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1. ALL INDIA JUDICIAL SERVICE NO PANACEA, SAYS STUDY

Introduction:
- Currently, the appointments of District Judges and Subordinate Judiciary are done by the respective State governments.
- But in recent years, there have been an invigorated push for creation of a unified pan-India judicial service for appointing them.
- AIJS has been pitched as a solution to judicial vacancies, lack of representation for the marginalised and the failure to attract the best talent.
- NITI Aayog in its report, ‘Strategy for New India@75’, mooted the creation of an All India Judicial Service (AIJS) for making appointments to the lower judiciary.

All India Judicial Service:
- The Constitution of India was amended in 1977 to provide for an All-India Judicial Services under Article 312.
- The Chief Justices conferences in 1961, 1963, and 1965 favoured creation of All-India Judicial Services and even the Law Commissions (1st, 8th and 11th, 116th) had suggested the creation of the service. However, each time it was faced with opposition.
- The idea for AIJS was first proposed by the 14th Report of the Law Commission of India in 1958, aimed at creating a centralised cadre of District Judges that would draw better talent.
- One of the recent justifications for creation of AIJS has been that a centralised service would help fill the approximately 5,000 vacancies across the District and Subordinate Judiciary in India.
- The proposal was again floated by the ruling UPA government in 2012 but the draft bill was done away with after opposition from High Court Chief Justices who labelled this an infringement of their rights.
- The report, however, said it is only certain High Courts which account for a majority of the approximately 5,000 vacancies.

Issues with Subordinate courts/ states:
- States and high courts are apprehensive of the scheme because, if implemented, it would take away their powers to appoint and administer subordinate judges.
- The main problem cited by the states is that the states have used the powers under the CrPC and CPC to declare that a local language can be used in lower courts even for writing orders.
- Because of this a person form other state may find it difficult to hold the proceedings in other states and it will affect the quality of justice.
- The other issue of conflict is that an all India judicial service may hamper the progression of state judicial service officers.
• It may also end up **not taking into account local laws**, practices and customs which vary widely across States, vastly increasing the costs of training for judges selected through the mechanism.

**Opposing from certain communities:**

• During the **Emergency**, Parliament amended **Article 312** of the Constitution to allow for the Rajya Sabha to pass a resolution, by two-thirds majority, in order to kick-start the process of **creating an all India judicial service** for the posts of district judge.

• Once the resolution is passed, Parliament can **amend Articles 233 and 234 through a simple law** (passed by a simple majority), which law will strip States of their appointment powers.

• This is unlike a constitutional amendment under **Article 368** that would have required ratification by State legislatures.

• In other words, if Parliament decides to go ahead with the creation of the AIJS, **State legislatures can do nothing to stop the process**.

• The argument that the **centralisation of recruitment processes** through the UPSC automatically leads to a more efficient recruitment process is **flawed and not a guarantee of a solution**.

• For example, the Indian Administrative Service its recruitments are through the UPSC, reportedly has a vacancy rate of 22%.

**Concern because of state quotas:**

• The report also highlighted that many of the communities who **currently benefit from the State quotas**, may oppose the creation of AIJS.

• This is because the communities recognised as Other Backward Classes (OBC) by State governments may or may not be classified as OBCs by the Central government.

• While AIJS has been pitched as a solution to **lack of representation** for the marginalised on the Bench, the report said many States are already reserving posts for **marginalised communities and women**.

• Another argument made against creation of AIJS is that judges recruited through this process will **not know the local languages of the States** in which they are posted.

• This becomes important considering that the proceedings of civil and criminal courts are to be conducted in a **language prescribed by the respective State governments**.

• The **issues of local language and customs** are issues that deserve **serious consideration** before moving ahead with the creation of the AIJS.

• Nine High courts are against this proposal and hence disapproving this proposal. The conflict between Centre and State would start.

• The **status of legal education in India** is very much **mismanaged**. Except for a few national law schools, others do not prioritize the legal education too much. Law is taken as the last report who do not get into medicine, IITs etc.

• Unremunerative pay is a big issue. Despite an effort by the Supreme Court to ensure uniformity in pay scales across States in the All India Judges’ Association case, it is still very low.

• Also, the judiciary has **fewer avenues** for growth, promotion and limited avenues for career advancement.

• There is low district judge representation in the High Courts, as **less than a third of seats in the High Courts are filled by judges from the district cadre**. The rest are appointed directly from the Bar.

• Both the **decentralized approach** of each High Court conducting its own appointment and a **centralized one** seem to have roughly the same efficacy in filling up the vacancy.

**Conclusion:**

• It is through an all India judicial services examination conducted by the UPSC in order to **maintain “high standards” in the judiciary**.

• In addition to proposing an AIJS as a **solution for judicial vacancies**, it may be **more prudent to investigate** the reasons and causes for the large number of vacancies in the poorly performing States.

• AIJS is facing hurdles from the administrative block and also from High Courts, even though Supreme Court has asked for AIJS twice.

• Therefore, AIJS should be **designed in a manner to remove its shortcomings** and it can be an effective solution to the vacancy in Judiciary.
• Adequate judges can be made available only if they are recruited in large strength through AIJS just like we see in case of IAS, IPS, IFS and other civil services. Hence there should be no more delay.
• Moreover, after the selection, a Judicial service officer can be provided sufficient training to handle the job. A meritocratic judiciary is the need of the hour which is possible with a competitive recruitment process.

2. A CASE FOR INCLUDING TULU IN THE EIGHTH SCHEDULE

Introduction:
• 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.

Indian Constitutional safeguards:
• India is one of unique countries in the world that has the legacy of diversity of languages.
• The Constitution of India has recognised 22 official languages. Multilingualism is the way of life in India as people in different parts of the country speak more than one language from their birth and learns additional languages during their life time.
• 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.
• Given the linguistic diversity of India, there is no national language as all the states are free to decide their own official languages.
• The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India lists the official languages of the Republic of India.
• In addition to these scheduled and classical languages, The Constitution of India has included the clause to protect minority languages as a fundamental right.
• It states” Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part of thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.”

Thousands of speakers:
• Many languages that are kept out of this favoured position are in some ways more deserving to be included in the Eighth Schedule.
• For example, Sanskrit, an Eighth Schedule language, has only 24,821 speakers (2011 Census). Manipuri, another scheduled language, has only 17,61,079 speakers.
• However, many unscheduled languages have a sizeable number of speakers: Bhill/Bhilodi has 1,04,13,637 speakers; Gondi has 29,84,453 speakers; Garo has 11,45,323; Ho has 14,21,418; Khandeshi, 18,60,236; Khasi, 14,31,344; and Oraon, 19,88,350.
• The language policy of India provides guarantee to protect the linguistic minorities.
• Under the Constitution provision is made for appointment of Special Officer for linguistic minority with the sole responsibilities of safeguarding the interest of language spoken by the minority groups.

About Tulu Language:
• 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 Samgama 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”.

Conclusion:
• India has a lot to learn from the Yuelu Proclamation.
• Placing of all the deserving languages on equal footing will promote social inclusion and national solidarity.
• It will reduce the inequalities within the country to a great extent.
• So, Tulu, along with other deserving languages, should be included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in order to substantially materialise the promise of equality of status and opportunity mentioned in the Preamble.
• Both the state and the citizens have an equal responsibility to conserve the distinct language, script and culture of a people.

Benefits of Recognition in Eighth Schedule:
If included in the Eighth Schedule, Tulu would get the following benefits:
• Recognition from the Sahitya Akademi.
• Translation of Tulu literary works into other languages.
• Members of Parliament (MP) and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) could speak Tulu in Parliament and State Assemblies, respectively.
• Option to take competitive exams in Tulu including all-India competitive examinations like the Civil Services exam.
• Special funds from the Central government.
• Teaching of Tulu in primary and high school.

3. ENDING INACTION: ON SPEAKERS AND DISQUALIFICATION

Context:
• In an important order aimed at rearming the anti-defection law, the Supreme Court set three months as the outer limit for the Speaker to conclude disqualification proceedings against defectors.
• The apex court also wanted Parliament to revisit the rationale behind giving exclusive powers to the Speaker in deciding disqualification petitions. After all, the Speaker also belongs to a political party and often gets caught in the power games.
Provisions of Anti-Defection Law:

- The anti-defection law was made by inserting the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution in 1985 to combat “the political defections”.
- The provisions require every Member of Parliament (MP) and of state legislative assemblies or councils (MLA or MLC) to abide by the party’s command on voting or abstaining on every vote.
- If a legislator fails to do so, he may be disqualified from his membership to the legislature.
- The provisions apply not only to votes that affect the stability of the government, i.e., no confidence motions and money Bills. They are applicable to all votes.

Arguments against Anti-Defection:

- Legislators often argue that defection is a matter of choice and as individuals they have a right to decide who to support.
- Several democracies have not adopted an anti-defection law, even though legislators often switch to the other side.
- In the U.K., Australia and the U.S., parliamentarians and senators often take positions contrary to their parties or vote against the party’s view, yet continue within the same party.
- Legislators should be allowed to express their own views and a defection law amounts to curtailment of the delegate’s freedom of choice.
- Anti-Defection goes against the basis of a representative democracy in which the elected representative is expected to act in public interest.
- Even in India, several commentators have highlighted the irrelevance of the anti-defection law and called for reconsideration of such a legal provision.

Supreme Court’s decision of Speaker’s Authority:

There are two significant aspects to the Supreme Court’s latest decision on the Speaker as the adjudicating authority under the anti-defection law.

- The first is that Parliament should replace the Speaker with a “permanent tribunal” or external mechanism to render quick and impartial decisions on questions of defection.
- Few would disagree with the Court’s view that initial fears and doubts about whether Speakers would be impartial had come true.
- The second is its extraordinary ruling that the reference by another Bench, in 2016, of a key question to a Constitution Bench was itself unnecessary.
- The question awaiting determination by a larger Bench is whether courts have the power to direct Speakers to decide petitions seeking disqualification within a fixed time frame.
- The question had arisen because several presiding officers have allowed defectors to bolster the strength of ruling parties and even be sworn in Ministers by merely refraining from adjudicating on complaints against them.
- Some States have seen en masse defections soon after elections.
- Secure in the belief that no court would question the delay in disposal of disqualification matters as long as the matter was pending before a Constitution Bench, Speakers have been wilfully failing to act as per law, thereby helping the ruling party, which invariably is the one that helped them get to the Chair.
- It is time that Parliament have a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto.

Supreme Court directed till Independent Tribunal is brought, decide in 3 months:

- However, for the present, the court said the Speakers should decide Tenth Schedule disqualifications within a “reasonable period”. What was ‘reasonable’ would depend on the facts of each case.
• Unless there were “exceptional circumstances”, disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be decided by Speakers within three months.
• The court noted that this period was ‘reasonable’, as the ordinary life of the Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assemblies was merely five years.
• Given the widespread abuse of provisions of the Anti-Defection Act in the country, it is time Parliament reflected on the matter and came up with an out-of-the-box solution.

Conclusion:
• The decision to disqualify a legislator is contingent on the institution of the Speaker.
• The partisan role of the Speaker in many States has ensured the continuation of turncoat legislators as legitimate members of the House.
• This is a good time to heed the advice of eminent constitutional experts to amend the anti-defection law and rest the authority to disqualify turncoats in the hands of an autonomous body.
• As “failure to exercise jurisdiction” is a recognised stage at which the court can now intervene, the court has thus opened a window for judicial intervention in cases in which Speakers refuse to act.
• This augurs well for the enforcement of the law against defection in letter and spirit.
• While recommending that keeping in view the partisan conduct of Speakers, Parliament should amend the Constitution to set up a permanent tribunal to decide cases under the 10th Schedule.

4. ABOLITION POLITICS: ON A.P. CABINET NOD TO ABOLISH LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Context:
• The abolition and revival of the second chamber in State legislatures have become matters of political expediency.
• Andhra Pradesh is the latest State to favour the alteration of the status quo regarding the Upper House, in an Assembly resolution for its Legislative Council’s abolition.
• A.P. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy’s drastic step comes after key legislation intended to take forward his three-capital proposal was referred to a select committee by the Council, in which his party does not have a majority.
• His grievance: the Council is working with a political agenda to block his proposal.
• While the need for a bicameral legislature in the States has often been questioned, few would support the idea that the potential difficulty in getting the Council’s approval should be a reason for its abolition.

Legislative Councils in various states:
• A.P.’s proposal will bear fruit only if Parliament passes a law to that effect, based on the State’s request.
• A.P. CM went to the extent of saying that there was no point in spending a huge sum (Rs.60 crore per year) on the Council if it comes in the way of important government business in the Legislature.
• He also mentioned in the Assembly that only six States have Legislative Councils and he was against allowing the Legislative Council of A.P. to function with a political agenda.
• However, recent experience suggests that States without a Legislative Council favour its revival. Rajasthan, Assam, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh have passed resolutions for a revival, but are yet to get parliamentary approval.
• In Tamil Nadu, at least two erstwhile DMK regimes had favoured revival, and even parliamentary approval given in 2010 did not result in the actual re-establishment of the Council, which was dissolved in 1986. I
• It is quite clear that wherever the Council is sought to be revived or abolished, there is no consensus.
What are the Legislative Councils, and why are they important?

- **India has a bicameral system**, 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.

- A second House of legislature is considered important for **two reasons**:
  - One, to **act as a check on hasty actions** by the popularly elected House and,
  - Two, 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.

- Our constitution does not force a bicameral legislature on states. It gives states the **option of having a second House**.

- The process of creating an Upper House is lengthy. 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.

- As per Article 171 (1), 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.

- Also, the total number of members in the legislative council of a state **shall in no case be less than 40**.

- As of today, six states have Legislative Councils. These are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

**Opposition to the idea of Legislative Councils is centred on three broad arguments:**

- One, they can be **used to park leaders** who have not been able to win an election.

- Two, they can be used to **delay progressive legislation**.

- Three, they would **strain state finances**.

Opinion in the Constituent Assembly was divided on the question of having a Legislative Council.

- The idea was backed on the above grounds; it was also suggested that having a second chamber would **allow for more debate and sharing of work between the Houses**.

- **2nd ARC recommended** that role of teachers and graduates should be decreased or done away with and **more say should be given to local bodies** in order to strengthen the voice of local bodies.

- **How are members of the Council elected?**

  - Membership may vary, but the **Legislative Council must not have more than a third of the total membership of the Assembly of that state**, and in no case fewer than 40 members.

  - About **1/3rd of members** are elected by members of the Assembly, another **1/3rd by electorates** consisting of members of municipalities, district boards and other local authorities in the state, 1/12th by an electorate consisting of teachers, and 1/12th by registered graduates.

  - 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.

  - Legislative Councils are permanent Houses, and like Rajya Sabha, **one-third of their members retire every two years**.

**Do Rajya Sabha and Vidhan Parishads have similar powers?**

Not really. The constitution gives Councils limited legislative powers.

- 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.

- Also, 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**.

**Conclusion:**

- Chief Ministers ought to bear the possible delay that the Council’s opinion or course of action may cause, and seek to **build a legislative consensus instead of pushing their agenda through**.

- In particular, state governments will have to listen to different voices on his proposal to locate the State High Court in Kurnool, its legislature in Amaravati, and the government secretariat in Visakhapatnam.
A parliamentary committee that went into the Bills introduced in respect of Assam and Rajasthan suggested that the Centre evolve a national policy on having an Upper House in the States.

The larger question is whether the Councils are serving their intended purpose to take a considered view on matters without being influenced by electoral considerations.

If the Upper Houses are used only for accommodating leaders who have lost general elections, there may not be much meaning in their existence.

And there is less justification for having separate representation in Councils for graduates and local bodies when democracy has taken roots and Assemblies are representative of all sections.

5. SUPREME COURT NOT TO REVIEW SABARIMALA CASE, TO EXAMINE ‘LARGER ISSUES’

Context:

Supreme Court said its objective was not to review the Sabarimala women entry case but examine “larger issues” of law arising from practices such as the prohibition of women from entering mosques and temples, female genital mutilation among Dawoodi Bohras and the ban on Parsi women who married inter-faith from entering the fire temple.

Points to ponder

Seven issues were framed by the five-judge Review Bench for the larger Bench. They form the crux but may be re-framed for future hearing before the nine-judge Bench. The ‘broad’ issues are:

- What should be the interplay between freedom of religion under Articles 25 and 26 and the right to equality under Article 14?
- Right to practice religion is subject to ‘public order, morality and health’ under Article 25(1). What do these terms actually mean?
- Is constitutional morality the over-arching morality in reference to the Preamble or limited to religious beliefs or faith?
- Should and, if so, how far can a court enquire into whether a religious practice is essential to a particular faith?
- What is the meaning of the expression ‘sections of Hindus’ appearing in Article 25(2)(b) of the Constitution?
- Whether ‘essential religious practices’ deserve constitutional protection under Article 26?
- What is the extent to which courts should entertain PILs questioning religious practices filed by a third person who is not a member of that faith?

To examine ‘larger issues’:

- The opening hearing before a nine-judge Supreme Court Bench, constituted to give an authoritative pronouncement on the nature of religious freedom under the Constitution, has revealed the conceptual confusion over the reference made to it.
- The Bench, headed by the Chief Justice of India has asked lawyers to “re-frame” the issues, or add to them, following submissions that the questions framed by a Bench of five judges were too broad.
- Further, the CJI has clarified that the Court will not be deciding the petitions seeking a review of the verdict in the Sabarimala temple case.
- Instead, it would limit itself to “larger questions” such as the interplay between freedom of religion and other fundamental rights; and the extent to which courts can probe whether a particular practice is essential to that religion or not.
- Instead, the Bench would examine the legality and essentiality of religious beliefs.
- The Bench, however, clarified that it would not go into the legality of issues such as the practice of polygamy and ‘nikah-halala’ in Islam.
Faiths vs Rights case:

- While the five-judge bench unanimously agreed to refer religious issues to a larger bench, it gave a 3:2 split decision on petitions seeking a review of the apex court’s September 2018 decision allowing women of all ages to enter the Sabarimala shrine in Kerala.

According to court:

- Every citizen has equal rights in religious matter, we can’t discriminate them on the basis of caste, race, gender etc, according to Article 15 of the constitution.
- Assures protection to every religious denomination to manage its own affairs.
- Can’t not stop women due to their biological cycle.

Indian Constitution Articles with respect to above case:

The bench while referring the matter to a larger bench had broadly mentioned seven questions of law to be examined. They are:

- the interplay between Article 25 (Right to profess religion of choice) and 26 (Right to manage religious affairs) of the Constitution;
- the meaning of the expression ‘sections of Hindus’ in the Constitution;
- the need to delineate the expression ‘constitutional morality’ or ‘morality’;
- whether ‘essential religious practices’ of a denomination or section are protected under Article 26;
- the extent to which courts can enquire into religious practices; the meaning of the expression ‘public order, morality and health’; and
- the permissible extent of judicial recognition to public interest litigations in matters calling into question religious practices at the instance of people who do not belong to the particular religious denominations.

Article 26: Freedom to Manage Religious Affairs

Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right—

1. to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;
2. to manage its own affairs in matters of religion;
3. to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and
4. to administer such property in accordance with

Article 14 : Equality Before Law

- The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 25 : Freedom of Religion

1. The Article 25 states that every individual is “equally entitled to freedom of conscience” and has the right “to profess, practice and propagate religion” of one’s choice.
2. Practicing religion or the act of propagating it should not, however, affect the “public order, morality and health.”
3. The Article doesn’t put any restriction on the government when it comes to making any law to regulate “economic, financial, political or other secular” activities, which may be associated with religious practice.
4. According to Article 25, the gates of Hindu religious institutions should be opened to every section of Hindus.
5. Here the term ‘Hindus’ also includes individuals who profess Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion. The same holds true for the term ‘Hindu religious institutions.

Conclusion:

- There are issues raises of serious questions about faith and practices of a religious denomination or sect.
- Therefore, it is time to evolve a judicial policy to do substantial and complete justice.
- Every state and person have right to possess their religion but this possession should be fair, without discrimination and untouchability. There should be measure to protect constitutional provision and also individual freedom be respected.
- The core values of our democracy and India civilisation are respect for diversity among the enormous range of communities cohabiting in India with substantial differences (as well as commonalities) in matters of faith,
cultural practices, value systems, family structure, dress codes, food habits and ways of relating to the world as well as the divine.

- This mutual respect for differences in ways of being, worship, singing, dancing, clothing, cooking, and so on is what **enabled the rich diversity of India to survive through millennia.**

### 6. A GOVERNMENT THAT CHOOSES ITS CRITICS

**Context:**

- Recently, the **Central Bureau of Investigation** raided **Amnesty International’s offices** in Bengaluru and Delhi based on allegations that the **NGO had violated provisions** of the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010**, and of the **Indian Penal Code**.
- Amnesty has been vocal about human rights abuses, notably in Jammu and Kashmir and Assam.

**Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010:**

- Foreign funding of voluntary organizations in India is regulated under FCRA act and is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The Acts ensures that the recipients of foreign contributions adhere to the stated purpose for which such contribution has been obtained.
- Under the Act, organisations require to register themselves every five years.
- As per the amended FCRA rules, all NGOs registered or granted prior permission under FCRA are now required to **upload details of foreign contributions** received and utilized by them **every three months** on their website or the FCRA website.
- The new FCRA rules ensure that the **human interface with foreign-funded NGOs** is minimized, with all queries and replies to applicants to be made through emails.
- The number of application/intimation forms has been **cut from 10 to six**, and the number of documents to be attached with applications also significantly reduced. The list of purposes for which foreign contribution can be utilized has been rationalized.
- NGOs now need to file their annual returns online, with the hard copy version dispensed with. The annual returns must be placed quarterly on the NGO’s website or the FCRA website maintained by the home ministry.

**Continuous raids on NGO’s:**

- The raid is **not an isolated incident** but part of a **pattern of harassment of NGOs** in India. In early 2019, **Greenpeace** had to shut two offices in India and reduce its staff.
- Since 2015, Greenpeace India has been barred from receiving foreign donations. In July 2019, there were raids in the offices of the Lawyers Collective.
• In 2019 alone, more than 1,800 NGOs lost their licence to receive foreign funding.
• This is worrying given that international funding is crucial for NGOs to function.

Importance of NGOs functioning in India:
• The contribution of NGOs to human rights and public awareness is significant in India.
• The recognition of the rights of homosexuals and transgender people, for instance, would have been unimaginable without the sustained effort of civil society organisations.
• Likewise, developments in the public provision of health and education are unlikely to come about without pressure by NGOs.
• Most NGOs are neither politically powerful nor have great financial capacity.
• For example, small environmental or tribal rights groups protesting against environmental violations by multinational companies cannot fight back against companies that use their resources profits from elsewhere for public relations, campaigning, and advertisement to resist the protests.
• Thus, there is a power imbalance in this struggle, exacerbated by financial restraints on organisations.

What is ‘public interest’?
• The FCRA regulates the receipt of funding from sources outside of India to NGOs working in India.
• It prohibits receipt of foreign contribution “for any activities detrimental to the national interest”.
• The Act specifies that NGOs require the government’s permission to receive funding from abroad.
• The government can refuse permission if it believes that the donation to the NGO will adversely affect “public interest” or the “economic interest of the state”.
• This condition is manifestly overbroad. There is no clear guidance on what constitutes “public interest”.

Government’s accusation against NGOs:
• A government could construe any disagreement with, or criticism of, any of its policies as being against public interest.
• For example, in 2014, several groups including Greenpeace were accused by the Intelligence Bureau of stalling India’s economic development.
• In the government’s narrow view, public interest is interpreted as being equivalent to its priorities. That is simply not the case.
• Thus, an environmental or human rights organisation criticising the government can be accused of “acting against public interest”.

Consequences on rights:
• The freedom is based on the idea that individuals can form voluntary groups and pursue various interests.
• It is a form of collective expression and thought.
• The Supreme Court has held that this right includes the right to continued sustenance of the association, without unreasonable restraint (Damyanti Naranga v. Union of India, 1971).
• The restrictions also have serious consequences on both the rights to free speech and freedom of association under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(c) of the Constitution.
• The foreign funding prohibition also negates the significance of voluntary, non-profit associations in a democracy.

Importance of Dissent in democracy:
• Free speech is valuable not because everyone agrees, but because it enables a culture of dissent, deliberation, and debate.
• The right to free speech is affected in two ways.
• One, by allowing only some political groups to receive foreign donations and disallowing some others, the government can ensure a biased political debate.
• It can reduce critical voices by declaring them to be against public interest.
• Two, this chilling effect on free speech can lead to self-censorship. Speech that is protected by the Constitution can be construed as “against public interest”.

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Thus, the standard regulates speech in a manner that is **incompatible with the Constitution.**

- In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)*, the Supreme Court was similarly faced with overbroad classifications in the Information Technology Act.
- **Striking down Section 66A**, the Court held that the Act could be used in a manner that has a chilling effect on free speech.

**Conclusion:**

- **Democracy requires critics and civil society.** This is why invoking the FCRA to curb the work of NGOs is deeply troubling.
- The setting up of **networking and support centres** for NGOs as a **public service** have first and foremost highlighted and acknowledged the importance of NGOs in societal development.
- In a democracy, **criticism should be welcomed, not repressed.** No government should ever be able to choose its own critics.
- **NGOs need to tread carefully** when they criticise the regime, knowing that too much criticism could cost their survival.

### 7. GOVERNANCE INDEX: ON STUDY OF STATES ON GOVERNANCE

**Context:**

- Minister of State for Personnel launched the **Good Governance Index (GGI).**
- **December 25**, the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was declared **Good Governance Day** by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014.
- The GGI had been “**scientifically designed**” to reflect various parameters of governance.

**About Good Governance Index (GGI):**

- GGI is a **uniform tool** that will help in **assessing the status of governance** and the impact of interventions undertaken by governments across all states and UTs.
- **Various principles** have been kept in mind while **selecting the indicators**, i.e. it should be easy to understand & calculate, **citizen-centric & result driven**, leading to improved results and applicable to all states and UTs, among others.
- **Various consultation meetings** were held with the stakeholders, including consultations with sector experts, ministries, states & UTs.

**The objectives of GGI are:**

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

Based on the **Root Cause Analysis of grievances** and as a step towards Good Governance, DoP&PW has planned **certain initiatives** to be acted upon during **2019-24**.

Irony in findings of Good Governance Index (GGI):

Different agencies including NITI Aayog, the government’s policy think-tank, are evaluating the States on different parameters.

- The findings of the GGI’s inaugural edition are significant in many respects. Although Tamil Nadu has always had the reputation of being a better-run State, it is only now that it is ranked first in any study of this kind.
- Its strength has been the ability to ensure stable and smooth delivery of services without much ado.
- But it is not the only southern State to have put up an impressive performance.
- Three of its neighbours are among the top 10 of the big 18 States, one of the three groups formed for the study with the north-east and hill States and Union Territories being the other two.
- Of course, traditionally, the south has been ahead of others in several parameters of development.
- What is more significant about the GGI is that the dubiously-labelled “BIMARU” States are seeking to catch up with others in development.
- Of the nine sectors, Rajasthan, a “BIMARU” State, has finished within the top 10 in five sectors, Madhya Pradesh in four and Uttar Pradesh in three.
- In agriculture and allied sectors, almost all the “BIMARU” States are within the top 10 category and in human resources development, U.P. and Bihar figure. In the composite ranking, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh are ranked fourth and ninth, respectively.
- The key message is that these northern States can catch up with others in due course of time, if the political leadership shows the will to overcome historical obstacles and stays focused on development.

Improvements needed in the next version:

- The indicator, “ease of doing business”, has been given disproportionate weight in the sector of commerce and industries, to the virtual exclusion of growth rate of major and micro, small and medium enterprises.
- Moreover, there will always be an unending debate over which indicators — process-based or outcome-based — should get more importance in the design of such a study.
- Notwithstanding these shortcomings, what is noteworthy is that the Centre has made an attempt to address the problem of the absence of a credible and uniform index for an objective evaluation of the States and Union Territories.
- It goes without saying that the GGI requires fine-tuning and improvement.
- But that does not take away the inherent strength of the work that has been accomplished, keeping in mind India’s size and complexity.
- Any index of this nature is bound to have some shortcomings, at least in the first round, a feature that the framers of the GGI have acknowledged.
- Some indicators — farmers’ income, prevalence of micro irrigation or water conservation systems and inflow of industrial investment — have been left out.

Conclusion:

- The nation-wide comparative study of States on governance carried out by the Government of India, as seen in the Good Governance Index (GGI), is a welcome exercise to incentivise States to competitively deliver on public services to the citizens.
- Good governance can be referred as an effective and efficient process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented) keeping the amelioration of citizens as the topmost priority.
Resource allocation, creation of formal establishments, setting up rules and regulations etc., are part of achieving this goal.”

8. THE NEED FOR A SINGLE ENERGY MINISTRY

Context:
- Five different ministries along with a multitude of regulators govern India’s energy sector.
- Petroleum and natural gas, coal, renewable energy and nuclear energy have separate ministries or departments.
- We also have a Ministry of Power, along with State-level bodies that regulate electricity distribution companies, or DISCOMS.
- Add to this, the presence of different regulators for each type of fuel and energy source which makes it cumbersome for businesses operating in this sector.
- Further, the petroleum and natural gas sector has two regulators: Directorate General of Hydrocarbons for upstream activities and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board for downstream activities.

Issues with data collection: Data constraints:
- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation collates data available from various ministries and conducts surveys at sporadic intervals.
- No single agency collects energy data in a wholesome and integrated manner.
- Data pertaining to consumption are barely available while supply side data collected by agencies of respective ministries are riddled with gaps.
- On the energy efficiency front, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency is the sole statutory authority with the mandate to regulate energy efficiency on the consumption side. There is no agency or body for the same purpose on the supply side.
- This stands in stark contrast to most other nations with their varied energy governance models.
- Developed and efficient countries such as the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom have their vibrant, diverse and prolific energy sectors administered by a single ministry or department.
- There are also instances where the energy ministry is in conjunction with other portfolios such as environment, climate change, mines and industry. The predominance of unified energy ministries is evident.

Various Committee reports and drafts: Unified Energy Ministry:
- The Kelkar Committee in its report “Roadmap for Reduction in Import Dependency in the Hydrocarbon Sector by 2030” (2013) stated that “Multiple ministries and agencies are currently involved in managing energy-related issues, presenting challenges of coordination and optimal resource utilization, hence undermining efforts to increase energy security”.
- In the Draft National Energy Policy (NEP), the NITI Aayog has advocated that a Unified Ministry of Energy be created by merging the Ministries of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG), Coal (MoC), New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and Power (MoP).
2020 will witness more investment in Country’s Energy Infrastructure:

- The Hydrocarbon Exploration & Licensing Policy (HELP), which has adopted the Revenue Sharing contract model, is a giant step towards **improving the ‘Ease of Doing Business’** in the Indian Exploration and Production (E&P) sector.
- It comes with attractive and liberal terms like reduced royalty rates, no oil cess, marketing and pricing freedom, round the year bidding, freedom to investors for carving out blocks of their interest.
- A **single license** to cover both conventional and unconventional hydrocarbon resources, exploration permission during the entire contract period, and an **easy, transparent and swift bidding and awarding process**.
- The ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) has proposed a draft policy for the supply of Round-The-Clock (RTC) power to DISCOMS which would be a mix of renewable energy and electricity generated in coal-based plants.
- The idea is to address the biggest issue with **large scale uptake of clean energy – intermittency**. Solar and wind energy are not available throughout the day severely limiting their use in modern grids.

**Enabling optimisation is the need of the hour:**

- A **single unified ministry of energy** would help India to have an **integrated outlook on energy** that would enable us **optimise our limited resources** to meet the **goals of energy security, sustainability and accessibility**.
- In the fast-changing energy landscape of our country, having a single energy ministry would be beneficial as it would allow for a **quicker policy response**.
- Formulating an **integrated and wholesome energy policy** in the current governance structure is a **complex and challenging task** not only due to lack of coordination among ministries.
- It also due to the **absence of good quality consumption data** and an inadvertent promotion of their own fuels over other choices, which may not always be the best option.
- The present government has already taken some steps towards **unifying the governance structure** of the energy sector such as **appointing a single minister** for both MNRE and MoP.
- This move has been lauded across sections of society as both those sectors are **heavily interlinked**.
- Having the same person heading both of these ministries will help **resolve long-standing issues** faced by both conventional and renewable power generators such as **power balancing and transmission infrastructure planning**.
- The hotly debated issue of non-payment of dues by DISCOMS to the generators might also be resolved with such synergy in administration.
- In the past too, this government has had the same minister for MNRE, MoP and MoC with great results in village electrification, LED bulb distribution (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All, or UJALA), power sector reforms (Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana, or UDAY), coal block e-auctions and alleviation of coal shortages. This demonstrates the intention of the political leadership to reform the energy governance structure.

**Unified Ministry: The ‘Jal Shakti’ example:**

They have already shown a disposition towards **unifying critical ministries**.

- A pertinent example is the newly created **Ministry of Jal Shakti** which was formed by merging the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- The objective of this action is **to unify water management functions**, treat the issues of water management **holistically** and ensure **better coordination** of efforts.
- This was a crucial decision at a time when **nearly 600 million indians faced “high to extreme water stress”**, while 75% households did not have drinking water on their premises.
- Though the actions by this government are a step in the right direction, there is a long road ahead.
- Accepting and implementing the recommendations of the NEP on **reforming energy governance**, which is to be placed for the approval of the Cabinet, would need to be carefully traversed given their hard-hitting implications on the existing bureaucratic structure.
- But nothing is more important than **ensuring energy security, sustainability and accessibility**.
• In this age of energy transition, this can only happen with quick and holistic decision-making as well as providing a level playing field for various fuels, all of which can happen if a single ministry handles the entire sector.
• Such a Unified Ministry of Energy will not only enable India to keep up with the global energy transition but also to continue to be a leader in adopting cleaner energy sources.

Conclusion:
• The scope of energy security has also expanded, with a growing emphasis on dimensions such as environmental sustainability and energy efficiency.
• The government of India has already set an ambitious target of developing 5 GW of offshore capacity by 2022, and a further 30 GW by 2030.
• To achieve the above targets, a single unified ministry of energy should come into picture to play an active role in India’s developmental goals.

9. REFORM OF GRAIN MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Context:
• With GDP growth rate plummeting to 4.5 per cent and with the agriculture GDP (GDPA) growth at 2.1 per cent in the second quarter of this fiscal year, everyone concerned with the economy is anxious.
• The question being asked is whether the Indian economy can be put back on the 7-8 per cent growth trajectory and can Agri-GDP grow at least at 4 per cent.
• And now, when the quarterly growth in GDPA is hovering at around 2 per cent, it is a cause for great concern.

Inflation effects in Agriculture sector:
• Agriculture still engages about 44 per cent of India’s workforce.
• If the masses do not gain from the growth process, their incomes remain subdued, then the demand for manufactured goods, housing and other goods will remain low.
• Inflation is led by different components of the food segment: cereals, pulses, and vegetables: in the consumer price index (CPI).
• Low demand in the economy is one of the main reasons behind India’s great slowdown today.
• Interestingly, it is during this slowdown that inflation has started to surge after a long period of low inflation during last five years.
• Also, there is the challenge of not slipping on the fiscal deficit target of 3.3 per cent.
• The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has already indicated that the real fiscal deficit of the country is much more if one accounts for the loans taken by many public sector undertakings (PSUs).
Therefore, Managing and Improving inefficiencies will provide more resources for other works:

- The central as well as state governments should take a look at the massive inefficiency in the grain management system under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) to find the required resources.
- The NFSA gives certain quantities of wheat and rice to 67 per cent of the population at Rs 2/kg and Rs 3/kg respectively, while the economic cost of these to the Food Corporation of India is Rs 25/kg and Rs 35/kg respectively.
- This led to a provision of Rs 1.84 lakh crore for food subsidy in the last Union budget.
- Not many people know that the FCI had pending bills of Rs 1.86 lakh crore that have not been cleared by the government, and that it has been asked to borrow more and more to finance its operations.
- The grain stocks with the FCI are far more than double the buffer stock norms as on January 1, every year.
- The massive accumulation of grain stocks is the result of a deeply inefficient strategy for food management wherein the procurement for wheat and rice (paddy) remains open-ended, but the disbursal of those stocks remains largely restricted to the public distribution system (PDS).
- The open market operations (OMO) are much less compared to what is needed to liquidate the excessive stocks. We don’t have a clear strategy. And now, if the rabi procurement is good, FCI may not have the storage space to accommodate it.
- The money locked in these excessive stocks (beyond the buffer norm) is more than Rs 1 lakh crore.
- Even if the government decides to liquidate half of it, it can garner Rs 50,000 crore to finance at least half of its infrastructure projects.

Solution: Shanta Kumar Committee Recommendations:

- The government had set up a six-member committee in 2014 to suggest some streamlines to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) regarding storage, procurement and distribution of the crop. The committee is headed by Shanta Kumar.

Procurement:

- Grain procurement surplus state like Punjab, Haryana should be delegated to state government.
- Food Corporation of India (FCI) focus more on price support operations in Eastern states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam etc. where the majority of the farmers are small and marginal.

Procurement Payment Systems:

- Under this system popularize negotiate Warehouse Receipts (NWRs) system should start in which farmers can deposit their produce to the FCI authorized warehouse and can get advance from banks against their produce valued at Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- This will bring back the private sector and reduce massively the costs of storage to the government and be more compatible with a market economy.

Storage Reforms:

- The government should introduce storage reforms in the country such as to outsource grain storage function to Centre Warehousing Corporation (CWC), State Warehousing Corporation (SWC) and Private Sector Players.
- The government should introduce a Private Entrepreneur Guarantee (PEG) scheme to construct go-downs, cold storage and other infrastructure based on Public-Private Partnership (PPP). It increases efficiency and infrastructure.
- For the storage purpose government should adopt ‘Silos’ rather than gunny bags. Because they are more efficient are safe for storage.
- Provide rail connectivity and end to end computerization and online tracking from procurement to retail distribution.

Reforms in Policies:

- The government should reform MSP policy and better price support operations for pulses and oilseeds.
- Proactive Liquidation Policy for excess buffer stocks.
India can **improve its quality of services** with the implementation of good policies. The government must **focus on mechanized policies** that escalated the growth and development of the economy.

**Way Forward:**

- Finance Minister has already announced an **investment package for infrastructure** of about **Rs 102 lakh crore** over the next five years, which implies more than doubling the growth in infra-investments from its current levels.
- The **legitimate question** being asked is: **Where will the resources come from?** The announcement does not unveil any clear strategy on the resource mobilisation front.
- Here are the two cents to raise (save) **Rs 50,000 crore per annum** to finance infrastructure projects without causing high inflation or without breaching the fiscal deficit target.
- The **blueprint for reforming the grain management system** was presented to the PM by the Shanta Kumar panel.

**Only three points need reiteration:**

- First, while the poor under the Antyodaya category should keep getting the maximum food subsidy, for others, the issue price should be fixed at, say, 50 per cent of the procurement price.
- Second, **limit subsidised grain distribution under NFSA to 40 per cent** of the population rather than the current 67 per cent.
- Third, **limit the procurement** of rice particularly in the north-western states of Punjab and Haryana where the groundwater table is depleting fast, and **invite private sector participation in grain management.**

**Conclusion:**

- We need bold moves to **reform our grain management system**. There is no need to set up another expert committee for this.
- If the government can implement just these above points, it can **save another Rs 50,000 crore annually.**
- On top of this, it will help the government to **reduce its fiscal deficit.** And if it liquidates stocks fast, it can contain inflation too.

### 10. INDIA’S UNDER-5 MORTALITY OF GIRLS EXCEEDS THAT OF BOYS

**Context:**

- According to the ‘**Levels and Trends in Child Mortality**’ report by the United Nations (UN) inter-agency group for child mortality, India is among the few countries in the world where, in 2018, the **mortality under-5 years of girls, exceeded that of boys.**
- The global report states that in 2018 fewer countries showed gender disparities in child mortality, and across the world, on average, boys are expected to have a higher probability of dying before reaching age-5 than girls. But this trend was not reflected in India.

The **SDG Goal 3** is to end preventable deaths of new-borns and under-5 children by 2030. There are **two targets:**

1. Reduce new-born mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births in every country (SDG 3.2); and
2. Reduce under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births in every country (SDG 3.2).

**UN Inter-agency Group report: Levels and trends in child mortality report:**

- This report is the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation estimates on child mortality among children under age 5 and children aged 5-14.
- Despite progress over the past two decades, in 2017 alone, an estimated 6.3 million children and young adolescents died, mostly from preventable causes. Globally, the majority of child and young adolescent deaths occur at the youngest ages, with the **risk of dying highest in the first month of life.**
- While the **chances of survival** have increased for all age groups since 2000, progress was uneven.
- The largest improvements in child survival for children under 5 years of age occurred for children aged 1–4 years – mortality in this age group dropped by 60% from 2000 to 2017.
• Post-neonatal mortality, or mortality among children aged 1–11 months, declined by 51%, neonatal mortality declined by 41% and mortality among children aged 5–14 declined by 37% over the same period.
• The largest gains in the survival chances for children aged 1–4 have occurred primarily since 2000.

Reasons for under 5 Mortality:
• Most children under 5 die due to preventable or treatable causes such as complications during birth, pneumonia, diarrhoea, neonatal sepsis, and malaria.
• By comparison, among children between 5 and 14 years of age, injuries become a more prominent cause of death, especially from drowning and road traffic.
• Within this age group, regional differences also exist, with the risk of dying for a child from sub-Saharan Africa 15 times higher than in Europe.
• Globally, in 2017, half of all deaths under 5 years of age took place in sub-Saharan Africa, and another 30% in Southern Asia.
• In sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 13 children died before their fifth birthday. In high-income countries, that number was 1 in 185.

Risk of dying is higher in girl child:
• In some countries, the risk of dying before age 5 for girls is significantly higher than what would be expected based on global patterns. These countries are primarily located in Southern Asia and Western Asia.
• According to India’s 2017 Sample Registration System (SRS) the States with the highest burden of neonatal mortality are Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh, with 32, 33 and 30 neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively. India’s neonatal mortality rate is 23 per 1,000 live births.
• Also States and Union Territories, Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttarakhand showed the largest gender gaps in under-5 mortality.
• The burden of child mortality is determined both by the mortality rate (the proportion of children who die) and by the estimated population of any given State (total number of annual births).
• In this sense, Uttar Pradesh is the State with the highest number of estimated new-born deaths in India, both because of the high neonatal mortality rate and because of the large cohort of births that occur every year in the State,” noted information released by UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund).

Five countries: Half of under-5 deaths:
• According to the report, half of all under-5 deaths in 2018 occurred in five countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia. India and Nigeria alone account for about a third.
• Estimates indicate that the majority of child mortality cases in India are attributable to deaths during the neonatal period.
The major causes of neonatal mortality are pre-term birth, intrapartum related events, and neonatal infection.

In the post-neonatal period, the major direct causes of death are diarrhoea and pneumonia.

The report adds that despite the tremendous progress in child survival that has been made over the past two decades, one child or young adolescent died every five seconds in 2018.

Globally, 85% of deaths among children and young adolescents in 2018 occurred in the first five years of life, accounting for 5.3 million deaths, of which 2.5 million (47%) occurred in the first month of life, 1.5 million (29%) at age 1-11 months, and 1.3 million (25%) at age 1-4 years.

An additional 0.9 million deaths occurred among children aged 5-14 years.

Conclusion:

It is urgently required to further accelerate progress in preventing child deaths.

Current trends predict that close to 10 million 5- to 14-year-olds, and 52 million children under 5 years of age, will die between 2019 and 2030.

Almost half of these under-5 deaths will be new born whose deaths can be prevented by reaching high coverage of quality antenatal care, skilled care at birth, postnatal care for mother and baby, and care of small and sick new born.

Way Forward: Solutions that save lives, reduce child mortality:

✓ According to the World Health Organization, six solutions to the most preventable causes of under-5 deaths include:
  1. Immediate and exclusive breastfeeding
  2. Skilled attendants for antenatal, birth, and postnatal care
  3. Access to nutrition and micronutrients
  4. Family knowledge of danger signs in a child’s health
  5. Improved access to water, sanitation, and hygiene
  6. Immunizations

✓ These solutions are among the various interventions World Vision employs in its work to promote maternal and child health.

✓ The state and central governments works with communities to train and equip midwives and local health workers; with governments and corporate partners to provide supplies and resources to clinics and hospitals; and with parents to teach best practices in the care and nurture of their young children.

✓ We need to ensure children grow up healthy in their communities, with access to basic health services, adequate nutrition, and disease prevention.

11. CHALK AND CHEESE IN PRIVATE VS. GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Context:

- Pratham, a well-known Non-Profit Organization has released the Annual Status of Education Report 2019.
- The report shared several key insights and interesting observations about the state of education, especially school-level education in the country.
- One of the big debates in early childhood education is on children’s “school readiness” and whether early childhood education provides them with the requisite skills to cope with the school curriculum.
- A vast literature exists on the importance of certain cognitive abilities that are supposed to be developed during the years children spend in pre-school, so that they are “ready” when they enter school in grade one.

Pratham’s ASER Report 2019:

- According to a brief analysis, Pratham’s ASER Report 2019 showcases parents’ choice of school when it comes to education of their students.
- This is an annual survey that aims to provide reliable annual estimates of children’s schooling status and basic learning levels for each state and rural district in India.
- ASER has been conducted every year since 2005 in almost all rural districts of India.
• ASER 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.
• In 2019, ASER aims to shine the spotlight on the early years, reporting on the schooling status as well as on a range of important developmental indicators for young children in the age group 4 to 8 across 26 districts in the country.

Parents exhibit a Unique Bias:
• According to the report, parents prefer private schools for education of boys while girl students are primarily sent to government schools to get basic education.
• The ASER 2019 report states that parents exhibit a unique bias when it comes to selection of schools for their children.
• The report shows that parents are more likely to opt for a private school when selecting a school for boys while government schools are primary choice of parents when it comes to girl’s education.
• Among four-five-year-old children, 56.8% of girls and 50.4% of boys were enrolled in government schools or preschools, whereas 43.2% of girls and 49.6% of boys were enrolled in private preschools or schools, the survey found.
• The gap in enrolment between boys and girls is larger among 6-8 year olds, with 61.1% of all girls versus 52.1% of all boys in this age group going to a government institution.

Need of ASER 2019 ‘Early Years’:
• The report underlined the need to focus on the early years to improve the basics of education.
• A focus on the “breadth of skills” and activities that strengthen cognitive skills rather than formal subject-learning in the early years may generate substantial benefits for later academic performance.
• India is home to the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, which is among the largest and oldest public sector initiatives for early childhood development in the world.
• India has developed additional important schemes, policies and frameworks, such as the National Early Childhood Care and Education (NECCE) Policy (2013); the National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Framework (2014).
• The draft Framework for Implementation of Samagra Shiksha (Integrated Scheme for School Education), which for the first time brings the pre-primary stage under the same umbrella as all other levels of schooling.
• Worldwide research tells us that lack of access to an appropriate environment and activities means that many children do not have the skills and abilities expected when they enter school, and therefore have difficulty coping with the school curriculum.
• In order to ensure that the needs and abilities of young children move into the centre of current debates on educational policy and practice in India, evidence needs to speak to and be understood by a much wider set of actors – parents and community members as well as policy makers and early childhood development professionals.
Areas of improvements needed:

- Government policy and practice has not kept pace with people’s aspirations as the Indian economy liberalized.
- Most of the young mothers in the next decade will not be very young as the median age of marriage has increased over the years from 18.2 years in 2001 to nearly 21.7 in rural India and 23.4 in urban India by 2016.
- There is also the improvement of education among women. Such changes in the profile of young Indian mothers need to be taken into account when thinking of the education inputs to be designed for the young children.

Key Recommendations from ASER report:

Based on the findings of the Annual State of Education Report 2019, Pratham has made some interesting recommendations to improve the state of school-level education in the country. The key recommendations include

1. Strengthening and expansion of the existing network of Anganwadi Centres.
2. Age of students play an important role in development of language, numeracy, social and emotional learning.
3. Enrolling students in primary grades at right age important for overall development.
4. Age group between 4 to 8 years seen as continuous progressive stages, so curriculum development should be done in accordance with it.

Conclusion:

- The government preschool system is managed through the Centre’s Integrated Child Development scheme, under the ministry of women and child development, while schools come under the education ministries at the Centre and in the states.
- India has huge investment in its early childhood programme, administered through 1.2 million anganwadis under the ICDS.
- The findings of ASER 2019 make it clear that there is need to strengthen these early childhood education centres so that they implement appropriate “school-readiness” activities.
- Coherence between central ministries is essential for improving early childhood education policymaking, but it is better to encourage state and district administrations to have a greater say to make early education effective.

12. GUARANTEEING HEALTHCARE, THE BRAZILIAN WAY

Context:

- As Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro visits New Delhi this Republic Day, one interesting field of cooperation to explore in the strategic partnership is healthcare.
- Both Brazil and India are composed of large States with a reasonable degree of administrative autonomy. This fact implies great challenges and opportunities.
- While universal health systems tend to consume around 8% of the GDP — the NHS, for instance, takes up 7.9% of Britain’s GDP, Brazil spends only 3.8% of its GDP on the Unified Health System (SUS), serving a population three times larger than that of the U.K.

Universal Health Coverage for India:

- Achieving universal health coverage is a very complex task, especially for developing countries.
- Here, the example of Brazil, the only country where more than 100 million inhabitants have a universal health system, is worth studying.
- It can also provide lessons for Ayushman Bharat, currently the world’s largest and most ambitious government health programme.

Unified Health System (SUS) of Brazil:

- The Brazilian society decided to achieve universal coverage by establishing a government-funded system.
- The Unified Health System (SUS), which guaranteed free health coverage that included pharmaceutical services, was written into the new Constitution in 1988.
In the last 30 years, Brazilians have experienced a drastic increase in health coverage as well as outcomes: life expectancy has increased from 64 years to almost 76 years, while Infant Mortality Rate has declined from 53 to 14 per 1,000 live births.

In terms of service provision, polio vaccination has reached 98% of the population.

**National Health Identification Card:** It allows a patient’s health record to be accessed via a central database from any public or private hospital within the Unified Health System network.

**Family Health Programme:** Community-based healthcare network who perform monthly visits to every family enrolled in the programme. They conduct health promotion and prevention activities and effectively manage the relationship between citizens and the healthcare system.

A 2015 report said that 95% of those that seek care in the SUS are able to receive treatment.

Every year, the SUS covers more than two million births, 10 million hospital admissions, and nearly one billion ambulatory procedures.

This has been made possible even amidst a scenario of tightening budget allocation.

### Healthcare in Brazil – Steps towards universal coverage

In 1988, half of Brazil’s population had no health coverage. Three decades after establishing its public system, Sistema Único de Saúde, three out of four Brazilians rely exclusively on it.

Establishing wellness centres: Community-based healthcare:

- The Brazilian experience can also inform the design of the expansion of primary care that underlies Ayushman Bharat, that is, the creation of 1,50,000 wellness centre by 2022.
- The Family Health Programme, which relies on a community-based healthcare network, is the backbone of the rapid expansion of coverage in Brazil.
- The strategy is based on an extensive work of community health agents who perform monthly visits to every family enrolled in the programme.
- These agents carry out a variety of tasks. They conduct health promotion and prevention activities, oversee whether family members are complying with any treatment they might be receiving, and effectively manage the relationship between citizens and the healthcare system.
- The strategy works: a large body of research shows that the programme has drastically reduced IMR and increased adult labour supply.
- Equally impressive has been its expansion, from 4% of coverage in 2000 to up to 64% of the overall population in 2015; it was able to reach even the rural areas and the poorest States of the country.
- The major challenge is that a one-size-fits-all approach for such heterogeneous regional realities is inconceivable.
- States such as Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, and Bihar differ in so many ways and this diversity must be met by an intricate combination of standardised programmes and autonomy to adopt policies according to their characteristics.
Example for India by Healthcare system in Brazil:

- India must record details of improvement in terms of **access, production and population health** on a year-by-year basis.
- A starting point for this daunting task is funding. Public health expenditure is still **very low in India**, at around **1.3% of GDP** in the 2017-2018 fiscal year.
- A study conducted by the Brazil-based Institute for Health Policy Studies (IEPS) forecasts that public health spending in Brazil will need to **increase by nearly 1.6 percentage points of the GDP by 2060** in order to cover the healthcare needs of a fast-ageing society.
- **National Health Identification Card scheme** can be integrated by making use of Aadhar ecosystem so as to create a better system of coordination between public and private sector healthcare institutions regulated by the Health Agency.
- The cost of the universal health system in Brazil averages around $600 per person, while in the U.K., this number reaches $3.428.
- A partnership for health between the government or an institution and the community is based on the commitment of both actors to actively collaborate to support the quality of health services or to make public health programmes more effective.
- **This formal or informal collaboration** can only be established if political leaders and administrators take on a specific commitment to social development and if the society is ready to assume its responsibility.

**Conclusion:**

- Achieving universal coverage in India, a country with a population of 1.3 billion, is a challenge of epic proportions.
- Hence, the advances in this field should be seen not in binaries but judged by its steady growth and improvement.
- The health system is responsible for **ensuring high-quality accessible health services**, for providing clear information and advice on the benefits of health to the community and for facilitating its early involvement in assessing the situation, defining the problem and managing the action.
- Moreover, regional disparities in terms of resources and institutional capabilities must be addressed. This diversity, nevertheless, can be a **powerful source of policy innovation and creativity**.

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**ECONOMY**

**1. INDIA NEEDS A BOTTOM-UP GROWTH MODEL**

**Introduction:**

- **China and India**, the two **most populous countries** in the world, both embarked on new journeys around the same time.
- More than 70 years later, China has progressed much faster. India, other the other hand, is yet to reach the development indicators that China attained back in the early 1990s.
- **Growth of incomes in India** will make India more attractive for investors. A **stronger industrial system** will give India more headroom in trade negotiations too.

**Unique conditions that are prevailing in India:**

- India’s challenge now is to build an **Indian ecosystem** in which **competitive enterprises** will grow to **create more opportunities for jobs for youth** and for **increasing citizens’ incomes**.
- **India’s complex, socio-economic environmental system** is under even greater stress.
- The country must improve on **many fronts** India ranks very low in international comparisons of **human development (education and health)**, even below its poorer subcontinental neighbours.
- It is the **most water-stressed large economy** in the world; its cities are the **most polluted**.
- India’s economic growth is **not generating enough jobs** for its burgeoning population of youth: the employment elasticity of India’s growth (numbers of jobs created with growth) is amongst the worst in the world.
- **Bold actions without an understanding of the whole system** can cause great harm.
• The bold move to demonetise the currency notes in 2016 was an egregious example. Unemployment of persons with vocational education has gone up between 2011-12 and 2017-18, from 18.5% to 33%. India now has a larger number of frustrated youth.

Increase in disposable incomes
• The government has computed that its programmes for improving the ‘ease of living’ of citizens by improving the quality and accessibility, and reducing costs, of a range of public services has increased savings per family by Rs.4,000 per month.
• The increase in disposable incomes has resulted in additional consumer-buying power, estimated at Rs.24,000 crore per annum.
• This proves that growth must be bottom-up to be equitable and sustainable.
• India has climbed many rungs on the World Bank’s ‘Ease of Business’ rankings. Yet, investments to expand production ventures have not increased much because consumer demand has slumped, even for basic items like packaged biscuits.
• It seems odd that democratically elected governments in many countries, including India, who should be focused on citizens’ well-being, have become so focused on making it easy for global capital to do business in their countries.
• This has made citizens rise up against the globalisation paradigm promoted by an ‘establishment’ of policymakers and economists.
• Citizens want their governments to put jobs in their countries first, and to implement policies that increase incomes at the bottom of the pyramid rather than facilitating only further growth at the top.

People-centric policies: case study of China and Delhi governments:
• A Chinese thought leader said 15 years ago that both countries have the same vision: of prosperity for their citizens.
• To reach there, they must cross a turbulent stream by feeling the stones underfoot. But how do governments do that?
• First, they need to make their policies people-centric rather than growth-centric.
• The Communist Party of China demands that local officials address the needs of citizens’ effectively, as does Singapore’s government.
• Singapore Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam once said, the Chinese government derives its legitimacy from citizens’ satisfaction with their well-being, not from a vote in an election.
• In the case of India, its constitutional structure enables its States to adopt different models of development.
• Thus, there is a ‘Kerala model’, a ‘Gujarat model’, and now a ‘common man’s model’ implemented by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi.

• **Local, participative governance** has been a distinction of Kerala’s model, and the State has been well ahead of the rest of the country, matching China in its Human Development Indicators in **education, health, and women’s inclusion**.

• Delhi’s AAP government has adopted a **people-centric model of government**. It has established School Management Committees with parental involvement.

• **Teacher training budgets** have increased five-fold. The performance of Delhi’s government schools is not only higher than the national average, it now exceeds the performance of private schools in Delhi.

• **Public health expenditures** have more than doubled.

• ‘**Mohalla clinics**’ have been set up in poor colonies to provide **accessible and affordable health care**.

• The share of unauthorised colonies provided with **piped water** has increased from 55% to 93% in just five years, reducing the need for poor people to pay for expensive tanker-delivered water.

• But despite water subsidies for the poor, the Delhi Jal Board’s income has increased.

• Electricity supply has expanded to include 20% more consumers. Amongst Indian metros, Delhi provides the cheapest electricity. Yet, its distribution companies, all in the private sector, have **improved their financial performance**.

**Conclusion: More free trade not the answer for Inclusive growth:**

The RCEP decision shows that India is now standing up to pressure from a rump of Washington Consensus economists who continue to advocate that **more free trade is the solution to India’s economic problems**, even when there is evidence that **India has not benefited from the agreements it has entered into**.

❖ **India’s industrial and entrepreneurial ecosystem’s growth** must be accompanied by an improvement in environment.

❖ Policies must be managed with a whole systems view. While ‘Ease of doing Business’ gauges health from a business perspective, ‘**ease of living**’ should become the measure of the health of the whole system.

❖ Policy decisions invariably require compromises between competing interests. Here, Mahatma Gandhi’s talisman provides a good test.

❖ The government should think of the **needs of the poorest citizens first**. Reduced duties on imports benefit citizens as consumers.

❖ However, a citizen’s more fundamental need is for a good job and source of income to buy the imported goods.

❖ India urgently requires an **employment and income strategy to guide its industry and trade policies**.

### 2. WHAT RAILWAYS RESTRUCTURE MEANS

**Context:**

• Cabinet has approved the merger of its eight services into one: **The Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS)**.

• The decision to merge the services is to ensure that officers put **railways first instead of their service** which had become the case under the present system.

• This is in line with the recommendations of numerous committees, notably **Rakesh Mohan (2001) and the Bibek Debroy panel (2015)**.

• The reforms as suggested by various committees from time to time including **Prakash Tandon Committee (1994)** have been largely adopted.

**Importance of Indian Railways:**

• Indian Railways (IR) has the **fourth-largest rail network** in the world, behind only the US, China and Russia.

• It is a **network of 70,000km**, spanning 29 states, three Union territories and 8,500 stations.

• It runs about 21,000 trains, two-thirds of which are passenger trains, carrying 23 million passengers and 3 million tonnes of freight per day.

• This translates into 1.2 trillion passenger-kilometres travelled a year in India by 8 billion passengers. Using a metric of fatalities per billion journeys, rail is among the safest forms of travel.
• Measured by distance instead of journeys, air travel is safest, with rail and water travel reasonably safe.

Existing system till now:
• The Indian Railways is governed by a pool of officers, among whom engineers are recruited after the Indian Engineering Service Examination, and civil servants through the Civil Services Examination.
• The civil servants are in the Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) and Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS).
• The engineers are in five technical service cadres: Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE), Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSM), Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE), Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSSE) and the Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS).
• Until the 1950s, the Railways system was run by officers from just three main streams: Traffic, Civil Engineering, and Mechanical. The other streams emerged as separate services over time.

Railway restructuring could be a game changer:
• Restructuring of the Railways has been on the agenda for decades. It is an unusual admission that hitherto decision-making in the Railways was incoherent and irrational and this coming after he has been the minister for over two years.
• Coming to the basic objective of the policy decision of ending “departmentalism” prima facie, this sounds well intended.
• However, departmentalism is just a word and means nothing for the rail users, or for the national economy.
• The stated aim is to end “departmentalism”: unification of services will “expedite decision making”, “create a coherent vision” and “promote rational decision-making”.
• Reportedly, a comprehensive plan for execution of the decision would be worked out by a committee of secretaries, and perhaps a group of ministers.
• Every large organisation is bound to have many departments. Even after the merging of cadres, departments will continue to exist, they would continue to quarrel, and it is the minister’s job to settle these disputes. He cannot remain a bystander, passing judgements.
• The minister should also understand that the problem is not departments but the composition of the same, and their role in the Railway organisation. This should be seen from the perspective of the national economy rather than as an issue pertaining to the Railways in isolation.

The key ingredients of present reform template were the following:
(1) Allow private entry, including in running of private trains;
(2) Change the composition of the Railway Board;
(3) Decentralise decision-making to zones/divisions and even further below;
(4) Separate the core functions of running trains from non-core functions like schools and medical services;
(5) Set up a regulator;
(6) Unify various railway services;
(7) Transit to commercial accounting and
(8) Unite the Railway Budget with the Union Budget.

Some concerns are:
- The current demand is for two distinct services instead of one a civil service, and one that encompasses all engineering specialisations.
- The logic is that functionally, departments will continue to exist through various technical and non-technical specialisations, so merging them will not end departmentalism per se.
- The government has on record assured all existing officers that no one’s seniority will be hampered and promotion prospects will be protected.
- There are allegations lower down the ranks that seniors in the Ministry did not put up resistance to the move. The morale of officers is said to be affected.
- Amid all this, one concern among the higher-ups is that the actual job of safely running trains 24/7 must not get neglected.

Conclusion:
- If the restructuring is done with such national priorities in mind it can be a game changer, not only for the Indian Railways, but for India as a nation. Or else, it may only create a bigger mess than it imagines it is solving.
- To facilitate faster movement of passenger trains, Indian Railways is upgrading two major branches of the Golden Quadrilateral; Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Kolkata to 160 kmph speed potential.
- According to the national transporter, the infrastructure upgradation will take 2-3 years and once the projects are complete, passengers will be able to commute between Delhi and Mumbai in 10 hours and Delhi and Kolkata in 12 hours.
- This upgrade is also aimed at making the network more lucrative for private players to run trains on.

3. MINING DEEP: ON CABINET EASING MINING LAWS

Context:
- The Union cabinet approved opening up of coal mining and further disinvestments.
- The Centre’s decision to liberalise norms for entry into coal mining and relax regulations on mining and selling coal in the country is significant in many respects.
- Apart from deciding that the Centre will shoulder 60% of the expense for the North East Gas Grid project.
- It also extended the validity period of mining lease clearances ending in 2020 by two years.

Coal sector in India:
- Despite having the world’s fourth largest coal reserves, India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal last year, of which 135mt valued at Rs.171,000 crore could have been met from domestic reserves.
- India’s state-run coal giant has been unable to meet growing demand despite abundant resources.
- The South Asian nation depends on Coal India for more than 80 per cent of its domestic production and the miner has consistently fallen short of production targets in the last few years.
- The government has been progressively liberalizing the coal sector over the last several months to attract new investments, and getting rid of this archaic end-use restriction was a key step.
Procedure established till now in Coal Mining:

- Until now there were restrictions on who could bid for coal mines only those in power, iron and steel and coal washery business could bid for mines and the bidders needed prior experience of mining in India.
- This effectively limited the potential bidders to a select circle of players and thus limited the value that the government could extract from the bidding.
- Second, end-use restrictions inhibited the development of a domestic market for coal.
- The ordinance essentially democratises the coal industry and makes it attractive for merchant mining companies, including multinationals such as BHP and Rio Tinto, to look at India.
- The move was overdue considering that the country spent a huge Rs.1,71,000 crore in coal imports last year to buy 235 million tonnes; of that, 100 million tonnes was not substitutable, as the grade was not available in India.
- But the balance 135 million tonnes could have been substituted by domestic production had it been available.

100% Foreign Direct Investment under automatic route is allowed:

- This will open up the coal mining sector completely, enabling anyone with finances and expertise to bid for blocks and sell the coal freely to any buyer of their choice.
- It is expected that the government will also address other procedural issues that add to time delays and upfront cost of developing a mine.
- Under the ordinance, allocation of coal/lignite blocks for composite prospecting licence cum mining lease has been provided;
- Requirement of previous approval in cases where allocation of blocks was made by Central Govt has been dispensed with.
- 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.

Challenges that need to be addressed:

- The company’s last year production was 606 million tonnes.
- The target is one billion tonnes production by 2023-24. Coal India Limited is a Maharatna PSU and tremendous public resources have been invested in the company over the years.
- Quality of coal needs to be improved through washing to reduce the environmental impact, enhance coal quality and increase process efficiency.
- Transportation facilities and infrastructure such as road and rail networks must be improved.
- There should be enhanced connectivity across mineral zones and infrastructure projects driven by PPP model.
- Doubling of rail routes near coal bearing areas where movement is higher is a must; enhanced port capacities are also imperative.
- Logistics need to be effectively and actively managed and eco-friendly technologies must be adopted across the coal value chain.
- The Government must also rethink the high royalties it charges on coal mining, if the latest move is to bear fruit.

Road Ahead:

- It is the Government’s responsibility to ensure that Coal India Limited is not compromised the way BSNL has been by the opening up to the private players.
- The company employs about three lakh people and is a listed company and hence a national asset. It has to be nurtured even as private players are welcomed.
- Just 10% of India’s prospective geography compared to Australia’s 95% have been explored and mining happens in a much smaller 1.5%.
- The Government needs to reduce time taken for approval of mining leases and also easing the procedures for clearances. NITI Aayog has suggested a 180-day limit.
Conclusion:

- Amendments to two legacy Acts through the Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020 cleared by the Cabinet will free the sector from restrictions that were inhibiting its development.
- The move will also help India gain access to sophisticated technology for underground mining used by global miners.
- Continuity of all Forest and Environment clearances for Iron-Ore mines for a period of 2 years is another great reform.
- This was a long-pending reform which will make the Indian Steel industry more aggressive and competitive on a global level.
- India’s move comes at a time when the window for fossil fuels is rapidly closing, and the global energy landscape evolving, with fundamental changes to the investment culture amid growing climate concerns.

4. IS THE INDIAN ECONOMY STARING AT STAGFLATION?

Context:

- The rise in retail price inflation to a nearly six-year high of 7.35% in December has led to increasing worries that the Indian economy may be headed towards stagflation.
- The current rise in retail inflation has been attributed mainly to the rise in the prices of vegetables such as onions.
- Still, the steady rise in wider inflation figures over the last few months amidst falling economic growth has led to fears of stagflation.

However, decrease in repo rate, Growth rate not rising:

- The growth rate of the economy continued to fall significantly.
- This combination of rising prices and falling growth has led many to believe that India may be sliding into stagflation.
- Perhaps the only thing right now that stops many from concluding that the economy is in full-fledged stagflation is the fact that core inflation, which excludes items such as vegetables whose prices are too volatile, remains within the RBI’s targeted range.

Why is stagflation a problem?

- On the one hand, the slowdown in growth could affect peoples’ incomes. On the other, higher inflation could cause a reduction in people’s standard of living as they can afford fewer things.
- Economists who believe that the current slowdown is due to the lack of sufficient consumer demand prescribe greater spending by the government and the central bank to resuscitate the economy.
- But stagflation essentially ties the hands of the government and the central bank from taking such countercyclical policy steps.
- With retail inflation now well above the RBI’s targeted range of 2-6%, the central bank is unlikely to assist the economy any time soon by cutting its benchmark interest rate.
- If the central bank decides to inject fresh money into the economy either by cutting its benchmark interest rate or other unconventional means, it could lead to a further rise in prices and make things worse.
- A similar rise in inflation could result if the government engages in deficit spending that is funded by the RBI.
- With both the private consumption growth and investment rate dropping below 5% in Q1 FY2020, the GDP growth rate has fallen to 5%.

What is stagflation?

- Stagflation is an economic scenario where an economy faces both high inflation and low growth (and high unemployment) at the same time.
- The Indian economy has now faced six consecutive quarters of slowing growth since 2018.
- Economic growth in the second quarter ending September, the most recent quarter for which data is available, was just 4.5%. For the whole year, growth is expected to be around 5%.
- Most economists have blamed the slowdown on the lack of sufficient consumer demand for goods and services.
- In fact, insufficient demand was cited as the primary reason behind the low-price inflation that was prevalent in the economy until recently.
- Subsequently, the government and many analysts prodded the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to cut interest rates in order to boost demand.
- This led to significant friction between the government and the RBI that led to the exit of several top-ranking officials (including the RBI’s former Governor) from the central bank.
- Eventually, the RBI obliged by cutting its benchmark interest rate, the repo rate, five times in 2019.
• **Nominal GDP growth** has slid to 8%, a record low. Growth in employment intensive sectors such as manufacturing and construction has also been muted.

• All this is considered to be bad news at a time when the economy, with significant unemployed resources, is not functioning at its full capacity.

**A fresh crisis?**

With India’s GDP growth the slowest in nearly six years and consumer inflation at a five-year-high, economists fear possible stagflation. A look at key economic parameters

**SIX-YEAR SLUMP**

India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at 4.5% in the July to September quarter of FY 2019-20

**DEMAND WORRIES**

Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE), which reflects consumption, grew marginally in the July-September quarter due to the festival season. However, the growth was not as robust as seen in some of the previous quarters

**HIGH ON PRICES**

India’s retail inflation rate at 7.35% in December 2019 hit a 65-month high, going past the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) comfort-level of 6%

**RATE CUTS**

The RBI kept the repo rate (rate at which the central bank lends to other banks) unchanged at 5.15% in December 2019. The graph shows the change in repo rate in 2019

Other set of Economists argue that Economy will be boosted by the availability of easy credit:

• Some economists even see the severe drop in consumer demand simply as a symptom rather than as the primary cause behind the current slowdown.

• Another point raised by these economists is that inflation on the broader level, as measured by the core inflation figures, remains within the RBI’s target range.

• Core inflation in December was at 3.7%. So greater spending by the government and the RBI will not cause inflation levels to run out of control, they argue.

• According to this view, it is natural for spending to drop after the end of a credit-fuelled boom.

• India’s growth rate, it is worth noting, was boosted by the availability of easy credit over the last decade, or even longer.

• Others, however, are more cautious about advocating a big-spending approach to rescue the economy from stagflation. They point to the fact that monetary easing in the last one year has only raised prices without leading to higher growth rates.

• So, injecting further liquidity into the economy may only stoke higher inflation without boosting economic growth.

• Further credit expansion by the central bank and debt-fuelled government spending, these economists argue, will not lead to genuine and sustainable economic growth but only to another unsustainable boom followed by a bust.

• So, they instead advocate supply-side reforms to bring about genuine economic growth.

**Conclusion: Supply-side reforms:**

• Supply-side policies are government attempts to increase productivity and increase efficiency in the economy.

• If successful, they will shift aggregate supply (AS) to the right and enable higher economic growth in the long-run.
• **Free-market supply-side policies** involve policies to increase competitiveness and free-market efficiency. For example, privatisation, deregulation, lower income tax rates, and reduced power of trade unions.

• **Interventionist supply-side policies** involve government intervention to overcome market failure. For example, higher government spending on transport, education and communication.

• Supply-side policies can contribute to reducing structural, frictional and real wage unemployment and therefore help reduce the natural rate of unemployment.

• **Improved trade and Balance of Payments**, by making firms more productive and competitive, they will be able to export more. This is important in light of the increased competition from an increasingly globalised marketplace.

### 5. REDESIGNING INDIA’S AILING DATA SYSTEM

#### Introduction:

- **The new series of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures with 2011-12 as base, released in 2015, has not gone well with analysts**; the withholding of employment-unemployment data for some time and consumer expenditure data, which is not released, added to this unease.

- **Bringing the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under the fold of National Statistics Office**, altering its long-standing arrangement under the Governing Council and then National Statistical Commission, triggered suspicion.

- The present national accounting and analytical framework misses out on many important dimensions of the economy and its complex character as an evolving economy that is constantly experiencing technological and institutional transitions and power plays in a market economy.

#### Overview of Indian System of National Accounts:

- The NAS is a framework that provides an internally consistent description of National macro economy based on the processing of data generated by the entire National statistical system.

- The estimates of National income and related aggregates and accounts are derived statistics that draw on basic data available from different primary sources.

- The primary sources consist of data generated as a by-product of public administration system (such as land records, collection of direct and indirect taxes, civil registration of births and deaths, etc.) as well as data collected directly through censuses and sample surveys conducted by official agencies of the Central and State Governments.

The accuracy and quality of the National account estimates depend on:

- Geographical coverage and quality of primary data; and

- The methods, procedures and approximations used in translating the primary data into NAS framework.
Wide-ranging impact of GDP Estimate figures:

- GDP covers all productive activity for producing goods and services, without duplication.
- In effect it adds apples and oranges, tractors and sickles, trade, transport, storage and communication, real estate, banking and government services through the mechanism of value.
- The System of National Accounting (SNA) is designed to measure production, consumption, and accumulation of income and wealth for assessing the performance of the economy.
- GDP data influence markets, signalling investment sentiments, flow of funds and balance of payments.
- The input-output relations impact productivity and allocation of resources; demand and supply influences prices, exchange rates, wage rates, employment and standard of living, affecting all walks of life.

Ministry of Corporate Affairs MCA21:

- The shift from establishment to enterprise approach, replacing Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) with Ministry of Corporate Affairs MCA21 posed serious data and methodological issues.
- The use of MCA21 data and blow up factors thereof without weeding out defunct enterprises, and then insufficient work on mapping of comparable ASI data, followed by similar survey on services sector enterprises were another major lacunae.

Corrections need to be made are:

- The data on GDP are initially estimated at current price and then deflated for constant price for comparability of data over time.
- It is necessary to separate out price effect to adjust value for real volume for comparison over time and sectors.
- There is a way of adjusting price effect through appropriate price index.
- The present series encountered serious problems for price adjustment, specifically for the services sector contributing about 60% of GDP, in the absence of appropriate price indices for most service sectors.
- The deflators used in the new series could not effectively separate out price effect from the current value to arrive at a real volume estimate at constant price.
- Price indices going into a low and negative zone in 2014-17 distorted real growth.
- The growing inequality and concentration of wealth in a few hands to the detriment of social welfare needs to be arrested at the earliest.
- We need data to assess competitiveness, inclusive growth, fourth-generation Industrial Revolution riding on the Internet of things, biotechnology, robotics-influencing employment and productivity, environmental protection, sustainable development and social welfare.
- Hence GDP data needs to be linked with a host of other data for deeper insight.
- We need to re-engineer the existing system, creating an integrated system populated with granular data.
- The country is vast, heterogeneous. There are non-linearities and path dependence, which should be considered while setting goals for development, reducing regional imbalance.

The present and future:

- We need a new framework for analysis for such a complex system and evolutionary process.
- There is a question of growing market power, automation, robotisation and other labour-replacing technologies affecting profitability, structural change and general welfare.
- We need to find alternative avenues for the unemployed and jobs lost.
- We also need to know in greater detail about market microstructure and optimality therein, the role of technology and advanced research, changing demand on human skills, and enterprise and organising ability, which are all complex.
- The consensus macroeconomic framework of analysis assumes symmetric income distribution, and does not get into the depth of structural issues, as it focuses on a trend-cycle decomposition of GDP for growth and stability in market parlance and a trickledown effect for percolation of income.
- In order to inject efficiency and stability, we need to have detailed data on how: markets clear, prices are formed, risks build up, institutions function and, in turn, influence the lifestyle of various sections of the people.
- The alternative to be realistic for the real world must rest on two pillars: the micro-behaviour of individuals, and the structure of their mutual interactions.
• In the changed situation of availability of micro data, we need to build a system to integrate the micro with the macro, maintaining distributional characteristics.

Conclusion:
• As official statistics is a public good, giving information about the state of the economy and success of governance, it needs to be independent to be impartial.
• Data is the new oil in the modern networked economy in pursuit of socio-economic development.
• The economics now is deeply rooted in data, measuring and impacting competitiveness, risks, opportunities and social welfare in an integrated manner, going much beyond macroeconomics.
• We have a commitment to produce these statistics transparently, following internationally accepted standards, tailor-made to suit local conditions, for multi-disciplinary analytics.
• As these statistics reflect on the performance of the government, it is necessary that its independence is maintained scrupulously.
• To pursue the goal of a $5-trillion economy by 2024-25, harnessing demographic dividend, we must tap underused resources for demand creating investment, which require data to pursue policy right from a district and evaluate performance for efficiency including governance.

6. WILL THE BUDGET SUSPEND THE FRBM’S FISCAL DEFICIT GOALS?

Context:
• With revenue receipts lagging behind budget estimates and economic growth slowing sharply, there is a real risk of the Centre missing its fiscal deficit target this year.
• Finance Minister is set to present her second Union Budget on February 1, 2020.

Fiscal Deficit targets for India:
• The fiscal deficit for FY20 and its roadmap for FY21 could be heading towards a recalibration with the February Budget slated to hint at the targeted 3 percent fiscal deficit for the next financial year be pushed to 2022-23.
• Fiscal Deficit is the difference between the Revenue Receipts plus Non-debt Capital Receipts (NDCR) and the total expenditure.
• Fiscal deficit is reflective of the total borrowing requirements of Government.

FRBM’s goal of reducing the fiscal deficit to 3% of GDP by March 2021:
• In principle, the FRBM is basically an expenditure switching mechanism, where you try to switch the expenditure from consumption to capital.
• That would lead to higher GDP growth and then lead to reduction in the public debt-to-GDP ratio.
• The original FRBM Act had said that you have to bring down the fiscal deficit to 3% and the revenue deficit to 0%.
• The 2018 Finance Bill actually did away with the revenue deficit target. So, there is no revenue deficit target any more.
• Rather, we have the target of bringing down the fiscal deficit to 3% and at the same time, we expect that that will bring down the public debt to 40% at the Central level.
• What we are seeing is not expenditure switching from consumption to capital, but we are actually seeing a switch from capital to consumption. And that would be growth retarding.

Significance of fiscal deficit:
• The significance of fiscal deficit is that if the deficit is too high, it implies that there is a lesser amount of money left in the market for private entrepreneurs and businesses to borrow.
• The lesser amount of this money will in turn leads to higher rates of interest charged on such lending.
• Hence, a higher fiscal deficit means higher borrowing by the government which in turn means higher interest rates in the economy.
• Currently, the high fiscal deficit and higher interest rates in India means that the efforts of the Reserve Bank of India to reduce interest rates are undone.
• It reveals the **overall strength in an economy**. Global investors watch the number as they fear a high fiscal deficit may crowd them out from the market and high inflation and high-interest rate regime can impact their profitability.

### Potential benefits and costs of a budget deficit

**Problems**
- Increase in national debt
- Higher debt interest payments
- Future tax rises/spending cuts?
- Potential ‘Crowding out’

**Benefits**
- Increased AD / economic growth
- Makes use of surplus saving in recession
- Automatic stabilisers
- Finance public sector investment

**Budget deficit**
- Potential inflation
- May cause higher bond yields

**Consequences of fiscal deficit shoots up:**

- From a high of 5.9% in 2011-12, fiscal deficit has been brought down to 3.5% in 2017-18.
- The **target was to achieve 3.3% in 2018-19**. During the Budget in July 2019, Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman reduced the fiscal deficit target to 3.3% from an earlier 3.4% for 2019-20 in a move that signalled the government’s commitment to **fiscal consolidation**.
- The government has to **borrow more or ask RBI to print more money**.
- But the printing of currency has its side effects. It leads to **inflation** and raises **interest rates**. Therefore, no government wishes to finance the fiscal deficit by printing money. It prefers borrowing.
- There is no set universal level of fiscal deficit that is considered good. In 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.
- In India, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act requires the central government to reduce its fiscal deficit to 3 percent of GDP.

**Therefore, sectors which give fiscal support to the financial services sector in terms of its multiplier impact:**

- It is true in general that **capital spending** is seen as **more productive and better-quality** spending than consumer spending.
- But this year is so unusual that we also need to give a **consumption stimulus**, including in the form of PM-Kisan, enhanced spending for the MGNREGA, and so on.
- Growth today is constrained due to a **collapse in credit**. Bank credit growth has fallen steeply and ironically there is so much excess liquidity, in fact, on a daily basis the Reserve Bank of India finds that there is more than 3 lakh crore of excess liquidity.
- The **reasons for the credit collapse** is because of the NPA [non-performing assets] situation.
- NPAs are actually incrementally rising. Plus the lingering effects of the NBFC [Non-Banking Financial Company] crisis and the still relatively high real interest rates.
- It is going to help if some kind of a **credit enhancer**, or anything that can release the credit flow which is required for growth, is done.
- We need to give **high priority for recapitalisation** wherever necessary, identifying or isolating bad assets and let credit grow.
- For GDP to grow at 7-8%, we **need credit to grow at 15-20%** and that includes bank credit, NBFCs, ECBs [external commercial borrowings], everything.
• Revisit the FRBM Act, revert to the original FRBM, try to focus more on the revenue deficit and at the same time try to increase capital expenditure. That alone will bring you more growth and fiscal discipline.
• We should not ignore the quality of spending and cost savings or cost efficiency wherever possible before we embark on fiscal stimulus in terms of increased spending.

Right usage spending by considering Demographic Dividend:
• In the Indian context, because of our young demography, our dependency ratio is low.
• This means there are more taxpayers than retired people. And this is going to remain like this for the next couple of decades, which means that if we have higher deficit spending today to induce growth, tomorrow’s generation will have to pay it back in the form of taxes.
• But per capita tax burden on future generations is going to be relatively low or modest because we have the young demography advantage.
• The bottom line is that there is an expectation that the Budget will do something about providing a fiscal stimulus but there will also be a challenge of remaining within the legislative remit.
• Also, the legislation itself gives the government some leeway of overshooting by 0.5% in times of rapid fall in GDP growth rate, which is what we are seeing.

Conclusion:
• Yes, the budget deficit matters. But, there is no simple answer.
• It is reasonable to suggest that over the course of the economic cycle, governments should seek to get close to balancing the structural deficit.
• However, there can be good reasons to run a deficit, at least in the short term. – For example, if the government wishes to fund public investment which offers a decent rate of return.
• Also, in a recession, a budget deficit can play an important role in managing aggregate demand. In a recession, the traditional fears of a budget deficit – inflation, interest rates, crowding out – often just don’t occur.
• But government spending financed by borrowing from the private sector can return the economy to full employment quicker.

7. THE FLAWED SPIN TO INDIA’S COTTON STORY

Introduction:
• Bt Cotton is a genetically modified organism or genetically modified pest-resistant variety of cotton.
• Genetically Modified (GM) pest resistant Bt cotton hybrids have captured the Indian market since their introduction in 2002.
• These now cover over 95% of the area under cotton, with the seeds produced entirely by the private sector.
• India’s cotton production in 2019 is projected as the highest ever: 354 lakh bales.
• Bt cotton’s role in increasing India’s cotton production, which GM proponents have highlighted as being instrumental, has also been used to argue for extending GM technology to increase food crop yield.
• However, critics say that Bt cotton hybrids have negatively impacted livelihoods and contributed to agrarian distress, particularly among resource-poor farmers.

The Indian experience:
• India is expected to be the world’s largest cotton producer, surpassing China in output.
• However, India’s productivity (yield per unit area), is much lower than other major cotton-producing countries, meaning a much larger area is used for cotton production.
• Indeed, India’s productivity has been only a third of these countries for over four decades.

Reasons for India’s Low yield per unit area:
• India is the only country that grows cotton as hybrids and the first to develop hybrid cotton back in 1970.
• Hybrids are made by crossing two parent strains having different genetic characters. These plants have more biomass than both parents, and capacity for greater yields.
• They also require more inputs, including fertilizer and water. Though hybrid cotton seed production is expensive, requiring manual crossing, India’s low cost of manual labour make it economically viable.
• All other cotton-producing countries grow cotton not as hybrids but varieties for which seeds are produced by self-fertilization.

• A key difference between hybrids and varieties is that varieties can be propagated over successive generations by collecting seeds from one planting and using them for the next planting; hybrid seeds have to be remade for each planting by crossing the parents.

• So, for hybrids, farmers must purchase seed for each planting, but not for varieties. Using hybrids gives pricing control to the seed company and also ensures a continuous market.

• Increased yield from a hybrid is supposed to justify the high cost of hybrid seeds.

• However, for cotton, a different strategy using high density planting (HDP) of compact varieties has been found to outperform hybrids at the field level.

• It cannot be explained by agronomic or socio-economic differences because these countries include both developed and developing countries, and different geographies.

**Background: India’s Policy for Hybrid Cotton:**

**Phase-1: Pre-GM cotton:** This phase of the policy ranges from 1980-2002 when India persisted with hybrids while other countries shifted to HDP (High-density Planting).

• The Cotton research centres & Public sector institutions ignored such a significant innovation (in the form of HDP) in cotton breeding in India.

**Phase-2: Post-GM:** This phase began post-2002 when Bt cotton was being considered for introduction into India.

• In this phase, the deliberation of hybrids versus compact varieties could have been undertaken which could have led to the introduction of the HDP technology in India.

• However, the scope of evaluation by the GM regulatory process in India was narrow and did not take the agro-economic conditions prevalent in India into account.

• Therefore, the hybrid seed model for cotton in India persisted for many years even after benefits of compact varieties became clear from global experience.

• For example, there was a steep increase in productivity for Brazil, from 400 to 1,000 kg/hectare lint (yield of cotton fibre after ginning, i.e., after separating cotton fibres from their seeds) between 1994 and 2000—the period which coincides with large-scale shift of the world to a non-GM compact variety.

**Impact of Policy:**

• **Market Capture:** Commercial Bt hybrids have overshadowed the market, accompanied by the rollback of public sector cottonseed production.

• Commercial Bt hybrids have completely taken over the market, accompanied by withdrawal of public sector cotton seed production.
• The Indian cotton farmer today is left with little choice but to use Bt hybrid seed produced by private seed companies.
• Hence, the Indian cotton farmers are left with little choice but to use Bt hybrid seed produced by private seed companies.
• Due to the combination of high input and high risk, agricultural distress is extremely high among hybrid cotton cultivating farmers.
• Compact varieties would have significantly reduced this distress as well as increased yield.

But, Farmer distress is also a reality:
• Agricultural distress is extremely high among cotton farmers and the combination of high input and high risk has likely been a contributing factor.
• Compact varieties would have significantly reduced distress as well as increased yield.
• Therefore, the hybrid seed model for cotton that India, and India alone, has followed for over three decades, is inferior to the HDP model being used in other countries on three important counts: much lower productivity; higher input costs; and increased risk particularly for low resource farmers in rain-fed areas.
• It is likely that production levels could have been much higher, with considerably lower risk and input costs, had compact varieties been developed and used in India.
• The purpose of risk assessment in GMO regulation is to enable exercising of this choice by careful and comprehensive evaluation of costs and benefits.
• In the case of Bt cotton hybrids, the benefits were limited and costs may well have been too high, particularly for resource-poor farmers.

Conclusion:
Takeaways from the experience of Bt cotton:
• First, we must be clear that the outcome of using a technology such as Bt is determined by the context in which it is deployed, and not just by the technology itself.
• If the context is suboptimal and does not prioritise the needs of the principal stakeholders (farmers), it can have significant negative fallouts, especially in India with a high proportion being marginal and subsistence farmers.
• Second, there is a need for better consultation in policy, be it agriculture as a whole or crop-wise.
• Notably, India is a signatory to international treaties on GMO regulation (the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety), which specifically provide for inclusion of socioeconomic considerations in GMO risk assessment.
• However, socioeconomic and need-based considerations have not been a part of GMO regulatory process in India.
• It is important to recognise that adoption of any new technology such as Bt is a choice and not an imperative.
• For example, some of the major cotton-producing countries such as Brazil (until 2012) and Turkey (up to the present) have achieved high productivity without the use of GM cotton by using alternative pest-management approaches.

SCIENCE & TECH

UNPRECEDENTED STEP: ON WUHAN LOCKDOWN

Context:
• In a bid to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus that emerged in the city of Wuhan in Hubei Province in early December last year, China took a drastic and unprecedented step to shut down the city, thus preventing its 11 million inhabitants from leaving.
• All modes of transport have been suspended to prevent residents from exiting the city.
• These moves come in the wake of an increasing number of people getting infected and even dying.
About Coronavirus:

- **Coronaviruses are zoonotic**, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people.
- A **coronavirus** is a kind of common virus that causes an infection in your nose, sinuses, or upper throat. Most coronaviruses are not dangerous.
- Detailed investigations found that **SARS-CoV** was transmitted from civet cats to humans and **MERS-CoV** from dromedary camels to humans.
- Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans.
- **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.
- In April 2014, the first American was hospitalized for **MERS** in Indiana and another case was reported in Florida. Both had just returned from Saudi Arabia.
- In May 2015, there was an outbreak of MERS in Korea, which was the largest outbreak outside of the Arabian Peninsula. In 2003, 774 people died from a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak.
- As of 2015, there were no further reports of cases of SARS. MERS and SARS are types of coronaviruses.
- About 858 people have died from **Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS)**, which first appeared in 2012 in Saudi Arabia and then in other countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Global concern grows as outbreak spreads:

- The number of infected people in China stood at 571 and deaths at 17.
- Wuhan, the **hotspot of the disease outbreak**, has reported nearly 80% of all cases and all the 17 deaths.
- Further, the virus has spread to 24 provinces within the country and outside as well — cases have been reported in Thailand and Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, U.S., Hong Kong, Macau, Vietnam, and Singapore.
- That the virus has already acquired the ability to spread from one person to another has been confirmed by the World Health Organization. Apart from people in close contact with affected individuals, 16 health-care workers have been infected.
- The WHO now sees possible evidence of **sustained transmission** — the ability of the virus to spread beyond just clusters of patients.

**WHO declared public health emergency of international concern:**

- The decision to enforce shutdowns came on a day when **WHO’s Emergency Committee** was deliberating on whether the coronavirus outbreak should be declared a “**public health emergency of international concern**”.
- With a split verdict and not enough information available to make a decision, the emergency committee reconvened.
- The WHO Director-General took note of China’s decision and said that the travel ban is a reflection of the significant measures taken by China to minimise the spread of the virus.
- These observations run counter to the stand the WHO has always taken even when it announces public health emergency.
- While declaring the Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a public health emergency last year, the WHO had stated unequivocally that it is “essential to avoid the punitive economic consequences of travel and trade restrictions on affected communities”.
- Shutting down entire cities go beyond the normal practice of quarantining infected people and might backfire.
Why is this any worse than normal influenza?

- We don’t yet know how dangerous the new coronavirus is – and we won’t know until more data comes in.
- Twenty-six deaths out of 800 reported cases would mean a 3% mortality rate.
- However, this is likely to be a overestimate since there may be a far larger pool of people who have been infected by the virus but who have not suffered severe enough symptoms to attend hospital and so have not been counted in the data.
- For comparison, seasonal flu typically has a mortality rate below 1% and is thought to cause about 400,000 deaths each year globally. Another key unknown, of which scientists should get a clearer idea in the coming weeks, is how contagious the coronavirus is.
- A crucial difference is that unlike flu, there is no vaccine for the new coronavirus, which means it is more difficult for vulnerable members of the population – elderly people or those with existing respiratory or immune problems – to protect themselves.
- One sensible step to get the flu vaccine, which will reduce the burden on health services if the outbreak turns into a wider epidemic.

How this spread can be avoided:

- **Standard recommendations to prevent infection spread** include regular hand washing, covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, thoroughly cooking meat and eggs.
- Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

Can coronavirus infections be prevented?

Right now, there aren’t any vaccines to prevent human coronavirus infections. But you may able to reduce your risk of getting or spreading an infection by

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoiding touching your face, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that you frequently touch.
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Then throw away the tissue and wash your hands.
- Staying home when sick.

Conclusion:

- India has **issued a travel advisory** asking citizens to follow certain precautionary measures while visiting China.
- “WHO advises against the application of any travel or trade restrictions on China based on the information currently available”. It does not recommend that travellers take any specific measures either.
- China shared the **whole genome sequence data with WHO** and submitted them to the **Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) platform** to allow researchers across the world to access the data.
- Sharing the data with GISAID will help other countries to **quickly identify the virus**, provide care, and also develop specific diagnostic kits, drugs and even vaccines.

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**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**MIDDLE EAST BRACED FOR BACKLASH AFTER KILLING OF QASSEM SOLEIMANI**

**Context: U.S. kills top Iranian General in air strike:**

- The U.S. killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, head of the **elite Quds Force**, in an **air strike** near Baghdad airport, the Pentagon and Iran said.
- Top Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an adviser to Gen. Soleimani, was also killed in the attack authorised by U.S. President Donald Trump after a pro-Iran mob laid siege to the U.S. Embassy in the **Iraqi capita Baghdad**.
  - officials said Gen. Soleimani had been **killed in a drone strike** while Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said he was killed in an **attack by American helicopters**.
• The killing of Gen. Soleimani, considered the architect of Tehran’s spreading military influence in West Asia, marks a dramatic escalation in the regional “shadow war” between Iran and the U.S. and its allies, principally Israel and Saudi Arabia, which could quickly ratchet up tit-for-tat attacks.

• Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed harsh revenge. Iran has been locked in a long conflict with the U.S. that escalated with an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Iraq by pro-Iranian militias after a U.S. air raid on the Kataib Hezbollah militia, founded by Muhandis.

• Some 5,200 U.S. troops are stationed across Iraq.

Reaction from Iraq:

• Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi said the strike was a “flagrant violation” of a security accord with the U.S., warning it would “spark a devastating war in Iraq”. Oil prices shot up by nearly $3 a barrel after news of the killing.

• Iraq is home to myriad Iranian-aligned Shia militia groups that have huge sway in the security apparatus and the government.

• The Islamic regime sponsors proxies across the region which it considers part of its national security and influence strategy, from Hizbollah, the Lebanese militant group, to groups in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and the Palestinian territories.

Oil sector as target:

• At a regional level, anxiety may rise about Gen. Soleimani’s death being avenged by a thousand cuts at the interests of the U.S. and its allies.

• This may involve resumed attacks on oil tankers and other low hanging but high value economic targets, particularly in the oil sector.

• Global oil prices have already seen a 4% rise within hours of the incident due to the “fear premium”; unless de-escalated, jittery commodity speculators may spin out of control.

• The urge for a riposte runs deep in the Iranian psyche. The U.S. has a global presence but that also brings in vulnerabilities. All that can be safely predicted is that the situation remains highly unpredictable.

Potential fallout, on India:

• India has already had considerable difficulties in meandering through the obstacle course created by the U.S.-Iran cold war.

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• While we need to be on the right side of the U.S., our ties with Iran, apart from being “civilisational”, have their own geostrategic logic.
• Now that the conflict has turned hot, its adverse impact on India could magnify.
• Apart from a rise in our oil import bill and difficulties in supplies, the safety of an estimated eight million expatriates in the Gulf may be affected.
• Iran has the capacity to influence the U.S.-Taliban peace process in Afghanistan, a neighbouring country.
• Last but not the least, after Iran, India has perhaps the largest number of the world’s Shia population and the possibility of some of them being radicalised by this event cannot be ruled out.

Critics argument:
• The attack has already killed off even the possibility of renegotiating the nuclear deal. Iran might see this as an act of war like any sovereign country would do.
• U.S. President Donald Trump is responsible for where U.S.-Iran ties stand today as he single-handedly destroyed the co-operation between the two nations established by the 2015 Iran nuclear deal by unilaterally pulling the U.S. out of the agreement in 2018 and re-imposing sanctions on Iran.
• It could trigger multiple attacks across the region, destabilising it further, cause heavy casualties and help the jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and the IS regroup and re-emerge.
• Resumed attacks on oil tankers and other low hanging but high value economic targets, particularly in the oil sector
• By sabotaging the fragile peace negotiated over years between world powers, Mr. Trump, in a single act, pushed both the U.S. and Iran down a dangerous slope.

Conclusion:
• For India, the bigger strategic choice will have to be made if the region does descend into an overt conflict situation between the Arab states and its old strategic partner, Iran and even Israel.
• Unlike in the past, Indian interests in the region are broader and deeper than ever before. There will be hell to pay in the aftermath of Soleimani’s assassination.
• The world doesn’t yet know exactly how the chips will fall. But it will not be good.
• India will ready its **contingency evacuation plans**, just in case things get ugly for the diaspora in the Gulf region, but that is now a relatively easier exercise, having done it several times.
• India will have to keep a keen eye out on Afghanistan, which could return into a **geopolitical conflict theatre**.
• Pakistan will attempt to fish in troubled waters, but frankly, India is now better able to take care of that. Also, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has more important things to worry about now rather than a discussion on Kashmir.

### ENVIRONMENT

#### 1. TOTAL TREE, FOREST COVER IN INDIA INCREASED BY 5,188 SQ KM

**Context:**
- The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, released the biennial “India State of Forest Report (ISFR)”.
- The report is published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) which has been mandated to assess the forest and tree resources of the country including wall-to-wall forest cover mapping in a biennial cycle.
- Starting 1987, 16 assessment have been completed so far. **ISFR 2019 is the 16th report in the series**.
- ISFR 2019 is the 16th report in the series. In tune with the Government of India’s vision of Digital India, FSI’s assessment is largely based on digital data whether it is satellite data, vector boundaries of districts or data processing of field measurements.

**Benefits of these reports:**
- The principal aim of India State of Forest Report (ISFR) is to ensure environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance including atmospheric equilibrium which are vital for sustenance of all life forms, human, animal and plant. The derivation of direct economic benefit must be subordinate to this principal aim.
- The report provides information on forest cover, tree cover, mangrove cover, growing stock inside and outside the forest areas, carbon stock in India’s forests, Forest Types and Biodiversity, Forest Fire monitoring and forest cover in different slopes & altitudes.
- **Special thematic information on forest cover** such as hill, tribal districts, and north eastern region has also been given separately in the report.
- The satellite data interpretation is followed by rigorous ground truthing. Information from other collateral sources are also used to improve the accuracy of the interpreted image.
Some Major Findings of “India State of Forest Report (ISFR)”, 2019:

- **Area-wise Madhya Pradesh** has the **largest forest cover** in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.

- In terms of forest cover as **percentage of total geographical area**, the **top five States** are Mizoram (85.41%), Arunachal Pradesh (79.63%), Meghalaya (76.33%), Manipur (75.46%) and Nagaland (75.31%).

- The **Mangrove ecosystems** are **unique & rich in biodiversity** and they provide numerous **ecological services**.

- Mangrove cover has been separately reported in the ISFR 2019 and the **total mangrove cover in the country is 4,975 sq km**.

- An increase of 54 sq km in mangrove cover has been observed as compared to the previous assessment of 2017.

- **Top three states showing mangrove cover increase** are Gujarat (37 sq km) followed by Maharashtra (16 sq km) and Odisha (8 sq km).

- Under the current assessment the **total carbon stock in country's forest** is estimated **7,124.6 million tonnes** and there an **increase of 42.6 million tonnes** in the carbon stock of country as compared to the last assessment of 2017.

- The annual increase in the carbon stock is 21.3 million tonnes, which is 78.2 million tonnes CO2 eq.

- **Wetlands within forest areas** form **important ecosystems** and add richness to the biodiversity in forest areas, both of faunal and floral species.

- Due to importance of wetlands, FSI has carried out an exercise at the national level to identify wetlands of more than 1 ha within RFA.

- There are **62,466 wetlands covering 3.8% of the area** within the RFA/GW of the country.

Forest Cover in Tribal Districts:

- The total forest cover in the tribal districts is 4,22,351 sq km, which is **37.54% of the geographical area of these districts**.

- There has been a **decrease of 741 sq km of forest cover** within the Recorded Forest Area/ Green Wash (RFA/GW) in the tribal districts and an increase of 1,922 sq km outside.

- There has been a decline in tree cover inside forests due to tribal populations getting “land titles” (patta) and there has been a rise in trees outside the forest area due to an increase in tree plantation and afforestation activities.

Decline of Forest Cover in North Eastern Region

- Total forest cover in the North Eastern region is 1,70,541 sq km, which is **65.05% of its geographical area**.

- There has been a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 765 sq km (0.45%) in the region. Except Assam and Tripura, all the States in the region show decrease in forest cover.

Basic objectives that should be fulfilled to increase Green cover:

- **Maintenance of environmental stability** through preservation and, where necessary, restoration of the ecological balance that has been adversely disturbed by serious depletion of the forests of the country.

- **Checking soil erosion and denudation** in the catchments areas of rivers, lakes, reservoirs in the “interest of soil and water conservation, for mitigating floods and droughts and for the retardation of siltation of reservoirs.

- Checking the **extension of sand-dunes** in the desert areas of Rajasthan and along the coastal tracts.

- **Increasing substantially** the forest/tree cover in the country through **massive afforestation and social forestry programmes**, especially on all denuded, degraded and unproductive lands.

- Meeting the requirements of fuel-wood, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber of the rural and tribal populations.

- Increasing the **productivity of forests** to meet essential national needs.

- Encouraging **efficient utilisation of forest produce** and maximising substitution of wood.

- Creating a massive people’s movement with the involvement of women, for achieving these objectives and to **minimise pressure on existing forests**.

- **Conserving the natural heritage** of the country by preserving the remaining natural forests with the vast variety of flora and fauna, which represent the remarkable biological diversity and genetic resources of the country.
Conclusion:

- India is among few countries in the world where forest cover is consistently increasing.
- In the present assessment, the total forest and tree cover of the country is 80.73 million hectare which is 24.56 percent of the geographical area of the country.
- The top five states to have shown an increase in forest cover include Karnataka (1,025 sq km), Andhra Pradesh (990 sq km), Kerala (823 sq km), J&K (371 sq km) and Himachal Pradesh (334 sq km)
- The government applauded that this is very encouraging for us as it means that we are on the right track to achieve our Paris Agreement commitment of 2.5 -3 billion carbon sinks.

2. AMIDST A TRAGEDIY, AN OPPORTUNITY

Context:

- The writer David Horne once described Australia as “the lucky country”, with its abundance of natural resources, good weather, and its relative geographical isolation from the turbulence of the world.
- Today, with wildfires burning more than 12 million hectares of land, destroying native flora, killing thousands of wild animals, including endangered species, and displacing residents and tourists, Australia is confronted with a dystopian vision, where “apocalypse becomes the new normal”.

Australia’s Bushfire:

- Scientists have long warned that a hotter, drier climate will contribute to fires becoming more frequent and more intense.
- Many parts of Australia have been in drought conditions, some for years, which has made it easier for the fires to spread and grow.
- Data shows that Australia has warmed overall by slightly more than one degree Celsius since 1910, with most of the heating occurring since 1950, the Bureau of Meteorology says.
- Although Australia has always had bushfires, this season has been a lot worse than normal.
- Australia broke its all-time temperature record twice in December. An average maximum of 40.9C was recorded on 17 December, broken a day later by 41.9C, both beating 2013’s record of 40.3C.
- Once fires have started, other areas are at risk, with embers blown by the wind causing blazes to spread to new areas.
- Bush fires themselves can also drive thunderstorms, increasing the risk of lightning strikes and further fires.

A climate phenomenon is causing the heatwave:

- The main climate driver behind the heat has been a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), an event where sea surface temperatures are warmer in the western half of the ocean, cooler in the east.
- The difference between the two temperatures is currently the strongest in 60 years.
- As a result, there has been higher-than-average rainfall and floods in eastern Africa and droughts in south-east Asia and Australia.
• The key culprit of our current and expected conditions is one of the strongest positive Indian Ocean dipole events on record.
• A positive IOD means we have cooler than average water pooling off Indonesia, and this means we see less rain-bearing weather systems, and warmer than average temperatures for large parts of the country.

**These bushfires triggering thunderstorm:**
• During a fire, heat and moisture from the plants are released, even when the fuel is relatively dry.
• Warm air is less dense than cold air so it rises, releasing the moisture and forming a cloud that lifts and ends up a thunderstorm started by fire.
• The science around climate change is complex.
• It happens from time to time in Australia and other parts of the world, including Canada. It’s an explosive storm called pyrocumulonimbus and it can inject particles as high as 10 miles into the air. These can be deadly, dangerous, erratic and unpredictable.
• Australia today is ground zero for the climate catastrophe:
  • As evidence, he pointed out that the Great Barrier Reef “is dying”, the “world-heritage rain forests are burning”, giant kelp forests have disappeared, “numerous towns have run out of water or are about to, and now the vast continent is burning on a scale never before seen.”

**India with Australia: An important partner:**
• At this moment of crisis, and while the tragedy of the bushfires is still unfolding, New Delhi and Canberra have a rare opportunity: to translate their rapidly converging interests and coalescing of values into a formidable partnership for the 21st century.
• The breadth and depth of the relationship was evident, as was the scope for the future in diverse areas, including the grand challenges facing our planet.
• Clearly, as a consequence of the bushfires, the debate on global warming, climate change and fossil fuels is going to intensify in the weeks ahead, even while scientists grapple with the new evidence.
• As two economies with a great stake holding in fossil fuels, it is critical for India and Australia to ensure that their dialogue on energy acquires momentum.
• This will require a joint scientific task force to disinter the latest evidence linking climate change and extreme climatic events with fossil fuels and to study the promise and potential of “clean” coal technology.
• Both countries must simultaneously strengthen the International Solar Alliance and the search for other alternative green fuels.
• The Leadership Dialogue also recognised that we are living through a period of immense turbulence, disruption and even subversion.
• For instance, the near overwhelming presence of an illiberal, totalitarian China, increasingly unilateralist, interventionist and mercantilist and willing to write its own rules, is the single biggest challenge to our two countries.
• India is the 5th largest trade partner of Australia with trade in goods and services at Australian $ 29 billion representing 3.6% share of the total Australian trade in 2017-18, with export at Australian $ 8 billion and import at Australian $ 21 billion.
• India and Australia have a strong track record of collaborating in research and innovation. The $84 million Australia-India Strategic Research Fund (AISRF) is Australia’s largest.
• Australia recognises India’s critical role in supporting security, stability and prosperity of the Indian Ocean region.
• Australia and India are committed to working together to enhance maritime cooperation and has a formal bilateral naval exercise (AUSINDEX) since 2015.
• In New Delhi there is a near consensus within the political leadership and the strategic community that the Australia-India relationship is an idea whose time has well and truly come.
• From water management to trauma research to skills and higher education, from maritime and cybersecurity to counterterrorism, a world of opportunities awaits the two countries if they can work in coordination.
Conclusion:

- While Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who postponed his visit to India because of the bushfires, will be missed at the Raisina Dialogue, one hopes that one immediate decision that be will take by New Delhi and Canberra is to elevate the ‘two plus two’ format for talks from the secretary level to the level of foreign and defence ministers.
- That should signal that New Delhi recognises Canberra as important a partner as Washington and Tokyo.
- In coming years, the overall relationship between India and Australia will continue to grow and has the potential to assume greater prominence.
- The prospects for bilateral relationship are recognised in both countries as strategically useful, economically productive and aligned with each other’s new agenda.

3. THINK CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION, ACT GLOCAL
Introduction:

- Almost everyone agrees that the recent global climate summit, the annual Conference of the Parties (COP25), held in Madrid in December 2019, was a failure and that the multilateral process to address the climate crisis is broken.
- The intensification of extreme weather events is likely to be a major factor affecting the health and safety of many youth living in these areas, especially those residing in South Asia, Central America, and the small island developing States of the Caribbean and Pacific regions.
- At several discussions on finance, ambition, transparency of support and pre-2020 action, wealthy countries were recalcitrant.
- Although responsible for using the bulk of the carbon space in the atmosphere, they now disavow their obligations, with some even denying anthropogenic climate change.

What can we do now?

- The next COP will be held at Glasgow, U.K. (in late 2020) and there may be little change in the outcomes, as the global political order may not alter much.
- The fact that we live in an unequal and unjust world is not going to change either.
- Climate change potentially represents a major threat to the health and socio-economic stability of youth—particularly in developing countries, where 80% of young people live.
- Climate change will continue to affect all aspects of food security, especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, where more than 1 billion young men and women live.
- At this stage, there is a complete severance of climate science from the negotiations and agreements at the global level.

The right political leaders could nudge action in a new direction:

- For example, younger members could be elected to the U.S. Congress and the Green New Deal could pass sometime in 2021.
- In the meantime, climate activism is increasing awareness and having some success in removing insurance and financial support for fossil fuel companies. But these kinds of changes will occur slowly.
- At least one expert has called for a parallel action COP at future summits where sub-state actors, civil society groups, non-governmental organisations and academics can share ideas and nudge action.
- How such an alternate meeting will be integrated with policy processes is unclear, but it is an idea whose time has come.
- The stalemate at the global level offers India the opportunity to focus earnestly on developing its climate change action at State and sub-State levels, where the environment and climate continue to be relegated to peripheral status.

Local Solutions to Global Problems: State action plans:

- Over decades, this has led to the destruction of ecosystems, forests, waterbodies and biodiversity.
- Numerous studies have shown the high economic and ecological costs and loss of lives due to extreme events.
- We do not need more data to stimulate action. As is also well recognised, India is extremely vulnerable to the effects of warming.
- With support from bilateral agencies, States initially took different approaches in the first round of State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs).
- Some of them set up separate climate change cells while some collaborated with academic institutions.
- A few produced detailed action plans while others developed strategy documents. Still others integrated improvements in energy efficiency (contributing to reducing emissions), while almost all focused on adaptation.
- Attention to climate change offers co-benefits to India for development.
- Unfortunately, taking the lead from the Centre, most State government departments are handling climate change as a fringe issue and do not seem to recognise its urgency.

Examples for Energy Efficiency mechanisms:

- Improving energy efficiency in industry reduces costs and local pollution;
• Improving **public transport reduces congestion**, Pollution and improves access; and using natural farming methods reduces fossil fuel-based fertilizers, improves soil health and biodiversity.
• These show that there are synergies in the steps to be taken for good development and climate change.
• As the next round of SAPCCs are being drawn up, under recommendations from the Centre, the focus ought to be on **integrating the response to climate change with the development plan** in different departments.
• Since the States together are to deliver the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that India has promised, it means that they require guidance from the Centre.

**On integration with states, districts and sub-district levels:**

• **Line departments for government schemes and programmes** in key development sectors, such as agriculture, transport and water, should be identified for carefully integrating actions that respond to climate change.
• This integration should also **take place at district and sub-district levels**.
• But only a demonstration of its success in some departments would show how this can be done. But first and foremost, **States need to get the signal that climate is an urgent issue**.
• How funds for implementing SAPCCs will be obtained is not clear. There will not be enough from the **Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund and bilateral agencies** to support all States unless new sources are found.
• The **coal cess in India is a good initiative**, and as others have pointed out, could be used for environment and climate-related expenses.
• Similar alternative sources from high emissions’ industries and practices would be an option, but still probably insufficient.
• If States are to **develop SAPCCs that would ultimately add up to India’s NDCs**, then the country needs **reliable greenhouse gas inventories**.
• Individual research groups and the civil society initiative, GHG Platform India, have been producing such inventories and would be useful in **synchronising and co-ordinating** State and Central mitigation programmes.

**Conclusion:**

• What were the challenges and how did they perform? Which approaches and projects were successful and ought to be scaled up and what lessons do the failures offer? Finally, **what institutional structure works best**?
• There also needs to be a clear analysis of **how the first round of action plans fared**.
• Therefore, **States must also develop their programmes with longer timelines**, with mid-course correction based on lessons and successes that can be integrated into the next stage of the plan.
• If the second round of SAPCCs were treated as an entry point to long-term development strategy, the States and the country would be better prepared for climate change. Ultimately, **climate should be part and parcel of all thinking on development**.

**SECURITY ISSUES**

1. **DECISIVE SHIFT: ON CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF**

**Context:**

• **Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has approved the creation of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) post.** It will be a four-star post.
• The country will soon get its first Chief of Defence Staff. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced to create this post from Red Fort on 15 August this year.
• At present, the army works without Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).
• There is Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) where chiefs of all three armies represent in the committee. Whenever any emergency or urgent situations come up, COSC calls for the meeting and all three chiefs works as a team.
Background for the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS):

- A committee set up to review flaws in the country’s security system suggested the appointment of CDS as the unified military advisor to the Defence Minister in the wake of the Kargil War of 1999.
- The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) recommended the appointment of a CDS as a means to provide single-point professional military advice to the political leadership and also get the forces to work together.
- The committee found a lack of communication among all three armies. It was advised that a CDS can play a major role in such a situation.
- After the Kargil war, a Group of Ministers (GoM) also strongly recommended the creation of CDS in 2001. But successive governments failed to build political consensus around the CDS before PM Modi on August 15 announced the creation of the post.

Single, unified chain of command is required for present circumstances:

- In 2017, intelligence and security officials had said that the absence of a CDS was hampering India’s combat capabilities.
- With a proxy war ongoing with Pakistan on India’s western front and a stand-off with China in Doklam in the East, security officials said a single chain of command was imperative to strengthen India’s collective defence might.
- As of now our forces are very good. But each force is operating in a silo.
- However, they cannot be perceived as formidable because they have no experience or habit of working together in any situation.
- They have rarely worked together and a single, unified chain of command is required to make the working of the three forces (army, navy and air force) seamless.
- The appointment of a single-point contact was to ensure “synergy, integration among all three services and better strategic alignment”.
- The chief of defence staff will carefully “pursue the Armed Forces’ objectives” to ensure better effectiveness in a dynamic security requirement.

Tasks for CDS for ‘jointness’ in working:

- The job calls for total transformation of traditional military mindset. The CDS has to restructure the military commands into appropriate theatre or joint commands for which a critical prerequisite is ‘jointness’ — a term that envisions the various arms of the armed forces working in unison towards a goal.
- This is a very tall order, considering India’s experience. Since Independence, the armed forces have been working separately, with no concept of jointness.
- All that will have to change, and change quickly, for a variety of reasons, not least the security environment in the region.
- Restructuring of military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands.
- That is an important role, which also points to a reform roadmap for the future — towards the eventual creation of joint theatre commands.

Conclusion:

- There are some countries in the world, including America, China, United Kingdom, Japan, have a system like Chief of Defence Staff.
- However, they have different names for this post like – Supreme Commander, Commander-in-Chief, Chief of Staff, etc.
• It is also necessary that the first incumbent is given a term of three years so as to be able to carry the ambitious vision laid out in the cabinet note through to its conclusion.
• The job is strategic, requires personal supervision, and cannot be left unfinished for the successor to finish. Given the challenges and the limited time-frame within which to accomplish it, allowances will have to be made for attendant hiccups.
• Some teething problems can be expected in the beginning but things are bound to fall in place as norms, processes and rules are worked out between the three services, the CDS and the defence ministry.
• It will require the navigation of entrenched institutional interests, hierarchical powers and military traditions, to lay the foundations for a strong and functional CDS.

AN UNFINISHED AGENDA

Five major reforms common to three defence committees over the past 20 years. And they still haven’t been implemented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MoD Reforms</th>
<th>Kargil Review Committee</th>
<th>Naresh Chandra Committee</th>
<th>Shekhatkar Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Security Strategy</td>
<td>A vision document from which the military security strategy and force planning will flow</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Defence Staff</td>
<td>Single-point military advisor to the government. Will oversee integration of the three armed forces</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (to be called Permanent Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Commands</td>
<td>Joint commands of the air force, army and navy to replace the 17 separate single-service commands</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of MoD with services headquarters</td>
<td>Where the three services HQs will be brought into the MoD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revamp of weapons acquisition procedures</td>
<td>To speed up the acquisition of military hardware</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. BRUS TO PERMANENTLY SETTLE IN TRIPURA, PACT SIGNED

Context:
• A quadripartite agreement in New Delhi, allowed some 35,000 Bru tribal people, who were displaced from Mizoram and are living in Tripura as refugees since 1997, to settle permanently in Tripura.
• The Centre, State governments of Tripura and Mizoram, and representatives of Bru organisations signed the agreement in the presence of Union Home Minister.
• The “solution” has evoked mixed reactions with rights activists fearing it could “legitimise” the ejection of minority communities by ethnocentric states.

Who are the Bru refugees?
• According to a report, the Brus, who are spread across Tripura, Mizoram and parts of southern Assam, are said to be the most populous tribe in Tripura.
• They are also known as the Reangs in Mizoram, as they are essentially ethnically different from the Mizo, and have their own distinct language and dialect and thus form one of the 21 scheduled tribes of Tripura.
• While in Tripura their numbers stand at approximately 32,000, spread across six refugee camps in the state, Mizoram has as many as 40,000 Brus living in the state.
• For their livelihood they pursue Hilltop Jhum Cultivation, several activities of food gathering including collection of jungle fruits, leaf, plants, fishing in stagnant water in hill slopes, hunting of wild animals and birds, etc.
• They are nomadic tribes. It is said that they are polytheists and believe in multiple Gods and Goddesses. They pray different deities like Mwtaikotorma, Tuibuma, Mailoma, Ganga etc.
• They also believe in spirits and existence of soul. We can say that by religion they are Hindus. Let us tell you that among Reangs followers of Vaishnavism are also found in good numbers.
• Like other Tripuri tribes of Tripura, the marriage system is similar. There is no dowry system. They are endogamous and don’t marry outside their community.
• The village council chief is “RAI” who permits Divorce and Widow Marriage. They cremate their dead beside of the river or chara after observing series of rites and rituals and funeral procession.

About Refugee Camps:
• Back in 1997, about 30,000 Bru-Reang tribals fled from Mizoram and took shelter in Tripura’s refugee camps.
• These refugees were said to have fled from Mizoram due to ethnic tension. Before the agreement, these people were living in temporary shelters at Kanchanpur, in North Tripura.
• The Indian Government has been making several efforts for permanent rehabilitation of the Bru-Reang crisis since 2010.
• Two state governments, Tripura and Mizoram, were in a continuous process for settling them down through a permanent solution.
• As per the information provided by Prime Minister Modi’s official website, 1622 Bru-Reang refugee families were returned to the Mizoram.
• In 2018, the Government had offered them to peacefully return to the Mizoram. However, only 328 families (1369 individuals) accepted the offer and went back to the Mizoram at the time.

What is Bru-Reang Refugee agreement?
• To end the 23-year old Bru-Reang refugee crisis, an agreement is signed which is known as Bru-Reang agreement.
• The Bru-Reang agreement is signed between the Government of India, Presided by the Home Minister for Home Affairs, Governments of Tripura and Mizoram and Bru-Reang representatives on 17 January, 2020.

According to Bru-Reang Refugee agreement:
• After the agreement about 34,000 Bru refugees will be settled in Tripura.
• Centre will provide help to these tribes for their all-round development and for this around Rs 600 crores were sanctioned.
• These tribes would get all the rights that normal residents of the State get and would be able to enjoy the benefits of social welfare schemes for Centre and State governments.
• According to the Home Minister, each displaced family would be given 40X30 sq.ft. residential plots.
• For 2 years, they will be given the aid of Rs 5000 per month.
• Free ration for 2 years
• About Rs 1.5 lakh aid to build their house.
Under this agreement, the Tripura Government would provide the land. Let us tell you that the settlement has been reached after a detailed discussion held by the Union Government with the State Governments of Tripura and Mizoram and also with the representatives of Bru tribes.

The decision can be considered as humanitarian from the point of view of the Brus, who were apprehensive about returning to Mizoram, but it could lead to conflicts with the locals of Tripura.

It could set a bad precedent, encouraging ethnocentric states to eject minorities of all hues.

Conclusion:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the agreement to permanently settle Bru-Reang refugees in Tripura, saying it will “greatly help” them.

The Bru-Reang refugees will benefit from numerous development schemes in the state. Seeking to put an end to the 23-year-old Bru-Reang refugee crisis, a quadripartite agreement was signed among the Centre, state governments of Tripura and Mizoram and Bru-Reang representatives to facilitate permanent settlement of Bru refugees in Tripura.

The displaced Brus, who returned to Mizoram have already begun demanding a package equivalent to one, those who stayed behind in the Tripura relief camps would be getting.

3. BLACK AND GREY: ON TERROR FUNDING AND PAKISTAN

Context:

The deliberations, in Beijing, of the Asia-Pacific joint group of the global watchdog on terror financing and money laundering, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), gave Pakistan some encouraging news: that it had progressed in its efforts to avoid a blacklisting.

A final decision will be taken at a plenary meeting of the body, expected in Paris next month: in keeping Pakistan on the current “grey list”, downgrading it to a “black list”, or letting it off altogether for the moment.

Pakistan has placed in grey list in 2018:

The 39-member body had determined that Pakistan was to be placed on the grey list in 2018, and presented it a 27-point list of actions.

These included freezing the funds of UN Security Council entities such as 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Saeed and the LeT, the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and other Taliban-affiliated groups.

The actions entailed a sustained effort to bring legal action against these groups, and also called for changes to Pakistani law in line with global standards for measures against money laundering and financing terrorism.

Unlike in October 2019, when Pakistan had completed five points, the Beijing meeting has cleared it on 14 points.

India want more scrutiny on removing Pakistan’s Grey list:

While Pakistan’s progress will come as a disappointment to India, it wants more scrutiny of Pakistan’s support to terror groups lest Islamabad feels it has been let off the hook there are a few points to consider.

1. First, the grey listing is not new. Pakistan was placed on it in 2012, and was removed in 2015 after it passed a National Action Plan to deal with terrorism following the 2014 Peshawar School massacre. It was also placed under severe restrictions in the years 2008-2012, after the Mumbai attack.
2. Second, this last grey list period has already seen some Indian demands met, including the chargeshielding of Hafiz Saeed for terror financing, and the addition of JeM chief Masood Azhar to the UNSC 1267 list.

About Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

- FATF is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering.
- In 2001 its mandate expanded to include terrorism financing.
- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- The FATF is therefore a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
3. Finally, although the FATF is a technical organisation, there is no doubting that **geopolitics and bilateral deals play a part** in deciding outcomes.

### Why Softer Tone on Pakistan?

- **Geopolitics and bilateral deals** play a role in deciding outcomes.
- Pakistan’s role in ensuring Taliban talks are brought to a successful conclusion soon may have weighed with the U.S. and its allies in the grouping.
- With **China in the President’s Chair**, and the backing of **Turkey and Malaysia**, Pakistan could escape being blacklisted in any case.

### ‘Grey List’ by the FATF on Pakistan in June 2018:

- The FATF is backed by the UN Security Council passed resolutions which made its **recommendations binding** and in case of deficiencies, sanctions could be imposed.
- In the Beijing meeting, Pakistan provided a list of its action taken to comply with the FATF diktat.
- Pakistan was placed on the ‘Grey List’ by the FATF in June 2018 and was given a **plan of action to complete it by October 2019** or face the risk of being placed on the blacklist along with Iran and North Korea.
- The FATF currently has 35 members and two regional organisations — the European Commission and Gulf Cooperation Council.
- India is a member of the FATF consultations and its Asia Pacific Group and was represented in the meeting by a team of officials from the ministries of Home, External Affairs and Finance.

### However, FATF needs to scrutinise in an unbiased manner:

- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the **adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally**.
- In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify **national-level vulnerabilities** with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.
- The FATF has developed a **series of Recommendations** that are recognised as the international standard for combatting money laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- They form the basis for a co-ordinated response to these **threats to the integrity of the financial system** and help ensure a level playing field.

### Conclusion:

- New Delhi must **study the politics behind Pakistan’s FATF “progress”**.
- Officials have suggested that Pakistan’s role in ensuring Taliban talks are brought to a successful conclusion soon may have **weighed with the U.S. and its allies** in the grouping.
- India’s recent troubles on the international stage, **including the UNSC** where China has been allowed to **raise the Kashmir issue twice in five months**, after nearly five decades, may also be a reason its objections at the Beijing discussions were not considered as carefully as in the past.
• Prime Minister Narendra Modi also asserted that the ‘New India’s’ ideology is young and disciplined and that is why India conducted surgical and airstrikes on Pakistan by entering their soil to fight the sponsors of terrorism.

MISCELLANEOUS

HOW SWAMI VIVEKANANDA BECAME THE ‘MESSENGER OF INDIAN WISDOM’ TO WEST

Context:
• January 12 is the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the famous Hindu spiritual leader and intellectual from the late 19th century.
• An important religious reformer in India, Swami Vivekananda is known to have introduced the Hindu philosophies of Yoga and Vedanta to the West.
• In his honour, the government of India in 1984 declared his birthday as National Youth Day.

Swami Vivekananda’s legacy:
• Through his speeches and lectures, Vivekananda worked to disseminate his religious thought.
• He preached ‘neo-Vedanta’, an interpretation of Hinduism through a Western lens, and believed in combining spirituality with material progress.
• ‘Raja Yoga’, ‘Jnana Yoga’, ‘Karma Yoga’ are some of the books he wrote.
• Before his death in 1902, Vivekananda wrote to a Western follower: “It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body, to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the whole world shall know that it is one with God.”

Remarkable step: The Chicago address of Swami Vivekananda:
• Vivekananda is especially remembered around the world for his speech at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1893.
• The speech covered topics including universal acceptance, tolerance and religion, and got him a standing ovation.
• Many parts of his speech have since become popular, including “I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance.
• We believe not only in universal tolerance but we accept all religions as true.”
• “I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth.”; and
• “Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth... Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now.”
• He began delivering lectures at various places in the US and UK, and became popular as the ‘messeger of Indian wisdom to the Western world’.

Set up a missionary when Returned to India:
• After coming back to India, 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.
• The goals of his Mission were based on the ideals of Karma Yoga, with its primary objective to save the poor masses in India.
• He urged people to achieve divinity of the soul through selfless work, worship and mental discipline. An ardent nationalist, Swami Vivekananda had the welfare of his countrymen top most on his mind. “Arise, Awake and Stop not till the Goal is reached” was his perpetual message.
• His teachings cut across all divisions based on political or religious affiliations. He held that spirituality was the core of every religion; dogmatic exclusiveness and intolerance are not part of every religion.
• The more spiritual a human, the more universal he/she is. He held that modern age stood in urgent need of this education from religion, by which human will learn to make their love of God into the love and service of all human.

Swami Vivekananda’s life: Lessons to everyone:

• Vivekananda’s life is full of values and inspiration which motivate every person who has read his books.
• The younger generation instead of spending their quality time on unwanted things, should make their life more meaningful by studying Vivekananda and treading the path shown by him.
• Any student who embraces the thoughts of Vivekananda will achieve success and climb up the social and professional ladder.
• On this occasion, Swami Vivekananda Jnana Kendra was declared opened. This centre would provide help get access to government programmes, facilities and skill-oriented training.
• Swami Vivekananda held up the idea of nationalism based on oneness and unity of people. Today, there are elements in the country who are trying to dilute his idea by breaking this unity.
• We need to channelise this strength and energy to be able to serve the society and the country.
• Swami Vivekananda also felt that no amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India were well educated, well fed, and well cared for.

• Talking about the importance of holistic education that takes care of the physical and mental wellbeing of the children.
• For Swami Ji education did not mean academic pursuits alone. He stressed equally on physical fitness and bodily health.
• While expressing his deep concern over the spurt in Non-Communicable Diseases, the Vice President cautioned the youth be aware of the ill effects of the changing life style and dietary habits.
• He also asked the youth to take a pledge to be physically fit and promote India’s cultural and spiritual values.

Conclusion:

• Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had called Vivekananda the “maker of modern India.”
• when we are celebrating Swami Vivekananda Ji’s birth anniversary, it would be quite in the fitness of things if we remember his conception of the future of our country.
• Swami Vivekananda believed that our culture is a rich mosaic containing Hindu, Muslim and other elements.
• He also believed that the Hindus and the Muslims have certain things to learn from each other, which would make them not merely better Hindus and better Muslims, but what is more important better human.
• Swami Vivekananda exhorted his countrymen to discard narrow loves, hates, and grow into that wholeness which is perfection of character.
• In the same vein, he exhorted the Hindus to discard the sectional loyalties of caste and sect and grow into that fullness and wholeness expressive of Divine in man.
RSTV/LSTV/AIR SYNOPSIS

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. ELECTION COMMISSION: COLLEGIUM SYSTEM & APPOINTMENTS

Introduction:

• The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to hear after four weeks a public interest litigation seeking that the chief election commissioner and election commissioners be appointed by a three-member collegium. The collegium will comprise the Prime Minister, the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India.
• A bench comprising Chief Justice S. A. Bobde and Justices B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant took note of submissions that the plea needed an urgent hearing. Advocate Ashwini Upadhyay filed the PIL seeking to ensure more autonomy for the chief election commissioner’s office and election commissioners. The plea has also sought an independent secretariat for the Election Commission of India and that it should also be given the power to make rules.

ECI:

• The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India.
• The body administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.

Article 324:

Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission

(1) The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State and of elections to the offices of President and Vice President held under this Constitution shall be vested in a Commission (referred to in this Constitution as the Election Commission).

(2) The Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the President may from time to time fix and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President.

(3) When any other Election Commissioner is so appointed the Chief Election Commissioner shall act as the Chairman of the Election Commission.

(4) Before each general election to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of each State, and before the first general election and thereafter before each biennial election to the Legislative Council of each State having such Council, the President may also appoint after consultation with the Election Commission such Regional Commissioners as he may consider necessary to assist the Election Commission in the performance of the functions conferred on the Commission by clause (1).

(5) Subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, the conditions of service and tenure of office of the Election Commissioners and the Regional Commissioners shall be such as the President may by rule determine; Provided that the Chief Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court and the conditions of service of the Chief Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment: Provided further that any other Election Commissioner or a Regional Commissioner shall not be removed from office except on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.

(6) The President, or the Governor of a State, shall, when so requested by the Election Commission, make available to the Election Commission or to a Regional Commissioner such staff as may be necessary for the discharge of the functions conferred on the Election Commission by clause (1).

Other articles related to ECI:

• Article 325: No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.

www.insightsindia.com
• **Article 326**: Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage.

• **Article 327**: Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures.

• **Article 328**: Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature.

• **Article 329**: Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.

**Demand since long time:**

• It has been a very old demand since the ECI is into existence.

• **Dinesh Goswami Committee** had suggested it too.

• Based on it, **70th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 1990** was introduced in the Parliament.

• But till date no law has been in place.

**Present situation:**

• Constitution has not prescribed any method.

• It is the **executive power of the President**.

• The parliament has the power to make law regulating the terms and conditions.

**Appointment needs overhaul:**

• Even in the constituent assembly debates this issue was taken up.

• Article 324(2) as stated above states that the President shall, with aid and advice of Council of Ministers, appoint CEC and ECs, till Parliament enacts a law fixing the criteria for selection, conditions of service and tenure.

• But a **law has not been enacted** for the purpose so far.

• Hence a PIL was filed in the Supreme Court seeking a fair and transparent procedure for appointment of CEC and ECs.

• The constituent assemble debates in which one of the suggestion said that President will appoint them with the consult of the Prime Minister with two third majority of the joint sitting.

**Challenges:**

• The fact remains that it is the **executive power** of the government and should that executive power be regulated.

• SC interprets any law on the basis of provisions of constitution and cannot with something extra.

• Similar demand for other bodies and posts like CAG, Attorney general, etc

• There is distinction between the position of a CEC & EC and the appointments to both the position may differ according to the task they perform.

**Way Forward:**

• **2nd ARC report** recommended that collegium headed by the Prime Minister with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Law Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha as members should make recommendations for the consideration of the President for appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners.

• **Law Commission 255th Report** on Electoral Reforms: Strengthening the office of the Election Commission of India recommended Making the appointment process of the Election Commissioners and the CEC consultative

• Similar **election and removal procedure** for CEC and Ecs.

• Expenses of ECI must be **charged expenditure on Consolidated Fund of India**.

**Link**: [https://youtube.be/mfo8Z2M8988](https://youtube.be/mfo8Z2M8988)

### 2. ELECTORAL POLITICS- NEED FOR REFORM

**Introduction:**

• India is a vibrant democracy with people electing their representatives at several levels beginning from local bodies and panchayats to the the Parliament. Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu has termed Indian experience with democracy as a remarkable success story. However he also pointed out two distortions which need to
be addressed urgently and those are use of enormous money power in politics and elections and the increasing attempts to entice the voters with short term benefits at the cost of long term goals of basic amenities, infrastructure, quality education, healthcare, growth and job opportunities etc.

- **Electoral reforms** refer to the initiatives undertaken with an objective to strengthen the electoral processes. They are necessary due to the dynamism displayed in the politics of India. Bringing about reforms from time to time is necessary in order to establish India as a democratic republic as outlined in the preamble and other constitutional principles.

**Need for electoral reforms:**

- **Criminalization** of politics: 40% of LS and 23% of RS MPs have criminal background.
- **Money and muscle power** still influencing election outcomes.
- **Electoral participation** is only 66% in 16th LS elections. So, there is need to increase electoral participation.
- Women constitute only 11.3% in the 16th LS.
- Role of EC – more Powers should be awarded. Appointments to EC need to be more transparent.
- Political funding – Highly non-transparent and corruption prone zone.
- Victimization of voters – through booth and constituency profiling.

**System of election financing in India:**

The system is two-tiered – based on parties and candidates. The parties are required to disclose income but not expenditure, while it’s the other way round for candidates.

- The parties, whose main source of income comes from donations by individuals and corporations, use loopholes in the law to avoid disclosing identities of even the big individual donors. As regards corporate donations, despite the availability of tax breaks, most of it is done off-the-books mainly to avoid reprisals in case the opposing party wins.
- On the other hand, the candidates grossly underreport expenditure while actually spending far higher than the legal limits allow. Most of the illegal spending by candidates comes from the assistance given to them by their parties which carry greater financial heft, and have no ceiling on expenditure.

**What reforms are needed?**

- Prescribe a ceiling for political parties’ expenditure, like that for the candidates.
- Consider state funding of political parties (not elections) with independent audit and a complete ban on private donations.
- Enforce internal democracy and transparency in the working of the political parties. Bring them under the RTI.
- Set up an independent national election fund where all tax-free donations could be made. It could be operated by the ECI or any other independent body.
- Accept the ECI’s proposal to legally empower it to cancel elections where credible evidence of abuse of money has been found.
- **Debar persons** against whom cases of heinous offences are pending in courts from contesting elections.
- Empower the ECI to de-register those political parties which have not contested any election for 10 years and yet benefited from tax exemptions.
- Make paid news an electoral offence with two years’ imprisonment by declaring it a “corrupt practice” (Sec 100 RP Act) and “undue influence” (Sec 123(2)).

**Election commission of India (ECI) suggestions:**

- Election commissioners should be given the security of tenure similar to chief election commissioner.
- ECI should have contempt power same as the court in India. Frequent contempt affects the dignity of the institution.
- There should be transparency in the funding of political parties.
- ECI should be given the power to make rules under Representation of people act 1951.
- ECI should have the power to audit the accounts of political parties.
- Election to the legislative assembly and to the parliament should be conducted simultaneously.
- Debar the candidate from contesting election if the criminal cases are pending against him.
- Make paid news an offence.
• Do not allow one candidate to contest from more than one constituency.

The law commission of India’s suggestions:
• The political parties should be brought under the ambit of the RTI.
• There should be internal democracy in political parties.
• greater financial accountability of parties
• opening party affairs to public
• experimenting with State Funding of election model to check black money in elections; among others.

The government has taken following actions as per the recommendations of ECI and law commission-
• NOTA was introduced to provide an alternative to the voters.
• Limitation on funding to political parties, Electoral bond was introduced to improve the transparency in electoral funding.

However, on Govt’s part, except for the recent proposal for electoral bonds and the ceiling on cash donations from anonymous sources, the Parliament has rejected other proposals with following excuses:
• Under vindictive politics candidates often try to sabotage the rival candidates with false complaints
• EC cannot be a body at par with the judiciary to try for contempt
• suggesting RoPA to be more than sufficient a measure to tame erring legislators etc.

Way Forward:
• We have a very successful experience with democracy over the last 70 years but Vice- President’s concerns are also very genuine.
• Political parties have to rise on this occasion and maintain self discipline.
• There are many instances where people have rejected money and freebies but instead of people rejecting, the political parties should compete with each other on this issue.
• Legislation will also not do much.
• Need to educate people more and more to not indulge in this.
• There should be limits on spending of political parties too.

However, there is a need of more innovative reforms to ensure – internal democracy, financial accountability in parties. A slew of reforms like use of vote-totaliser machines to protect voters privacy, simultaneous elections, penal provisions for compliance of Sec 29C, statutory backing to MCC, bringing political parties in RTI ambit, further increasing transparency in pol-funding, measures to increase political participation, etc. are needed for a strengthening our democracy.

Link: https://youtu.be/eeP4yKHa11o

3. NPR- NATIONAL POPULATION REGISTER

Introduction:
• The Union Cabinet approved a proposal to update the National Population Register (NPR), which is linked to the Census. The exercise will cost Rs 8,500 crore, the government said. The Census Commission has said the objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every “usual resident” of the country. The database will have demographic details. A “usual resident”, for the NPR, is a person who has lived in an area for at least six months or more, or a person who intends to live in an area for the next six months or more. It is mandatory for every “usual resident” of India to register in the NPR.
• The NPR, since it is linked to the Census, is seen as the first step towards a nationwide exercise to implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
• Though an NPR doesn’t necessarily mean it’s guaranteed there will be an NRC, it clears the path for a nationwide citizens’ list. This is seen as one of the reasons why some states like West Bengal and Kerala, which are opposed to the NRC, have stopped work on the NPR.
Objectives:
- The objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every usual resident in the country. The database would contain demographic as well as biometric particulars.

Demographic Particulars:
The following demographic details of every individual are required for every usual resident:
- Name of person
- Relationship to head of household
- Father’s name
- Mother’s name
- Spouse’s name (if married)
- Sex
- Date of Birth
- Marital status
- Place of birth
- Nationality (as declared)
- Present address of usual residence
- Duration of stay at present address
- Permanent residential address
- Occupation/Activity
- Educational qualification

Present Status:
- The data for National Population Register was collected in 2010 along with the house listing phase of Census of India 2011.
- The updation of this data was done during 2015 by conducting door to door survey.
- The digitisation of the updated information has been completed.
- Now it has been decided to update the National Population Register along with the Houselisting phase of Census 2021 during April to September 2020 in all the States/UTs except Assam.
- A Gazette notification to this effect has already been published by the Central Government.

Components:
- The NPR database would contain demographic as well as biometric details.
- As per the provisions of the NPR, a resident identity card (RIC) will be issued to individuals over the age of 18.
- This will be a chip-embedded smart card containing the demographic and biometric attributes of each individual.
- The UID number will also be printed on the card.

Controversy around it:
- Comes in the backdrop of the NRC excluding lakhs of people in Assam.
- It intends to collect a much larger amount of personal data on residents of India.
- There is yet no clarity on the mechanism for protection of this vast amount of data.

Census and NPR:
There are two crucial differences between the census and NPR processes.
- First, the census doesn’t ask for individual identity details, and at the end of the day, is a macro exercise.
- The NPR, on the other hand, is designed to collect identity details of every individual.
- The second is that census data is protected by a confidentiality clause. The government has committed that it will not reveal information received from an individual for the headcount.
- Officials said the NPR would serve as the mother database to verify citizenship if a nationwide NRC is carried out later.
- The home ministry used the example of the Ujjwala scheme, under which subsidised gas cylinders are given to below-poverty-line families, to underline the importance of data in shaping welfare policy.
Positives of National Population Register (NPR):

- Population census is an exercise that helps to provide people the benefits of the government schemes. National Population Register will help government solve many issues in the country.
- A digital NPR will help in solving several issues, like law and order and gender equality.
- It would be a solution to the multifarious problems facing the country – from effective maintenance of law and order to an efficient implementation of welfare schemes like MGNREGA, food security and nutrition campaigns.
- NPR will prove to be a game changer in the country. Digital census has many benefits.
- If a child takes birth and attains the age of 18, then he/she should be able to vote automatically without applying for a voter identification card.
- A Census helps us plan our social welfare and entitlement schemes better, through NPR India would have a multipurpose identity document that will have all details like Aadhaar and PAN card.

Data privacy:

- Privacy concerns which are there with Aadhaar will continue to add with any kind of data collected.
- The fact that Aadhaar details will be added to the NPR database has given rise to concerns of data privacy.
- The NPR has raised anxieties around the idea of citizenship in the country.
- After a list of residents is created, a nationwide NRC could go about verifying the citizens from that list.
- In the past, reports have stated that Aadhaar data has been compromised on multiple occasions even as the UIDAI continues to deny that there have been breaches.
- The personal data that the government is planning to collect for NPR is quite large and there are concerns whether the government is equipped to protect the citizens’ data.
- Apart from data privacy, concern has also been voiced over the exercise as a whole.
- NPR will be the base for a nationwide National Register of Citizens and will be similar to the list of citizens of Assam released recently.
- During the NRC exercise, there were several instances where some members of a family featured in the draft list while the others did not.
- The idea of NPR is a likely cause for worry since there could be such discrepancies in the NPR as well.

Conclusion:

- The objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every “usual resident” in the country.
- While there are concerns about privacy, the government position is based on two grounds.
- One is that every country must have a comprehensive identity database of its residents with demographic details.
- In its statement issued after Cabinet approval to NPR, the Home Ministry said the objective of conducting NPR is to “prepare a credible register of every family and individual” living in the country apart from strengthening security and improvement in targeting of beneficiaries under various Central government schemes.

4. GOVERNANCE INDEX

Introduction:

- On 25th December, the government released a good governance index to assess the state of governance in the country. States and Union Territories were divided into three groups. They were measured on 50 indicators in 10 sectors of governance. Tamil Nadu emerged on top of the Index among 18 big states in the country. In the north-east and hill category, Himachal Pradesh topped the ranking, Puducherry stood first among union territories.

Good Governance Day:

- Good Governance Day is observed in India annually on the twenty-fifth day of December, the birth anniversary of former-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
• Good Governance Day was established in 2014 to honor Prime Minister Vajpayee by fostering awareness among the Indian people of accountability in government.
• In keeping with this principle, the Government of India has decreed Good Governance Day to be a working day for the government
• On 23 December 2014, the ninety-year old former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (posthumously) were announced as recipients of India’s highest civilian award for merit, the Bharat Ratna, by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee.
• Following the announcement, the newly elected administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi established that the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister would be henceforth commemorated annually in India as Good Governance Day.

The Good Governance Index:
• It is a uniform tool across States to assess the Status of Governance and impact of various interventions taken up by the State Government and UTs.
• The Minister said that good governance initiatives by the Government draw inspiration from former PM Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji.
• He added that good governance initiatives are being replicated not only by the states in India, but also by the other countries. He added that many regional conferences have been organized by the DARPG in different parts across India to replicate good governance practices.
• The purpose behind developing a comprehensive index, termed as Good Governance Index (GGI), is to create a tool which can be used uniformly across the state, and eventually district level, to assess the status of governance and impact of various interventions taken up by Central and State Governments including Union Territories (UTs).
• Another significant contribution of the GGI would be contributing in tracking the progress of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at state level.

Objectives:
• The objectives of GGI are to provide quantifiable data to compare the state of governance in all states and UTs.
• Enable states and UTs to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving governance and shift to result oriented approaches and administration.
• Various principles have been kept in mind while selecting the indicators, i.e. it should be easy to understand & calculate, citizen-centric & result driven, leading to improved results and applicable to all states and UTs, among others. Various consultation meetings were held with the stakeholders, including consultations with sector experts, ministries, states & UTs.

The GGI takes into consideration ten sectors:
1. Agriculture and Allied Sectors
2. Commerce & Industries
3. Human Resource Development
4. Public Health
5. Public Infrastructure & Utilities,
6. Economic Governance,
7. Social Welfare & Development
8. Judicial & Public Security
9. Environment
10. Citizen-Centric Governance.

These ten Governance Sectors are measured on total 50 indicators. Difference indicators are given different weightage under one Governance Sector to calculate the value. E.g. Under Agriculture & Allied Sector, there are 6 indicators with different weightage, namely: Growth rate of agriculture and allied sector (0.4), growth rate of food grains production (0.1), growth rate of horticulture produce (0.1), growth rate of milk production (0.1), growth rate of meat production (0.1) and crop insurance (0.2).
Categories:
The states and UTs are divided into three groups:
- Big States,
- North-East & Hill States and
- UTs

The states and UTs are ranked on all indicators separately, at the same time composite ranking is also calculated for these states and UTs under their respective groups based upon these indicators.

Key Findings of the first GGI Report:
- **Top performers among the big states:** Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.
- **The bottom six states** are Odisha, Bihar, Goa, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.
- **Among the North-East & Hill States:** Top 3 states are Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Tripura.
- The bottom 3 states are Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Pondicherry leads among the UTs** followed closely by Chandigarh with Delhi bagging the third spot. Lakshadweep is at the bottom among the UTs.
- **Sector-wise ranking:** In the environment sector: The top three states are West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The bottom 3 states are Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Goa.
- **Agriculture and Allied Sectors:** Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan are at the top
- **Commerce & Industries:** Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana are at the top
- **Human Resource Development:** Goa is at the top.
- **Judicial and public security ranking:** West Bengal is at the bottom two in the judicial and public security ranking. Tamil Nadu tops the chart here.
- **Economic governance:** Karnataka is at the top under the economic governance category.
- **Health:** Kerala is at the top in the public health sector.

Limitations:
- The limitations of the index are determined largely by the availability of data, which can be overcome with time as data becomes available from authentic and reliable government sources.
- While agreeing the importance of input and process based indicators, the framework is also limited by its focus only on outcome/output based indicators.
- The purpose of selection of such indicators is to keep the focus on performance and achievements of the State Governments and also to limit the number of indicators for implementation purpose.

Link: [https://youtu.be/Q7Mb_iGocEE](https://youtu.be/Q7Mb_iGocEE)

5. HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY MANDATE

**Introduction:**
- Aiming to improve the quality in Higher Education Institutions the University Grants Commission has adopted the Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate. 5 verticals of Quality Mandate developed by UGC cover evaluation reforms, eco friendly and sustainable university campuses, human values and professional ethics, faculty induction and academic research integrity
- University Grants Commission has adopted the **Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate** to improve the quality in Higher Educational Institutions. The quality mandate aims at evolving higher education system to equip country’s next generation with vital skills, knowledge and ethics for leading a rewarding life.
- Student evaluation plays a crucial role in improving the quality of Higher Education in the country. In order to make student assessment more meaningful, effective and linked to ‘Learning Outcomes’, the report ‘Evaluation Reforms in Higher Educational Institutions in India’ is very timely and beneficial for HEIs.
- **SATAT**— Framework for Eco-Friendly and Sustainable Campus development in Higher Educational Institutions, framework encourages universities to adopt reflective policies and practices to enhance the environmental quality of the campus and to adopt sustainable green and sustainable methods in its future.
To infuse the culture of **human values and ethics in educational institutions**, UGC has also developed a policy framework—“**Mulya Pravah – Guidelines for Inculcation of Human values and Professionals Ethics in Higher Educational Institutions**”.

**Guru-Dakshta – A guide to Faculty Induction Programme** (FIP) will fulfill its main objective to **sensitise and motivate the faculty to adopt learner centered approaches, ICT integrated learning and new pedagogic approaches to teaching-learning, assessment tools in higher education**

**Other initiatives by UGC:**

1. **Deeksharambh**— To help new students adjust and feel comfortable in the new environment, help them inculcate the ethos and culture of the institution, help them build bonds with other students and faculty members, and expose them to a sense of larger purpose and self-exploration.

2. **Paramarsh**—A scheme for Mentoring National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) Accreditation Aspirant Institutions to promote Quality Assurance in Higher Education

3. **STRIDE** will provide support to research projects that are socially relevant, locally need-based, nationally important and globally significant. STRIDE shall support research capacity building as well as basic, applied and transformational action research that can contribute to national prioritiers with focus on inclusive human development. STRIDE shall support creation, development and integration of new ideas, concepts and practices for public good and strengthening civil society.

**Indian higher education system:**

- India’s focus on expanding the higher education sector to provide access has led to a situation where **research and scholarship have been neglected**.
- **Funding issues:**
  - The Central government’s slant toward premier institutions has continued ever since the Eleventh Five Year Plan where in spite of a nine-fold increase in Budget allocation State institutions have been left to fend for themselves with funding mainly directed towards starting more premier institutes.
  - Investment by State governments has been also dwindling each year as higher education is a low-priority area. The University Grant Commission’s system of direct releases to State institutions which bypasses State governments also **leads to their sense of alienation**.
  - There has been a demand to take spending on education to 6% of gross domestic product for decades.

**Low enrolment:**

- The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education is 24.5 meaning out of every 100 youths eligible for higher education, less than 25 are pursuing tertiary education.

**Desired levels of research and internationalization of Indian campuses remain weak points**

- It follows a largely linear model with very little focus on specialization. Both experts and academics feel Indian higher education is tilted towards social sciences.
  - Only 1.7% colleges run PhD programmes and a mere 33% colleges run postgraduate-level programmes.

**Regulatory issues:**

- The country has a poor record with both the University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) being seen more as controllers of education than facilitators.
  - As a regulator of India’s higher education, coordinator of vastly different kinds of institutions, and custodian of standards, the UGC had begun to look ill-equipped.
  - Regulatory bodies with licensing powers hurt the autonomy of professional higher education, leading to serious imbalance in the diarchy they were under, and partitioning general from professional higher education in several crucial areas of knowledge.
  - Privately set-up institutions in medicine, engineering, and other fields created the ground conditions in which strict regulation acquired justification. The power to license led to corruption.
  - The existing model is based on deep and pervasive distrust among regulators over the possibility of universities doing things on their own, and doing it well. The current framework that require universities to be constantly regulated by laws, rules, regulations, guidelines and policies set by the government and the regulatory bodies have not produced the best results.
• Lack of autonomy:
  o All aspects of academic life, including admission norms, syllabus design, and examination were controlled by the affiliating university.
  o In colleges set up and run by the government, recruitment of faculty was the state government’s prerogative.
  o When certain state governments stopped fresh recruitment altogether and moved over to the practice of hiring contractual or ad hoc teachers, no college could practise autonomy to alleviate its suffering.
  o Autonomy to function through their own structures of governance first began to diminish in many provincial or state universities in the sphere of appointment of vice chancellors. State universities could not resist the imposition by those with political power of poorly qualified and unsuitable individuals as vice chancellors.

• The vacancy crisis broke the sense of professional community among teachers and their organisations. Even teacher quality was abysmal

• Ranking systems:
  o Additional autonomy granted on the basis of NAAC rating and status in NIRF begs questions about these systems of evaluation. They are neither authentic nor valid. The reason they lack authenticity lies in the processes through which they are derived.
  o The NAAC is based on an inspectorial process. Its reliability suffers from both ends involved in any inspectorial system in our ethos.
  o NIRF’s need arose from India’s poor performance in global ranking systems but the question is if Indian institutions of higher learning were found to be generally too poor to be noticed globally, how would they get any better if ranked among themselves

• Roots of Vulnerability
  o Currently there is a dominant ideology of commercialisation of knowledge and teaching.
  o Higher education is not leading to graduates entering the work sector as the education is not in sync with the needs of the companies.

Link: https://youtu.be/45VSRvgQnWl

6. TACKLING INFANT MORTALITY

Introduction:
• The death toll of infants at the JK Lon Hospital in Rajasthan’s Kota has reached 110 in the past 36 days. In Gujarat the State run civil hospitals in Rajkot and Ahmedabad witnessed death of 134 and 85 infants respectively in the month of December, 2019.
• Death of children under the age of 1 is measured by Infant Mortality Rate which is the number of deaths per 1000 live births. While Rajasthan’s Infant Mortality Rate in 2017 stood at 38 which is higher than the national average of 33, this figure for Gujarat was below the national average in 2017 at 30.

Infant mortality
• It is the death of young children under the age of 1.
• This death toll is measured by the infant mortality rate (IMR), which is the number of deaths of children under one year of age per 1000 live births.
• The under-five mortality rate, which is referred to as the child mortality rate, is also an important statistic, considering the infant mortality rate focuses only on children under one year of age.
• In 1990 9 million infants younger than 1 year died globally. Until 2015 this number has almost halved to 4.6 million infant deaths. Over the same period, the infant mortality rate declined from 65 deaths per 1,000 live births to 29 deaths per 1,000.
• Child mortality is the death of a child before the child’s fifth birthday, measured as the under-5 child mortality rate (USMR).
• The child mortality rate, but not the infant mortality rate, was an indicator used to monitor progress towards the Fourth Goal of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations for the year 2015.
• A reduction of the child mortality is now a target in the Sustainable Development Goals for Goal Number 3 (“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”).

www.insightsonindia.com 67 InsightsIAS
• Every day, India witnesses the death of an estimated 2,350 babies aged less than one year.
• Among them, an average 172 are from Rajasthan and 98 from Gujarat.
• India has the most child deaths in the world.
• The infant mortality rate (IMR) in the country currently stands at 33 per 1,000 live births.
• India’s IMR remained worse than that of Nepal (28), Bangladesh (27), Bhutan (26), Sri Lanka (8) and China (8).
• The problem remains severe in the northern Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Assam and Uttar Pradesh.

Forms of infant mortality:
• Perinatal mortality is late fetal death (22 weeks gestation to birth), or death of a newborn up to one week postpartum.
• Neonatal mortality is newborn death occurring within 28 days postpartum. Neonatal death is often attributed to inadequate access to basic medical care, during pregnancy and after delivery. This accounts for 40–60% of infant mortality in developing countries.
• Postneonatal mortality is the death of children aged 29 days to one year. The major contributors to postneonatal death are malnutrition, infectious disease, troubled pregnancy, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and problems with the home environment.

Why India is not able to reduce new born mortality rate:
• Premature birth. Premature births counts for over 80% of newborn deaths.
• Complications like asphyxia during delivery. Due to lack of institutionalisation of births and lack of health infrastructure in rural areas.
  o Complications during labour and delivery as well as infections like sepsis, meningitis and pneumonia are also major contributors
• Female literacy rates are less leading to less awareness regarding nutrition needed.
  o Babies born to mothers with no education face nearly twice the risk of early death as babies whose mothers have at least a secondary education
  o Prevalence of child marriages, anaemia among young women and a lack of focus on adolescent sanitation, all of which impact child death rates.
  o With the substantial unmet need of contraception nearly a quarter of married adolescents (15–19 years) and low contraception use by them in general, girls in this age band are at a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, HIV and unintended and unplanned pregnancies. All these impact the mortality rate.
• Shortage of properly trained health workers and midwives:
  o Also the large reproductive population of 2.6 crore remains bereft of care during the critical phases of pregnancy
• Babies born to the poorest families are 40 per cent more likely to die than those who are born to the least poor
• The absence of steps to propagate basic healthy practices relating to breast feeding and immunisation.
• Part of the reason is that in the last two decades, efforts to tackle the problem were not as well funded as HIV and AIDS prevention.

India’s Per capita spending on health:
• Per capita spending on health in the Budget in India is Rs.458 (Rs.61,398 crore/ 134 crore, which is the population).
• The S. spends $10,224 per capita on healthcare per year (2017 data).
• A comparison between two large democracies is telling the U.S.’s health expenditure is 18% of GDP, while India’s is still under 1.2%.
• US Budget spending per capita on health in the U.S. is therefore $3,150 ($1.04 trillion/ 330 million, the population). Adjusting for purchasing power parity, this is about $30, one-hundredth of the U.S.
• Yet, the $4,000-$5,000 per capita spending in other OECD countries is not comparable with India’s dismal per capita health expenditure.
• The rate of growth in U.S. expenditure has slowed in the last decade, in line with other comparable nations.
Solutions:

- Paying attention to the mother’s health during pregnancy and ensuring she delivers in a hospital attended by trained doctors or midwives. India has programmes such as the Janani Suraksha Yojana for this, but must expand its reach in laggard States like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- Each State will have to identify a specific goal to meet the target. These could be enhanced coverage of health and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene which can prevent pneumonia and diarrhoea.
  - Inexpensive lifesaving treatments remain inaccessible to a vast majority of Indian children, and especially those in the poorest groups within the country. All these challenges can only be met by State intervention.
- It is also equally important to forge interlinkages and package different interventions at various levels like linking child survival to reproductive health, family planning, and maternal health
- In addition to focusing attention to addressing disparities within States and among regions, there is an urgent need to bring health and child services under universal health coverage with a focus on special requirements of vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Universalisation of maternal health and child services, which includes special newborn care, skilled delivery, immunisation and management of diarrhoea, need to be effectively implemented if India is to achieve the high goals of reducing child deaths.
- To lower neonatal deaths, India needs to strengthen mother and newborn health services, including home-based care by health workers, promoting breastfeeding, treating underweight babies, keeping the mother healthy, preventing early marriage and reducing malnutrition in adolescent girls.
- More than 80 per cent of newborn deaths can be saved with:
  - Provide clean water, disinfectants
  - Breastfeeding within the first hour
  - Good nutrition

Conclusion:

- The Central and State governments have introduced several innovations in the healthcare sector in recent times, in line with India’s relentless pursuit of reforms.
- However, while the government’s goal is to increase public health spending to 2.5% of GDP, health spending is only 1.15-1.5% of GDP.
- Since a major innovation in universal healthcare, Ayushman Bharat, is being rolled out, it must be matched with a quantum leap in funding. Only if we invest more for the long-term health of the nation will there be a similar rise in GDP.
- To reach its target, the government should increase funding for health by 20-25% every year for the next five years or more.

Link: https://youtu.be/B4R6q40w1xw

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**ECONOMY**

**1. NATIONAL STATISTICAL COMMISSION BILL**

Introduction:

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has sought comments and suggestions on the Draft National Statistical Commission Bill 2019 to make data collection more transparent and reliable.
- The present draft NSC Bill proposes to establish a National Statistical Commission as the nodal and autonomous body for core statistical activities for the country, to evolve, monitor and enforce priorities and standards and to ensure coordination.

Draft National Statistical Commission Bill, 2019:

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation published the Draft National Statistical Commission Bill, 2019 for public comments. The draft Bill seeks to constitute a National Statistical Commission (NSC) as the nodal regulatory body for all principal statistical activities of the country. Key features include:

- **Constitution of National Statistical Commission:** The draft Bill sets up the National Statistical Commission (NSC). The NSC will consist of nine members. These include: (i) the Chairperson, (ii) five full time members, (iii) the Deputy Governor, RBI, (iv) the Chief Statistician of India, and (v) the Chief Economic Advisor, Ministry
of Finance. The Chairperson and the five full time members of the NSC will be appointed by the centre. These appointments will be based on the recommendations of a Search Committee constituted by the central government.

- **Functions of the National Statistical Commission:** The NSC will advise central and state governments, courts and tribunals on matters relating to government statistics. These include evolving national policies, legislative measures, and laying standards for statistical concepts and methodologies. It will maintain government statistics data for public distribution.

- **Statistical audit:** The draft Bill establishes the National Statistical Audit and Assessment Organization within the NSC. This division will conduct periodic statistical audit of any statistical survey being conducted by a government agency. It will be headed by the Chief Statistical Auditor, appointed by the central government.

- **National Statistical Fund:** The draft Bill constitutes the National Statistical Fund. This fund shall include resources received by the NSC through government grants, fees and charges, and any other sources decided by the central government. The fund can be used to pay salaries, allowances and other remuneration to the members, among others.

- **Inquiries, offences and penalties:** The NSC has the power to warn, caution or censure a government agency if: (i) it does not comply with the standards of statistical ethics, or (ii) any person engaged in government statistics commits professional misconduct, makes a false or misleading statement or material omission in any information furnished to the NSC.

**Evolution of National Statistics Commission:**

- It is based on the recommendations of Rangarajan Commission, which reviewed the Indian Statistical System in 2001.
- It is supposed to act as a nodal and empowered body for all core statistical activities of the country. It will also ensure statistical coordination among the different agencies involved.
- The mandate is to evolve policies, priorities and standards in statistical matters.
- It is to have chairperson and four members. CEO, NITI Aayog is the Ex-officio Member and Chief Statistician of India and Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation is the Secretary to the National Statistical Commission.

**Recent controversies regarding data anomalies:**

- Over the past few months, Indian national statistics and the organisations that administer them have faced a volley of criticism.
- Two independent members of the National Statistical Commission resigned in protest, over alleged suppression of economic data by the government.
- More recently, amidst growing scepticism regarding India’s official statistics, more than a hundred scholars comprising economists and social scientists released a statement decrying the fall in standards of institutional independence, suggesting political interference as the cause.
- **Kaushik Basu,** a former chief economist of the World Bank, also recently regret strongly the declining credibility of India’s official statistics.

**How important is this bill?**

- There was a long felt need of an apex body to handle statistics.
- We need structural data collection for many government oriented policy interventions.
- Today, data is a new oil and if not collected in a structural fashion the desired conclusion would be difficult to reach.
- The data available at one department or ministry is not available for other departments.
- This bill will make data available for other departments whenever needed.
- Data need statistical, sound and robust approach which is globally required and this bill will fill up those gaps.

**How this bill will provide credible data?**

- By providing statutory status and giving it adequate autonomy and authority and thus validating in due course will be a good idea.
- Data is the same but now it will have legal backing.
• All things will be set up to rest with the legal backing.
• Our data standard will be to the level of global standards.

Importance of improving the Statistical system:
• The Indian National Sample Survey is respected the world over. Not just because of its size, but also for its sample design, that uses methods make perfect by some of the world’s most reputed statisticians.
• This distinguished history, which India can claim with pride, makes the recent undermining of the credibility of our statistical output especially regrettable.
• We can, however, ensure that when we look back on this several years from now, it represents an anomaly rather than a lasting, irreparable loss of institutional credibility.
• It is also imperative to use the scientific methods for data collection and estimation and their timely dissemination, which form vital public services.
• India, with its vastness and complexities, poses tremendous challenges for data collection.
• The dualistic nature of the economy means a large unorganised sector coexists with the organised sector that the data collection systems are unable to fully cover.

Link: https://youtu.be/sFYz_fvVLic

2. RBI’S OPERATION TWIST

Introduction:
• The Reserve Bank of India will conduct a simultaneous sale and purchase of bonds, in a move seen by market participants as an attempt to bring longer-term yields lower. It is the first time the RBI has conducted a special open market operation (OMO) of this kind, similar to the ‘Operation Twist’ carried out in the United States near the start of the decade. Bond yields have been rising since the RBI unexpectedly left its key repo rate unchanged, even as it slashed its forecast for economic growth to its lowest in over a decade.
• The RBI said it will buy 100 billion rupees’ worth of the current benchmark 10-year bond while selling four bonds maturing in 2020 for an equivalent amount. The central bank said it had decided to conduct the special OMO after reviewing the liquidity & market situation and assessing financial conditions.

Operation Twist:
• It is the new buzz word in the money market ever since the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) made an announcement for the simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities on 19 December of a similar amount of Rs 10,000 crore. The same has been replicated on 26 December and 2 January with the auctions to take place
• This an unusual step by the RBI to flatten the yields curves.
• An open market operation (OMO) is where the RBI buys and sells securities to infuse or absorb liquidity in the system.
• But when the RBI does the same on both sides, it is different when the amounts are the same which means that overall liquidity does not get influenced at all.
• But what is done is that the RBI is buying the benchmark 6.45 percent 2029 paper which is the 10 year one. On the other hand, it sells various papers in the 2020 bracket which is less than one year.
• Now what happens is that when the RBI buys 10 years paper, the demand for the same goes up leading to an increase in price or decline in yields. The same happens when it sells short-term paper which banks buy that, in turn, increases the yield as supply increases reducing thus the prices.
• This attempt to sell short term and buy long term is essentially aimed at helping out the government to meet its borrowing requirement at a slight lower cost.
• Operation Twist normally leads to lower longer-term yields, which will help boost the economy by making loans less expensive for those looking to buy homes, cars and finance projects, while saving becomes less desirable because it doesn’t pay as much interest

Why Operation Twist is conducted?
• If there is a shortfall in long term investment in the country and the investors are reluctant to do long term investment in the economy, then the government tries to reduce the interest rate for the long term investment ventures.
• These long term investment venture includes; purchase of land/house, investment in infrastructure and securities, etc.
• The long-term investment will create jobs in the country which would lead to an increase in the demand for other products. So due to a positive atmosphere in the country, the holistic development of the entire country would take place

Why is this being done now?
• The idea is to lower the long-term yields to something more tuned to the RBI.
• At the time of the first simultaneous OMO announced, the 10-year yield was 6.75 percent and after the two rounds of Operation Twist has come down to 6.51 percent.
• Clearly the RBI is not satisfied and is going in for the third round too. It is also possible that this operation can continue until such time the yields come down to the level with which the RBI is satisfied. While the 2020 paper yields have not quite increased to the same extent, the overall differential has come down. The latest auction announced also involves 4 and 6 years paper purchase along with the 10 years paper.
• At the theoretical level, such operations are influencing the yield curve which should reflect the differential in the tenures as well as move all rates down as the repo rate has been reduced by the RBI by 135 bps last year.
• As the transmission to the market did not take place in the last policy when the repo rate was reduced in October, Operation Twist has been used to guide rates.

Benefits of Operation Twist
• The interest rate for the long term investment will come down so the investor will take more loans for long term investments.
• Address the worries of lack of transmission of repo rate cuts.
• The flow of money will increase in the country, and aggregate demand in all sectors of the economy will boost.
• The overall increase in productive activities will further create jobs in the economy.

How does it affect investors?
• Fixed income investors with higher exposure to long term debt will benefit from easing yield of long-term bonds.
• Consumers/borrowers will also profit from ‘Operation Twist’ as the retail loans will now get cheaper.
• Previously banks were forced to price their retail loans at higher rates owing to high yields on long-term government borrowings.
• Cheaper retail loans mean a boost in consumption and spending in the economy which in turn will revive growth.

Link: https://youtu.be/wnL8lt2qt1c

3. EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

Introduction:
• The government is set to slash the requirements & time taken for starting a new business from 10 processes and 18 days to five processes and as many days. Ten key services, including name reservation, incorporation as well as registration for various taxes such as goods and services tax, will soon be available via two forms instead of multiple individual ones at present.

Companies soon will be able to start business in 5 days with minimal processes:
• The government is set to slash the requirements & time taken for starting a new business from 10 process and 18 days to five processes and as many days.
• Ten key services, including name reservation, incorporation as well as registration for various taxes such as goods and services tax, will soon be available via two forms instead of multiple individual ones at present.
• The Ministry of Corporate Affairs will in a month unveil the two new forms — ‘Spice Plus’ and ‘Agile Pro’ — which will replace six forms currently required to avail of these services.
• These two forms will provide access to GSTIN, PAN, TAN, ESIC, EPFO, DIN, bank accounts and professional tax.
• The new forms will be web-based and much easier to use. The Spice Plus (incorporation form) will allow you to apply for name and incorporation in the same form besides other paservices,” the official said. Businesses will now have to register with the Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) and Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) at the time of incorporation, the official said. Inclusion of director identification number (DIN) and registration for professional tax along with registrations of permanent account number (PAN), tax deduction and collection account number (TAN) and GST identification number (GSTIN) at the time of incorporation would greatly improve the ease of setting up a business.

• World Bank’s latest Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) report has measured the number of days required to set up a business in India at 18, and the number of processes at 10.

• On the World Bank’s list, India is ranked 136th out of 190 economies in the category of ease of starting a business.

• Ease of Starting a business is just starting of ease of doing business.

• Improving ease of doing business has been a key agenda of the government, with India climbing 14 ranks to 63rd in the latest rankings.

• FICCI study says that large business have to follow 1900 rules and regulations and if clubbed it with states it will be 6000 rules.

• The framework has to percolate down at state level too.

How to better our Ease of Doing business ranking further?

• From 142 to 63, it is a good jump but far away from our real potential.

• As many nations have cut down on procedures on “starting a business” to improve their rankings, India needs to make drastic changes to rank higher.

• Coordination across all departments and between the Centre, the States and local level to get the implementation right and fast.

• It is imperative to create awareness of the reforms introduced so that the enterprises can benefit from it.

• Regular feedback on reforms undertaken, and ensure the reforms are implemented at the ground level.

• Bureaucracy must continue to be an active agent of process re-engineering.

• To secure changes in the remaining areas will require new laws, online systems and deepening the investment.

• India’s ambition must be to become the easiest and simplest place for investors to do business in.

Problems which startups face in India:

• Both unease of business and high cost have implications on sustainability and startups.

• Many Indian founders have a technical background and lack business knowledge.

• Finding the right investor and raising funds is difficult • Information gap exists between those who provide solutions and those who are supposed to use them.

• Startups are at a disadvantage compared to large companies in terms of market penetration

• For many job-seekers, joining a startup as an employee is not an attractive career option, due to the inherent risk that the startup might fail.

• The present regulatory framework in which startups operate is widely seen as difficult, inefficient and unpredictable.

• The tax policy and its enforcement are considered unfriendly for startups.

• There is still a lack of clarity on how GST works and which items are applicable as tax base or not.

How to develop manufacturing sector?

• Investor’s confidence must be improved.

• Improving physical infrastructure from transport systems to the power sector is essential.

• Importance should be given to electronic sector.

• Improve access to finance for smaller enterprises.

• Making firm entry and exit easier.

• Inverted duty structure.

• Enhancing the flexibility of labour regulations.

• Low-cost manufacturing is important for India.
• If India has to raise its share of manufacturing in GDP to around 25%, industry will have to significantly step up its R&D expenditure. This must be addressed by the new industrial policy.
• The quantum of value addition has to be increased at all levels. Larger the value addition, greater the positive externalities.
• FDI policy requires a review to ensure that it facilitates greater technology transfer, leverages strategic linkages and innovation.
• Aim for higher job creation in the formal sector and performance linked tax incentives.
• Attractive remuneration to motivate people to join the manufacturing sector.
• Need to have a curriculum that focuses on soft-skills and value-based training that meets the demands of the industry.

What are the factors to attract foreign investment?
• Regulatory framework policy needs to be predictable
• Wage Rates
• Labour skills
• Tax rates
• Transport and Infrastructure
• Size of economy and its potential for growth
• Political stability
• Existence of commodities
• Exchange rate
• Access to free trade areas

Link: https://youtu.be/OzTZUzy9kVI

4. PRIVATE TRAINS IN INDIA

Introduction:
• NITI Aayog and Indian Railways have come out with a discussion paper for running 150 trains on 100 routes by private operators. The recommendations of the high powered committee envisaging an investment of 22500 crore rupees have been put in public domain for stakeholder consultations. The 100 identified routes which include Mumbai Central – New Delhi, Patna – New Delhi, Howrah- Chennai and Lucknow-Jammu Tawi etc. have been split in to 10-12 clusters.
• As per the report the private operator will have the right to collect market linked fares and will be provided flexibility of class composition and halts. The aim for this ove is said to ensure world class service experience to passengers, reduce supply demand deficit and introduce modern technology

Benefits of private investment in Railways:
• Opens opportunity for returns from investment in Rail Projects.
• Improved Infrastructure – It will lead to better infrastructure which in turn would lead to improved amenities for travelers.
• People’s expectation has changed and we need to cope up with those so private investment is the way for providing higher services.
• Lesser Accidents – Because private ownership is synonymous with better maintenance, supporters of privatisation feel that it will reduce the number of accidents, thus resulting in safe travel and higher monetary savings in the long run.
• Rails will remain the same, the signaling will remain the same but interface with public and rolling stock have a substantial change.
• Augmentation of railway infrastructure and decongestion of the railways.
• Ensure timely availability of Rail Infrastructure to the beneficiaries viz. Port, Industry and States.
• Better maintenance and efficiency in implementation of projects.
• It leads to simplification of cost recovery for the money spent by the government in setting up the infrastructure. It would be profitable as the government would charge the operator
• The move would foster competition and hence lead to overall betterment in the quality of services.
Challenges:

- Absence of independent regulator in the railway sector. In the absence there are chances of litigation or other issues as cropped up in the road sector.
- Government has water, river, health and education to look for and therefore limited finance available for railways.
- **Coverage Limited to Lucrative Sectors:** An advantage of Indian Railways being government-owned is that it provides nation-wide connectivity irrespective of profit. This would not be possible with privatisation since routes which are less popular will be eliminated, thus having a negative impact on connectivity. It will also render some parts of the country virtually inaccessible and omit them from the process of development.
- **No past experience in the PPP model** for the implementation of projects for railways.
- **Fares:** Given that a private enterprise runs on profit, it is but natural to assume that the easiest way of accruing profits in Indian Railways would be to hike fares, thus rendering the service out of reach for lower income groups.
- **Trade Unions.**
- **Affects socio-economic development:** This will defeat the entire purpose of the system which is meant to serve the entire population of the country irrespective of the level of income
- **Accountability:** Private companies are unpredictable in their dealings and do not share their governance secrets with the world at large. In such a scenario it would be difficult to pin the accountability on a particular entity, should there be a discrepancy.

Way Forward:

- Privatisation of railways operations will require a new institutional framework where infrastructure will remain as a government’s monopoly while the rest would be a market of service providers.
- It is important to modernize the railways, so measures must be taken to reimburse the social costs speedily so that resources of the railways is better allocated and facilities are upgraded from time to time.
- **Core Railways functions** can be Corporatized rather than privatized.
- Corporatization refers to the restructuring or transformation of a state-owned asset or organization into a corporation. These organizations typically have a board of directors, management, and shareholders.
- However, unlike publicly traded companies, the government is the company’s only shareholder, and the shares in the company are not publicly traded.
- The peripheral function of railways (cleanliness, ticket disposal, traveller’s amenities), must be privatized

Link: [https://youtu.be/gPUwxxplU6c](https://youtu.be/gPUwxxplU6c)

### 5. ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN INDIA

**Introduction:**

- The government has approved a 10,000 crores programme under the ‘Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India II for promotion of Electric Mobility in the country. The main objective of the scheme is to encourage Faster adoption of Electric and hybrid vehicle by way of offering upfront Incentive on purchase of Electric vehicles and also by way of establishing a necessary charging Infrastructure for electric vehicles. The scheme will help in addressing the issue of environmental pollution and fuel security. The GST reduction for electric vehicles from 12% to 5%. Finance Minister announced additional income tax reduction of 1.5 lakh rupees on loans taken. Government is on the way to make India a global manufacturing hub in electric vehicles.

**Infrastructure’s need:**

- There is a strong believe that electric infrastructure will have a massive scale going forward.
- In fact, Ather has more than 30 charging stations in Bengaluru while the other companies in this space are yet to foray into support infrastructure.
- As of today, there are only 250 charging stations in the country and they mostly catering to three-wheelers. To make this transition viable, infrastructure is a key factor.
• **SIAM** (Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers) the nodal body for Indian automobile industry reports that the country currently sells close to 750,000 electric vehicles a year, a majority of these are three wheelers, which sold 6,30,000 units, with 1,26,000 of these three-wheelers.

• A **longer-term policy** priority has to be the **setting up of lithium battery production and solar charging infrastructure** of a scale that matches the ambition. The Centre has accepted some of the demands of the auto industry to popularise EVs.

• The government should provide **incentives for CNG vehicles** and should also come out with a **scrappage plan for vehicles** to incentivise customers to buy new vehicles.

**Government Initiatives:**

• The government aims to see 6 million electric and hybrid vehicles on the roads by 2020 under the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020.

• Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India (FAME India Scheme) for improving electric mobility in India.

• The GST reduction for electric vehicles from 12% to 5%.

• The Union power ministry categorized charging of batteries as a service, which will help charging stations operate without licences.

• Implementation of smart cities would also boost the growth of electric vehicles.

**Concerns:**

• The Indian electric vehicle (EV) market currently has one of the **lowest penetration rates** in the world.

• Capital costs are high and the payoff is uncertain.

• Affordability of e-vehicles (EVs) and the range they can cover on a single battery charge.

• The Indian EV industry has been hit hard due to rupee’s dramatic depreciation in recent months.

• Local production of inputs for EVs is at just about 35% of total input production.

• The production will be severely affected in terms of production costs.

• The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid) and Electric Vehicles (Fame) framework has been extended repeatedly.

• **An uncertain policy environment and the lack of supporting infrastructure** are major roadblocks.

• India’s limited ability to manufacture cost effective batteries.

• India does not have any known reserves of lithium and cobalt, which makes it dependent on imports of lithium-ion batteries from Japan and China.

• High rate of GST on EVs when government is trying to promote EVs.

• **Lack of attention** on building charging infrastructure.

**Way Forward:**

• For EVs to contribute effectively, we need commensurate efforts in **developing an entire ecosystem**.

• Need to shift the focus from subsidizing vehicles to subsidizing batteries because batteries make up 50% of EV costs.

• Increasing focus on **incentivizing electric two-wheelers** because two-wheelers account for 76% of the vehicles in the country and consume most of the fuel.

• A wide network of charging stations is imminent for attracting investment.

• Work places in tech parks, Public bus depots, and Multiplexes are the potential places where charging points could be installed. In Bangalore, some malls have charging points in parking lots.

• Corporates could **invest in charging stations** as Corporate Social Responsibility compliances.

• Addressing technical concerns like AC versus DC charging stations, handling of peak demand, grid stability etc.

• **Private investment in battery** manufacturing plants and developing low cost production technology is needed.

• India is highly dependent on thermal sources, which account for about 65% of current capacity. As EV adoption increases, so should the contribution of renewables.

• Need for a **policy roadmap on electric vehicles** so that investments can be planned.

• Acquiring (**lithium fields** in Bolivia, Australia, and Chile could become as important as buying oil fields as India needs raw material to make batteries for electric vehicles.)
• Providing waiver of road tax and registration fees, GST refunds and free parking spaces for EVs.

• Conclusion:
  • The budgetary measures will have an immediate impact on the pricing of electric vehicles and bring in more models, but it will take a sustained effort by the Centre, in partnership with State governments, to enable a fast rollout of charging infrastructure.
  • In a bold and far-reaching move, India’s electric vehicle goals are set to flourish if NITI Aayog has its way.
  • The government think tank moved a Cabinet note to address e-mobility targets for a greener India, which emphasises on the sale of only electric vehicles by the year 2030.
  • This would go a long way in addressing India’s clean fuel ideology and reduce high pollution levels.
  • The government said it is planning to set up a National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage to bring clean and connected technologies that can usher in an era of shared and sustainable EV infrastructure in the country.

Link: https://youtu.be/6OXfDWLXvwI

SCIENCE & TECH

1. INDIA’S SOLAR MISSION- ADITYA

Introduction:
• If 2019 was all about the Moon for Indian space agency ISRO, year 2020 could well be about the Sun. In his Mann Ki Baat address on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke about the ISRO’s plans to launch its first Sun Mission Aditya L1. This ambitious plan of the Indian Space Research Organisation will not only put India in a very elite league, but also at the very frontier of cutting edge research.
  • With Aditya L1, ISRO will take a huge step forward in the study of solar corona. The solar Corona is the outermost part of the Sun’s atmosphere. It is usually hidden by the bright light of the Sun’s surface. The 400 KG-Class Aditya L1 will carry six scientific payloads that will be inserted in a halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 or L1, Incidentally L1 is 1.5 million kilometres from the Earth.

Aditya-1 mission:
• The Aditya-1 mission was conceived as a 400kg class satellite carrying one payload, the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC) and was planned to launch in a 800 km low earth orbit.
  • A Satellite placed in the halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system has the major advantage of continuously viewing the Sun without any occultation/ eclipses.
  • Therefore, the Aditya-1 mission has now been revised to “Aditya-L1 mission” and will be inserted in a halo orbit around the L1, which is 1.5 million km from the Earth. The satellite carries additional six payloads with enhanced science scope and objectives.
  • The project is approved and the satellite will be launched during mid 2020 timeframe by PSLV-XL from Sriharikota.
  • Aditya-1 was meant to observe only the solar corona. The outer layers of the Sun, extending to thousands of km above the disc (photosphere) is termed as the corona. It has a temperature of more than a million degree Kelvin which is much higher than the solar disc temperature of around 6000K. How the corona gets heated to such high temperatures is still an unanswered question in solar physics.
  • Aditya-L1 with additional experiments can now provide observations of Sun’s Corona (soft and hard X-ray, Emission lines in the visible and NIR), Chromosphere (UV) and photosphere (broadband filters).
  • In addition, particle payloads will study the particle flux emanating from the Sun and reaching the L1 orbit, and the magnetometer payload will measure the variation in magnetic field strength at the halo orbit around L1. These payloads have to be placed outside the interference from the Earth’s magnetic field and could not have been useful in the low earth orbit.

What are Lagrangian points and halo orbit?
• Lagrangian points are the locations in space where the combined gravitational pull of two large masses roughly balance each other. Any small mass placed at that location will remain at constant distances relative to the large masses. There are five such points in Sun-Earth system and they are denoted as L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5. A halo orbit is a periodic three-dimensional orbit near the L1, L2 or L3
Why do we study the sun and the solar wind?

- The sun is the only star we can study up close. By studying this star we live with, we learn more about stars throughout the universe.
- The sun is a source of light and heat for life on Earth. The more we know about it, the more we can understand how life on Earth developed.
- The sun also affects Earth in less familiar ways. It is the source of the solar wind; a flow of ionized gases from the sun that streams past Earth at speeds of more than 500 km per second (a million miles per hour).
- Disturbances in the solar wind shake Earth’s magnetic field and pump energy into the radiation belts, part of a set of changes in near-Earth space known as space weather.
- Space weather can change the orbits of satellites, shorten their lifetimes, or interfere with onboard electronics. The more we learn about what causes space weather – and how to predict it – the more we can protect the satellites we depend on.
- The solar wind dominates the space environment. As we send spacecraft and astronauts further and further from home, we must understand this space environment just as early seafarers needed to understand the ocean.

Solar Missions:

- Genesis (2001-04)- Genesis was the first spacecraft to capture a sample of the solar wind, or the constant stream of particles that emanate from our sun.
- Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) (1995-present)- SOHO is a collaboration between the European Space Agency (ESA) and NASA to study the sun, observing all the way from its core out to the solar wind.
- Transition Region and Coronal Explorer (TRACE) (1998-2010)- TRACE’s major goal was to better understand how magnetic fields and plasma (superheated gas) act in the sun’s environment.
- Ulysses (1990-2009)- Ulysses, a joint mission between NASA and ESA, was designed to look at the heliosphere, which is the part of space under the influence of the sun.
- Yohkoh (1991-2001)- Yohkoh (also known as Solar-A) was a Japanese-led spacecraft from the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science, the former name of Japan’s space agency. The Earth-orbiting spacecraft imaged the sun in X-rays and with spectrometry.
- Hinode (2006-present)- Japan’s Hinode satellite (also known as Solar-B) focuses on the solar corona, the extremely hot upper atmosphere of the sun.
- Solar Terrestrial Relations Observatory (STEREO) (2006-present)- STEREO was launched with two spacecraft: STEREO-Ahead (which orbits the sun ahead of Earth in its orbit) and STEREO-Behind (which orbits the sun behind Earth). Its achievements include showing the three-dimensional structure of CMEs and showing how matter and energy flow to Earth
- Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO) (2010-present)- The major goal of SDO is to better understand solar activity.
- Interface Region Imaging Spectrograph (2013-present)- IRIS focuses on the lower levels of the sun’s atmosphere, which is a region that is called the interface region.

ISRO’s Success Story: 2019

- Microsat-R– Microsat-R, an imaging satellite was successfully injected into intended orbit of 274 km by PSLV-C44 on January 24, 2019.
- GSAT-31– India’s telecommunication satellite, GSAT-31 was successfully launched on February 06, 2019 from Kourou launch base, French Guiana by Ariane-5 VA-247. The satellite provides Indian mainland and island coverage.
- EMISAT– EMISAT is a satellite built around ISRO’s Mini Satellite-2 bus weighing about 436 kg. The satellite was successfully placed in its intended sun-synchronous polar orbit of 748 km height by PSLV-C45 on April 01, 2019. The satellite is intended for electromagnetic spectrum measurement.
- RISAT-2B– RISAT-2B is radar imaging earth observation satellite developed by ISRO.
- Chandrayaan 2– Chandrayaan-2 mission is a highly complex mission, which represents a significant technological leap compared to the previous missions of ISRO. It comprised an Orbiter, Lander and Rover to explore the unexplored South Pole of the Moon.
- Cartosat-3– Cartosat-3 satellite is a third generation agile advanced satellite having high resolution imaging capability.
• RISAT-2BR1—RISAT-2BR1 is radar imaging earth observation satellite. The satellite will provide services in the field of Agriculture, Forestry and Disaster Management.

Link: https://youtu.be/wEGAly_oekU

2. CORONAVIRUS

Introduction:

- China is struggling to contain the spread of a new virus that has claimed at least six lives so far since 31st December. Almost 300 people have been hospitalised. Worryingly enough doctors have confirmed that the infection is spreading rapidly among humans. The outbreak has triggered memories of SARS or severe acute respiratory syndrome, SARS originated in China in 2002, By 2003 it infected more than 8,000 people and killed 774 in a pandemic that ripped through Asia. The present virus is called the Coronavirus. It was first detected in Wuhan city that has cancelled the upcoming Lunar New Year celebrations, where hundreds of thousands of people were expected to attend. Tour agencies have also been banned from taking groups out of Wuhan, even as Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered resolute efforts to curb the spread of the virus. With one patient infecting as many as 14 medical staff in just one hospital, Chinese doctors believe the disease is spreading far more easily than it was thought previously.
- A coronavirus is a kind of common virus that causes an infection in your nose, sinuses, or upper throat.
- Most coronaviruses are not dangerous. Some types of them are serious, though. About 858 people have died from Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), which first appeared in 2012 in Saudi Arabia and then in other countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe.
- In April 2014, the first American was hospitalized for MERS in Indiana and another case was reported in Florida. Both had just returned from Saudi Arabia.
- In May 2015, there was an outbreak of MERS in Korea, which was the largest outbreak outside of the Arabian Peninsula.
- In 2003, 774 people died from a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak. As of 2015, there were no further reports of cases of SARS. MERS and SARS are types of coronaviruses.
- By late January, there were 300 confirmed cases in China and a death count that was still in the single digits, but rising. And despite airport screenings, a traveler had brought the first case to the U.S.
- Often a coronavirus causes upper respiratory infection symptoms like a stuffy nose, cough, and sore throat. You can treat them with rest and over-the-counter medication. The coronavirus can also cause middle ear infections in children.

Common human coronaviruses

- Common human coronaviruses, including types 229E, NL63, OC43, and HKU1, usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses, like the common cold. Most people get infected with these viruses at some point in their lives.
What are the symptoms of coronavirus infections?

- The symptoms depend on the type of coronavirus and how serious the infection is. If you have a mild to moderate upper-respiratory infection such as the common cold, your symptoms may include:
  - Runny nose
  - Headache
  - Cough
  - Sore throat
  - Fever
  - Not feeling well overall

- Some coronaviruses can cause severe symptoms. The infections may turn into bronchitis and pneumonia, which cause symptoms such as:
  - Fever, which may be quite high if you have pneumonia
  - Cough with mucus
  - Shortness of breath
  - Chest pain or tightness when you breathe and cough

- Severe infections are more common in people with heart or lung diseases, people with weakened immune systems, infants, and older adults.

Other human coronaviruses

- Two other human coronaviruses, MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV have been known to frequently cause severe symptoms.
- MERS symptoms usually include fever, cough, and shortness of breath which often progress to pneumonia. About 3 or 4 out of every 10 patients reported with MERS have died. MERS cases continue to occur, primarily in the Arabian Peninsula.
- SARS symptoms often included fever, chills, and body aches which usually progressed to pneumonia. No human cases of SARS have been reported anywhere in the world since 2004.

Diagnosis:

- Healthcare provider may order laboratory tests on respiratory specimens and serum (part of your blood) to detect human coronaviruses. Laboratory testing is more likely to be used if you have severe disease or are suspected of having MERS.
- One should tell your healthcare provider about any recent travel or contact with animals. Most MERS-CoV infections have been reported from countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore reporting a travel history or contact with camels or camel products is very important when trying to diagnose MERS.

How to protect yourself?

There are currently no vaccines available to protect you against human coronavirus infection. You may be able to reduce your risk of infection by doing the following:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick

Treatment

There are no specific treatments for illnesses caused by human coronaviruses. Most people with common human coronavirus illness will recover on their own. However, you can do some things to relieve your symptoms:

- Take pain and fever medications (Caution: do not give Aspirin to children)
- Use a room humidifier or take a hot shower to help ease a sore throat and cough

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS):

- Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a severe respiratory illness that mainly involves the upper respiratory tract. It causes fever, coughing, and shortness of breath. About 30% of people who have gotten this illness have died. Some people only have mild symptoms.
- MERS is caused by the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). It was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012 and then spread to many countries. Most cases were spread from people who traveled to the Middle Eastern countries.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS):

- Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a serious form of pneumonia. Infection with the SARS virus causes acute respiratory distress (severe breathing difficulty) and sometimes death.
- Expand Section SARS is caused by a member of the coronavirus family of viruses (the same family that can cause the common cold). It is believed the 2003 epidemic started when the virus spread from small mammals in China.
If you are mildly sick, you should
• drink plenty of liquids
• stay home and rest

2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV):
• It is a virus (more specifically, a coronavirus) identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China.
• Early on, many of the patients in the outbreak in Wuhan, China reportedly had some link to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread.
• However, a growing number of patients reportedly have not had exposure to animal markets, suggesting person-to-person spread is occurring. At this time, it’s unclear how easily or sustainably this virus is spreading between people.

Link: https://youtu.be/D7K70R9vtCs

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. RAISINA DIALOGUE 2020

Introduction:
• The 5th edition of the Raisina Dialogue addressed some of the most challenging issues facing the global community. The three-day event this year is addressed the theme ‘21@20: Navigating the Alpha Century’.
• The Raisina Dialogue 2020 brings together 700 international participants from over 100 countries, Foreign Ministers from 12 countries are taking part in the Dialogue. The Raisina Dialogue is committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community. Structured as a multi-stakeholder discussion, it involves heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, major private sector executives, members of the media and academics.

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.
• The Raisina Dialogue is a multilateral conference committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community.
• Every year, global leaders in policy, business, media and civil society are hosted in New Delhi to discuss cooperation on a wide range of pertinent international policy matters.
• The Dialogue is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, as well as major private sector executives, members of the media and academics.
• This year’s Dialogue titled ‘Navigating the Alpha Century’ is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving heads of states, cabinet ministers and local government officials as well as major private sector executives, members of the media and academics.
• The three-day conclave started on 14th January and ended on 16th January in New Delhi. It brought together 700 international participants out of which 40 per cent of the speakers were women, emphasizing India’s commitment to gender equality.

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:
- 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.

Raisina Dialogue 2016:
- The first Raisina Dialogue was held from March 1–3, 2016.
- Over 100 speakers from over 35 countries attended to speak on the theme, “Asia: Regional and Global Connectivity”.
- The focus of the 2016 conference was on Asia’s physical, economic, human and digital connectivity.
- Panels and discussions explored opportunities and challenges for the region to manage its common spaces, as well as the global partnerships needed to develop common pathways in this century.

Raisina Dialogue 2017:
- In 2017, The Dialogue was held from January 17–19. Held on a larger scale, the conference welcomed over 120 speakers from 65 countries and upwards of 800 participants.
- Attendees discussed the theme, “The New Normal: Multilateralism with Multipolarity”.
- The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, inaugurated the 2017 edition of the Raisina Dialogue.
- Other eminent speakers included the former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai; the former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper; Nepal’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prakash Shara Mahat; the U.K.’s Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs, Boris Johnson; the Diplomatic Adviser to the President of France, Jacques Audibert; the Commander of U.S. Naval Forces, Europe and Africa, Admiral Michelle Howard; the Commander of U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, Jr.; and the Indian Chief of the Army Staff, General Bipin Rawat.

Raisina Dialogue 2018:
- The third edition of The Raisina Dialogue was held at the Taj Diplomatic Enclave in New Delhi, India from January 16–18, 2018.
- The theme for the 2018 Conference is “Managing Disruptive Transitions: Ideas, Institutions and Idioms”.
- This theme is designed to explore the shifting dynamics within the global order; where old relationships need new directions, emerging partnerships face unprecedented constraints and the notions of power and sovereignty are challenged.
- The Dialogue will foster discussion on the role of institutions, the possibility of collective action and successful responses to these modern developments.

Link: https://youtu.be/aTbY-03t3t8

2. SCO SUMMIT 2020

Introduction:
- Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan will be invited to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Heads of Government meeting to be held in India at the end of this year. Invitations will be sent to all the member countries of the SCO for the summit to take place later this year. The SCO has eight members – India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and four observer states – Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia. The official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Raveesh Kumar confirmed that the invitation will be sent out to all SCO members. It will be interesting to see if Prime Minister Khan attends the SCO summit or sends a representative on his behalf. In 2014, former Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif had visited India after an invite for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s swearing-in was sent to all heads of SAARC countries. Since then no Pak prime minister has visited India. India has scrapped all bilateral meetings with Pakistan and has held the neighbouring country responsible for sponsoring terror attacks in Kashmir.
- India will invite Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to attend the 19th council of heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which will be hosted by India later this year.Sources have said
that as per protocol all heads of government would be invited for the event. As per practice, the prime ministers of India and Pakistan and presidents of Russia, China and other countries attend the ‘Heads of State’ meeting. This would be the first high-level meeting of the SCO that would be organised here since India’s admission to the eight-member grouping. India would be writing the letter of invitation addressed to the Prime Minister of Pakistan since he is the head of government. SCO General Secretary, on a visit to New Delhi, “The SCO Heads of Government meeting will be held in India in the second half of autumn. All member-states were very happy with the decision. There is huge potential and India can play a very positive role.”

SCO:

- **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** or SCO is a Eurasian political, economic and security organisation. SCO grew out of **Shanghai Five founded in 1996** with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as its original members.
- After the **disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991**, China has a large number of undecided and disputed borders with many of the countries that became independent then. This saw the formation of Shanghai Five by these nations.
- **Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Five group in June 2011** and the group was henceforth named, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Its charter was signed in June 2002.
- **India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members in June 2017** at a summit in Astana, Kazakhstan.
- **SCO** is the **largest regional organisation in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population** and has become very powerful and influential.

**Members of SCO in 2018:**

- 8 member states: China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- 4 observer states: Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia
- 6 dialogue partners: Armenia, Azerbaizan, Cambodia, Nepal, SriLanka and Turkey

- SCO was initially formed to secure relations about security. Countries were supposed to work together against terrorism, extremism and separatism. **Over the years it has become a comprehensive regional organisation.** Its goals have become more widened.

**Main goals of SCO are:**

- Promoting mutual trust and neighbourliness.
- Promoting cooperation in politics, trade, economy, research, technology and culture.
- Enhancing ties in areas like education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection and healthcare.
- Maintaining and ensuring peace, security and stability in the region.
- Moving towards establishment of democratic, fair and rational international political and economic order.

**Heads of State Council** is supreme decision-making body. It meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters. Heads of Government Council is the second highest body. Meetings are also held at levels of heads of parliament, ministers of foreign affairs, economy, transport, etc.

- **2 permanent bodies of SCO:** SCO secretariat, Beijing and Executive Committee of the Anti-Terrorist Structure, Tashkent.

**SCO’s Significance for India:**

- The invite for Imran Khan has signalled India’s desire to increase its engagement with the organisation.
- The SCO’s significance for India lies in economics and geopolitics with the Eurasian states.
- SCO is a potential platform to advance India’s Connect Central Asia policy.
- The SCO member states occupy the huge landmass adjacent to India’s extended neighbourhood where India has both economic and security imperatives.
- Importance of SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group to stabilise Afghanistan.
- SCO membership provides India a vital counter to some of the other groupings it is a part of.
- The SCO provides the only multilateral platform for India to deal in close proximity with Pakistan and Afghanistan.
Analysis:
- Neither India or Pakistan which have entered SCO in 2017 will like to do anything which may project them as odd man out.
- Pakistan wants to project itself as different to the world and may attend the summit since we have gone ahead and invited them.
- Pakistan’s army even wants the pressure to be brought down because of economic sanctions which it is facing.
- If bilateral meeting on the side if held will be significant.

Challenges for India:
- There are differences on the idea of connectivity being put forth by different SCO members.
- While India has made its opposition to Belt and Road Initiative clear, all other SCO members have embraced the Chinese project.
- Growing closeness of Russia and China.
- India’s bilateral trade with Central Asia and Russia is very low compared to China’s trade with Russia and Central Asia.
- The lack of connectivity has also hampered development of energy ties between the hydrocarbonrich region and India.

Way Forward:
- SCO provides a very good opportunity to India to connect with the leadership of Central Asian countries and that a very big take away.
- India has a good record of economic growth and handling problem which is a problem of other countries which lays foundation to huge foreign investment.
- Increase cooperation between SCO and other multilateral organisations.
- Need to increase economic cooperation among SCO member states.
- Focus on illegal drug trafficking, cooperation in information technology, environment, healthcare and sports.
- Strengthen the fight against terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and organised crime among others.
- Increasing awareness of our shared cultures can help boost tourism.
- If India is not able to exploit the economic potential of the region, it will be a missed opportunity.

Link: https://youtu.be/9d1rU-bY78g

ENVIRONMENT

1. AUSTRALIA FIRE- CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Introduction:
- Wild bushfires have been ravaging Australia for several weeks now. These fires have been especially severe in the New South Wales region. The State declared a week-long state of emergency in response to the escalating disaster. 916 homes have been destroyed this season, 363 more have been damaged. More than 100 fires are still burning in. Seven people died this week, including a firefighter. Australian authorities told people to leave bushfire-affected areas in three states. They fear that conditions could get so extreme that even firefighters may be unable to defend entire towns. Authorities in New South Wales urged people in high risk areas in the Snowy Valley to leave overnight. In Victoria, 28 people are missing in the East Gippsland region, authorities have sent 250,000 text messages to people in affected shires and urged them to evacuate. Both New South Wales and Victoria have given firefighting authorities the power to forcibly relocate people.

Causes of the fires:
- Record-breaking temperatures, extended drought and strong winds have converged to create disastrous fire conditions.
- As a severe heat wave gripped most of the country in mid-December, Australia recorded its hottest day on record, with average highs of 107.4 degrees Fahrenheit, or 41.9 degrees Celsius.
• The heat wave is continuing this week in southeastern Australia, with temperatures expected to reach 105 in Canberra, the capital.
• The extreme heat has followed the driest spring on record.
• Most of New South Wales and Queensland have been experiencing shortfalls in rain since early 2017. The drought has hit the country’s most productive agricultural areas, including some of those now ablaze.

Effect of forest fires on biodiversity:
• 50% of global water and this helps in cooling the Earth.
• Significant source of emitted carbon.
• Contribute to global warming that leads to biodiversity changes.
• At regional and local level will lead to change in biomass stocks, alter hydrological cycle.
• Subsequent effects for marine systems like coral reefs.
• Impact functioning of plant and animal species.
• Smokes from fires reduces photosynthetic activity and can be detrimental to the health of human and animals.
• Increased probability of further burning in subsequent years.
• As dead trees topple to the ground, open up forest to drying by sunlight.
• Consequences of repeated burns is detrimental as it is the key factor in the impoverishment of biodiversity in rainforest ecosystem.
• Replacement of vast areas of forest with grasslands is another negative ecological impact of fires in tropical rain forest.

Australia fires and Climate Change:
• This year a natural weather phenomenon known as the Indian Ocean Dipole has meant a hot, dry spell across the country.
• But the overwhelming scientific consensus is that rising levels of CO2 are warming the planet. And Australia has been getting hotter over recent decades and is expected to continue doing so.
• This year, Australia twice set a new temperature record: an average maximum of 41.9C was recorded on 18 December. That comes on top of a long period of drought.
• Scientists have long warned that this hotter, drier climate will contribute to fires becoming more frequent and more intense.
• The more extreme weather patterns and higher temperatures increase the risk of bushfires and allow them to spread faster and wider.

Impact of Australian Fires:
The impact can be short and long term.
• Fires taking massive toll on wildlife.
• Flames, heat, smoke in habitation having devastating impacts on vertebrates, invertebrates not only killing them directly but also leading to longer term indirect effects like stress, loss of habitat, territories, shelter and food.
• Loss of key organisms in forest ecosystem such as invertebrates, pollinators and decomposers can slow forest recovery rate.
• Vulnerable species may become more threatened and face extinction.
• Experts also say the entire ecosystem of rainforest will be altered.
• Surviving in transformed ecosystem difficult for many species.
• Displacements of territorial birds and mammals.

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) burn. To put that into perspective, the 2019 Amazon rainforest fires burned more than 7 million hectares (about 17.5 million acres), according to Brazilian officials.
• In California, which is known for its deadly wildfires, just over 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres) burned in 2019, and about 404,680 hectares (1 million acres) in 2018.
• A total of 27 people across Australia have died this fire season, including several volunteer firefighters.

How many animals have died?
• About half a billion animals have been affected by the fires across NSW, with millions likely dead — and that’s a conservative estimate.
• That number of total animals affected could be as high as one billion nationwide, according to ecologists from the University of Sydney.
• The figures for NSW include birds, reptiles, and mammals, except bats. It also excludes insects and frogs, so the real sum is almost certain to be higher, the ecologists said.
• Almost a third of koalas in NSW may have been killed in the fires, and a third of their habitat has been destroyed.
• Some species, like koalas, aren’t in any immediate danger of extinction because they are spread out across the country. But others that live in more niche environments with lower populations, including certain types of frogs and birds, could be wiped out entirely if their habitats are hit by the fires.
• These are pretty good estimates based on previous research on population density — but until the fires stop, researchers have no way of surveying just how extensive the damage is, and exactly how many animals have died.

Link: [https://youtu.be/GobQuN2dlGs](https://youtu.be/GobQuN2dlGs)

### 2. ENSURING WATER SECURITY

**Introduction:**
• Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently released the operational guidelines of Jal Jeevan Mission which is centre govt’s initiative to provide Functional Household Tap Connections to every rural household by 2024. Out of 17.87 crore rural households in the country about 14.6 crore which accounts for 81.67 percent are yet to have household tap connections for water.
• The Jal Jeevan Scheme will be implemented through institutional mechanism at four levels – national, state, district and gram panchayat or its sub committees. Women will play a bigger role in this scheme and the paani samitis or the user group will decide about the user fee for sustainability of the scheme.

**Jal Jeevan Mission:**
• The Mission was announced in August 2019
• The chief objective of the Mission is to provide piped water supply (Har Ghar Jal) to all rural and urban households by 2024.
• It also aims to create local infrastructure for rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household waste water for reuse in agriculture.
• The Jal Jeevan Mission is set to be based on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater for agriculture and source sustainability.
• The Jal Jeevan Mission will converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

**Need for and significance of the mission:**
• India has 16% of the world population, but only 4% of freshwater resources. Depleting groundwater level, overexploitation and deteriorating water quality, climate change, etc. are major challenges to provide potable drinking water.
• It is an urgent requirement of water conservation in the country because of the decreasing amount of groundwater level. Therefore, the Jal Jeevan Mission will focus on integrated demand and supply management of water at the local level.
Operational Guidelines for the implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission:

- The new guidelines will emphasize the **critical role of the gram panchayat level paani samiti or village committee** to run and maintain the water supply system in their community and also bring in systems for water use charges.
- The new Mission will underline the need for a clear and definite O&M policy at the state level which will involve a water user charge mechanism by ensuring ‘cost recovery from user groups and thereby avoiding any unwanted burden on public exchequer’.
- JIM envisages a structural change in the provision of drinking water supply services. It will bring in a utility based approach’ centered on ‘service delivery’.
- Such a reform is proposed in the guidelines so as to enable the institutions to function as utilities focusing on services and recover water tariff/ user fee.
- For the implementation of the Mission, institutional arrangements will be made from national to state, district and Gram Panchayat level which will have the the Paani Samiti.
- The village community in fact will be a key and active stakeholder for the Mission. To bring in sense of ownership and pride among rural communities, 5% capital cost contribution towards in-village water supply infrastructure in hilly, forested, and more than 50% SC/ ST dominant population villages, and 10% in the remaining villages is proposed.
- Further, communities will be rewarded by providing 10% of the in-village infrastructure cost of the scheme which will be maintained by them as a revolving fund to meet any unforeseen expenditure due to breakdown, etc.
- Self Help groups and NGOs will be roped in to handhold and facilitate the implementation of in-village infrastructure and community participation process.
- The guidelines, however, also bring in a new paradigm of central funding involving **incentivising performing states**. It is proposed that good performance of the States/ UTs will be incentivized out of the fund not utilized by other States at the fag end of the financial year.
- Time bound completion of schemes taken up under National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) has been proposed. No extension of time or cost escalation will be allowed except for the cost towards retrofitting the same to provide FHTCs.
- No expenditure towards O&M cost of the schemes like electricity charges, salary of regular staff and purchase of land, etc. will be allowed out of Central share. Third party inspection is proposed to be undertaken before making any payment to instill accountability.
- Every village is to prepare a village action plan (VAP) which will be essentially having three components—water source & its maintenance, water supply and grey water management. This plan will feed into the district and state plans.

Reasons for Water Stress and Water Scarcity:

- Water scarcity is the insufficient availability of water resources to the demands of water usage within a region or a country.
- Water Stress is a different thing than water scarcity, it is difficulty in accessing the sources of fresh water for use over a period of time which may result in further depletion of water in the region.
- **Inefficient water management and uneven distribution:** In India, some regions have an excess amount of water for their needs or requirements while some regions are facing droughts or have less amount of water simultaneously.
- **Improper water irrigation:** as we know India is one of the top agricultural countries in the world so they need for the water for irrigation is very high.
- Traditional techniques of the water irrigation resulted in the loss of water due to evaporation, drainage, excess use of groundwater, etc.
- Government several policies to farmers for providing **free electricity and financial support for water extraction** through tube wells and bore wells resulted in the exploitation of water.
- Rapid urbanization, industrialization, population growth, demand for domestic use increases the demand for water in India.
- **Water pollution** in the form of disposal of industrial wastes, domestic wastes into the freshwater bodies like rivers, lakes have resulted in polluting water bodies. Hence eutrophication of surface water along with coastal water will increase.
• The most common reason is that water is not valued in India.
• **Poor water storage:** During the monsoon season the desilting operations of the water bodies, dams, etc are not done at the time affecting the water storage capacity of India.
• Poor legislation on groundwater extraction, political reasons for not valuing water, etc. enhance water scarcity in India.

**Steps need to be taken:**

• First, India needs to reconsider the institutional processes for dissemination of knowledge about water resource management.
• There is a certain amount of danger inherent in the casual manner in which knowledge about water resources is legitimised and consumed, particularly in these days of ‘viral’ information.
• Second, we need to recognise the crisis is not as much of scarcity as of delivery.
• The challenge is to ensure an adequate access to quality water, more so in urban areas where inequities over space and time are acute.
• We need to also realise that with the country’s rapid urbanisation, demand cannot be met by groundwater reserves alone.
  o For instance, according to the Delhi Jal Board estimates, groundwater meets just 10% of Delhi’s drinking water needs. The rest is met by surface water sources, most of it transported from outside Delhi.
• The urban needs, which underpin much reporting on ‘water crises’, need to be met by robust long-term planning and preparation for droughts and other contingencies.
• Cities need to stop the destruction of local water bodies and local tree cover, treat its sewage properly, harvest rainwater, and stop straightening and concretizing the rivers and encroaching on their floodplain.

**Way Forward:**

• India’s priority must be:
  o To make our irrigation and water systems amenable to modern concepts.
  o To complete irrigation and water sector reforms.
  o To implement improved water management, governance and regulation practices.
  o Pricing system for water: For making people use water efficiently
• Bigger program on water efficiency as energy efficiency – Setting standards for water management.
• Ensuring minimal pollution in both urban areas and industry.
• Fixing India’s water crisis will need well balanced policies, meticulous strategy and a massive amount of public participation.
• Sugarcane consumes a disproportionate amount of water and water-stressed regions must make an effort to move away from the crop.
• Comprehensive restructuring of India’s Central Ground Water Board and the Central Water Commission in order to create a new 21st Century management authority.
• Right to water should mean a high priority to drinking water.
• India has so far seen the water sector in terms of irrigation projects or water schemes. We need to balance between our water-needs and that of the river itself.

Link: [https://youtu.be/XI3ebEZwGuA](https://youtu.be/XI3ebEZwGuA)

**3. ALTERNATIVES TO PLASTIC**

**Introduction:**

• Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stressed on the need to find an alternative to Plastic in order to keep the environment safe. Single use plastic was banned in India last year on the occasion of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
• Almost half of the plastic produced in the world is designed to be used only once. There are several alternatives to plastic such as glass, paper, cardboard etc. However several aspects need to be looked in to such as recycling rate, safety, affordability etc
What are single use plastics?

- There is no central and comprehensive definition for single-use plastic, crucial for any ban to be successful.
- Governments currently use various definitions.
- The problems caused by them were recognized in 2007.
- It has been found everywhere right from depth of the oceans to the peaks of Himalayas.
- Single used plastics are used once and thrown away.
- They accumulate in the water bodies and choke the drains which lead to floods.

Common sources of Plastic pollution:

- Merchant ships expel cargo, sewage, used medical equipment, and other types of waste that contain plastic into the ocean.
- The largest ocean-based source of plastic pollution is discarded fishing gear (including traps and nets).
- Continental plastic litter such as Food Wrappers & Containers, Bottles and container caps, Plastic bags, Straws and stirrers etc. enters the ocean largely through storm-water runoff.

Alternatives:

- Although compostable, biodegradable or even edible plastics made from various materials such as bagasse (the residue after extracting juice from sugarcane), corn starch, and grain flour are promoted as alternatives, these currently have limitations of scale and cost.
- In India in the absence of robust testing and certification to verify claims made by producers, spurious biodegradable and compostable plastics are entering the marketplace.
- In January this year, the CPCB said that 12 companies were marketing carry bags and products marked ‘compostable’ without any certification, and asked the respective State Pollution Control Boards to take action on these units.

Solutions to the problem:

- A ban on single use plastic items would have to lay down a comprehensive mechanism to certify the materials marketed as alternatives, and the specific process required to biodegrade or compost them.
- The solutions can be packaging innovation and upscaling waste segregation, collection and transmission.
- Recovering materials from garbage should be a high priority, considering that India is the third highest consumer of materials.
- A movement against plastic waste would have to prioritise the reduction of single use plastic such as multilayer packaging, bread bags, food wrap, and protective packaging. Consumers often have no choice in the matter.
- Municipal and pollution control authorities must also be held accountable for the lapses.

Challenges posed:

- Petroleum-based plastic is not biodegradable and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
- Plastic in oceans and forests are choking flora and fauna. In fact, plastic trash is expected to exceed the fish population in 2050.
- Microplastics have ability to enter food chain with the highest concentration of the pollutants.
- The PWM Rules Amendment, 2018, omitted explicit pricing of plastic bags that had been a feature of the 2016 Rules.
- Waste plastic from packaging of everything from food, cosmetics and groceries to goods delivered by online platforms remains unaddressed.
- The fast moving consumer goods sector that uses large volumes of packaging, posing a higher order challenge.
- Lack of adequate infrastructure for segregation and collection is the key reason for inefficient plastic waste disposal.
- Small producers of plastics are facing the ban, while more organised entities covered by the Extended Producer Responsibility clause continue with business as usual.
- Lack of consultation with stakeholders such as manufacturers of plastics, eateries and citizen groups: This leads to implementation issues and inconvenience to the consumers.
• Exemptions for certain products such as milk pouches and plastic packaging for food items severely weaken the impact of the ban.
• No investment in finding out alternative materials to plug the plastic vacuum: Until people are able to shift to a material which is as light-weight and cheap as plastic, banning plastic will remain a mere customary practice.
• Lack of widespread awareness among citizens about the magnitude of harm caused by single-use plastic: Without citizens ‘buying in’ to a cause, bans only result in creating unregulated underground markets.
• No strategy to offset the massive economic impact: Sweeping bans like the one in Maharashtra are likely to cause massive loss of jobs and disruption of a large part of the economy dependent on the production and use of plastic.

Way forward:
• Promote alternatives like cotton, khadi bags and bio-degradable plastics.
• Provide economic incentives to encourage the uptake of eco-friendly and fit-for-purpose alternatives that do not cause more harm. Support can include tax rebates, research and development funds, technology incubation, public-private partnerships, and support to projects that recycle single-use items and turn waste into a resource that can be used again.
• Reduce or abolish taxes on the import of materials used to make alternatives.
• Provide incentives to industry by introducing tax rebates or other conditions to support its transition. Governments will face resistance from the plastics industry, including importers and distributors of plastic packaging. Give them time to adapt.
• Use revenues collected from taxes or levies on single-use plastics to maximize the public good. Support environmental projects or boost local recycling with the funds. Create jobs in the plastic recycling sector with seed funding.
• Enforce the measure chosen effectively, by making sure that there is clear allocation of roles and responsibilities.
• Monitor and adjust the chosen measure if necessary and update the public on progress.

International examples:
• The success of imposing a plastic bag fee has also been established in cities like Chicago and Washington, showing that such interventions could be effective in shaping behaviour change.
• The European Union is mulling new laws to ban some everyday single-use plastic products including straws, cutlery and plates citing plastic litter in oceans as the concern prompting the action.
• Countries such as the U.S., Canada and the Netherlands have already put in place regulations to stop the use of microbeads in personal-care products. The sooner India adopts such regulations, the better

Encouraging plogging: Picking up litter while jogging or strolling was kick-started on a small scale in a small part of Stockholm about an year ago, it has spread across the globe and India can adopt this as well.

Conclusion:
• Packaging is projected to grow into a $72.6 billion industry in India by 2020 from about $31 billion in 2015, with a proportionate rise in waste volumes. The pressure on producers to streamline the collection, recycling and processing of all forms of plastic is bound to grow. Individuals and organizations should now actively remove plastic waste from their surroundings and municipal bodies must arrange to collect these articles. Startups and industries should think of newer ways of recycling.

Link: https://youtu.be/UXQzkxQMhTc

4. INDIA WILL SHIFT TO BS VI NORMS

Introduction:
• BS 6 is the new emission standard that all vehicles in the country will have to adhere to from April 1, 2020. The sale of BS-4 vehicles will also cease from this day. The Supreme Court had ruled on October 24 2019 that no BS-4 vehicle would be sold with effect from April 1, 2020. Bharat Stage Emission Standards are emission regulations implemented by the government to keep a check on emissions from motor vehicles.
Decoding the term ‘BS’:

- To start with, the ‘BS’ in BS VI stands for ‘Bharat Stage’ which signifies the emission regulation standards set by Indian regulatory bodies.
- The ‘VI’ is a roman numeric representation for six (6). The higher the number gets, the stricter the Bharat Stage emission norms get which eventually means it becomes trickier (and costlier) for automakers to meet them.
- These emission standards were set by the central government to keep a check on the pollutant levels emitted by vehicles that use combustion engines. To bring them into force, the Central Pollution Control Board sets timelines and standards which have to be followed by automakers.
- Also, the BS norms are based on European emission norms which, for example, are referred to in a similar manner like ‘Euro 4’ and ‘Euro 6’. These norms are followed largely by all automakers across the globe and act as a good reference point as to how much does a vehicle pollute.
- To wrap it up and put it simply, Bharat Stage emission norms are largely similar to the European emission norms followed globally.

Difference between BS-IV and the new BS-VI:

- The major difference in standards between the existing BS-IV and the new BS-VI auto fuel norms is the presence of sulphur.
- The newly introduced fuel is estimated to reduce the amount of sulphur released by 80%, from 50 parts per million to 10 ppm
- As per the analysts, the emission of NOx (nitrogen oxides) from diesel cars is also expected to reduce by nearly 70% and 25% from cars with petrol engines.

Why is it important to upgrade these norms?

- Upgrading to stricter fuel standards helps tackle air pollution.
- Global automakers are betting big on India as vehicle penetration is still low here, when compared to developed countries.
- At the same time, cities such as Delhi are already being listed among those with the poorest air quality in the world. The national capital’s recent odd-even car experiment and judicial activism against the registration of big diesel cars shows that governments can no longer afford to relax on this front.
- With other developing countries such as China having already upgraded to the equivalent of Euro V emission norms a while ago, India has been lagging behind. The experience of countries such as China and Malaysia shows that poor air quality can be bad for business. Therefore, these reforms can put India ahead in the race for investments too.

BS IV engine change to BS VI engine: Following changes needs to be done:

- Although the BS-4 car can run on BS-6 Fuel, but what will happen if we defer our purchase
- Emission: Cleaner fuel as the sulphur levels will be lower and lower PF (Particulate Filter). Thus, the emissions will be relatively much lower than what emit by cars.
- Also, our BS-6 Car will get latest Technology and updates including changes in Catalytic, Diesel Particulate Filter, Fuel Injection for better compliance to Emission. Care for Environment – you should defer your purchase call
- Engine Performance: The Sulphur levels will be lower, thus acids as formed will be lower and also the engine oil live will improve.
- Even the fuel would be much cleaner and thus care for better efficiency from our car in terms of improved Engine Oil Life, Engine Performance, Engine NVH Levels you will get all these benefits with BS-6 Fuel
- Fuel Efficiency: Been the fuel in BS-6 regime would be much cleaner – the overall fuel efficiency can also jump in when used a BS-6 compliant car using BS-6 Fuel grade.
- Safety Features: ABS, Airbags would be standard all across model Variants as sold from 2020. Even crash test regulations would be improved.
- It involves Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR), which is an advanced active emissions control technology.
- SCR converts nitrogen oxides to nitrogen, water, tiny amounts of CO2 by pumping in automotive grade liquid urea, which is known as Diesel Exhaust Fluid (DEF).
- It achieves NOx reductions up to 90%. Tailpipe Particulate Matter filter is used.
This reduces the Particulate Matter coming out of the vehicle to the required level.

Will the vehicles with BS-VI tech become expensive?

- The everyday customer who is yet to buy themselves a vehicle or is planning to get one could soon have to shell out more for their purchase.
- On top of that, the fuel costs also need to be taken into account. But above all of this, there is a bigger target to be achieved. India has some of the most polluted cities in the world and automobiles are often considered as one of the biggest factors responsible for it.
- The need of the hour is to control the pollution levels by all means possible and since globally, countries are implying Euro 6 levels of emission regulations, India needs to step up its game and hence the BS IV to BS VI emission norm implication.

Conclusion:

- This outcome should be welcomed for the positive impact it will have on air quality and public health.
- At every stage, the technology is increasingly more complex. To attain the specified super low emissions, all reactions have to be precise, and controlled by microprocessors.
- So, for carmakers, skipping the diesel value chain at this point makes more sense.
- Alongside the constraints faced by carmakers, there are also question marks regarding the ability of the oil companies to manage the transition, given that the full transition to BS-IV took from 2010 to April 2017 because refiners were unable to produce the superior fuel in required quantities.
- Improving air quality in the cities requires a transformative planning approach guided by the singular objective of reducing the use of polluting vehicles.

Link: [https://youtu.be/pPAgzonp6L0](https://youtu.be/pPAgzonp6L0)

5. CARBON TRADING & CLIMATE CHANGE

Introduction:

- India has been in the forefront of an intense battle to protect the environment by reducing its carbon footprint. To this end, it has invested heavily in low-carbon intensive technologies, successfully switched to renewable energy and stepped up its efforts to protect forests. In the process it earned hundreds of millions of carbon credits or emission reduction certificates that are also called CERs.
- Under the prevailing Kyoto Protocol climate agreement, carbon credits are used in market-based system of Carbon Trading.
- Carbon trading allows countries and companies to sell their carbon credits for money.
- In December the UN Climate Change Conference or COP 25 was held in Madrid. COP 25 was to have finalised rules for a new global carbon market under the Paris Agreement.
- For India, one the goals and focus at the Madrid conference was to win the right to sell its hard-earned carbon credits. But the talks that concluded in Madrid on 15th December ended without agreeing on the rules for future carbon trading.

Why We Have the Carbon Trade?

- When countries use fossil fuels and produce carbon dioxide, they do not pay for the implications of burning those fossil fuels directly. There are some costs that they incur, like the price of the fuel itself, but there are other costs not included in the price of the fuel. These are known as externalities. In the case of fossil fuel usage, often these externalities are negative externalities, meaning that the consumption of the good has negative effects on third parties.
- These externalities include health costs, (like the contribution that burning fossil fuels makes to heart disease, cancer, stroke, and lung diseases) and environmental costs, (like environmental degradation, pollution, climate change, and global warming). Interestingly, research has found that, often, the burdens of climate change most directly affect countries with the lowest greenhouse emissions.

Carbon Trade:
- Carbon trading is an exchange of credits between nations designed to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide.
- Carbon trading is also referred to as carbon emissions trading. Carbon emissions trading accounts for most emissions trading.
So, if a country is going to burn fossil fuels, and produce these negative externalities, the thinking is that they should pay for them.

The carbon trade originated with the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, with the objective of reducing carbon emissions and mitigating climate change and future global warming. At the time, the measure devised was intended to reduce overall carbon dioxide emissions to roughly 5% below 1990 levels by between 2008 and 2012.

How It Works?

- Basically, each country has a cap on the amount of carbon they are allowed to release. Carbon emissions trading then allows countries that have higher carbon emissions to purchase the right to release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from countries that have lower carbon emissions.
- The carbon trade also refers to the ability of individual companies to trade polluting rights through a regulatory system known as cap and trade. Companies that pollute less can sell their unused pollution rights to companies that pollute more.
- The goal is to ensure that companies in the aggregate do not exceed a baseline level of pollution and to provide a financial incentive for companies to pollute less.

Kyoto Protocol:
The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets.

- The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997 and entered into force in February 2005.
- The first commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol was from 2008-2012. The Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Qatar in December 2012. The amendment includes new commitments for parties to the Kyoto Protocol who agreed to take on commitments in a second commitment period from January 2013 to December 2020 and a revised list of greenhouse gases to be reported on by Parties in the second commitment period.
- Recognizing that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of Greenhouse Gas (GHGs) in the atmosphere, the Kyoto Protocol places commitments on developed nations to undertake mitigation targets and to provide financial resources and transfer of technology to the developing nations.
- Developing countries like India have no mandatory mitigation obligations or targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

Paris Agreement:
The Paris Agreement of 2016 is a historic international accord that brings almost 200 countries together in setting a common target to reduce global greenhouse emissions in an effort to fight climate change.

- The pact seeks to keep global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels, and to try and limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- To this end, each country has pledged to implement targeted action plans that will limit their greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Agreement asks rich and developed countries to provide financial and technological support to the developing world in its quest to fight and adapt to climate change.

Benefits of emissions trading:

- Emissions trading achieves the environmental objective – reduced emissions – at the lowest cost.
- Emissions trading incentivizes innovation and identifies lowest-cost solutions to make businesses more sustainable.
- Cap and trade has proven to be an effective policy choice.
- Emissions trading is better able to respond to economic fluctuations than other policy tools.
- Cap and trade is designed to deliver an environmental outcome – the cap must be met, or there are sanctions such as fines. Allowing trading within that cap is the most effective way of minimising the cost – which is good for business and good for households.
- Determining physical actions that companies must take, with no flexibility, is not guaranteed to achieve the necessary reductions. Nor is establishing a regulated price, since the price required to drive reductions may take policy-makers several years to determine.
By allowing the open market to set the price of carbon allows for better flexibility and avoids price shocks or undue burdens. For example, as seen in Europe, prices will fall during a recession as industrial output, and thus emissions, fall. A centrally-administered tax does not have the same flexibility.

The combination of an absolute cap on the level of emissions permitted and the carbon price signal from trading helps firms identify low-cost methods of reducing emissions on site, such as investing in energy efficiency – which can lead to a further reduction in overheads. This helps make business more sustainable for the future. Imposing technology on business does not allow for creativity and can actually lead to higher costs as companies look merely to comply with regulations.

Cap and trade has proven its effectiveness in the US through the acid rain program, where it quickly and effectively reduced pollution levels at a far lower cost than expected. The EU Emissions Trading System has shown that cap and trade can be extended to carbon, and in doing so creates a price on carbon that drives emissions reductions. Reductions in pollution that industry feared would be excessively costly were achieved at a fraction of the original estimates.

Emissions trading can provide a global response to a global challenge. Cap and trade provides a way of establishing rigour around emissions monitoring, reporting and verification – essential for any climate policy to preserve integrity.

Disadvantages:

• Creating a market in something with no intrinsic value such as carbon dioxide is very difficult. You need to promote scarcity – and you have to strictly limit the right to emit so that it can be traded.
• In the world’s biggest carbon trading scheme, the EU ETS, political interference has created gluts of permits.
• These have often been given away for free, which has led to a collapse in the price and no effective reductions in emissions. Another problem is that offset permits, gained from paying for pollution reductions in poorer countries, are allowed to be traded as well.
• The importance of these permits in reducing carbon emissions is questionable and the effectiveness of the overall cap and trade scheme is also reduced.

Link: https://youtu.be/OlgwZE4_YRU

SECURITY ISSUES

1. CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Introduction:

• Aiming to usher in reforms in the higher defence management Centre govt has approved the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff and Department of Military Affairs within the Ministry of Defence. CDS will be a four star officer and act as principal military adviser to defence minister on all tri services matters. In addition to heading the department of military Affairs, the CDS will also be the permanent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. However CDS will not exercise any military command including over three service chiefs.

• Creation of post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) was recommended by Group of Ministers in 2001. The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) recommended the appointment of a CDS as a means to provide single-point professional military advice to the political leadership and also get the forces to work together. After the GoM recommendations, in preparation for the post of CDS, the government created the Integrated Defence Staff in 2002, which was to eventually serve as the CDS’s Secretariat. In 2012, the Naresh Chandra Committee suggested the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee as a midway to eliminate apprehensions over the CDS. The post of CDS was also recommended by the D.B. Shekhatkar Committee.

• This follows the announcement made by the Prime Minister on 15th August 2019, in his address to the nation, inter alia, “India should not have a fragmented approach. Our entire military power will have to work in unison and move forward. All the three (Services) should move simultaneously at the same pace. There should be good coordination and it should be relevant to the hope and aspirations of our people. It should be in line with the changing war and security environment with the world. After formation of this post (CDS), all the three forces will get effective leadership at the top level.” He will be the single-point military adviser.
to the government as suggested by the Kargil Review Committee in 1999. CDS oversees and coordinates the working of the three Services.

The following areas will be dealt by the Department of Military Affairs headed by CDS:

- The Armed Forces of the Union, namely, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.
- Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence comprising Army Headquarters, Naval Headquarters, Air Headquarters and Defence Staff Headquarters.
- The Territorial Army.
- Works relating to the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.
- Procurement exclusive to the Services except capital acquisitions, as per prevalent rules and procedures.

Apart from the above, the mandate of the Department of Military Affairs will include the following areas:

- Promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services through joint planning and integration of their requirements.
- Facilitation of restructuring of Military Commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands.
- Promoting use of indigenous equipment by the Services.

The Chief of Defence Staff, apart from being the head of the Department of Military Affairs, will also be the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. He will act as the Principal Military Adviser to Raksha Mantri on all tri-Services matters. The three Chiefs will continue to advise RM on matters exclusively concerning their respective Services. CDS will not exercise any military command, including over the three Service Chiefs, so as to be able to provide impartial advice to the political leadership.

Conditions: He will be a Four-star General.

- Not eligible to hold any Government office after demitting the office of CDS.
- No private employment without prior approval for a period of five years after demitting the office of CDS.

Functions:

- CDS will administer tri-services organisations. Tri-service agencies/organisations/commands related to Cyber and Space will be under the command of the CDS.
  - CDS will be member of Defence Acquisition Council chaired by Raksha Mantri and Defence Planning Committee chaired by NSA.
  - Function as the Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority.
  - Bring about jointness in operation, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance, etc of the three Services, within three years of the first CDS assuming office.
  - Ensure optimal utilisation of infrastructure and rationalise it through jointness among the services.
  - Implement Five-Year Defence Capital Acquisition Plan (DCAP), and Two-Year roll-on Annual Acquisition Plans (AAP), as a follow up of Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP).
  - Assign inter-Services prioritisation to capital acquisition proposals based on the anticipated budget.
- Bring about reforms in the functioning of three Services aimed at augmenting combat capabilities of the Armed Forces by reducing wasteful expenditure.

It is expected that this reform in the Higher Defence Management would enable the Armed Forces to implement coordinated defence doctrines and procedures and go a long way in fostering jointmanship among the three Services. The country would be benefitted by coordinated action on greater jointmanship in training, logistics and operations as well as for prioritisation of procurements.

Challenges:

- The KRC Report pointed out that India is the only major democracy where the Armed Forces Headquarters is outside the apex governmental structure.
- It observed that Service Chiefs devote most of their time to their operational roles, “often resulting in negative results”.
- Long-term defence planning suffers as day-to-day priorities dominate.
• Also, the Prime Minister and Defence Minister do not have the benefit of the views and expertise of military commanders, in order to ensure that higher level defence management decisions are more consensual and broadbased.
• The CDS is also seen as being vital to the creation of “theatre commands”, integrating tri-service assets and personnel like in the US military.

Way Forward:
• This is a major first step in the direction of changes but not the final step.
• The single services must be evolved in a way so that it can raise, train and sustain.
• Restructuring of defence must be done in a transparent manner such that there is cross-posting of the senior military officers in the decision making in the Department of Defence as well.
• The creation of the CDS will need to be followed up with further reforms to reconfigure the armed forces to meet India’s aspirations to be a global power.
• It is also necessary that the first incumbent is given a term of three years so as to be able to carry the ambitious vision laid out in the cabinet note through to its conclusion.
• The job is strategic, requires personal supervision, and cannot be left unfinished for the successor to finish. Given the challenges and the limited time-frame within which to accomplish it, allowances will have to be made for attendant hiccups.
• Some teething problems can be expected in the beginning but things are bound to fall in place as norms, processes and rules are worked out between the three services, the CDS and the defence ministry.
• It will require the navigation of entrenched institutional interests, hierarchical powers and military traditions, to lay the foundations for a strong and functional CDS.

Link: https://youtu.be/Yx52fi-c3oE

2. NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU (NCRB) REPORT, 2018

Introduction:
• Crime in India registered a 1.3 percent increase in 2018 compared to 2017 with over 50 lakh cognisable crimes being reported and registered. The National Crime Records Bureau’s annual crime in India report 2018 shows that over 31 lakh of these cases were registered under the Indian Penal Code, and nearly 20 lakh cases under Special and Local Laws. The per day numbers for the year 2018 show an alarming trend, the report says that an average of 80 murders, nearly 300 kidnappings and 91 rapes were reported every single day. Crimes against women saw a rise with over three lakh cases registered in 2018. That’s a 7 percent rise from 2017. Crimes against children also saw an increase, especially cases under the POCSO Act, including child rape.

National Crime Records Bureau:
• NCRB was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.
• It was set up based on the recommendation of the Task force and National Police Commission by merging the Directorate of Coordination and Police Computer (DCPC), Statistical Branch of BPR&D, Inter State Criminals Data Branch of CBI and Central Finger Print Bureau of CBI.

Crimes In India 2018:
• A total of 50,74,634 cognizable crimes comprising 31,32,954 Indian Penal Code (IPC) crimes and 19,41,680 Special & Local Laws (SLL) crimes were registered in 2018. Though it shows an increase of 1.3% in registration of cases over 2017 (50,07,044 cases), however, crime rate per lakh population has come down from 388.6 in 2017 to 383.5 in 2018.
• During 2018, registration of cases under IPC have increased by 2.3% whereas SLL crimes have declined by 0.1% over 2017.
• Percentage share of IPC was 61.7% while percentage share of SLL cases was 38.3% of total cognizable crimes during 2018.
Offences Affecting the Human Body:

- A total of 10,40,046 cases of offences affecting the human body were registered which accounted for 2% of total IPC crimes during 2018, out of which hurt (5,30,076 cases) accounted for maximum cases i.e. 51.0% followed by cases of causing death by negligence (1,44,031 cases), Kidnapping and Abduction (1,05,734 cases) accounting for 13.8% and 10.2% respectively.

Violent Crimes:

- **Murder**
  - A total of 29,017 cases of murder were registered during 2018, showing an increase of 1.3% over 2017 (28,653 cases).
  - Disputes (9,623 cases) was the motive in highest number of murder cases during 2018 followed by ‘Personal vendetta or enmity’ (3,875 cases) and ‘Gain’ (2,995 cases).

- **Kidnapping & Abduction**
  - A total of 1,05,734 cases of kidnapping & abduction were registered during 2018, showing an increase of 10.3% over 2017.
  - A total of 1,05,536 (24,665 male and 80,871 female) victims were reported kidnapped or abducted, out of which 63,356 (15,250 male and 48,106 female) victims were children and 42,180 (9,415 male and 32,765 female) victims were adult during 2018.
  - During 2018, a total of 92,137 kidnapped or abducted persons (22,755 male and 69,382 female) were recovered out of which 91,709 persons were recovered alive and 428 persons were dead.

Offences Against Public Tranquillity:

- A total of 76,851 cases of offences against public tranquillity were registered under various sections of IPC during 2018, out of which rioting (57,828 cases) accounted for 75.2% of total such cases.

Crime Against Women

- Majority of cases under crimes against women out of total IPC crimes against women were registered under ‘Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives’ (31.9%) followed by ‘Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty’ (27.6%), ‘Kidnapping & Abduction of Women’ (22.5%) and ‘Rape’ (10.3%).
  - The crime rate per lakh women population is 58.8 in 2018 in comparison with 57.9 in 2017.

Crime against Children

- In percentage terms, major crime heads under ‘Crime Against Children’ during 2018 were Kidnapping & Abduction (44.2%) and cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (34.7%) including child rape.
  - The crime rate per lakh children population is 31.8 in 2018 in comparison with 28.9 in 2017.

Juveniles in Conflict with Law

- A total of 38,256 juveniles were apprehended in 31,591 cases, out of which 35,380 juveniles were apprehended under cases of IPC and 2,876 juveniles were apprehended under cases of SLL during 2018.
  - Majority of juveniles in conflict with law apprehended under IPC & SLL crimes were in the age group of 16 years to 18 years (75.5%) (28,867 out of 38,256) during 2018.

Crime/Atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs)

- Crime head-wise cases revealed that simple hurt with 30.6% (13,078 cases) registered the highest number of cases of crimes/atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs) followed by SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act only with 9.8% (4,212 cases) and criminal intimidation with 7.3% (3,137 cases) during 2018.

Crime/Atrocities against Scheduled Tribes (STs)

- Crime head-wise cases revealed that simple hurt (1,429 cases) registered the highest number of cases of crimes/atrocities against Scheduled Tribes (STs) accounting for 21.9% followed by rape with 15.4% (1,008 cases) and assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty with 13.1% (857 cases) during 2018.

Economic Offences

- Out of three specified category of economic offences (viz. criminal breach of trust, forgery, cheating & fraud and counterfeiting), forgery, cheating and fraud accounted for maximum such cases, with 1,34,546 cases, followed by criminal breach of trust (20,456 cases) and counterfeiting (1,266 cases) during 2018.

Cyber Crimes

- During 2018, 55.2% of cyber-crime cases registered were for the motive of fraud (15,051 out of 27,248 cases) followed by sexual exploitation with 7.5% (2,030 cases) and causing disrepute with 4.4% (1,212 cases).
Offences Against Property
- During 2018, a total of 8,02,372 cases were registered under offences against property (25.6% of total IPC crimes), out of which, theft (6,25,441 cases) followed by burglaries (99,940 cases) accounting for 77.9% and 12.5% respectively.
- During 2018, Properties worth Rs. 5,227.0 Crore were stolen and Properties worth Rs. 1849.9 Crore were recovered accounting for 35.4% of recovery of stolen properties.
- During 2018, 2,44,271 cases of property crimes took place at residential premises. However, majority of robberies took place on roadways with 18,418 cases.

Offences Relating to Documents & Property Marks
- During 2018, total of 1,35,812 cases were registered under offences against documents & property marks (comprising of counterfeiting and forgery, cheating & fraud), out of which, forgery, cheating & fraud (1,34,546 cases) accounted for 99.1% of total such cases.

Missing Persons
- A total of 3,47,524 persons (1,23,339 male, 2,23,621 female and 564 transgender) were reported missing in 2018. During the year 2018, a total of 3,32,754 persons (1,22,384 males, 2,09,852 females and 518 transgender) were recovered/traced.

Missing Children
- A total of 67,134 children (19,784 male, 47,191 female and 159 transgender) were reported missing in 2018. During the year 2018, a total of 71,176 children (22,239 male, 48,787 female and 150 transgender) were recovered/traced.

Seizures under Arms Act
- A total of 66,305 cases were registered under the Arms Act, 1959 in which 74,877 firearms were seized, out of which, 3,742 arms were licensed/factory made and 71,135 arms were Unlicensed/improvised/crude/country made. A total of 1,08,444 number of ammunitions were seized during 2018.

Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) Seizure
- A total of 2,57,243 notes worth Rs.17,95,36,992 were seized under Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) during 2018.

Seizure of Narcotic Drugs
- Ganja (3,91,275 kg), Acetic Anhydride (9,717 kg), Opium (4,307 kg) , Hashish (3,911 kg), Heroin (1,258 kg) and Ephedrine /Pseudoephedrine (337 kg) accounted for the major part of the drugs seized in 2018.
- As per Narcotics Control Bureau, a total of 49,450 cases were registered for drugs seizure in which 60,156 persons (including foreigners) were arrested during 2018 in the country.

Arrests, Convictions & Acquittals
- A total of 33,15,033 persons were arrested under 31,32,954 IPC crimes. A total of 35,75,644 persons were charge-sheeted, 8,64,686 persons were convicted,10,73,377 persons were acquitted and 89,735 persons were discharged.
- A total of 21,93,157 persons were arrested under 19,41,680 SLL crimes. A total of 23,84,982 persons were charge-sheeted, 14,22,151 persons were convicted, 3,13,443 persons were acquitted and 27,642 persons were discharged.

Limitations:
- Since the publication caters to the ‘Principle Offence Rule’ for classification of crime, the actual count of each crime head may be under reported. This is because among many offences registered in a single FIR case, only most heinous crime (maximum punishment) will be considered as counting unit. Hence, there is likelihood of some IPC/SLL cases getting under reported as they are hidden under major IPC crimes. For example, Murder with Rape is accounted as Murder; Dowry Prohibition Act when applied along with Dowry Death (304B of IPC) will be counted as Dowry Death only.
- The Socio-economic causative factors or reasons of crimes are not being captured by the Bureau. Only police recorded crime cases are being captured for this publication.
- Crime Rates of States/UTs have been arrived at using the Mid-Year Projected Population of respective States/UTs of 2018 based on 2011 census (Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections, Nov. 2019, National Commission on Population, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare). However, this is not available in respect of metropolitan cities. Crime Rates for Metropolitan cities have been calculated using Actual Population Census 2011. Hence, Crime Rates of States and Metropolitan cities are not comparable.
• ‘Crime Rate’ is not calculated for City-wise Crimes under ‘Children, SCs/STs & Senior Citizen’ due to non-availability of Population figures of the cities.
• Clarifications on data for Crime in India are pending from West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Kolkata City. Hence, data from aforesaid States/City may be treated as provisional.

Link: https://youtu.be/_YjcI3nXOKA

3. THE EXTREMIST THREAT

Introduction:
• Uttar Pradesh State govt has written to the Union Home Ministry seeking a ban on Popular Front of India-PFI. This was done after two dozen members of PFI were arrested from various parts of the state by UP police for their alleged involvement in violence during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act. State police says it has impounded objectionable material from the arrested persons and a detailed report has been sent to the Home Ministry for further action.

PFI:
• The Popular Front of India (PFI) is an extremist and militant Islamic fundamentalist organisation in India formed as a successor to National Development Front (NDF) in 2006.
• It acquired a multi-state dimension by merging with the National Development Front, Manitha Neethi Pasarai, Karnataka Forum for Dignity and other organisations.
• The PFI describe themselves as a neo-social movement committed to empower people to ensure justice, freedom and security.
• Since its inception, the organisation has been accused of various antisocial and anti-national activities.
• The allegations include connections with various Islamic terrorist groups, possessing arms, kidnapping, murder, intimidation, hate campaigns, rioting, Love Jihad and various acts of religious extremism.
• In 2010, the assault on Prof. T. J. Jose who published a controversial question paper, supposedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad, was linked to the PFI.
• In 2012, the Government of Kerala informed the High Court their opinion that the activities of the Popular Front are inimical to the safety of the country and that it is “nothing but a resurrection of the banned outfit Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in another form”, in its argument to ban the organisation’s Independence Day programme, dubbed “Freedom Parade.”
• The High Court dismissed the Government’s stand, but upheld the ban imposed by the State Government.
• In July 2010, the Kerala Police seized country-made bombs, weapons and CDs and several documents containing Taliban and Al-Qaeda propaganda, from PFI activists.
• The raids conducted were subsequently termed “undemocratic” and “unconstitutional” by the organisation.
• As of 6 September 2010, as informed to the state high court by the Kerala government, no evidence has been found by the Police in its probe into the allegation of links to Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e Taiba (Let) or Al-Qaeda.
• However, in April 2013 a series of raids by the Kerala Police on PFI centres across North Kerala found lethal weapons, foreign currency, human shooting targets, bombs, explosive raw materials, gunpowder, swords, among other things. The Kerala Police claimed that the raid revealed the “terror face” of the PFI

India’s Vulnerabilities:
• Past cases of extremist and terrorist attacks suggest that the reactions of the local police remain inadequate.
• The task of the police becomes difficult in the democratic society to deal with such issues as that in UP.
• While this was clearly apparent, which was a well-orchestrated attack sponsored by the group, responses to subsequent attacks do not indicate police capacities that are necessary for undertaking clinical operations to limit potential damage.
• Heavy concentration of people in public areas offers a large number of potential targets. While some installations have utilised the limited protection offered by private security measures, a large number of public places continue to remain vulnerable.
• A fast growing population, especially youth with access to mass media and social media, opens limitless avenues of unrestrained radical propaganda. This increases the possibility of subversion, given the unverified
yet powerful platforms of messaging that promise liberation from everyday frustrations of the youth at their places of work, in society and across borders in conflict zones.

- While the popular discourse seems to suggest an increasing level of intolerance, the reality is quite different.
- They indulge with local people in peaceful protest and further their own agenda.
- They cover themselves under Human Rights organizations.

Conclusion:

- Attacks by home grown groups is a threat that has proved its nefariousness in the recent times.
- The centre and states should look into the matters of this organization like their funding mechanisms etc.
- This is likely to be expanded through volunteers encouraged to undertake lone wolf attacks.
- Since they clearly hurt the sovereignty and integrity of India with adequate investigation, they should be banned under UAPA, 2019.
- India remains an important target for groups, which visualize the country’s democratic, secular and open social fabric as a threat to their concept. It is therefore important to undertake suitable proactive measures to limit the potential damage that can be caused by such attacks.

Link: https://youtu.be/AypmcKxn_4w

MISCELLANEOUS

SDG INDIA INDEX 2019-20

Introduction:

- NITI Aayog has recently released the second edition of Sustainable development goals India Index which comprehensively documents the progress made by all states and union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets. While Kerala has retained the top position in states, Bihar is at the bottom of SDG India Index 2019 though it has improved its score from 48 in 2018 to 50 this year.
- Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim have joined all the southern states in the top tier of front runners who scored more than 65 points out of 100. India’s progress in the SDGs is crucial for the world as we are home to about one sixth of the world’s population.

The SDG India Index 2019-20:

- The SDG India Index 2019-20, developed by NITI Aayog, was launched on December 30th, 2019.
- NITI Aayog today released the second edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index, which comprehensively documents the progress made by India’s States and Union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets.
- The SDG India Index—which has been developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), United Nations in India, and Global Green Growth Institute.
- The SDG India Index 2019 tracks progress of all States and UTs on 100 indicators drawn from the MoSPI’s National Indicator Framework (NIF). The process of selection of these indicators included multiple consultations with Union ministries/departments and States/UTs.
- The SDG India Index 2019 is more robust than the first edition on account of wider coverage of goals, targets, and indicators with greater alignment with the NIF.
- The Index spans 16 out of 17 SDGs with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17. This marks an improvement over the 2018 Index, which covered only 13 goals.
- Additionally, this year, the SDG India Index report has a new section on profiles of all 37 States and UTs, which will be very useful to analyse their performance on all goals in a lucid manner.
- NITI Aayog has the twin mandate to oversee the implementation of SDGs in the country and promote competitive and cooperative federalism among States and UTs.
- A composite score was computed in the range of 0–100 for each State/UT based on its aggregate performance across 16 SDGs, indicating the average performance of every State/UT towards achieving 16 SDGs and their respective targets. If a State/UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies it has achieved the 2030 national targets. The higher the score of a State/UT, the closer it is towards achieving the targets.
Classification criteria based on SDG India Index score is as follows:

- Aspirant: 0–49
- Performer: 50–64
- Front Runner: 65–99
- Achiever: 100

How will the Index be useful to States/UTs?

- Support States/UTs to assess their progress against national targets and performance of their peers to understand reasons for differential performance and devise better strategies to achieve the SDGs by 2030.
- Support States/UTs to identify priority areas in which they need to invest and improve by enabling them to measure incremental progress.
- Highlight data gaps related across SDGs for India to develop its statistical systems at the national and State levels.

Highlights of the index:

- **India’s composite score has improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019**, thereby showing noticeable progress.
- The maximum gains been made in **Goals 6** (clean water and sanitation), **Goal 9** (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) and **Goal 7** (affordable and clean energy).
- All three states that were in the ‘Aspirant’ category (with score/s in the range of 0–49)—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Assam—have graduated to the ‘Performer’ category (50–64).
- **Kerala achieved the first rank** in the composite SDG Index with a score of 70, followed by Himachal Pradesh at 69.
- Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu ranked at the third position with the score of 67 and Karnataka has a score of 66.
- The biggest improvers since 2018 are UP (which has moved from the 29th position to the 23rd), Orissa (23rd to 15th), and Sikkim (15th to 7th).
- While Bihar improved its score from 48 in 2018 to 50 in 2019, it still has a long way to go in achieving the targets.
- The world is now in the fifth year of the SDG era.
- India’s National Development Agenda is mirrored in the SDGs. **India’s progress in the global Goals is crucial for the world as the country is home to about one-sixth of the world’s population.**

Significance and analysis:

- India is the first country in the world with a government-led, sub-national measure of progress on Sustainable Development Goals.
- The SDG India Index acts as a bridge between these mandates, aligning the SDGs with the Hon’ble Prime Minister’s clarion call of **Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas**, which embodies the **five Ps of the global SDG movement: people, planet, prosperity, partnership and peace.**
- The Index is designed to function as a tool for focused policy dialogue, formulation and implementation, and moving towards development action pegged to globally recognizable metrics.
- The **Index also supplements NITI Aayog’s continuous efforts to encourage evidence-based policymaking by supporting States/UTs to benchmark their progress, identifying priority areas and sharing best practices.**
- The SDG India Index 2019 also helps highlight crucial gaps related to monitoring SDGs and the need for improving statistical systems at the National/State/UT levels.
- Further, the Index highlights the **need for improvements in data collection, reporting and methodology.**
- NITI Aayog is also exploring partnerships for disaggregating data and developing capacity for real-time monitoring and measuring incremental progress.
- There are many schemes to achieve those goals which the central and state governments are running.
- There is a need to train and motivate people to achieve the goals.
- The SDGs still remain outside of the system. **We are not mainstreaming many of the concerns.**
- There is a **lot of overlap.** India has 40% food wastage which impact SDG goal 2.
- The growth which has taken in technology is very critical in achieving our targets.
• If we use cutting edge technology in the monitoring and evaluation in a correct way in achieving SDGs it will give results.
• Interconnectivity between the goal is very critical and important.
• Each district, taluk and gram panchayats should have a SDG plan.
• We should develop proper monitoring measure.
• There is a need that Technology and People should converge.
Link: https://youtu.be/hINdUjI3kA