier.
5. Enable seamless merchant transactions.

Benefits for end Customers:
- Round the clock availability.
- Single Application for accessing different bank accounts.
- Use of Virtual ID is more secure, no credential sharing.
• Single click authentication.
• Raise Complaint from Mobile App directly.

Benefits for Merchants:
• Seamless fund collection from customers – single identifiers.
• No risk of storing customer’s virtual address like in Cards.
• Tap customers not having credit/debit cards.
• Suitable for e-Com & m-Com transaction.
• Resolves the COD collection problem.
• Single click 2FA facility to the customer – seamless Pull.
• In-App Payments (IAP).

About NPCI:
NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India. It is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks’ Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment and Settlement Infrastructure in India. It has been incorporated as a not for profit company. In 2016 the shareholding was broad-based to 56 member banks to include more banks representing all sectors.

Sources: pib.

3. What is Space Internet?

What to study?
For Prelims: Different orbits, about the Starlink network project.
For Mains: Significance of the project and challenges present.

Why in News?
SpaceX, the world’s leading private company in space technology, has launched 60 satellites into the low earth orbit, under the Starlink network project.

What is it?
The Starlink network is one of several ongoing efforts to start beaming data signals from space. Under the project, the company intends to evolve into a constellation of nearly 12,000 satellites. The aim is to provide low-cost and reliable space-based Internet services to the world. The project announced in 2015, has now 122 satellites in the orbit.

Significance of the project:
The project ensures that reliable and uninterrupted Internet services are universally available in every part of the globe.
• Currently, about 4 billion people, more than half the world’s population, do not have access to reliable Internet networks.
• And that is because the traditional ways to deliver the Internet — fibre-optic cables or wireless networks — cannot take it everywhere on Earth.
• In many remote areas, or places with difficult terrain, it is not feasible or viable to set up cables or mobile towers.
Signals from satellites in space can overcome this obstacle easily.

Why use low earth orbit instead of geostationary?
Geostationary orbit is located at a height of 35,786 km over the Earth’s surface, directly above the Equator. Satellites in this orbit move at speeds of about 11,000 km per hour, and complete one revolution of the Earth in the same time that the earth rotates once on its axis. To the observer on the ground, therefore, a satellite in geostationary orbit appears stationary.
Advantages: Signals from geostationary orbit can cover a very large part of the Earth. Signals from one satellite can cover roughly a third of the planet — and three to four satellites would be enough to cover the entire Earth. Also, because they appear to be stationary, it is easier to link to them.

Then what’s the issue?
There is a time lag — called latency — between a user seeking data, and the server sending that data. And because data transfers cannot happen faster than the speed of light (in reality, they take place at significantly lower speeds), the longer the distance that needs to be covered the greater is the time lag, or latency.

A transmission from a satellite in geostationary orbit has a latency of about 600 milliseconds.

How low earth orbit seeks to solve this issue?
A satellite in the lower orbit, 200-2,000 km from the Earth’s surface, can bring the lag down to 20-30 milliseconds, roughly the time it takes for terrestrial systems to transfer data.

Concerns over LEOs:
Owing to their lower height, their signals cover a relatively small area. As a result, many more satellites are needed in order to reach signals to every part of the planet.

Other issues include: Increased space debris, increased risk of collisions, and the concern of astronomers that these constellations of space Internet satellites will make it difficult to observe other space objects, and to detect their signals.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. Patent Prosecution Highway Programme
What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the programme.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for adoption of Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) programme by the Indian Patent Office (IPO) under the Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks, India (CGPDTM) with patent offices of various other interest countries or regions.

• PPH will initially commence between Japan Patent Office (JPO) and Indian Patent Office on pilot basis for a period of three years only.

Eligibility:
Under this Pilot programme, Indian Patent Office may receive patent applications in certain specified technical fields only, namely, Electrical, Electronics, Computer Science, Information Technology, Physics, Civil, Mechanical, Textiles, Automobiles and Metallurgy while JPO may receive applications in all fields of technology.

What is PPH?
The Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) is a set of initiatives for providing accelerated patent prosecution procedures by sharing information between some patent offices.

How it works?
This would allow a patent applicant to demand fast-tracking of his patent application by showing that his product or process has already been granted a patent in Japan.

PPH programme would lead to the following benefits for the Indian IP office:
1. Reduction in time to dispose patent applications.
2. Reduction in pendency of patent applications.
3. Improvement in quality of search and examination of patent applications.
4. An opportunity for Indian inventors including MSMEs and Start ups of India to get accelerated examination of their patent applications in Japan.

Sources: pib.
5. Contract for the Web

What to study?
For Prelims: What is World Wide Web? How is it regulated?
For Mains: Overview and significance of the contract.

Context: Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, has announced a “Contract for the Web” — aimed at saving the future of his invention.

What is the Contract for the Web?
The idea is to create a global plan of action for all stakeholders to together commit to building a “better” Web. The goal is to create a standard policy for a Web that benefits all. The Contract consists of nine principles — three each for governments, private companies, and individuals and civil society to endorse. It has been created by representatives from over 80 organisations, including governments, companies, civil society activists, and academics.

What are the principles in the Contract?
1. Governments will “Ensure everyone can connect to the Internet”, “Keep all of the Internet available, all of the time”, and “Respect and protect people’s fundamental online privacy and data rights”.
2. Companies will “Make the Internet affordable and accessible to everyone”, “Respect and protect people’s privacy and personal data to build online trust”, and “Develop technologies that support the best in humanity and challenge the worst”.
3. Citizens will “Be creators and collaborators on the Web”, “Build strong communities that respect civil discourse and human dignity”, and “Fight for the Web” so that it “remains open and a global public resource for people everywhere, now and in the future”.

Relevance of the contract:
The Contract is not meant to be “simply aspirational”, or just a “declaration”. “It’s actually meant to be implemented, and it’s meant to be a plan of action.” Governments who are looking to regulate in the digital era, can use the contract as a roadmap to lay out their policies and laws going forward. Companies had themselves reached out to be active participants in the Contract. This was an opportunity for them to have conversations with governments and civil society instead of shouting at each other.

How will the Contract be implemented?
The ‘Contract for the Web’ is not a legal document, or a United Nations document — though the organisation is in talks with the UN. It cannot currently bend governments or companies — even those that are on board — to its will.

Need of the hour:
• The Web, which is now almost an essential condition for human existence, is at a tipping point and needs radical intervention from all stakeholders — governments, companies, civil society groups, as well as individual users.
• Citizen action is an important part of the Contract, and the organisation hopes citizens would hold governments and companies accountable for violations of its terms.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. Public Health Emergency declared in Delhi
What to study?
For Prelims: GRAP and key features.

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For Mains: Concerns over rising pollution levels, challenges and ways to address them, need for a permanent solution.

**Context:** EPCA declares public health emergency in Delhi-NCR. AQI entered the "severe plus" or "emergency" category.

**Background** - Pollution levels and indicators:
An AQI between 0-50 is considered 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor' and 401-500 'severe'. Above 500 falls in the 'severe-plus emergency' category.

**Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):**
- Approved by the Supreme Court in 2016.
- It works only as an emergency measure.
- As such, the plan does not include action by various state governments to be taken throughout the year to tackle industrial, vehicular and combustion emissions.
- When the air quality shifts from poor to very poor, the measures listed have to be followed since the plan is incremental in nature.

**Has it been helpful?**
1. It has created a step-by-step plan for the entire Delhi-NCR region and getting on board several agencies including pollution control boards, industrial area authorities, municipal corporations, regional officials of the India Meteorological Department, and others.
2. It has been successful in fixing accountability and deadlines. For each action to be taken under a particular air quality category, executing agencies are clearly marked.
3. Coordination among as many as 13 agencies from four states is simplified to a degree because of the clear demarcation of responsibilities.
4. Three major policy decisions that can be credited to EPCA and GRAP are the closure of the thermal power plant at Badarpur, bringing BS-VI fuel to Delhi before the deadline set initially, and the ban on Pet coke as a fuel in Delhi NCR.

**To address this menace, we need a permanent solution which might include the following:**
1. Strict enforcement of lower pollution norms: Trucks and buses mixing kerosene and diesel should be impounded, and fined.
2. Buses from other states should be allowed to enter Delhi only if they meet certain pollution norms.
3. Constant monitoring of garbage dumps such as those in Bhalswa and New Ashok Nagar and any fire incidents at these places need to proactively put out.
4. Complete ban on burning of leaves in Delhi through the year.
5. All construction activity in Delhi should be done with draping, to ensure that dust and dirt doesn’t fly into the air. This is done everywhere else in the world.
6. Dust soppers can be run through Delhi roads regularly, every morning.
7. To prevent burning of wood etc during peak winters, build shelters for the homeless to sleep at night in the winters. Some of this has been done by the govt. More needs to be done.
8. Move Brick kilns out of Delhi within 3 years. This was done with tanneries almost 20 yrs ago.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Wasteland Atlas

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings of the atlas.
For Mains: Wasteland- causes, concerns and how to improve them.

- This is significant as it takes into account 12.08 MHa of unmapped area of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) for the first time.
- The new wastelands mapping exercise was carried out by NRSC using the Indian Remote Sensing Satellite data.

Background:
Department of land resources in collaboration with National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), Department of Space has published Wastelands Atlases of India - 2000, 2005, 2010 & 2011 editions.

Key findings:
1. Spatial extent of wastelands in India is 55.76 Mha (16.96 per cent of geographical area of the country i.e. 328.72 Mha) for the year 2015-16 as compared to 56.60 Mha (17.21 per cent) in the year 2008-09.
2. As per the Atlas, during this period 1.45 Mha of wastelands are converted into non wastelands categories.
3. India with 2.4 per cent of total land area of the world is supporting 18 per cent of the world's population. The per capita availability of agriculture land in India is 0.12 ha whereas world per capita agriculture land is 0.29 ha.

Significance and the need for information:
Unprecedented pressure on the land beyond its carrying capacity is resulting into degradation of lands in the country. Therefore, robust geospatial information on wastelands assumes significance and effectively helpful in rolling back the wastelands for productive use through various land development programmes/schemes.

Sources: the Hindu.


What to study?
For Prelims: Key features and significance of the act.
For Mains: Role in increasing air pollution in the capital and surrounding.

Context: The Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009 is being blamed for contributing to the air pollution over Delhi and surrounding areas.

Why?
The law led to the sowing and transplantation of the summer paddy crop to be delayed by about a fortnight, and moved the harvesting season to end-October and early November — a time when the moist air and largely inactive wind systems cause particulate matter and gases from burning paddy stubble to hang in the atmosphere. This air is carried by northwesterly winds towards Delhi, which lies to the southeast of Punjab.

What is The Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009?
The law aimed at conserving groundwater by mandatorily delaying the transplanting of paddy to beyond June 10, when the most severe phase of evapotranspiration (transfer of water from land to the atmosphere through
evaporation from the soil and plant transpiration) is over. *Farmers were forbidden from sowing paddy before May 10, and transplanting it before June 10.*

**Why was the law enacted?**

There has been serious concern over the drastic fall in the water table in Punjab and the cultivation of paddy leads to over-exploitation of underground aquifers, as a very large number of tubewells (more than 14 lakh in 2015-16) running on free power pump out virtually endless amounts of water.

It was believed that *early transplanting of rice (before mid-June) resulted in unsustainable withdrawals of groundwater with the monsoon still far, temperatures very high, and the evapotranspiration rate (ETR) at its peak.* And hence this law was put in place.

**What is the law’s link with air pollution?**

Farmers’ organisations say *late sowing and transplanting delays the harvesting as well* (it is end-October by the time operations end), and they are left with a very small window to prepare their fields for the next (wheat) crop.

In this situation, *setting the stubble ablaze is a quick-fix solution.* By this time, temperatures have started to fall, and a combination of atmospheric and meteorological conditions ensure that the smoke cannot disperse easily.

A part of the smoke from *the farm fires is carried by westerly winds towards the NCR and further down the Indo-Gangetic plain.*

**But does the Act really help conserve groundwater?**

A study has reported a robust effect of the 2009 Act on reducing groundwater depletion. Between 2008-09 and 2012-13, the average annual rate of decline of groundwater in Punjab was 0.7 metres, less than the 0.9 m during the period 2000-01 to 2008-09, the study found.

**What is Punjab’s underground water situation currently?**

According to a report in May 2019 by the Central Ground Water Board under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, 105 out of 138 blocks are in the dark zone. At current rates of depletion, good quality water in the first aquifer up to a depth of 100 m shall be exhausted in 10 years, and the entire subsurface water resource could be finished in the next 22 years.

Sources: Indian Express.

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**4. Brown to Green Report 2019**

**What to study?**

For Prelims: Key findings of the report.

For Mains: Concerns and challenges and ways to address them.

**Context:** The 2019 *Brown to Green Report* has been published by the *Climate Transparency partnership*, an international research collaboration.

The report is *the most comprehensive review of G20 countries’ climate performance*, mapping achievements and drawbacks in their efforts to reduce emissions, adapt to climate impacts and green the financial system.

**Key findings:**

1. *Carbon emissions* from the world’s 20 biggest economies, including India, are *rising*.
2. None of the G20 countries have plans that will help them achieve the target. Many of the current 2030 climate targets under the Paris Agreement (Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs) are too weak, with about half of the G20 countries projected to meet or overachieve their inadequate NDCs.
3. *Energy-related carbon dioxide emissions in G20 countries shot up* by 1.8 per cent in 2018 due to rising energy demand.
4. *Energy supply is not getting cleaner:* despite a more than five per cent rise in G20 total renewable energy supply in 2018, the share of fossil fuels in the G20 energy mix remains at 82 per cent.
5. While renewables now account for 25.5 per cent of power generation, this is not sufficient to outweigh the growth of emissions from fossil fuel sources.

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6. Low-carbon fuels need to increase roughly 10 times by 2050 to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

7. **G20 emissions in the building sector grew more than in any other sector** in 2018 (4.1 per cent). Retrofitting existing buildings challenges all G20 and especially OECD countries. New buildings have to be near-zero-energy by 2020-25 to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

**India specific observations:**
- Among the G20 countries, India has the most ambitious NDC. However, it still needs real action now to prepare the different sectors for stringent emission reductions.
- In the power, India is currently investing most in renewable energy, while Brazil and Germany are the only G20 countries with long-term renewable energy strategies.
- India and China are among the G20 countries with the most progressive energy efficiency policies.

**Need of the hour:**
1. To keep the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degrees goal within reach, G20 countries will have to increase their 2030 emission targets by 2020 and significantly scale up mitigation, adaptation and finance over the next decade.
2. Coal needs to be phased out by 2030 in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and by 2040 globally.
3. G20 countries need to scale up their policies to ban new fossil fuel cars by 2035 at the latest, reduce emissions from freight transport to net-zero by 2050 and shift towards non-motorised and sustainable public transport.
4. Cutting government subsidies to the aviation sector, taxing jet fuel and using revenues to invest massively in new carbon free fuels would leverage huge emissions reductions and health benefits.
5. A coal phase-out plan is needed in Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Turkey and the US.

Sources: Indian Express.

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**5. Dal Lake area to be Eco-sensitive Zone**

**For Prelims:** Eco Sensitive zones- how are they declared and key provisions in this regard, about Dal.

**For Mains:** Significance and the need for these zones, and issues related to management of these zones.

**Context:** The Jammu and Kashmir UT will set up a 10-member committee that will declare **Dal Lake, an Eco-sensitive Zone.**

**Need:**
According to a report, the area of the Dal Lake has shrunk to 24 sq km from 31 sq km and the lake has witnessed significant changes in land use and cover, apart from increasing human population.

**What are Eco-sensitive zones?**
The Environment Protection Act, 1986 does not mention the word “Eco-sensitive Zones”.

1. **The section 3(2)(v) of the Act**, says that Central Government can restrict areas in which any industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards.
2. **Besides the section 5 (1)** of this act says that central government can prohibit or restrict the location of industries and carrying on certain operations or processes on the basis of considerations like the biological diversity of an area, maximum allowable limits of concentration of pollutants for an area, environmentally compatible land use, and proximity to protected areas.

The above two clauses have been effectively used by the government to declare Eco-Sensitive Zones or Ecologically Fragile Areas (EFA). The same criteria have been used by the government to declare No Development Zones.

**Criteria:**
The MoEF (Ministry of Environment & Forests) has approved a comprehensive set of guidelines laying down parameters and criteria for declaring ESAs. **These include** Species Based (Endemism, Rarity etc), Ecosystem Based (sacred groves, frontier forests etc) and Geomorphologic feature based (uninhabited islands, origins of rivers etc).

**About Dal:**
Also known as the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, dal lake, which is the second largest in the state, is integral to tourism and recreation in Kashmir and is named the “Jewel in the crown of Kashmir” or “Srinagar’s Jewel”. The lake is also an important source for commercial operations in fishing and water plant harvesting. The lake is located in the Zabarwan mountain valley, in the foothills of the Shankracharya hills, which surrounds it on three sides.
The lake has four main interconnected basins namely, Hazratbal, Bod dal, Gagribal and Nagin.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Jal Jeevan Mission

**What to study?**
For Prelims: Key features of the mission.
For Mains: challenges and concerns in water conservation, ways to address them.

**Context:** The Union Minister for Water Resources recently reviewed the performance of Jal Jeevan Mission in the southern states.

**About Jal Jeevan Mission:**
The Mission was announced in August 2019.
The chief objective of the Mission is to provide piped water supply (Har Ghar Jal) to all rural and urban households by 2024.
It also aims to create local infrastructure for rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household waste water for reuse in agriculture.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is set to be based on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater for agriculture and source sustainability.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission will converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

**Need for and significance of the mission:**
*India has 16% of the world population, but only 4% of freshwater resources.* Depleting groundwater level, overexploitation and deteriorating water quality, climate change, etc. are major challenges to provide potable drinking water.
It is an urgent requirement of water conservation in the country because of the decreasing amount of groundwater level. **Therefore, the Jal Jeevan Mission will focus on integrated demand and supply management of water at the local level.**

Sources: Pib.

7. New Water Policy

**What to study?**
For Prelims: Overview of NWP 2012.
For Mains: The need for and significance of the new policy.

**Context:** The government has finalised a committee to draft a new National Water Policy (NWP).
The committee is expected to produce a report within six months.

**National Water Policy 2012:**
- The NWP currently in force was drafted in 2012 and is the third such policy since 1987.
• Among the major policy innovations in the 2012 policy was the concept of an Integrated Water Resources Management approach that took the “river basin/sub-basin” as a unit for planning, development and management of water resources.

• Minimum levels: It also proposed that a portion of river flows ought to be kept aside to meet ecological needs. Such an approach led to the government, in 2018, requiring minimum water levels to be maintained in the Ganga all through the year and hydropower projects, therefore, to refrain from hoarding water beyond a point.

• The policy also stressed for a minimum quantity of potable water for essential health and hygiene to all its citizens to be made available within easy reach of households.

• The policy also noted that inter-basin transfers of water should be considered on the basis of merits of each case after evaluating the environmental, economic and social impacts of such transfers.

Need for revision:
There have been a lot of changes which need to be addressed and the prioritization of the water usage needs to be defined.

1. Spring sets in Himalayas have been decreasing without any active step by the government.
2. Revitalisation of rivers needs to be brought in focus because many of our rivers and rivulets are drying and the policy parameters need to be set up accordingly.
3. Technological innovations like censors, geographic information systems (GIS) and satellite imagery need to be introduced to modulate the water and track the flow.
4. Budgeting needs to be done in a way that it covers all levels from the basin to sub basin.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. Climate change is damaging health of children, says Lancet Report

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Concerns and challenges and ways to address them.

Context: The Lancet has published a report titled ‘Countdown on Health and Climate Change’.

• The report is a comprehensive yearly analysis tracking progress across 41 key indicators, demonstrating what action to meet Paris Agreement targets — or business as usual — means for human health.

• The project is a collaboration between 120 experts from 35 institutions, including the World Health Organisation, the World Bank, University College London, and the Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Key findings:
1. Climate change is already damaging the health of the world’s children and is set to shape the well-being of an entire generation, unless the world meets the target to limit warming to well below 2°C.
2. As temperatures rise, infants will bear the greatest burden of malnutrition and rising food prices — average yield potential of maize and rice has declined almost 2% in India since the 1960s, with malnutrition already responsible for two-thirds of under-5 deaths.
3. Also, children will suffer most from the rise in infectious diseases — with climatic suitability for the Vibrio bacteria that cause cholera rising 3% a year in India since the early 1980s.
4. With its huge population and high rates of healthcare inequality, poverty and malnutrition, few countries are likely to suffer from the health effects of climate change as much as India.
5. Diarrhoeal infections, a major cause of child mortality, will spread into new areas, whilst deadly heatwaves, similar to the one in 2015 that killed thousands of people in India, could soon become the norm.

Increased vulnerability:
1. Children are particularly vulnerable to the health risks of a changing climate. Their bodies and immune systems are still developing, leaving them more susceptible to disease and environmental pollutants.
2. The damage done in early childhood is persistent and pervasive, with health consequences lasting for a lifetime.

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3. As temperatures rise, harvests will shrink — threatening food security and driving up food prices. This will hit infants hardest.
4. They would also feel deadliest impact of disease outbreaks.
5. If the world follows a business-as-usual pathway, with high carbon emissions and climate change continuing at the current rate, a child born today will face a world on average over 4°C warmer by their 71st birthday, threatening their health at every stage of their lives.

**Challenges ahead for India:**

- Over the past two decades, the Government of India has launched many initiatives and programmes to address a variety of diseases and risk factors. But **the public health gains achieved over the past 50 years could soon be reversed by the changing climate**.
- For the world to meet its UN climate goals and protect the health of the next generation, **the energy landscape will have to change drastically, and soon**.
- Nothing short of a 7.4% year-on-year cut in fossil CO2 emissions from 2019 to 2050 will limit global warming to the more ambitious goal of 1.5°C.
- Without immediate action from all countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions, **gains in wellbeing and life expectancy will be compromised**, and climate change will come to define the health of an entire generation.

**Need of hour:**
To dramatically reduce emissions by 2050, and to meet multiple Sustainable Development Goals, **India must transition away from coal and towards renewable energy**. It will also need to enhance public transport, increase use of cleaner fuels, and improve waste management and agricultural production practice.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 9. Germany’s Climate Protection Act

**What to study?**
**For Prelims and mains: Key features and significance of the programme.**

**Context:** The German parliament has passed the Climate Protection Act in an attempt to reach its climate target by 2030. This will be Germany’s first climate action law.

**Key features of the bill:**
1. With this bill, **a price on carbon emissions in the transport and heating sectors will be imposed** along with some other measures to combat climate change.
2. The bill consists of **emissions targets** for different sectors of the economy such as transport, energy and housing.
3. **Pollution rights: From 2021**, companies that market diesel and petrol, heating oil and natural gas in the country will need to obtain pollution rights for the amount of greenhouse gases they emit.
4. This will be regulated through a national **emissions trading mechanism**. The cost of these emissions will drive up the cost of using fossil fuels, making the usage of such fuels more expensive for the citizens and hence, discouraging their use and paving the way for climate-friendly technologies.
5. The **aviation tax will be increased**.

**Criticisms:**
- Climate package was not sufficient and that the goals were not achievable.
- The price of CO2 was kept too low to dissuade its emissions and the increased burden on the citizens.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 10. Water Quality Report

**What to study?**
[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
Context: The Centre has released the Water Quality Report. The report is in line with the Jal Jeevan Mission that was launched to provide clean and safe drinking water to all by 2024.

Background: In order to ensure that clean and safe drinking water is provided to all, Department of Consumer Affairs decided to undertake a study through the Bureau of India Standards (BIS) on the quality of piped drinking water being supplied in the country and also rank the States, Smart Cities and even Districts based on the quality of tap water.

How was the water tested? Tests were conducted on various parameters such as Organoleptic and Physical Tests, Chemical test, Toxic substances and Bacteriological tests in the first stage.

Performance of cities:
1. In Delhi, all the samples drawn from various places did not comply with the requirements of the Indian Standard& failed on several parameters.
2. All the 10 samples drawn from Mumbai were found to comply with the requirements.

Significance:
- All should get clean drinking water and that is the objective of this activity.
- State Governments are encouraged to ensure quality potable tap water to all citizens.

Way ahead: The Union Government wants to make BIS Standards mandatory for Tap Water so as to ensure quality drinking water for all households.

Sources: the Hindu.

11. Avian Botulism

What to study?
For Prelims: What is Avian botulism?
For Mains: The sambhar tragedy, causes and how to prevent such incidents?

Context: Avian botulism is said to be the reason behind the deaths of 18,000 birds in and around Rajasthan’s Sambhar lake.

What happened at Sambhar? As per the report, the avian botulism in Sambhar was caused by the climate.

Fluctuating Water levels: Fluctuated throughout the year. Due to a good monsoon this year, the water level reached the lake bed after a gap of 20 years.

Favourable environment for bacteria: The good monsoon provided a favorable environment for the bacteria to spread. The bacteria needs anaerobic (absence of oxygen) conditions and does not grow in acidic conditions.

Nutrient-rich substrate: The lake also provided a nutrient-rich substrate, like areas with large amounts of decaying plant or animal materials. The monsoon brought with it a large population of crustaceans (like shrimps, crabs, and prawns), invertebrates (snails) and plankton (like algae), which are capable of hosting the bacteria for a long period of time.

What happened now? There are two theories:
1. The bacteria is also found in the gills and digestive tracts of healthy fish. It reproduces through spores and these spores remain dormant for years. They are resistant to temperature changes and drying. Under
favourable conditions, the spores are activated. After the monsoon, when the water levels receded, there might have been an increase in salinity levels which could have led to the death of these living organisms. At this point in time, the spores could have been activated.

2. ‘A bird-to-bird cycle’ could also have led to the tragedy. In such an event, maggots feeding on dead birds can concentrate the toxin. Birds feeding on dead birds can get affected. This was observed in Sambhar too as researchers found only insectivorous and omnivorous birds affected and not herbivores.

What need to be done?
The government should pass legislation in the Assembly to create a Sambhar Lake Development and Conservation Authority. This authority should be handed A to Z responsibility of Sambhar Lake.

A fresh document should study why the water from four rivers, which flows into the lake, has decreased over the years. It should study the hydrology, sedimentation, the increase or decrease in depth of the lake, as well as birds, animals, their food sources, etc.

Sources: down to earth.

12. Stubble Burning

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Crop burning- why, concerns, effects on environment and health, their regulation and the need for a comprehensive policy on this.

Context: Centre, Punjab at odds over stubble burning.
Why? Both the Central and State governments have released data on stubble burning, but with starkly different narratives.

• As per the Centre, the events had declined 19% this year, including a 16.8% reduction in Punjab.
• As per Punjab, there is an increase of 2.3% in the number of incidents.

What is stubble burning?
Stubble burning is a common practice followed by farmers to prepare fields for sowing of wheat in November as there is little time left between the harvesting of paddy and sowing of wheat. Stubble burning results in emission of harmful gases such carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide along with particulate matter.

Concern of the Farmers: Why they opt for stubble burning?
1. Even though farmers are aware that the burning of straw is harmful to health, they do not have alternatives for utilising them effectively.
2. The farmers are ill-equipped to deal with waste because they cannot afford the new technology that is available to handle the waste material.
3. Experts say that with less income due to crop damage, farmers are likely to be inclined to light up their fields to cut costs and not spend on scientific ways of stubble management.

Advantages of stubble burning:
1. It quickly clears the field and is the cheapest alternative.
2. Kills weeds, including those resistant to herbicide.
3. Kills slugs and other pests.
4. Can reduce nitrogen tie-up.

What’s the issue?
Stubble burning is adversely affecting environment and public health. The problem has not been fully tackled and the adverse impacts on the air quality and consequent impacts on the citizens’ health and lives are undisputed.

Alternative solutions that can avoid Stubble Burning:
1. There is great potential for making investments in paddy straw-based power plants which can help avoid stubble burning to a large extent and also create employment opportunities.
2. Incorporation of crop residues in the soil can improve soil moisture and help activate the growth of soil microorganisms for better plant growth.
3. Convert the removed residues into enriched organic manure through composting.
4. New opportunities for industrial use such as extraction of yeast protein can be explored through scientific research.

What needs to be done - Supreme Court’s observations?
1. The problem is required to be resolved by taking all such measures as are possible in the interest of public health and environment protection.
2. Incentives could be provided to those who are not burning the stubble and disincentives for those who continue the practice.
3. The existing Minimum Support Price (MSP) Scheme must be so interpreted as to enable the States concerned to wholly or partly deny the benefit of MSP to those who continue to burn the crop residue.
4. Secretary, Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare has also been directed to be present to “find a lasting solution.”
5. The Central government should convene a meeting with the States.

Sources: the Hindu.

13. Ken-Betwa River Interlinking Project
What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the project and the location of Ken and Betwa rivers.
For Mains: Challenges involved, need for and significance of interlinking.

Context: The government has said it is pushing Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to make progress on the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project.

What’s the issue?
The ₹18,000-crore project has been mired in several hurdles. The most recent one is a disagreement between the States on the share of water. There are outstanding environmental obstructions too. It involves deforesting a portion of the Panna Tiger Reserve.

About Ken-Betwa project:
Conceived as a two-part project, this is the country’s first river interlinking project. It is perceived as a model plan for similar interstate river transfer missions. The project aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken river in MP to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region spread across the districts of two states mainly Jhansi, Banda, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts of UP and Tikamgarh, Panna and Chhatarpur districts of MP.

Key facts:
- Ken and Betwa rivers originate in MP and are the tributaries of Yamuna.
- Ken meets with Yamuna in Banda district of UP and with Betwa in Hamirpur district of UP.
- Rajghat, Paricha and Matatila dams are over Betwa river.
- Ken River passes through Panna tiger reserve.

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Benefits of interlinking:
1. Enhances water and food security.
2. Proper utilisation of water.
3. Boost to agriculture.
4. Disaster mitigation.
5. Boost to transportation.

Sources: the Hindu.

14. Emission Gap Report

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Challenges present and ways to address them.

Context: The annual United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) flagship Emissions Gap Report has been released.

What is the “Emissions Gap”?
Also called as the “Commitment Gap”, it is the difference between the low level of emissions that the world needs to drop to, compared with the projected level of emissions based on countries’ current commitments to decarbonization. It measures the gap between what we need to do and what we are actually doing to tackle climate change.

Why does the Emissions Gap Matter?
The gap is important because if we can’t close it and meet the emissions reduction target, we will face increasingly severe climate impacts worldwide. Therefore, it is important that policymakers, and their citizens, know what the gap is so that the commitments countries are making are sufficient to close the gap.

The Emissions Gap Report measures and projects three key trendlines:
1. The amount of greenhouse gas emissions every year up to 2030.
2. The commitments countries are making to reduce their emissions and the impact these commitments are likely to have on overall emission reduction.
3. The pace at which emissions must be reduced to reach an emission low that would limit temperature increase to 1.5°C, affordably.

The report also identifies key opportunities for each country to increase the pace of emission reduction necessary to close the gap.

Key findings of the report:
1. The world will fail to meet the 1.5°C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement unless global greenhouse gas emissions fall by 7.6 per cent each year.
2. Global temperatures are set to rise about 3.2 degrees C by 2100, the report says, bringing catastrophic weather including hotter, deadlier heatwaves and more frequent floods and drought.
3. The top four emitters (China, USA, EU and India) contributed to over 55% of the total emissions over the last decade, excluding emissions from land-use change such as deforestation.
4. **The rankings would change if land-use change emissions were included**, with Brazil likely to be the largest emitter.

**Where India stands?**
India is **the fourth-largest emitter of Green House Gases (GHGs)**. It is among a small group of countries that are on their way to achieve their self-declared climate targets under the Paris Agreement.

**The report names five key areas that will be decisive in the future:**
1. At least €1.45 billion ($1.59 billion) annual investment in renewables and more efficient energy use.
2. Coal phaseout.
3. Decarbonization of transport.
4. Decarbonization of industry.
5. Increased access to electricity for 3.5 billion people.

**Solutions:**
1. A full decarbonization of the energy sector is necessary and possible.
2. Renewables and energy efficiency are critical to the energy transition.
3. The potential emission reduction thanks to renewable energy electricity totals 12.1 gigatonnes by 2050.
4. Electrification of transport could reduce the sector’s CO2 emissions by a huge 72 per cent by 2050.
5. Each sector and each country has unique opportunities to harness renewable energy, protect natural resources, lives and livelihoods, and transition to a decarbonization pathway.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**15. EU declares Climate Emergency**

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Which countries have announced climate emergencies so far?*
*For Mains: what does this mean, rationale behind, significance and implications?*

**Context:** European Union (EU) has become **the first multilateral bloc to declare climate emergency**. A resolution in this regard was recently passed.

**Implications:**
The symbolic move is expected to pressurise countries to act ahead of **the United Nations summit on climate change that starts on December 2 in Spain**.
The resolution will **have more symbolic effect than practical impact**, and is designed to pressure EU governments to adopt a commitment for all of the EU to reduce emissions to net zero.

**Who else have declared climate emergency?**
Similar climate emergency declarations have already been made in several EU member states, including Spain, France and the United Kingdom. Outside Europe only Canada, Argentina and Bangladesh have declared a climate emergency.

**What is Climate Emergency?**
There is no single definition of what that means but many local areas say they want to be **carbon-neutral by 2030**. It varies. For example, for UK government it is **to reduce carbon emissions by 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050**.

**Why declare an emergency?**
1. The United Nations says we could have just 11 years left to limit a climate change catastrophe.
2. It’s not just about reducing carbon emissions on a local scale, but also raising awareness about climate change.
What does the Paris Agreement say?
With the planet to experience further warming from the heat held by the oceans, there is increasing international focus on meeting the United Nation’s Paris Agreement which was signed by 197 countries in 2016. The agreement has the ambitious global aim of preventing global temperatures from reaching 2°C above pre-industrial levels (the late nineteenth century) by 2100, and ideally should be no more than 1.5°C.

Sources: Down to earth.

Topics: Disaster and management.

1. ‘Red Atlas Action Plan Map’ atlas and CFLOWS-Chennai
What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Features, need for and significance of the Atlas and CFLOWS.


What is Red Atlas Action Plan Map?
- It is a first of its kind ready reckoner map, prepared by Union Ministry of Earth Sciences to aid state government of Tamil Nadu in effective flood mitigation in Chennai which witnessed the worst deluge in 2015.
- The atlas is aimed at flood mitigation, preparedness, operations and management aspects.
- The manual besides showcasing the probable scenarios for different rainfall periods also provides information on corporation wards that are likely to be affected due to flooding, and the areas that may need evacuation in Chennai by taking into account all historical datasets.

Coastal Flood Warning System app for Chennai (CFLOWS-CHENNAI):
- Launched by NIOT.
- It is India’s first integrated coastal flood warning system.
- It is an integrated GIS-based decision support system to provide forecast on potential inundation 10 days in advance.
- It will be hosted and made operational at National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) with meteorological data inputs from India Meteorological Department (IMD), National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).
- The system can simulate the scenario and predict what will happen in a particular area.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)
What to study?
For Prelims: composition, objectives and significance of CRDI.
For Mains: Disaster preparedness and the need for information sharing and collaboration between various agencies.

Context: At the Leaders’ Dialogue with BRICS Business Council and New Development Bank (NDB), Prime Minister Modi requested the BRICS countries and the NDB to join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

About CDRI:
Launched by Modi in September 2019 at the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit in New York, US.
- A platform where knowledge is generated and exchanged on different aspects of disaster and climate resilience of infrastructure.
• It will create a mechanism to assist countries to upgrade their capacities and practices, with regard to infrastructure development in accordance with their risk context and economic needs.

**Benefits and significance:**
• This initiative will benefit all sections of society.
• Economically weaker sections of society, women and children, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and hence, will be benefitted from the improvement of knowledge and practice in creating disaster resilient infrastructure.
• It will also benefit all areas with high disaster risk.
• In India, the north-eastern and Himalayan regions are prone to earthquakes, coastal areas to cyclones and tsunamis and central peninsular region to droughts.

**Why do we need a global coalition?**
Many countries, including India, have over the years developed robust disaster management practices that have helped in sharply reducing human casualties in a disaster. However, the economic costs of a disaster remain huge, mainly due to the damage caused to big infrastructure. A global coalition for disaster resilient infrastructure would address concerns that are common to developing and developed countries, small and large economies, countries at early and advanced stages of infrastructure development, and countries that have moderate or high disaster risk.

Sources: pib.

**Topics: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.**

1. **Brus of Mizo**

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Who are Brus and issues associated.*
*For Mains: Agreement in this regard and the recent demands for relaxation of the norms in the agreement.*

**Context:** Nearly 32,000 Brus living in Tripura camps since 1997 have been affected after the government decided to stop food supplies and cash dole. The Tripura government recently announced that it would restore food supplies, leading to the Bru withdrawing a road blockade they had set up for eight days. The restoration of supplies, however, is only until a deadline of November 30, within which the Brus have to decide whether they will accept a package for repatriation to Mizoram.

**Who are Brus?**
The Brus, also referred to as the Reangs, are spread across the northeastern states of Tripura, Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram.

**In Tripura, they are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group.** In Mizoram, they have been targeted by groups that do not consider them indigenous to the state.

**What's the issue?**
1. A bout of ethnic violence forced thousands of people from the Bru tribe to leave their homes in Mizoram. As many as 32,876 people are living in the refugee camps in the Jampui Hills of Tripura.
2. The displaced Bru people from Mizoram have been living in various camps in Tripura since 1997. In 1997, the murder of a Mizo forest guard at the Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mizoram’s Mamit district allegedly by Bru militants led to a violent backlash against the community, forcing several thousand people to flee to neighbouring Tripura.
3. The Bru militancy was a reactionary movement against Mizo nationalist groups who had demanded in the mid-1990s that the Brus be left out of the state’s electoral rolls, contending that the tribe was not indigenous to Mizoram.

Sources: Indian Express.
Topics: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention

1. NATGRID

What to study?
For Prelims: NATGRID- features.
For Mains: Significance, need for and criticisms.

Context: The ambitious National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) project will be operational by December 31, 2020.

What is NATGRID?
- It is an ambitious counter terrorism programme.
- It will utilise technologies like Big Data and analytics to study and analyse the huge amounts of data from various intelligence and enforcement agencies to help track suspected terrorists and prevent terrorist attacks.
- It will connect, in different phases, data providing organisations and users besides developing a legal structure through which information can be accessed by the law enforcement agencies.
- NATGRID is a post Mumbai 26/11 attack measure.

Who can access the data?
The database would be accessible to authorised persons from 11 agencies on a case-to-case basis, and only for professional investigations into suspected cases of terrorism.

Criticisms:
1. NATGRID is facing opposition on charges of possible violations of privacy and leakage of confidential personal information.
2. Its efficacy in preventing terror has also been questioned given that no state agency or police force has access to its database thus reducing chances of immediate, effective action.
3. According to few experts, digital databases such as NATGRID can be misused. Over the last two decades, the very digital tools that terrorists use have also become great weapons to fight the ideologies of violence.
4. Intelligence agencies have also opposed amid fears that it would impinge on their territory and possibly result in leaks on the leads they were working on to other agencies.

Why do we need NATGRID?
1. The danger from not having a sophisticated tool like the NATGRID is that it forces the police to rely on harsh and coercive means to extract information in a crude and degrading fashion.
2. After every terrorist incident, it goes about rounding up suspects—many of who are innocent. If, instead, a pattern search and recognition system were in place, these violations of human rights would be much fewer.
3. Natgrid would also help the Intelligence Bureau keep a tab on persons with suspicious backgrounds.
4. The police would have access to all his data and any movement by this person would also be tracked with the help of this data base.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Budapest Convention on Cyber Security

What to study?
For Prelims: What is Budapest convention?

www.insightsonindia.com
For Mains: Why India has not signed? Why it should reconsider it’s decision?

Context: A UN committee has passed a Russian-led resolution on a global cybercrime treaty, despite reservations that it could be used to justify shutting down civil society in repressive countries. The resolution was sponsored by China, North Korea, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Syria, among others, and will up an "Open Ended Working Group" to examine cybercrime. The proposed treaty has been framed to serve as an alternative to the US-led Budapest Convention.

What is Budapest convention?
The Convention on Cybercrime, also known as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime or the Budapest Convention, is the first international treaty seeking to address Internet and computer crime by harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations. It was drawn up by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, with the active participation of the Council of Europe’s observer states Canada, Japan, South Africa and the United States. It is open for ratification even to states that are not members of the Council of Europe. As of September 2019, 64 states have ratified the convention.

What it does?
- The Budapest Convention provides for the criminalisation of conduct, ranging from illegal access, data and systems interference to computer-related fraud and child pornography, procedural law tools to make investigation of cybercrime and securing of e-evidence in relation to any crime more effective, and international police and judicial cooperation on cybercrime and e-evidence.

India’s concerns over signing of this agreement:
- India did not participate in the negotiation of the Convention and thus is worried about it.
- The Convention — through its Article 32b — allows for transborder access to data and thus infringes on national sovereignty.
- The regime of the Convention is not effective, “the promise of cooperation not firm enough,” or that there are grounds for refusal to cooperate.

Why India should join?
- The challenges currently being addressed by the parties to the Convention through the Cybercrime Convention Committee are highly relevant also for India;
- The Convention offers a legal basis and practical framework for police-to-police and judicial cooperation on cybercrime and e-evidence with an increasing number of other parties. This framework is constantly under review to make it more effective;
- As the Convention evolves, India would be able to contribute to shaping future solutions if it were a party;
- India would become a priority country for capacity-building.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

1. AFSPA

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: AFSPA- features, draconian provisions, misuses and need for review.

Context: The Cabinet Secretariat has notified rules reasserting the Union Home Ministry as the authority that would decide on the imposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

What does the AFSPA mean?
- In simple terms, AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”.
They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.

If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.

**What is a “disturbed area” and who has the power to declare it?**

1. A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
2. The Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area. A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette. As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary”.

**What’s the origin of AFSPA?**
The Act came into force in the context of increasing violence in the Northeastern States decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and it was approved by the President on September 11, 1958. It became known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.

**What are the special powers given to army officials?**

1. Under Section 4 of the AFSPA, an authorised officer in a disturbed area enjoys certain powers. The authorised officer has the power to open fire at any individual even if it results in death if the individual violates laws which prohibit (a) the assembly of five or more persons; or (b) carrying of weapons. However, the officer has to give a warning before opening fire.
2. The authorised officer has also been given the power to (a) arrest without a warrant; and (b) seize and search without any warrant any premise in order to make an arrest or recovery of hostages, arms and ammunition.
3. Individuals who have been taken into custody have to be handed over to the nearest police station as soon as possible.
4. Prosecution of an authorised officer requires prior permission of the Central government.

**What has been the role of the judiciary?**
There were questions about the constitutionality of AFSPA, given that law and order is a state subject. *The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of AFSPA in a 1998 judgement (Naga People’s Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India).*

In this judgement, the **Supreme Court arrived at certain conclusions including:**
(a) a suo-motu declaration can be made by the Central government, however, it is desirable that the state government should be consulted by the central government before making the declaration;
(b) AFSPA does not confer arbitrary powers to declare an area as a ‘disturbed area’;
(c) the declaration has to be for a limited duration and there should be a periodic review of the declaration 6 months have expired;
(d) while exercising the powers conferred upon him by AFSPA, the authorised officer should use minimal force necessary for effective action,
(e) the authorised officer should strictly follow the ‘Dos and Don’ts’ issued by the army.

**Has there been any review of the Act?**
On November 19, 2004, **the Central government appointed committee headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy made the following recommendations:** (a) AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967; (b) The Unlawful Activities Act should be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and (c) grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.

**The 5th report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission on public order** has also recommended the repeal of the AFSPA. These recommendations have not been implemented.
Sources: the Hindu.

2. Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GCTOC) Bill

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the law.
For Mains: Controversial provisions, concerns associated and ways to address them.

Context: President Ram Nath Kovind has given his assent to the ‘Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GCTOC) Bill’, controversial anti-terror legislation passed in March 2015.

Background:
The Bill, earlier named as the Gujarat Control of Organised Crime Bill, failed to get the presidential nod thrice since 2004. Now, Sixteen years after the first version of it was passed by the Gujarat Assembly, the Gujarat GCTOC has finally become law.

Controversial provisions in the Bill:
1. The Bill provides for admissibility of evidence collected through interception of mobile calls of an accused or through confessions made before an investigating officer, in a court of law.
2. Clause 16, which makes confessions before police officers admissible in court.
3. The bill empowers police to tap telephonic conversations and submit them in court as evidence.
4. It extends period of probe from stipulated 90 days to 180 days before filing of charge sheet.
5. The legislation makes offences under the Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime Act, 2015, non-bailable.
6. The Bill provides immunity to the State government from legal action.

Other provisions include:
• It defines ‘terrorist acts’, as including “an act committed with the intention to disturb law and order or public order or threaten the unity, integrity and security of the State”, apart from economic offences.
• The economic offences under GCTOC include Ponzi schemes, multi-level marketing schemes, and organised betting. It also includes extortion, land grabbing, contract killings, cybercrimes, and human trafficking.
• It also provides for the creation of a special court as well as the appointment of special public prosecutors.
• It provides for attachment of properties acquired through organised crimes. Transfer of properties can also be cancelled.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. “No Money For Terror” Conference

What to study?
For Prelims: About the conference and the Egmont group.
For Mains: Terror financing- concerns, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: India will host the next edition of the “No Money For Terror” conference to be held in 2020. The announcement was made at the “No Money For Terror” conference in Melbourne, Australia.

Key facts:
• The "No Money For Terror" conference is organised by Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) of over 100 countries, jointly called The Egmont Group.
• Recognising the importance of international cooperation in the fight against money laundering and financing of terrorism, a group of FIUs met a few years ago at the Egmont Arenberg Palace in Brussels, Belgium, and decided to establish an informal network of FIUs for the stimulation of international co-operation.

www.insightsonindia.com
• The **Egmont Group** was created to provide FIUs around the world a forum to exchange information confidentially to combat money-laundering, the financing of terrorism and other predicate offences.

**Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism:**

• Terrorists and terrorist organizations rely on money to sustain themselves and to carry out terrorist acts. Money for terrorists is derived from a wide variety of sources.

• While terrorists are not greatly concerned with disguising the origin of money, they are concerned with concealing its destination and the purpose for which it has been collected. Terrorists and terrorist organizations therefore employ techniques similar to those used by money launderers to hide their money.

• The ability to prevent and detect money-laundering is a highly effective means of identifying criminals and terrorists and the underlying activity from which money is derived.

• The application of intelligence and investigative techniques can be one way of detecting and disrupting the activities of terrorists and terrorist organizations.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. **Arunachal seeks new officer cadre**

What to study?
**For Prelims:** Location of Arunachal Pradesh.
**For Mains:** Need for new officer cadre, challenges involved and ways to address them.

**Context:** Arunachal Pradesh is planning for a separate cadre of bureaucrats because of its cultural and topographical diversity.

**What’s the issue now?**
Presently, Officials and police officers posted in the State belong to the Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre, and are deputed for a minimum of two years and above. Besides, there is no institutional memory as officers are transferred frequently. This affects governance, and benefits do not reach people. The advantage of having a separate cadre is that they can understand the pulse of the local people well. The State has 27 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes. Political parties enter office and go out, but a dedicated bureaucracy is essential for the State’s welfare.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. **What is the Bodoland Dispute?**

What to study?
**For Prelims:** Who are Bodos and What is Bodoland?
**For Mains:** Bodo dispute- timeline, demands, concerns and ways to address them.

**Context:** The Home Ministry has declared the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) along with all its groups, factions, and front organisations as an “unlawful association” under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. The ban has been extended by five more years for its involvement in a series of violent activities including killings and extortion, and for joining hands with anti-India forces.

**Who are the NDFB?**
Alongside political movements, armed groups have also sought to create a separate Bodo state. In October 1986, the prominent group Bodo Security Force (BdSF) was formed by Ranjan Daimary. The BdSF subsequently renamed itself as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), an organisation that is known to be involved in attacks, killings, and extortions.

**Who are Bodos?**
www.insightsonindia.com
Bodos are the single largest tribal community in Assam, making up over 5-6 per cent of the state’s population. They have controlled large parts of Assam in the past. The four districts in Assam — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang — that constitute the Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD), are home to several ethnic groups.

The Bodoland dispute:
In 1966-67, the demand for a separate state called Bodoland was raised under the banner of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), a political outfit. In 1987, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) renewed the demand. “Divide Assam fifty-fifty”, was a call given by the ABSU’s then leader, Upendra Nath Brahma. The unrest was a fallout of the Assam Movement (1979-85), whose culmination — the Assam Accord — addressed the demands of protection and safeguards for the “Assamese people”, leading the Bodos to launch a movement to protect their own identity.

Why the demand for separate Bodoland?
- For centuries, they survived sanskritisation without giving up their original ethnic identity. However in the 20th century, they had to tackle a series of issues such as illegal immigration, encroachment of their lands, forced assimilation, loss of language and culture. The 20th century also witnessed the emergence of Bodos as a leading tribe in Assam which pioneered the movements for safeguarding the rights of the tribal communities in the area.
- From then on, they have been consistently deprived of the political and socio-economic rights by successive state and central governments. The Bodos have not only become an ethnic minority in their own ancestral land but have also been struggling for their existence and status as an ethnic community.

Sources: the Hindu

Topics: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

1. SPG, NSG and other Security Forces — How India protects its VIPs
What to study?
For Prelims: Roles and features of various security forces.
For Mains: Need for and significance of these security forces.

Context: The Union government is expected to take away the security cover by Special Protection Group (SPG) being provided at present to Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi. They will, however, continue to get a Z+ security cover, where they will be provided commandos belonging to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

How are security levels decided?
- The Union Home Ministry takes this call after evaluating the inputs from all the intelligence agencies such as the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).
- However, since none of the intelligence agencies is accountable to any external statutory body, barring internal oversight by ministries of Home and Foreign Affairs, the issue of security cover is open to manipulation.

Genesis of SPG:
1. In March 1985, following the recommendations of a committee set up by the Home Ministry, a special unit was created for this purpose under the Cabinet Secretariat. This unit, initially called the Special Protection Unit, was renamed as Special Protection Group in April 1985.
2. Subsequently, the Parliament passed **The Special Protection Group (SPG) Act**, which was notified in June 1988 “to provide for the constitution and regulation of an armed force of the Union for providing proximate security to the Prime Minister of India and for matters connected therewith”.

3. The SPG Act defined “**proximate security**” as “protection provided from close quarters, during journey by road, rail, aircraft, watercraft or on foot or any other means of transport” and to “include the places of functions, engagements, residence or halt”.

4. **Coverage**: SPG protection was extended, apart from the Prime Minister, to “former Prime Ministers of India and members of their immediate families” through an amendment in the Act in the aftermath of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

**Categories of security:**
Besides the SPG, VIPs in India are protected by other security forces as well. **The levels of security cover are determined by the threat perception around the individual.**

1. The highest level of security cover is the Z-plus category, followed by Z, Y, and X categories.
2. The higher the level of cover, the larger the number of personnel protecting the individual.
3. Roughly 24-36 personnel with automatic weapons are deployed for Z-plus category protectees and 16-20 personnel guard Z-category protectees.
4. The elite ‘Black Cat’ commandos of the NSG are deployed to protect VIPs for whom the threat perception is the highest.

Sources: Indian Express.
1. WhatsApp hacking and issues related

Context: WhatsApp has been used to spy on journalists and human rights activists in India earlier this year. The surveillance was carried out using a spyware tool called Pegasus, which has been developed by an Israeli firm, the NSO Group.

- In response, WhatsApp has sued the NSO Group in a federal court, accusing it of using WhatsApp servers in the United States and elsewhere “to send malware to approximately 1,400 mobile phones and devices (‘Target Devices’) for the purpose of conducting surveillance of specific WhatsApp users (‘Target Users’”).

Concerns:
- Tools that enable surveillance into our private lives are being abused, and the proliferation of this technology into the hands of irresponsible companies and governments puts us all at risk.
- WhatsApp is the world’s most popular messaging app, with more than 1.5 billion users worldwide. About a quarter of those users — more than 400 million, or 40 crore — are in India.

So what exactly is Pegasus? How it works?
- It is a spyware that works by sending an exploit link, and if the target user clicks on the link, the malware or the code that allows the surveillance is installed on the user’s phone.
- Pegasus is installed without the user’s knowledge or permission.
- Once Pegasus is installed, the attacker has complete access to the target user’s phone.
- Pegasus delivers a chain of zero-day exploits to penetrate security features on the phone and installs Pegasus without the user’s knowledge or permission.
- A “zero-day exploit” is a completely unknown vulnerability, about which even the software manufacturer is not aware, and there is, thus, no patch or fix available for it.

Demands by Indian govt?
• The government has pulled up WhatsApp for not disclosing to Indian authorities the details of the spyware attack launched on Indian citizens through the Israeli software Pegasus, despite at least a couple of high-level meetings between the two sides in the past few months.
• However, WhatsApp appeared to counter the Indian government, saying it had in May “quickly resolved a security issue and notified Indian and international government authorities.”
• However, the government points out that though the WhatsApp informed CERT-In, or the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, it failed to communicate the fact that Indian citizens had been affected by it.
• WhatsApp was legally bound under Section 70(B) of the IT Act, 2000 to inform the government about the details of such attacks (on Indian citizens), which they failed to.

Sources: the Hindu.
FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. Institutions in News- Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO)
   - SFIO comes under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA).
   - It is a multi-disciplinary organisation that investigates and guides prosecution in white-collar fraud requiring expertise in forensic auditing, corporate law, information technology, capital markets, taxation, and other allied fields.
   - It was established in 2003, based on recommendations by the Naresh Chandra Committee on Corporate Audit and Governance.
   - It received statutory powers under the Companies Act, 2013.
   - Cases are assigned to the SFIO based on the scale of financial misappropriation or extent of public interest that is at stake.

2. National Waterway -2
   **Context**: First ever movement of container cargo on Brahmaputra (National Waterway -2) begins.
   The journey of a container took place between Haldia Dock Complex (HDC) to the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) terminal at Pandu in Guwahati.
   **The 12-15 days voyage will be an integrated IWT movement via National Waterway-1 (river Ganga), NW-97 (Sunderbans), Indo-Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route and NW-2 (river Brahmaputra).**
   **Where is NW 2?**
   It is a section of the Brahmaputra River having a length of 891 km between the Bangladesh border near Dhubri and Sadiya in Assam.

3. India and Bangladesh using the Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) Routes
   **Context**: The traffic on NW-1 has grown from 5.48 million tonne in 2017-18 to 6.79 million tonne in 2018-19. Out of the total traffic of 6.79 million tonne on NW-1, approximately 3.15 million tonne is the EXIM trade between India and Bangladesh using the Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) routes.
   **What is IBP route?**
   The IBP route extends from Kolkata (India) on NW-1 to Silghat (Assam) on NW-2 (River Brahmaputra) and Karimganj (Assam) on NW-16 (River Barak).
   Two stretches of Bangladesh inland waterways viz. Sirajganj–Daikhawa & Ashuganj-Zakiganj on the IBP route are being developed at a total cost of Rs 305.84 Cr. on 80:20 cost sharing basis (80% being borne by India & 20% by Bangladesh).
   **Significance**: The development of these two stretches is expected to provide seamless navigation to and from North East India through waterways via the IBP route.

4. India International Science Festival (IISF)
   **Context**: Fifth India International Science Festival is being held at Kolkata.
   **Objective**: To instill scientific temper among the masses, showcase India’s contribution in the field of S&T over the years and encourage translation of its benefits to people. It aims to build a strategy for inclusive advancement of Science and Technology.
   **India International Science Festival (IISF) is an annual event** organised jointly by science and technology related Ministries and Departments of the Government of India and Vijnana Bharati (Vibha).
   **Theme**: ‘RISEN India – Research, Innovation, and Science Empowering the Nation’.

5. National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)
   Established in November 1993 as an autonomous society under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

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• NIOT has developed niche technologies to mine manganese nodules from deep sea, has developed several deep sea systems like remotely operable vehicles, etc. and is striving hard to bring India on par with developed Nations in the area of Ocean Technology.
• NIOT will be the nodal institution for implementing the proposed Deep Ocean Mission, which encompasses all the areas of Ocean technology like development of manned submersible, offshore large scale desalination, Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC), extensive survey of the oceans, acquisition of new ships etc.

6. Dustlik 2019
• It is the first-ever India-Uzbekistan Joint Exercise.
• Being held at Tashkent in Uzbekistan.
• The exercise will enable sharing of best practices and experiences between the Armed Forces of the two countries and would lead to greater operational effectiveness.
• The primary focus will be on counterterrorism.

7. ICEDASH and ATITHI for Improved Customs Clearance
Two new IT Initiatives - ICEDASH and ATITHI have been launched for improved monitoring and pace of customs clearance of imported goods and facilitating arriving international passengers.
1. ICEDASH is an Ease of Doing Business monitoring dashboard of the Indian Customs helping the public see the daily Customs clearance times of import cargo at various ports and airports.
2. ATITHI app will facilitate hassle-free and faster clearance by Customs at the airports and enhance the experience of international tourists and other visitors at the airports.

8. Polypedates Bengalensis
• It is a newly discovered frog species from West Bengal.
• Also known as the Brown Blotched Bengal Tree Frog.
• It belongs to the genus Polypedates. There are 25 other Polypedates species round the world. Polypedates bengalensis is the 26th.
• The frog’s body colour is yellowish-brown to greenish-brown.

9. What is the Danakil Depression?
Context: A new study says that active and naturally occurring life cannot be sustained at Danakil.
Why? It identifies two barriers: magnesium-dominated brines that cause cells to break down; and an environment having simultaneously very low pH and high salt, a combination that makes adaptation highly difficult.
Where is Danakil?
• The Danakil Depression in northeastern Ethiopia is one of the world’s hottest places, as well as one of its lowest, at 100 metres below sea level.
• At the northern end of the Great Rift Valley, and separated by live volcanoes from the Red Sea, the plain was formed by the evaporation of an inland water body.
• All the water entering Danakil evaporates, and no streams flow out from its extreme environment. It is covered with more than 10 lakh tonnes of salt.

10. Thiruvalluvar
Context: Recently, the Tamil Nadu BJP kicked up a controversy by tweeting a picture of the ancient Tamil saint Thiruvalluvar in a ‘Hindu’ style, replacing his usual white shawl with a saffron one, and adding Hindu symbols such as ‘vibhuti’ in the picture.
Who is he?
• Thiruvalluvar is a celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher whose contribution to Tamil literature is the Thirukkural, a work on ethics.
• He is thought to have lived sometime between the 4th century BC and the 1st century BC.
• The Tamil poet Mamulanar of the Sangam period mentioned that Thiruvalluvar was the greatest Tamil scholar.

11. Shaala Darpan portal

Context: Human Resource Development ministry has launched Shaala Darpan portal.

• It is an E-Governance school automation and management system for Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) in New Delhi.
• It is an end to end e-Governance school automation and management system.
• It is a database management portal, where information about all government schools and education offices is kept online and updated as a continuous process.

12. Samudra Shakti

It is a bilateral maritime exercise between India and Indonesia. The latest edition is being held in Bay of Bengal. The joint exercises include, manoeuvres, surface warfare exercises, air defense exercises, weapon firing drills, helicopter operations and boarding operations.

13. Cyclone Bulbul

• It is the seventh named storm of the unusually active 2019 North Indian Ocean cyclone season.
• The season has seen Cyclone Pabuk (South China Sea-Andaman Sea), Cyclone Fani (Bay of Bengal), Cyclone Vayu (Arabian Sea), Cyclone Hikka (Arabian Sea), Cyclone Kyarr (Arabian Sea) and Cyclone Maha (Arabian Sea).
• Bulbul name was contributed by Pakistan.
• If IMD's predictions hold true, Bulbul will also be the sixth storm to reach an intensity of very severe cyclonic storm.

14. Cyclones so far in the Indian Ocean

2019 may be the record-breaking cyclone year for India. We are already on a par with 2018 when a record of seven Cyclones was made. The latest cyclone- bulbul, is the seventh to be formed in the Indian Ocean this year.

• It is the highest in the last 34 years — a record held jointly with 2018.
• It will also be the second storm to form in the Bay of Bengal this year after extremely severe Cyclone Fani in April-May.

Previously there was Cyclone Maha formed in the Arabian Ocean.

• In the Indian Ocean region, cyclones Bulbul and Maha came in quick succession after super cyclone Kyarr — a first in the region after the Odisha super cyclone of 1999.
• The Arabian sea, usually not known to be prone to cyclones, has had four major cyclones this year — very severe cyclone Vayu, very severe cyclone Hikka, super cyclone Kyarr and extremely severe cyclone Maha. This equals the record for the highest number of severe cyclones in the Arabian sea in the last 117 years.
• There have been two extremely severe cyclones and one super cyclone in the Indian Ocean region in 2019, taking the total number of severe cyclones to five.

Elsewhere:

• Super typhoon Halong in the western north Pacific Ocean.
• Hurricane Dorian - Bahamas.
• Nakri - West Philippine’s Sea.
15. **What is Pliosaur**
- They are *the largest aquatic carnivorous reptiles* that have ever lived.
- They are often dubbed “sea monsters”. Scientifically, they are placed in the suborder *Pliosauridae*.

**Context:** Interest in these giants has been revived with the recent discovery of their bones in a cornfield in the Polish village of *Krzyzanowice*. Remains of pliosaurs are rare in Europe.

16. **New Zealand - Zero Carbon Law**
- The country has passed the *Zero Carbon bill* which aims to make New Zealand reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to the point the country becomes mostly carbon neutral by 2050.
- It gives *some leeway to farmers*, who bring in much of the country’s foreign income.
- The bill requires *all greenhouse gases except methane from animals to be reduced to net zero by 2050*. Methane emissions would be reduced by 10% by 2030 and by between about one-quarter and one-half by 2050.

17. **Maternal Mortality Rate in India**
A Special Bulletin on *Maternal Mortality in India* 2015-2017 from the Sample Registration System has been released.

**Key facts:**
1. Maternal mortality ratio is measured as the number of maternal deaths per lakh live births.
2. It varies among the Indian states from a high of 229 per lakh in Assam to a low of 42 in Kerala.
3. Across the country, the maternal mortality ratio has declined from 130 during 2014-2016 to 122 during 2015-17.
4. There is a 26.9% decrease since 2013 (from 167 in 2011-13 to 122 in the latest bulletin).
5. For Assam, which recorded the *highest maternal mortality ratio*, or MMR, the 229 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births is still an improvement from the 2014-16 MMR of 237. Uttar Pradesh (216), Madhya Pradesh (188), Rajasthan (186), Odisha (168), Bihar (165) and Chhattisgarh (141) follow.
6. Among these states, the *maternal mortality rate* is the highest in Uttar Pradesh, at 20.1. Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Assam follow with maternal mortality rates at 17.5, 16.9, 16.8 and 15.2 respectively.
7. Kerala has the lowest MMR, at 42. It is followed by Maharashtra (55), Tamil Nadu (63), Andhra Pradesh (74), Jharkhand (76) and Telangana (76). Kerala also has the lowest maternal mortality rate, at 1.9, followed by Maharashtra at 3.3.

According to the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global target is to bring down the MMR to fewer than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030.

18. **NASA Unveils First Electric Plane X-57 "Maxwell"**
NASA recently showcased an early version of its *first all-electric experimental aircraft, the X-57 "Maxwell.* Adapted from an Italian-made Tecnam P2006T twin-engine propeller plane, the X-57 has been under development since 2015 and remains at least a year away from its first test flight in the skies over Edward Air Force Base.

19. **Tiger Triumph**
- It is a *India-U.S. joint tri-services Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)*.
- The *maiden exercise* is being held in *India*.
- The exercise is *aimed at developing interoperability for conducting HADR operations.*

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20. Sri Lanka has criminalised match-fixing
   - In a first for a South Asian nation, Sri Lanka has criminalised several offences related to match-fixing, and decreed strict penalties.
   - According to the new legislation, “any person related to a sport” who is directly involved in fixing, as well as those who “provide inside information”, curators who prepare pitches to suit betting operators, and match officials who “deliberately misapply the rules” for money, will be punished.
   - Match-fixing is a serious crime in a number of other cricketing nations, including England and Australia.

21. World Congress on Rural and Agricultural Finance
   - The 6th World Congress is being held in New Delhi.
   - It is co-hosted by NABARD and the Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA) and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.
   - Theme: ‘Rural and Agricultural Finance: Critical Input to Achieve Inclusive and Sustainable Development’.
   - Aim: To bring member institutions and all interested development sector partners together to discuss the topics that define the future of the flow of finance to the rural and agricultural sector and to bring a powerful message to the worldwide policymaking community.
   - APRACA, representing 81 member institutions from 21 countries, is a regional association that promotes cooperation and facilitates mutual exchange of information and expertise in the field of rural finance.

22. Project Zero
   - Introduced by Amazon.
   - To block selling of counterfeit goods on its platform.
   - The aim is to ensure that customers receive authentic goods when shopping on Amazon.
   - It introduces additional proactive mechanisms and powerful tools to identify, block and remove counterfeits.

23. “Shishu Suraksha” app launched in Assam
   - “Shishu Suraksha”, the mobile application, is the brainchild of Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (ASCPCR).
     - The e-complaint box will enable users from all over the state to lodge complaints about the violation of child rights.
     - The purpose of the e-box is to empower citizens to take moral responsibility of protecting our future generations.
     - The app can be used by anyone in Assam, coming across any incident of children’s rights violation, to lodge a complaint which will be directly registered at ASCPCR.
     - As soon as the complaint is lodged, the Commission will receive a message. It will then deal with the issue by being in touch with the appropriate authority.

24. International Symposium on Lighting (iSoL)
   - Organised by the International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT).
   - It provides a common platform to professionals related directly or indirectly to the automotive lighting fraternity from all around the globe.
   - iSoL-2019 is aimed at creating a knowledge sharing platform ensuring the flow of information.

25. Golden Leaf Award
   - Context: Tobacco Board Receives the 2019 Golden Leaf Award.
   - Category: ‘Most Impressive Public Service Initiative’.
   - The award was given in recognition of the Board’s efforts to initiate various sustainability (green) initiatives in Flue-Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco cultivation in India.
   - About the Golden Leaf Award:
     The Golden Leaf Awards were created to recognize professional excellence and dedication in the tobacco industry by Tobacco Reporter, an international magazine in the year 2006.

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Awards are granted on an annual basis to companies that have achieved outstanding performance in five categories:

1. Most impressive public service initiative
2. Most promising new product introduction
3. Most exciting newcomer to the industry
4. Most outstanding service to the industry
5. BMJ most committed to quality award

26. **Chile to hold referendum on new Constitution**
Chile has announced that it will stage a **referendum to replace the country’s Constitution**.

**Need:** The current charter, in force since 1980 and enacted by the military dictatorship, does **not establish the State’s responsibility to provide education and healthcare** — two demands made by millions of Chileans who have taken to the streets.

27. **Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (OCSAE) Prevention/Investigation Unit**

*The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)* has set up an Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (OCSAE) Prevention/Investigation Unit.

- The unit, which will **function under the agency’s Special Crime Zone in Delhi**, will collect and disseminate information on online child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- It will also **probe such offences covered under the IPC, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the Information Technology Act, apart from other relevant laws.**

28. **European Investment Bank to stop fossil fuel funding**

- The European Investment Bank is to **stop funding oil and coal projects at the end of 2021.**
- The EIB’s new policy demands that the energy projects applying for funding must prove that they can produce 1 Kilo watt hour of energy emitting less than 250 grams of carbon dioxide.
- The new rules being adopted are not applicable to gas-based energy projects.

29. **NASA renames Ultima Thule to ‘Arrokoth’**

*National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)* has recently renamed farthest cosmic body, earlier known as ‘**Ultima Thule**’ to ‘Arrokoth’ or Sky.

The old name attracted controversy because the word ‘Thule’ has been associated with Nazis in the past.

**Key facts about Arrokoth:**

- Located in the Kuiper belt in the outermost regions of the Solar system.
- Measures approximately 30 km in diameter, and is irregularly shaped.
- It has a reddish color, probably caused by exposure of hydrocarbons to sunlight over billions of years.
- It belongs to a class of Kuiper belt objects called the “cold classicals”, which have nearly circular orbits with low inclinations to the solar plane.

30. **Sisseri River Bridge**

- Recently, the Defence Minister inaugurated the **Sisseri River Bridge** located at lower Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh.
- The 200m long bridge provides **connectivity between Dibang Valley and Siang.**
- The bridge was constructed by ‘**Project Brahmank**’ of Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

This bridge is strategically important from the military viewpoint and will be a part of Trans Arunachal Highway.
31. Indian Oil develops winter grade diesel for Ladakh

Indian Oil Corporation has developed winter-grade diesel for Ladakh to address the problem of loss of fluidity in fuel during extreme winter conditions.

**Significance:** The new fuel has a pour point of –33°C and does not lose its fluidity function even in the extreme winter weather of the region unlike the normal grade of diesel which becomes exceedingly difficult to utilise.

**Need:** Using the normal grade of diesel fuel becomes an arduous task for the people in the winter months where temperatures fall to sub-zero temperatures of nearly –30 degree Celsius.

32. Za’ir-Al-Bahr (the Roar of the Sea)

- It is the Joint Exercise between the Qatari Emiri Navy and the Indian Navy, Za’ir-Al-Bahr (the Roar of the Sea).
- The latest edition is being held in Doha.
- **Aim:** To strengthen cooperation and enhance interoperability between the two navies.

33. Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)

- Launched by Ministry of Sports within the ambit of National Sports Development Fund (NSDF).
- It aims at identifying and supporting potential medal prospects for upcoming Olympic Games.
- It will provide selected sportspersons customized training at institutes having world class facilities and also other necessary support is being provided to the elite athletes. It will also provide a benchmark for selection of athletes on par with international standards.
- Under it, Sports Authority of India (SAI) and federations, which are members of Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), will be nodal agencies for disbursal for fund. They will make payments directly to beneficiary person and institution concerned on behalf of athletes.

34. Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS)

It is a representative body of artists, including music owners, composers, lyricists, and publishers of music.

- It collects royalties due to the artists if their work is used anywhere from a wedding to a New Year function or on radio or TV — in other words, wherever music is played.
- **Set up in 1969,** and re-registered as a copyright society in 2017, following which it started functioning actively.
- The IPRS is responsible for collecting the 50% royalty that is due to artists involved in “literary work accompanied to music” — meaning lyricists, music composers, and publishers of music.
- IPRS has both civil and criminal remedies available to it under The Copyright Act.

**How is the royalty shared?**

A 2012 amendment in The Copyright Act, 1957 laid down that artists would get 50% of royalties every time their work was used, even if the copyright remained with the production house or the music brand.

35. Idris Elba

A species of wasp has been named Idris Elba.

- The wasp, recently discovered in Mexico, was found living as a parasite in the eggs of another insect, known as the bagrada bug, which is a major pest of cruciferous vegetables.
- This newly discovered wasp species could be the ultimate weapon in the battle against the stink bug -- also known as the painted bug -- by “parasitizing” stink bug eggs and thus preventing offspring from growing.
- **Genus Idris** contains over 300 species.

36. MK-45 Naval Guns

**Context:** The United States of America has approved the sale of thirteen MK-45 naval guns and related equipment to India.

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Key facts:
- The MK 45 is a naval artillery gun designed for use against surface warships, anti-aircraft and shore bombardment to support amphibious operations.
- The gun mount features an automatic loader with a capacity of 20 rounds that can be fired under full automatic control, taking a little over a minute to exhaust those rounds at maximum fire rate.
- It has a range of more than 20 nautical miles or 36 km.

37. National Institute of Sowa-Rigpa (NISR)
Context: The Union Cabinet has approved setting up of National Institute of Sowa-Rigpa (NISR) at Leh, Union Territory of Ladakh.
Key facts:
- It will be an autonomous national institute under the Ministry of AYUSH with the mandate to undertake interdisciplinary education and research programmes in Sowa-Rigpa in collaboration with national and international institutes.
- It will act as an apex institute for Sowa-Rigpa system. The existing Sowa-Rigpa institutions work under the Ministry of Culture.
What is Sowa-Rigpa?
- It is a traditional system of medicine practised in the Himalayan belt of India.
- It originated in Tibet and popularly practiced in countries namely, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, and Russia.
- The majority of theory and practice of Sowa-Rigpa is similar to “Ayurveda”.
- Yuthog Yonten Gonpo from Tibet is believed to be the father of Sowa Rigpa.
The basic theory of Sowa-Rigpa may be adumbrated in terms of the following five points:
   1. The body in disease as the locus of treatment.
   2. Antidote, i.e., the treatment.
   3. The method of treatment through antidote.
   4. Medicine that cures the disease.
   5. Materia Medica, Pharmacy & Pharmacology.

38. Prithvi-II Missile
It is a surface-to-surface tactical missile with a strike range of 350 km.
It is India’s first missile indigenously developed by DRDO under prestigious Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP).
It is capable of carrying 500 to 1,000 kg of warheads, both conventional as well as nuclear.
The state-of-the-art missile is powered by liquid propulsion twin engines.
It uses an advanced inertial guidance system with maneuvering orbit to hit its target.
It was inducted into armour of the defence forces in 2003.

39. Bacteriophages
They are the viruses that can kill the bacteria.
They are comprised of a protein capsule around an RNA or DNA genome.
They are ubiquitous viruses, found wherever bacteria exist.
They are seen as a possible therapy against multi-drug-resistant strains of many bacteria.

40. Living Root Bridges
Also known as Jing Kieng Jri, these are aerial bridges built by weaving and manipulating the roots of the Indian rubber tree.
They have been serving as connectors for generations in Meghalaya.
Built over centuries, the bridges, primarily a means to cross streams and rivers, have also become world-famous tourist attractions.
41. Malabar Tree Toad
A Bengaluru-based non-profit is working to train and equip residents of villages in the Western Ghats stretching from Maharashtra to Tamil Nadu for mapping the range of an extremely rare species of toad—Malabar Tree toad.

About Malabar Tree Toad (MTT):
- It is a very rare species of amphibian endemic to the Ghats.
- It is an endangered species that spends most of its life on trees, coming to the ground only during the first monsoon showers to mate.
- The Western Ghats, where the MTT is found, is a biodiversity hotspot and is home to 179 recorded amphibian species, 80 per cent of which are not found anywhere else.

42. Haryana’s Johads
What are they? Johads are community-owned rainwater storage wetland mainly used for harnessing water resources.
Why in News? Haryana state government has come out with a plan of rehabilitating over 16,400 ponds in rural areas across the state in order to analyze pond water to ascertain its suitability for irrigation and other uses.

43. What is Golden rice?
It is a genetically-engineered rice that contains beta-carotene. Here, the traditional rice is changed by inserting bacteria and daffodil and maize genes into it.
It is called golden rice because of the golden colour of its grains.
It was claimed to be able to fight Vitamin A deficiency, which is the leading cause of blindness among children and can also lead to death due to infectious diseases such as measles.

44. Sumatran Rhino
Context: Sumatran rhino is now extinct in Malaysia.
Now, there are now just 80 Sumatran rhinos left in the world, all of them in Indonesia, especially on the island of Sumatra and the Indonesian part of Borneo.
Background: The Sumatran rhino is the smallest of the five extant rhino species in the world. The other species include the White Rhino, the Black Rhino, the Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros and the Javan Rhino.
In the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century, the Sumatran rhinoceros occurred in parts of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, northern Bengal, Bhutan, Comilla and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

45. Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli to be merged
Two Union Territories—Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli—will be merged into one and a bill in this effect will be tabled in Parliament.
The merger of the two UTs, located along the western coast near Gujarat, will be done for better administration and check duplications of various work.
At present, the country currently has nine UTs after the creation of the UTs of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. However, with the merger of Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the number of UTs will come down to eight.

46. Secretagogin
Scientists have recently demonstrated the role of a protein secretagogin (SCGN) in increasing insulin action in obesity-induced diabetes.
Key facts:
- SCGN is now established as a functional insulin-binding protein with therapeutic potential against diabetes.
- SCGN binds to insulin and protects it from various stresses, increases its stability and adds to its action.
- SCGN is found in lower quantities in the brains of Alzheimer’s patients.
47. ASI protected temples in India

Context: Information on this was given in Lok Sabha recently.

Key facts:
- A total 651 Hindu temples in India are designated as Centrally Protected Monuments under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- The largest number of Hindu temples under the ASI’s protection is in Karnataka, followed by Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh.

48. Rohtang Tunnel

Context: Rohtang tunnel will officially be ready for inauguration by September 2020.

Key facts about the tunnel:
The 8.8 km long tunnel will cut through Pir Panjal range.
When complete, it will become the world’s longest highway tunnel above 10,000 feet.
The tunnel provides a temporary winter link to the outside world not only to residents of Lahaul and Spiti but also to those living in Zanskar Valley of Ladakh.
The Seri nullah default zone inside the tunnel which had affected the work badly in the past many years has been fixed and only a 100m work is left to be completed.

49. Flight service from Imphal to Mandalay

Context: Last week, Myanmar’s private airlines Air KBZ kicked off a chartered flight service from Manipur’s state capital Imphal to Myanmar’s second-largest city Mandalay.

Significance: Mandalay is an important economic centre of Myanmar and the flight service is said to be benefiting both traders and tourists.

50. Assam roofed turtle

Context: The multipurpose Assamese gamosa, a ubiquitous, white cotton towel, has been assigned a new function — conservation of rare freshwater turtles-Assam roofed turtle.

Key facts:
- It is an endangered small freshwater species.
- Protected under Schedule I of the wildlife protection act.

51. Guru Ghasidas National Park

This will be Chhattisgarh’s 4th tiger reserve.

Current 3 tiger reserves: Achanakmar, Udanti - Sitanadi and Indravati tiger reserves.

52. Etawah Lion Safari

- Located in Uttar Pradesh.
- There are 18 lions in the premises.
- The park is officially categorised in Multiple Safari Park, Asiatic Lion Breeding Centre & Visitor Facilitation Centre.

53. National Milk Day 2019

National Milk Day 2019 is observed on November 26 in India.

Established by the Food and Agricultural Organisation in 2014, the day is celebrated on this date to honour Dr Verghese Kurien-who is considered to be father of India’s White Revolution.
The White Revolution, also known as Operation Flood, was launched in 1970. It is considered to be world's biggest dairy development programme which transformed India from a milk deficient nation to the one of the largest producers of milk in the world.

54. Trachischium aptei
- It is a newly discovered snake species from Arunachal Pradesh.
- It was found in Tally Valley Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It belongs to a group of fossorial (adapted to digging) snakes that live mostly underground, and surface mainly during or after a heavy monsoon shower.

55. HIM VIJAY Military Exercise
- HIM Vijay is the Indian Army's biggest mountain combat exercise.
- It is the first-ever military drill that was held in the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The exercise will include troop mobilisation, mountain assault and air assault.

56. Dendrochronology Conference
**Context:** The 6th Asian Dendrochronology Conference being held at the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences in Lucknow.
This is the first time that the conference is being held in India.
**What is it?**
Dendrochronology is the study of tree rings that hold a wealth of information about not only a tree’s past but also that of the ecosystem in which it lives.

57. 'YuWaah'- Generation Unlimited initiative
Launched by UNICEF.
- It brings young people together with the private sector, governments, international and local organisations.
- The aim is to tackle the urgent challenge of investing in their learning and training so that they are prepared for the complex and fast-changing world of work and can be active and engaged citizens.

58. India’s Cold Wave Zone
India’s cold-wave zone covers the north Indian states of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and also other states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar.
**Context:** India’s cold-wave regions to have warm winter this year as per IMD.