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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. Indian History Congress

What to study
For Prelims and Mains: About IHC, origin and objectives.

Context: Recently, the 80th session of the Indian History Congress (IHC) was held at Kannur, Kerala. It called upon political and administrative authorities to pursue the constitutional duty of promoting composite culture, which is vital to promoting the territorial unity of India.

What is Indian History Congress?
Founded in 1935, the Indian History Congress (IHC) is the largest association of professional historians in South Asia.
- It has about 35000 members of which over 2000 delegates participate in its session every year.
- It has been holding its sessions very regularly from its inception and publishing its proceedings every year since 1935.
- Its main objective is to promote secular and scientific writing of history.

Origin:
The BISM organised an All India Congress in 1935 to celebrate its silver jubilee in Pune. As an outcome, the Indian History Congress (IHC) was thus born with about 50 delegates. The Bharata Itihasa Samshodhaka Mandala (BISM) was founded by Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade in 1910 in Pune with the support of K C Mehdale.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Guru Gobind Singh

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Guru Gobind Singh- key contributions.

Context: The birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh was celebrated on January 2nd this year.

About Guru Gobind Singh:
- He was the 10th Sikh guru.
- He was born at Patna, Bihar, India, on December 22, 1666. His birthday sometimes falls either in December or January or even both months in the Gregorian calendar. The annual celebration of the Guru’s birthday is based on the Nanakshahi calendar.
- He became the Sikh guru at the age of nine, following the demise of father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru.
- He is known for his significant contributions to the Sikh religion, including the introduction of the turban to cover hair.
- He also founded the principles of Khalsa or the Five ‘K’s.
- He is also responsible to establish the highest order in the Sikh community.
- Followers of the Sikh faith religiously follow the morals and codes of discipline set up by Guru Gobind Singh.
- He fought against the Mughals later in battle of Muktsar in 1705.
- He was assassinated in 1708.
- He named Guru Granth Sahib, the religious text of the Khalsas and the Sikhs, as the next Guru of the two communities.
3. Indian harvest festivals

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: Harvest festivals celebrated across various parts of the country and their significance.*

**Context:** The Harvest season is on and festivities have gripped the nation from the north to down south.

*Various festivals being celebrated across the Nations:*

**Makar Sankranti:** The festival of Makar Sankranti will be celebrated in Karnataka when the Sun enters the Makar zodiac and the days begin to lengthen compared to nights.

**Pongal:** In South India and particularly in Tamil Nadu, it’s the festival of Pongal which is being celebrated over 4 days at harvest time.

**Magha Bihu:** In Assam and many parts of the North East, the festival of Magha Bihu is celebrated. It sees the first harvest of the season being offered to the gods along with prayers for peace and prosperity.

**Uttarayan:** Gujarat celebrates it in the form of the convivial kite festival of Uttarayan.

**Maghi:** In Punjab, Makar Sankranti is celebrated as Maghi. Bathing in a river in the early hours on Maghi is important.

**Saaji:** In Shimla District of Himachal Pradesh, Makara Sankranti is known as Magha Saaji. Saaji is the Pahari word for Sankranti, start of the new month. Hence this day marks the start of the month of Magha.

**Kicheri:** The festival is known as Kicheri in Uttar Pradesh and involves ritual bathing.

*Outside India:*

**Shakrain** is an annual celebration of winter in Bangladesh, observed with the flying of kites.

**Maghe Sankranti** is a Nepalese festival observed on the first of Magh in the Bikram Samwat Hindu Solar Nepali calendar (about 14 January).

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Classical language

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: Classical language - recognition, benefits and significance.*

**Context:** At the recently concluded 93rd edition of the Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan, a resolution was passed demanding the declaration of Marathi as a ‘Classical’ language.

*What are ‘Classical’ languages in India?*

Currently, **six languages enjoy the ‘Classical’ status:** Tamil (declared in 2004), Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).

**How are they classified?**

Guidelines for declaring a language as ‘Classical’ are:

1. High antiquity of its early texts(recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years.
2. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
3. The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
4. The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

**How are the Classical languages promoted? Various benefits:**

1. Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages.
2. A Centre of Excellence for studies in Classical Languages is set up.
3. The University Grants Commission is requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages so declared.
5. Bharati Script

What to study?
For Prelims: About the script, similar scripts world over.
For Mains: Need for common script, significance and the challenges involved.

Context: Researchers from IIT Madras have already developed a unified script for nine Indian languages, named the Bharati Script.
Now, going a step further, developed a method for reading documents in Bharati script using a multi-lingual optical character recognition (OCR) scheme.

What is Optical Character Recognition (OCR) scheme?
1. It involves first separating (or segmenting) the document into text and non-text.
2. The text is then segmented into paragraphs, sentences words and letters.
3. Each letter has to be recognised as a character in some recognisable format such as ASCII or Unicode.
4. The letter has various components such as the basic consonant, consonant modifiers, vowels etc.

What is Bharati Script?
It is an alternative script for the languages of India developed by a team at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Madras lead by Dr. Srinivasa Chakravarthy.
The scripts that have been integrated include Devanagari, Bengali, Gurmukhi, Gujarati, Oriya, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil.

Format:
The Bharati characters are made up of three tiers stacked vertically. The consonant at the root of the letter is placed in the centre and the modifiers are in the top and bottom tiers.
Bharati has, in general, 17 vowels and 22 consonants.

Need for unified script?
A common script for the entire country is hoped to bring down many communication barriers in India.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Nagardhan excavations- findings on Vakataka dynasty

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Recent excavations and revelations on vakataka dynasty and queen Prabhavatigupta.

Context: Archaeological excavations at Nagardhan, near Nagpur, have provided concrete evidence on the life, religious affiliations and trade practices of the Vakataka dynasty and also about the Vakataka rule under Queen Prabhavatigupta.
About findings and their significance:
1. An oval-shaped sealing has been traced. It belongs to the period when Prabhavatigupta was the queen of the Vakataka dynasty.
2. It bears her name in the Brahmi script, along with the depiction of a conch.
3. The presence of the conch, scholars say, is a sign of the Vaishnava affiliation that the Guptas held.
4. A copper plate issued by Queen Prabhavatigupta has also been found. It starts with a genealogy of the Guptas, mentioning the Queen’s grandfather Samudragupta and her father Chandragupta II.
5. Since the Vakataka people traded with Iran and beyond through the Mediterranean Sea, scholars suggest that these sealings could have been used as an official royal permission issued from the capital city. Besides, these were used on documents that sought mandatory royal permissions.

Who was Queen Prabhavatigupta?
• The Vakataka rulers were known to have forged several matrimonial alliances with other dynasties of their times. One of the key alliances was with Prabhavatigupta of the mighty Gupta dynasty, which was then ruling north India.
• After marrying Vakataka king Rudrasena II, Prabhavatigupta enjoyed the position of Chief Queen.
• Scholars say Queen Prabhavatigupta was among a handful of women rulers in India to have reigned over any kingdom during ancient times. Also, there had been no evidence so far of any successor female ruler within the Vakataka dynasty, the researchers suggest.
• She ruled for about 10 years until her son Pravarasena II succeeded.
• She had a pivotal role in propagation of Vaishnava practices in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

About Vakataka dynasty:
1. Ruled parts of Central and South India between the third and fifth centuries.
2. Rule extended from the southern edges of Malwa and Gujarat in the north to the Tungabhadra River in the south as well as from the Arabian Sea in the west to the edges of Chhattisgarh in the east.
3. They were the most important successors of the Satavahanas in the Deccan and contemporaneous with the Guptas in northern India.
4. They were Shaivite rulers.
5. Nagardhan served as a capital of the Vakataka kingdom.
6. The elephant god was a commonly worshipped deity in those times.
7. Animal rearing was one of the main occupations. Remains of seven species of domestic animals — cattle, goat, sheep, pig, cat, horse and fowl — have been traced.
8. The rock-cut Buddhist viharas and chaityas of Ajanta Caves (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) were built under the patronage of Vakataka emperor, Harishena.

Sources: Indian Express.

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

1. Bhima Koregaon anniversary

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Battle of Koregaon- reasons, key facts and outcomes of the battle.

Context: 202nd anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle of 1818 was observed on January 1, 2020.

About the Bhima- Koregaon battle:
A battle was fought in Bhima Koregaon, a district in Pune with a strong historical Dalit connection, between the Peshwa forces and the British on January 1, 1818. The British army, which comprised mainly of Dalit soldiers, fought the upper caste-dominated Peshwa army. The British troops defeated the Peshwa army.
Outcomes of the battle:

- The victory was seen as a win against caste-based discrimination and oppression. Peshwas were notorious for their oppression and persecution of Mahar dalits. The victory in the battle over Peshwas gave dalits a moral victory, a victory against caste-based discrimination and oppression and sense of identity.
- However, the divide and rule policy of the British created multiple fissures in Indian society which is even visible today in the way of excessive caste and religious discrimination which needs to be checked keeping in mind the tenets of the Constitution.

Why Bhima Koregaon is seen as a Dalit symbol?
The battle has come to be seen as a symbol of Dalit pride because a large number of soldiers in the Company force were the Mahar Dalits. Since the Peshwas, who were Brahmins, were seen as oppressors of Dalits, the victory of the Mahar soldiers over the the Peshwa force is seen as Dalit assertion.

On 1 January 1927, B.R. Ambedkar visited the memorial obelisk erected on the spot which bears the names of the dead including nearly two dozen Mahar soldiers. The men who fought in the battle of Koregaon were the Mahars, and the Mahars are Untouchables.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Savitribai Phule

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key contributions.

Context: Birth anniversary of Indian Social Reformer Savitribhai Phule is observed on January 3.

Key facts:
1. Born in Naigaon in Maharashtra on January 3, 1831, Phule is widely regarded as one of India’s first generation modern feminists for her significant contributions in ensuring equal education opportunities under the British raj.
2. She became the first female teacher in India in 1848 and opened a school for girls along with her husband, social reformer Jyotirao Phule.
3. The two also worked against discrimination based on caste-based identity, something vehemently opposed by the orthodox sections of society in Pune.
4. She went on to establish a shelter for widows in 1854 which she further built on in 1864 to also accommodate destitute women and child brides cast aside by their families.
5. Phule also played a pivotal role in directing the work of the Satyashodhak Samaj, formed by her husband with the objective to achieve equal rights for the marginalised lower castes.
6. Savitribai opened a clinic in 1897 for victims of the bubonic plague that spread across Maharashtra just before the turn of the century.
7. She also set up “Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha.”
8. In her honour, University of Pune was renamed Savitribai Phule University in 2014.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Lord Curzon

What to study?
For Prelims: Reforms and key events during his rule.
For Mains: Implications of his policies.

Context: Bengal Governor Tweets About “Iconic” Lord Curzon Table, Gets Trolled. The table was apparently used by Lord Curzon to sign papers pertaining to the Partition of Bengal in 1905.

Who was Lord Curzon?

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He was a true successor of Lord Dalhousie. He was great imperialist, authoritarian in temperament, ruthless in his ways and wanted to achieve too much at too great pace. *The time of his governorship (1899-1905), was the formative phase of Indian national movement.* Thus he tried to strangulate Indian nationalism and freedom movement by all fair and foul means.

**Reactionary policies of Lord Curzon:**
Through *Calcutta Corporation act 1899* he reduced the number of elected legislatures to deprive Indians from self-governance.
He looked at Indians with contempt and insulted and injured their feelings. He described Bengalis as *cowards, windbags, impracticable talkers and mere frothy patriots*. He even refused to meet to president of Indian national congress.
The biggest blunder he committed was *the partition of Bengal*. Although it was a political masterstroke to break growing Indian nationalism among Bengalis, it proved disastrous for British in longer term.

**Impact of Curzon’s reactionary policies:**
Curzon by his impolitic utterances and imperialist designs brought political unrest in India to a bursting point. Curzon’s imperialistic policies provoked reaction which in turn stung political life in India. Out of his tyranny was born a stronger sense of nationhood. Taken in this light Curzon proved to be a benefactor of India without intending to do so.

**Reforms by Lord Curzon:**
1. Educational:
To set the educational system in order, he instituted in 1902, *Universities Commission* to go into the entire question of university education in the country.
On the basis of the findings and recommendations of the Commission, Curzon brought in *the Indian Universities Act of 1904*, which brought all the universities in India under the control of the government.

2. Scientific:
*The Agriculture Research Institute in Pusa* (Bihar – Bengal Presidency) was established.

3. Administrative:
He made efforts for police reforms, eliminating the corruption and to promote the economic development. He provided a revival to conservatism in India by refurbishing the main features of *Lord Mayo’s policies*.
He instituted *a Police Commission in 1902* under the chairmanship of Sir Andrew Frazer. Curzon accepted all the recommendations and implemented them.
He set up training schools for both the officers and the constables and introduced provincial police service. During Curzon regime, *the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP)* was established which covered roughly the areas of upper course of River Indus.

4. Military:
*Imperial cadet corps* was set up which became an instrument for Indianisation of army later.

5. Other reforms:
He passed a law called *the Ancient Monuments Act, 1904* which made it obligatory on the part of the government and local authorities to preserve the monuments of archaeological importance and their destruction an offence.

Sources: Indian Express.

**4. Taanaji Malusare and the Battle of Singhagad**

*What to study?*
*For Prelims and mains: About Taanaji, the battle and it’s outcomes.*
Context: A Bollywood film, based on **Subedar Taanaji Malusare, a Maratha military leader**, was recently released.

Who was Tanaaji Malusare?
He was a Maratha military leader and a close aide of Chhatrapati Shivaji. Hailing from the Malusare clan, Taanaji is popularly remembered for **the Battle of Singhgad that took place in the year 1670**.

In the battle, Taanaji fought against Udaybhan Rathore, a formidable Rajput warrior, who was put in charge of Fort Kandhana (later named Singhgad) by Jai Singh.

**Battle of Singhgad, 1670:**
In the year 1665, **the Treaty of Purandar** was signed between Jai Singh and Shivaji. Amongst several demands, the treaty had required the Maratha ruler to give up Fort Kandhana to the Mughals.

After it was taken over by the Mughals, **the fort was guarded by Rajput, Pathan and Arab troop guards and was said to be impenetrable**.

This deeply disturbed and enraged Shivaji’s mother **Rajmata Jijabai**. Upon knowing this, Shivaji entrusted Taanaji, the only man he could think of capable of reconquering the fort Kondhana at any cost.

Outcomes of the battle:
1. Even though the attack by Taanaji took the Mughals by surprise, the latter nonetheless outnumbered the Marathas.
2. The two clashed for long. Malusare was gravely wounded in the fight and died.
3. Enraged by the death of their general, the Marathas fought under the leadership of his brother, Suryaji Malusare, and eventually vanquished the enemy.
4. The fort was renamed as Singhgad (lion’s fort) by Shivaji to honour Tanaji.

Sources: Indian Express.

5. Lala Lajpat Rai

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


His contributions, achievements and related key facts:
1. Rai is remembered for his role during the **Swadeshi movement** and for his advocacy of education.
2. 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. He also helped found the **Punjab National Bank**.
4. In 1885, Rai established the **Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School in Lahore** and remained a committed educationist throughout his life.
5. Rai, Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal (called Lal-Bal-Pal) fervently advocated the use of Swadeshi goods and mass agitation in the aftermath of the controversial Partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon.
6. He founded the **Indian Home Rule League of America in New York City** in 1917.
7. 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**.
8. The patriot died at Lahore in 1928 after he was attacked by police during a protest rally against the **Simon Commission**.

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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 Gandhiji’s ideas of inclusive fight against British led to Non-Cooperative movement linked with the Khilafat movement.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

1. Commission to Examine Sub Categorization of other Backward Classes

What to study?
For prelims and mains: Need for Sub Categorization, significance, issues involved and what can be done?

Context: Cabinet approves Extension of term of the commission constituted under Article 340 of the constitution to examine the issue of Sub-categorization within other Backward Classes in the Central List.

Background:
Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law.
- That means un-equals cannot be treated equally. Measures are required to be taken for the upliftment of un-equals to bring them on par with the advanced classes.

Sub-categorisation:
In view of this, the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) proposed the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) back in 2015. In October 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 340 of the Constitution, appointed a commission to examine the issue of sub-categorisation of OBCs, chaired by retired Justice G. Rohini, to ensure social justice in an efficient manner by prioritising the Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs).

Need for subcategorization:
Sub categorization of the OBCs will ensure that the more backward among the OBC communities can also access the benefits of reservation for educational institutions and government jobs.
At present, there is no sub-categorisation and 27% reservation is a monolithic entity.

Significance of this move:
This decision, taken on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, reinforces, in the spirit of his teachings, the Government’s efforts to achieve greater social justice and inclusion for all, and specifically members of the Other Backward Classes.

Analysis:
The decision to set up a commission to examine the issue of sub-categorisation of the Other Backward Classes speaks to the long years of failure in effectively preventing large sections of the creamy layer from taking advantage of the quota system to the detriment of the poorer sections among their own caste groups. In effect, the Union government is now seeking to ensure a more equitable distribution of reservation benefits by further differentiating caste groups coming under backward classes on the basis of their levels of social and economic backwardness.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Women and women related issues.

1. Women, Business and the Law 2020

What to study?
For Prelims: About the index and its overview.
For Mains: Significance and challenges highlighted, ways to address them.

Context: Women, Business and the Law 2020, the sixth edition in a series, has been released. Women, Business and the Law (WBL) is a World Bank Group project collecting unique data on the laws and regulations that restrict women’s economic opportunities.

About the Women, Business and the Law Index:
The index analyzes laws and regulations affecting women’s economic inclusion in 190 economies.

- It is composed by eight indicators structured around women’s interactions with the law as they begin, progress through and end their careers, aligns different areas of the law with the economic decisions women make at various stages of their lives.

The indicators are:
- Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension.

How are countries ranked?
- The study tracked “how laws affect women at different stages in their working lives and focusing on those laws applicable in the main business city”.
- The Index is based on the countries’ formal laws and regulations that have a bearing on women’s economic participation.

Performance of various countries:
1. No economy in ‘East Asia and the Pacific’, ‘Europe and Central Asia’, or ‘Latin America and the Caribbean’ were among top reformers, the report claimed.
2. Only eight economies scored a perfect 100 — Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Sweden. Those countries have ensured equal legal standing to men and women on all the eight indicators of the index.
3. The global average was 75.2 — a slight increase from 73.9 in the previous index released in 2017.

Performance of India:
- India is placed 117th among 190 countries.
- It scored 74.4 on a par with Benin and Gambia and way below least developed countries like Rwanda and Lesotho.

Way ahead:
No country can achieve its full potential without the equal participation of women and men. Achieving gender equality is not only the right thing to do but it is also good for a country’s economic growth and development.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Tougher law against sexual harassment at work
What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the law, recommendations by GoM.
For Mains: Need for stringent law.

Context: The Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by Home Minister Amit Shah, which was constituted to strengthen the legal framework to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace, has finalised its recommendations.

Background:
The GoM was constituted first in October 2018 in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement after many women shared their ordeal on social media.

Present scenario:
The Women and Child Development Ministry had steered the Sexual Harassment of Women and Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act in 2013, which was applicable to government offices, the private sector, NGOs and the unorganised sector.

Need for stricter provisions:
- The 2013 Act has entrusted the powers of a civil court to the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) without specifying if the members need to have a legal background. This was a major lacuna given that the ICC formed an important grievance redressal mechanism under the framework of the act.
- The 2013 act only imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on employers for non-compliance with respect to the constitution of the ICC. This proved to be insufficient in ensuring that the employers constituted the ICC in a time-bound manner.

What next?- Overview of Vishakha guidelines:
The proposed amendments would be largely based on the Vishaka Guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997, on which the 2013 Act was based.
It made the employer responsible to prevent or deter acts of sexual harassment at the workplace.

Definition of sexual harassment:
Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition And Redressal) Act, 2013 defines sexual harassment:
It includes “any one or more” of the following “unwelcome acts or behaviour” committed directly or by implication: Physical contact and advances, Sexually coloured remarks, Showing pornography, A demand or request for sexual favours, Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Key provisions of the act:
1. This Act lays down the procedures for a complaint and inquiry and the action to be taken.
2. It mandates that every employer constitute an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) at each office or branch with 10 or more employees.
3. It lays down the procedures and defines various aspects of sexual harassment.
4. A woman can be of any age, whether employed or not, who “alleges to have been subjected to any act of sexual harassment”, that means the rights of all the women working or visiting any workplace, in any capacity, are protected under the Act.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. World's fastest-growing cities

What to study?
For Prelims: About the survey and top performers.
For Mains: Fastest growing urban areas- meaning, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: Three Indian cities have been listed as the world’s fastest-growing urban areas, a survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) revealed.

How are the cities ranked?
Cities are ranked based on “Total % change, 2015-20 forecast”.
The list is based on data from the United Nations Population Division.
The Economist has listed the rate at which the populations of the “urban agglomerations” (UA) are expected to increase between 2015 and 2020.

Key facts:
- Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kollam were the only three cities to make it to the top 10 of the world’s fastest-growing cities.
- Malappuram was ranked No. 1 in the world rankings with a 44.1 per cent change between 2015 and 2020.
- While Kozhikode was ranked fourth with 34.5 per cent change and Kollam was at number 10 with 31.1 per cent.

Why then are Malappuram (44%), Kozhikode (34.5%), and Kollam (31%) growing so fast?
These cities are seeing rapid urbanisation, and the main reason is the inclusion of new areas in the UA’s limits.

1. In 2001, there were two municipal corporations within the UA of Malappuram. In 2011, the number of municipal corporations had doubled to four, and an additional 37 CTs were included within...
Malappuram. The population of the UA (excluding the residents of the outgrowths) increased almost 10 times in the same period — from 1,70,409 to 16,99,060 — obviously because of the inclusion of existing urban areas in the town.

2. Similarly, Kollam UA grew from one municipal corporation in 2001 to 23 CTs, one municipal corporation, and one municipal council in 2011. Its population increased by 130%, even though the population of the original ST of Kollam actually decreased by 4%.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. **Time to Care report**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: Key findings.*

*For Mains: Concerns highlighted and ways to address them.*

**Context:** A report titled “Time to Care” has been released by Oxfam International. The report focuses on the alleviation of global poverty.

**Key findings:**

1. The world had 2,153 billionaires in the world in 2019. The number of billionaires has doubled in the last decade, despite their combined wealth having declined in 2018.
2. World’s richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.
3. From 2011 to 2017, average wages in G7 countries grew 3%, while dividends to wealthy shareholders increased by 31%.
4. Globally, extreme poverty rates are 4% higher for women than men and this gap rises to 22% during women’s peak productive and reproductive ages.

**Women related:**

Globally, 42% of working-age women are outside the paid labour force, compared with 6% of men, due to unpaid care responsibilities.

1. The monetary value of unpaid care work globally for women aged 15 and over is at least $10.8 trillion annually — three times the size of the world’s tech industry.
2. 80% of domestic workers worldwide are women and 90% of domestic workers have no access to social security such as maternity protection and benefits.

**Findings related to India:**

1. India’s richest 1% hold more than four-times the wealth held by the bottom 70% of the country’s population.
2. The combined total wealth of 63 Indian billionaires is higher than the total Union Budget of India for the fiscal year 2018-19 which was at Rs 24,42,200 crore.

**Concerns expressed:**

Economic inequality is out of control and has created a great divide in the world. This great divide is based on a flawed and sexist economic system which has accumulated vast wealth and power into the hands of a rich few. And they are also exploiting the labour of women and girls, and systematically violating their rights.

**Way ahead:**

- An additional 0.5% tax on the wealth of the richest 1% over the next 10 years can create 117 million jobs in education, health and elderly care.
- Invest in national care systems to address the disproportionate responsibility for care work done by women and girls.
- End extreme wealth to end extreme poverty and bring in legislation to protect the rights of all carers and secure living wages for paid care workers.
Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Northeast monsoon

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, impacts and significance.

Context: The northeast, or winter, monsoon has ended on a high, with an overall surplus rainfall being recorded for the season.
The year that just went by witnessed the rare meteorological coincidence of the northeast (winter) monsoon making its onset on the same day as the southwest monsoon withdrew officially.

What is the northeast (winter) monsoon?
Though much less heard of, especially in the north of the country, the northeast monsoon is as permanent a feature of the Indian subcontinent’s climate system as the summer monsoon.
The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recognises October to December as the time for the northeast monsoon.
During this period, rainfall is experienced over Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh, along with some parts of Telangana and Karnataka.

Difference between Northeast and Southwest monsoons?
The Northeast monsoon derives its name from the direction in which it travels — from the northeast to the southwest.
Similarly, the summer monsoon moves in exactly the opposite direction — from the southwest to the northeast. That is why it is called the southwest monsoon.

When does the northeast monsoon set in?
Although October, November, and December are supposed to comprise the northeast monsoon season, the rains normally set in only around October 20.
The southern peninsular region receives rain in the first half of October as well, but that is attributable to the retreating summer monsoon.
- The summer monsoon season ends on September 30 but the withdrawal does not happen overnight.
- The southward withdrawal takes place over a period of three to four weeks. It usually starts around the second week of September and continues till about the second week of October, bringing rain as it retreats.

Where does it rain during the northeast monsoon season?
The northeast monsoon brings rain to just five of the 36 meteorological divisions in the country — Tamil Nadu (which includes Puducherry), Kerala, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema and South Interior Karnataka.
As such, this season contributes only 11 per cent to India’s annual rainfall of 1,187 mm, compared to about 75 per cent in the summer monsoon season (the remaining rain comes in other non-monsoon months).

Impact on northern states:
Many other parts of the country, like the Gangetic plains and northern states, also receive some rain in November and December but this is not due to the northeast monsoon.
It is caused mainly by the Western Disturbances, an eastward-moving rain-bearing wind system that originates beyond Afghanistan and Iran, picking up moisture from as far as the Mediterranean Sea, even the Atlantic Ocean.

In the higher reaches of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, the precipitation is often in the form of snow.

Sources: Indian Express.
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.

1. State can regulate minority institutions

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: All about minority status and constitutional provisions related.

Context: In an important judgement which could have bearing on running of all government-aided minority educational institutions across the country, the Supreme Court has held that such institutions cannot claim to have absolute right in deciding appointment of teachers and it can be regulated by a government to ensure excellence in imparting education.

What’s the issue?
These observations were made by the court while upholding constitutional validity of West Bengal Madrassas Service Commission Act, 2008, under which the selection and appointment of teachers in madrassas are to be decided by a commission.
It set aside Calcutta high court verdict declaring various provision of the law unconstitutional for being violative of Article 30.

Article 30:
It says all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

Observations made by the Supreme Court:
Good quality of education cannot be compromised in national interest irrespective of whether it is minority or majority educational institutions.
The essence of Article 30(1) is to ensure equal treatment between the majority and the minority institutions and that rules and regulations would apply equally to the majority institutions as well as to the minority institutions.

How to strike a “balance” between the two objectives of excellence in education and the preservation of the minorities’ right?
The court explains how to strike a “balance” between the two objectives of excellence in education and the preservation of the minorities’ right to run their educational institutions.
For this, the court broadly divides education into two categories — secular education and education “directly aimed at or dealing with preservation and protection of the heritage, culture, script and special characteristics of a religious or a linguistic minority.”
• When it comes to the latter, the court advocated “maximum latitude” to be given to the management to appoint teachers.
• The court reasons that only “teachers who believe in the religious ideology or in the special characteristics of the concerned minority would alone be able to imbibe in the students admitted in such educational institutions, what the minorities would like to preserve, profess and propagate.”
• However, minority institutions where the curriculum was “purely secular”, the intent must be to impart education availing the best possible teachers.

Constitutional Provisions regarding Minority Educational Institutions:
Article 30(1) recognizes linguistic and religious minorities but not those based on race, ethnicity. It recognizes the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions, in effect recognizing the role educational institutions play in preserving distinct culture. A majority community can also establish and administer educational institution but they will not enjoy special rights under Article 30(1)(a).

Special rights enjoyed by religious minority institutions are:
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1. Under Art 30(1)(a), MEI enjoy right to education as a Fundamental Right. In case the property is taken over by state, due compensation to be provided to establish institutions elsewhere
2. Under Article 15(5), MEIs are not considered for reservation
3. Under Right to Education Act, MEI not required to provide admission to children in the age group of 6-14 years upto 25% of enrolment reserved for economically backward section of society
4. In St Stephens vs Delhi University case, 1992, SC ruled that MEIs can have 50% seats reserved for minorities
5. In TMA Pai & others vs State of Karnataka & others 2002 case, SC ruled that MEIs can have separate admission process which is fair, transparent and merit based. They can also separate fee structure but should not charge capitation fee.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Eighth Schedule

What to study?
For Prelims: Eighth schedule.
For Mains: Need for and significance of recognition of languages.

Context: A case for including Tulu in the Eighth Schedule.

Why Tulu should be given a place in eighth schedule?
Tulu is a textbook example of linguistic discrimination.
- Tulu is a Dravidian language whose speakers are concentrated in two coastal districts of Karnataka and in Kasaragod district of Kerala. Kasaragod district is called ‘Sapta bhasha Samagama Bhumi (the confluence of seven languages)’, and Tulu is among the seven.
- The Census reports 18,46,427 native speakers of Tulu in India. The Tulu-speaking people are larger in number than speakers of Manipuri and Sanskrit, which have the Eighth Schedule status.
- Robert Caldwell (1814-1891), in his book, A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages, called Tulu as “one of the most highly developed languages of the Dravidian family”.
- The present-day Tulu linguistic majority area is confined to the region of Tulu Nadu, which comprises the districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi in Karnataka and the northern part of Kasaragod district of Kerala up to the river Payaswani, or Chandragiri. The cities of Mangaluru, Udupi and Kasaragod are the epicentres of Tulu culture.

Why the demand?
Efforts are being made to include Tulu in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. If included in the Eighth Schedule, Tulu would get recognition from the Sahitya Akademi. Tulu books would be translated into other recognised Indian languages. Members of Parliament and MLAs could speak in Tulu in Parliament and State Assemblies, respectively. Candidates could write all-India competitive examinations like the Civil Services exam in Tulu.

Linguistic diversity of India:
- According to the 2001 Census, India has 30 languages that are spoken by more than a million people each.
- Additionally, it has 122 languages that are spoken by at least 10,000 people each.
- It also has 1,599 languages, most of which are dialects. These are restricted to specific regions and many of them are on the verge of extinction.
- India must accommodate this plethora of languages in its cultural discourse and administrative apparatus.

Right to Conserve?
Article 29 of the Constitution provides that a section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same.

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Background:
The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India lists the official languages of the Republic of India. As per Articles 344(1) and 351 of the Indian Constitution, the eighth schedule includes the recognition of the following 22 languages.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Curative petition

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Meaning of curative petition.

Context: Curative petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court by two convicts in the Nirbhaya case. The petitions come just days after a Delhi sessions court scheduled the execution of the four convicts at Tihar Jail on January 22.

What is curative petition?
It is the last judicial resort available for redressal of grievances in court which is normally decided by judges in-chamber. It is only in rare cases that such petitions are given an open-court hearing.

- The concept of curative petition was first evolved by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and Anr. (2002) where the question was whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after dismissal of a review petition.
- The Supreme Court in the said case held that in order to prevent abuse of its process and to cure gross miscarriage of justice, it may reconsider its judgements in exercise of its inherent powers. For this purpose, the Court has devised what has been termed as a “curative” petition.

To entertain the curative petitions, the Supreme Court has laid down certain specific conditions:

1. The petitioner will have to establish that there was a genuine violation of principles of natural justice and fear of the bias of the judge and judgement that adversely affected him.
2. The petition shall state specifically that the grounds mentioned had been taken in the review petition and that it was dismissed by circulation.
3. The petition is to be sent to the three senior most judges and judges of the bench who passed the judgement affecting the petition, if available.
4. If the majority of the judges on the above bench agree that the matter needs hearing, then it would be sent to the same bench (as far as possible) and the court could impose “exemplary costs” to the petitioner if his plea lacks merit.

Constitutional provisions in this regard:
Article- 137 of the Constitution subjects to the provisions of the guidelines made under Article 145, by which it is clear that the Supreme Court has the ability to review any judgment declared by it.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Private property is a human right: Supreme Court

What to study?
For Prelims: Right to property.
For Mains: Observations made by the court and their significance.

Context: The Supreme Court has recently held that a citizen’s right to own private property is a human right and the state cannot take possession of it without following due procedure and authority of law.

Important observations made by the Court:
1. The state cannot trespass into the private property of a citizen and then claim ownership of the land in the name of ‘adverse possession’.
2. Grabbing private land and then claiming it as its own makes the state an encroacher.
3. In a welfare state, right to property is a human right.
4. A welfare state cannot be permitted to take the plea of adverse possession, which allows a trespasser i.e. a person guilty of a tort, or even a crime, to gain legal title over such property for over 12 years. The State cannot be permitted to perfect its title over the land by invoking the doctrine of adverse possession to grab the property of its own citizens.

**What’s the issue?**
The Himachal Pradesh government forcibly took over four acres of land belonging to a person at Hamipur district to build a road in 1967.
Even 52 years later, the state has failed to pay the compensation.
The appellant was wholly unaware of her rights and entitlement in law, and did not file any proceedings for compensation of the land compulsorily taken over by the state.
When her petition was turned down by the High Court, the appellant moved the Supreme Court.

**Right to Property:**
‘Right to private property was previously a fundamental right’ under Article 31 of the Constitution. Property ceased to be a fundamental right with the 44th Constitution Amendment in 1978. Nevertheless, Article 300A required the state to follow due procedure and authority of law to deprive a person of his or her private property.
The right to property is now considered to be not only a constitutional or statutory right, but also a human right.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 5. Centre-state disputes and Article 131

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: All about Article 131 and Supreme Court’s jurisdiction.*
*For Mains: Cooperative federalism- need, challenges and concerns.*

**Context:** Kerala has become the first state to challenge the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) before the Supreme Court under Article 131 of the Constitution.
Besides, Chhattisgarh government has also filed a suit in the Supreme Court under Article 131, challenging the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act on the ground that it encroaches upon the state’s powers to maintain law and order.

**So, What is Article 131?**
Under Article 131 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction to deal with any dispute between the Centre and a state; the Centre and a state on the one side and another state on the other side; and two or more states.

**Criteria:**
- For a dispute to qualify as a dispute under Article 131, it has to necessarily be between states and the Centre, and must involve a question of law or fact on which the existence of a legal right of the state or the Centre depends.
- In a 1978 judgment, State of Karnataka v Union of India, Justice P N Bhagwati had said that for the Supreme Court to accept a suit under Article 131, the state need not show that its legal right is violated, but only that the dispute involves a legal question.
- Article 131 cannot be used to settle political differences between state and central governments headed by different parties.

**Facts for Prelims:**
www.insightsonindia.com
The Supreme Court has three kinds of jurisdictions: original, appellate and advisory.

1. Under its **advisory jurisdiction**, the President has the power to seek an opinion from the apex court under Article 143 of the Constitution.
2. Under its **appellate jurisdiction**, the Supreme Court hears appeals from lower courts.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 6. Powers of Speaker under 10th schedule

**What to study?**
- **For Prelims:** 10th schedule.
- **For Mains:** Need for a permanent mechanism - challenges and measures.

**Context:** The Supreme Court has recently held that *disqualification petitions under the tenth schedule should be adjudicated by a mechanism outside Parliament or Legislative Assemblies.*

**What has the court suggested?**
The Court has suggested *a permanent tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or a former High Court Chief Justice as a new mechanism.* This would require an amendment to the Constitution.

**Background:**
The suggestion for devising an independent mechanism to deal with disqualification pleas against lawmakers came in a judgment by which the top court asked the Manipur assembly speaker to decide within four weeks the plea of a Congress leader seeking disqualification of BJP lawmaker and Manipur forest minister Th Shyamkumar.

**Need for independent mechanism:**
- Currently, disqualification of members of a House/Assembly is referred to the Speaker of the House/Assembly. But, *speaker also belongs to a political party.*
- The Court held that only swift and impartial disqualification of defectors would give “real teeth” to the Tenth Schedule.

**What has the court said on time frame to decide?**
The Speakers should decide Tenth Schedule disqualifications within a “reasonable period”. What is ‘reasonable’ would depend on the facts of each case.
The Court held that unless there are “exceptional circumstances”, *disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be decided by Speakers within three months.*

**Disqualification under the Tenth Schedule:**
The *Anti-Defection Law* was passed in 1985 through the 52nd amendment to the Constitution. It added the *Tenth Schedule* to the Indian Constitution.

According to it, *a member of a House belonging to any political party becomes disqualified for being a member of the House, if:*

1. He voluntarily gives up his membership of such political party; or
2. He votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party without obtaining prior permission of such party and such act has not been condoned by the party within 15 days.
3. An independent candidate joins a political party after the election.
4. A nominated member joins a party six months after he becomes a member of the legislature.

**Exceptions to the disqualification on the ground of defection:**
1. If a member goes out of his party as a result of a merger of the party with another party. A merger takes place when two-thirds of the members of the party have agreed to such merger.
2. If a member, after being elected as the presiding officer of the House, voluntarily gives up the membership of his party or rejoins it after he ceases to hold that office.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. 71st Republic Day

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Republic Day- significance and things showcased.


Guest of Honour: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.
- Bolsonaro is the third Brazilian President to be invited as Chief Guest for India’s Republic Day Parade.
- Before him, India hosted President Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1996 and President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in 2004, as chief guests for the Republic Day Parade.

Why January 26th?
The Constitution came into effect on January 26, 1950, a date specially chosen to coincide with the anniversary of ‘Purna Swaraj Diwas’.
January 26, 1930 was marked as ‘Purna Swaraj Diwas’, or the day the nation would attain complete freedom from its colonisers by the Congress.
- The members of the drafting committee felt that the birth of the constitution should be observed on a day that held some significance in their fight for independence.
- When India was ultimately granted freedom by the British in 1947, but on August 15 and not January 26, the date was instead assigned to celebrating India’s Republic Day.
- This was the day the Indian Independence Act was consequently repealed and India was established as a democratic republic, no longer a dominion of the British Crown.

What was showcased at the parade?
1. Dhanush Artillery Gun.
2. Rafale and Tejas aircrafts.
5. Meghalaya – Living Root Bridge.

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. Kerala becomes first state to pass anti-CAA resolution

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

Context: Kerala has become the first state in India to pass a resolution demanding rollback of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Why? – Kerala’s arguments:
The CAA act contradicts the basic values and principles of the Constitution.
It is against the "secular" outlook and fabric of the country and would lead to religion-based discrimination in granting citizenship.
Background:
The Parliament had passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019 on December 11, 2019. The act had triggered widespread protests across India and created fear of discrimination based on religion. Kerala has already put on hold all the activities in connection with the National Population Register (NPR) considering the anxiety among people that it relates to the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

What’s the issue now?
The Centre has clarified that the CAA act will not impact any Indian citizen including Muslims. The clarification has failed to have any impact on the protests, with many states announcing that they will not implement the law.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019:
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.

Why is it criticised?
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. It 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. It 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.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal

What to study?
For prelims: Geographical location of SYL canal and associated rivers.
For mains: Dispute over the construction of this canal, concerns and what needs to be done?

Punjab has also demanded that suitable amendments be made to the proposed Inter State River Water Disputes Act to set up a new tribunal, to ensure that Punjab gets adequate water "in a just and equitable manner in keeping with its total demand and securing livelihood of the future generations."
Meanwhile, Haryana has said that the Supreme Court decision on the Sutlej Yamuna link (SYL) canal issue will come soon because in the previous execution order, it was stated that the issue should be resolved amicably.

What is the Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal, and the controversy over it?

Historical background:
1. The creation of Haryana from the old (undivided) Punjab in 1966 threw up the problem of giving Haryana its share of river waters.
2. Punjab was opposed to sharing waters of the Ravi and Beas with Haryana, citing riparian principles, and arguing that it had no water to spare.
3. However, Centre, in 1976, issued a notification allocating to Haryana 3.5 million acre feet (MAF) out of undivided Punjab’s 7.2 MAF.
4. **The Eradi Tribunal** headed by Supreme Court Judge V Balakrishna Eradi was set up to reassess availability and sharing of water. The Tribunal, in 1987, recommended an increase in the shares of Punjab and Haryana to 5 MAF and 3.83 MAF, respectively.

The canal:
To enable Haryana to use its share of the waters of the Sutlej and its tributary Beas, a canal linking the Sutlej with the Yamuna, cutting across the state, was planned.

A **tripartite agreement** was also negotiated between Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan in this regard. The Satluj Yamuna Link Canal is a proposed 214-kilometer long canal to connect the Sutlej and Yamuna rivers. However, the proposal met obstacles and was referred to the Supreme Court. It defines river water sharing between Punjab and Haryana.

Background:
Haryana has been seeking the completion of the SYL canal to get its share of 3.5 million acre-feet of river waters. It has maintained that Punjab should comply with the 2002 and 2004 Supreme Court orders in this regard. Haryana is getting 1.62 million acre-feet of the Ravi-Beas waters.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. SC verdict on internet shutdowns

*What to study?*
For Prelims: Section 144, Article 19.
For Mains: The verdict, significance and lessons.

*Context:* Supreme Court has delivered the verdict on a clutch of petitions challenging the Union government’s decision to impose restrictions on the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir after the August 5 revocation of provisions of Article 370, giving special status to the state. The Court said that all restrictive orders under **Section 144 of CrPC and suspension of internet services** in Jammu and Kashmir have to be reviewed by the administration within a week.

*Implications:*
The verdict has laid down a framework of how the Internet can be suspended, and what rights and legal recourses a citizen has when it is suspended.

*What’s the issue?*
Many parts of Jammu and Kashmir have been under lockdown for five months now - with no internet and restrictions on movement. The internet shutdown in Kashmir is the longest in any democracy in the world. The Union government decided to impose restrictions on the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir after the **August 5 revocation of provisions of Article 370**, giving special status to the state.

*Observations made by the Court:*
**On internet restrictions:**
The Supreme Court on 10 January said, Right to access the internet is a fundamental right (subject to reasonable restrictions) included in the freedom of expression under **Article 19 of the Indian Constitution.** Restrictions on fundamental rights could not be in exercise of arbitrary powers. These freedoms could only be restricted as a last resort if “relevant factors” have been considered and no other options are there. Any order passed to restrict or suspend judicial scrutiny will be subject to judicial scrutiny.
Suspension of internet services indefinitely is also a violation of telecom rules.

On section 144:
1. Sec 144 cannot be used to suppress the legitimate expression of opinion or grievance, or the exercise of democratic rights.
2. When Sec 144 is imposed for reasons of apprehended danger, that danger must be an “emergency”.
3. The imposition of Sec 144 must strike a balance between the rights of the individual and the concerns of the state.
4. Powers under Sec 144 should be exercised in a reasonable and bona fide manner, and the order must state material facts in order to enable judicial review.

Criticisms:
Restrictions have virtually abrogated the fundamental rights and paralyzed the lives of seven million people in the region. These restrictions have been imposed under the garb of public tranquillity, public order and national security, but national security does not appear in the order imposing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code in the region.
The shutdown of internet services have severe consequences on business, trade and heavily affect the common people in the region.
India also tops the list of Internet shutdowns globally. According to Software Freedom Law Center’s tracker, there have been 381 shutdowns since 2012, 106 of which were in 2019.

What procedure does the government follow to suspend Internet services?
The Information Technology Act, 2000, the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973 and the Telegraph Act, 1885 are the three laws that deal with suspension of Internet services.
But before 2017, Internet suspension orders were issued under section 14 of the CrPC.
In 2017, the central government notified the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Service) Rules under the Telegraph Act to govern suspension of Internet. These Rules derive their powers from Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, which talks about interception of messages in the “interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India”.
Despite the 2017 rules, the government has often used the broad powers under Section 144.

So, what does the judgment say on the rules to be followed?
The court recognised that the 2017 Rules are the only procedure to be followed to suspend Internet services in the occurrence of a “public emergency” or for it to be “in the interest of public safety”.
1. The verdict reiterated that the competent authority to issue an order under the Suspension Rules, in ordinary circumstances, would be the Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. The Rules also say that in case the confirmation does not come from a competent authority, the orders shall cease to exist within a period of 24 hours.
3. Clear reasons for such orders need to be given in writing, and need to be forwarded to a Review Committee by the next working day.
4. The confirmation must not be a mere formality, but must indicate independent application of mind by the competent authority to the order passed by the authorised officer, who must also take into account changed circumstances if any, etc.

Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services [Public Emergency or Public Service] Rules, 2017:
- According to these rules, only the Home Secretary of the country and a secretary of a state’s home department can pass such an order.
- These also state that any such order should be taken up by a review committee within five days.

For an overview of Section 144, refer: https://www.insightsonindia.com/2019/12/23/section-144-crpc/.

Sources: the Hindu.
2. What is National Investigation Agency Act, and why is Chhattisgarh challenging it?

What to study?
For Prelims: NIA Act- key features.
For Mains: Need for, concerns and measures to address them.

Context: Chhattisgarh government has moved the Supreme Court against the National Investigation Act, 2008 stating it is violative of the Constitution.

What is NIA Act?
• The law governs the functioning of India’s premier counter-terror agency. It was passed in the wake of the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks.
• It makes the National Investigation Agency the only truly federal agency in the country, along the lines of the FBI in the United States, more powerful than the CBI.
• It gives the NIA powers to take suo motu cognisance of terror activities in any part of India and register a case, to enter any state without permission from the state government, and to investigate and arrest people.

Objections by Chhattisgarh:
• In its petition, the Chhattisgarh government said the Act “ultra vires the Constitution” and “beyond the legislative competence of the Parliament”.
• According to the state, the 2008 Act allows the Centre to create an agency for investigation, which is a function of the state police. ‘Police’ is an entry in the State List of the Constitution’s 7th Schedule.
• The Act takes away the state’s power of conducting an investigation through the police, while conferring “unfettered, discretionary and arbitrary powers” on the Centre.

The 2019 NIA Amendment Act:
It expanded the type of offences that the investigative body could investigate and prosecute. The agency can now investigate offences related to human trafficking, counterfeit currency, manufacture or sale of prohibited arms, cyber-terrorism, and offences under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.
The amendment also enables the central government to designate sessions courts as special courts for NIA trials.
It also allows an NIA officer to conduct raids, and seize properties that are suspected to be linked to terrorist activities without taking prior permission of the Director General of Police of a state. The investigating officer only requires sanction from the Director General of NIA.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Parliamentary Privileges

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: All about Parliamentary Privileges, Privilege motion and privilege committee.

Context: A Rajya Sabha member has filed a petition with the Chairman of the House seeking to initiate breach of privileges and contempt proceedings against the Chief Minister of Kerala after the Kerala Assembly passed a resolution against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

What are they?
Parliamentary privileges are certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament, individually and collectively, so that they can “effectively discharge their functions”.
Parliamentary privileges are defined in Article 105 of the Indian Constitution and those of State legislatures in Article 194.
When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is punishable under law of Parliament. Besides, Rule No 222 in Chapter 20 of the Lok Sabha Rule Book and correspondingly Rule 187 in Chapter 16 of the Rajya Sabha rulebook govern privilege.

Privileges of Parliamentarians:

1. Freedom of Speech:
According to the Indian Constitution, the members of Parliament enjoy freedom of speech and expression. No member can be taken to task anywhere outside the four walls of the House (e.g. court of law) or cannot be discriminated against for expressing his/her views in the House and its Committees.

2. Freedom from Arrest:
It is understood that no member shall be arrested in a civil case 40 days before and after the adjournment of the House (Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha) and also when the House is in session. It also means that no member can be arrested within the precincts of the Parliament without the permission of the House to which he/she belongs.

3. Exemption from attendance as witnesses:
The members of Parliament also enjoy freedom from attendance as witnesses.

Privileges of Parliament:

Right to publish debates and proceedings:
• Though by convention, the Parliament does not prohibit the press to publish its proceedings, yet technically the House has every such right to forbid such publication.
• Again, while a member has the privilege of freedom of speech in Parliament, he has no right to publish it outside Parliament.
• Anyone violating this rule can be held responsible for any libellous matter it may contain under the common law rules.

Right to exclude strangers:
Each house of Parliament enjoys the right to exclude strangers (no-members or visitors) from the galleries at any time and to resolve to debate with closed doors.

Right to punish members and outsiders for breach of its privileges:
• In India, the Parliament has been given punitive powers to punish those who are adjudged guilty of contempt of the House.
• Such contempt can be committed by the members of any House or any outsider. When a member of the House is involved for parliamentary misbehaviour or commits contempt he can be expelled from the House.

Right to regulate the internal affairs of the House:
The House has the right to regulate its internal affairs. A member of the House is free to say whatever he likes subject only to the internal discipline of the House or the Committee concerned.

What is the privileges committee?
In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker nominates a committee of privileges consisting of 15 members as per respective party strengths. A report is then presented to the House for its consideration. The Speaker may permit a half-hour debate while considering the report. The Speaker may then pass final orders or direct that the report be tabled before the House.
A resolution may then be moved relating to the breach of privilege that has to be unanimously passed. In the Rajya Sabha, the deputy chairperson heads the committee of privileges, that consists of 10 members.

Sources: the Hindu.
2. Legislative Council

What to study?
For Prelims: Features, composition and formation of legislative councils.
For Mains: Significance and issues related.

Context: Andhra Pradesh Cabinet has approved a statutory resolution seeking the abolition of the Legislative Council.

Background:
The Vidhan Parishad of united Andhra Pradesh was created on July 1, 1958, and dissolved on May 31, 1985. It was resurrected after 22 years, on March 30, 2007. Since the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the Council has had 58 members.

Councils in other states:
Besides Andhra Pradesh, five other states have Vidhan Parishads — Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, UP. Jammu and Kashmir had a Council until the state was bifurcated into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

What are the Legislative Councils, and why are they important?
India has a bicameral system i.e., two Houses of Parliament. At the state level, the equivalent of the Lok Sabha is the Vidhan Sabha or Legislative Assembly; that of the Rajya Sabha is the Vidhan Parishad or Legislative Council.

Why do we need a second house?
1. To act as a check on hasty actions by the popularly elected House.
2. To ensure that individuals who might not be cut out for the rough-and-tumble of direct elections too are able to contribute to the legislative process.
3. Having a second chamber would allow for more debate and sharing of work between the Houses.

Arguments against having a second house:
1. Rather than fulfilling the lofty objective of getting intellectuals into the legislature, the forum is likely to be used to accommodate party functionaries who fail to get elected.
2. It is also an unnecessary drain on the exchequer.
3. Unlike Rajya Sabha which has substantial powers to shape non-financial legislation, Legislative Councils lack the constitutional mandate to do so. Legislative Assemblies have the power to override suggestions/amendments made to a legislation by the Council.
4. While Rajya Sabha MPs can vote in the election of the President and Vice-President, members of Legislative Councils can’t. MLCs also can’t vote in the elections of Rajya Sabha members.
5. As regards Money bills, only fourteen days’ delay can be caused by the Council, which is more or less a formality rather than a barrier in the way of Money Bill passed by the Assembly.

How is a legislative council created?
Under Article 169 of the constitution, Parliament may by law create or abolish the second chamber in a state if the Legislative Assembly of that state passes a resolution to that effect by a special majority.

Strength of the house:
As per article 171 clause (1) of the Indian Constitution, the total number of members in the legislative council of a state shall not exceed one third of the total number of the members in the legislative Assembly of that state and the total number of members in the legislative council of a state shall in no case be less than 40.

How are members of the Council elected?
1. 1/3rd of members are elected by members of the Assembly.
2. 1/3rd by electorates consisting of members of municipalities, district boards and other local authorities in the state.
3. 1/12th by an electorate consisting of teachers.
4. 1/12th by registered graduates.
5. The remaining members are nominated by the Governor from among those who have distinguished themselves in literature, science, art, the cooperative movement, and social service.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. President’s address to both Houses of Parliament

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: President’s address- what, when and how? Significance and other key features.

Context: On first day of the Budget Session of Parliament, President Ram Nath Kovind will address a joint sitting of the two Houses.

What does the Constitution say about this?
Article 87(1) says: “At the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year the President shall address both Houses of Parliament assembled together and inform Parliament of the causes of its summons.”

First Constitutional Amendment: Originally, the Constitution required the President to address both Houses of Parliament at the commencement of “every session”. This requirement was changed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

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

What procedures follow the address?
After the President or Governor delivers the address, a debate takes place not only on the contents of the address but also the broad issues of governance in the country. This then paves the way for discussion on the Budget.

If the President disagrees with the text of the speech, are they still bound to read it?
The President or a Governor cannot refuse to perform the constitutional duty of delivering an address to the legislature. But there can be situations when they deviate from the text of the speech prepared by the government.

So far, there have been no instances of President doing so. But there has been an occasion when a Governor skipped a portion of the address to the Assembly.

- In 1969, the Governor of West Bengal, Dharma Vira, skipped two paragraphs of the address prepared by the United Front government. The skipped portion described as unconstitutional the dismissal of the first United Front government by the Congress-ruled central government.

Are there parallels in other countries?
Similar provisions exist in other democracies.

1. In the United States, it is referred to as the “State of the Union”. The phrase comes from an article in the US Constitution which specifies that the President, “from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.”

2. In the United Kingdom, it is referred to as the Queen’s Speech and is part of the ceremony to mark the formal start of the parliamentary year.

Sources: Indian Express.
### Topics: Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act.

#### 1. Political Parties Registration Tracking Management System

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

**What is it?**
It is a new online tracking system for political parties launched recently by the Election Commission of India.

**Key features:**
- It will allow them to track their registration applications submitted to the poll panel on a real-time basis.
- It will apply for parties registering from January 1, 2020.

**How it works?**
It will enable those applying for the party registration from January 1 to track the progress of their application using the system. The users will get status updates through SMS and e-mail.

**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.

Sources: the Hindu.

#### 2. Criminalization of Politics

**What to study?**
For Prelims: Salient features of RPA.
For Mains: Criminalisation of politics - concerns, challenges and solutions.

**Context:** SC asks EC to devise mechanism to curb criminalization of politics.
The court also asked the poll body to come up with a framework within one week, which can contribute towards the larger issue of containing the entry of candidates having criminal background into politics.

**Need for:**
Fielding candidates with criminal antecedents has been one of the key concerns in the recent elections.
The extent of this can be understood from the fact that according to an analysis by New Delhi based Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), nearly half the MPs of the 17th Lok Sabha elected in May last year had declared criminal cases against them.
Out of the 539 MPs which ADR analysed, 233 had declared criminal cases against them which was an increase of 44% in the number of MPs with declared criminal cases since 2009.
In its analysis released in May last year, ADR added that out of the 542 MPs analysed during Lok Sabha polls in 2014, 34% or 185 had declared criminal cases against themselves while out of 543 in 2009, 30% or 162 had declared criminal cases against themselves.

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

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Efforts by SC in this regard:
The SC has repeatedly expressed concern about the purity of legislatures.
1. In 2002, it made it obligatory for all candidates to file an affidavit before the returning officer, disclosing criminal cases pending against them.
2. The famous order to introduce NOTA was intended to make political parties think before giving tickets to the tainted.
3. In its landmark judgment of March 2014, the SC accepted the urgent need for cleansing politics of criminalisation and directed all subordinate courts to decide on cases involving legislators within a year, or give reasons for not doing so to the chief justice of the high court.

Main reasons for Criminalization:
1. Corruption
2. Vote bank.
3. Lack of governance.

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

Other suggested measure to curb criminalization of politics:
1. Bringing greater transparency in campaign financing is going to make it less attractive for political parties to involve gangsters.
2. The Election Commission of India (ECI) should have the power to audit the financial accounts of political parties.
3. Broader governance will have to improve for voters to reduce the reliance on criminal politicians.
4. The Election Commission must take adequate measures to break the nexus between the criminals and the politicians.

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

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Who is a star campaigner?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Who is a star campaigner? Significance, removal, implications.

Context: The Election Commission (EC) has removed BJP leaders Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma from the party’s list of star campaigners.

Background: The move comes after Thakur encouraged the crowd at a rally this week to chant “desh ke gaddaron ko goli maaro (gun down traitors)” and Singh, in an interview, claimed that Shaheen Bagh protestors could “enter homes and rape sisters and daughters”.

Who is a star campaigner? How are they chosen?
A recognised political party can have 40 star campaigners and an unrecognised (but registered) political party can have 20.

The list of star campaigners has to be communicated to the Chief Electoral Officer and Election Commission within a week from the date of notification of an election.

**Advantages:**
The expenditure incurred on campaigning by such campaigners is **exempt from being added to the election expenditure of a candidate**. However, this only applies when a star campaigner limits herself to a general campaign for the political party she represents. Candidates **cannot afford to breach their expenditure limit (Rs 28 lakh in case of Delhi elections).**

**What if a star campaigner campaigns specifically for one candidate?**

1. If a candidate or her election agent shares the stage with a star campaigner at a rally, then the entire expenditure on that rally, other than the travel expenses of the star campaigner, is added to the candidate’s expenses.
2. Even if the candidate is not present at the star campaigner’s rally, but there are posters with her photographs or her name on display, the entire expenditure will be added to the candidate’s account.
3. This applies even if the star campaigner mentions the candidate’s name during the event. When more than one candidate shares the stage, or there are posters with their photographs, then the expenses of such rally/meeting are equally divided between all such candidates.

**Does removal from the star campaigner’s list bar them from campaigning?**
No, that decision will only be taken by the EC once the barred leaders reply to the showcase notices served to them. However, the removal from the star campaigner’s list does **make campaigning difficult for them.** This is because whichever constituency they hold their election meeting or rally at, irrespective of whether they limit themselves to general party propaganda or not, **the entire expenditure of the event will be added to the account of the candidate contesting from that seat.**

Sources: Indian Express.

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

1. **Zonal Councils**

   **What to study?**
   **For Prelims and Mains: Particulars and significance of Zonal Councils.**

   **Context:** The **25th meeting of the western zonal council** will be held in January 2020. **Maharashtra will be the lead coordinator** this time.

   **Zonal councils:**
   **Statutory bodies** established under **the States Reorganisation Act 1956** and not constitutional bodies. They are only deliberative and advisory bodies. **Aim:** to promote interstate cooperation and coordination.

   **There are five Zonal councils namely:**
   2. The Central Zonal Council, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
   3. The Eastern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.
   4. The Western Zonal Council, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
   5. The Southern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.
The North Eastern States i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya (vii) Sikkim and (viii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.

**Composition:**

**Chairman** – The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.

**Vice Chairman** – The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.

**Members** – Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.

**Advisers** – One person nominated by the Planning Commission (which has been replaced by NITI Ayog now) for each of the Zonal Councils, Chief Secretaries and another officer/Development Commissioner nominated by each of the States included in the Zone.

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

**The main objectives of setting up of Zonal Councils are:**

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

Sources: pib.

### 2. National Startup Advisory Council

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: NSAC- objectives, composition and functions.*

**Context:** The Union Government has notified the structure of the National Startup Advisory Council to advice on measures needed to build a strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and startups in the country.

**Composition:**

The Council will be chaired by Minister for Commerce & Industry.

- It will consist of the non-official members, to be nominated by Central Government, from various categories like founders of successful startups, veterans and persons capable of representing interests of incubators and accelerators etc.
- The term of the non-official members of the Startup Advisory Council will be for a period of two years.
- The nominees of the concerned Ministries/Departments/Organisations, not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India, will be ex-officio members of the Council.
- Joint Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade will be the Convener of the Council.

**Roles and functions:**

1. Suggest measures to foster a culture of innovation amongst citizens and students in particular, promote innovation in all sectors of economy across the country.
2. Suggest measures to facilitate public organizations to assimilate innovation with a view to improving public service delivery, promote creation, protection and commercialization of intellectual property rights.
3. Suggest making it easier to start, operate, grow and exit businesses by reducing regulatory compliances and costs, promote ease of access to capital for startups, and incentivize domestic capital for investments into startups.
4. Mobilize global capital for investments in Indian startups, keep control of startups with original promoters and provide access to global markets for Indian startups.

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: NCIM- objectives, composition and functions.

Context: The Union Cabinet has given its approval for proposal of Official Amendments in the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2019 (NCIM).

About NCIM and it’s objectives:
The main objective of establishing NCIM is to promote equity by ensuring adequate supply of quality medical professionals and enforce high ethical standards in all aspects of medical services in Indian System of Medicine.

- The Commission will promote availability of affordable healthcare services in all parts of the country.
- The Commission has been structured to streamline the functions related to academic standards, evaluation, assessment and accreditation of educational institutions pertaining to Indian System of Medicine.

Composition of NCIM:
1. The NCISM will consist of 29 members, appointed by the central government.
2. A Search Committee will recommend names to the central government for the post of Chairperson, part time members, and presidents of the four autonomous boards set up under the NCISM.
3. These posts will have a maximum term of four years.
4. The Search Committee will consist of five members including the Cabinet Secretary and three experts nominated by the central government (of which two should have experience in any of the fields of Indian System of Medicine).

Functions of the NCISM include:
1. Framing policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals of Indian System of Medicine.
2. Assessing the requirements of healthcare related human resources and infrastructure.
3. Ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils of Indian System of Medicine of the regulations made under the Bill.
4. Ensuring coordination among the autonomous boards set up under the Bill.

Sources: pib.

4. Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO (INCCU)

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: About INCCU- composition, objectives and functions.

What is it?
Initially Setup in 1949, it is a governmental body functioning under the Department of Secondary and Higher Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
A permanent Commission was established in 1951.
The objective of the Commission is to advise the Government in matters relating to the UNESCO.
The Constitution of the UNESCO mandates each member to form a national commission to function as agencies of liaison between the national government and UNESCO.

Composition:
- The Minister for Human Resource Development is the President of the Commission.
- The Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Higher Education is the Secretary-General of the Commission.
**Important functions:**
1. To promote understanding of the objects and purposes of UNESCO among the people of the Republic of India.
2. To serve as a liaison agency between the Government of India and the institutions concerned with the working for the advancement of education, science and culture.
3. To cooperate with the Government departments and with services, organizations and institutions concerned with questions within UNESCO’s competence.
4. To collaborate with the National Commissions of Asia and the Pacific and with UNESCO’s Regional Offices and centres in fostering regional, sub-regional and bilateral cooperation in education, the sciences, culture and information, particularly through the joint formulation and execution of programmes.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. **Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana**

   **What to study?**
   
   For Prelims: Key features of the Yojana.
   For Mains: Significance and challenges present and ways to address them.

   **Context:** Out of the total 790, only 252 Members of Parliament (MPs) have adopted gram panchayats under phase-4 of *Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY).*

   Since the launch of the scheme, only 1,753 gram panchayats have been selected across four phases, way below the expected figure.

   **About Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana:**
   Launched in 2014, it is a village development project under which each Member of Parliament will take the responsibility of developing physical and institutional infrastructure in three villages by 2019. The goal is to develop three Adarsh Grams or model villages by March 2019, of which one would be achieved by 2016. Thereafter, five such Adarsh Grams (one per year) will be selected and developed by 2024.

   The Project was launched on the occasion of birth anniversary of Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan.

   **Implementation:**
   1. The scheme will be implemented through a village development plan that would be prepared for every identified gram panchayat with special focus on enabling every poor household to come out of poverty.
   2. The constituency fund, MPLADS, would be available to fill critical financing gaps.
   3. The planning process in each village will be a participatory exercise coordinated by the District Collector. The MP will play an active facilitating role in this exercise.
   4. Adoption and adaptation of technology and introduction of innovations are critical to this programme. This will include use of space application and remote sensing for planning, mobile based technology for monitoring, agriculture technology for increasing productivity etc.
   5. At the state level there will be an Empowered Committee headed by the Chief Secretary consisting of the relevant Departments and including experts, as required with at least two Civil Society representatives.

**GRAM PANCHAYATS SELECTED BY MPs UNDER DIFFERENT PHASE OF SAGY AS ON 31.12.2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MPs adopted gram panchayats</th>
<th>Phase-1</th>
<th>Phase-2</th>
<th>Phase-3</th>
<th>Phase-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LSM MPs selected gram panchayats</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS MPs selected gram panchayats</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

133 | 62 | 44
6. **The district Collector will be the nodal officer for implementing the SAGY.** He will conduct a monthly review meeting with representatives of the participating Line Departments. The Members of Parliament concerned will chair the review meetings.

7. SAGY gives focus to community participation. **Social mobilization of village community** can trigger a chain of other development activities in the village.

Sources: The Hindu.

### 2. Farm loan waiver

**What to study?**

*For Prelims:* Which states announced farm loan waivers in last one year.

*For Mains:* Advantages and Disadvantages of farm loan waivers, the need for viable solution to farm distress.

**Context:** The new Maharashtra government has announced a loan waiver for farmers who had up to Rs 2 lakh in pending loans between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2019. Maharashtra thus became possibly the only state to have offered two consecutive farm loan waivers within two-and-a-half years of each other.

**Who is eligible?**

- Farmers with outstanding crop loan up to Rs 2 lakh, pending from April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2019.
- Farmers with more than Rs 2 lakh outstanding are not eligible for the scheme. Also, the scheme has no incentive for farmers who are regular in their repayments.
- Families with more than one loan account are eligible for waiver in each one of their accounts.

**Background:**

To help the farm sector, state governments have time and again announced loan waiver schemes. Back in 2008-09, the then UPA government at the Centre had announced a loan waiver scheme for the entire country. States like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and others have announced similar schemes in the recent past.

**Drawbacks of loan waivers:**

- Firstly, it **covers only a tiny fraction of farmers.** The loan waiver as a concept excludes most of the farm households in dire need of relief and includes some who do not deserve such relief on economic grounds.
- Second, it **provides only a partial relief to the indebted farmers** as about half of the institutional borrowing of a cultivator is for non-farm purposes.
- Third, **in many cases, one household has multiple loans** either from different sources or in the name of different family members, which entitles it to multiple loan waiving.
- Fourth, **loan waiving excludes agricultural labourers** who are even weaker than cultivators in bearing the consequences of economic distress.
- Fifth, **it severely erodes the credit culture,** with dire long-run consequences to the banking business.
- Sixth, **the scheme is prone to serious exclusion and inclusion errors,** as evidenced by the Comptroller and Auditor General’s (CAG) findings in the Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008.
- Lastly, schemes have serious **implications for other developmental expenditure,** having a much larger multiplier effect on the economy.

**Way ahead:**

The magic wand of a waiver can offer **temporary relief,** but long-term solutions are needed to solve farmer woes. There are many dimensions of the present agrarian crisis in India. The search for a solution therefore needs to be comprehensive by taking into consideration all the factors that contribute to the crisis. Furthermore, both short- and long-term measures are required to address the numerous problems associated with the agrarian crisis.

**What needs to be done?**

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**Proper identification:** For providing immediate relief to the needy farmers, a more inclusive alternative approach is to identify the vulnerable farmers based on certain criteria and give an equal amount as financial relief to the vulnerable and distressed families.

**Enhance non-farm income:** The sustainable solution to indebtedness and agrarian distress is to raise income from agricultural activities and enhance access to non-farm sources of income. The low scale of farms necessitates that some cultivators move from agriculture to non-farm jobs.

**Improved technology, expansion of irrigation coverage, and crop diversification** towards high-value crops are appropriate measures for raising productivity and farmers’ income. All these require more public funding and support.

**Observations made by RBI:**
As per RBI, loan waivers not only inhibit investment in the farm sector but put pressure on the fiscal of states which undertake farm loan waiver.
In every state election during the last five years, loan waiver promise made by one political party or other. Also, loan waivers, as the RBI has repeatedly argued, vitiate the credit culture, and stress the budgets of the waiving state or central government.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. Telcos seek open court hearing on 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:** Telecom companies, including Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, have urged an open court hearing of their petitions seeking a review of a Supreme Court judgment upholding the recovery of past dues amounting to ₹1.47 lakh crore from them.

**What is the issue?**
- On October 24 last year, dealing a huge blow to telecom service providers, the Court had upheld the Department of Telecom’s (DoT) move to recover **AGR of about ₹92,000 crore from the telcos.**
- The Court dismissed the telecom service providers’ objection to the government’s formulation of AGR.

**What is AGR?**
It 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.

The judgment had said that **the gross revenue would be inclusive of** installation charges, late fees, sale proceeds of handsets (or any other terminal equipment etc.), revenue on account of interest, dividend, value-added services, supplementary services, access or interconnection charges, roaming charges, revenue from permissible sharing of infrastructure and any other miscellaneous revenue, without any set-off for related item of expense, etc.

**Why the Court had upheld DOT’s move? - Observations made by the Court:**
- The telecom sector had long reaped the fruits of the Centre’s liberalised mode of payment by revenue sharing regime.
- The sector has benefited immensely under the scheme as apparent from the gross revenue trend from 2004 to 2015.
- But, the service providers had failed to fulfil their obligations to the government and raised frivolous objections.

Sources: the Hindu.
4. Northeast gas pipeline grid project

What to study?
For Prelims: Northeast gas pipeline grid project and Urja Ganga Project- key features.
For Mains: Significance and the need for such projects for India, especially for NE region India.

Context: Govt to provide ₹5,559 crore funding to northeast gas grid.

Northeast gas pipeline grid project:
The proposed gas pipeline grid will connect Guwahati to the major Northeast cities and major load centers. It is 1,656 km long. The project is being implemented under ambitious Urja Ganga Gas Pipeline Project.
- Besides connecting all the state capitals in the region, the pipeline will also connect with the National Gas Grid through Barauni-Guwahati Gas Pipeline, which is being laid by GAIL.
- The pipeline will enable the supply of piped cooking gas to households and CNG to automobiles, besides fuel to industry.

Implementation: The North-East pipeline grid is to be implemented by Indradhanush Gas Grid, a joint venture of state-owned GAIL India, Indian Oil Corp (IOC), Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), Oil India Ltd (OIL) and Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL).

About the Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga project:
The gas pipeline project aims to provide piped cooking gas to residents of Varanasi and later to millions of people in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha.
- From Varanasi’s perspective, an 800-km long MDPI pipeline will be laid and 50,000 households and 20,000 vehicles will get PNG and CNG gas respectively. The government estimates that around 5 lakh gas cylinders will be sent at rural areas annually.
- According to GAIL, with the Urja Ganga project, 20 lakh households will get PNG connections. The project is said to be a major step towards collective growth and development of the Eastern region of India.
- GAIL has built a network of trunk pipelines covering the length of around 11,000 km. With Urja Ganga project, this number will further increase by 2540 km.

Significance:
The funding support to the gas grid is a part of a broader goal of the government to raise the share of natural gas in the country’s energy mix to 15% by 2030 from current 6.2%.
The government has envisaged developing the National Gas Grid. At present, about 16,788 km natural gas pipeline is operational and about 14,239 km gas pipelines are being developed to increase the availability of natural gas across the country.

The objectives of the National Gas Grid are:
1. To remove regional imbalance within the country with regard to access for natural gas and provide clean and green fuel throughout the country.
2. To connect gas sources to major demand centres and ensure availability of gas to consumers in various sectors.
3. Development of City Gas Distribution Networks in various cities for the supply of CNG and PNG.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Overview of the ordinance, how is coal mining regulated in India? Current challenges and ways to address them.
Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the promulgation of Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020 that will amend the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957 and Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act 2015.

Under the ordinance:
1. Allocation of coal/ignite blocks for composite prospecting licence cum mining lease has been provided. 
2. Requirement of previous approval in cases where allocation of blocks was made by Central Govt has been dispensed with.  
3. This will speed up the process of implementation of projects, ease of doing business, simplification of procedure and benefit all the parties in areas where minerals are located.

Background:
• In 2018, the government had allowed commercial mining by private entities but non-coal companies couldn’t participate in the auction. 
• In August 2019, the government announced 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) under the automatic route in coal mining for open sale, besides creating associated infrastructure, such as washeries.

Implications of this move- significance:
• This opens up the sector to players outside steel and power as well as removes end-use restrictions.  
• It will create an efficient energy market and bring in more competition as well as reduce coal imports. India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal last year, of which 135 mt valued at Rs 171,000 crore could have been met from domestic reserves.
• It might also put an end to Coal India Ltd’s monopoly in the sector.
• It would also help India gain access to high-end technology for underground mining used by miners across the globe.

New mining target:
In 2018, the government allowed commercial mining by private entities and set a mining target of 1.5 billion tonnes by 2020. Out of this, 1 billion tonnes was set to be from Coal India, while 500 million tonnes was to be from non-Coal India entities. This target has now been revised to 1 billion tonnes by 223-24.

Who grants permission for mining?
The state governments grant permission for mining, known as mineral concessions, for all the minerals located within the boundary of the state, under the provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and Mineral Concession Rules, 1960. However, for minerals specified in the First Schedule to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, Central government approval is necessary before granting the mineral concession. Minerals specified under the First Schedule include hydrocarbons, atomic minerals and metallic minerals such as iron ore, bauxite copper-ore, lead precious stones, zinc and gold.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019

What to study?
For Prelims: Definitions included and key features of the bill.
For Mains: Significance, criticisms and the need for a comprehensive review.


Impact:
This 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.

**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. The Act 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. It 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 Act, *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. *Composition*: The committee would comprise a medical officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, a government official, and a transgender person.

**Criticisms:**
The Act is *silent on granting reservations to transgender persons*. It has prescribed *punishments for organised begging*. However, the Act *doesn’t provide anything to better to condition in those areas*, it doesn’t provide for reservation. It also *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.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 7. Open Acreage Licensing Policy

**What to study?**
For Prelims: OALP, HELP. 
For Mains: Need for HELP and its significance.

**Context**: Government has launched the bidding process offering 11 areas in oil and gas blocks under *Open Acreage Licensing Policy Round-V (OALP-V)*.

**What is Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)?**
A critical part of the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy. Provides *uniform licences for exploration and production of all forms of hydrocarbons*, enabling contractors to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources.

**Revenue-sharing model:**
Fields are offered under a *revenue-sharing model* and throw up marketing and pricing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced.

**How it works?**
Under the OALP, once an explorer selects areas after evaluating *the National Data Repository (NDR)* and submits the EoI, it is to be put up for competitive bidding and *the entity offering the maximum share of oil and gas to the government is awarded the block*. 

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**What is NDR?**
NDR has been created to provide explorers’ data on the country’s repositories, allowing them to choose fields according to their capabilities. Data received through the National Seismic Programme, an in-depth study of 26 sedimentary basins, are continuously being added to the NDR.

**What is HELP?**
The Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) replacing the erstwhile New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) was approved in March 2016. The main features of HELP are Revenue Sharing Contract, single Licence for exploration and production of conventional as well as unconventional Hydrocarbon resources, marketing & pricing freedom, etc.

Sources: pib.

**8. Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund (TCEPF)**

*What to study?*
For Prelims and Mains: the fund- objectives, significance and potential.

*Context:*
TRAI has asked the telecom service providers to deposit all unclaimed money of consumers, including excess charges and security deposit, in the Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund (TCEPF).

*Composition:*
- It includes money on account of excess billing revealed in the audit, unclaimed money such as security deposits and plan charges of failed activations.
- Such unclaimed/nonrefundable amount belonging to consumers would be deposited in the TCEP fund as it will be utilised for the welfare measures of the consumers.

*Framework in this regard:*
- It offers a basic framework for depositing unclaimed money of consumers by service providers, maintenance of the fund and other aspects.
- The income from the fund is utilised for programmes and activities relating to consumer education and protection.

Sources: the Hindu.

**9. Punjab’s new Right to Business Bill**

*What to study?*
For Prelims: Key features.
For Mains: Significance and the need for.

*Context:*
The Punjab Cabinet has given its approval to a Punjab Right to Business Bill, 2020.

*About the Punjab Right to Business Bill, 2020:*
It is aimed at ensuring ease of doing business for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector. Under the law, an MSME unit can be set up after ‘In-Principle’ approval from the District Bureau of Enterprise, headed by the Deputy Commissioner, working under the guidance of the State Nodal Agency, headed by the Director, Industries.

*Approval time:*
Approval for units in approved Industrial Parks will be given in three working days. For new enterprises outside approved Industrial Parks, the decision on the “Certificate of In-Principle Approval” shall be taken by the District Level Nodal Agency within 15 working days, as per the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee.
What is the timeframe for unit owners to comply?
Unit owners will have three and a half years after setting up the unit to obtain seven approvals from three departments: the sanction of building plans; issuance of completion/occupation certificate for buildings; registration of new trade licences under relevant laws.

Why was a law needed, rather than an executive order?
According to the government, the Act will have **overriding powers over various Acts of different departments that make approvals necessary before the setting up of small and medium units** — this purpose could not have been achieved by an executive order.

Sources: the Hindu.

**10. China’s one-child policy**

What to study?
*For Prelims: What is one child policy? Malthusian theory- overview.*
*For Mains: Significance and overview of the policy.*

Context: The birth rate in China has fallen to the lowest in 70 years.

Observations:
1. Birth rate in 2019 was at 10.48 per 1,000, the lowest since 1949.
2. The number of babies born in 2019 fell by over $80,000 to 14.65 million.
3. This fall in birth rate can be largely attributed to China’s **one-child policy**, which came into force in 1979 under then leader Deng Xiaoping.

Why One Child Policy was adopted by China?
It was adopted out of the **Malthusian fears** that unchecked population growth would lead to economic and environment catastrophe. It was also a response to **concerns about food shortages**.

What is Malthusian theory all about?
**Thomas Robert Malthus** was the first economist to propose a systematic theory of population. He articulated his views regarding population in his famous book, *Essay on the Principle of Population (1798)*, for which he collected empirical data to support his thesis.
   - He argued that **if left unchecked, a population will outgrow its resources, leading to a host of problems**.

Was the Policy Effective?
In essence, it did bring down the population by 400 million, according to Chinese officials.
   - But, **it failed to spark a baby boom**. When the announcement was made, 11 million couples were eligible to have a second child. As such, officials were expecting around two million births in 2014.
   - That figure never came into fruition as only 700,000 couples applied for the new dispensation and only 620,000 were given a permit. In other words, **China is facing a huge demographic issue in the next years to come. They have a rapidly aging population where a quarter will be over 60 by 2030**.

What’s good about One Child Policy?
1. Helps to ease the over population problems.
2. It is seen as practical by some families.
3. Lowers the poverty rate.

Why it isn’t a good idea?
1. The enforcement is unequal.
2. It is a human rights violation.
3. Shrinking work population.
4. Gender imbalance due to the strong cultural preference of boys for labor and work.

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5. Increase in abortions and female infanticide.
6. Extra babies end up being illegal and never becoming a citizen, due to fines.
7. Intrudes on people’s personal values and opinions.

**Why such policies are not suitable for India?**
1. The implications of such a policy being enforced in India would surely have been more disastrous than it did in China.
2. India is way behind China in basic development indicators like life expectancy, IMR and maternal mortality rate. The preference of a male child, the regional disparities in development, and the growing intolerance against minorities in the present milieu would be further magnified with the state entering homes and enforcing such strict norms.
3. The fact that women are at the receiving end of such policies in a patriarchal society is another story in itself. The burden of limiting family size falls on the woman, and most often female sterilisations are promoted rather than giving the couple the choice of contraception.
4. Limiting family size cannot be an end in itself at the neglect of basic needs and services like food security, housing, education, and health.

**Sources:** the Hindu.

### 11. Three capitals for Andhra Pradesh

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: The three capitals.*

*For Mains: Need for, challenges and what’s the way out?*

**Context:** The Andhra Pradesh Assembly has passed The Andhra Pradesh Decentralisation and Equal Development of All Regions Bill, 2020. This law paves the way for three capitals for the state.

**The three capitals:**
1. Amaravati - legislative capital.
2. Visakhapatnam - executive capital.

**Need for three capitals:**
The government says it is against building one mega capital while neglecting other parts of the state. Three capitals ensure equal development of different regions of the state. Decentralisation has been the central theme in recommendations of all major committees that were set up to suggest a suitable location for the capital of Andhra Pradesh. These include Justice B N Srikrishna Committee, K Sivaramakrishnan Committee, G N Rao Committee etc.

**Challenges ahead:**

*Coordinating between seats of legislature and executive in separate cities* will be easier said than done, and with the government offering no specifics of a plan, officers and common people alike fear a logistics nightmare.

1. Executive capital Visakhapatnam is 700 km from judicial capital Kurnool, and 400 km from legislative capital Amaravati. The Amaravati-Kurnool distance is 370 km. The time and costs of travel will be significant.
2. The AP Police are headquartered in Mangalagiri, 14 km from Vijayawada, and senior IPS officers who may be required to visit the Secretariat will have to travel 400 km to Visakhapatnam. Likewise, government officers who may have to appear in the High Court will have to travel 700 km to Kurnool, which does not have an airport.
3. All officers and Ministerial staff who may have to be at hand to brief Ministers when the Assembly is in session, will probably have to stay put in Amaravati, leaving behind their other responsibilities in Visakhapatnam.

What are the other examples of multiple capital cities?
Several countries in the world have implemented the concept.
1. In Sri Lanka, Sri Jayawardenepeura Kotte is the official capital and seat of national legislature, while Colombo is the de facto seat of national executive and judicial bodies.
2. Malaysia has its official and royal capital and seat of national legislature at Kuala Lumpur, and Putrajaya is the administrative centre and seat of national judiciary.

Among Indian states:
1. Maharashtra has two capitals– Mumbai and Nagpur (which holds the winter session of the state assembly).
2. Himachal Pradesh has capitals at Shimla and Dharamshala (winter).
3. The former state of Jammu & Kashmir had Srinagar and Jammu (winter) as capitals.

Sources: the Hindu.

12. Enemy properties
What to study?
For Prelims: Meaning of enemy properties and key features of the enemy properties act.
For Mains: Significance and key features of the act.

Context: A Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah will monitor the disposal of over 9,400 enemy properties, which the government estimates is worth about Rs 1 lakh crore.
- Two committees headed by senior officials will be set up for the disposal of immovable enemy properties vested in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India under The Enemy Property Act.

What are enemy properties?
Properties that were left behind by the people who took citizenship of Pakistan and China.
- There are 9,280 such properties left behind by Pakistani nationals and 126 by Chinese nationals.
- Of the total properties left behind by those who took Pakistani citizenship, 4,991 are located in Uttar Pradesh, the highest in the country. West Bengal has 2,735 such estates and Delhi 487.
- The highest number of properties left by Chinese nationals is in Meghalaya (57).West Bengal has 29 such properties and Assam seven.
- The estimated value of all enemy properties is approximately Rs 1 lakh crore.

Who oversees these properties?
Under the Defence of India Rules framed under The Defence of India Act, 1962, the Government of India took over the properties and companies of those who took Pakistani nationality. These “enemy properties” were vested by the central government in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India. The same was done for property left behind by those who went to China after the 1962 Sino-Indian war. The Tashkent Declaration of January 10, 1966 included a clause that said India and Pakistan would discuss the return of the property and assets taken over by either side in connection with the conflict. However, the Government of Pakistan disposed of all such properties in their country in the year 1971 itself.

How did India deal with enemy property?
The Enemy Property Act, enacted in 1968, provided for the continuous vesting of enemy property in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India. Some movable properties too, are categorised as enemy properties.
- The 2017 amended Act expanded the definition of the term “enemy subject”, and “enemy firm” to include the legal heir and successor of an enemy, whether a citizen of India or a citizen of a country which is not an enemy; and the succeeding firm of an enemy firm, irrespective of the nationality of its members or partners.
• The amended law provided that **enemy property shall continue to vest in the Custodian** even if the enemy or enemy subject or enemy firm ceases to be an enemy due to death, extinction, winding up of business or change of nationality, or that the legal heir or successor is a citizen of India or a citizen of a country which is not an enemy.

• The Custodian, with prior approval of the central government, may dispose of enemy properties vested in him in accordance with the provisions of the Act, and the government may issue directions to the Custodian for this purpose.

Sources: the Hindu.

13. What is shamlat land?

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: Meaning and features.*

*For Mains: Concerns over recent changes and ways to address them.*

**Context:** Punjab state Cabinet recently approved an amendment to the Village Common Land (Regulation) Rules, 1964, allowing panchayats to sell shamlat land to industrial houses, entrepreneurs, businessmen, and companies for setting up micro, small and medium industrial units.

The underlying objective is to facilitate the “gram panchayats” to promote development of villages by unlocking the value of such land and transfer it for industrial projects to the Industry department and the Punjab Small Industries and Export Corporation (PSIEC).

**What is shamlat land?**

Three categories of common land in Punjab villages are:

1. ‘Shamlat’ land is owned by the village panchayat.
2. ‘Jumla mushtra malkan’ is land in a common pool made with villagers’ personal contributions, and is managed by the panchayat.
3. ‘Gau charan’, too belongs to the panchayat, and is for cattle grazing.

Shamlat land is mainly used for cultivation, and is allotted for this through an open auction that is conducted by the Rural Development and Panchayat Department every year.

**What’s the issue now?**

Various organisations in Punjab have been protesting against this revised land policy relating to ‘shamlat’ land. One-third of Punjab’s shamlat lands are reserved for Dalits. Around 25,000 to 26,000 families in the state, mostly Dalits, depend on this land for their livelihood. The recent government move has sparked fears of unemployment.

Sources: Indian Express.


**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: Key features, need for amendments and significance.*

**Context:** Moving to ease abortion laws in the country, the Union Cabinet is set to consider a host of changes to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971.

**Changes planned:**

1. Among others, amendments seek to increase the upper limit for termination of a pregnancy from 20 weeks to 24 weeks.
2. It also seeks to extend the contraceptive-failure clause for termination to include “any woman or her partner” from the present provision for “only married woman or her husband”.
3. The draft Bill proposes requirement of opinion of one registered medical practitioner (RMP) for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation.

Sources: the Hindu.
4. It also provides for the requirement of opinion of two RMPs for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks.
5. The Bill also seeks to increase the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women.
6. For unmarried women, the Bill seeks to relax the contraceptive-failure condition for “any woman or her partner” from the present provision for “only married woman or her husband”, allowing them to medically terminate the pregnancy.

Need for overhaul:
The present abortion law, which is about five decades old, permits abortion up to a maximum foetal gestation period of 20 weeks.
In recent years, there have been strong demands to raise the foetal gestation period for abortion beyond 20 weeks.

Significance:
The move to amend the MTP Act, 1971 is a progressive step towards empowerment of women. It will provide greater reproductive rights to women as abortion is considered an important aspect of the reproductive health of women. Deaths and injuries from unsafe abortions are largely preventable provided services are performed legally by trained practitioners.

Abortion laws across the world:
Abortion laws vary across the world. It is learnt that around 60 countries prescribe gestational limits.
1. 52% including France, the UK, Austria, Ethiopia, Italy, Spain, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and even Nepal, allow for termination beyond 20 weeks on the diagnosis of foetal abnormalities.
2. Some countries go beyond even these limits with laws in 23 countries-Canada, Germany, Vietnam, Denmark, Ghana, and Zambia-allowing for abortion at any time during the pregnancy on the request of the mother.
3. In UK, abortions are allowed at up to 24 weeks, with abortion guidelines formulated by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists including procedures for termination of pregnancies older than 20 weeks. It also states that, in pregnancy older than 21 weeks and 6 days, an injection to cause foetal death is given before the foetus is evacuated.

Sources: the Hindu.

15. Karnataka anti-superstition law

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the law.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the law.

Context: A controversial anti-superstition law in Karnataka has formally been notified by the current government.
It is called the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act, 2017.

The bill bans the following:
1. Performing any inhumane act, evil practices and black magic in search of treasure, bounty.
2. Tantric acts including physical and sexual assault.
3. Parading anyone naked.
4. Ostracising anyone in the name of ritual and encouraging inhumane acts.
5. Creating impression of ‘possession’ and exorcism.
6. Assaulting people under the garb of exorcism.
7. Spreading misinformation and creating panic in the garb of ghosts, black magic.
8. Making claims of healing power.

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10. Coercing people to perform fire-walking.

What is not banned?
1. The form of the worship such as Pradakshina, Yatra, Parikrama performed at religious places.
3. Miracles of the deceased saints propagation, publicity and circulation of the same and the propagation, publicity and distribution of literature about miracles of the religious preachers which do not cause physical injury.
4. Performance of prayers, upasana and religious rituals at home, temple, darghas, gurdwara, pagoda, church, and other religious places which do not cause physical injury.
5. All religious celebrations, festivals, prayers, procession and other act relating other rituals.
6. Piercing of ears and nose of children in accordance with rituals and performance of religious ritual such as Kesh Lochan by the Jains.
7. Advice in regard to vaastu shasthra, and advice by jyothishya and other astrologers.

Need for a law:
Inhuman practices in the name of religion in the country are a cause of worry. In Maharashtra, there were several cases where people murdered or brutally injured others and held them responsible for some deaths in their families, merely on suspicion.
So, a law to prevent exploitation in the name of religion is necessary.

Sources: the hindu.

16. India’s no-fly list

What to study?
For Prelims: What is it, how it works and features?
For Mains: Need for and redress?

Context: Four airlines in India — IndiGo, SpiceJet, Air India and GoAir — have banned stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra from taking their flights after he allegedly heckled television news anchor Arnab Goswami on an IndiGo flight.

What are the rules for putting a flier on the no-fly list?
Rules in this regard have been issued by the government in 2017.
They aim at preventing disruptive behaviour by air travellers and lay down guidelines for a no-fly list.
As per the rules, a complaint of unruly behaviour needs to be filed by the pilot-in-command, and this is to be probed by an internal committee to be set up by the airline.
During the period of pendency of the inquiry, the rules empower the concerned airline to impose a ban on the passenger.
The committee is to decide the matter within 30 days, and also specify the ban duration.

What is an unruly behaviour?
The rules define three categories of unruly behaviour:
1. Level 1 refers to behaviour that is verbally unruly, and calls for debarment up to three months.
2. Level 2 indicates physical unruliness and can lead to the passenger being debarred from flying for up to six months.
3. Level 3 indicates life-threatening behaviour for which the debarment would be for a minimum of two years.

Need for a no-fly list:
Even one unruly passenger can jeopardise safety on board. Therefore, Unruly behaviour on board aircraft has been declared an offence and is a punishable act.
How does someone end up on the list?
The DGCA has given an indicative list of actions that may be construed as unruly. These include: consuming alcohol or drugs resulting in unruly behaviour; smoking in an aircraft; using threatening or abusive language towards a member of the crew or other passengers; intentionally interfering with the performance of the duties of a crew member etc.

What is the structure of the internal committee?
The internal committee is to consist of a retired district and sessions judge as Chairman, along with a representative from a different scheduled airline and a representative from a passengers association or consumer association as members.
The decision of the committee shall be binding on the airline concerned. In case the committee fails to take a decision in 30 days, the passenger will be free to fly.

Is there redress for someone declared guilty by the internal committee?
Any aggrieved person, upon receipt of communication of a ban from the airline, may appeal within 60 days from the date of issue of the order, to an Appellate Committee. This committee is constituted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation. It consists of a retired judge of a High Court as Chairman; a representative from a passengers’ association or a consumer association; and an airlines representative not below the rank of vice-president or equivalent. The decision of the appellate committee shall be final and that any further appeal shall lie in a High Court.

Sources: Indian Express.

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

1. Ranking of Aspirational districts

What to study?
For Prelims: About Aspirational Districts Programme, key performers.
For Mains: Significance and the need for such programmes.

Context: NITI Aayog recently released the ranking of Aspirational Districts of the country for the month of December 2019.

Performance of various states:
1. The Chandauli district of UP topped the list followed by Bolangir of Odisha, YSR (AP) in second and third positions respectively.

How are districts ranked?
The districts have been ranked in a transparent basis on parameters across various performance indicators like Health and Nutrition, Education, Skill Development and Basic Infrastructure among others.
The rankings are based on the data that is publicly available through the Champions of Change Dashboard, which includes data entered on a real-time basis at the district level.

About Aspirational Districts Programme:
1. The programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
2. The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level ‘Prabhari’ Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan.
3. With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
Focus of the programme:
To enable optimum utilization of their potential, this program focuses closely on improving people’s ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy. Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure are this programme’s core areas of focus.

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

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

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

Context: Maharashtra has become the first state in the country to integrate its land records with the web portal of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY). This will help in checking the cases of “over-insurance” — insurance of more land than in possession — as well as insurance of ineligible people.

About PMFBY:
Launched in April, 2016, after rolling back the earlier insurance schemes viz. National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS), Weather-based Crop Insurance scheme and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).

Premium: It envisages a uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for Kharif crops, and 1.5% for Rabi crops. The premium for annual commercial and horticultural crops will be 5%.

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

Farmers to be covered:
All farmers growing notified crops in a notified area during the season who have insurable interest in the crop are eligible.

Compulsory coverage: The enrolment under the scheme, subject to possession of insurable interest on the cultivation of the notified crop in the notified area, shall be compulsory for following categories of farmers:
1. Farmers in the notified area who possess a Crop Loan account/KCC account (called as Loanee Farmers) to whom credit limit is sanctioned/renewed for the notified crop during the crop season and
2. Such other farmers whom the Government may decide to include from time to time.

Voluntary coverage: Voluntary coverage may be obtained by all farmers not covered above, including Crop KCC/Crop Loan Account holders whose credit limit is not renewed.

Challenges at present:
Insufficient reach and the issue of penetration.
Data constraints: With just around 45% of the claims made by farmers over the last three crop seasons data for the last rabi season is not available paid by the insurance companies.
**Low payout of claims:** The reason for the very low payout of claims is that only few state governments are paying their share of the premiums on time and till they do, the central government doesn’t pay its share either. Till they get the premium, insurance companies simply sit on the claims.

**Gaps in assessment of crop loss:** There is hardly any use of modern technology in assessing crop damages. There is lack of trained outsourced agencies, scope of corruption during implementation and the non-utilisation of technologies like smart phones and drones to improve reliability of such sampling.

**Less number of notified crops** than can avail insurance. Inadequate and delayed claim payment.

**High actuarial premium rates:** Insurance companies charged high actuarial premium rates. If states delay notifications, or payment of premiums, or crop cutting data, companies cannot pay compensation to the farmers in time.

**Poor capacity to deliver:** There has been no concerted effort by the state government and insurance companies to build awareness of farmers on PMFBY. Insurance companies have failed to set-up infrastructure for proper Implementation of PMFBY.

Sources: the Hindu.

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### 2. Pradhan Mantri Laghu Vyapari Maan-dhan Yojana

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: Key features, objectives of the scheme.*

*For Mains: Significance of the scheme and its role in ensuring financial security of the citizens.*

**Context:** The *National Pension Scheme* for Traders and Self-Employed Persons has failed to gain traction as only about 25,000 persons have opted for the scheme as against the government’s target to enrol 50 lakh by March-end.

**Key facts:**

- As per government data, only 84 traders and self-employed persons from Delhi have registered for the scheme so far, while 59 persons from Kerala, 54 from Himachal Pradesh, 29 from Jammu and Kashmir and two from Goa have registered.
- No one has registered for the scheme in Lakshadweep and Mizoram.
- Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of registrations with 6,765 persons.

**What is Pradhan Mantri Laghu Vyapari Maan-dhan Yojana?**

It is a voluntary and contribution based central sector scheme. The government launched the scheme, entailing monthly *minimum assured pension of ₹3,000 for the entry age group of 18-40 years after attaining the age of 60 years, with effect from July 22, 2019.* Under the scheme, *the government makes matching contribution in the subscribers’ account.*

The scheme is based on *self-declaration* as no documents are required except bank account and Aadhaar Card.

**Eligibility:**

- All small shopkeepers, self-employed persons and retail traders aged between 18-40 years and with Goods and Service Tax (GST) turnover below Rs.1.5 crore can enrol for pension scheme.
- To be eligible, the applicants should not be covered under the National Pension Scheme, Employees’ State Insurance Scheme and the Employees’ Provident Fund or be an Income Tax assessee.

Sources: the Hindu.

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### 3. National Girl Child Day (NGCD)

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: About NGCD- objectives, theme and significance, BBBP-key features.*

*For Mains: BBBP significance, challenges to the development of girl child in the country, measures needed.*
**What? National Girl Child Day (NGCD)** was observed on **24th January** with objectives of generating awareness on the issue of declining **Child Sex Ratio (CSR)** and create a positive environment around valuing the girl child.

The programme also observed anniversary of **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme**.

**Background:**
National Girl Child Day was **first initiated in 2008**.

**Objectives:**
1. To increase the consciousness of the people and offer new opportunities to the girl child in the society.
2. To remove all the inequalities faced by the girl child.
3. To ensure that the girl child should get all their human rights, respect and value in the country.
4. To work regarding gender discrimination, to educate people.

**About BBBP:**

**Launch and expansion:** Launched in January, 2015 at Panipat in Haryana. All India Expansion of BBBP covering all 640 districts (as per Census 2011) was launched at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan on 8th March 2018.

It is a **tri-ministerial effort** of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.

**Implementation:**
It is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% financial assistance for District level component and the fund are directly released to the DC/DM’s account for smooth operation of the Scheme.

**Objectives:**
- Main Objective of the scheme is to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of empowerment of women over a life-cycle continuum.
- The specific objectives of the scheme include preventing gender biased sex selective elimination; ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.

Sources: pib.

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

### 1. Swachh Survekshan league

**What to study?**

**For Prelims:** Key findings, performance of various states.

**For Mains:** Concerns and challenges highlighted, ways to address them.

**Context:** Results (July-September) of **‘Swachh Survekshan League 2020’** have been released.

SS League is conducted in three quarters (April-June, July-September and October-December) with the **objective of sustaining the on-ground performance of cities along with monitoring of when it comes to cleanliness**.

Swachh Survekshan 2020 is **the 5th edition of the annual urban cleanliness survey conducted by the Ministry**.

**Performance of various states:**
- **Cleanest city:** Indore for the fourth time in a row.
- **Worst performer:** Kolkata.
- In the category of cities having population more than 10 lakh, **Bhopal stood second in first quarter results (April to June)**, while Rajkot grabbed the second spot in second quarter results (July-September) of ‘Swachh Survekshan League 2020’.
- **The third position was grabbed by Surat in the first quarter** and Navi Mumbai in the second quarter.
In the second quarter, **Vodara was ranked fourth**, followed by Bhopal, Ahmedabad, Nashik, Greater Mumbai, Allahabad and Lucknow.

**Among cantonment boards**, Tamil Nadu’s St.Thomas Mount Cantt was ranked 1st in quarter 1 whereas Delhi Cantt ranked first in the 2nd quarter.

**Secunderabad Cantonment Board** in Hyderabad is the worst performer among other cantonment boards.

**All About Swachh Survekshan:**
- The process of ranking cities and town of India on the basis of cleanliness was first conducted in 2016, which covered 73 cities.
- The second and third round of the survey in 2017 and 2018 widened the coverage of the assessment to 434 cities with a population of one lakh and above and 4,203 cities respectively.

**Objectives of Swachh Survekshan:**
1. The annual cleanliness survey aims to encourage large scale participation of citizens in cleanliness drives.
2. It aims to ensure sustainability of initiatives taken towards garbage free and open defecation free cities.
3. It aims to create awareness among all sections of the society regarding the importance of working together towards making towns and cities a better place to live in.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 2. Why is National Youth Day celebrated on Swami Vivekananda Jayanti?

**What to study?**
**For Prelims and Mains: NYD- objectives, about Swami Vivekananda.**

**Context:** January 12 marks the birthday of **Swami Vivekananda**.
- **National Youth Day** is celebrated on this day. **Celebrated since 1984.**
- **The main objective** is to promote rational thinking among the youth, believed to be the future of the country.

**About Swami Vivekananda:**
He was **a true luminary, credited with enlightening the western world about Hinduism.**
He was **an ardent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** and a major force in the revival of Hinduism in India.
He pushed for national integration in colonial India, and his famous speech remains as the one that he gave in **Chicago in 1893.**

**Early life- contributions:**
- Born in Kolkata on January 12, 1863 in Kolkata, Swami Vivekananda was known as **Narendra Nath Datta** in his pre-monastic life.
- He is known to have introduced the **Hindu philosophies of Yoga and Vedanta to the West.**
- Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had called Vivekananda the “**maker of modern India.**”
  In 1893, he took the name ‘**Vivekananda**’ after Maharaja Ajit Singh of the Khetri State requested him to do so, changing from ‘**Sachidananda**’ that he used before.
- He formed the **Ramakrishna Mission in 1897** “to set in motion a machinery which will bring noblest ideas to the doorstep of even the poorest and the meanest.”
- In 1899, he established the **Belur Math**, which became his permanent abode.
- He preached ‘**neo-Vedanta**’, an interpretation of Hinduism through a Western lens, and believed in combining spirituality with material progress.

**Books written by him:**
‘Raja Yoga’, ‘Jnana Yoga’, ‘Karma Yoga’ are some of the books he wrote.

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3. What is H9N2?

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: H9N2- spread, concerns and symptoms.*

**Context:** Indian scientists have detected the **country’s first case of infection with a rare variant of the virus-H9N2- that causes avian influenza, or bird flu.**

**About H9N2:**

H9N2 is a *subtype of the influenza A virus*, which *causes human influenza as well as bird flu.* The **H9N2 subtype** was isolated for the first time in Wisconsin, US in 1966 from turkey flocks. **H9N2 viruses are found worldwide in wild birds** and are endemic in poultry in many areas.

**Threats and concerns:**

H9N2 viruses could potentially play a major role in **the emergence of the next influenza pandemic.** According to the **World Health Organization (WHO),** with avian influenza viruses circulating in poultry, **there is a risk for sporadic infection and small clusters of human cases due to exposure to infected poultry or contaminated environments.** Therefore, **sporadic human cases are not unexpected.**

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Rare diseases

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: What are rare diseases? Overview of Government’s policy on rare diseases. For Mains: Need for awareness, international cooperation in this regard, need for a policy on this.*

**Context:** The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has published a **national policy for the treatment of 450 ‘rare diseases’.** The Centre first prepared such a **policy in 2017 and appointed a committee in 2018 to review it.**

**Overview of the policy:**

- Among other measures, the policy intends to kickstart a **registry of rare diseases, which will be maintained by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).**
- According to the policy, **rare diseases include** genetic diseases, rare cancers, infectious tropical diseases, and degenerative diseases.
- Under the policy, **there are three categories of rare diseases** — requiring one-time curative treatment, diseases that require long-term treatment but where the cost is low, and those needing long-term treatments with high cost. **Some of the diseases in the first category** include osteopetrosis and immune deficiency disorders, among others.
- As per the policy, the assistance of Rs 15 lakh will be provided to patients suffering from rare diseases that require a one-time curative treatment under **the Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi scheme.** The treatment will be limited to the beneficiaries of **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.**

**Background:**

The policy was created on **the direction of the Delhi High Court** to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This was in response to writ petitions for free treatment of such diseases, due to their “prohibitively” high cost of treatment. Hence, a policy was deemed necessary to devise a “multipronged” and “multisectoral” approach to build India’s capacity for tackling such ailments, including by gathering epidemiological data, arriving at a definition and estimating the cost of such diseases.

**What is a rare disease?**

Sources: the Hindu.
A rare disease, also referred to as an orphan disease, is any disease that affects a small percentage of the population.

- Most rare diseases are genetic, and are present throughout a person’s entire life, even if symptoms do not immediately appear.

**Characteristics:**
- Rare diseases are characterised by a wide diversity of symptoms and signs that vary not only from disease to disease but also from patient to patient suffering from the same disease. Relatively common symptoms can hide underlying rare diseases, leading to misdiagnosis.
- The most common rare diseases recorded in India are Haemophilia, Thalassemia, sickle-cell anaemia and primary immuno deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease, Hirschsprung disease, Gaucher’s disease, Cystic Fibrosis, Hemangiomas and certain forms of muscular dystrophies.

**Definition:**
While there is no universally accepted definition of rare diseases, countries typically arrive at their own descriptions, taking into consideration disease prevalence, its severity and the existence of alternative therapeutic options.

In the US, for instance, a rare disease is defined as a condition that affects fewer than 200,000 people. The same definition is used by the National Organisation for Rare Disorders (NORD).

**Concerns and challenges:**
- Rare diseases pose a significant challenge to health care systems because of the difficulty in collecting epidemiological data, which in turn impedes the process of arriving at a disease burden, calculating cost estimations and making correct and timely diagnoses, among other problems.
- Many cases of rare diseases may be serious, chronic and life-threatening. In some cases, the affected individuals, mostly children, may also suffer from some form of handicap.
- As per the 2017 report, over 50 per cent of new cases are reported in children and these diseases are responsible for 35 per cent of deaths in those below the age of one, 10 per cent of deaths between the ages of one and five, and 12 per cent between five and 15.

**Need of nationwide policy:**
1. State has responsibility for providing affordable, accessible and reliable health-care services to every citizen. In fact constitution also mentions importance of health-care services under articles like 21, 38 and 47 and thus state cannot evade this responsibility under the pretext of non-justifiability of articles.
2. Given the low volumes at which the drugs needed to treat such diseases would be consumed, pharmaceutical companies have little commercial incentive to produce them. Thus, a nationwide policy on orphan drugs could incentivize these players.
3. Even if pharmaceutical companies are incentivized to develop drugs to treat rare diseases, pharmaceutical companies remain beholden to the laws of economics and, given the low demand for orphan drugs, price these drugs as high as they choose to. Hence there has to be regulation of the government in restricting the exorbitant prices of the drugs.
4. Although proportion of rare diseases is much less than the other diseases, it does not reduce the importance of the life of person affected by rare diseases. Thus national policy would remove this adverse distinction and would make government committed equally to all people.

Sources: Indian Express.

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**5. WHO Names Top 13 Global Health Challenges for the New Decade**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: 13 challenges- concerns and measures needed.*

**Context:** World Health Organization (WHO) has released a list of 13 urgent global health challenges.
These include:

1. **Climate Crisis**: Climate change causes more extreme weather events, exacerbates malnutrition, and fuels the spread of infectious diseases such as malaria. The same emissions that pollute the air and cause global warming are responsible for more than one quarter of deaths from heart attack, stroke, lung cancer, and chronic respiratory disease.

2. **Delivering Health in Conflict and Crisis**: Last year, most disease outbreaks that required the highest level of WHO response occurred in countries with protracted conflict. And the "disturbing" trend in which healthcare workers and facilities are targeted continued. Conflict is also forcing a record number of people out of their own homes, leaving them with little or no access to healthcare, often for years.

3. **Healthcare Equality**: "Persistent and growing" socioeconomic gaps that result in major discrepancies in the quality of people’s health is also an urgent challenge. There is not only an 18-year difference in life expectancy between rich and poor countries, but also a marked gap within countries and even within cities.

4. **Expanding Access to Medicines**: About one third of the world’s people lack access to medicines, vaccines, diagnostic tools, and other essential health products. Low access to quality health products threatens health and lives and contributes to drug resistance.

5. **Infectious Diseases**: Such as HIV, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases, and sexually transmitted infections will take the lives of an estimated four million people in 2020, most of them poor. Meanwhile, vaccine-preventable diseases continue to kill, including measles, which took 140,000 lives in 2019. Polio is also once again a concern, with 156 cases of wild poliovirus last year, the most since 2014.

6. **Preparing for Epidemics**: A pandemic of a new, highly infectious, airborne virus — most likely a strain of influenza — to which most people lack immunity is inevitable. And vector-borne diseases like dengue, malaria, Zika, chikungunya, and yellow fever are spreading as mosquito populations move into new areas, fanned by climate change.

7. **Dangerous Products**: Lack of food, unsafe food, and unhealthy diets are to blame for nearly one third of the global disease burden.

8. **Investing in People Who Defend Our Health**: Another challenge is the global shortage of healthcare workers. The world will need 18 million more healthcare workers by 2030, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, including nine million nurses and midwives.

9. **Keeping Teens Safe**: More than one million adolescents aged 10 to 19 years die every year. The chief causes are road accidents, HIV, suicide, lower respiratory infections, and interpersonal violence. Harmful use of alcohol, tobacco and drug use, lack of physical activity, unprotected sex, and previous exposure to child maltreatment all increase the risks for these causes of death.

10. **Earning Public Trust**: Public health is compromised by the uncontrolled dissemination of misinformation in social media, as well as through an erosion of trust in public institutions. The antivaccination movement has been a significant factor in the rise of deaths in preventable diseases.

11. **Harnessing New Technologies**: New technologies such as genome editing and artificial intelligence are revolutionizing the ability to prevent, diagnose, and treat many diseases, but raise new questions and challenges for monitoring and regulation.

12. **Antimicrobial Resistance**: The rise of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a persistent and urgent challenge that threatens to send modern medicine back decades to the preantibiotic era.

13. **Clean Water, Sanitation, Hygiene**: About one in four health facilities globally lack basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services that are critical to a functioning health system. The lack of these basics in health facilities leads to poor-quality care and an increased chance of infection for patients and health workers.

**What next?**
The list reflects a “deep concern that leaders are failing to invest enough resources in core health priorities and systems.” This puts lives, livelihoods and economies in jeopardy. None of these issues are simple to address, but they are within reach.

- All of the challenges on the list "demand a response from more than just the health sector. We face shared threats and we have a shared responsibility to act.
- Governments, communities, and international agencies must work together to achieve these critical goals. There are no shortcuts to a healthier world.

www.insightsonindia.com
6. Coronavirus

It is a new virus identified by Chinese researchers. It was responsible for a new pneumonia-like illness that had swept Wuhan since last month, leaving many ill and created panic.

Key facts:

- Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).
- Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people.
- Coronaviruses can affect mammals including pigs, cattle, cats, dogs, martens, camels, hedgehogs and some birds.
- A coronavirus has many “regularly arranged” protrusions on its surface, because of which the entire virus particle looks like an emperor’s crown, hence the name “coronavirus”.

So far, there are four known disease-causing coronaviruses, among which the best known are the SARS coronavirus and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) coronavirus, both of which can cause severe respiratory diseases.

Symptoms:

Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

Transmission:

Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

1. the air by coughing and sneezing.
2. close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.
3. touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands.
4. rarely, fecal contamination.

7. ASER 2019

What to study?

For Prelims: Brief overview of stats.
For Mains: Concerns, challenges highlighted by the survey and ways and measures needed to address them.

Context: The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019 has been published by education non-profit Pratham.

What is ASER and why it matters?

This is an annual survey that aims to provide reliable estimates of children’s enrolment and basic learning levels for each district and state in India.

ASER has been conducted every year since 2005 in all rural districts of India.

- It is the largest citizen-led survey in India.
- It is also the only annual source of information on children’s learning outcomes available in India today.

Unlike most other large-scale learning assessments, ASER is a household-based rather than school-based survey. This design enables all children to be included – those who have never been to school or have dropped out, as well as those who are in government schools, private schools, religious schools or anywhere else.

How the survey was conducted?
1. The survey was conducted in 26 districts across 24 states in India, covering a total of 1,514 villages, 30,425 households, and 36,930 children in the age group of 4-8 years.
2. The sampled children’s enrolment status in pre-school or school was collected. Children did a variety of cognitive, early language, and early numeracy tasks; and activities to assess the children’s social and emotional development were also undertaken.
3. All tasks were done one-on-one with children in their homes.

What is early years?
The latest edition focuses on early years.
It is defined globally as age 0-8, is known to be the most important stage of cognitive, motor, social and emotional development in the human life cycle.

Key findings:
1. Only 16% of children in Class 1 in 26 surveyed rural districts can read text at the prescribed level, while almost 40% cannot even recognise letters.
2. Only 41% of these children could recognise two digit numbers.
3. Many Indian parents choose government schools for girls in the age group of 4 to 8 years while they favour private schools for boys.
4. At least 25% of school children in the four-eight age group do not have age-appropriate cognitive and numeracy skills, making for a massive learning deficit at a very early stage.
5. More than 90% of children in the 4-8 age group are enrolled in some type of educational institution. This proportion increases with age, from 91.3% of all 4-year-olds to 99.5% of all 8-year-olds in sampled districts.
6. Children from less advantaged homes are disproportionately affected. Although almost half of all 4-year-olds and more than a quarter of all 5-year-olds are enrolled in anganwadis, these children have far lower levels of cognitive skill and foundational ability than their counterparts in private LKG/UKG classes.
7. Overall, 41.7% of children in class I are of the RTE-mandated age.
8. Children’s skills and abilities improve in each subsequent class. As per the report, “children’s ability to read standard I level text improves from 16.2% of children in standard I to 50.8% children in standard III. This means that half of all children in standard III are already at least two years behind where the curriculum expects them to be.”

Role of mothers:
Among the pre-primary section, children with mothers who completed eight or fewer years of schooling are more likely to be attending anganwadis or government pre-primary classes. Whereas their peers whose mothers studied beyond the elementary stage are more likely to be enrolled in private LKG/UKG classes.

Measures suggested:
1. Focus on cognitive skills rather than subject learning in the early years can make a big difference to basic literacy and numeracy abilities.
2. Children’s performance on tasks requiring cognitive skills is strongly related to their ability to do early language and numeracy tasks.
3. This suggests that focussing on play-based activities that build memory, reasoning and problem-solving abilities is more productive than an early focus on content knowledge.
4. Global research shows that **90% of brain growth occurs by age 5**, meaning that the quality of early childhood education has a crucial impact on the development and long-term schooling of a child.

5. **The entire age band from 4 to 8 needs to be seen as a continuum**, and curriculum progression across grades and schooling stages designed accordingly. For an effective and implementable curriculum, the process of designing, planning, piloting, and finalizing needs to keep ground realities in mind.

6. Expand and strengthen the existing network of **anganwadi centres**.

*(Note: For a broader and simpler understanding, please go through the link: http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202019/ASER2019%20report%20/alldistricts_mainfindings_aser2019final.pdf.)*

Sources: the Hindu.

**8. Pulse Polio Programme**

*What to study?*

*For Prelims: What is IPV and its significance, about polio.*

*For Mains: Pulse Polio Programme - significance and the need.*

*Context:* January 18 marked the beginning of this year’s **Pulse Polio Programme**. The Union health ministry has launched the campaign to check the disease that affects children at a young age.

*What is Polio?*

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines polio or poliomyelitis as **“a highly infectious viral disease,”** which mainly affects young children.

*Transmission:* The virus is transmitted by person-to-person, spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and cause paralysis.

*Initial symptoms of polio include* fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs. In a small proportion of cases, the disease causes paralysis, which is often permanent. There is no cure for polio, it can only be prevented by immunization.”

*What is the Pulse Polio Programme?*

India **launched the Pulse Polio immunisation programme in 1995**, after a resolution for a **global initiative of polio eradication** was adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1988.

*Coverage:*

Children in the age group of 0-5 years are administered polio drops during national and sub-national immunisation rounds (in high-risk areas) every year.

*Polio in India:*

The WHO on February 24, 2012, removed India from **the list of countries with active endemic wild polio virus transmission.**

Two years later, **the South-East Asia Region of the WHO, of which India is a part, was certified as polio-free.**

*Prevention:*

To prevent the virus from coming to India, the government has since March 2014 made **the Oral Polio Vaccination (OPV)** mandatory for those travelling between India and polio-affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Syria and Cameroon.

Sources: the Hindu.

**9. What is a vaccine-derived poliovirus?**

*What to study?*

*For Prelims: Polio- symptoms, spread and prevention, vaccine- derived poliovirus?*
For Mains: Recurrence- concerns and challenges, ways to address them.

Context: In the last one year or so, polio has made a comeback in countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Ghana, Myanmar, China, Cameroon, Indonesia and Iran, mostly as vaccine-derived polio infection. All these countries had wiped the virus out at various times during the last couple of decades.

What is a vaccine-derived poliovirus?
It is a strain of the weakened poliovirus that was initially included in oral polio vaccine (OPV) and that has changed over time and behaves more like the wild or naturally occurring virus. This means it can be spread more easily to people who are unvaccinated against polio and who come in contact with the stool or respiratory secretions, such as from a sneeze, of an infected person. These viruses may cause illness, including paralysis.

How is it spread?
1. Oral polio vaccine (OPV) contains an attenuated (weakened) vaccine-virus, activating an immune response in the body. When a child is immunized with OPV, the weakened vaccine-virus replicates in the intestine for a limited period, thereby developing immunity by building up antibodies.
2. During this time, the vaccine-virus is also excreted. In areas of inadequate sanitation, this excreted vaccine-virus can spread in the immediate community (and this can offer protection to other children through ‘passive’ immunization), before eventually dying out.

What’s the issue here?
A circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV) occur when routine or supplementary immunization activities (SIAs) are poorly conducted and a population is left susceptible to poliovirus, whether from vaccine-derived or wild poliovirus. Hence, the problem is not with the vaccine itself, but low vaccination coverage. If a population is fully immunized, they will be protected against both vaccine-derived and wild polioviruses.

Where does India stand?
In January 2014, India was declared polio-free after three years on zero cases. In 2018, there was a brief scare when some vials of the polio vaccine were found contaminated with the polio 2 virus that had been eradicated from the country in 1999. However, WHO quickly issued a statement saying that all vaccines used in the government programme in India were safe. The last case due to wild poliovirus in the country was detected on January 13, 2011.

How should India be prepared?
It calls for heightened vigilance, in short. Some years ago, India introduced the injectable polio vaccine in the Universal Immunisation Programme. This was to reduce chances of vaccine-derived polio infection, which continues to happen in the country. If both wild and vaccine-derived polio infection are reduced to zero, it would mean there is no trace left of the virus anywhere in the world, except in controlled situations in laboratories for future contingencies.

What is Polio?
It is a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.

Sources: Indian Express.
10. NISHTHA— National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement

What to study?
For prelims: Key features of the initiative.
For mains: Need for and significance.

About NISHTHA:
• NISHTHA is the world’s largest teachers’ training programme of its kind in the world.
• It has been launched to improve Learning Outcomes at the Elementary level.
• The basic objective of this massive training programme is to motivate and equip teachers to encourage and foster critical thinking in students.
• The initiative is first of its kind wherein standardized training modules are developed at national level for all States and UTs. However, States and UTs can contextualize the training modules and use their own material and resource persons also, keeping in view the core topics and expected outcomes of NISHTHA.

The prominent features of this integrated programme are:
Activity based modules including educational games and quizzes, Social-emotional learning, motivational interactions, team building, preparation for school based assessment, in-built continuous feedback mechanism, online monitoring and support system, training need and impact analysis (Pre and Post training).

Expected outcomes:
1. Teachers will get awareness and develop their skills on various aspects related to Learning Outcomes, Competency Based Learning and Testing, Learner-centered Pedagogy, School Safety and Security etc.
2. This integrated programme aims to build the capacities of around 42 lakh participants covering all teachers and Heads of Schools at the elementary level in all Government schools, faculty members of State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) as well as Block Resource Coordinators and Cluster Resource Coordinators in all States and UTs.

Need and necessity for such programmes:
1. Teachers today are also expected to be aware of the provisions regarding Gender, The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.
2. The integrated programme therefore seeks to train all heads and teachers as first level counsellors to be alert and responsive to the needs of the students, in addition to promoting joyful learning and taking special care of the requirements of special children.

Sources: the Hindu.

11. Global Talent Competitiveness Index

What to study?
For prelims and mains: GTCI- key findings, indicators and significance.

Context: Global Talent Competitive Index (GTCI) for 2020 has been released.

About GTCI:
• GTCI, launched in 2013, is an annual benchmarking report that measures the ability of countries to compete for talent.
• It is released by INSEAD business school in partnership with Adecco Group and Google.
• The report measures levels of Global Talent Competitiveness by looking at 70 variables such as ease of hiring, gender earnings gap, and prevalence of training in firms.

Performance of India:
www.insightsonindia.com
1. India is placed at no. 72.
2. Although more could be done to improve the country’s educational system (68th in Formal Education), India’s key strength relates to growing (44th) talent, due to its levels of lifelong learning (40th) and access to growth opportunities (39th).
3. The country’s highest-ranked sub-pillar is employability, but the ability to match labour market demand and supply stands in contrast to the country’s poor mid-level skills.

**Global performance:**
1. Switzerland, the United States and Singapore lead the index.

**Key observations:**
- The **gap between talent champions and the rest of the world is widening.**
- A similar gap is also seen in the universe of **artificial intelligence.** AI talent is scarce and unequally distributed across industries, sectors, and nations.
- **More than half of the population in the developing world lacks basic digital skills.**

**What next?**
1. AI policies and programmes should work to minimise negative outcomes and increase access to AI for those left behind.
2. AI could provide significant opportunities for emerging markets to leapfrog.
3. Some developing countries (e.g., China, Costa Rica, and Malaysia) can become talent champions in their respective regions, while others (e.g., Ghana and India) have significantly improved their capacity to enable, attract, grow, and retain talent over the past few years, and hence can be labelled talent movers.
4. The emergence of AI in the workplace requires **a massive re-skilling of the workforce.** At all levels of qualifications, workers will need training on adaptability, social intelligence, communication, and problem-solving.

Sources: the Hindu.

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### 12. National Population Register (NPR)

**What to study?**
*For prelims and mains: NPR- features, composition and uses.*

**Context:** Supreme Court Agrees To Hear Pleas Against National Population Register.

**What’s the issue?**
Various petitions have been filed challenging the NPR.

- The concern here is that data collected under NPR does not enjoy the same protection as the census data.
- Also, the rules under which NPR data is collected don’t provide protection against misuse, unlike Aadhaar and census data.

**What is National Population Register (NPR)?**
It is a **Register of usual residents of the country.**
It is being prepared at the local (Village/sub-Town), sub-District, District, State and National level under provisions of the **Citizenship Act 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.**
It is **mandatory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR.**
**Objectives:** To create a comprehensive identity database of every usual resident in the country.

**Who is a usual resident?**
A usual resident is defined for the purposes of NPR as a person who has resided in a local area for the past 6 months or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next 6 months or more.
What is the controversy around it?
1. Comes in the backdrop of the NRC excluding lakhs of people in Assam.
2. It intends to collect a much larger amount of personal data on residents of India.
3. There is yet no clarity on the mechanism for protection of this vast amount of data.

Why does the government want so much data?
1. Every country must have a comprehensive identity database of its residents with relevant demographic details. It will help the government formulate its policies better and also aid national security.
2. It will ease the life of those residing in India by cutting red tape. Not only will it help target government beneficiaries in a better way, but also further cut down paperwork and red tape in a similar manner that Aadhaar has done.
3. With NPR data, residents will not have to furnish various proofs of age, address and other details in official work.
4. It would also eliminate duplication in voter lists, government insists.

Sources: pib.

Neglected diseases

What to study?
For Prelims: What are neglected tropical diseases?
For Mains: Neglected diseases- spread, vulnerable sections, concerns, measures and the need for international cooperation.

Context: January 30, 2020 is the first-ever World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day (World NTD Day), a day when we celebrate the achievements made towards control of the world's NTDs, yet recognize the daunting challenges we face in the control and elimination of these conditions.

Policies on neglected diseases research in India:
1. The National Health Policy (2017) sets an ambition to stimulate innovation to meet health needs and ensure that new drugs are affordable for those who need them most, but it does not specifically tackle neglected diseases.
2. The National Policy on Treatment of Rare Diseases (2018) includes infectious tropical diseases and identifies a need to support research on treatments for rare diseases. It has not yet prioritised diseases and areas for research funding or how innovation would be supported.

What’s missing?
1. A comprehensive policy to foster research and innovation in drug discovery, diagnostics, and vaccine development in neglected tropical diseases is lacking.
2. While political intent and will are expressed in a few, clear operational plans and funding mechanisms are not specified. Consequently, follow-up action is patchy or absent.
3. No institutional mechanism exists at a national level to identify gaps in neglected diseases research, set priorities, liaise with research institutions, or monitor research output.
4. There is often no coordination between the various funding and research bodies to prioritise the research agenda and minimise duplication.

Why are some tropical diseases called “neglected”?
The people who are most affected by these diseases are often the poorest populations, living in remote, rural areas, urban slums or conflict zones. Neglected tropical diseases persist under conditions of poverty and are concentrated almost exclusively in impoverished populations in the developing world.

Challenges and concerns:
1. Lacking a strong political voice, people affected by these tropical diseases have a low profile and status in public health priorities.
2. Lack of reliable statistics and unpronounceable names of diseases have all hampered efforts to bring them out of the shadows.
3. Neglected tropical diseases affect more than 1 billion people, primarily poor populations living in tropical and subtropical climates.
4. They are frequently clustered together geographically and individuals are often afflicted with more than one parasite or infection.
5. More than 70% of countries and territories that report the presence of neglected tropical diseases are low-income or lower middle-income economies.

Spread:
1. Infections are caused by unsafe water, poor housing conditions and poor sanitation.
2. Children are the most vulnerable to these diseases, which kill, impair or permanently disable millions of people every year, often resulting in life-long physical pain and social stigmatization.

Control:
Many neglected tropical diseases can be prevented, eliminated or even eradicated with improved access to existing safe and cost-effective tools. Control relies on simple interventions that can be carried out by non-specialists — for example schoolteachers, village heads and local volunteers — in community-based preventive action.

Need of hour:
1. A unified programme on neglected diseases encompassing research and elimination measures is likely to have a greater impact in prioritising the matter in the health agenda and streamlining efforts towards disease elimination.
2. Creating an enabling environment for research and innovation will be crucial if India is to achieve the target set in sustainable development goal 3.3 to end epidemics of neglected tropical diseases by 2030.

Sources: the hindu.

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

1. NetSCoFAN

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: NetSCoFAN- objectives and significance.

Context: Union Health Minister has launched NetSCoFAN, a network of research & academic institutions working in the area of food & nutrition.

What is NetSCoFAN?
It would comprise of eight groups of institutions working in different areas viz. biological, chemical, nutrition & labelling, food of animal origin, food of plant origin, water & beverages, food testing, and safer & sustainable packaging.
FSSAI has identified eight Nodal Institutions who would develop a ‘Ready Reckoner’ that will have inventory of all research work, experts and institutions and would carry out and facilitate research, survey and related activities.
* It would identify research gaps in respective areas and collect, collate and develop database on food safety issues for risk assessment activities.

Need for and significance:
The need for identify research gaps in respective areas and collect, collate and develop database on food safety issues for risk assessment activities, will be addressed by NetSCoFAN.
2. Top Risks 2020

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Concerns expressed, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: Eurasia Group has released its report titled “Top Risks 2020”.
The Eurasia Group is one of US' most influential risk assessment companies.

Key findings:
Observations made on India:
1. India is one of the world’s top geopolitical risks for 2020. It is the 5th highest geopolitical risk.
2. PM Narendra Modi has spent much of his second term promoting controversial social policies at the expense of an economic agenda.
3. The impacts will be felt in 2020, with intensified communal and sectarian instability, as well as foreign policy and economic setbacks.
4. Modi has less room to manoeuvre on structural reforms, just as the economy is starting to sputter, with quarterly growth falling to a six-year low of 4.5% and forward-looking indicators looking softer still.
5. A weakened economy will in turn feed further economic nationalism and protectionism, weighing on India’s troubled course in 2020.

Global scenario:
1. US and its broken domestic politics is the "top" global geopolitical risk of this year.
2. There were risks of a US election that many will view as illegitimate, uncertainty in its aftermath, and a foreign policy environment made less stable by the resulting vacuum. Besides, a broken impeachment mechanism, questions of electoral illegitimacy, and a series of court challenges will make this the most volatile year of politics the US has experienced in generations.
3. The top risks include the technological "decoupling" between the US and China and the challenges that it poses to the world besides the enduring US-China tensions.
4. This will lead to "more explicit clash over security, influence and values."
5. Countries and governments will push back more and more against multinational corporations, with tougher nationalism-based regulatory frameworks.
6. The EU may increasingly push back against the unilateralism displayed by the US and China.
7. Climate change will challenge companies and countries equally, creating conflicts between controlling emissions and bottomlines.
The Shia world may rise creating greater regional instability.
8. Turkey may be unravelling, which could be dangerous to others in the region. Latin American volatility and instability would be another source of risk.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD)

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: the database- need for and significance.

Context: The database has been launched by the government.

Key facts:
Developed by the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M).
It will be implemented by the National Informatics Centre.
The project costs ₹258 crore and is being supported by the World Bank.
The system will be first piloted in the six States with highest fatalities from road crashes — Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

How it works:
1. The IRAD mobile application will enable police personnel to enter details about a road accident, along with photos and videos, following which a unique ID will be created for the incident.
2. Subsequently, an engineer from the Public Works Department or the local body will receive an alert on his mobile device.
3. He or she will then visit the accident site, examine it, and feed the required details, such as the road design.
4. Data thus collected will be analysed by a team at IIT-M, which will then suggest if corrective measures in road design need to be taken.
5. Road users will also be able to upload data on road accidents on a separate mobile application, which is expected to go live from April 1.

Significance and benefits:
It will help in analysing causes of road crashes and in devising safety interventions to reduce such accidents in the country.

Need for this data:
India sees the largest number of road fatalities in the world. More than 1.5 lakh people lost their lives in road crashes in the country in 2018, according to government data. Of the total people killed in road crashes in 2018, 48% were between 18 years and 35 years old, and more than 60% of such fatalities were due to overspeeding.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Corruption Perception Index 2019

What to study?
For Prelims: Performance of various countries in the corruption perception index.
For Mains: Need for transparency, efforts by government.

Context: Corruption Perception Index 2019 has been released.
It is prepared by Transparency International.

What is Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)?
It is a composite index that draws from 12 surveys to rank nations around the globe. It has become a benchmark gauge of perceptions of corruption and is used by analysts and investors. The index is also based on expert opinions of public sector corruption and takes note of range of factors like whether governmental leaders are held to account or go unpunished for corruption, the perceived prevalence of bribery, and whether public institutions respond to citizens’ needs.

How are the countries ranked?
It ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, according to experts and business people.
It uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. More than two-thirds of countries score below 50 on this year’s CPI, with an average score of just 43.
Performance of India and neighbours:
1. With a score of 41, India is at the 80th spot.
2. The rank is also shared by China, Benin, Ghana and Morocco.
3. Neighbouring Pakistan is ranked at the 120th place.

Performance of various other countries:
1. Denmark and New Zealand have cornered the top spot, followed by Finland, Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland in the top ten.

Key observations:
- This year’s analysis shows corruption is more pervasive in countries where big money can flow freely into electoral campaigns and where governments listen only to the voices of wealthy or well-connected individuals.
- Not only are more than two-thirds of countries -- along with many of the world's most advanced economies -- stagnating, some are seriously backsliding.
- In the last eight years, only 22 countries have shown significant improvement on the CPI, while almost as many have declined.

Indian scenario:
Even in democracies, such as Australia and India, unfair and opaque political financing and undue influence in decision-making and lobbying by powerful corporate interest groups, result in stagnation or decline in control of corruption.

What next?
Governments must urgently address the corrupting role of big money in political party financing and the undue influence it exerts on our political systems.

Recommendations:
To end corruption and restore trust in politics, it is imperative to prevent opportunities for political corruption and to foster the integrity of political systems. Transparency International recommends:
1. Manage conflicts of interest.
2. Control political financing.
3. Strengthen electoral integrity.
4. Regulate lobbying activities.
5. Empower citizens.
7. Reinforce checks and balances.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Bhuvan Panchayat 3.0

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance.

Context: The Bhuvan Panchayat V 3.0 web portal was recently launched.

About Bhuvan Panchayat Version 3.0:
Bhuvan Panchayat is part of ISRO’s Space-based Information Support for Decentralised Planning Update project.
Aim: For better planning and monitoring of government projects.
Services: This version of the portal will provide database visualisation and services for the benefit of panchayat members, among others.
The targeted audiences for this portal are Public, PRIs and different stakeholders belonging to the gram panchayats.
**Features:**
Using Bhuvan satellite imagery, hi-resolution database at 1:10,000 scale is applied to identify land use land cover, settlements, road and rail network etc. The portal offers database visualization, data analytics, generation of automatic reports, model-based products and services for Gram Panchayat members and other stake-holders.

**Implementation:**
In the project that will last for at least two years, ISRO will collaborate with the gram panchayat members and stakeholders to understand their data requirements.

**Significance:**
The project is meant to provide geo-spatial services to aid gram panchayat development planning process of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

**Background:**
The space-based information support for decentralised planning programme was taken up in 2011 to empower panchayati raj institutions and its stake-holders to enable participatory and decentralised planning in the country.
Taking advantage of information and communication technology, the Bhuvan Panchayat web portal was launched for visualisation, planning and monitoring of schemes at panchayat levels.

Sources: pib.

**Topics: Role of civil services in a democracy.**

1. **What is the commissionerate system?**

   **What to study?**
   For Prelims: Meaning, need for and significance.

   **Context:** The Uttar Pradesh has approved the commissionerate system of policing for state capital Lucknow, and Noida.

   **What is Commissionerate system? What are the benefits?**
   1. In the commissionerate system, the Commissioner of Police (CP) is the head of a unified police command structure, is responsible for the force in the city, and is accountable to the state government.
   2. The office also has magisterial powers, including those related to regulation, control, and licensing.
   3. The CP is drawn from the Deputy Inspector General rank or above, and is assisted by Special/Joint/Additional/Deputy Commissioners.
   4. It is supposed to allow for faster decision-making to solve complex urban-centric issues.

   **How and who can implement this?**
   Under the 7th Schedule of the Constitution, ‘Police’ is under the State list, meaning individual states typically legislate and exercise control over this subject.

   **Where is the system in force?**
   Previously, only four cities had the system: Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai.
   However, with rapid urbanisation, states felt an increasing need to replicate the system in more places.
The sixth National Police Commission report, which was released in 1983, recommended the introduction of a police commissionerate system in cities with a population of 5 lakh and above, as well as in places having special conditions. Over the years, it has been extended to numerous cities, including Delhi, Pune, Bangalore and Ahmedabad. By January 2016, 53 cities had this system.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: The agreement, its significance and the need.

Context: Both India and Pakistan have exchanged their list of nuclear installations. The exchange was in accordance with the Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India.

Background: The exchange is done each year on January 1, under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities, also referred to as the Non-Nuclear Aggression Agreement.

About the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations: The agreement, which was signed on December 31, 1988, and entered into force on January 27, 1991, provides that the two countries inform each other of nuclear installations and facilities to be covered under the pact on the first of January of every calendar year.

Significance of the agreement:
- The need for the agreement had been felt against the backdrop of Israel’s 1981 bombing of Iraq’s Osirak reactor near Baghdad. The strike, carried out by Israeli fighter jets over hostile airspace, had set Iraq’s nuclear weapons programme significantly.
- The agreement had also come at a time of deep anxiety for Pakistan. Islamabad had been rattled by the memory of the 1972 defeat which dismembered the country, and military developments in India, such as Operation Brasstacks in 1987, which was a wargame exercise to prepare for deep strike offensive capabilities. Pakistan had at the time responded by putting at its nuclear installations and assets on ‘high alert’.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Kalapani Territory

What to study?
For Prelims: Location of Kalapani.
For Mains: The dispute and ways to address them.

Context: Nepal and India are planning to resolve the Kalapani border issue through dialogue. India has clarified that the latest political map of India reflects the sovereign territory of India.

Background: The issue was raised by Nepal after India published a new political map that showed the creation of two Union Territories in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh after revoking the special status of Kashmir on August 5. Ever since, diplomatic sources have maintained that both sides have made conciliatory statements which have so far fallen short of producing a solution to the Kalapani issue.
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. 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. Raisina Dialogue

What to Study?
For Prelims and Mains: Raisina Dialogue - key facts.

Context: Fifth edition of the Raisina Dialogue is being held in New Delhi.
• More than 700 international participants, including 80 from African countries, are attending the meet. This year’s Dialogue is titled ‘Navigating the Alpha Century’.

About the Raisina Dialogue:
This is an annual geo-political event, organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and Observer Research Foundation (ORF).
It is designed to explore prospects and opportunities for Asian integration as well as Asia’s integration with the larger world.
It is predicated on India’s vital role in the Indian Ocean Region and how India along with its partners can build a stable regional and world order.

Participants:
The conference is a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral meeting involving policy and decision-makers, including but not limited to Foreign, Defence and Finance Ministers of different countries, high-level government officials and policy practitioners, leading personalities from business and industry, and members of the strategic community, media and academia.

**Significance of the event:**
The Raisina Dialogue was born in 2016, in the belief that the Asian century that the world was talking about was not about any exclusive geographical region. It was rather about the engagement of global actors with Asia and of Asia with the world. So this dialogue took birth as a platform, where the old and the new could work together, to discover their connections, their inter-dependence.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. India-Pakistan trade freeze hits thousands: report

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Overview of border areas, meaning of MFN status.*
*For Mains: Impact of trade shutdown and ways to address these issues.*

**Context:** The Bureau of Research on Industry and Economic Fundamentals (BRIEF) has released a report highlighting the impact of trade shutdown between India and Pakistan on people across borders. The report is called “Unilateral Decisions, Bilateral Losses”.

**What has happened?**
Following the Pulwama attacks, trade between India and Pakistan across the Wagah-Attari border and the Line of Control (LoC) Salamabad-Chakhan da Bagh routes was closed in 2019.

**MFN (most favoured nation) status** to Pakistan was also cancelled.
Pakistan has also imposed few counter-measures, including an airspace ban and suspension of trade relations.

**Impacts of these decisions:**
1. The decisions on trade were meant to be a tough message for Pakistan and would impact Pakistan’s economy even more than India’s. Even though ties have been much worse in the past like after the Parliament attack, trade had never been touched.
2. Now, at least 9,354 families, roughly 50,000 people, in Punjab and about 900 families in Kashmir have been directly impacted.
3. Both countries have lost billions of dollars and hundreds of job days.
4. These measures that led to a 200% duty increase on imports from Pakistan at Punjab saw even the relatively meagre bilateral trade of $2.56 billion in 2018-2019 dropping to $547.22 million (April-August 2019) - imports dropping from about $500 million to just $11.45 million.
5. Similarly, the closure of LoC trading points in Jammu and Kashmir has put small trade, handicrafts sellers, truckers, labourers, and hotel owners near the LoC in Baramulla and Poonch out of business.

**What next?**
1. Cross-LoC trade before the suspension order in April 2019 was about $95 million for the year. In the suspension order, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said trade would be resumed after “putting into place a stricter regulatory regime” in order to block misuse of the route for “weapons, narcotics and currency,” but nine months later, there are no signs of resumption of LoC trade.
2. Therefore, the centre now has to take up this matter seriously and give equal attention on development of livelihoods of those affected. Besides, national security should not be compromised.
3. The governments should also consider compensating them for the losses and finding alternative trading markets internally so that those affected are not put out of business permanently.

**What is Most Favoured Nation status?**
A treatment accorded to a trade partner to ensure non-discriminatory trade between two countries vis-a-vis other trade partners.

It is the first clause in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Under WTO rules, a member country cannot discriminate between its trade partners. If a special status is granted to a trade partner, it must be extended to all members of the WTO.

MFN at the same time allows some exemptions as well:

- **Right to engage in Free Trade Agreements**: This means members can participate in regional trade agreements or free trade agreements where there is discrimination between member countries and non-member countries.

- **Members can give developing countries special and differential treatment like greater market access**. This special concession are in different forms like reduced tariff rates from developing country imports, concessions that allows developing countries to give subsidies to their production sectors etc.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. India helps Maldives tackle measles outbreak

**What to study?**

**For prelims and mains**: Measles—causes, symptoms, spread and vaccines.

**Context**: India has stepped in to help the Maldives tackle a recent outbreak of measles. The Indian Embassy in Male recently handed over 30,000 doses of measles and rubella (MR) vaccine to the Maldivian Health Ministry. The outbreak comes less than three years after the World Health Organisation declared the Maldives measles-free.

**Background**:
The Indian government’s initiative comes even as the two countries implement the Memorandum of Understanding on Health cooperation — signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Male in June 2019. Secretary-level delegations met in Male early January to draw a roadmap for cooperation, in capacity building and training of doctors and medical professionals, disease surveillance, training of mental health professionals, setting up of digital health capacities in Maldives.

**About Measles**:  
**What is It?** Measles is a highly contagious viral disease. It remains an important cause of death among young children globally, despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine.  
**Spread**: Measles is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons.  
**Initial symptoms**, which usually appear 10–12 days after infection, include high fever, a runny nose, bloodshot eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth. Several days later, a rash develops, starting on the face and upper neck and gradually spreading downwards. 
**Vulnerability**: Severe measles is more likely among poorly nourished young children, especially those with insufficient vitamin A, or whose immune systems have been weakened by HIV/AIDS or other diseases. 
**The most serious complications include** blindness, encephalitis (an infection that causes brain swelling), severe diarrhoea and related dehydration, and severe respiratory infections such as pneumonia. 
**Prevention**: Routine measles vaccination for children, combined with mass immunization campaigns in countries with low routine coverage, are key public health strategies to reduce global measles deaths.

**Preventive efforts**:
Under the Global Vaccine Action Plan, measles and rubella are targeted for elimination in five WHO Regions by 2020. WHO is the lead technical agency responsible for coordination of immunization and surveillance activities supporting all countries to achieve this goal.

**What is Rubella?**
Also called German Measles, Rubella is a contagious, generally mild viral infection that occurs most often in children and young adults.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. ICJ ruling on Rohingya crisis

What to study?

For Prelims: Who are Rohingya? Where is Rakhine?
For Mains: About the alleged genocide, concerns and what’s the way ahead?

Context: The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has given its verdict on the Rohingya crisis. The ruling of the court is binding on Myanmar, and cannot be appealed. However, no means are available to the court to enforce it.

What the ruling says?- provisional measures:
1. The government of Myanmar should immediately take “all measures within its power” to prevent atrocities against members of the minority Rohingya Muslim community.
2. This is to be done in accordance with its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
3. Myanmar shall ensure that its military or any irregular armed units within its control, do not commit any of the acts described above, or conspire to commit, direct, attempt to commit, or be complicit in genocide.
4. Myanmar shall take “effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to allegations of acts” of genocide.

How the case reached ICJ?
It was the Republic of the Gambia. It went to the ICJ in November 2019, accusing Myanmar of genocide, which is the most serious of all international crimes. The Gambia was backed by the 57-member Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
Myanmar was represented by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

What Next?
This order is a provisional measure and a restraining order. The hearings dealing with the main, and more serious allegations of genocide by the Myanmar military, have not even started. And cases at the ICJ often drag on for years on end, and no quick closure can be reasonably expected.

How common is it to convict a country for genocide?
So far, only three cases of genocide worldwide have been recognised since World War II: Cambodia (the late 1970s), Rwanda (1994), and Srebrenica, Bosnia (1995).

Proving genocide has been difficult because of the high bar set by its ‘intent requirement’ — that is showing the genocidal acts were carried out with the specific intent to eliminate a people on the basis of their ethnicity.

Rohingya Crisis in Short:
• An estimated 7.3 lakh Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since 2017 when the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown on Rohingya villages in the country’s coastal Rakhine state. In August 2019, the UN said the army’s action was carried out with “genocidal intent”.
• Myanmar has stoutly denied all allegations of genocide. It has also denied nearly all allegations made by the Rohingya of mass rape, killings and arson against its army. Myanmar says the soldiers carried out legitimate counterterrorism operations.

More about ICJ:
7. Import duty on palm oil cut

What to study?
For Prelims: What is import duty? India’s palm oil consumption, why refining is necessary?
For Mains: Implications of this move on Malaysia and India.

Context: India has cut import duty on crude palm oil (CPO) and refined, bleached and deodorised (RBD) palm oil, and also moved RBD oil from the “free” to the “restricted” list of imports.

What’s the issue now?
The move has been construed as retaliation against Malaysia’s Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, who has criticised India’s internal policy decisions such as the revocation of the special status for Jammu and Kashmir and the new citizenship Act.
Malaysia has also been sheltering since 2017 the Islamic preacher Zakir Naik, who is wanted by India on charges of money laundering, hate speech, and links to terror.

Why and How this decision would affect Malaysia?
Indonesia and Malaysia together produce 85% of the world’s palm oil, and India is among the biggest buyers.
Both Indonesia and Malaysia produce refined palm oil; however, Malaysia’s refining capacity equals its production capacity — this is why Malaysia is keen on exporting refined oil.
Indonesia, on the other hand, can supply CPO, which would allow India to utilise its full refining capacity.

How and why crude oil is refined?
Crude oil contains fatty acids, gums and wax-like substances. Refining neutralises the acids and filters out the other substances.
The filtrate is bleached so that the oil does not change colour after repeated use.
Substances that may cause the oil to smell are removed physically or chemically.
This entire process increases the value of a barrel of crude oil by about 4%.
Additionally, there are costs to transporting the crude, which makes it more cost-effective to import the refined oil.

Why domestic players demand for crude oil imports?
The refining industry has been demanding that the import duty on refined oil be increased, which would make importing crude oil cheaper than importing refined oil. This will mainly benefit domestic refiners, which include big-ticket names like the Adani Wilmar group.

Why does India need so much palm oil?
It is the cheapest edible oil available naturally.
Its inert taste makes it suitable for use in foods ranging from baked goods to fried snacks.
It stays relatively stable at high temperatures, and is therefore suitable for reuse and deep frying.
It is the main ingredient in vanaspati (hydrogenated vegetable oil).

Implications of this move:
On Indian consumers: Palm oil is not used in Indian homes and the fact that CPO continues to be imported, makes it unlikely that the decision to restrict refined palm oil imports will impact food inflation immediately.
On Malaysia: With imports to its largest market restricted (India bought over 23% of all CPO produced by Malaysia in 2019), Malaysian palm oil futures fell by almost 10% between January 10 and January 17, although it has recovered since then. If India does not issue licenses for importing refined oil, Malaysia will have to find new buyers for its product.

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

1. Hormuz peace initiative

What to study?
For Prelims: About the Start of Hormuz and peace initiative.
For Mains: Significance and need for stability in the region.

Context: The meeting of Hormuz Peace Initiative was recently held in Iran.
The meeting saw participation from key regional players including Oman and India besides Afghanistan and China.

About the Initiative:
The initiative is led by Iran.
It aims to stabilise the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway for a significant amount of global oil supplies.

What is the Strait of Hormuz?
It is the waterway separates Iran and Oman, linking the Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- On the north coast lies Iran, and on the south are the UAE and Musandam, an enclave of Oman.
- The Strait is 21 miles (33 km) wide at its narrowest point, but the shipping lane is just two miles (three km) wide in either direction.

Why does Strait of Hormuz matter?
- The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world’s most strategically important choke points.
- Two-thirds of the oil and half the liquefied natural gas India imports come through the strait between Iran and Oman.
- As much as 18 million barrels of oil pass through the Strait of Hormuz every day, accounting for one-third of the global oil trade. A third of the world’s LNG trade also passes through the strait.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. India-EU Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)

What to study?
For Prelims: BTIA- overview.
For Mains: Challenges and ways to address them.

Context: The European Union (EU) has expressed interest in exploring a bilateral investment protection agreement (BIPA) with India that would be delinked from the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) where ongoing negotiations are in a state of limbo.

Implications:
Carving out a separate investment protection agreement from the bilateral FTA — formally called the Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) — which is currently under negotiations, will make it possible for the investment protection pact to be signed even if there is no progress on the BTIA.

About India-EU Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) negotiations:
On 28th June 2007, India and the EU began negotiations on a broad-based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) in Brussels, Belgium.
These negotiations are pursuant to the commitment made by political leaders at the 7th India-EU Summit held in Helsinki on 13th October 2006 to move towards negotiations for a broad-based trade and investment agreement on the basis of the report of India-EU High Level Technical Group.

**Significance:**
India and the EU expect to promote bilateral trade by removing barriers to trade in goods and services and investment across all sectors of the economy. Both parties believe that a comprehensive and ambitious agreement that is consistent with WTO rules and principles would open new markets and would expand opportunities for Indian and EU businesses.

**The negotiations cover:**

**What’s the issue now?**
Negotiations have been languishing since 2013 when the talks collapsed over certain demands from the EU such as greater market access for automobiles, wine and spirits, and further opening up of the financial services sector such as banking, insurance and e-commerce.

- The EU wanted labour, environment and government procurement to be included in the talks.
- India’s demand for easier work visa and study visa norms as well as data secure status, that would make it easier for European companies to outsource business to India, were also not received enthusiastically by the EU countries.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. UAE has been declared ‘reciprocating territory’ by India

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: reciprocating territory and superior courts.*
*For Mains: Significance and implications.*

**Context:** Last week, the Ministry of Law and Justice issued an Extraordinary Gazette Notification, declaring the United Arab Emirates to be a “reciprocating territory” under Section 44A of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908.

- The notification also declared a list of courts in the UAE to be “superior Courts” under the same section.

Apart from UAE, the other countries declared to be “reciprocating territories” are: United Kingdom, Singapore, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Trinidad & Tobago, New Zealand, the Cook Islands (including Niue) and the Trust Territories of Western Samoa, Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Aden.

What is a ‘reciprocating territory’ and what are superior courts?

“Reciprocating territory” means any country or territory outside India which the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, declare to be a reciprocating territory; and “superior Courts”, with reference to any such territory, means such Courts as may be specified in the said notification.”

- Essentially, orders passed by certain designated courts from a ‘reciprocating territory’ can be implemented in India, by filing a copy of the decree concerned in a District Court here.
- The courts so designated are called ‘superior Courts’.

**What does Section 44 of the CPC say?**
Section 44A, titled “Execution of decrees passed by Courts in reciprocating territory”, provides the law on the subject of execution of decrees of Courts in India by foreign Courts and vice versa.

Section 44A (1) provides that a decree passed by “a superior Court in any “reciprocating territory” can be executed in India by filing a certified copy of the decree in a District Court, which will treat the decree as if it has been passed by itself.
Limitations:
*The scope of the Section is restricted to* decrees for payment of money, not being sums payable “in respect of taxes or other charges of a like nature or in respect of a fine or other penalty”.

It also *cannot be based on an arbitration award, even if such an award is enforceable as a decree or judgment.*

**Why is the move significant?**
The decision is believed to help bring down the time required for executing decrees between the two countries.

Indian expatriates in the UAE would no longer be able to seek safe haven in their home country if they are convicted in a civil case in the UAE.

Sources: Indian Express.

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**4. Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Competency of Seafarers**

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: STCW convention, features, significance and implications.*

**Context:** Cabinet approves Model MoU with foreign countries for unilateral/bilateral recognition of Certificates of Competency of seafarers.

This is in pursuant to Regulation 1/10 of *International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) for Seafarers.*

**Benefits:**
1. It will facilitate unilateral recognition by another country of the certificates issued by the Directorate General of Shipping to Indian seafarers, without seeking similar recognition by India of the certificates issued by that country.
2. Indian Seafarers, therefore, will be eligible to be placed on ships under the flag of that country for employment, thus leading to increased employment opportunities.
3. The bilateral MoU would make the seafarers of both the countries to be eligible for employment on ships of either party based on the certificates so recognized. India being a seafarer supplying nation with large pool of trained seafarers will stand to be benefitted.

**About STCW convention:**
The *International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (or STCW), 1978* sets qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel on seagoing merchant ships.

- STCW was *adopted in 1978 by conference at the International Maritime Organization (IMO)* in London, and *entered into force in 1984.*
- The 1978 STCW Convention was the *first to establish basic requirements on training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers on an international level.*
- The Convention *prescribes minimum standards relating to training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers which countries are obliged to meet or exceed.*
- One important feature of the Convention is that *it applies to ships of non-party States when visiting ports of States which are Parties to the Convention.*
- The *Manila amendments to the STCW Convention and Code* were adopted on 25 June 2010, marking a major revision of the STCW Convention and Code.

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

1. Qassem Soleimani killing

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: What Quds force?*

*For Mains: Implications of the latest event.*

**Context:** Major General Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander, was recently killed in a US strike at Baghdad International Airport. He was the long-serving head of Iran’s Quds (“Jerusalem”) Force and has been seen as a deadly adversary by America and its allies.

**What has the US said?**
The US Department of Defense has stated that the US military had taken the “decisive step to protect US personnel abroad by killing Soleimani, the head of Quds Force, which is the overseas operations wing of the IRGC and a US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organisation.”

- According to the State Department, the regime in Tehran “is responsible for the deaths of at least 603 American service members in Iraq since 2003”. This, according to the US, “accounts for 17% of all deaths of US personnel in Iraq from 2003 to 2011, and is in addition to the many thousands of Iraqis killed by the IRGC’s proxies”.
- In recent years, Quds Force plots have been uncovered in countries including Germany, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kenya, Bahrain, and Turkey.

**Background - Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC):**
Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini set up the IRGC in 1979 after the Iranian Revolution ended to protect the Islamic order of the new Iranian government.
IRGC has contributed roughly 125,000 men to Iran’s forces and has the capability of undertaking asymmetric warfare and covert operations.
This includes the Quds Force that over the years has established links with the Hezbollah of Lebanon, Shi’ite militias in Iraq, Shi’ites in Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories.

**What is the Quds Force?**
Quds is the Arabic word for Jerusalem, and is responsible for carrying out unconventional warfare and intelligence activities.
The force is responsible for training, financing and providing assistance to some extremist groups overseas. It also undertakes Iranian missions in other countries, including covert ones.

**What does Soleimani’s death mean for US-Iran relations?**
- Soleimani’s death would result in a dramatic escalation in relations between the US and Iran.
The strike has left the Middle East on edge, with possible repercussions beyond the region. The killing would make Iran more decisive in resisting the US, while anti-US forces would exact revenge across the Muslim world. The killing could have a ripple effect in any number of countries across the Middle East where Iran and the US compete for influence.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. 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 completely withdrawn from JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) nuclear deal. The announcement came after the US troops killed General Qassem Soleimani.

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?
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.

Implications for India:
- On Oil and Gas: The impact on world oil prices will be the immediately visible impact. Iran is presently India’s third biggest supplier (after Iraq and Saudi Arabia), and any increase in prices will hit both inflation levels as well as the Indian rupee.
- It would impact the development of Chabahar port.
- INSTC: It will also 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.

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 inturn would affect global trade.
4. Giant economy like India, China and Russia will suffer.
5. US may cancel airlines from US to India because they pass over Iran which would affect airspace industry.
3. What is Protecting Power?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: What is protecting power? Vienna Convention?

Context: Following the killing of Iranian military and intelligence commander Major General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in a drone attack carried out by the United States, the Iranian government registered its protest with the Swiss Embassy in Tehran.

Why Switzerland?
Switzerland represents the interests of the US in Iran. This is because the US itself does not have an embassy there.
Iran’s interests in the United States, on the other hand, are represented by the Pakistan Embassy in Washington.

How can one country represent another country?
In an arrangement such as this, Switzerland is the “Protecting Power” of the United States’ interests in Iran. The instrument of Protecting Powers is provided for under the 1961 and 1963 Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations.

What the Vienna rules say?
1961 Vienna Convention states, if diplomatic relations are broken off between two States, or if a mission is permanently or temporarily recalled, the sending State may entrust the protection of its interests and those of its nationals to a third State acceptable to the receiving State.
And the 1963 Convention reiterates: “A sending State may with the prior consent of a receiving State, and at the request of a third State not represented in the receiving State, undertake the temporary protection of the interests of the third State and of its nationals.”

Roles of Protecting power:
In the absence of diplomatic and consular relations of the United States of America with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Swiss government, acting through its Embassy in Tehran, serves as the Protecting Power of the USA in Iran since 21 May 1980. The Swiss Embassy’s Foreign Interests Section provides consular services to US citizens living in or travelling to Iran.
The United States government describes the same role on a web page on the “US Virtual Embassy” in Iran.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2020

What to study?
For Prelims: Date, themes and historical background.
For Mains: Significance of the day.

Context: Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated on 9th January every year to mark the contribution of Overseas Indian community in the development of India.

Why 9th January?
9th January was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa and eventually led India’s freedom struggle.

Significance:
PBD conventions are being held every year since 2003. These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and people of the land of their ancestors for mutually beneficial activities. These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Sikhs in US to be counted as separate ethnic group

What to study?
For Prelims: How are ethnic groups classified in the US?
For Mains: Implications of this move.

What’s the News?
Sikhs in the US will be counted as a separate ethnic group in the 2020 census for the first time.

Background:
Over a million Sikhs are estimated to be living in the US. One of the reasons for advocating the inclusion of Sikhs as a separate ethnic group is so “that action can be taken to address Sikh issues of significance such as bullying, intimidation and hate crimes against the community.”

How are race and ethnicity defined under the US Census?
The US Census Bureau considers race and ethnicity as two distinct and separate concepts. It adheres to the 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards on race and ethnicity.

1. There are five broad categories under which race is categorised. These are White, Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. This is a social definition of race recognised and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically.
2. Ethnicity determines whether a person is of Hispanic origin or not. For consideration under the US Census, ethnicity is broken down into two categories: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino.

What are the benefits of this move?
1. Ensure an accurate count of Sikhs in the United States.
2. Help in tracking and measuring hate crimes against the community.
3. Ensure an equal and accurate representation of Sikhs.
4. Useful in providing access to members of Congress and other essential government services for the needs of the community.

Elsewhere:
Apart from the US, Sikhs in Britain have also demanded inclusion as a separate ethnic group. In November 2019, British Sikhs took the government to court over the “unlawful” refusal to treat them as a separate ethnic group. It is estimated that there are over 800,000 Sikhs in the UK. Furthermore, Sikhs are one of the fastest-growing religious minorities in New Zealand, where they are considered to be a distinct ethnic group. Other ethnic groups in New Zealand include Punjabis, Bengalis, Indian Tamils and Fijian Indian, among others.

Sources: Indian Express.

6. US imposes new 'birth tourism' visa rules for pregnant women

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the new rule, key features.
For Mains: Need for, significance and concerns.

Context: The US Department of State has unveiled new rules to deter pregnant women from travelling to the US to give birth.
The policy is intended as a crackdown on what is known as "birth tourism".

**Present scenario:**
Currently, pregnant women can enter the US even up until birth, according to US Customs and Border Protection. But the prospective mother’s travel may be restricted if there is reason to believe she intends to remain in the US beyond the time allowed by her visa, or plans for US taxpayers to foot the bill for her childbirth.

**Need for the new policy?**
Nearly all children born in the US get automatic citizenship - a law US President Donald Trump has criticised. His administration says the new travel policy is necessary to safeguard US national security and public health.

**What is the new rule?**
1. The new rule applies to visitors seeking B visas, which are issued to non-immigrants.
2. Under the rule, pregnant women applying for US visitor visas may need to prove they have a specific reason for travel other than giving birth on US soil.
3. It allows consular officials to deny a visa to any individual whose "primary purpose" in obtaining such documentation is to give birth there.

**Significance:**
The rule addresses concerns about the attendant risks of this activity to national security and law enforcement, including criminal activity associated with the birth tourism industry, as reflected in federal prosecutions of individuals and entities involved in that industry.

**How many children are born under 'birth tourism'?**
There are no records of how many babies are born to US visitors each year, but various groups have issued estimates.
- About 10,000 babies were born to a foreign resident in 2017, the latest year that data is available, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- That number is up from about 7,800 in 2007.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 7. Oslo Accords

**What to study?**
- *For Prelims:* Where is Jerusalem located?
- *For Mains:* What is the Controversy all about, India’s stand and the need for viable solution.

**Context:** Palestinians threaten to quit Oslo Accords, if U.S. President Donald Trump announces his West Asia peace plan next week.

**Why? Palestinians’ concerns:**
The main worry is that this initiative will turn Israel’s “temporary occupation (of Palestinian territory) into a permanent occupation”.
The Palestinians see east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state and believe Mr. Trump’s plan buries the two-state solution that has been for decades the cornerstone of international West Asia diplomacy.

**What’s the issue?**
Under the Oslo Accords of the 1993, 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.
About the Oslo Accords:
Formally known as the Declaration of Principles (DOP), the pact established a timetable for the Middle East peace process. It planned for an interim Palestinian government in Gaza and Jericho in the West Bank. Oslo II, officially called the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza, expanded on Oslo I. It included provisions for the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from six West Bank cities and about 450 towns. Additionally, the pact set a timetable for elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council.

The Details of Oslo Accords:
The Declaration calls for:
- Israel to withdraw from Jericho and Gaza, and eventually the West Bank.
- Five years of limited autonomy for Palestinians in those areas.
- Election of Palestinian Legislative Council within nine months.
- Establishment of a Palestinian police force.
- The question of Jerusalem was left undecided.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. West Asia Peace Plan

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the plan.
For Mains: Need for, significance and the issues involved.

Context: The West Asia peace plan was recently unveiled by U.S. President Trump.

What is it all about?
It plans to revive the stalled two-state talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians.
It seeks to give the Israelis an expansive state with Jerusalem as its “undivided capital” and tight security control over a future Palestinian state.

Key highlights of the plan:
1. It proposes an independent Palestinian state and the recognition of Israeli sovereignty over West Bank settlements.
2. As per the plan, Israel would be allowed to annex the Jewish settlements on the West Bank as well as the Jordan Valley.
3. The Palestinian refugees, who were forced out from their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed the declaration of the state of Israel in the historic Palestine, would not be allowed to return. They could move to the future Palestinian state, be integrated into the host countries or settled in other regional countries.
4. Land swap: The plan proposes some land swap for the Israeli annexation of the West Bank Jewish settlements. It seeks to enlarge Gaza and connect the strip with the West Bank through a tunnel.
5. US has also proposed $50 billion in investment over 10 years should Palestine accept the proposals. In the final settlement, Palestine would get control over more land than what it currently controls.

Background:
Both Israel and the Palestinians hold competing claims to the holy city. The Palestinians insist that East Jerusalem, which Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war, be the capital of their future state.

How has the Palestine reacted?
Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas dismissed the plans as a "conspiracy". Thousands are protesting against this.
The Palestinians want an independent state of their own, comprising the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.
India’s response:

- India urged both Israel and Palestine to “engage with each other, including on the recent proposals put forward by the United States, and find an acceptable two-state solution for peaceful coexistence”.
- India has since long been maintaining that Israel-Palestine conflict should be resolved through negotiation “resulting in sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions”.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. UNESCO creative cities network (UCCN)

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: About Creative Cities Network- features and significance.

Context: The government of Hanoi recently held a ceremony to formally announce that the Vietnamese capital city is joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN).

To date, the UCCN has granted membership to 246 cities around the world.

About Creative Cities Network:

What is it?
The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

Objective: placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level.

The Network covers seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.

Joining the Network, cities commit to sharing their best practices and developing partnerships involving the public and private sectors as well as civil society in order to:

1. Strengthen the creation, production, distribution and dissemination of cultural activities, goods and services;
2. Develop hubs of creativity and innovation and broaden opportunities for creators and professionals in the cultural sector;
3. Improve access to and participation in cultural life, in particular for marginalized or vulnerable groups and individuals;
4. Fully integrate culture and creativity into sustainable development plans.

As of November, 2019, there are five Indian cities in UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) as follows:


Sources: the hindu.

2. Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conference

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: About APDRC- objectives and significance, what is Drosophila?

Context: The fifth edition of the Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conference (APDRC5) is being held at Pune.
• The conference is being organised in the country for the first time by the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER).
• The last four editions of this conference took place in Taipei, Seoul, Beijing and Osaka.

About APDRC:
The Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conferences (APDRC) are biennial events that aim to promote the interaction of Drosophila Researchers in the Asia-Pacific region with their peers in the rest of the world.

What is Drosophila?
It is a genus of flies, belonging to the family Drosophilidae, whose members are often called "small fruit flies" or (less frequently) pomace flies, vinegar flies, or wine flies, a reference to the characteristic of many species to linger around overripe or rotting fruit.

• It is one of the most widely-used and preferred model organisms in biological research across the world for the last 100 years. Several discoveries in biology have been made using this.
• Its genome is entirely sequenced and there is enormous information available about its biochemistry, physiology and behaviour.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Nepal’s Seke ‘near-extinct’

What to study?
For Prelims: About Endangered languages and Seke.
For Mains: Endangered languages- concerns, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: Recently, The New York Times reported that the “near-extinct” Nepalese language Seke has just 700 speakers around the world.

About Nepal’s Seke language and threats to it:
According to the Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), Seke is one of the over 100 indigenous languages of Nepal.
In recent years, Seke has been retreating in the face of Nepali, which is Nepal’s official language and is considered to be crucial for getting educational and employment opportunities outside villages.

• According to ELA, difficult conditions at home and job prospects elsewhere have brought speakers of Seke to places such as Pokhara, Kathmandu and even New York. Therefore, the vulnerability of the language is linked to the migration of people to places where Seke is not spoken, which has reduced the intergenerational transmission of the language. Furthermore, the younger generation does not find much use in learning the language, giving preference to Nepali and English.

Languages in danger?
UNESCO has six degrees of endangerment. These are:
1. Safe, which are the languages spoken by all generations and their intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted.
2. Vulnerable languages, which are spoken by most children but may be restricted to certain domains.
3. Definitely endangered languages, which are no longer being learnt by children as their mother tongue.
4. Severely endangered are languages spoken by grandparents and older generations, and while the parent generation may understand it, they may not speak it with the children or among themselves.
5. Critically endangered languages are those of which the youngest speakers are the grandparents or older family members who may speak the language partially or infrequently.
6. Extinct languages, of which no speakers are left.
Considering these definitions, Seke may be considered to be a definitely endangered language.

Fact for Prelims:
The last year, 2019, was the International Year of Indigenous Languages, mandated by the United Nations (UN).
As per UNESCO, roughly 57 per cent of the world’s estimated 6,000 languages are safe, about 10 per cent are vulnerable, 10.7 per cent are definitely endangered, about 9 per cent are severely endangered, 9.6 per cent are critically endangered and about 3.8 per cent of all languages are extinct since 1950.

As per the Endangered Languages Project (ELP), there are roughly 201 endangered languages in India and about 70 in Nepal.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. '8 Wonders of SCO'

What to study?

For Prelims: About SCO and the eight wonders.

For Mains: Significance and potential of SCO, challenges ahead.

Context: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has included the Statue of Unity among the ‘Eight Wonders of the SCO.

Key facts:

1. At 182 metre, the statue is 23 metre taller than China’s Spring Temple Buddha statue and almost double the height of the Statue of Liberty (93 metre tall) in US.
2. Located on the Sadhu Bet island, near Rajpipla on the Narmada river, the Statue of Unity is located between the Satpura and the Vindhya mountain ranges.

The Eight Wonders of the SCO are:

1. India — the Statue of Unity.
2. Kazakhstan — the Archaeological Landscape of Tamgaly.
3. China — The Daming imperial palace complex.
5. Pakistan — The Great Mughals’ heritage at Lahore.
7. Tajikistan — The Palace of Nowruz.
8. Uzbekistan — the Poi Kalon complex.

About the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

It is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation.

It’s creation was announced on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai (China) by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

It was preceded by the Shanghai Five mechanism.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Charter was signed during the St.Petersburg SCO Heads of State meeting in June 2002, and entered into force on 19 September 2003.

The SCO’s main goals are as follows:

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.

The SCO’s official languages are Russian and Chinese.

Bodies under SCO:

Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO. It meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters of the organisation.
SCO Heads of Government Council (HGC) meets once a year to discuss the organisation’s multilateral cooperation strategy and priority areas, to resolve current important economic and other cooperation issues, and also to approve the organisation’s annual budget.

The organisation has two permanent bodies — the SCO Secretariat based in Beijing and the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent.

The SCO Secretary-General and the Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS are appointed by the Council of Heads of State for a term of three years.

Currently:

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;

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;

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.

5. Henley Passport Index

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Passport Index- features, performance of various countries and significance of the index.

Context: The latest edition of Henley Passport Index has been released.

What is Henley Passport Index (HPI)?

It is a global ranking of countries according to the travel freedom for their citizens.

Started in 2006 as Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index (HVRI) and was modified and renamed in January 2018.

How are the countries ranked?

The ranking is based on exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which maintains the world’s largest and most accurate database of travel information, and enhanced by the Henley & Partners Research Department.

The Index lists the world’s passports “according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa”.

The index includes 199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations.

Performance of various Countries:

1. Japan is at the top. It has been topping the Index for three straight years; according to the 2020 index, its citizens are able to access 191 destinations without having to obtain a visa in advance.

2. Singapore, in second place (same as in 2019), has a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 190.

3. Germany is No. 3 (same position as in 2019), with access to 189 destinations;

4. The US and the UK have been falling consistently over successive Indices.

Performance of India:

1. The Indian passport is closer to the bottom, ranked 84th in the world.

2. This translates into visa-free access to 58 destinations, including 33 which give Indians visas on arrival.

3. Twenty of the 58 visa-free access destinations in the 2020 list are in Africa, and 11 each in Asia and the Caribbean. Serbia is the only European country to which Indian passport holders can travel visa-free.

Sources: the Hindu.
Sources: the Hindu.

6. Global social mobility report

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview and key findings.
For Mains: Concerns and challenges highlighted, measures to address them.

Context: World Economic Forum has come out with its first-ever Global Social Mobility Report.

Performance of India:
1. The report has ranked India a lowly 76 out of the 82 countries profiled.
2. It lists India among the five countries that stand to gain the most from a better social mobility score.
3. It ranks 41st in lifelong learning and 53rd in working conditions.
4. The Areas of improvement for India include social protection (76th) and fair wage distribution (79th).

Global performance:
1. The Nordic nations hold the top five spots, led by Denmark in the first place (scoring 85 points), followed by Norway, Finland and Sweden (all above 83 points) and Iceland (82 points).
2. Among the G7 economies, Germany is the most socially mobile, ranking 11th with 78 points.

What is social mobility?
It can be understood as the movement in personal circumstances either “upwards” or “downwards” of an individual in relation to those of their parents.

• In absolute terms, it is the ability of a child to experience a better life than their parents.
• On the other hand, relative social mobility is an assessment of the impact of socio-economic background on an individual’s outcomes in life.
• It can be measured against a number of outcomes ranging from health to educational achievement and income.

Why does social mobility matter?
Research has shown that in high-income countries, since the 1990s, there is stagnation at both the bottom and the top end of the income distribution—a phenomenon which social mobility experts describe as ‘sticky floors’ and ‘sticky ceilings’.

• In other words, how far an individual can move up in the society determines a lot whether one is closer to the income “floor” (or poor) or “ceiling” (or rich).
• Social mobility levels, then, can help us understand both the speed – that is, how long it takes for individuals at the bottom of the scale to catch up with those at the top – and the intensity – that is, how many steps it takes for an individual to move up the ladder in a given period – of social mobility.

Why the need for a new index?
• Social mobility has become the pressing issue of modern life, and as the index highlights, while major improvements have been made in some areas, notably extreme poverty, in others, the situation is deteriorating.
• Globalization and technology are frequently blamed for this, but as the report highlights, there are a plethora of reasons – not least of which is poor policy-making – and it is the responsibility of a range of stakeholders to redress these.

What does it do that other indices don’t?
The index considers what a country can do holistically to foster relative social mobility for all citizens, which is markedly different from other methodologies.

• The Global Social Mobility Index, focuses on drivers of relative social mobility instead of outcomes. It looks at policies, practices and institutions. This allows it to enable effective comparisons throughout regions and generations.
• It uses 10 pillars, which in turn are broken down into five determinants of social mobility – health, education, technology access, work opportunities, working conditions and fair wages and finally, social protection and inclusive institutions.

Key findings:
• The Global Social Mobility Index reveals that there are only a handful of nations with the right conditions to foster social mobility.
• Most countries underperform in four areas: fair wages, social protection, working conditions and lifelong learning.
• The index also reveals that achieving higher levels of social mobility needs to be perceived as an important element of a wider move towards a stakeholder-based model of capitalism.
• Looking at all economies and average income levels, those children who are born into less affluent families typically experience greater barriers to success than their more affluent born counterparts.
• Furthermore, inequalities are rising even in countries that have experienced rapid growth.
• In most countries, individuals from certain groups have become historically disadvantaged and poor social mobility perpetuates and exacerbates such inequalities. In turn, these types of inequalities can undermine the cohesiveness of economies and societies.

Way ahead - suggestions:
1. Creating a new financing model for social mobility: improving tax progressivity on personal income, policies that address wealth concentration and broadly re-balancing the sources of taxation can support the social mobility agenda. Most importantly though, the mix of public spending and policy incentives must change to put greater emphasis on the factors of social spending.
2. More support for education and lifelong learning: targeted at improvements in the availability, quality and distribution of education programmes as well as a new agenda for promoting skills development throughout an individual’s working life. This includes a new approach to jointly financing such efforts between the public and private sector.
3. Developing a new social protection contract: this would offer holistic protection to all workers irrespective of their employment status, particularly in a context of technological change and industry transitions, requiring greater support for job transitions in the coming decade.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

What to study?
For Prelims: Objectives of the treaty.
For Mains: Significance and implications of the treaty.

Context: Iran has warned to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if the European Nations refer the dispute over its atomic programme to the United Nation Security Council.

What’s the issue?
Britain, France and Germany launched a process last week charging Iran with failing to observe the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal.
This move could eventually see the Security Council reimpose international sanctions on the country.
Iran has accused the three EU member states of inaction over sanctions the United States reimposed on it after unilaterally withdrawing from the landmark accord in 2018.

Background:
The landmark 2015 deal reached with Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States gave Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme. Since the U.S. pullout, Iran has progressively rolled back its commitments to the accord in retaliation.

What is NPT?
The NPT is a multilateral treaty aimed at limiting the spread of nuclear weapons including three elements: (1) non-proliferation, (2) disarmament, and (3) peaceful use of nuclear energy. These elements constitute a “grand bargain” between the five nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear weapon states.

The treaty was signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. Presently, it has 190 member states.

**Implications:**
1. States without nuclear weapons will not acquire them.
2. States with nuclear weapons will pursue disarmament.
3. All states can access nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, under safeguards.

**Key provisions:**
1. The Treaty defines nuclear weapon states (NWS) as those that had manufactured and detonated a nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January 1967. All the other states are therefore considered non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS).
2. The five nuclear weapon states are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
3. The Treaty does not affect the right of state parties to develop, produce, and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

**Role of states:**
1. Nuclear weapon states are not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons and not to assist, encourage, or induce any NNWS to manufacture or otherwise acquire them.
2. Non-nuclear weapons states are not to receive nuclear weapons from any transferor, and are not to manufacture or acquire them.
3. NNWS must accept the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards on all nuclear materials on their territories or under their control.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 8. UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: UNCITRAL- objectives and functions.*

**Context:** An International Arbitration Tribunal has dismissed all claims brought against India in entirety.

**What’s the issue?**
The arbitration arose out of the cancellation of Letters of Intent for the issuance of telecom licences to provide 2G services in five telecommunications circles by reason of India’s essential security interests.
- The verdict was pronounced last year in July 2019 by the International Arbitration Tribunal constituted in accordance with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Arbitration Rules, 1976.
- The proceedings were administered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA).

**About UNCITRAL:**
1. The UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) is a subsidiary body of the U.N. General Assembly.
2. It is responsible for helping to facilitate international trade and investment.
3. Established by the UNGA in 1966.
4. Mandate is “to promote the progressive harmonization and unification of international trade law” through conventions, model laws, and other instruments that address key areas of commerce, from dispute resolution to the procurement and sale of goods.
5. Annual sessions held alternately in New York City and Vienna, where it is headquartered.
6. The Tribunal constituted in accordance with the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules 1976 is seated at the Hague, Netherlands, and proceedings are administered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration.
9. Democracy Index 2019

What to study?
For Prelims: Democracy Index 2019- features and performance of various countries, what is a flawed democracy?
For Mains: Concerns expressed over India and measures needed to improve.

Context: Democracy Index 2019 has been released.
The report ranks 165 independent states and two territories, covering almost the entire population of the world.

About the index:
It is released annually by The Economist Intelligence Unit.
It provides a snapshot of the state of world democracy for 165 independent states and two territories.

The Index is based on five categories:
1. Electoral process and pluralism.
2. Civil liberties.
3. Functioning of government.
4. Political participation.
5. Political culture.

Classification:
Based on their scores on 60 indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regime: full democracy; flawed democracy; hybrid regime; and authoritarian regime.

Performance of India:
In 2019, India slipped 10 places to 51st position.
It is placed in the “flawed democracy” category, which also includes Bangladesh (5.88).

Its score, down from 7.23 in 2018 to 6.90 in 2019, is its lowest ever since the Democracy Index was begun in 2006.
On the CAA, the report says, “The new citizenship law has enraged the large Muslim population, stoked communal tensions and generated large protests in major cities.”

What caused democratic regression in India?
As per the report, erosion of civil liberties in the country is main reason.
The report mentioned the stripping of Jammu and Kashmir’s special status with the repeal of Articles 370 and 35A, the various security measures that followed the bifurcation of the state including restriction of Internet access, and the exclusion of 1.9 million people from the final NRC (National Register of Citizens) in Assam.

Rankings of various other countries:
1. Norway (top-ranked with 9.87) is counted as a “full democracy”.
2. Following Norway at the top of the rankings are Iceland (9.58), Sweden (9.39) and New Zealand (9.26).
3. Other “full democracies” include Germany, the United Kingdom and France.
4. The United States, with a score of 7.96 is a “flawed democracy”, in the same category as India.
5. In 2019, the average global score fell from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.44, the worst result since 2006.
6. China (2.26) and North Korea (bottom-ranked with 1.08) are categorised as “authoritarian regimes”.
7. Pakistan, with a score of 4.25, is categorised as a “hybrid democracy”.
8. The report describes the year in Asia as one filled with “drama and tumult,” with Hong Kong being the epicentre of protest in the continent.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. What makes WHO declare a disease outbreak a public health emergency?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Coronavirus- spread, symptoms and prevention, WHO public health emergency.

Context: World Health Organization declares coronavirus a public health emergency of international concern.

What necessitated this?
Rising numbers and evidence of person-to-person transmission in a handful of cases outside of China. Greatest concern is the potential for the virus to spread to countries with weaker health systems, and which are ill-prepared to deal with it.

What is a public health emergency of international concern?
As per WHO, it is "an extraordinary event" that constitutes a "public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease" and "to potentially require a coordinated international response." Previous emergencies have included Ebola, Zika and H1N1.

The responsibility of declaring an event as an emergency lies with the Director-General of the WHO and requires the convening of a committee of members.

Implications:
Declaring the coronavirus a public health emergency of international concern would allow WHO to better coordinate the international response and hold nations to account if they overstep the organization’s standards -- which may pertain to travel, trade, quarantine or screening.

Background:
The novel coronavirus (a new strain of coronavirus which has not been previously identified in human beings) is one among a large family of coronaviruses that can cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to the more serious Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

- The source of the novel coronavirus is not yet known and there is no treatment for it so far.
- The infection has killed more than 100 people in China, and according to the WHO’s latest situation report, there are 5,997 confirmed cases of coronavirus in the country and 68 in the rest of the world.
- Other countries where confirmed coronavirus cases have been reported include Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Australia, Thailand, Nepal, Germany, France, the US and Canada.

Sources: the Hindu.

11. World Sustainable Development Summit

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: WSDS- key facts and significance of the summit, about TERI.

Context: The theme of the 2020 edition of the Summit is 'Towards 2030 Goals: Making the Decade Count'.

World Sustainable Development Summit:
It is the annual flagship event of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).
It is the sole Summit on global issues taking place in the developing world.
It provides a platform for global leaders and practitioners to discuss and deliberate over climatic issues of universal importance. It strives to provide long-term solutions for the benefit of the global community by assembling the world’s most enlightened leaders and thinkers on a single platform. It is continuing the legacy of Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS) which was initiated in 2001 with the aim of making ‘sustainable development’ a globally shared goal.

**The Energy and Resources Institute – TERI:**
It is a leading think tank dedicated to conducting research for sustainable development of India and the Global South.
- TERI was established in 1974 as an information centre on energy issues. However, over the following decades, it made a mark as a research institute, whose policy and technology solutions transformed people’s lives and the environment.

Sources: pib.

**START WITH DETERMINATION**
**FINISH WITH SATISFACTION.**

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GENERAL STUDIES – 3

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

1. India’s fiscal deficit

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: FD- meaning, implications, what is off budget spending? Implications.

Context: Former Economic Affairs Secretary S C Garg has stated that the true fiscal deficit for 2018-19 is 4.7%. According to Garg, for the current financial year, too, the actual fiscal deficit is likely to range between 4.5 per cent to 5 per cent of GDP.

What’s the issue?
Contrary to these views, the Indian government says, the fiscal deficit just 3.4 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) for 2018-19. For the current year, the Union Budget presented in July expected the fiscal deficit to be 3.3 per cent of the GDP.

• For long, it has been suspected that the official figures hide the true fiscal deficit. That’s because some of the government’s expenditure was funded by the so-called “off-budget” items.
• As a result, while this extra expenditure did not figure in the official calculations, it did mean that the true fiscal deficit or borrowing by the public sector was higher than the level presented in the Budget.

What is fiscal deficit?
It is the difference between the Revenue Receipts plus Non-debt Capital Receipts (NDCR) and the total expenditure.
In other words, fiscal deficit is “reflective of the total borrowing requirements of Government”.

What is the significance of fiscal deficit?
1. In the economy, there is a limited pool of investible savings. These savings are used by financial institutions like banks to lend to private businesses (both big and small) and the governments (Centre and state).
2. If the fiscal deficit ratio is too high, it implies that there is a lesser amount of money left in the market for private entrepreneurs and businesses to borrow.
3. Lesser amount of this money, in turn, leads to higher rates of interest charged on such lending.
4. So, simply put, a higher fiscal deficit means higher borrowing by the government, which, in turn, mean higher interest rates in the economy.
5. A high fiscal deficit and higher interest rates would also mean that the efforts of the Reserve Bank of India to reduce interest rates are undone.

What is the acceptable level of fiscal deficit?
There is no set universal level of fiscal deficit that is considered good.
Typically, for a developing economy, where private enterprises may be weak and governments may be in a better state to invest, fiscal deficit could be higher than in a developed economy.
Here, governments also have to invest in both social and physical infrastructure upfront without having adequate avenues for raising revenues.

What should the ideal fiscal deficit look like?
In India, the FRBM Act suggests bringing the fiscal deficit down to about 3 percent of the GDP is the ideal target. Unfortunately, successive governments have not been able to achieve this target.

What is off-budget financing?
This refers to expenditure that’s not funded through the budget.
For example:
1. The government sets up a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to construct a bridge.
2. The SPV will likely borrow money to build the bridge on the strength of a government guarantee. If it’s not a toll bridge, the SPV will need government support to meet interest obligations.
3. So, even though the borrowing and spending is outside the budget, it has implications for the budget and for all practical reasons should be included in that document.
4. Since it’s not, this doesn’t reflect on the fiscal deficit number as well.

**Concerns and implications:**
- Governments across the world use this to escape budget controls.
- Off-budget financing by its nature isn’t taken into account when calculating fiscal indicators.
- But the cost is borne by the budget through some mechanism or the other. Such financing tends to hide the actual extent of government spending, borrowings and debt and increase the interest burden.

Sources: Indian Express.

**Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.**

1. Small finance banks

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Small Finance Banks- management, functions and features.*
*For Mains: Financial inclusion- need, challenges and efforts by the government.*

**Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) granted ‘in-principle’ approval to Saharanpur-based Shivalik Mercantile Cooperative Bank to convert into a Small Finance Bank (SFB), making it the first such lender to have opted for the transition.

**What next?**
The ‘in-principle’ approval implies that the lender now has 18 months to comply with all conditions required to get the final SFB license from the RBI.

On being satisfied that the applicant has complied with the requisite conditions laid down by it as part of “in-principle” approval, the RBI would consider granting it a licence for the commencement of banking business under **Section 22 (1) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949** as an SFB.

**What are small finance banks?**
The small finance bank will primarily undertake basic banking activities of acceptance of deposits and lending to unserved and underserved sections including small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries and unorganised sector entities.

**What they can do?**
1. Take small deposits and disburse loans.
2. Distribute mutual funds, insurance products and other simple third-party financial products.
3. Lend 75% of their total adjusted net bank credit to priority sector.
4. Maximum loan size would be 10% of capital funds to single borrower, 15% to a group.
5. Minimum 50% of loans should be up to 25 lakhs.

**What they cannot do?**
1. Lend to big corporates and groups.
2. Cannot open branches with prior RBI approval for first five years.
3. Other financial activities of the promoter must not mingle with the bank.
4. It cannot set up subsidiaries to undertake non-banking financial services activities.
5. Cannot be a business correspondent of any bank.

**The guidelines they need to follow:**
1. Promoter must contribute minimum 40% equity capital and should be brought down to 30% in 10 years.
2. Minimum paid-up capital would be Rs 100 cr.
3. Capital adequacy ratio should be 15% of risk weighted assets, Tier-I should be 7.5%.
4. Foreign shareholding capped at 74% of paid capital, FPIs cannot hold more than 24%.
5. Priority sector lending requirement of 75% of total adjusted net bank credit.
6. 50% of loans must be up to Rs 25 lakh.

**SMALL FINANCE BANKS IN A NUTSHELL**

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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. Zero Budget Natural Farming

**What to study?**

- **For Prelims:** Features of ZBNF.
- **For Mains:** Significance of ZBNF, advantages of ZBNF.

**Context:** The Andhra Pradesh government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with German firm KfW regarding Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF).
- The MoU is aimed at encouraging natural farming in the State. As part it, the government has taken a loan of ₹711 crore out of the estimated amount of ₹1,015 crore earmarked for ZBNF.

**What is Zero Budget Natural Farming?**

It is a method of farming where the cost of growing and harvesting plants is zero. This means that farmers need not purchase fertilizers and pesticides in order to ensure the healthy growth of crops.

- Farmers use earthworms, cow dung, urine, plants, human excreta and such biological fertilizers for crop protection. It reduces farmers’ investment. It also protects the soil from degradation.

**Benefits of Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF):**

1. As both a social and environmental programme, it aims to ensure that farming – particularly smallholder farming – is economically viable by enhancing farm biodiversity and ecosystem services.
2. It reduces farmers’ costs through eliminating external inputs and using in-situ resources to rejuvenate soils, whilst simultaneously increasing incomes, and restoring ecosystem health through diverse, multi-layered cropping systems.

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3. **Cow dung from local cows has proven to be a miraculous cure to revive the fertility and nutrient value of soil.** One gram of cow dung is believed to have anywhere between 300 to 500 crore beneficial micro-organisms. These micro-organisms decompose the dried biomass on the soil and convert it into ready-to-use nutrients for plants. 

4. **Zero budget natural farming requires only 10 per cent water and 10 per cent electricity** than what is required under chemical and organic farming. ZBNF may improve the potential of crops to adapt to and be produced for evolving climatic conditions.

**Four wheels of ZBNF to be implemented in practically:**

The “four wheels” of ZBNF are ‘Jiwamrita’, ‘Bijamrita’, ‘Mulching’ and ‘Waaphasa’, says Palekar, a Padma Shri awardee.

- **Jiwamrita** is a fermented mixture of cow dung and urine (of desi breeds), jaggery, pulses flour, water and soil from the farm bund. This isn’t a fertiliser, but just a source of some 500 crore micro-organisms that can convert all the necessary “non-available” nutrients into “available” form.

- **Bijamrita** is a mix of desi cow dung and urine, water, bund soil and lime that is used as a seed treatment solution prior to sowing.

- **Mulching**, or covering the plants with a layer of dried straw or fallen leaves, is meant to conserve soil moisture and keep the temperature around the roots at 25-32 degrees Celsius, which allows the microorganisms to do their job.

- **Waaphasa**, or providing water to maintain the required moisture-air balance, also achieves the same objective.

**Government initiatives to support ZBNF:**

Government of India has been promoting organic farming in the country through the dedicated schemes of **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)** since 2015-16 and also through **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)**.

- In the revised guidelines of **PKVY scheme** during the year 2018, various organic farming models like Natural Farming, Rishi Farming, Vedic Farming, Cow Farming, Homa Farming, Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) etc. have been included wherein flexibility is given to states to adopt any model of Organic Farming including ZBNF depending on farmer’s choice.

- Under the **RKVY scheme**, organic farming/natural farming project components are considered by the respective State Level Sanctioning Committee (SLSC) according to their priority/choice.

Sources: the hindu.

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2. **National Agriculture Market**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: NAM-features.*

*For Mains: Need for and significance.*

**Context:** Punjab Mandi Board (PMB) had recently organised awareness camps, training programmes and seminars on the **National Agriculture Market (e-NAM)** across mandis in the state.

**What is e-NAM?**

E-NAM (National Agriculture Market) is **an online trading platform for agriculture produce** aiming to help farmers, traders, and buyers with online trading and getting a better price by smooth marketing. It was launched by the Centre in 2015 and the government had to extend it in a phased manner across the 585 mandis of the country by December 31, 2019.

**NAM has the following advantages:**

1. **For the farmers**, NAM promises more options for sale. It would increase his access to markets through warehouse based sales and thus obviate the need to transport his produce to the mandi.

2. **For the local trader in the mandi / market**, NAM offers the opportunity to access a larger national market for secondary trading.

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3. **Bulk buyers, processors, exporters etc.** benefit from being able to participate directly in trading at the local mandi / market level through the NAM platform, thereby reducing their intermediation costs. 
4. The gradual integration of all the major mandis in the States into NAM will ensure common procedures for issue of licences, levy of fee and movement of produce.
5. The NAM will also facilitate the emergence of value chains in major agricultural commodities across the country and help to promote scientific storage and movement of agri goods.

**Need for:**
1. Fragmentation of state into multiple market areas.
2. Poor quality of infrastructure and low use of technology.
3. In the traditional mandi system, farmers generally procured very less price for their crops as they had to pass through various intermediaries at the physical marketplace. This not only adds costs but also handling costs.
4. In addition, the farmer has to face obstacles in form of multiple tax levies and licenses and weak logistics and infrastructure in India.

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. PM – KISAN scheme**

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

**Context:** The Centre will transfer over Rs. 12,000 crore to the bank accounts of more than 6 crore farmers under the flagship PM-Kisan Scheme.

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

**What is a small and marginal landholder family?**
It comprises of husband, wife and minor children up to 18 years of age, who collectively own cultivable land up to two hectares as per the land records of the concerned states.

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

**Similar programmes by states:**
*Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana in Madhya Pradesh* was sought to provide relief to farmers by providing the differential between MSPs and market prices.
The Rythu Bandhu scheme of the Telangana provides ₹4,000 per acre for every season to all the farmers of the state. Similar initiatives have also been framed in Jharkhand and Odisha. 

Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income augmentation (KALIA) of Odisha is more complicated in design and implementation. It commits to give Rs 5,000 per SMF, twice a year, that is Rs 10,000 a year.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.

1. Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: APEDA and FPO- objectives, functions and significance.

Context: 800 FPOs registered on Farmer Connect Portal of APEDA.

Background:
A Farmer Connect Portal has been set up by APEDA on its website for providing a platform for Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) to interact with exporters.

About APEDA:
The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) was established by the Government of India under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act 1985.
The Authority replaced the Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPC).
APEDA, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industries, promotes export of agricultural and processed food products from India.

APEDA is mandated with the responsibility of export promotion and development of the following scheduled products:

- Fruits, Vegetables and their Products.
- Meat and Meat Products.
- Poultry and Poultry Products.
- Dairy Products.
- Confectionery, Biscuits and Bakery Products.
- Honey, Jaggery and Sugar Products.
- Cocoa and its products, chocolates of all kinds.
- Alcoholic and Non-Alcoholic Beverages.
- Cereal and Cereal Products.
- Groundnuts, Peanuts and Walnuts.
- Pickles, Papads and Chutneys.
- Guar Gum.
- Floriculture and Floriculture Products.
- Herbal and Medicinal Plants.

Administrative set up:
1. Chairman – Appointed by the Central Government.
2. Director – Appointed by APEDA.
3. Secretary – Appointed by the Central Government.
4. Other Officers and Staff – Appointed by the Authority.

Background:
An **Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)**, formed by a **group of farm producers**, is a **registered body** with producers as shareholders in the organisation.

It deals with business activities related to the farm produce and it works for the benefit of the member producers.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

### 1. HSN Code

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and mains: Meaning, features and significance of HSN code.*

**Context:** India **not to allow imports without HSN code.** This will enable India’s exports to be accepted globally due to the quality of goods and services.

**What does the HSN code mean?** - Harmonised System, or simply ‘HS’:

It 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.**

**HSN:**

HS Code is also known as HSN Code in India. Goods are classified into Harmonized System of Nomenclature or HSN. It is used up to 8 digit level.

**Application:**

HSN classification is widely used for taxation purposes by helping to identify the rate of tax applicable to a specific product in a country that is under review. It can also be used in calculations that involve claiming benefits.

**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: pib.
Topics: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. National Infrastructure Pipeline

What to study?
For Prelims: Features of NIP.
For Mains: Funding, need for and significance.

Context: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has unveiled a ₹102 lakh crore national infrastructure pipeline, in accordance with the Narendra Modi government's vision to make India a $5 trillion economy by 2024-25.

Background: The finance ministry had set up a task force headed by Economic Affairs Secretary to prepare a road map for the "national infrastructure pipeline" from 2019-20 to 2024-25 under the ₹100 lakh crore infra plan.

Sector-specific:
1. Irrigation and rural infrastructure projects would account for ₹7.7 lakh crore each. ₹3.07 lakh crore would be spent on industrial infrastructure. Agriculture and social infrastructure would account for the rest.
2. Road projects will account for ₹19.63 lakh crore while another ₹13.68 lakh crore would be for railway projects.
3. Port projects would see spending of ₹1 lakh crore and airports another ₹1.43 lakh crore. ₹16.29 lakh crore would be spent on urban infrastructure and ₹3.2 lakh crore in telecom projects.
4. According to the sector-wise break-up of projects made available by the Finance Ministry, ₹24.54 lakh crore investment will flow in the energy sector, and of that ₹11.7 lakh crore would be in just the power sector.
5. ₹42 lakh crore NIP projects which are in the implementation stage now include expressways, national gas grid and PMAY-G.

About the National Infrastructure Pipeline and its significance:
It is estimated that India would need to spend $4.5 trillion on infrastructure by 2030 to sustain its growth rate. The endeavour of the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), is to make this happen in an efficient manner.

Funding: The central government and state governments would have an equal share of 39% each in the NIP. The private sector, on the other hand, would have 22% share which the government expects to increase to 30% by 2025.

- National Infrastructure Pipeline will ensure that infrastructure projects are adequately prepared and launched.
- Each Ministry/ Department would be responsible for the monitoring of projects so as to ensure their timely and within-cost implementation.
- It will help in stepping-up annual infrastructure investment to achieve the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $5 trillion by 2024-25.

Need for infrastructure funding:
- Availability of quality infrastructure is a pre-requisite to achieve broad-based and inclusive growth on a sustainable basis.
- Investment in infrastructure is also necessary for sustaining the high growth rate of India.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. FAME-II Scheme.

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: FAME- India scheme- features, significance and potential.
Context: To give a further push to clean mobility in Road Transport Sector, the Department of Heavy Industries has sanctioned 2636 charging stations in 62 cities across 24 States/UTs under FAME India (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India) scheme phase II.

What are the salient features of FAME 2 scheme?

- **Aims** to boost electric mobility and increase the number of electric vehicles in commercial fleets.
- **Target**: The outlay of ₹10,000 crore has been made for three years till 2022 for FAME 2 scheme.
- The government will offer the incentives for electric buses, three-wheelers and four-wheelers to be used for commercial purposes.
- Plug-in hybrid vehicles and those with a sizeable lithium-ion battery and electric motor will also be included in the scheme and fiscal support offered depending on the size of the battery.

How will FAME 2 scheme help improve charging infrastructure?

1. The centre will invest in setting up charging stations, with the active participation of public sector units and private players.
2. It has also been proposed to provide one slow-charging unit for every electric bus and one fast-charging station for 10 electric buses.
3. Projects for charging infrastructure will include those needed to extend electrification for running vehicles such as pantograph charging and flash charging.
4. FAME 2 will also encourage interlinking of renewable energy sources with charging infrastructure.

Background:

FAME India is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan. Main thrust of FAME is to encourage electric vehicles by providing subsidies. FAME focuses on 4 areas i.e. Technology development, Demand Creation, Pilot Projects and Charging Infrastructure.

Need of the hour:

India needs auto industry’s active participation to ease electric mobility transition.

- The auto and battery industries could collaborate to enhance customer awareness, promote domestic manufacturing, promote new business models, conduct R&D for EVs and components, consider new business models to promote EVs.
- Government should focus on a phased manufacturing plan to promote EVs, provide fiscal and non-fiscal incentives for phased manufacturing of EVs and batteries.
- Different government departments can consider a bouquet of potential policies, such as congestion pricing, ZEV credits, low emission/exclusion zones, parking policies, etc. to drive adoption of EVs.

Sources: pib.

3. Ujala scheme

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.

Context: Fifth anniversary of the Centre’s zero subsidy ‘Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All’ (UJALA) scheme and ‘LED Street Lighting National Programme’ (SLNP).

Performance of the schemes:

- Under the SLNP initiative, in five years around 1.03 crore smart LED street lights were installed. This helped in reducing Green House Gas emission by 4.8 million tonnes annually. Also, the initiative has created 13,000 jobs.
- Under UJALA programme, 36.13 crore LED bulbs have been distributed so far. This helped in reducing the green house gas emission by 38 million tonnes annually.

About UJALA scheme:

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The main objective of the scheme is to promote efficient lighting, enhance awareness on using efficient equipment which reduce electricity bills and help preserve environment. The scheme is being implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a joint venture of PSUs under the Union Ministry of Power. UJALA is a flagship project of the Govt. of India where it wants every home in India to use LED bulbs so that the net power or energy consumption rate comes down and the carbon emission rates can also be checked.

About SLNP: Launched in 2015, EESL’s Street Light National Programme (SNLP) has been instrumental in replacing over 50 lakh street lights in over 500 cities in India, leading to 135 crore kWh of energy savings and cost saving of INR 742 crore every year. Under the programme, EESL replaces the conventional street lights with LEDs at its own costs, with no upfront investment by the municipalities, thereby making their adoption even more attractive.

Sources: pib.

4. State Energy Efficiency Index 2019

What to study?
For Prelims: Highlights of ‘State Energy Efficiency Index’.
For Mains: Energy efficiency- need, significance and government efforts.

Context: State Energy Efficiency Index 2019 has been released. The first such Index, the “State Energy Efficiency Preparedness Index 2018”, was launched on August 1, 2018.

About the index:
It tracks the progress of Energy Efficiency (EE) initiatives in 36 states and union territories based on 97 significant indicators.
For a rational comparison, the States or Union Territories are grouped into four groups based on the aggregated Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES) required to meet the state’s actual energy demand (electricity, coal, oil, gas, among others) across sectors.
The Index categorises states as ‘Front Runner’, ‘Achiever’, ‘Contender’ and ‘Aspirant’ based on their efforts and achievements towards energy efficiency implementation.
There isn’t any ‘front runner’ state this year. The index has developed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) in association with the Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy (AEEE).

The objective behind releasing this Index is to help states in contributing towards national goals on energy security and climate action by:
1. Helping drive energy efficiency policies and program implementation at the state and local level.
2. Tracking progress in managing the states’ and India’s energy footprint.
3. Institutionalising data capture and monitoring of energy efficiency activities by states.

Performance of various states:
- Karnataka, HP, Haryana and Puducherry were the best performers.
- Manipur, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir were the least performers.

Significance of the Index: Such an index assumes significance in a country that is now the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases after the US and China, and which is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. India plans to reduce its...
carbon footprint by 33-35% from its 2005 levels by 2030, as part of its commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted by 195 countries in Paris in 2015.

Sources: pib.

5. Development Support Services For States/UTs (DSSS) For Infrastructure Projects

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: About the project- features and significance.*

**Context:** NITI Aayog and Ladakh Union Territory have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, under which NITI Aayog will support the administration of the Ladakh through its initiative “Development Support Services to States for Infrastructure Projects” (DSSS).

**About Development Support Services For States/UTs (DSSS) For Infrastructure Projects:**
- Implemented by **NITI Aayog**.
- **Aim:** To achieve transformational, sustained delivery of infrastructure projects with state of art capacity disseminated at all levels of governance.
- **The key objective:** Creating PPP success stories and rebooting infrastructure project delivery models so a sustainable infrastructure creation cycle is established.
- **How it works?** The DSSS Infrastructure initiative involves providing project level support from Concept plan till financial closure to State Governments / UTs.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Infrastructure Investment Trust

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Features of InvIT. For Mains: Need for and significance of InvIT.*

**Context:** Markets regulator SEBI has put in place a framework for the rights issue of units by listed REIT and InvITs.

**These guidelines include:**
1. The issuer will have to disclose objects of the issue, related-party transactions, valuation, financial details, review of credit rating and grievance redressal mechanism in the placement document.
2. Sebi has allowed listed REIT and InvIT to make a rights issue of units. This is subject to several conditions including these investment vehicles obtaining in-principle approval of the stock exchanges for listing of units proposed to be issued etc.
3. With regard to pricing, the investment manager on behalf of the REIT and InvIT, in consultation with the lead merchant banker(s), will decide the issue price before determining the record date.
4. With regard to **manner of issuance of unit**, units shall be allotted in the dematerialised form only and shall be listed on the stock exchange where the units of the REIT and InvIT are listed.

**What are Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvIT)?**
It is like a mutual fund, which enables direct investment of small amounts of money from possible individual/institutional investors in infrastructure to earn a small portion of the income as return.

1. InvITs can be treated as the **modified version of REITs** designed to suit the specific circumstances of the infrastructure sector.
2. They are similar to REIT but invest in infrastructure projects such as roads or highways which take some time to generate steady cash flows.

**What are Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT)?**
A REIT is roughly like a mutual fund that invests in real estate although the similarity doesn’t go much further.

1. The basic deal on REITs is that you own a share of property, and so an appropriate share of the income from it will come to you, after deducting an appropriate share of expenses.
2. Essentially, it’s like a group of people pooling their money together and buying real estate except that it’s on a large scale and is regulated.

Why need InvITs and REITs?

1. Infrastructure and real estate are the two most critical sectors in any developing economy.
2. A well-developed infrastructural set-up propels the overall development of a country.
3. It also facilitates a steady inflow of private and foreign investments, and thereby augments the capital base available for the growth of key sectors in an economy, as well as its own growth, in a sustained manner.
4. Given the importance of these two sectors in the country, and the paucity of public funds available to stimulate their growth, it is imperative that additional channels of financing are put in place.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Investment models.

1. Government Owned Contractor Operated model

What to study?
For Prelims: Features of the GOCO model.
For Mains: Significance and potential.

Context: The Army has initiated the process of identifying potential industry partners to implement the Government Owned Contractor Operated (GOCO) model for its base workshops and ordnance depots intended to improve operational efficiency.

Background:
The GOCO model was one of the recommendations of the Lt. Gen. DB Shekatkar (Retd.) committee to “enhance combat capability and re-balancing defence expenditure.”

How it works?
- The assets owned by government will be operated by the private industries.
- Under the model, the private companies need not make investments on land, machinery and other support systems.
- The missions are set by government and the private sectors are given full independence in implementing the missions using their best practices.

Significance of the model:
The main advantage of the model is that the targets are achieved in lesser time frame. Also, it will boost competitiveness among the private entities paving way to newer technologies.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Global Investment Trend Monitor report

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Improvements, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: The Global Investment Trend Monitor report, compiled by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), has been released.

Key findings:
India-specific:
www.insightsonindia.com
1. India was among the top 10 recipients of Foreign Direct Investment in 2019, attracting $49 billion in inflows, a 16 per cent increase from the previous year.

Global scenario:
1. The global foreign direct investment remained flat in 2019 at $1.39 trillion, a one per cent decline from a revised $1.41 trillion in 2018.
2. Reasons: This is against the backdrop of weaker macroeconomic performance and policy uncertainty for investors, including trade tensions.
3. Developing economies continue to absorb more than half of global FDI flows.
4. South Asia recorded a 10 per cent increase in FDI to $60 billion and this growth was driven by India, with a 16 per cent increase in inflows to an estimated $49 billion.
5. The FDI flows to developed countries remained at a historically low level, decreasing by a further six per cent to an estimated $643 billion.
6. There was zero-growth of flows to United States, which received $251 billion FDI in 2019, as compared to $254 billion in 2018, the report said.
7. Despite this, the United States remained the largest recipient of FDI, followed by China with flows of $140 billion and Singapore with $110 billion.
8. The FDI in the UK was down six per cent as Brexit unfolded.

Way ahead:
1. GDP growth, gross fixed capital formation and trade are projected to rise, both at the global level and, especially, in several large emerging markets.
2. Such an improvement in macroeconomic conditions could prompt MNEs to resume investments in productive assets, given also their easy access to cheap money, the fact that corporate profits are expected to remain solid in 2020, and hopes for waning trade tensions between the United States and China.
3. However, significant risks persist, including high debt accumulation among emerging and developing economies, geopolitical risks and concerns about a further shift towards protectionist policies.

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. Gaganyaan mission

What to study?
For Prelims: Particulars of the programme.
For Mains: Challenges involved.

Context: The ISRO Chairman announced in a press briefing that four astronauts have been selected for the country’s first manned mission to space, called Gaganyaan.

Indian Human Space Flight Programme:
ISRO aims to launch its maiden Human Space Mission, Gaganyaan before the 75th anniversary of India’s independence in 2022.

Objectives of the Mission:
1. Enhancement of science and technology levels in the country
2. A national project involving several institutes, academia and industry
3. Improvement of industrial growth
4. Inspiring youth
5. Development of technology for social benefits
6. Improving international collaboration
Relevance of a Manned Space Mission for India:

**Boost to industries:** The Indian industry will find large opportunities through participation in the highly demanding Space missions. Gaganyaan Mission is expected will source nearly 60% of its equipment from the Indian private sector.

**Employment:** According to the ISRO chief, the Gaganyaan mission would create 15,000 new employment opportunities, 13,000 of them in private industry and the space organisation would need an additional manpower of 900.

**Technological development:** Human Space flights are frontier field in the science and technology. The challenges the Human Space Flights provide to India, and the benefits accruing from taking up those missions will be very high and will lead to further thrust for technological developments in India.

**Spurs research and development:** It will boost good research and technology development. With a large number of researchers with proper equipment involved, HSF will thrust significant research in areas such as materials processing, astro-biology, resources mining, planetary chemistry, planetary orbital calculus and many other areas.

**Motivation:** Human space flight will provide that inspiration to the youth and also the national public mainstream. It would inspire young generation into notable achievements and enable them to play their legitimate role in challenging future activities.

**Prestige:** India will be the fourth country to launch human space mission. The Gaganyaan will not only bring about prestige to the nation but also establish India’s role as a key player in the space industry.

**Challenges for astronauts:**

1. The astronauts will have to adapt to the change in *gravitational field*. The change in gravity affects hand-eye and head-eye coordination. Bones may lose minerals adding to the risk of osteoporosis related fractures.
2. *Lack of exercise and improper diet* make them lose muscle strength and cause develop vision problems.
3. Once they are in space, *astronauts will receive over 10 times more radiation than what people are subjected to on earth.* It can cause cancer, nervous system damage and trigger nausea, vomiting, and anorexia and fatigue. Without pressure, human blood heats up.
4. Despite the training, *behavioural issues* may crop up due to isolation leading to depression, fatigue, sleep disorders and psychiatric disorders.

Sources: pib.

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2. Indian Science Congress

**What to study?**

For Prelims and Mains: Indian science congress- theme, features and significance of such platforms.

**Context:** 107th Indian Science Congress is being held at the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

**Theme:** “Science & Technology: Rural Development”.

**Background:**

Indian Science Congress is organised by the Indian Science Congress Association every year in the first week of January.

**About Indian Science Congress Association:**

The Indian Science Congress Association was started in the year 1914 in Kolkata and has a membership of more than 30,000 scientists.

**Origin:** It owes its origin to the foresight and initiative of two British chemists, namely, Professor J. L. Simonsen and Professor P. S. MacMahon. It occurred to them that scientific research in India might be stimulated if an annual meeting of research workers somewhat on the lines of the British Association for the Advancement of Science could be arranged.
Objectives:
1. To advance and promote the cause of science in India.
2. To hold an annual congress at a suitable place in India.
3. To publish such proceedings, journals, transactions and other publications as may be considered desirable.
4. To secure and manage funds and endowments for the promotion of Science including the rights of disposing of or selling all or any portion of the properties of the Association.
5. To do and perform any or all other acts, matters and things as are conductive to, or incidental to, or necessary for, the above objects.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Project NETRA

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the project.

Context: Indian Space Research Organisation has inked a pact with Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) to pave the way for collaboration in establishing optical telescope facilities under Project "NETRA" for tracking space objects.

What is Project NETRA (Network for space object Tracking and Analysis)?
Under the project, the ISRO plans to put up many observational facilities: connected radars, telescopes; data processing units and a control centre.
They can, among others, spot, track and catalogue objects as small as 10 cm, up to a range of 3,400 km and equal to a space orbit of around 2,000 km.

Significance of the project:
- The project will give India its own capability in space situational awareness (SSA) like the other space powers — which is used to ‘predict’ threats from debris to Indian satellites.
- NETRA’s eventual goal is to capture the GEO, or geostationary orbit, scene at 36,000 km where communication satellites operate.
- The effort would make India a part of international efforts towards tracking, warning about and mitigating space debris.

Need:
Currently there are 15 functional Indian communication satellites in the geostationary orbit of 36,000 km; 13 remote sensing satellites in LEO of up to 2,000 km; and eight navigation satellites in medium earth orbits. Their protection is utmost importance for India.

Background:
- Space junk is an ever-growing problem with more than 7,500 tonnes of redundant hardware now thought to be circling the Earth. Ranging from old rocket bodies and defunct spacecraft through to screws and even flecks of paint — this material poses a collision hazard to operational missions.
- The rising population of space debris increases the potential danger to all space vehicles, but especially to the International Space Station (ISS), space shuttles, satellites and other spacecraft.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Scientific Social Responsibility (SSR) Policy

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the draft policy.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the policy.
**Context:** Centre is in advanced stages of preparing a policy on implementing scientific social responsibility (SSR). The draft has already been released.

**About SSR Policy:**
India is going to be possibly the first country in the world to implement a Scientific Social Responsibility (SSR) Policy on the lines of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). A draft of the new policy was recently made available by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

**Aims:**
1. To encourage science and technology (S&T) institutions and individual scientists in the country to proactively engage in science outreach activities to connect science with the society.
2. To harness latent potential of the scientific community for strengthening linkages between science and society, and for making S&T ecosystem vibrant.
3. To develop a mechanism for ensuring access to scientific knowledge, transferring benefits of science to meet societal needs, promoting collaborations to identify problems and develop solutions.

**Highlights of the Draft:**
1. Under the proposed policy, individual scientists or knowledge workers will be required to devote at least 10 person-days of SSR per year for exchanging scientific knowledge to society.
2. It also recognises the need to provide incentives for outreach activities with necessary budgetary support.
3. It has also been proposed to give credit to knowledge workers/scientists for individual SSR activities in their annual performance appraisal and evaluation.
4. No institution would be allowed to outsource or sub-contract their SSR activities and projects.
5. The draft defines SSR as “the ethical obligation of knowledge workers in all fields of science and technology to voluntarily contribute their knowledge and resources to the widest spectrum of stakeholders in society, in a spirit of service and conscious reciprocity”.
6. A central agency will be established at DST to implement the SSR. Other ministries would also be encouraged to make their own plans to implement SSR as per their mandate.

**Need for SSR:**
When most research is being done by using taxpayers’ money, the scientific establishment has an ethical obligation of “giving back” to the society. SSR is not only about scientific impact upon society but also about the social impact upon science. SSR would therefore strengthen the knowledge ecosystem and bring efficiencies in harnessing science for the benefit of society.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. World's most efficient lithium sulphur battery developed in Australia

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: operating principle, advantages and significance.*

**Context:** Researchers at the University of Monash in Australia have managed to create a super-capacity prototype by re-engineering a Lithium Sulphur (Li-S) battery.

**Is it new?**
Li-S batteries are not new. But they had an intrinsic problem with the sulphur electrode, which would break after repeated charge cycles, making its superior capacity redundant.

**The sulphur cathode would break** because of expansion and contraction during cycles.

**How was this problem overcome?**
- To overcome this problem, the researchers gave the electrodes more space to expand and contract. The electrodes are bound inside the battery using polymers. The research team used lesser quantity of these adhesives so that the electrodes had more space out structures inside them.
• These structures behaved more like bridges between the sulphur particles rather than a dense network, which stopped the electrodes from disintegrating.

*How it works?*
The lithium-sulphur batteries operate in the same way as regular lithium-ion work - *lithium ions flow between electrodes producing power while not being chemically changed.* Charging a battery involves those ions being returned to their starting positions for the process to begin anew.

*Significance:*
This battery that has *five times the capacity of a traditional lithium ion battery.* It can retain 99 per cent of its charge even after 200 charge cycles. Li-S batteries are also *many times cheaper than lithium ion batteries that could bring down the cost of electric mobility.*

Sources: the Hindu.

**6. Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory (LIGO) project**

*What to study?*
*For Prelims and Mains: LIGO- global significance and significance for India, all about gravitational waves.*

*Context:* An international team led by LIGO-Virgo scientists has identified another event of gravitational ripples from *a collision of two neutron stars,* making it the second time this type of occurrence has ever been observed in gravitational waves.

*Background:*
In August 2017, the first observation of gravitational ripples from a neutron star collision made history for being the first time that both gravitational waves and light were detected from the same cosmic occurrence.

*What is LIGO?*
It is a massive observatory for detecting *cosmic gravitational waves and for carrying out experiments.* The objective is to use gravitational-wave observations in astronomical studies. The project operates *three gravitational-wave (GW) detectors.* Two are at Hanford, Washington, north-western US, and one is at Livingston in Louisiana, south-eastern US. The proposed *LIGO India project aims to move one advanced LIGO detector from Hanford to India.*

*About LIGO- India project:*
It is piloted by *Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Department of Science and Technology (DST).* The LIGO-India project will be *jointly coordinated and executed by three Indian research institutions:* the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune and Department of Atomic Energy organisations: Institute for Plasma Research (IPR), Gandhinagar and the Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology (RRCAT), Indore.

*Benefits for India:*
1. The project will bring unprecedented opportunities for scientists and engineers to dig deeper into the realm of gravitational wave and take global leadership in this new astronomical frontier.
2. The LIGO-India project will also bring considerable opportunities in cutting-edge technology for the Indian industry which will be engaged in the construction of the eight-km long beam tube at ultra-high vacuum on a levelled terrain.
3. With its establishment, India will join the global network of gravitational wave detectors.
4. Establishing an observatory in India also assumes importance because the further the distance between the observatories, the greater will be the accuracy in locating gravity waves.

Sources: the Hindu.
7. Hyperloop
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Hyperloop technology- features, significance and its use in India.

Context: The proposed Pune-Mumbai Hyperloop project, an ultra-modern transport system that will reduce the travelling time between the two cities to 25 minutes from 2.5-3 hours, may be scrapped by the state government. The state has expressed reservations about the project that was still in its experimental stage, and had not been “implemented anywhere in the world”.

What is hyperloop transportation system?
It is a transportation system where a pod-like vehicle is propelled through a near-vacuum tube connecting cities at speeds matching that of an aircraft. The hyperloop concept is a brainchild of Tesla founder Elon Musk.

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

The Problems Plaguing the Hyperloop:
1. Constructing a tube hundreds of kilometers long would be an engineering marvel in of itself. However, introducing a tube hundreds of kilometers long that operates at a near perfect vacuum which can support the force of capsule weighing thousands of kilograms as it travels hundreds of kilometers an hour is nothing short of sci-fi fantasy.
2. Small scale experiments reveal the fundamentals of the idea are sound. Although, in the real world, there are tens of thousands of kilograms of atmospheric pressure which threatens to crush any vacuum chamber.
3. There is also the problem with thermal expansion which threatens to buckle any large structure without proper thermal expansion capabilities.
4. The Hyperloop would also be stupendously expensive. There are many unavoidable problems facing the Hyperloop that threaten the structural integrity, and every human life on board. The problems can be addressed, but at a great cost.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. NavIC
What to study?
For Prelims: Navic and its key features.
For Mains: Significance, applications and potential of Navic.

Context: Qualcomm Technologies has unveiled mobile chipsets supporting the Indian regional satellite navigation system - NavIC (Navigation in Indian Constellation).

Significance:
The release of chipsets will help accelerate the adoption of NavIC by smartphone Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). The OEMs can now release any new models for the Indian market which are NavIC
enabled, thus eventually making NavIC as a standard feature in the upcoming handsets, applications, processors, etc.

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:

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.

9. Polycrack technology

What to study?
For Prelims: Polycrack, how it works?
For Mains: Need for and significance.

Context: The country’s first Government-owned Waste-to-Energy Plant was recently commissioned at the Mancheswar Carriage Repair Workshop in Odisha. The plant, a patented technology called Polycrack, is first-of-its-kind in the Indian Railways and fourth in the country. It converts multiple feed stocks into hydrocarbon liquid fuels, gas, carbon and water.

What is Polycrack?
It is the world’s very first patented heterogeneous catalytic process which converts multiple feedstocks into hydrocarbon liquid fuels, gas, carbon as well as water.
- The waste generated will become the feeder material for the waste to energy plant.
- The energy which will be produced at the plant, will be in the form of light diesel oil and this oil will be used to light furnaces.

The plant, having a capacity of 500 kg per batch can be fed with the following:
- All kinds of existing plastic
- Petroleum sludge
- Un segregated MSW with moisture up to 50 per cent
- E-waste
- Automobile fluff
- Organic waste including bamboo, garden waste
- Jathropa fruit and palm bunch

Some of the advantages of this plant are as follows:
- The pre-segregation of waste is not required for processing in the plant. The waste as collected from the source, can be directly fed into the polycrack plant.
- The plant has high tolerance to moisture hence drying of the waste after treatment, is not required.
- The waste is processed in the plant and reformed within a period of 24 hours
- The biological decomposition is not allowed as the waste is treated in the plant as it is received
- All the constituents are converted to valuable energy therefore, making it a zero discharge process through the plant
- The gas generated in the process of the plant is reused in order to provide energy to the system, hence making it self reliant and self sufficient for its energy requirements. This also brings down the operating cost of the plant.
- The plant does not cause atmospheric emission during the process unlike the other conventional methods except for the combustion of gases which have pollutants less than the prescribed norms across the world.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Awareness in space.

1. Indian Data Relay Satellite System
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: IDRSS- need, objectives and significance.

Context: India plans to ring in its own era of space-to-space tracking and communication of its space assets this year by putting up a new satellite series called the Indian Data Relay Satellite System.

What is IDRSS? Why it is vital?
The IDRSS is planned to track and be constantly in touch with Indian satellites, in particular those in low-earth orbits which have limited coverage of earth.
It will be a set of satellites that will track, send and receive information from other Indian Satellites. IDRSS satellites of the 2,000 kg class would be launched on the GSLV launcher to geostationary orbits around 36,000 km away.
A satellite in GEO covers a third of the earth below and three of them can provide total coverage.

**Significance:**
In the coming years, it will be vital to Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), whose roadmap is dotted with advanced LEO missions such as space docking, space station, as well as distant expeditions to moon, Mars and Venus. It will also be useful in monitoring launches.

The first beneficiary would be the prospective crew members of the **Gaganyaan mission of 2022** who can be fully and continuously in touch with mission control throughout their travel.

Sources: the Hindu.

## 2. Artemis Mission

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: Key features, objectives and significance of the mission, previous missions.*

**Context:** NASA announces graduating class of 11 astronauts for upcoming **space missions including the Artemis Mission.**
The team includes an Indian American- **Raja Chari.**

**About Artemis:**
NASA wants to send the **first woman and the next man to the Moon by the year 2024,** which it plans on doing through the **Artemis lunar exploration program.**

ARTEMIS stands for Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence and Electrodynamics of Moon’s Interaction with the Sun.
The mission was named Artemis after the **Greek mythological goddess of the Moon and twin sister to Apollo,** namesake of the program that sent 12 American astronauts to the Moon between 1969 and 1972.

**Objective:**
The main objective is **to measure what happens when the Sun’s radiation hits our rocky moon, where there is no magnetic field to protect it.**

**The mission:**
For the Artemis program, NASA’s new rocket called **the Space Launch System (SLS)** will send astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft a quarter of a million miles away from Earth to the lunar orbit.
Once astronauts dock Orion at the Gateway — which is a small spaceship in orbit around the moon — the astronauts will be able to live and work around the Moon, and from the spaceship, astronauts will take expeditions to the surface of the Moon.

**Lunar missions- key facts:**
- Before the US sent the Apollo 11 mission to the Moon, it sent **three classes of robotic missions between 1961 and 1968.**
- On July 20, 1969, **Neil Armstrong became the first human to step on the Moon as part of the Apollo 11 mission.**
- After July 1969, **12 American astronauts walked on the surface of the Moon until 1972.**
- In 1959, the Soviet Union’s uncrewed **Luna 1 and 2 became the first rover to visit the Moon. Since then, seven nations have followed suit.**
- In the 1990s, the US resumed lunar exploration with **robotic missions Clementine and Lunar Prospector.**
- In 2009, it began a new series of robotic lunar missions with the launch of the **Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS).**
- In 2011, NASA began the **ARTEMIS (Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence, and Electrodynamics of the Moon’s Interaction with the Sun) mission** using a pair of repurposed spacecraft and in 2012 **the Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory (GRAIL) spacecraft** studied the Moon’s gravity.
• Apart from the US, the European Space Agency, Japan, China, and India have sent missions to explore the Moon.
• China landed two rovers on the surface, which includes the first-ever landing on the Moon’s far side in 2019.
• The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently announced India’s third lunar mission Chandrayaan-3, which will comprise a lander and a rover.

Sources: Indian Express.

3. GSAT-30

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: GSAT 30- components and applications, various bands.

Context: The first mission of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 2020, India’s latest telecommunication satellite GSAT-30 was successfully launched recently. The launch took place from the Spaceport in French Guiana. The launch vehicle is named Ariane 5 VA-251.

Key facts:
• GSAT-30 derives its heritage from ISRO’s earlier INSAT/GSAT satellite series and will replace INSAT-4A in orbit.
• GSAT-30 is configured on ISRO’s enhanced I-3K Bus structure to provide communication services from Geostationary orbit.

GSAT-30 uses two satellite frequencies:
It gives the Indian mainland and islands coverage in the Ku band, and extended coverage in a wider area stretching from Australia to Europe in the lower-frequency C-band. The Ku and C bands are part of a spectrum of frequencies, ranging from 1 to 40 gigahertz, that are used in satellite communications.

Services:
With a mission life of over 15 years, GSAT-30 will provide DTH [direct-to-home] television Services, connectivity to VSATs [Very Small Aperture Terminals] for ATM, stock exchange, television uplinking and teleport services, Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) and e-governance applications.
What is Arianespace?
It is the world’s first commercial launch service provider and since the launch of India’s APPLE experimental satellite on Ariane Flight L03 in 1981, Arianespace has orbited 24 satellites, including Gsat-30, for the Indian space agency.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)

What to study?
For prelims and mains: TMT- objectives and significance, location.

Context: India, a partner in the construction of one of the largest telescopes in the world, TMT, has said it wants the project to be moved out of the proposed site at Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano in Hawaii.

About TMT:
The Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) is an astronomical observatory with an extremely large telescope (ELT). It is an international project being funded by scientific organisations of Canada, China, India, Japan and USA.

Planned location: Mauna Kea on the island of Hawaii in the US state of Hawaii.

Purpose: The TMT is designed for near-ultraviolet to mid-infrared observations, featuring adaptive optics to assist in correcting image blur.

Significance:
1. TMT will enable scientists to study fainter objects far away from us in the Universe, which gives information about early stages of evolution of the Universe.
2. It will give us finer details of not-so-far-away objects like undiscovered planets and other objects in the Solar System and planets around other stars.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. EAO (East Asian Observatory)

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: EAO- objectives, significance and the need for.

Context: India is in preliminary discussions to be a part of the East Asian Observatories Consortium of eight countries committed to build large telescopes and pool resources.

About EAO (East Asian Observatory):
Formed by EACOA (East Asian Core Observatories Association) for the purpose of pursuing joint projects in astronomy within the East Asian region.

- The intention of EAO is to build and operate facilities, which will enhance and leverage existing and planned regional facilities.
- It will also raise funding and to build an observatory staff, separate from that of the EACOA institutions.
- The EAO is chartered as a non-profit Hawaii corporation.
- Its first task is to assume the operation of the James Clerk Maxwell Submillimetre Telescope (JCMT) on the summit of Maunakea, Hawai’i.
- It consists of China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea as full members and Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia as ‘observers’.
Implications for India:
Having India join the group could mean the establishment of new kinds of telescopes — one proposed being in Tibet — that could aid the observation of new black holes and throw light on cosmic phenomena.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Accretion Burst Event

What to study?
For Prelims: Meaning, features, about maser monitoring organisation.
For Mains: Significance of the findings.

What is it?
Astronomers have recently found that the funnelling of matter into a forming star happens at different rates over time, as per the rotating disc of gas and dust theory. Sometimes the forming star swallows up a huge amount of matter, resulting in a burst of activities in the massive star. This is called an accretion burst event. It is incredibly rare: only three such events have been observed, out of all the billions of massive stars in the Milky Way.

Need for these understandings:
Astronomers don’t yet fully understand how massive stars in our galaxy are formed. So far, observations have only yielded some pieces of the puzzle. This is because nearly all the known massive stars in our galaxy are located very far away from our solar system. They also form in close proximity to other massive stars, making it difficult to study the environment where they take shape.
So, rotating disc theory helps in understanding these events. With this, the astronomers will be able to develop and test theories to explain how high-mass stars gain their mass.

Maser Monitoring Organisation (M2O):
After the first detection of an accretion burst, in 2016, astronomers from around the world agreed in 2017 to coordinate their efforts to observe more. This led to the formation of the Maser Monitoring Organisation (M2O). The primary goal of M2O is to make the astronomy community aware of the importance of Maser monitoring. It is also to increase the number of sources monitored, the number of transitions monitored at, and increase cadence of observation.

What is a Maser?
A maser is the microwave (radio frequency) equivalent of laser. The word stands for "microwave amplification by stimulated emission of radiation".
- Masers are observed using radio telescopes and most of them are observed at centimetre wavelength: they are very compact.
- A maser flare can be a sign of an extraordinary event such as the formation of a star.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Spitzer telescope

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Features and objectives of the telescope, significant achievements.

Context: Spitzer space telescope of NASA will be retired on January 30, 2020. Spitzer is going to shut down permanently after about 16 years of exploring the cosmos in infrared light.
Background:
Launched into solar orbit on August 25, 2003, Spitzer was initially scheduled for a minimum 2.5-year primary mission. But the space telescope has lasted far beyond its expected lifetime.

What Will Happen to the Spitzer Space Telescope After It Is Retired?
The telescope has a very particular orbit, trailing about 158 million miles behind the Earth to keep it away from interfering heat.
In about 53 years, Spitzer’s orbit will take it past our planet. But, once the telescope flies by Spaceship Earth, Spitzer will drift off in the opposite direction into the emptiness of space.

Key achievements:
1. Spitzer’s discoveries extend from our own planetary backyard, to planets around other stars, to the far reaches of the universe.
2. Spitzer has logged over 106,000 hours of observation time in the past 15 years. It has illuminated some of the oldest galaxies in the universe, revealed a new ring around Saturn, and peered through shrouds of dust to study newborn stars and black holes.
3. The telescope also assisted in the discovery of planets beyond our solar system, including the detection of seven Earth-size planets orbiting the star TRAPPIST-1, among other accomplishments.

About Spitzer:
NASA’s Spitzer Space Telescope was launched in 2003 to study the universe in the infrared. It is the last mission of the NASA Great Observatories program, which saw four specialized telescopes (including the Hubble Space Telescope) launched between 1990 and 2003. The goal of the Great Observatories is to observe the universe in distinct wavelengths of light. The other observatories in the Great Observatories Program looked at visible light (Hubble, still operational), gamma-rays (Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory, no longer operational) and X-rays (the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, still operational).

How it works?
1. Spitzer focuses on the infrared band, which normally represents heat radiation from objects.
2. Spitzer’s highly sensitive instruments allow scientists to peer into cosmic regions that are hidden from optical telescopes, including dusty stellar nurseries, the centers of galaxies, and newly forming planetary systems.
3. Spitzer’s infrared eyes also allows astronomers see cooler objects in space, like failed stars (brown dwarfs), extrasolar planets, giant molecular clouds, and organic molecules that may hold the secret to life on other planets.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1. Black Box in an airplane
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Black Box—meaning and significance.

Context: On January 8th, a passenger plane bound for Ukraine exploded as it slammed into a field in Iran, just minutes after takeoff killing at least 176 people on board. Questions remain about the cause, and there have been some contradictory statements from officials in both Iran and Ukraine.

- The plane’s so-called black boxes could help answer some of those questions, but Iranian officials may not turn the devices over to Boeing, which would typically be involved in an investigation into what went wrong.
Any commercial aeroplane or corporate jet is required to be equipped with a **cockpit voice recorder and a flight data recorder. It is these two items of separate equipment which we commonly refer to as a 'Black Box.'**

While they do nothing to help the plane when it is in the air, both these pieces of equipment are vitally important should the plane crash, as **they help crash investigators find out what happened just before the crash.**

To help locate the cockpit voice recorder and a flight data recorder in the aftermath of a plane crash that occurs at sea, each recorder has a device fitted to it known as an **Underwater Locator Beacon (ULB).** The device is activated as soon as the recorder comes into contact with water and it can transmit from a depth as deep as 14,000 feet. Also, to help investigators find them; **a Black Box is not actually black at all, but bright orange.**

Sources: the Hindu.

### 2. ‘Virtual human’ NEONS

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: NEONS, how do they work? Technologies behind.
For Mains: Significance and potential.*

**Context:** The **first project of Samsung’s Star Labs, NEONS** are being called **the world’s first artificial humans.**

**What are they?**

- NEONS are computationally created virtual humans — the word derives from NEO (new) + humaN.
- For now the virtual humans can show emotions when manually controlled by their creators.
- But the idea is for NEONS to become intelligent enough to be fully autonomous, showing emotions, learning skills, creating memories, and being intelligent on their own.

**How do they work?**

There are two core technologies behind his virtual humans.

1. First, there is the proprietary **CORE R3 technology** that drives the “reality, real time and responsiveness” behind NEONS.
2. The next stage will be **SPECTRA,** which will complement CORE R3 with the “spectrum of intelligence, learning, emotions and memory”.

**How could NEONS be used?**

NEONS might be **the interface for technologies and services.**

- They will answer your queries at a bank, welcome you at a restaurant, or read out the breaking news on television at an unearthly hour.
- This form of virtual assistance would be more effective, for example, while teaching languages, as NEONS will be capable of understanding and sympathising.

**How are NEONS different from Virtual Assistants?**

Virtual Assistants now learn from all the data they are plugged into. **NEONS will be limited to what they know and learn.** Their leaning could potentially be limited to the person they are catering to, and maybe her friends — but not the entire Internet. **They will not be an interface for you to request a song, rather they will be a friend to speak to and share experiences with, says Star Labs.**

Sources: Indian Express.

### 3. Block Chain Technology

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: Blockchain technology- what is it? How it operates? Concerns and potential.*
**Context: National Informatics Centre (NIC) has set up a Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Blockchain Technology in Bengaluru, which will provide Blockchain as a service and allow stakeholders to benefit from shared learning, experiences and resources.**

**Functions:**
1. The Centre of Excellence will facilitate various government departments in building proof of concepts for use of Blockchain technology in different dimensions of governance, leading to large scale deployment of some such applications.
2. With National Informatics Centre (NIC) providing a robust and an agile infrastructure, the CoE shall also provide Blockchain as a Service (BaaS) for efficient hosting of Blockchain network, says an official release.

**What are Blockchains?**
Blockchains are a new data structure that is secure, cryptography-based, and distributed across a network.
- The technology supports cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, and the transfer of any data or digital asset.
- Spearheaded by Bitcoin, blockchains achieve consensus among distributed nodes, allowing the transfer of digital goods without the need for centralized authorisation of transactions.

**How it operates?**
1. The technology allows transactions to be simultaneously anonymous and secure, peer-to-peer, instant and frictionless.
2. It does this by distributing trust from powerful intermediaries to a large global network, which through mass collaboration, clever code and cryptography, enables a tamper-proof public ledger of every transaction that’s ever happened on the network.
3. A block is the “current” part of a blockchain which records some or all of the recent transactions, and once completed, goes into the blockchain as permanent database.
4. Each time a block gets completed, a new block is generated. Blocks are linked to each other (like a chain) in proper linear, chronological order with every block containing a hash of the previous block.

**Benefits of blockchain technology:**
1. As a public ledger system, blockchain records and validate each and every transaction made, which makes it secure and reliable.
2. All the transactions made are authorized by miners, which makes the transactions immutable and prevent it from the threat of hacking.
3. Blockchain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.
4. It allows decentralization of the technology.

Sources: the Hindu.

**4. Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property**

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: Paris Convention- overview, KVIC- objectives.*

**Context: Khadi Village Industries Corporation is eyeing international trademark for ‘khadi’ under the Paris Convention for protection of industrial property.**

**Why?** To prevent any product from masquerading as ‘khadi’ nationally or globally.

**How is it presently protected?**
The Regulations issued in 2013 by the ministry of micro, small and medium enterprises, empower KVIC to grant ‘Khadi Mark’ registration and take royalties from any producer using the Khadi mark.

**About Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property:**
It is a multilateral treaty dealing with the protection of industrial property in the widest sense.
Article 6 of the Paris Convention of 1883 protects armorial bearings, flags and other State symbols of the States part to the convention, including official signs, and hallmarks indicating control and warranty adopted by them. 

As of January 2019, the Convention has 177 contracting member countries.

Sources: pib.

**Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.**

1. **Supreme Court bats against transfer of community resources**

*What to study?*

For Prelims and Mains: Observations made by the court and significance of these observations.

*Context:* Recently, the Supreme Court of India held that the Government has no right to transfer “invaluable” community resources like village water ponds to powerful people and industrialists for commercialisation of the property.

*What’s the issue?*

The judgment came on a plea against the transfer of village ponds’ sites of Saini Village in the National Capital Region to some private industrialists by the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority.

*Observations made by the Court:*

1. Protection of such village commons is essential to safeguard the fundamental right guaranteed by Article 21 of our Constitution.
2. These common areas are the lifeline of village communities, and often sustain various chores and provide resources necessary for life.
3. The State cannot divest villagers of their existing source of water even if it promises to provide them an alternative site where the water body can be replicated. Such an attitude would display “a mechanical application of environmental protection.”
4. There is no guarantee that the adverse effect of destroying the existing water body would be offset and people would be compelled to travel miles to access the alternative site.

*Background- concerns:*

Since time immemorial, certain common lands had vested in village communities for collective benefit. Such protections, however, remained on paper. Since Independence, powerful people and a corrupt system had appropriated these lands for personal aggrandisement.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. **Kerala to turn to Miyawaki method**

*What to study?*

For Prelims: Key features of the method.

For Mains: Significance of the method.

*Context:* The Miyawaki method of afforestation is to come up on the government office premises, residential complexes, school premises, and puramboke land in Kerala.
What is Miyawaki method?
The Miyawaki method, developed by a Japanese botanist after whom it is named, *involves planting saplings in small areas, causing them to "fight" for resources and grow nearly 10 times quicker.*
It *originated in Japan,* and is now increasingly adopted in other parts of the world, including our Chennai. It has revolutionised the concept of urban afforestation by turning backyards into *mini-forests.*

**The process explained:**
1. A pit has to be dug, and its dimensions depend on the available space. Before digging the pit, the list of tree species should be chosen judiciously. As there is very little space to work around with, trees with varying heights should be chosen.
2. Fill it with one layer of compost, followed by a layer of natural waste such as bagasse and coconut shells and then top it with a layer of red soil.
3. Plant the saplings following interval and tree height specifications.
4. The whole process can be completed in two to three weeks. The saplings have to be maintained regularly for a year.

**Cost analysis:**
The exercise will cost approximately ₹ 20,000 for a 600 sq. ft mini forest.

Sources: the Hindu.

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3. Green Credit Scheme

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Key features of the scheme.*
*For Mains: Significance of the scheme.*

**Context:** *Forest Advisory Committee* has approved the implementation of *Green Credit scheme.*

**Key features of the scheme:**
It allows “*forests*” to be traded as a commodity.
It allows the Forest Department to *outsource one of its responsibilities of reforesting to non-government agencies.*

**Implementation:**
1. The scheme allows agencies — they could be private companies, village forest communities — to identify land and begin growing plantations.
2. After three years, they would be eligible to be considered as compensatory forest land if they met the Forest Department’s criteria.
3. An industry needing forest land could then approach the agency and pay it for parcels of such forested land, and this would then be transferred to the Forest Department and be recorded as forest land.
4. The participating agency will be free to trade its asset, that is plantation, in parcels, with project proponents who need forest land.

**Present scenario:**
1. In the current system, industry needs to make good the loss of forest by finding appropriate non-forest land — equal to that which would be razed.
2. It also must pay the State Forest Department the current economic equivalent — called *Net Present Value* — of the forest land.
3. It’s then the Forest Department’s responsibility to grow appropriate vegetation that, over time, would grow into forests.

**Need for change:**
1. Industries have often complained that they find it hard to acquire appropriate non-forest land, which has to be contiguous to existing forest.

2. Nearly ₹50,000 crore had been collected by the Centre over decades, but the funds were lying unspent because States were not spending the money on regrowing forests.

3. The Supreme Court intervened, a new law came about with rules for how this fund was to be administered. About ₹47,000 crore had been disbursed to States until August, but it has barely led to any rejuvenation of forests.

Background:
This is not the first time that such a scheme has been mooted. In 2015, a ‘Green Credit Scheme’ for degraded forest land with public-private participation was recommended, but it was not approved by the Union Environment Minister, the final authority.

Benefits of the scheme:
Such a scheme will encourage plantation by individuals outside the traditional forest area and will help in meeting international commitments such as sustainable development goals and nationally determined contributions.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Open-loop scrubber usage in ships

What to study?
For Prelims: Exhaust scrubbers and about MARPOL.
For Mains: Sulphur pollution, concerns, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: According to GlobalData, a data and analytics company, there has been a huge increase in the use of open-loop scrubbers in ships in just last one year, even as a debate about their viability in mitigating sulphur emissions from ships has also escalated. There are currently 3,756 vessels with scrubbers installed, compared to just 767 in 2018. Out of these, only 65 have closed-loop, rest are all open-loop.

How sulphur emissions are regulated?
The International Maritime Organisation’s (IMO) adopted the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) Annex VI in 2008 that regulates the prevention of air pollution from ships and prohibits deliberate emissions of ozone-depleting substances such as sulphur oxides and nitrous oxides.

What’s the issue now?
Following the adoption, exhaust scrubbers have become one of the most preferred ways of reducing sulphur exhaust as they ‘scrub’ pollutants out of emissions. There are two types of exhaust scrubbers - open and closed. While closed-loop scrubbers retain the sulphur emissions for safer disposal at port, open-loop scrubbers release pollutants back in the sea after turning the sulphur dioxide into sulphuric acid. However, uncertainty around the sustainability of open-loop scrubbers continues to escalate in the shipping industry.

About International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL):
The Convention was adopted on 2 November 1973 at IMO. It includes regulations aimed at preventing and minimizing pollution from ships - both accidental pollution and that from routine operations. All ships flagged under countries that are signatories to MARPOL are subject to its requirements, regardless of where they sail and member nations are responsible for vessels registered on their national ship registry.

Sources: down to earth.
5. What are CRZ rules?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: CRZ Regulations- key features and significance.

Context: SC backs order to demolish 59 villas on Kerala island for violating CRZ norms.
The villas are constructed in the Vembanad backwaters -- a Ramsar site. The wetland is of international
importance and protected by the Ramsar Convention.

What are CRZ norms?
In India, the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Rules govern human and industrial activity close to the coastline,
in order to protect the fragile ecosystems near the sea. They restrict certain kinds of activities — like large
constructions, setting up of new industries, storage or disposal of hazardous material, mining, reclamation and
bunding — within a certain distance from the coastline.

Background:
After the passing of the Environment Protection Act in 1986, CRZ Rules were first framed in 1991. After these
were found to be restrictive, the Centre notified new Rules in 2011, which also included exemptions for the
construction of the Navi Mumbai airport and for projects of the Department of Atomic Energy.
In 2018, fresh Rules were issued, which aimed to remove certain restrictions on building, streamlined the
clearance process, and aimed to encourage tourism in coastal areas.

What is the regulation zone?
In all Rules, the regulation zone has been defined as the area up to 500 m from the high-tide line.

What are the restrictions?
The restrictions depend on criteria such as the population of the area, the ecological sensitivity, the distance
from the shore, and whether the area had been designated as a natural park or wildlife zone.
The latest Rules have a no-development zone of 20 m for all islands close to the mainland coast, and for all
backwater islands in the mainland.
For the so-called CRZ-III (Rural) areas, two separate categories have been stipulated.
1. In the densely populated rural areas (CRZ-IIIA) with a population density of 2,161 per sq km as per the
   2011 Census, the no-development zone is 50 m from the high-tide level, as against the 200 m
   stipulated earlier.
2. CRZ-IIIB category (rural areas with population density below 2,161 per sq km) areas continue to have
   a no-development zone extending up to 200 m from the high-tide line.

Implementation:
While the CRZ Rules are made by the Union environment ministry, implementation is to be ensured by state
governments through their Coastal Zone Management Authorities.

Sources: Indian Express.

6. Centre eases CRZ rules for ‘Blue Flag’ beaches

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

Context: Centre eases CRZ rules for ‘Blue Flag’ beaches.
This is to help States construct infrastructure and enable them to receive ‘Blue Flag’ certification.

Need:
The Blue Flag certification requires beaches to create certain infrastructure — portable toilet blocks, grey
water treatment plants, a solar power plant, seating facilities, CCTV surveillance and the like. However, India’s
CRZ laws don’t allow the construction of such infrastructure on beaches and islands.
Blue flag programme:
The Blue Flag Programme for beaches and marinas is run by the international, non-governmental, non-profit organisation FEE (the Foundation for Environmental Education).
It started in France in 1985 and has been implemented in Europe since 1987, and in areas outside Europe since 2001, when South Africa joined.

Definition:
The ‘Blue Flag’ beach is an ‘eco-tourism model’ and marks out beaches as providing tourists and beachgoers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, a safe and healthy environment, and sustainable development of the area.

Key facts:
- Japan and South Korea are the only countries in South and southeastern Asia to have Blue Flag beaches.
- Spain tops the list with 566 such beaches; Greece and France follow with 515 and 395, respectively.

Criteria:
There are nearly 33 criteria that must be met to qualify for a Blue Flag certification, such as the water meeting certain quality standards, having waste disposal facilities, being disabled-friendly, have first aid equipment, and no access to pets in the main areas of the beach. Some criteria are voluntary and some compulsory.

Beaches identified in India:
- 13 pilot beaches have been identified for the certification.
- These include Ghoghala Beach (Diu), Shivrajpur beach (Gujarat), Bhogave (Maharashtra), Padubidri and Kasarkod (Karnagaka), Kappad beach (Kerala) etc.
- Chandrabhaga beach of Odisha’s Konark coast has completed the Blue Flag certification process.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Australian Bushfires

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Forest fires- reasons, impact and preparedness.

Context: Australia was recently ravaged by the worst wildfires seen in decades, with large swaths of the country devastated since the fire season began.
All this has been exacerbated by persistent heat and drought, and many point to climate change as a factor making natural disasters go from bad to worse.

Regions affected:
There have been fires in every Australian state, but New South Wales has been hardest hit.
Blazes have torn through bushland, wooded areas, and national parks like the Blue Mountains.
Some of Australia’s largest cities have also been affected, including Melbourne and Sydney – where fires have damaged homes in the outer suburbs and thick plumes of smoke have blanketed the urban center.

What is causing the fires?
Each year there is a fire season during the Australian summer, with hot, dry weather making it easy for blazes to start and spread.
Natural causes are to blame most of the time, like lightning strikes in drought-affected forests.
Dry lightning was responsible for starting a number of fires in Victoria's East Gippsland region.
Humans can also be to blame. NSW police have charged at least 24 people with deliberately starting bushfires.

Challenges that Australia is facing:
Australia is experiencing one of its worst droughts in decades- last spring was the driest on record.
Meanwhile, a heatwave in December broke the record for highest nationwide average temperature, with some places sweltering under temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius (about 113-120 degrees Fahrenheit). Strong winds have also made the fires and smoke spread more rapidly. Experts say climate change has worsened the scope and impact of natural disasters like fires and floods -- weather conditions are growing more extreme, and for years, the fires have been starting earlier in the season and spreading with greater intensity.

What has been the damage so far?

- Entire towns have been engulfed in flames, and residents across several states have lost their homes.
- The heaviest structural damage occurred in NSW, the country’s most populated state, where 1,588 homes have been destroyed and over 650 damaged.
- In total, more than 7.3 million hectares (17.9 million acres) have been burned across Australia’s six states -- an area larger than the countries of Belgium and Denmark combined.
- The worst-affected state is NSW, with more than 4.9 million hectares (12.1 million acres) burned.
- Number of total animals affected could be as high as one billion nationwide. Almost a third of koalas in NSW may have been killed in the fires, and a third of their habitat has been destroyed.

When will the fires end?

Unfortunately, Australia is only about halfway through its summer season. Normally, temperatures peak in January and February, meaning the country could be months away from finding relief. The fires are unlikely to end entirely since they are an annually occurring event -- and may even get worse if recent years are a guide.

Sources: Indian Express.

8. Review of state and Central government water departments

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Significance and challenges highlighted.

Context: Report on the review of state and Central government water departments by the ministry of Jal Shakti has been released.

How are they ranked?
Ranking has been done under the National Hydrology Project that aims to improve drought and flood management, creating a state specific database on availability, plugging leakages in canals and dams and meteorological forecast on water resources information system.
1. The ranking is part of the mid-term review of the Central and the state government departments dealing with water to achieve the target to provide piped drinking water connection to every household in the next five years.
2. Another aim of the ranking is to have a water resources information system (WRIS) for all states to create a real-time integrated National Water Information Center (NWIC).

Performance of various states:
1. Gujarat has been ranked the best for parameters on efficiency targets.
2. Delhi is among the worst performing states.
3. In the previous year’s ranking, Telangana had got the top slot and this year’s topper, Gujarat, was ranked seventh last time.
4. Among the states that significantly improved its ranking was Tamil Nadu, which stood at 13th position as compared to 33 in 2018.

Performance of government departments:
The departments have been ranked on parameters for procurement, finance, real-time data acquisition system, data digitization, analytical work, trainings and updating MIS. The agencies have been given score out of 100, and those scoring between 48 and 100 are called *satisfactory*; the ones scoring between 40 and 48 are *moderately satisfactory*; score between 34 and 40 falls under *moderately unsatisfactory category* and score below 34 is in the *unsatisfactory category*.

- Among the seven Central departments reviewed, the Survey of India has got the top billing followed by the National Institute of Hydrology (NIH) and Central Water Commission.
- The Central Pollution Control Board, the country’s pollution watchdog, has got the lowest rank.

**Way ahead:**
Ranking project will have impact on ground only if leakages are detected on real time basis and there are personnel to act on the alerts to be issued by the WRIS. The states need to strengthen its workforce on ground to deliver the benefits of the system to people. The system can also help people in getting real time alerts on water related natural calamities such as drought and floods.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 9. Carbon Disclosure Project

**What to study?**

*For Prelims:* Key findings and overview.
*For Mains:* Significance, performance improvements and challenges ahead.

**Context:** The *CDP India annual report* has been released by CDP (Carbon Disclosure Project) India. The report examines *carbon reduction activities of companies*. **Top 4:** United States of America secured the top spot followed by Japan, United Kingdom and France.

**Key findings:**
1. The *boards of 98% of the firms directly monitor climate change risks* with top management integrating these concerns in performance evaluation.
2. 2/3rd of the 59 firms that were surveyed use *climate analysis tools* to formulate their business strategies.
3. Improvement in disclosure rate has primarily been driven by investors who are actively pushing companies to reveal climate risks and take steps to reduce their carbon footprint.
4. Among the key focus areas of Indian firms is renewable energy. According to the report, 23 companies reported renewable energy targets in 2019, a 44% rise over 2018. Of these, *Infosys, Dalmia Cement and Tata Motors have reported 100% RE consumption*.

**Overall performance of India:**
1. India is now among the *top five countries globally when it comes to adopting science-based target initiatives (SBT)* with as many as 38 Indian companies in 2019 committing to going beyond policy requirements to plan urgent climate action, a significant rise from 25 firms in 2018.
2. In 2019, up to 57 of the 59 responding companies stated that they have a process for risks assessment; 51 declared that their process of identifying, assessing and managing climate related risks is integrated into the multi-disciplinary, company-wide risk identification, assessment, and management process which is considered a best practice.

**About CDP:**
- The CDP is a global disclosure system that enables companies, cities, states and regions to measure and manage their environmental impacts.
- It collects and collates self-reported environmental data in the world.
- It is aimed at measuring the carbon reduction activities undertaken by different companies and firms operating in various countries across the globe.
Sources: the Hindu.

10. Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFC)

What to study?
For Prelims: About HCFC-141b - uses and environmental concerns.
For Mains: Significance of the move and other measures necessary.

Context: India has successfully achieved the complete phase out of hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141b, claims the ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

About HCFC-141b:
• It is a chemical used by foam manufacturers.
• It is used mainly as a blowing agent in the production of rigid polyurethane (PU) foams.
• It is one of the most potent ozone depleting chemical after Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

Background:
On 31 December 2019, as part of the move towards environment friendly technologies, the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) also brought out a Gazette notification prohibiting the issuance of import licence for HCFC-141b from 1 January 2020 under Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2019 issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Significance:
Nearly, 50% of the consumption of ozone depleting chemicals in the country was attributable to HCFC-141b in the foam sector. India has now emerged as one among the few countries globally and a pioneer in some cases in the use of technologies, which are non-Ozone Depleting and have a low Global Warming Potential (GWP).

Montreal Protocol:
The complete phase out of HCFC 141b from the country in foam sector is among the first at this scale in Article 5 parties (developing countries) under the Montreal Protocol.

Benefits of this move:
The phase out of HCFC-141b from the country has twin environmental benefits, viz, assisting the healing of the stratospheric ozone layer, and towards climate change mitigation due to transitioning of foam manufacturing enterprises at this scale under HPMP to low global warming potential alternative technologies.

What are HCFCs?
Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) are a large group of compounds, whose structure is very close to that of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), but including one or more hydrogen atoms.
1. Under normal conditions, HCFCs are gases or liquids which evaporate easily. They are generally fairly stable and unreactive.
2. HCFCs do not usually dissolve in water, but do dissolve in organic (carbon-containing) solvents.
3. HCFCs are chemically similar to Hydrobromofluorocarbons (HBFCs), Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and Halons and therefore display some similar properties, though they are much less stable and persistent.
4. HCFCs are also part of a group of chemicals known as the volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

How might it affect the environment?
HCFCs are unlikely to have any impact on the environment in the immediate vicinity of their release.
1. As VOCs, they may be slightly involved in reactions to produce ozone, which can cause damage to plants and materials on a local scale.
2. At a global level however, releases of HCFCs have serious environmental consequences. Although not as stable and therefore not so persistent in the atmosphere as CFCs, HBFCs or Halons, they can still end up in the higher atmosphere (stratosphere) where they can destroy the ozone layer, thus reducing the protection it offers the earth from the sun’s harmful UV rays.
3. HCFCs also contribute to Global Warming (through “the Greenhouse Effect”). Although the amounts emitted are relatively small, they have a powerful warming effect (a very high “Global Warming Potential”).

Sources: the Hindu.

11. Biorock or mineral accretion technology

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the technology.

Context: The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), with help from Gujarat’s forest department, is attempting for the first time a process to restore coral reefs using biorock or mineral accretion technology in the Gulf of Kachchh.

What is Biorock?
It is the name given to the substance formed by electro accumulation of minerals dissolved in seawater on steel structures that are lowered onto the sea bed and are connected to a power source, in this case solar panels that float on the surface.

How they are formed?
1. The technology works by passing a small amount of electrical current through electrodes in the water.
2. When a positively charged anode and negatively charged cathode are placed on the sea floor, with an electric current flowing between them, calcium ions combine with carbonate ions and adhere to the structure (cathode).
3. This results in calcium carbonate formation. Coral larvae adhere to the CaCO3 and grow quickly.
4. Fragments of broken corals are tied to the biorock structure, where they are able to grow at least four to six times faster than their actual growth as they need not spend their energy in building their own calcium carbonate skeletons.

Sources: the Hindu.

12. Cheetah reintroduction project

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Cheetah reintroduction project and its significance, challenges therein.

Context: The Supreme Court has allowed the Centre to introduce the African cheetah to a suitable habitat in India.

Background:
The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had previously told the Supreme Court that African cheetahs would be translocated in India from Namibia and would be kept at Nauradehi wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has given a ‘no objection’ for the translocation.
What is reintroduction and why reintroduce Cheetah now?

'Reintroduction' of a species means releasing it in an area where it is capable of surviving. Reintroductions of large carnivores have increasingly been recognised as a strategy to conserve threatened species and restore ecosystem functions.

- The cheetah is the only large carnivore that has been extirpated, mainly by over-hunting in India in historical times.
- India now has the economic ability to consider restoring its lost natural heritage for ethical as well as ecological reasons.

Facts:

- The cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus*, is one of the oldest of the big cat species, with ancestors that can be traced back more than five million years to the Miocene era.
- The cheetah is also the world’s fastest land mammal.
- It is listed as vulnerable in IUCN red listed species.
- The country’s last spotted feline died in Chhattisgarh in 1947. Later, the cheetah — which is the fastest land animal — was declared extinct in India in 1952.
- The Asiatic cheetah is classified as a “critically endangered” species by the IUCN Red List, and is believed to survive only in Iran.

Cheetah reintroduction programme in India:
The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun had prepared a ₹260-crore cheetah re-introduction project seven years ago.

Nauradehi in Madhya Pradesh was found to be the most suitable area for the cheetahs as its forests are not very dense to restrict the fast movement of the spotted cat. Besides, the prey base for cheetahs is also in abundance at the sanctuary.

Reasons for extinction:

1. The reasons for extinction can all be traced to man’s interference. Problems like human-wildlife conflict, loss of habitat and loss of prey, and illegal trafficking, have decimated their numbers.
2. The advent of climate change and growing human populations have only made these problems worse.
3. With less available land for wildlife, species that require vast home range like the cheetah are placed in competition with other animals and humans, all fighting over less space.

About NTCA:
The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

It was constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation.

Sources: Indian Express.

13. Ramsar sites in India

What to study?
For Prelims: Ramsar sites in India, overview of the convention.
For Mains: Significance of wetlands, need for conservation, challenges.

Context: India has added 10 more wetlands to sites protected by the Ramsar Convention. With this, a total of 37 sites in the country have been recognised under the international treaty.

The 10 new ones are:
Nandur Madhameshwar, a first for Maharashtra; Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal in Punjab; and Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar in Uttar Pradesh. The other
Ramsar sites are in Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Tripura.

About Ramsar convention:
- It is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- It is named after the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the Caspian Sea, where the treaty was signed on 2 February 1971.
- Known officially as ‘the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat’ (or, more recently, just ‘the Convention on Wetlands’), it came into force in 1975.

Montreux Record:
Montreux Record under the Convention is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. It is maintained as part of the Ramsar List.
The Montreux Record was established by Recommendation of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1990).
Sites may be added to and removed from the Record only with the approval of the Contracting Parties in which they lie.
- Currently, two wetlands of India are in Montreux record: Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan) and Loktak Lake (Manipur).
- Chilka lake (Odisha) was placed in the record but was later removed from it.

Sources: the Hindu.

14. UN’s new rules for ships in the Arctic region

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the new rules, about MARPOL.
For Mains: Sulphur emissions- concerns, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: On January 1, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has issued new rules aiming to reduce sulphur emissions, due to which ships are opting for newer blends of fuels. But, recently environmental activists called for a ban on the use of new low sulphur marine fuel in the Arctic region, citing a research which shows that blends of very low-sulfur fuel oil (VLSFO) contribute to highly polluting black carbon emissions in the environment.

What do the new IMO rules say?
The IMO has banned ships from using fuels with a sulphur content above 0.5 per cent, compared with 3.5 per cent previously.
The new limits are monitored and enforced by national authorities of countries that are members of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) Annex VI.
Under the new policy, only ships fitted with sulphur-cleaning devices, known as scrubbers, are allowed to continue burning high-sulphur fuel.
Alternatively, they can opt for cleaner fuels, such as marine gasoil (MGO) and very low-sulfur fuel oil (VLSFO).
There are complaints against VLSFO as well, as testing companies have claimed that high sediment formation due to the fuel’s use could damage vessel engines.

Implications:
The new regulations, called IMO 2020, have been regarded as the biggest shake up for the oil and shipping industries in decades. It affects more than 50,000 merchant ships worldwide.

Concerns associated with Sulphur usage:
Sulphur oxides (SOx), which are formed after combustion in engines, are known to cause respiratory symptoms and lung disease, while also leading to acid rain.
About International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL):
The Convention was adopted on 2 November 1973 at IMO. It includes regulations aimed at preventing and minimizing pollution from ships – both accidental pollution and that from routine operations. All ships flagged under countries that are signatories to MARPOL are subject to its requirements, regardless of where they sail and member nations are responsible for vessels registered on their national ship registry.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Disaster and management.

1. National Disaster Response Fund

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of NDRF.
For Mains: It’s significance and usage.

Context: Centre releases Rs 5908 cr for flood relief to 7 states from the National Disaster Relief Fund. The states are- Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tripura, Assam, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

About NDRF:
National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) was renamed as National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) with the enactment of the Disaster Management Act in 2005. Defined in Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act). It is a fund managed by the Central Government for meeting the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation due to any threatening disaster situation or disaster. Constituted to supplement the funds of the State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF) of the states to facilitate immediate relief in case of calamities of a severe nature.

Key features of NDRF:
Located in the “Public Accounts” of Government of India under “Reserve Funds not bearing interest”. Monitoring: Department of Agriculture and Cooperation under Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) monitors relief activities for calamities associated with drought, hailstorms, pest attacks and cold wave /frost while rest of the natural calamities are monitored by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) audits the accounts of NDRF.

What is it to be used for?
NDRF amount can be spent only towards meeting the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation. For projects exclusively for the purpose of mitigation, i.e, measures aimed at reducing the risk, impact or effect of a disaster or threatening disaster situation a separate fund called National Disaster Mitigation Fund has to be constituted.

Sources of Financing NDRF:
Financed through the levy of a cess on certain items, chargeable to excise and customs duty, and approved annually through the Finance Bill. The requirement for funds beyond what is available under the NDRF is met through general budgetary resources. Currently, a National Calamity Contingency Duty (NCCD) is levied to finance the NDRF and additional budgetary support is provided as and when necessary. A provision also exists in the DM Act to encourage any person or institution to make a contribution to the NDRF.

Sources: the Hindu.
Topics: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

1. Bru-Reang refugee agreement

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: The centre has signed a historic pact for permanent solution of Bru refugees’ issue. The agreement is between Union Government, Governments of Tripura and Mizoram and Bru-Reang representatives to end the 23-year old Bru-Reang refugee crisis.

Highlights of the agreement:
1. Under the agreement, the centre has announced a package of Rs. 600 crore under this agreement.
2. As per the agreement the Bru tribes would be given land to reside in Tripura.
3. A fixed deposit of Rs. 4 lakh will be given to each family as an amount of government aid. They will be able to withdraw this amount after two years.
4. Each of the displaced families will be given 40x30 sq ft residential plots.
5. Apart from them, each family will be given Rs. 5,000 cash per month for two years.
6. The agreement highlights that each displaced family will also be given free ration for two years and aid of Rs. 1.5 lakh to build their houses.

Significance of the government:
This agreement will bring a permanent solution for the rehabilitation of thousands of Bru-Reang people in Tripura. The government believes that this agreement will bring a bright future for them. Bru-Reang people will be able to enjoy the benefits of all social-welfare schemes of governments.

Background:
More than 30,000 Bru tribes who fled Mizoram, are residing in Tripura’s refugee camps.

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.
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. New and Emerging Strategic Technologies (NEST)

What to study?
For Prelims: Objectives and functions of NEST.
For Mains: Need for and significance of NEST.

Context: With India grappling with issues like the security implications of the introduction of 5G and artificial intelligence, the Indian foreign ministry has announced the setting up of a new division on New and Emerging Strategic Technologies (NEST).

About NEST and its functions:
- The division will act as the nodal point in India's foreign ministry for all matters connected to new and emerging technologies including exchange of views with foreign governments and coordination with domestic ministries and departments.
- It will also help assess foreign policy and international legal implications of emerging technology and technology-based resources.
- The desk will also be involved in negotiations to safeguard Indian interests at multilateral fora like the United Nations or the G20 where rules governing the use and access to such technologies could be decided.

Significance:
The new division is one of the many specialized desks created in recent years to deal with emerging challenges and scenarios.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Revised norms for data-led probes

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the guidelines and about GR Network.
For Mains: Need for data preservation and privacy.

Context: The Union Home Ministry has issued revised guidelines to streamline the process of seeking legal assistance from foreign countries in criminal matters. It has also issued directives on drafting and processing letters rogatory, mutual legal assistance requests and service of summons, notices and other judicial documents.

As per the new guidelines:
1. Before seeking information about a person’s e-mail account hosted on servers in foreign countries, investigating agencies will have to establish that it is linked to a crime.
2. All data, including personal, must be obtained and processed fairly and lawfully. The requested country has to be informed about the time period for which the data is required. Such period shall be consented by the requested country.
3. The transferred data shall be kept for no longer than the period required for the purpose for which it has been received and shall be returned to the requested country or deleted at the end of the period specified.
4. ‘Data preservation’ shall be the key to the investigation of cyber-offences and those involving digital evidence.
5. The G-8 countries’ 24/7 Network could be used to place request for preserving data in real time.

Need for data preservation:
Accessing the Internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP) creates important records and other information such as customer records, connection information and stored data. This is very important evidence.
to prove the guilt intention of the accused. Since this type of evidence can disappear quickly, it is of paramount importance to get the data preserved expeditiously through appropriate channels.

**Background:**
The Centre introduced the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 in the Lok Sabha last month that seeks to provide for protection of personal data of individuals and establishes a Data Protection Authority for it. But, most intermediaries and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, Yahoo!, Twitter and YouTube have their servers outside India.

**About G-8 24/7 Network:**
It allows law enforcement agencies to make urgent preservation requests of the digital data before it perishes.
- It is a new mechanism to expedite contacts between the Participating States or other autonomous law enforcement jurisdictions of a State.
- It is a point to point network for urgent assistance in cybercrime matters.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. Cyber Crime Coordination Centre

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: I4C- objectives, compositions and functions.*

**Context:** The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** was recently inaugurated by the government. The scheme to set up I4C was **approved in October 2018,** to deal with all types of cybercrimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

**About the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre:**
It will be set up under the newly created **Cyber and Information Security (CIS) division** of the MHA.

**It has seven components:**
1. National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit
2. National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal
3. National Cyber Crime Training Centre
4. Cyber Crime Ecosystem Management Unit
5. National Cyber Crime Research and Innovation Centre
6. National Cyber Crime Forensic Laboratory Ecosystem

**Functions:**
The I4C will assist in centralising cyber security investigations, prioritise the development of response tools and bring together private companies to contain the menace.

**Objectives:**
1. To act as a nodal point in the fight against cybercrime
2. Identify the research problems/needs of LEAs and take up R&D activities in developing new technologies and forensic tools in collaboration with academia / research institutes within India and abroad
3. To prevent misuse of cyber space for furthering the cause of extremist and terrorist groups
4. Suggest amendments, if required, in cyber laws to keep pace with fast changing technologies and International cooperation
5. To coordinate all activities related to implementation of Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLAT) with other countries related to cybercrimes in consultation with the concerned nodal authority in MHA.

**Need for surveillance:**
Asia is the region most targeted by cyber-attackers, resulting in significant economic losses. As the region continues to play a key role in the global economic market, these cyber threats are expected to increase. Over 460 million people in India currently use the internet, leaving them vulnerable to online criminals – both individuals and organised syndicates.

Way ahead:
The government has decided to hire IT experts from premier public and private institutes, including IITs, to help fight new age crimes like online fraud, hacking, identity theft, dark net, trafficking, child pornography, online radicalisation and cyber-terrorism and prepare a roadmap for Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Juice jacking

What to study?
For Prelims: Meaning and how it works?
For Mains: Ways to prevent such malware attacks, potential threats.

Context: SBI has publicly issued a warning of ‘Juice Jacking’ through its twitter handle. The bank has advised its customers and general public to “think twice before plugging-in their phone at (public) charging stations, as hackers can maliciously infect their smartphone with a malware.”

What is Juice Jacking?
It is an **attack carried out by hackers through a USB charging cable**.

How it works?
When a user plugs in the charging cable in his mobile’s charging port, and connects it to any of the rigged charging stations installed at public spaces such as airports, train stations, hotels, cafes etc – it gives a *backdoor entry to hackers into the compromised device*.
The charging port which is also used for data transfer over the USB, is pointed as the main cause of concern over here.

Threats:
*Installing malware*, cleaning user data, asking ransom in exchange for access to personal data on the phone, personal and financial account hijacking are just some of the many nefarious things that a hacker can do with this unrestricted access.

Steps to Mitigate the Risks
*In order to guard your phone against Juice Jacking, take these precautionary measures:*
1. Avoid using public charging stations. These are soft targets for hackers as they are often kept unguarded and without any surveillance.
2. Always **use your own AC charging adapter and cable for charging the device**. And be sure to plug it into the AC wall socket, and not the USB socket on the wall.
3. Stay guarded against a stranger’s device and laptop. Do not connect with an unknown person’s laptop or PC for charging your electronic devices and vice-versa.
4. For emergency situations, buy and carry a **certified power bank** with enough capacity to take care of your device’s emergency power backup needs.
5. Try to use a **cable that can be used only as a charging cable and not a data cable**.
6. Frequent travelers should use a **USB blocker**.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

What to study?
For Prelims: CCTNS, NCRB.
For Mains: CCTNS- need and benefits, smart policing, police reforms.

Context: NCRB has launched two online national-level services related to Search of Missing Persons and to Generate Vehicle NOC.
- These police-related citizen-centric services have been launched on Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS).
- The services can be accessed through ‘digitalpolicecitizenservices.gov.in’ portal or through a link in the existing ‘Digital Police Portal’.

What is CCTNS project?
Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) is a project initiated in June 2009 which aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policing at the Police Station level. This will be done through adoption of principles of e-Governance, and creation of a nationwide networked infrastructure for evolution of IT-enabled state-of-the-art tracking system around “investigation of crime and detection of criminals”. CCTNS is a Mission Mode Project (MMP) under the National e-Governance Plan of Govt. of India.

What it does?
1. The Project will interconnect about 15000 Police Stations and additional 5000 offices of supervisory police officers across the country and digitize data related to FIR registration, investigation and charge sheets in all Police Stations.
2. It will not only automate Police functions at Police station and higher levels but will also create facilities and mechanism to provide public services like registration of online complaints, ascertaining the status of case registered at the police station, verification of persons etc.
3. In 2015, an additional objective of establishing a basic platform for an Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) was added to the Project.

Benefits:
1. The Full implementation of the Project with all the new components would lead to a Central citizen portal having linkages with State level citizen portals that will provide a number of citizen friendly services like Police Verification for various purposes including passport verification, reporting a crime including cyber-crime and online tracking of the case progress etc.
2. The project will enable National level crime analytics to be published at increased frequency, which will help the policy makers as well as lawmakers in taking appropriate and timely action, it will also enable Pan-India criminal/accused name search in the regional language for improved inter-state tracking of criminal movement. This would lead to development of a national database of crimes and criminals.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

1. What is a Blue Corner notice?

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: Composition, objectives and functions of Interpol, various notices.

Context: Interpol has issued a Blue Corner notice to help locate fugitive self-styled godman Nithyananda, weeks after the Gujarat Police sought the agency’s intervention for this. Nithyananda fled India last year amid allegations of rape and sexual abuse.
What is a Interpol notice?

Notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information.

There are seven types of notices — Red Notice, Yellow Notice, Blue Notice, Black Notice, Green Notice, Orange Notice, and Purple Notice.

What is blue notice?

Issued to “collect additional information about a person’s identity, location or activities in relation to a crime.”

What is Interpol?

The International Criminal Police Organisation, or Interpol, is a 194-member intergovernmental organisation. Headquartered in Lyon, France.

Formed in 1923 as the International Criminal Police Commission, and started calling itself Interpol in 1956. Interpol’s declared global policing goals include countering terrorism, promoting border integrity worldwide, protection of vulnerable communities, providing a secure cyberspace for people and businesses, curbing illicit markets, supporting environment security, and promoting global integrity.

India joined the organisation in 1949.

What is the Interpol General Assembly?

It is Interpol’s supreme governing body, and comprises representatives from all its member countries. It meets annually for a session lasting approximately four days, to vote on activities and policy. Each country is represented by one or more delegates at the Assembly, who are typically chiefs of law enforcement agencies.

The Assembly also elects the members of the Interpol Executive Committee, the governing body which “provides guidance and direction in between sessions of the Assembly”.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Govt signs accord with NDFB, ABSU to resolve Bodo issue

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 Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Assam government and the Bodo groups have signed an agreement to redraw and rename the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Assam.

The BTAD district is currently spread over four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baks and Udalguri.

Overview of the agreement signed:

As per the agreement, villages dominated by Bodos that were presently outside the BTAD would be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded.

The memorandum of settlement says that the criminal cases registered against members of the NDFB factions for “non-heinous” crimes shall be withdrawn by the Assam government and in cases of heinous crimes it will be reviewed.

The families of those killed during the Bodo movement would get Rs. 5 lakh each.

A Special Development Package of Rs. 1500 Crore would be given by the Centre to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodo areas.

A committee will decide the exclusion and inclusion of new areas in the BTAD. Subsequent to this alteration, the total number of Assembly seats will go up to 60, from the existing 40.
Significance:
The signing of the agreement would end the 50-year-old Bodo crisis.
Around 1500 cadres of NDFB(P), NDFB(RD) and NDFB(S) will be rehabilitated by Centre and Assam Government. They will be assimilated in the mainstream now.
After the agreement, the NDFB factions will leave the path of violence, surrender their weapons and disband their armed organisations within a month of signing the deal.

Background:
The first Bodo accord was signed with the ABSU in 1993, leading to the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council with limited political powers. The BTC was created in 2003 with some more financial and other powers. The BTAD and other areas mentioned under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution have been exempted from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, that enables undocumented non-Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who entered India on or before December 31, 2014 to apply for Indian citizenship.

What next?
As of now the agreement has not addressed the issue of “citizenship or work permit” for non-domiciles in the BTAD, to be renamed as the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).
Several Bodo groups have been demanding a separate land for the ethnic community since 1972, a movement that has claimed nearly 4,000 lives.

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?
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?
1. 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.
2. 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.
3. From then on, they have been consistently deprived of the political and socio-economic rights by successive state and central governments.
4. 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.
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1. Ethical veganism

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: What is Veganism, ethical veganism?

Context: An employment tribunal in the United Kingdom has ruled that “ethical veganism” is a philosophical belief protected by British law against discrimination.

What’s the case?
The man who brought the case, Jordi Casamitjana, claimed that he was fired from an animal welfare charity, The League Against Cruel Sports, for raising concerns about its pension funds’ alleged investment in companies that use animal testing.

What has the tribunal said?
The tribunal determined that ethical veganism meets the test required to be a philosophical belief, because of which it is protected under The Equality Act, 2010.

What is Veganism, ethical veganism?
Broadly, a vegan person does not consume meat products and also products that are derived from animals (such as milk, eggs, etc).
Ethical veganism, on the other hand, has been defined as the view that attaches a positive ethical valuation to a vegan lifestyle.
There are two types of ethical veganism: broad absolutist veganism, under which it is always wrong to use any product made by or from animals, and modest ethical veganism, under which it is typically wrong to use products made from or by a range of animals including cats, dogs, cows, pigs, etc.
An example of the former category is a person who would not press a leather button, “even if doing so were necessary in order to avert global nuclear war”.

How is it different from ethical vegetarianism?
Ethical veganism is different from ethical vegetarianism — the latter makes a distinction between products made from animals, such as meat, and products made by animals, such as milk.
Ethical vegetarianism is opposed to products made from animals in particular.

Sources: Indian Express.
FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. What is Merchant Discount Rate?

- It is a fee charged from a merchant by a bank for accepting payments from customers through credit and debit cards in their establishments.
- MDR compensates the card issuing bank, the lender which puts the PoS terminal and payment gateways such as Mastercard or Visa for their services.
- MDR charges are usually shared in pre-agreed proportion between the bank and a merchant and is expressed in percentage of transaction amount.
- **Why in News?** From January onwards, all companies with a turnover of Rs 50 crore or more need to provide the facility of payment through RuPay Debit card and UPI QR code to their customers, under which no MDR fee will be charged from customers as well as merchants.

2. Mani App

**Context:** RBI launches mobile app MANI for visually challenged to identify currency notes.

- The application also works offline once installed.
- The application can scan the currency notes using the camera of the mobile phone.
- It also gives audio output in Hindi and English.

3. Senna Spectabilis

- It is a deciduous tree native to tropical areas of America.
- It grows up to 15 to 20 metres in a short period of time and distributes thousands of seeds after flowering.
- It is an invasive species.
- **Concerns:** The thick foliage of the tree arrests the growth of other indigenous tree and grass species. Thus, it causes food shortage for the wildlife population, especially herbivores. It also adversely affect the germination and growth of the native species.
- It is categorised as ‘Least Concern’ under IUCN Red List.

**Why in News?** The Kerala Government is planning to arrest the rampant growth of Senna spectabilis, in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), including the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

4. Sangita Kalanidhi award

**Context:** S.Sowmya has been conferred with Sangita Kalanidhi Award.

**About the award:**
Sangita Kalanidhi Award was instituted by the Music Academy, Chennai. It is the title awarded yearly to a Carnatic Musician.

5. MiG-27

**Context:** On December 27, the Indian Air Force retired its fleet of MiG-27s.

**Key facts:**
- It was due to the jet's heroics during the Kargil war that the aircraft earned the nickname "bahadur" from Air Force pilots.
- It is a single-engine, single-seater tactical strike fighter aircraft.
- Initially developed in the erstwhile Soviet Union and later indigenously manufactured by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited in India.
- The MiG-27 is primarily a 'ground attack' aircraft, whose main role is to conduct precision air strikes in battle while tackling the adversary’s air defences.
6. Year of the Nurse and the Midwife 2020

The World Health Assembly has designated 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.

Key facts:
- This marks the bicentenary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.
- It celebrates professionals who provide a broad range of essential services to people everywhere.
- Besides preventing, diagnosing and treating diseases, and providing expert care during childbirth, nurses and midwives also serve people caught in humanitarian emergencies and conflicts.

Existing gaps: Currently, there are 22 million nurses and two million midwives worldwide. The world will need an additional nine million nurses and midwives to achieve the commitment of providing all people with access to health care by 2030, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned.

7. What is Extraocular Vision?

The ability to see without eyes is known as extraocular vision. Previous researchers have defined it as the ability to resolve scenes without discrete eyes.

Why in News?
Researchers have shown that red brittle star, which are relatives of starfish, can see even though it does not have eyes. The red brittle star (Ophiocoma wendtii), which lives in the coral reefs of the Caribbean Sea, becomes only the second creature, after a sea urchin species, known to have this ability (barring freak cases in other species).

How it works?
In sea urchins and brittle stars, researchers suspect that extraocular vision is facilitated by the photoreceptor cells found on their bodies.

8. First-of-its kind turtle rehab centre comes up in Bihar

- A first-of-its-kind rehabilitation centre for freshwater turtles will be inaugurated in Bihar’s Bhagalpur forest division in January 2020.
- The rehab centre, spread over half a hectare, will be able to shelter 500 turtles at a time.
- The need to build such a centre was felt after several turtles were found severely wounded and sick when rescued from smugglers by rescue teams.

9. ‘Cyber Safe Women’ initiative

- The Maharashtra government has launched a ‘cyber safe women’ campaign across the state, on the birth anniversary of Indian social reformer, Savitribai Phule.
- The cyber safe women initiative aims to spread awareness regarding the atrocities committed against women and children as well as the laws regarding cybercrime.
- It will educate women about how the web is used by anti-social elements to commit various types of crimes.

10. Patola Sarees

Context: Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has inaugurated a first Silk Processing Plant at Surendranagar in Gujarat.

The plant would help to reduce the cost of production of silk yarn and increase the sale and availability of raw material for Gujarati Patola Sarees locally.

Key facts:
- Patola, the trademark saree of Gujarat, is considered to be very costly and worn only by royals or aristocrats.
- It is a double ikat woven sari, usually made from silk, made in Patan, Gujarat, India.
- The reason high cost of Patola sarees is that the silk yarn used to make them is purchased from Karnataka or West Bengal, where silk processing units are situated. This increases the cost of the fabric manifolds.
- It has received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2013.
11. Chinese paddlefish found in the Yangtze declared extinct

- It is native to the Yangtze, Asia's longest river.
- It is one of the world's largest species of freshwater species.
- It has been declared extinct by Chinese scientists. The last confirmed sighting of the fish was in 2003.
- It is thought to have become functionally extinct — which means there are no breeding pairs left — in 1993.
- Two other notable Yangtze species — reeves shad, a type of fish and the baiji, or Yangtze River dolphin — were declared 'functionally extinct' in 2015 and 2006 respectively.

12. Bhitarkanika census on saltwater crocodiles

Context: Bhitarkanika census finds an increase of 15 saltwater crocodiles from last year.
- There are now 1,757 crocodiles in the park, the census conducted on January 3, 2020, found. Last year, there were 1,742.

Back to Basics:
There are three species of crocodilians—saltwater, Mugger and Gharial.
1. Mugger:
The mugger crocodile, also called the Indian crocodile, or marsh crocodile, is found throughout the Indian subcontinent.
It is listed as vulnerable by IUCN.
The mugger is mainly a freshwater species, and found in lakes, rivers and marshes.

2. Gharial:
The Gharial or fish eating crocodile is native to the Indian subcontinent.
It is listed as Critically Endangered by IUCN.
Small released populations are present and increasing in the rivers of the National Chambal Sanctuary, Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Son River Sanctuary and the rainforest biome of Mahanadi in Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary, Orissa.

3. Saltwater Crocodile:
It is the largest of all living reptiles. It listed as least concern by IUCN. It is found throughout the east coast of India.

13. Smog tower

Delhi gets its first smog tower.
In November, the Supreme Court had directed the Centre and the Delhi government to prepare a plan to install ‘smog towers’ across the capital to deal with air pollution.

What is a ‘smog tower’?
- Smog towers are structures designed to work as large-scale air purifiers.
  They are usually fitted with multiple layers of air filters, which clean the air of pollutants as it passes through them. After the cleaning, the tower releases clean air.
- The filters installed in the tower will use carbon nanofibres as a major component and will be fitted along its peripheries. The tower will focus on reducing particulate matter load.
14. **Bibi Ka Maqbara**

It is a tomb located in Aurangabad, Maharashtra.
- It was **commissioned in 1660 by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb** in the memory of his first and chief wife Dilras Banu Begum.
- It is considered to be a symbol of Aurangzeb's 'conjugal fidelity'.
- The structure, known as the 'Taj of the Deccan' because of its striking resemblance to the Taj Mahal.

15. **‘Zo Kutpui’ festival**

**Context:** Mizoram govt to organise ‘Zo Kutpui’ globally to unify Mizo tribes.
- The **first festival would be held at Vanghmun**, a hub town of Mizos in neighbouring Tripura.
- The event will see the presence of many important dignitaries from various Mizoram tribes and also witness cultural programmes and traditional songs from various Mizo tribes from Mizoram and other northeastern states.

The event **aims at re-unifying and strengthening brotherhood among different tribes of Mizo.**

16. **Great Indian Bustards (GIB)**

**IUCN status:** critically endangered.
**Found in** Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
**Listed in** *Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in the CMS Convention and in Appendix I of CITES.*

Identified as one of the species for the **recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.**

**Project Great Indian Bustard** — state of Rajasthan — identifying and fencing off bustard breeding grounds in existing protected areas as well as provide secure breeding enclosures in areas outside protected areas.

**Protected areas:** Desert National Park Sanctuary — Rajasthan, Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary – Andhra Pradesh and Karera Wildlife Sanctuary— Madhya Pradesh.

17. **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)**

NAAC is established by *University Grants Commission (UGC)* to assess and accredit institution of higher learning in the country.

The NAAC was originally formed in 1992 as a result of recommendations from *National Policy on Education - 1986* which emphasizes on deteriorating quality of higher education in the country.

**Functions:** The NAAC certifies institutions of higher learning (Colleges, Universities, Institutes, etc) in the country; however, it does not include the institutes providing technical education.

It is an autonomous organisation that assesses and accredits institutions of higher education in India.

18. **CISF**

**Why in News?**

The Supreme Court has asked the Union government to explore possibility of creating a special wing of **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)** for providing security to courts across the country, including the high courts and the SC.

**About CISF:**
- CISF is an armed force of the Union established under an Act of Parliament, *“Central Industrial Security Force Act, 1968 (50 of 1968)”*.  
- According to the mandate, CISF provides security to the premises staff along with the security of property and establishments.
• CISF is also providing protection to some private sector units and important government buildings in Delhi.
• Presently, CISF is also providing security to the protected persons classified as Z Plus, Z, X, Y.
• CISF is the only force with a customized and dedicated fire wing.
• CISF is a compensatory cost force.

19. What is the habitable zone
• The habitable zone (or “Goldilocks zone”) is the range of orbital distances from a star at which liquid water can exist on the surface of a planet.
• It is the area around a star where it is not too hot and not too cold for liquid water to exist on the surface of surrounding planets.
• This range of distances changes depending on the size and temperature of the star.
• Earth is in the habitable zone of the sun – one of the reasons our planet has liquid water like oceans and lakes.

Why in News?
NASA reported the discovery of an Earth-size planet, named TOI 700 d, orbiting its star in the “habitable zone”.

20. What is Epiphany festival?
On 6th January, the Epiphany festival was celebrated in parts of India, such as Goa and Kerala. In Goa, the celebration is known by its Portuguese name ‘Festa dos Reis’, and in parts of Kerala by its Syriac name ‘Denha’.

What is it?
Epiphany is a feast day, or a day of commemoration, which in Christianity marks the visit of the Magi (meaning the Three Wise Men or Three Kings) to the Infant Jesus (Christ from his nativity until age 12). According to Christian belief, the Magi — Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar (or Casper), the kings of Arabia, Persia, and India, respectively — followed a miraculous guiding star to Bethlehem, where they paid homage to the Infant Jesus.

• The three are said to have brought gifts for Jesus: gold by Melchior, myrrh by Balthasar, and incense by Gaspar. The visit is believed to signify Jesus’ physical manifestation to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people).
• The day also commemorates the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River.

21. Sea Guardians 2020
• It is a joint naval drill between Pakistan and China.
• The latest edition is being held in Karachi.
• It is the sixth in the bilateral series.
• It will focus on “augmenting interoperability and strategic cooperation.”

22. Operation Sankalp
• It is a maritime security operation launched by India to promptly respond to the emergency situations for Indian sea vessels in the Middle East region.
• It has been launched in order to ensure safe passage of Indian Flag Vessels through the Strait of Hormuz.

23. MILAN 2020
It will be held in Visakhapatnam in March 2020.
About MILAN 2020:
• MILAN stands for Multilateral Naval Exercise.
• It is a multilateral naval exercise aimed to enhance professional interaction between friendly foreign navies and learn from each other’s strengths and best practices in the maritime domain.
• Of the 41 navies invited, confirmations from over 30 navies have been received towards their participation in MILAN 2020.

24. India’s borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh
India is planning to erect non-cut steel fence in the sensitive areas of Pakistan and Bangladesh borders.
Key facts:
India shares 4,096.7 km border with Bangladesh and 3,323 km with Pakistan.

25. World Hindi Day 2020
Context: World Hindi Day is celebrated on January 10 every year, marking the anniversary of first World Hindi Conference which was held in 1975 by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
World Hindi Day was first observed on January 10, 2006. Since then, it is celebrated on January 10 every year. 
World Hindi Day vs National Hindi Diwas:
National Hindi Diwas is celebrated every year on September 14. On that day in 1949, the constituent assembly adopted Hindi, written in Devanagari script, as the official language of the Union.
Focus: While the focus of the World Hindi Day is to promote the language at the global stage, the National Hindi Diwas, which is held across the country at a national level, marks adaptation of Hindi, written in Devanagari script as the official language.

26. Kolkata port renamed
Centre has renamed the Kolkata Port Trust after Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee.
Key facts:
• In the early 16th century, the Portuguese first used the present location of the port to anchor their ships, since they found the upper reaches of the Hooghly river, beyond Kolkata, unsafe for navigation.
• After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, this port was used to ship lakhs of Indians as ‘indentured labourers’ to far-flung territories throughout the Empire.
• The Kolkata port is the only riverine port in the country, situated 203 km from the sea. The river Hooghly, on which it is located, has many sharp bends, and is considered a difficult navigational channel.
• The Farakka Barrage, built in 1975, reduced some of the port’s woes as Ganga waters were diverted into the Bhagirathi-Hooghly system.

27. Mission Purvodaya
• The Centre unveils Mission Purvodaya to develop eastern region into an integrated steel hub.
• The eastern belt has the potential to add over 75 percent of the country’s incremental steel capacity envisioned by the National Steel Policy.
• Through this programme, the government aims to transform logistics and utilities infrastructure which would change the socio-economic landscape in the eastern India.
• The steps, under mission, also include growth of steel industry along with employment opportunities across the entire value chain.

28. Island Development Agency (IDA)
What is it? The IDA was set up on June 1, 2017 for the development of islands. The meetings of the agency are chaired by the Union Home Minister.
Composition: Members of the IDA include cabinet secretary, home secretary, secretary (environment, forests and climate change), secretary (tourism) and secretary (tribal welfare).

29. Taal volcano
• It is a volcano on the island of Luzon in Philippines.
• It erupted recently.
• It is classified as a “complex” volcano. A complex volcano, also called a compound volcano, is defined as one that consists of a complex of two or more vents, or a volcano that has an associated volcanic dome, either in its crater or on its flanks.

30. Saksham
It is a people centric fuel conservation mega campaign of Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA).
Saksham actively involves the Oil & Gas PSUs along with other stakeholders like State Governments:
1. To create focused attention on fuel conservation through people centric activities and
2. To sensitize the masses about the conservation and efficient use of petroleum products leading to better health and environment.

About PCRA (established in 1978):
It is a registered society set up under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India. As a non-profit organization, PCRA is a national government agency engaged in promoting energy efficiency in various sectors of economy.

31. Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)
Context: Celebrated its 5th annual day.
About CARA:
• CARA is an apex body of Government of India for promoting and facilitating In-country Adoption and is the designated Central Authority for regulating Inter-country Adoption.
• CARA was designated as a Statutory Body on 15 Jan 2016, under the provisions of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

32. Yada Yada virus
Context: Detected recently in Australian mosquitoes.
What is it?
• It belonged to a group that includes other alphaviruses such as chikungunya virus and the astern equine encephalitis.
• Even so, the novel virus poses no threat to human beings, because it is a part of a group of viruses that only infect mosquitoes. Other viruses in the same group include the Tai forest alphavirus and the Agua Salud alphavirus.

33. Z Morh tunnel
Context: Govt awards over Rs 2000 cr for completing Z Morh tunnel.
Key facts:
• The 6.5-kilometre long Z-Morh tunnel is located in Jammu and Kashmir.
• The tunnel is capable of allowing 1,000 vehicles an hour at a speed of 80 km per hour.
• Border Road Organization (BRO) was the previous implementation agency of the project. The project was however transferred to IL&FS in 2016. APCO will now complete the balance work.

34. Winged Raider
It is Indian Army’s biggest airborne exercise conducted recently in the north-eastern theatre.
35. ‘Sahyog-Kaijin’
- It is a joint coast guard exercise between India and Japan.
- The aim is to strengthen the bond between the two countries.
- The latest edition is being held in India.

36. About CICT
The Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT) is an autonomous Institute of higher research functioning under the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India.
- This is an Institute constituted specifically for carrying out higher research Classical Tamil at international levels not to be found elsewhere globally.
- The CICT is engaged in several research activities aimed at establishing the ancientness and uniqueness of Tamil and of Classical Tamil in particular and in propagating its findings globally.
- The Institute is responsible for the Kural Peedam Award.

37. About Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL)
- The DFCCIL is a corporation run by the Ministry of Railways (India) to undertake planning & development, mobilisation of financial resources and construction, maintenance and operation of the Dedicated Freight Corridors.
- DFCC has been registered as a company under the Companies Act 1956 on 30 October 2006.

38. ELECRAMA 2020
- It is the flagship showcase of the Indian electrical industry and a platform to connect the world with the Indian industry in respect of technology, new trends and innovation for the future energy transition.
- It is a platform for knowledge-sharing with a strong focus on electric vehicles, Internet of Things (IoT), storage solutions and renewable energy.
- It is supported by the Ministry of Power, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, Government of India.

39. Steppe eagle
Why in News? Sighted recently near Vijayawada.
Key facts:
- *IUCN status:* Endangered.
- *Scientific name:* Aquila nipalensis.
- Like all eagles, it belongs to the family Accipitridae.
- *Habitat:* It breeds from Romania east through the south Russian and Central Asian steppes to Mongolia. The European and Central Asian birds winter in Africa, and the eastern birds in India.
- Throughout its range it favours open dry habitats, such as desert, semi-desert, steppes, or savannah.
- The Steppe Eagle appears on the flag of Kazakhstan. It is also the National bird (animal) of Egypt and appears on its flag.

40. Submarine-launched ballistic missile, K-4
Context: Test-fires recently.
Key facts:
- *Range:* 3,500 km.
- *The Circular Error Probability (CEP)* of the K-4 is much more sophisticated than most countries which possess similar missiles. The CEP determines the accuracy of a missile. The lower the CEP, the more accurate the missile would be in targeting.
41. **Vyom Mitra**  
It is ISRO’s **first woman astronaut.**  
- It will be used for an **unmanned flight of ISRO’s GSLV III rocket in December 2020,** which, along with a second unmanned flight in July 2021.  
- Vyommitra, equipped with a head, two arms and a torso, is built to **mimic crew activity inside the crew module of Gaganyaan.**  
- **Functions:** Attaining launch and orbital postures, responding to the environment, generating warnings, replacing carbon dioxide canisters, operating switches, monitoring of the crew module, receiving voice commands, responding via speech (bilingual).

42. **Reciting preamble is compulsory in Maharashtra**  
Maharashtra government has made it **compulsory to recite the Preamble to the Constitution in all schools starting January 26.**  
- The objective is **to instil values such as justice, freedom and equality enshrined in the Constitution.**  
- The government has also asked the schools to put up a plaque or board with the Preamble and asked schools to hold quizzes, essay, drawing, slogan, poster competitions based on the Constitution.

43. **Ophichthus kailashchandrai**  
This is a **new snake eel species** residing in the Bay of Bengal. It was **discovered** recently.  
It has been named **Ophichthus kailashchandrai** to honour the vast contributions of **Dr. Kailash Chandra,** Director of ZSI, to Indian animal taxonomy.  
It is the **eighth species of the Ophichthus genus found on the Indian coast.**  
**More about Ophichthus kailashchandrai:**  
- Lives at a depth of around 50 metres in the sea.  
- Individuals of this species are around 420 mm to 462 mm in length.  
- They are light brown in colour, with white fins.  
- It feeds on small fish and crabs. The outer surface of their bodies is slimy but they are not poisonous.

44. **Web portal ‘GATI’**  
Launched by the **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways.**  
Created by **NHAI.**  
**How it works?**  
1. The portal ‘GATI’ can be accessed from NHAI’s website, and contractors and concessionaires can raise any project-related issues on the platform.  
2. The issues raised in the GATI will be daily monitored by a team of officers in NHAI and will be constantly reviewed by the senior officers of NHAI and the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways.

45. **National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP)**  
**Context:** NITI Aayog released its vision for the National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP).  
**Features:**  
- The platform aims to democratize access to publicly available government data.  
- It will host the latest datasets from various government websites, present them coherently, and provide tools for analytics and visualization.  
- NDAP will follow a user-centric approach and will enable data access in a simple and intuitive portal tailored to the needs of a variety of stakeholders.

46. **Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar**  
**Context:** Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2020 announced.  
**About the award:**
1. Awarded to recognise the excellent work done by *individuals and institutions in India in the field of disaster management*.
2. Announced every year on 23rd January, *the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose*.
3. If the awardee is an institution, it shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 51 lakhs. The Institution shall utilize this cash prize for Disaster Management related activities only.
4. If the awardee is an individual, the winner shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 5.00 lakhs.
5. *Only Indian nationals and Indian institutions* can apply for the award.

### 47. Archaea

- They are a *primitive group of microorganisms* that thrive in extreme habitats such as hot springs, cold deserts and hypersaline lakes.
- These *slow-growing organisms* are also present in the human gut, and have a potential relationship with human health.
- They are known for *producing antimicrobial molecules, and for anti-oxidant activity* with applications in eco-friendly waste-water treatment.

**Why in News?**

Scientists have reported a new *archaeon* (a kind of microorganism), which they discovered in *Sambhar Salt Lake in Rajasthan*.

It has been named *Natrialba swarupiae*, after Dr Renu Swarup, secretary, Department of Biotechnology.

### 48. Hemorrhagic septicemia

- It is a *severe bacterial disease* caused by certain strains.
- The disease is also spread through contact with infected animals, contaminated clothing, equipment, and through ingestion or inhalation of the bacteria.
- *Primary symptoms* include swishing tails, reduced cudding, undigested food in faeces and reduced milk yield.

**Why in News?**

Around 40 buffaloes have died within four days due to suspected Sahana disease (hemorrhagic septicemia) in a number of villages located in the Garadapur block of Odisha’s Kendrapara.

### 49. Sagarmatha Sambaad

- It is *the first-ever multi-stakeholder dialogue event in Nepal’s recent history*, to be held in April.
- It will be attended by *many global figures* apart from the leaders of the member countries of *the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)*.
- It is expected to be the *biggest diplomatic initiative*.

### 50. About Padma Awards

*Padma Awards* – one of the highest civilian Awards of the country, are *conferred in three categories, namely, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri*. They were instituted in the year 1954. The Awards are given in various disciplines/fields of activities, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.

Categories:

1. Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; (it is a second degree honour).
2. Padma Bhushan is awarded for distinguished service of high order. (It is a third degree honour).
3. Padma Shri is awarded for distinguished service in any field. (It is a fourth degree honour).

The awards are *announced on the occasion of Republic Day every year*. The award is normally not conferred posthumously. However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously if the demise of the person proposed to be honoured has been recent, say within a period of one year preceding the Republic Day on which it is proposed to announce the award.

### 51. India's first underwater metro

**Context:** India’s *first underwater metro* nears completion after costs double.
**Location:** The first underwater metro project is being constructed in Kolkata, a part of which will pass under the iconic Hoogly river on which the famous Howrah bridge is constructed.

**52. Operation Vanilla**

**Context:** Indian navy will perform HADR operations in Madagascar under ‘Operation Vanilla’. It has been **launched to provide assistance to the affected population of Madagascar post devastation caused by Cyclone Diane.**

**53. Nagoba Jatara**

**Context:** A month-long Nagoba Jatra festival has come to an end in Telangana.

**What is it?**

- It is a tribal festival held in **Telangana.**
- Also known as **Keslapur jatara.**
- It is a huge religious and cultural event of the Boigutta branch of Mesram clan of the aboriginal **Raj Gond and Pardhan tribes.**
- During the festival, the maha puja of serpent god Nagoba is held.
- The **Gusadi Dance performance** by dancers from the Gond tribe is a major special attraction of the event.

**54. SAMPRITI-IX**

It is a **bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and Bangladesh.**

- The latest edition will be the ninth edition and will be conducted in Umroi, Meghalaya.