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GENERAL STUDIES – 1

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

1. Bodo Language

What to study?
For Prelims: Bodo Language and its scripts.
For Mains: Significance, need for protection.

Context: Bodo language is one of the key thrust areas in the Bodo Accord which was signed recently.

Bodo language - Key facts:
1. Estimated to have 1.5 million speakers (Census 2011), Bodo is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
2. It is spoken in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and West Bengal.
3. While Bodo is officially written in the Devanagri script, the language has a history of having been written in at least three different scripts — until in 1974, the Government recognised Devanagari as its official script. In the first decade of the 20th century, Bodos started writing in the Assamese/Bangla script. Then they also used Roman Script.
4. In the pre-13th century era, it was called Deodhai.

Promises in the accord regarding Bodo language:
1. It was only in 2003, under the then Bodo Accord, that the language was listed in the Eighth Schedule. And it was the first tribal language to be included in the Eight Schedule.
2. In Assam, it has enjoyed the status of official associate language in undivided Goalpara district since 1986.
3. Now the 2020 Accord makes Bodo the associate official language throughout Assam.
4. The new Accord also promises to establish a separate directorate for Bodo medium schools, provincialise schools and colleges in the BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District) and establish a Cultural Complex-cum-Centre of Excellence in Kokrajhar for protection and promotion of the language.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Kumbhabhishekam

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: the ritual and its significance, the temple.

Context: The ‘kumbhabhishekam’ (consecration) of the 1,010-year-old Brihadeeswarar Temple or the Big Temple is being held at Thanjavur.
This enormously significant event was held after 23 years — and after the Madras High Court had settled an old argument over the ritual purification process only five days previously.

Background:
The judgment delivered on January 31 by the Madurai Bench of the court addressed the struggle for supremacy between the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions that lies at the heart of several cultural battles in the state — and which also played out in the kumbhabhishekam ceremony.

What was the issue?
There was a dispute over which language should be used in the slokas at the kumbhabhishekam. The Thanjavur Periya Koil Urimai Meetpu Kuzhu (Thanjavur Big Temple Rights Retrieval Committee), an organisation that aims to restore Tamil traditions in the Sri Brihadishwara Temple, had demanded that the kumbhabhishekam should be held only in Tamil.

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However, the government had told that the consecration will be performed in both Tamil and Sanskrit.

About Brihadeshvara Temple:
- Built by emperor Rajaraja Chola I (985 CE -1015 CE).
- It has seen only five kumbhabhishekam ceremonies so far.
- As per the customs of Hinduism, ‘kumbhabhishekam’ is done once in 12 years. According to the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department, the temple had ‘kumbhabhishekam’ in 1010, 1729, 1843, 1980 and 1997.
- Located on the banks of Kaveri river, it is an exemplary example of a fully realised Dravidian architecture.
- It is called as Dhakshina Meru (Meru of south).
- The temple is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the “Great Living Chola Temples”, along with the Chola dynasty era Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple.
- There are several shrines added to the temple by most of the following rulers such as the Pandyas, the Vijayanagara rulers and the Marathas, too.
- Brihadeshwara Temple is also the first all-granite temple in the world.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Guru Ravidas

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: About Guru ravidas, teachings, important literary works and relevance today.

Context: Sant Ravidas Jayanti was celebrated on February 9th.

About Guru Ravidas:
- Guru Ravidas was a North Indian mystic poet of the bhakti movement.
- While the exact year of his birth is not known, it is believed that the saint was born in 1377 C.E.
- Guru Ravidas Jayanti is celebrated on Magh Purnima, which is the full moon day in the Hindu calendar month of Magha.
- The Adi Granth of Sikhs, in addition to the Panchvani are the two of the oldest documented sources of the literary works of Guru Ravidas.
- Notably, he belonged to an untouchable caste and suffered a lot of atrocities as a result. However, the saint chose to focus on spiritual pursuits and also penned several devotional songs which made a huge impact in the Bhakti movement during the 14th to 16th century CE.
- He is believed to be a disciple of the bhakti saint-poet Ramananda and a contemporary of the bhakti saint-poet Kabir.
- One of his famous disciples was the saint, Mirabai.
- Among Ravidas’s moral and intellectual achievements were the conception of “Begampura”, a city that knows no sorrow; and a society where caste and class have ceased to matter.

Guru Ravidas Teachings:
Guru Ravidas spoke against the caste divisions and spoke of removing them to promote unity. His teachings resonated with the people, leading to a religion being born called the Ravidassia religion, or Ravidassia Dharam based on his teachings.
He taught about the omnipresence of God and said that a human soul is a particle of God and hence Ravidas rejected the idea that people considered lower caste cannot meet God. He said in his teachings that the only way to meet God was to free the mind from the duality.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Hampi

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview, rule of Hampi and various associated dynasties.
For Mains: Challenges to it’s protection, concerns and ways to address them.

Context: SC backs move of Karnataka government to demolish restaurants near Hampi site. The court concluded that the constructions were in violation of the Mysore Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1961.

Background:
Previously, the Karnataka High Court had held that the Hampi World Heritage Area Management Authority was empowered to order the demolition of the illegal buildings.

About Hampi:
1. It is a UNESCO world heritage site.
2. It was a part of the Mauryan Empire back in the third century BC.
3. Hampi was the capital city during the four different dynasties altogether in the Vijayanagar city that came into existence in the year 1336 AD.
4. The Vijayanagara Empire reached unfathomable heights under the guidance of King Krishnadeva Raya of the Tuluva Dynasty.
5. ‘Kishkindha Kaand’ in Ramayana has special significance concerning Hampi.
6. It is located near the Tungabhadra river.
7. By 1500 CE, Hampi-Vijayanagara was the world’s second-largest medieval-era city after Beijing, and probably India’s richest at that time, attracting traders from Persia and Portugal.
8. It has been described by UNESCO as an "austere, grandiose site" of more than 1,600 surviving remains of the last great Hindu kingdom in South India.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Konark Sun Temple

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

Context: A plan to restore and preserve the nearly 800-year-old Konark Sun Temple in Odisha would be drawn up soon, after a two-day conference of experts at the end of the month, Union Culture Minister Prahlad Singh Patel said.

Background:
The temple had been filled with sand and sealed by the British authorities in 1903 in order to stabilise the structure. A scientific study was carried out by the Roorkee-based Central Building Research Institute from 2013 till 2018 to ascertain the temple’s structural stability as well as the status of the filled-in sand.

About the Temple:
1. Built in the 13th century, the Konark temple was conceived as a gigantic chariot of the Sun God, with 12 pairs of exquisitely ornamented wheels pulled by seven horses.
2. It was built by King Narasimhadeva I, the great ruler of Ganga dynasty.
3. The temple is included in UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984 for its architectural greatness and also for the sophistication and abundance of sculptural work.
4. The temple is perfect blend of *Kalinga architecture*, heritage, exotic beach and salient natural beauty.

5. It is protected under the *National Framework of India* by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act (1958) and its Rules (1959).

6. The Konark is the *third link of Odisha’s Golden Triangle*. The first link is Jagannath Puri and the second link is Bhubaneswar (Capital city of Odisha).

7. This temple was also known as ‘**BLACK PAGODA**’ due to its dark color and used as a navigational landmark by ancient sailors to Odisha. Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the “**White Pagoda**”.

8. It remains a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the *Chandrabhaga Mela* around the month of February.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Kambala

*What to study?*

*For Prelims: Key facts on Kambala.*

*For Mains: Kambala - For and Against issues.*

**Context:** After Srinivas Gowda created a storm by covering 100 metres in 9.55 seconds recently, another Kambala runner Nishant Shetty has now overtaken the former by completing the same distance in 9.51 seconds.

**What is Kambala?**

- It is *traditional slush track buffalo race* held annually in coastal districts of Karnataka to entertain rural people of the area.
- *Slushy/marshy paddy field track* is used for Kambala.
- *The sports season* generally starts in November and lasts till March.

**Why it has become controversial?**

Over the years, it has however become an organised sport with animal rights activists claiming that the buffaloes run in the race due to fear of being beaten, which the organizers dismiss, saying no violence is involved and that several modifications had been made to ensure that it is an animal friendly event.

- Karnataka High Court had stayed this sport in view of Supreme Court’s ban on *jallikattu*. And later the Govt. of Karnataka had passed an ordinance to exempt this sport from the ban.

**Arguments in favour of this sport:**

1. The sport is rooted in celebrating and honouring agriculture. It is celebrated as a festival of expressing gratitude to the various forces of nature that give us food.
2. Some agriculturists race their buffaloes as a means to thank god for protecting their animals from disease.
3. At the most fundamental level of humanity, sports like these are great outlets for channelising energy, which is expressed in promoting competitive spirit and forging and strengthening community relationships.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Kiliki language

What to study?
For Prelims: About Kiliki language, and IMLD.
For Mains: Significance and measures for protection.

Context: On International Mother Language Day (February 21), an official website of Kiliki language has been launched.

About Kiliki language:
The new speech was invented for the terrifying warrior tribe called Kalakeya in the two-part Baahubali franchise.
It now has evolved into a language with script grammar and more than 3000 words for everyday communication.
It is considered as the world's easiest language.
This fictional language was created by popular lyricist and screenwriter Madhan Karky.

About International Mother Language Day:
- Observed every year on 21st February since 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.
- The idea to celebrate International Mother Language Day was the initiative of Bangladesh.
- It was approved at the UNESCO General Conference (1999) and has been observed throughout the world since 2000.
- The United Nations General Assembly had proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages.
- The Ministry of Human Resource and Development along with educational institutions and language institutions is celebrating the day as the Matribhasha Diwas in the country.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. Rakhigarhi

What to study?
For Prelims: Location of the town and excavations.
For Mains: Relevance and significance, challenges in conservation.

Context: Centre is moving ahead with its plan to develop Rakhigarhi as a tourist hub and set up a museum. As part of encroachment removal at the Rakhigarhi heritage site, 152 households are being shifted to flats.

Background:
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the government’s plan to fund five on-site museums, including the under-construction museum initiated by the Haryana government at Rakhigarhi, in her Budget speech on February 1.
Other sites mentioned in the Budget — Hastinapur in Uttar Pradesh, Shivsagar in Assam, Dholavira in Gujarat and Adichanallur in Tamil Nadu.

What’s the issue now?
Rakhigarhi’s rise as a site of ancient curiosity has disrupted the villager’s life to an extent. The ASI has been able to get under its control just 83.5 acres of the 350-hectare site that spans 11 mounds, after first taking over the site in 1996, due to encroachments and pending court cases.
About Rakhigarhi:
Rakhigarhi, in Haryana, became an archaeological hotspot when Amarendra Nath, former director of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), undertook excavations at the site in 1997.

- The ASI team unearthed a fire altar, parts of a city wall, drainage structures as well as a hoard of semi-precious beads.
- Villagers subsequently began to see the significance of the terracotta shards that littered Rakhigarhi.
- It is a 5,000-year-old site that shows continuity from the Harappan age to the present times. The village also has havelis that are a couple of hundred years old.
- The site is located in the Sarasvati river plain, some 27 km from the seasonal Ghaggar river.
- In May 2012, the Global Heritage Fund, declared Rakhigarhi one of the 10 most endangered heritage sites in Asia.
- In January 2014, the discovery of additional mounds resulted in it becoming the largest Indus Valley Civilization site, overtaking Mohenjodaro (300 Hectares) by almost 50 hectares, resulting in almost 350 hectares.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Dara Shikoh

What to study?
For Prelims: Legacy and other related facts, about Humayun’s tomb.
For Mains: His religious tolerance and it’s significance.

Why in News?
- The Ministry of Culture recently set up a seven-member panel of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to locate the grave of the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh (1615-59). He is believed to be buried somewhere in the Humayun’s Tomb complex in Delhi, one of around 140 graves of the Mughal clan.
- The panel has been given three months time to complete this task.
- The panel will use architectural evidence from that time, and also written history and any other information that can be used as evidence.

Who was Dara Shikoh?
- He was the eldest son of Shah Jahan.
- He was killed after losing the war of succession against his brother Aurangzeb.
- He is described as a “liberal Muslim” who tried to find commonalities between Hindu and Islamic traditions.
- He translated into Persian the Bhagavad Gita as well as 52 Upanishads.

According to the Shahjahannama, after Aurangzeb defeated Dara Shikoh, he brought the latter to Delhi in chains. His head was cut off and sent to Agra Fort, while his torso was buried in the Humayun’s Tomb complex.

His legacy:
Dara Shikoh is described as “one of the greatest free thinkers of that time”.

www.insightsonindia.com
He realised the greatness of the Upanishads and translated them, which were earlier known only to a few upper caste Hindus. Translations from that Persian translation have inspired a lot of free thinkers of today, even inspiring the likes of former United States President Barack Obama.

Some historians argue that if Dara Shikoh had ascended the Mughal throne instead of Aurangzeb, it could have saved thousands of lives lost in religious clashes. He was the total antithesis of Aurangzeb, in that he was deeply syncretic, warm-hearted and generous — but at the same time, he was also an indifferent administrator and ineffectual in the field of battle.

Challenges ahead for ASI:
No one knows where exactly Dara Shikoh was buried. All that is known is that it’s a small grave in the Humayun’s Tomb complex. Italian traveller Niccolao Manucci gave a graphic description of the day in Travels of Manucci, as he was there as a witness to the whole thing. That is the basis of the thesis. Now, the ASI’s biggest problem is that most graves in the complex have no names.

About Humayun’s Tomb, Delhi:
This tomb, built in 1570, is of particular cultural significance as it was the first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent. Commissioned by Humayun’s first wife and chief consort, Empress Bega Begum (also known as Hajji Begum). Humayun’s garden-tomb is an example of the charbagh (a four quadrant garden with the four rivers of Quranic paradise represented), with pools joined by channels. It is also called the ‘dormitory of the Mughals’ as in the cells are buried over 150 Mughal family members. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Cultural Significance:
It represented a leap in Mughal architecture, and together with its accomplished Charbagh garden, typical of Persian gardens, but never seen before in India, it set a precedent for subsequent Mughal architecture. It is seen as a clear departure from the fairly modest mausoleum of his father, the first Mughal Emperor, Babur, called Bagh-e Babur (Gardens of Babur) in Kabul (Afghanistan).

Sources: Indian Express.

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

1. Iran celebrates 1979 Islamic Revolution

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Causes, effects and outcomes of the revolution.

Context: Iran celebrates 1979 Islamic Revolution.

About Islamic Revolution:
Also called Islamic Revolution, it was a popular uprising in Iran in 1978–79 that resulted in the toppling of the monarchy on February 11, 1979, and led to the establishment of an Islamic republic.

Reasons advanced for the revolution include:
1. A backlash against Western imperialism.
2. the 1953 Iranian coup d’état.
3. a rise in expectations created by the 1973 oil revenue windfall.
4. an overly ambitious economic program.
5. anger over a short, sharp economic contraction in 1977–78.
Outcomes:
Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Islamic Republic was formed under Khomeini's rule. The U.S. Embassy in Iran was taken over by a group of Muslim students and 52 U.S. diplomats and citizens were taken hostage on November 4, 1979. This event came to be known as the Iran Hostage Crisis.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Battle of Çanakkale/Gallipoli

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the battle and outcomes.
For Mains: Significance and why was it compared with the situation in Kashmir?

Context: Speaking to MPs at a joint session of Pakistan’s Parliament, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed his country's deep love and affection for Pakistan, strongly backed its position on Kashmir.
- Erdogan went on to say that what happened in Turkey during World War I was now happening in Kashmir, that is the Battle of Çanakkale

What is the Battle of Çanakkale?
The Battle of Çanakkale, also known as the Gallipoli campaign or the Dardanelles campaign, is considered to be one of the bloodiest of World War I, during which the Ottoman army faced off against the Allied forces, leading to the slaughter of tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides.
It was an unsuccessful attempt by the Allied Powers to control the sea route from Europe to Russia during World War I.
- The campaign began with a failed naval attack by British and French ships on the Dardanelles Straits in February-March 1915 and continued with a major land invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula on April 25, involving British and French troops as well as divisions of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC).
- Lack of sufficient intelligence and knowledge of the terrain, along with a fierce Turkish resistance, hampered the success of the invasion.

Key outcomes and significance:
The campaign was considered a great Ottoman victory.
- In Turkey, it is regarded as a defining moment in the history of the state, a final surge in the defence of the motherland as the Ottoman Empire retreated.
- The struggle formed the basis for the Turkish War of Independence and the declaration of the Republic of Turkey eight years later.
- The campaign is often considered to be the beginning of Australian and New Zealand national consciousness- April 25, anniversary of the Gallipoli landings, is observed as ANZAC Day, the day of national remembrance for the war dead.

Sources: Indian Express.

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

1. Uniform Civil Code

What to study?
For Prelims: Constitutional provisions related to Uniform Civil Code.
For Mains: UCC- need, concerns, challenges and is it suitable for India?

Context: Last week, while hearing a matter relating to properties of a Goan, the Supreme Court described Goa as a “shining example” with a Uniform Civil Code, observed that the founders of the Constitution had “hoped and expected” a Uniform Civil Code for India but there has been no attempt at framing one.
What is uniform civil code?
A generic set of governing laws for every citizen without taking into consideration the religion.

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

India needs a Uniform Civil Code for the following reasons:
1. A secular republic needs a common law for all citizens rather than differentiated rules based on religious practices.
2. Another reason why a uniform civil code is needed is gender justice. The rights of women are usually limited under religious law, be it Hindu or Muslim. The practice of triple talaq is a classic example.
3. Many practices governed by religious tradition are at odds with the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Indian Constitution.
4. Courts have also often said in their judgements that the government should move towards a uniform civil code including the judgement in the Shah Bano case.

Does India not already have a uniform code in civil matters?
- Indian laws do follow a uniform code in most civil matters – Indian Contract Act, Civil Procedure Code, Sale of Goods Act, Transfer of Property Act, Partnership Act, Evidence Act etc. States, however, have made hundreds of amendments and therefore in certain matters, there is diversity even under these secular civil laws. Recently, several states refused to be governed by the uniform Motor Vehicles Act, 2019.
- If the framers of the Constitution had intended to have a Uniform Civil Code, they would have given exclusive jurisdiction to Parliament in respect of personal laws, by including this subject in the Union List. But “personal laws” are mentioned in the Concurrent List. Last year, the Law Commission concluded that a Uniform Civil Code is neither feasible nor desirable.

Why is UCC may not desirable at this point?
Secularism cannot contradict the plurality prevalent in the country. Besides, cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for threat to the territorial integrity of the nation.
The term ‘secularism’ has meaning only if it assures the expression of any form of difference. This diversity, both religious and regional, should not get subsumed under the louder voice of the majority. At the same time, discriminatory practices within a religion should not hide behind the cloak of that faith to gain legitimacy.

How does the idea of a Uniform Civil Code relate to the fundamental right to religion?
Article 25 lays down an individual’s fundamental right to religion; Article 26(b) upholds the right of each religious denomination or any section thereof to “manage its own affairs in matters of religion”; Article 29 defines the right to conserve distinctive culture.
An individual’s freedom of religion under Article 25 is subject to “public order, health, morality” and other provisions relating to fundamental rights, but a group’s freedom under Article 26 has not been subjected to other fundamental rights.
In the Constituent Assembly, there was division on the issue of putting Uniform Civil Code in the fundamental rights chapter. The matter was settled by a vote. By a 5:4 majority, the fundamental rights sub-committee headed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel held that the provision was outside the scope of fundamental rights and therefore the Uniform Civil Code was made less important than freedom of religion.

What is needed now?
Need of the hour is the codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and can be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the Constitution. By codification of different personal laws, one can arrive at certain universal principles that prioritise equity rather than imposition of a Uniform Code, which would discourage many from using the law altogether, given that matters of marriage and divorce can also be settled extra-judicially.
Topics: Women and women related issues.

1. Female Genital Mutilation

What to study?
For Prelims: Meaning and where is it practiced?
For Mains: Prevention, challenges, need for and ways.

Context: Every year, February 6 is observed as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

What is Female Genital Mutilation?
It is the name given to procedures that involve altering or injuring the female genitalia for non-medical or cultural reasons, and is recognised internationally as a violation of human rights and the health and integrity of girls and women.

Types:
WHO classifies four types of FGM:
1. type 1 (partial or total removal of the clitoral glans).
2. type 2 (partial or total removal of the external and visible parts of the clitoris and the inner folds of the vulva).
3. type 3 (infibulation, or narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal).
4. type 4 (picking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the genital area).

Where is it practiced?
Most girls and women who have undergone FGM live in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States, but it is also practiced in some countries in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Countries where FGM is performed include Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Egypt, Oman, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, Iran, Georgia, Russian Federation, Colombia and Peru, among others.

Why prevent FGM?
As per the World Health Organization (WHO), globally, over 200 million girls alive today have suffered FGM in over 30 countries.
The economic costs of treating health complications arising out of FGM amount to roughly $1.4 billion for 2018 for 27 countries where FGM is performed.
If the prevalence remains the same, the amount is expected to rise up to $2.3 billion by 2047.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. HC seeks govt. stand on plea to ban acid sale

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview of the guidelines.
For Mains: Loopholes, challenges in implementation and ways to address them.

Context: The Delhi High Court has sought the State government’s stand on a plea by an acid attack survivor, who has alleged that the chemical was easily available despite the Supreme Court’s directions to regulate its sale. She also alleged that the statutory rules which regulate the sale of acid were not being implemented by the authorities.

Need for stricter compliance:
Acid violence is often referred to as “weapon of misogyny”, “result of toxic masculinity” and “weapon of patriarchy” for targeting women who have tried to assert their agency by refusing to pay dowry, asking for
their property rights, defying religious norms or social custom, or laughing loudly, refusing to wear hijab, or choosing to wear jeans and most commonly rejecting a love proposal. Acid violence is a premeditated attack born out of a feeling of vengeance intended to put the victim who dares to challenge the attacker.

Background:
Till 2013, there was no separate provision in the Indian Penal Code to charge those accused of acid attacks, nor were there rules restricting sale and purchase of acid. But after the Supreme Court directives to regulate the sale of harmful substances like acid, the government declared acid attacks a cognizable offence under **Section 326 (A) of the Indian Penal Code** with punishment up to 10 years. The Supreme Court ordered strict restrictions on the sale of acid which were seldom followed.

**What are the Supreme Court guidelines on this?**
**These guidelines were an outcome of the 2013 SC ruling.**

The ruling came during the hearing of an acid attack case in which a woman, **Laxmi**, whose face and other body parts were disfigured in an acid attack.
- The victim had filed a PIL asking for the framing of a new law, or amendment to the existing laws such as IPC, Indian Evidence Act and CrPC. The PIL asked for changes in the existing laws to enable dealing with the offence as well as asking for compensation.
- In her PIL, she had also asked for a total ban on the sale of acid at the retail level.

Following this, **the court had directed the Centre to frame guidelines in this regard.**

**Overview of the guidelines:**
1. Acid should be sold only to people who show a valid identity card.
2. Buyers will also have explain why they need the chemical and sales will have to be reported to the police.
3. There will also be more compensation for victims.

**Present challenges and concerns:**
1. In clear defiance of the Court’s guidelines, acid is regularly available in India across various pharmacy or grocery shops.
2. Although the acid available in markets is diluted, there is complete absence of regulation to determine if the level of dilution confirms to the prescribed safety levels.
3. The issue of compliance has been brought to the Court’s notice by a writ petition which is currently pending. Such clear defiance of the Court’s guidelines has resulted in easy availability of acid and is an encouraging factor for prospective perpetrators.
4. Besides, acid is allowed to be politicised for the guidelines have not been implemented by several state governments.

**Way ahead:**
Acid attacks are a problem throughout South Asia, with cases also reported in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
There are an estimated 1,000 acid attacks a year in India.
The victims, who have to live with terrible disfigurements, are mainly women and are often targeted by jealous partners.
• Acid attacks are not like normal crimes. They are the handiwork of individuals with a perverted mentality. Such people become blind and insensitive so they need to be identified and injurious substances like acid or arms must be kept away from them.

• The government at every level including all the state governments need to answer the question of why acid is still available for sale in the market.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Permanent Commission for Women

What to study?
For Prelims: What was the issue? What is Permanent Commission?
For Mains: Significance and implications of this judgment.

Context: The Supreme Court has brought women officers in 10 streams of the Army on a par with their male counterparts in all respects, setting aside longstanding objections of the government. The court ordered the government to implement its judgment in three months.

Court’s observations:
• The Supreme Court rejected arguments against greater role for women officers, saying these violated equality under law.
• The biological argument was also rejected as disturbing.
• The court has rejected government’s arguments, saying they are based on sex stereotypes premised on assumptions about socially ascribed roles of gender which discriminate against women.
• It has also said that it only shows the need “to emphasise the need for change in mindsets to bring about true equality in the Army”.

Background:
The case was first filed in the Delhi High Court by women officers in 2003, and had received a favourable order in 2010. But the order was never implemented, and was challenged in the Supreme Court by the government.

Women in Army: Background of the case:
The induction of women officers in the Army started in 1992. They were commissioned for a period of five years in certain chosen streams such as Army Education Corps, Corps of Signals, Intelligence Corps, and Corps of Engineers. Recruits under the Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) had a shorter pre-commission training period than their male counterparts who were commissioned under the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme.
• In 2006, the WSES scheme was replaced with the SSC scheme, which was extended to women officers. They were commissioned for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years. Serving WSES officers were given the option to move to the new SSC scheme, or to continue under the erstwhile WSES. They were to be however, restricted to roles in streams specified earlier — which excluded combat arms such as infantry and armoured corps.

What was the main issue now?
While male SSC officers could opt for permanent commission at the end of 10 years of service, this option was not available to women officers. They were, thus, kept out of any command appointment, and could not qualify for government pension, which starts only after 20 years of service as an officer.

Why the government was against this?
1. Motherhood, childcare, psychological limitations have a bearing on the employment of women officers in the Army.
2. Family separation, career prospects of spouses, education of children, prolonged absence due to pregnancy, motherhood were a greater challenge for women to meet the exigencies of service.
3. **Physical limitations**: Soldiers will be asked to work in difficult terrains, isolated posts and adverse climate conditions. Officers have to lead from the front. They should be in prime physical condition to undertake combat tasks. The Govt. said women were not fit to serve in ground combat roles.

4. **Behavioural and Psychological Challenges**: Army units were a “unique all-male environment”. The presence of women officers would require “moderated behaviour”. The male troop predominantly comes from a rural background and may not be in a position to accept commands from a female leader.

**But, why they should be granted permanent commission?**

1. **Past records**: A quick look at the past records reveals, all the arguments put forth against giving women more responsibility have been answered by the armed forces by giving women greater responsibility in uniform — the IAF has allowed women to become fighter pilots, and the Army has sent them to tough UN peacekeeping missions globally.

2. **Women officers are already commanding platoons, companies and second in command successfully**, with male soldiers accepting orders from them as part of a professional force.

3. Now they are being excluded from commanding a unit, only on the basis that they are women. This argument doesn’t hold water.

4. **A professional force does not discriminate on the basis of gender**, it works because of training, norms and culture. Denying women the posts will be an “extremely retrograde step” and “will inflict irreparable injury” to their dignity.

**Order and its implications:**

1. It means that women officers will be eligible to tenant all the command appointments, at par with male officers, which would open avenues for further promotions to higher ranks for them.

2. It also means that in junior ranks and career courses, women officers would be attending the same training courses and tenanting critical appointments, which are necessary for higher promotions.

3. The implications of the judgment will have to be borne by the human resources management department of the Army, which will need to change policy in order to comply.

**Way ahead:**

The bigger shift will have to take place in the culture, norms, and values of the rank and file of the Army, which will be the responsibility of the senior military and political leadership. After the Supreme Court’s progressive decision, they have no choice but to bite the proverbial bullet.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. **Private member’s Bill calls for two-child norm**

**What to study?**

For prelims and mains: Concerns and issues associated with the proposed two-child policy.

**Context**: Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha member Anil Desai has introduced a **Private Member’s Bill** in the Rajya Sabha that proposes **incentives in taxation, education and employment for people who limit their family size to two children**.

**Key features of the Bill:**

1. The Bill has sought the incorporation of a new provision, **Article 47A in Part IV of the Constitution**, to withdraw all concessions from people who fail to adhere to the “small-family” norm.

2. Essentially, the Bill aims to amend the Constitution in order to incentivise limiting families to two children by offering tax concessions, priority in social benefit schemes and school admissions, among other things.

**Why we need a legislation on this?**
India’s population has already crossed 125 crore is “really frightening”. It has doubled in the last 40 years and that it is expected to unseat China as the world’s most populous nation in the next couple of decades.

- Despite the fact that we have framed a National Population Control Policy, we are the second most populous country in the world.
- Further, the population explosion will cause “many problems” for our future generations.

**Criticisms related to two-child policy:**

1. India is a country with a **booming technology industry, one that relies on young people**. There is fear that, by restricting the number of children that can be born, there will not be enough educated young people in the next generation to carry on India’s technological revolution.
2. Critics also argue that **the population growth of India will slow down naturally as the country grows richer and becomes more educated**.
3. There are already **well-documented problems with China’s one-child policy**, namely the gender imbalance resulting from a strong preference for boys and millions of undocumented children who were born to parents that already had their one child. **These problems risk being replicated in India with the implementation of their two-child policy**.
4. By interfering with the birth rate, India faces a future with severe negative population growth, a **serious problem that most developed countries are trying to reverse**. With negative population growth, the number of old people receiving social services is larger than the young tax base that is paying for the social services.
5. The law related may also be **anti-women**. Human rights activists argue that, not only does the law discriminate against women right from birth (through abortion or infanticide of female fetuses and babies), but divorce and familial abandonment are at risk of increasing if a man with a large family wants to run for political office.
6. A legal restriction to two children could **force couples to go for sex-selective abortions as there are only two ‘attempts’**. A significant proportion of such women, especially those from lower socio-economic strata, would be forced to go for unsafe abortions because of issues of access and affordability. Besides being inhumane, this is bound to create gender imbalances.

Sources: Indian Express.

### 2. Swachh Bharat Mission

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: Overview and key features.*

*For Mains: Significance and relevance of the mission.*

**Context:** The Centre has approved the second phase of **the Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural)** with an estimated central and state budget of Rs 52,497 crore.

**Key facts:**

- The **second phase will be implemented on a mission mode between 2020-21 and 2024-25**.
- The second phase will focus on **Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus)**, which includes ODF sustainability and solid and liquid waste management (SLWM).
- The ODF Plus programme will **converge with MGNREGA**, especially for grey water management, and will complement **the newly launched Jal Jeevan Mission**.
- The programme will also work towards ensuring that **no one is left behind and everyone uses a toilet**.
- **The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and States** will be 90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States and UT of J&K; 60:40 for other States; and 100:0 for other Union Territories, for all the components.

**About SBM- Rural:**

Launched on 2nd October, 2014 to accelerate the efforts to achieve universal sanitation coverage and to focus on sanitation.

- The aim is **to achieve a clean and open defecation free (ODF) India**.
• Implemented by the *Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation*.

**Objectives:**
It seeks to improve the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making Gram Panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitised.

**Incentive:**
*Eligibility:* Incentive as provided under the Mission for the construction of Individual Household Latrines (IHHL) shall be available for all Below Poverty Line (BPL) Households and Above Poverty Line (APL) households restricted to SCs/STs, small and marginal farmers, landless labourers with homestead, physically handicapped and women headed households.

- The Incentive amount provided under SBM(G) to Below Poverty Line (BPL) /identified APLs households shall be up to Rs.12,000 for construction of one unit of IHHL and provide for water availability, including for storing for hand-washing and cleaning of the toilet.
- Central Share of this Incentive for IHHLs shall be Rs.9,000/- (75%) from Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin). The State share will be Rs.3,000/- (25%).
- For North Eastern State, and Special category States, the Central share will be Rs. 10,800/- and the State share Rs.1,200/- (90% : 10%).

**Performance and significance of the mission:**
The rural sanitation programme was *started on October 2, 2014*, when the sanitation coverage in the country was reported at 38.7 per cent. More than 10 crore individual toilets have been constructed since the launch of the mission and as a result rural area in all the States have declared themselves ODF as on 2nd October, 2019.

Sources: pib.

3. *Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission*

*What to study?*
For Prelims: Key features.
For Mains: Significance of the scheme.

**Context:** 4th anniversary of the *Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission* observed. It was launched from Kurubhat in Rajnandgaon District of Chhattisgarh on 21st February 2016.

**About Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission:**
Launched in 2016, the programme is designed to deliver catalytic interventions to rural areas on the threshold of growth.
It is now a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

**Funding:** Shared between the Centre and the State in a ratio of 60:40 for Plain area States and 90:10 for Himalayan and NE States.

The Mission aims at development of 300 Rurban clusters, in five years.

**The objective** is to give a boost to economic activities, skill development and infrastructure amenities in the regions.

**Development:** Under the mission, the Central government in coordination with the district administration has taken measures to bring about multi-layered phased development of the rural gram panchayats and villages on the lines of urban cities with proper civic amenities keeping the soul of villages intact.

**What are Rurban areas? Why develop them?**
A 'Rurban cluster', would be a cluster of geographically contiguous villages with a population of about 25000 to 50000 in plain and coastal areas and with a population of 5000 to 15000 in desert, hilly or tribal areas. These clusters typically illustrate potential for growth, have economic drivers and derive locational and competitive advantages.
The larger outcomes envisaged under this Mission are:

1. Bridging the rural-urban divide-viz: economic, technological and those related to facilities and services.
2. Stimulating local economic development with emphasis on reduction of poverty and unemployment in rural areas.
3. Spreading development in the region.
4. Attracting investment in rural areas.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

1. Swachh Iconic Places

What to study?
For Prelims: SIP and SBM- key features, brief overview of places chosen for SIP project.
For Mains: SBM- features, significance, challenges and sub-missions.

Context: The 3rd Annual Review meeting on Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) was held recently at Baidyanath Dham Deoghar, Jharkhand.

About Swachh Iconic Places (SIP):
What is it? It is an initiative of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission. Aims to take iconic places and their surroundings to higher standards of Swachhata, so that all visitors benefit and also take away home the message of cleanliness.
Implementation of the project: It is a collaborative project with three other central Ministries: Urban Development, Culture, Tourism; all levels in the concerned States and more importantly, Public Sector and Private companies as partners.
Initiatives taken up under Swachh Iconic Places initiative: Improved sewage infrastructure, installation of Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), drainage facilities, improved sanitation facilities, water vending machines, solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) set-up, structure restoration, lighting arrangements, beautification of parks, roads maintenance, better transport facilities in approach and access areas besides at the main sites.

Places selected:
**Phase I iconic places are:** Ajmer Sharif Dargah, CST Mumbai, Golden Temple, Kamakhya Temple, MaikarnikaGhat, Meenakshi Temple, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi, Shree Jagannath Temple, The Taj Mahal and Tirupati Temple.

**Phase II included** Gangotri, Yamunotri, Mahakaleshwar Temple, Charminar, Convent and Church of St. Francis of Assissi, Kalady, Gommateswara, BaidyanathDham, Gaya Tirth and Somnath temple.

**Phase III includes** RaghavendraSwamy Temple (Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh); Hazardwari Palace (Murshidabad, West Bengal); Brahma Sarovar Temple (Kurukshetra, Haryana); VidurKuti (Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh); Mana village (Chamoli, Uttarakhand); Pangong Lake (Leh-Ladakh, J&K); Nagvasuki Temple (Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh); ImaKeithal/market (Imphal, Manipur); Sabarimala Temple (Kerala); and Kanvashram (Uttarakhand).

Sources: the Hindu.

**Topics: Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.**

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1. **Supreme Court upholds changes to SC/ST atrocities law**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: What is Anticipatory bail? Supreme Court Judgment, over of SC/ST atrocities law.*

*For Mains: Concerns over misuse, impact of Supreme Court ruling, implications and way ahead.*

**What’s the issue?**

The Supreme Court has upheld a 2018 amendment which barred persons accused of committing atrocities against those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes from getting anticipatory bail. The Court upheld the constitutionality of **Section 18A of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act of 2018.** The sole purpose of Section 18A was to nullify a controversial March 20, 2018, judgment of the Supreme Court diluting the stringent anti-bail provisions of the original Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989.

**Views of the Court:**

- A **High Court** would also have an “inherent power” to grant anticipatory bail in cases in which prima facie an offence under the anti-atrocities law is not made out.
- Besides, a **High Court,** in “exceptional cases”, could also **quash cases** to prevent the misuse of the anti-atrocities law.
- However, the courts should take care to use this power to grant anticipatory bail “**only sparingly and in very exceptional cases**”. It should not become a norm lest it leads to miscarriage of justice and abuse of the process of law.

**What’s there in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act of 2018?**

1. **A preliminary inquiry is not essential** before lodging an FIR under the act and the **approval of senior police officials is not needed.**
2. There is **no provision for anticipatory bail** to the accused being charged with SC/ST Act.
Why stringent provisions against SC/ST atrocities are necessary?

Such stringent terms, otherwise contrary to the philosophy of bail, are absolutely essential, because a liberal use of the power to grant pre-arrest bail would defeat the intention of Parliament.

The express provisions of the Constitution and statutes like the Act, meant to protect the oppressed classes, underline the social or collective resolve to ensure that “all humans are treated as humans, that their innate genius is allowed outlets through equal opportunities and each of them is fearless in the pursuit of her or his dreams”.

Way ahead:

Unless provisions of the Act (anti-atrocities law) are enforced in their true letter and spirit, with utmost earnestness and dispatch, the dream and ideal of a casteless society will remain only a dream, a mirage. The marginalisation of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities is an enduring exclusion and is based almost solely on caste identities.

Background:

In March 2018, Supreme Court diluted the stringent provisions of SC/ST Act (Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra).

The verdict saw a huge backlash across the country. The government filed a review petition in the Supreme Court and subsequently amended the 1989 Act back to its original form.

Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court and rationale behind it:

Supreme court gave the judgement on the pretext that Innocents cannot be terrorised by the provisions of the SC/ST Act and their fundamental rights need to be protected.

- The court said that public servants could be arrested only with the written permission of their appointing authority.
- In the case of private employees, the Senior Superintendent of Police concerned should allow it.
- A preliminary inquiry should be conducted before the FIR was registered to check if the case fell within the ambit of the Act, and whether it was frivolous or motivated, the court ruled.

Why this decision?

The court referred to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for 2015, which said that closure reports had been filed in 15-16 percent of the complaints under the Act.

- Over 75% of such cases taken up by the courts had resulted in acquittals/ withdrawal or compounding of the cases.
- Therefore, there was a need to safeguard innocent citizens against false implication and unnecessary arrest for which there is no sanction under the law.

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

1. Why we have leap years?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: What is leap year, when and why it is considered?

Context: The year 2020 is a ‘leap year’, meaning the month of February will have 29 days instead of 28, and the total number of days will be 366 instead of 365. This was also the case in 2016, and 2024 will again be a leap year.

Why do we have leap years?

1. The time required by the Earth to complete its orbit around the Sun is approximately 365.242 days. But years are usually only 365 days.
2. To adjust for the extra 0.242 days in the orbital period, which becomes almost one full day in four years, the calendar adds an extra day once every four years.
3. This approximates the time to 365.25 days, which is close to the actual 365.242 days.

Exceptions:

In the Gregorian calendar, a century year (a year ending with 00) is not a leap year, even though it is a multiple of 4. Thus, the year 2100 will not be a leap year. To ensure that, some century years remain leap years. In the Gregorian calendar, leap years include those century years which are exactly divisible by 400. Thus, 2000 remained a leap year even though it ended with 00.

Sources: Indian Express.
GENERAL STUDIES – 2

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

1. Motion of thanks to President’s Address

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: What is Motion of thanks, what it contains? Its significance and what happens if it is not passed.

What is “Motion of Thanks” and what it contains?
The President makes an address to a joint sitting of Parliament at the start of the Budget session, which is prepared by the government and lists its achievements. It is essentially a statement of the legislative and policy achievements of the government during the preceding year and gives a broad indication of the agenda for the year ahead.
The address is followed by a motion of thanks moved in each House by ruling party MPs. During the session, political parties discuss the motion of thanks also suggesting amendments.

Amendments to the “Motion of Thanks“:
Notices of amendments to Motion of Thanks on the President’s Address can be tabled after the President has delivered his Address. Amendments may refer to matters contained in the Address as well as to matters, in the opinion of the member, the Address has failed to mention.
Amendments can be moved to the Motion of Thanks in such form as may be considered appropriate by the Speaker.

Limitations:
The only limitations are that members cannot refer to matters which are not the direct responsibility of the Central Government and that the name of the President cannot be brought in during the debate since the Government and not the President is responsible for the contents of the Address.

Provisions governing them:
President’s Address and Motion of Thanks are governed by Articles 86 (1) and 87 (1) of the Constitution and Rules 16 to 24 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.

Its passage:
Members of Parliament vote on this motion of thanks. This motion must be passed in both of the houses. A failure to get motion of thanks passed amounts to defeat of government and leads to collapse of government. This is why, the Motion of Thanks is deemed to be a no-confidence motion.

Constitutional provisions on this:
Article 86(1) of the Constitution provides that the President may address either House of Parliament or both Houses assembled together, and for that purpose require the attendance of members.
Article 87 provides for the special address by the President. Clause (1) of that article provides that at the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year, the President shall address both Houses of Parliament assembled together and inform Parliament of the causes of its summons. No other business is transacted till the President has addressed both Houses of Parliament assembled together.

Sources: pib.
2. Reservation in promotion in public posts not a fundamental right: SC

What to study?
For prelims: Names of relevant SC cases and constitutional provisions wrt to SC/ST welfare.
For mains: Significance of Supreme Court verdict and its implications.

Context: The Supreme Court has recently ruled that the states are not bound to provide reservation in appointments and promotions and that there is no fundamental right to reservation in promotions.

What has the court said?

1. Reservation in promotion in public posts cannot be claimed as a fundamental right.

2. Articles 16 (4) and 16 (4-A) of the Constitution does not confer individuals with a fundamental right to claim reservation in promotion. It only empowers the State to make a reservation in matters of appointment and promotion in favour of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, only if in the opinion of the State they are not adequately represented in the services of the State.

3. State governments are not bound to make a reservation and have discretion in providing reservations.

4. The judgment also noted that even the courts could not issue a mandamus directing the States to provide reservation.

Constitutional basis for reservations- Article 335:
Article 335 recognises that special measures need to be adopted for considering the claims of SCs and STs in order to bring them to a level-playing field.

Need: Centuries of discrimination and prejudice suffered by the SCs and STs in a feudal, caste-oriented societal structure poses real barriers of access to opportunity. The proviso contains a realistic recognition that unless special measures are adopted for the SCs and STs, the mandate of the Constitution for the consideration of their claim to appointment will remain illusory.

Significance:
The proviso is an aid of fostering the real and substantive right to equality to the SCs and STs. It protects the authority of the Union and the States to adopt any of these special measures, to effectuate a realistic (as opposed to a formal) consideration of their claims to appointment in services and posts under the Union and the states. It also emphasises that the need to maintain the efficiency of administration cannot be construed as a fetter on adopting these special measures designed to uplift and protect the welfare of the SCs and STs.

Indra Sawhney vs Union of India and M Nagaraj case:
In its landmark 1992 decision in Indra Sawhney vs Union of India, the Supreme Court had held that reservations under Article 16(4) could only be provided at the time of entry into government service but not in matters of promotion.
It added that the principle would operate only prospectively and not affect promotions already made and that reservation already provided in promotions shall continue in operation for a period of five years from the date of the judgment. It also ruled that the creamy layer can be and must be excluded.

1. On June 17, 1995, Parliament, acting in its constituent capacity, adopted the seventy-seventh amendment by which clause (4A) was inserted into Article 16 to enable reservation to be made in promotion for SCs and STs. The validity of the seventy-seventh and eighty-fifth amendments to the Constitution and of the legislation enacted in pursuance of those amendments was challenged before the Supreme Court in the Nagaraj case.
2. Upholding the validity of Article 16 (4A), the court then said that it is an enabling provision. “The State is not bound to make reservation for the SCs and STs in promotions. But, if it seeks to do so, it must collect quantifiable data on three facets — the backwardness of the class; the inadequacy of the representation of that class in public employment; and the general efficiency of service as mandated by Article 335 would not be affected”.

3. The court ruled that the constitutional amendments do not abrogate the fundamentals of equality.

Sources: The Hindu.

3. Delimitation of Constituencies

What to study?
For prelims and mains: What is delimitation, why is it needed, how is it carried out and special provisions w.r.t to J&K.

Context: About six months after the State of Jammu and Kashmir was split into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, the government has moved to start the delimitation of Assembly constituencies in J&K.

Background:
• Bifurcation of J&K into two UTs has led to redrawing of Assembly constituency boundaries. While, the UT of Ladakh will not have its own legislature, J&K will. This would be similar to Puducherry or Delhi.
• Such delimitation was also necessitated in 2014 when Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were bifurcated.

What is Delimitation?
Delimitation literally means the process of fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a state that has a legislative body.

How it will be done?
The new state assembly shall have 114 seats (currently 107), out of which only 90 will be open for elections, and the remaining 24 will be shadow seats reserved for the areas of the erstwhile state that have been occupied by Pakistan (PoJK).
For the delimitation exercise, the population figures of 2011 census shall be taken as the basis.
The J&K Representation of the People Act 1957 has now been invalidated and, instead, delimitation will be done as per the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (as amended from time to time) and provisions of Sections 59, 60 of Act 34 of 2019.

Who carries out the exercise?
1. Delimitation is undertaken by a highly powerful commission. They are formally known as Delimitation Commission or Boundary Commission.
2. These bodies are so powerful that its orders have the force of law and they cannot be challenged before any court.
4. The commissions' orders are enforced as per the date specified by the President of India. Copies of these orders are laid before the Lok Sabha or the concerned Legislative Assembly. No modifications are permitted.

Composition of the Commission:
According to the Delimitation Commission Act, 2002, the Delimitation Commission appointed by the Centre has to have three members: a serving or retired judge of the Supreme Court as the chairperson, and the Chief Election Commissioner or Election Commissioner nominated by the CEC and the State Election Commissioner as ex-officio members.

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

1. Recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission

What to study?
For Prelims: About FC - composition, functions and objectives, key recommendations.
For Mains: Significance and the need for a permanent status.

Context: The report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, along with an Action Taken Report, was recently tabled in Parliament.

How revenue has been divided?
- FC has considered the 2011 population along with forest cover, tax effort, area of the state, and “demographic performance” to arrive at the states’ share in the divisible pool of taxes.
- In order to reward population control efforts by states, the Commission developed a criterion for demographic effort — which is essentially the ratio of the state’s population in 1971 to its fertility rate in 2011 — with a weight of 12.5%.
- The total area of states, area under forest cover, and “income distance” were also used by the FC to arrive at the tax-sharing formula.

Key recommendations:
- The Commission has reduced the vertical devolution — the share of tax revenues that the Centre shares with the states — from 42% to 41%.
- The Commission has said that it intends to set up an expert group to initiate a non-lapsable fund for defence expenditure.

State-wise distribution:
- Shares of the southern states, except Tamil Nadu, have fallen — with Karnataka losing the most.
- Shares of states like Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, along with Tamil Nadu, all of which have fertility rates below the replacement level, have increased slightly.
- On the other hand, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and West Bengal’s shares have fallen, even though their fertility rates are also low.
- Incidentally, Karnataka, the biggest loser in this exercise, also had the highest tax-GSDP ratio in 2017-18, as per an RBI report on state finances.

Criticisms:
- The population parameter used by the Commission has been criticised by the governments of the southern states.
- The previous FC used both the 1971 and the 2011 populations to calculate the states’ shares, giving greater weight to the 1971 population (17.5%) as compared to the 2011 population (10%).
- The use of 2011 population figures has resulted in states with larger populations like UP and Bihar getting larger shares, while smaller states with lower fertility rates have lost out.
- The combined population of the Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand is 47.8 crore.
- This is over 39.48% of India’s total population, and is spread over 32.4% of the country’s area, as per the 2011 Census.
On the other hand, the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and undivided Andhra Pradesh are home to only 20.75% of the population living in 19.34% of the area, with a 13.89% share of the taxes.

This means that the terms decided by the Commission are loaded against the more progressive (and prosperous) southern states.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Private member’s Bill

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

Context: Four Members of Parliament are ready with Private Member’s Bill in the Lok Sabha offering a way out for the central government to deal with high unemployment.

The four bills are:
1. Unemployment Allowance Bill 2019 propose doling out some form of unemployment allowance to jobless citizens.
2. Financial Assistance to Unemployed Post-Graduates Bill 2019 restricts the unemployment allowances to unemployed postgraduates only.
3. Unemployed Youth (Allowance and Employment Opportunities) Bill 2019 eyes the twin-purpose of generating gainful employment opportunities and payment of unemployment allowance.
4. Another Unemployment Allowance Bill proposes unemployment allowances for jobless youth until they get gainful employment.

Background:
Unable to tame rising unemployment has been the biggest criticism against the present government in its near six-year tenure. Part of the blame does lie with the central government itself. More than 6.83 lakh posts are lying vacant in the central government.

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

Admissibility of a private member’s Bill:
The admissibility is decided by the Chairman for Rajya Sabha and Speaker in the case of Lok Sabha.
The procedure is roughly the same for both Houses:
- The Member must give at least a month’s notice before the Bill can be listed for introduction.
- The House secretariat examines it for compliance with constitutional provisions and rules on legislation before listing.

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

Has a private member’s bill ever become a law?
As per PRS Legislative, no private member’s Bill has been passed by Parliament since 1970. To date, Parliament has passed 14 such Bills, six of them in 1956.
In the 14th Lok Sabha, of the over 300 private member’s Bills introduced, roughly four per cent were discussed, the remaining 96 per cent lapsed without a single dialogue.

Sources: Indian Express.
Topics: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

1. Gram Nyayalayas

What to study?
For Prelims: What are they, how are they function?
For Mains: Need for and significance.

Context: The Supreme Court has directed the states, which are yet to come out with notifications for establishing ‘Gram Nyayalayas’, to do so within four weeks, and asked the high courts to expedite the process of consultation with state governments on this issue.

What’s the issue?
So far only 11 states have taken steps to notify Gram Nyayalayas. Several states have issued notifications for establishing ‘Gram Nyayalayas’ but all of them were not functioning except in Kerala, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Only 208 ‘Gram Nyayalayas’ are functioning in the country as against 2,500 estimated to be required by the 12th five-year plan.

About Gram Nyayalayas:
Gram Nyayalayas or village courts are established under the Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008 for speedy and easy access to justice system in the rural areas of India.
The Act came into force from 2 October 2009.

Composition:
The Gram Nyayalayas are presided over by a Nyayadhikari, who will have the same power, enjoy same salary and benefits of a Judicial Magistrate of First Class. Such Nyayadhikari are to be appointed by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.

Jurisdiction:
- A Gram Nyayalaya have jurisdiction over an area specified by a notification by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.
- The Court can function as a mobile court at any place within the jurisdiction of such Gram Nyayalaya, after giving wide publicity to that regards.
- They have both civil and criminal jurisdiction over the offences.
- The pecuniary jurisdiction of the Nyayalayas are fixed by the respective High Courts.
- Gram Nyayalayas has been given power to accept certain evidences which would otherwise not be acceptable under Indian Evidence Act.

Procedure to be followed:
Gram Nyayalayas can follow special procedures in civil matters, in a manner it deem just and reasonable in the interest of justice.
Gram Nyayalayas allow for conciliation of the dispute and settlement of the same in the first instance.

Appeals:
Appeal in criminal cases shall lie to the Court of Session, which shall be heard and disposed of within a period of six months from the date of filing of such appeal.
Appeal in civil cases shall lie to the District Court, which shall be heard and disposed of within a period of six months from the date of filing of the appeal.

Significance:
The setting up of Gram Nyayalayas is considered as an important measure to reduce arrears and is a part of the judicial reforms. It is estimated that Gram Nyayalayas can reduce around 50% of the pendency of cases in subordinate courts and can take care of the new litigations which will be disposed within six months.
2. Kerala High Court bans all forms of agitations in schools, colleges

What to study?
For Prelims: Key observations made by the Court.
For Mains: Implications and criticisms of the judgment.

Context: The Kerala High Court has ruled that strikes, rallies and gheraos that affect regular classes should not be held on the campuses of schools and colleges.

Observations made by the Court:
1. Those who are not participating in the strike have every right to attend their classes and no one should force them to participate in agitations that affect smooth conduct of classes.
2. Academic institutions are only meant for studies and they should not be venues for strikes and protests.
3. Nobody has the right to override a student’s right to study and action can be against those who indulge in strikes, rallies and gheraos that affect regular classes.
4. Campuses can have peaceful discussions and sharing of thoughts in a peaceful manner.
5. Students and others who force students to take part in the strike can be dealt with the law as it was the infringement of the basic right of the student.

Background:
The important verdict came in the wake of some private schools in Pathanamthitta moving the court with a plea to restrain student politics. Though the court had banned politics on the campus earlier also it was not implemented properly and students were suffering due to frequent disruptions of classes during strikes, they contended.

Measures:
1. If such incidents take place in schools, the authorities concerned, including the district educational officer, can take action against erring students. They can even summon the police to restore the peace in the campus.
2. Similar measures should be taken on the college campuses as well. But, campuses can have peaceful discussions and sharing of thoughts on any issue. This, however, should not be done by causing inconvenience to students or lead to a strike.

Earlier judgments:
The HC also cited the long list of court verdicts on the issue over the years.
1. An earlier judgment had granted managements the authority to ban politics in their respective campuses.
2. Another court order also stated that students should not be forcefully made to boycott classes.
3. The court had also ruled earlier that police should give protection if the authorities ask for it.
4. In the ‘Vijayakumar’ case, the court ruled that if criminal activities take place in college premises, police has the right to take action and enter campus without permission.

Criticisms:
The HC verdict has evoked sharp reactions from many student outfits and political parties which they said would affect students’ rights and their plan to carry out peaceful protests.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. What is ‘unparliamentary’ speech and conduct?
For Prelims: Rules in this regard, what constitutes unparliamentary language?
For Mains: Need for rules in this regard and ways to improve.

Context: Few recent instances of heated exchanges in Parliament have brought back recurring questions around “unparliamentary” speech and conduct.

What are the checks available on MPs’ speech?
Despite Article 105(2) of the constitution, Whatever an MP says is subject to the discipline of the Rules of Parliament, the “good sense” of Members, and the control of proceedings by the Speaker. These checks ensure that MPs cannot use “defamatory or indecent or undignified or unparliamentary words” inside the House.

Rules in this regard:
Rule 380 (“Expunction”) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha says: “If the Speaker is of opinion that words have been used in debate which are defamatory or indecent or unparliamentary or undignified, the Speaker may, while exercising discretion order that such words be expunged from the proceedings of the House.”
Rule 381 says: “The portion of the proceedings of the House so expunged shall be marked by asterisks and an explanatory footnote shall be inserted in the proceedings as follows: ‘Expunged as ordered by the Chair’.”

What are Unparliamentary expressions? Who decides on this?
There are phrases and words, literally in thousands, both in English and in other Indian languages, that are “unparliamentary”.
The Presiding Officers — Speaker of Lok Sabha and Chairperson of Rajya Sabha — have the job of keeping these bad words out of Parliament’s records.
For their reference and help, the Lok Sabha Secretariat has brought out a bulky tome titled ‘Unparliamentary Expressions’, the 2004 edition of which ran into 900 pages.

- The list contains several words and expressions that would probably be considered rude or offensive in most cultures; however, it also has stuff that is likely to be thought of as being fairly harmless or innocuous.
- The state legislatures too are guided mainly by the same book, which also draws heavily from unparliamentary words and phrases used in the Vidhan Sabhas and Vidhan Parishads of India.

Examples of unparliamentary- (Breif overview for understanding):
Among the words and phrases that have been deemed unparliamentary are “scumbag”, “shit”, “badmashi”, “bad” (as in “An MP is a bad man”), and “bandicoot”, which is unparliamentary if an MP uses it for another, but which is fine if he uses it for himself.
If the Presiding Officer is a “lady”, no MP can address her as “beloved Chairperson”.
MPs or Presiding Officers can’t be accused of being “double minded”, having “double standards”, being of “doubtful honesty”, being “downtrodden”, indulging in “double talk”, being “lazy”, “lousy”, a “nuisance” or a “loudmouth”.
The government can’t be called “andhi-goongi”, or one of “Ali Baba aur 40 chor”. An illiterate MP can’t be called “angootha chhaap”, and it is unparliamentary to suggest that a member should be sent to the “ajayabghar” (museum).

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Elections to Rajya Sabha
What to study?
For Prelims: Procedure, eligibility and voting.
For Mains: Significance of upper house, criticisms and reforms necessary.
Context: The biennial elections for 55 Rajya Sabha seats will take place on March 26, 2020. The announcement was made by the Election Commission recently.

Rajya Sabha:
The Constitution provides that the Rajya Sabha shall consist of 250 members, of which 12 members shall be nominated by the President from amongst persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of such matters as literature, science, art and social service; and not more than 238 representatives of the States and of the Union Territories.

How are the members elected?
Elections to the Rajya Sabha are indirect.
1. Members representing States are elected by elected members of legislative assemblies of the States in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote.
2. Members representing Union Territories are chosen in such manner as Parliament may by law prescribe.

Related facts:
• The Rajya Sabha is not subject to dissolution; one-third of its members retire every second year.
• According to Section 154 of the Representation of the People Act 1951, a member chosen to fill a casual vacancy will serve for the remainder of his predecessor's term of office.
• Members of a state's Legislative Assembly vote in the Rajya Sabha elections in what is called proportional representation with the single transferable vote (STV) system. Each MLA’s vote is counted only once.

Sources: pib.

3. Police and public order in Delhi

What to study?
For Prelims: Limitations of Delhi Legislature, who handles police and public order in Delhi?
For Mains: Concerns over Delhi Legislature’s limitations, implications and measures needed.

Context: The Delhi High Court has issued a series of directions to the Delhi police, the State government and other agencies for providing all necessary assistance to those affected by the violence in northeast Delhi.
• The directions were given on a petition seeking police protection for the safe passage of the injured persons from AI Hind Hospital to other nearest hospitals.

Background:
More than 20 people have been killed in Delhi’s worst-ever communal violence since 1984 which resulted in clashes that began over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on Sunday evening.

What’s the issue?
A key question now being raised is whether or not the government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi can take any action to bring law and order under control. The answer is not a straightforward one, with many factors coming into play.

What the elected legislature in Delhi cannot do?
The NCT of Delhi, under Article 239 AA, has been given a special status. It gives powers of law-making and administration to an elected legislature and the council of ministers. But, puts two subjects — public order and police — directly under the Union government, however, with exceptions- Two sections of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) —129 & 130 — give the Executive Magistrate certain powers relating to “unlawful assembly”.
Under these two limited powers, the Executive Magistrate, who reports to the Chief Minister, can issue orders relating to public security.
What is CrPC 129?
If a group is found in unlawful assembly under Section 129 CrPC, the Executive Magistrate can issue orders to these persons to disperse. If this fails, the magistrate can use the civil force — which is the police.

What is CrPC section 130?
If efforts under CrPC section 129 fail, the Executive Magistrate, under Section 130 CrPC, can call an officer of the armed forces of the Union to disperse the assembly. This section states that it can be invoked for “public security”.
However, this Section empowers the officer to decide, on his own, the manner in which the unlawful assembly has to be dispersed by forces under his command.

How are these powers different from the powers of a full fledged state?
While public order and police are under the state list, the state government may request the Union government to make available armed forces to help restore public order.
Even in circumstances where public disorder is not so serious as to fall in the category of an “internal disturbance” as defined in Article 355 of the Constitution, the Union Government may accede to the request.
But, as per CrPC 130, except for the limited purpose of dispersing an “unlawful assembly” and arresting its members, neither the state government nor any authority under it has been conferred by the Constitution any legal right to call the armed forces while dealing with a public disorder or “internal disturbance”.
Also, the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution states that use of the armed forces in the maintenance of public order is outside the purview of the states.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

1. What is Curative Petition?

What to study?
For Prelims: Meaning, evolution and constitutional status.
For Mains: Significance.

Context: With curative petitions being a new addition to the field of law in India and that being used by the convicts of one of India's landmark case, the Nirbhaya case, it is important to understand what it means and what can be the consequences of such a petition.

About Curative Petition:
The concept was first evolved by the Supreme Court of India in Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and another case (2002) on the question whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, even after the dismissal of a review petition.
The court used the Latin maxim “actus curiae neminem gravabit”, which means that an act of the court shall prejudice no one.
It's objectives are twofolds- avoid miscarriage of justice and to prevent abuse of process.

Related Constitutional provisions:
The concept of the curative petition is supported by Article 137 of the Indian Constitution.
- It provides that in the matter of laws and rules made under Article 145, the Supreme Court has the power to review any judgement pronounced (or order made) by it.
- Such a petition needs to be filed within 30 days from the date of judgement or order.

Procedure:
1. A curative petition may be filed after a review plea against the final conviction is dismissed.
2. It can be entertained if the petitioner establishes that there was a violation of the principles of natural justice, and that he was not heard by the court before passing an order.

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3. It must be rare rather than regular.
4. A curative petition must be first circulated to a Bench of the three senior-most judges, and the judges who passed the concerned judgment, if available.
5. Only when a majority of the judges conclude that the matter needs hearing should it be listed before the same Bench.
6. The Bench at any stage of consideration of the curative petition can ask a senior counsel to assist it as amicus curiae (Friend of the court).
7. A curative petition is usually decided by judges in the chamber unless a specific request for an open-court hearing is allowed.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Sedition cases in India

What to study?
For Mains: Significance of the law, need for, concerns and criticisms.

Context: Latest data suggest that the sedition law remains as relevant as ever with sedition arrests increasing in recent years.

The data:
1. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), though, has only been collecting separate data on sedition cases since 2014. In 2014, there were 47 cases of sedition but that number increased to 70 in 2018 (the latest year with available data).
2. Compared to other offences, sedition remains a rare crime (it accounts for less than 0.01% of all IPC crimes).
3. But within India, some parts are emerging as sedition hotspots. Assam and Jharkhand, for instance, with 37 sedition cases each, account for 32% of all sedition cases between 2014-2018.
4. In 2018, there were 1,182 cases registered under UAPA. And almost all these cases (92%) were concentrated in five states (Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Jharkhand and Manipur).

What is Sedition?
Sedition, which falls under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, is defined as any action that brings or attempts to bring hatred or contempt towards the government of India and has been illegal in India since 1870.

Kedarnath Singh vs State of Bihar:
Section 124A has been challenged in various courts in specific cases. The validity of the provision itself was upheld by a Constitution Bench in 1962, in Kedarnath Singh vs State of Bihar.
- That judgment went into the issue of whether the law on sedition is consistent with the fundamental right under Article 19 (1) (a) which guarantees each citizen’s freedom of speech and expression.
- The Supreme Court laid down that every citizen has a right to say or write about the government, by way of criticism or comment, as long as it does not “incite people to violence” against the government established by law or with the intention of creating public disorder.

Why sedition law should be repealed?
Sedition leads to a sort of unauthorised self-censorship, for it produces a chilling effect on free speech. It suppresses what every citizen ought to do in a democracy — raise questions, debate, disagree and challenge the government’s decisions.
Sedition systematically destroys the soul of Gandhi’s philosophy that is, right to dissent.
Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. **Voting Rights of Prisoners**

**What to study?**

For Prelims: Who can and who cannot cast their votes?
For Mains: Should undertrials and convicts be allowed to vote- arguments ‘For’ and ‘Against’.

**Context:** The Delhi High Court has rejected a petition seeking voting rights for prisoners.

**Observations made by the Court:**

1. The right to cast vote is neither a fundamental right nor a common law right and is only provided by a statute.
2. The right to vote provided under the statute — Representation of the People Act — was subject to restrictions imposed by the law, which does not allow prisoners to cast vote from jails.

**Who can vote and who cannot?**

Under Section 62(5) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, individuals in lawful custody of the police and those serving a sentence of imprisonment after conviction cannot vote. Undertrial prisoners are also excluded from participating in elections even if their names are on electoral rolls. Only those under preventive detention can cast their vote through postal ballots.

**Why undertrials should be given voting rights?**

1. The present voting ban is criticised on the ground that it makes no offence-based or sentence-based classification — that is, prisoners are debarred from voting irrespective of the gravity of the offence they have committed, or the length of their sentence. It also makes no distinction between convicted prisoners, undertrials, and those in lawful police custody.
2. Besides, a person is innocent until proven guilty by law. Despite this, it denies an undertrial the right to vote but allows a detainee the same.
3. The provision also violates the rights to equality, vote (Article 326) and is arbitrary. It is not a reasonable restriction.

**Need of the hour:**

Undertrials should be allowed to vote. This is because there are many people, awaiting trial, who have spent more time in prison than the actual term their alleged crime merits. Their numbers are much bigger than convicts.

**Stats:**

The ‘Prison Statistics India, 2014’ published by the National Crime Records Bureau, says there were 2,82,879 undertrials and 1,31,517 convicts lodged across 1,387 prisons in the country as on December 31, 2014.

**Global practice:**

1. In Europe, Switzerland, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Ireland, the Baltic States, and Spain already allow prisoner voting.
2. Countries like Romania, Iceland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Germany have opted for a middle path: Voting is allowed subject to certain permits and conditions such as the quantum of sentence served.
3. They are only disenfranchised as an added penalty based on the gravity of the crime. Bulgaria allows for anyone sentenced to less than a decade to vote. In Australia, the limit is five years.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Criminalization of Politics

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

Context: Expressing concern about the "alarming increase" in number of persons with criminal backgrounds being elected Members of Parliament and Legislative Assemblies of states, the Supreme Court has passed directions to compel political parties to "explain" why such candidates are given tickets.

These directions include:
1. It is mandatory for all political parties to publish all details regarding pending criminal cases against their chosen candidates, not only in local newspapers, but also on party websites and social media handles.
2. Along with the details of pending cases, the parties will also have to publish "the reasons for such selection, as also as to why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates".
3. The "reasons" given for selection of the candidates have to be "with reference to the qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidate concerned, and not mere 'winnability' at the polls".

Background:
The judgment was passed in a contempt of court case filed against the Chief Election Commissioner of India.
- The petition claimed the ECI had failed to take any steps to ensure the implementation of a 2018 judgment of the bench, which had made it mandatory for political parties to declare and publish all criminal cases pending against their candidates.
- The petitioners argued that parties were "circumventing" the 2018 judgment by publishing the details of their candidates' criminal background in "obscure and limited circulation newspapers" and "making the webpages on their websites difficult to access".

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Finance Commission of India

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: About FC- roles, objectives, functions, criteria used and need for reforms.*

**Context:** The report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, along with an Action Taken Report, has been tabled in Parliament. The Commission, headed by N K Singh, had submitted its Report to the President in December 2019.

**What is the Finance Commission?**
The Finance Commission is constituted by the President under article 280 of the Constitution, mainly to give its recommendations on distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the States and amongst the States themselves.

Two distinctive features of the Commission’s work involve redressing the vertical imbalances between the taxation powers and expenditure responsibilities of the centre and the States respectively and equalization of all public services across the States.

**What are the functions of the Finance Commission?**
It is the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to:
1. the distribution between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them and the allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds;
2. the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India;
3. the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
4. any other matter referred to the Commission by the President in the interests of sound finance.

The Commission determines its procedure and have such powers in the performance of their functions as Parliament may by law confer on them.

**Who appoints the Finance Commission and what are the qualifications for Members?**

The Finance Commission is appointed by the President under [Article 280 of the Constitution](https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1687187/).

As per the provisions contained in the [Finance Commission [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act, 1951 and The Finance Commission (Salaries & Allowances) Rules, 1951](https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1687187/), the Chairman of the Commission is selected from among persons who have had experience in public affairs, and the four other members are selected from among persons who:

1. are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as Judges of a High Court; or
2. have special knowledge of the finances and accounts of Government; or
3. have had wide experience in financial matters and in administration; or
4. have special knowledge of economics.

**When was the first Commission Constituted and how many Commissions have been Constituted so far?**

The First Finance Commission was constituted vide Presidential Order dated 22.11.1951 under the chairmanship of Shri K.C. Neogy on 6th April, 1952. Fifteenth Finance Commissions have been Constituted so far at intervals of every five years.

**Why is there a need for a Finance Commission?**

The Indian federal system allows for the division of power and responsibilities between the centre and states. Correspondingly, the taxation powers are also broadly divided between the centre and states. State legislatures may devolve some of their taxation powers to local bodies.

**Need for permanent status:**

Finance commissions have over the past several decades adopted different approaches with regard to principles of tax devolution, grants to be given to states and fiscal consolidation issues. In other words, **there has to be continuity and change between finance commissions.**

**There is a need to ensure broad consistency between Finance Commissions so that there is some degree of certainty in the flow of funds, especially to the states.** This has become even more critical in the post GST scenario.

If it is given permanent status, the Commission can function as a leaner entity in the intervening period till the next Finance Commission is set up in a full-fledged manner. During the intervening period, it can also address issues arising from implementation of the recommendations of the finance commission.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. **Ram Temple trust**

**What to study?**

For Prelims: About the Ayodhya verdict and the trust- functions.

For Mains: Issues, concerns and ways to address them.

**Context:** A 15-member trust to oversee the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya has been constituted.

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The announcement of a "broad scheme" for developing a Ram Temple and formation of a Trust named 'Shri Ram Janamabhoomi Teertha Kshetra' was made by the prime minister.

**Composition:** There will be a total of 15 members in the trust -- 9 permanent and 6 nominated members.

**The government has made nine rules which will be the basis of how the trust will work:**
1. **The permanent office of the Trust** will be discussed in the first meeting of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra.
2. Trust will be *completely free to take every decision related to the construction of Ram temple*. It will also have to arrange all facilities for devotees such as kitchen, gaušala, museum and sarai.
3. **Trustees can legally accept donations, grants, immovable property and assistance from any person, an institution** for facilities and temple construction. Apart from this, the trust can also take a loan.
4. The board of trustees will appoint one trustee as president-managing trustee, who will preside over meetings. At the same time, the general secretary and treasurer will also be appointed.
5. The trust will *decide on investment for existing funds for the construction of Ram temple*. Investment for the temple will be in the name of the trust.
6. The *donations received for the Ram temple will be used only for the work of the trust*. This money will not be used for any other work.
7. Trustees will *not have the right to sell immovable property associated with Ram Mandir trust*.
8. Trust will have to *keep account of donations and expenses received for Ram Temple*. Balance sheets will be created and trust's accounts will be audited.
9. There is *no provision of salary for the members of the Ram Mandir trust*, but the expenses incurred during the journey will be paid by the trust.

**Background:**
This comes in the wake of the Supreme Court, in its judgement on the dispute, asking the Union government to form a trust that can look at the construction and management of the temple.

**Why a trust?**
One of the five suits before the court in the Babri Masjid case was in the name of the deity itself, *Sri Ram Lalla Virajman*, and of the birthplace, *Asthana Shri Ram Janmabhoomi*. This suit was founded on the claim that the law recognises both the idol and the birthplace as juridical entities. The court did not accept the Janmasthan as a juridical entity.

It awarded the title of the land to *Ram Lalla*, to be held by the Trust that the Court said should be set up within three months. This Trust is the *Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra*.

**What did the Supreme Court say about the Trust?**
When the Supreme Court delivered its judgment on November 9, 2019, it directed the Centre to formulate within three months a scheme to set up a “Trust with a Board of Trustees or any other appropriate body” under *The Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993*, with powers “including the construction of a temple”.

The court used its powers under *Article 142* to direct that “appropriate representation may be given in the Trust to the Nirmohi Akhara”.

The Court also said that the scheme to be framed by the Centre should make “*necessary provisions*” about the functioning of the Trust or the body, including on matters relating to its management, the powers of the trustees “including the construction of a temple and all necessary, incidental and supplemental matters”.

Furthermore, this *Trust will get the possession of the inner and outer courtyards along with the rest of the acquired land*, which will be managed and developed by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra.

**What next?**
Under the Ayodhya law, the government would transfer the authorized land, which is nearly 67.703 acres and of which the inner and outer courtyard is a part, to the newly constituted Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra.

Sources: the Hindu.
2. Debts Recovery Tribunals

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

Context: The Direct Tax Vivaad se Vishwas Bill, 2020 will now cover pending litigation in debt recovery tribunals (DRTs) as well besides those in various courts and tribunals, the Union cabinet said while approving the change to the bill.

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

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

Other key facts:
- A DRT is presided over by a presiding officer who is appointed by the central govt. and who shall be qualified to be a District Judge; with tenure of 5 years or the age of 62, whichever is earlier.
- No court in the country other than the SC and the HCs and that too, only under articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution have jurisdiction over this matter.
- The central government, in 2018, raised the pecuniary limit from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh for filing application for recovery of debts in the Debts Recovery Tribunals by such banks and financial institutions.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Tribes of Tripura

What to study?
For Prelims: Autonomous Councils- composition, objectives and functions.
For Mains: Their significance, challenges being faced and scope for reforms.

Context: The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has passed resolutions to codify the customary laws of three tribal clans- Mizo, Kaipeng and Malsom.

What are Autonomous District Council?
As per the Sixth Schedule, the four states viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram contain the Tribal Areas which are technically different from the Scheduled Areas.
Though these areas fall within the executive authority of the state, provision has been made for the creation of the District Councils and regional councils for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers.
Each district is an autonomous district and Governor can modify / divide the boundaries of the said Tribal areas by notification.

The Governor may, by public notification:
(a) Include any area.
(b) Exclude any area.
(c) Create a new autonomous district.
(d) Increase the area of any autonomous district.
(e) Diminish the area of any autonomous district.
(f) Alter the name of any autonomous district.
(g) Define the boundaries of any autonomous district.

Constitution of District Councils and Regional Councils:
(1) There shall be a District Council for each autonomous district consisting of not more than thirty members, of whom not more than four persons shall be nominated by the Governor and the rest shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage.
(2) There shall be a separate Regional Council for each area constituted an autonomous region.
(3) Each District Council and each Regional Council shall be a body corporate by the name respectively of the District Council of (name of district) and the Regional Council of (name of region), shall have perpetual succession and a common seal and shall by the said name sue and be sued.

Related- 125th amendment bill:
1. It seeks to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeastern region.
2. The amendments provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grassroot level.
3. **Powers**: The village councils will be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.
4. **The Finance Commission** will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.
5. **Finance**: The Autonomous Councils now depend on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects.
6. **Reservations**: At least one-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura after the amendment is approved.

Facts for Prelims- other tribes in Tripura:
1. Bhil.
2. Bhutia.
3. Chaimal.
5. Garo.
6. Halam.
7. Jamatia.
10. Lepcha.
11. Lushai.
12. Mog.
15. Orang.
16. Reang.

Sources: the Hindu.
4. All medical devices to be treated as ‘drugs’ from April 1

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: The announcement.*
*For Mains: Why treat medical devices as drugs—need, concerns and significance.*

**Context:** The central government has notified all medical devices as ‘drugs’, effective from April 1, bringing a range of products from instruments to implants to even software intended for medical use in human beings or animals under the purview of the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.

At present, only 37 medical devices are notified as drugs.

The health ministry made some amendments to the **Medical Devices Rules, 2017**.

**Significance and implications of this move:**
- Apart from expanding the scope of regulation to ensure safety and efficacy, the move may pave the way for regulation of prices under the **Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO)**.
- It will also make companies, in case of violations, **liable to be penalised in a court of law**.
- Companies will now have to seek **approval from the drug controller** to manufacture, import and sell any medical device in the country.
- Medical devices shall be registered with the **Central Licensing Authority** through an identified online portal established by the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)**. Such registration is voluntary for a period of 18 months, after which it will be mandatory.
- The manufacturer of a medical device shall upload the information relating to that medical device for registration on the “**Online System for Medical Devices**” established by the CDSCO. Importers too will be required to do the same.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC)

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: CVC—eligibility, appointment and removal.*
*For Mains: Corruption—issues, challenges and ways to prevent.*

**Context:** Sanjay Kothari, Secretary to the President of India, will be the next Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC).

The **post of CVC has been vacant since June 2019**.

**About CVC:**
- It is the apex vigilance institution **created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964** but was **conferred with statutory status in 2003**.
- It **submits its report to the President of India**.

The Commission was set up on the recommendation of the **K.Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption**.

**Composition:**
- Consists of **central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners**.

**Appointment:**
- They are **appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee** consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).

**Term:**
- Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
Removal:
The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

Sources: pib.

6. Law commission of India
What to study?
For Prelims: Composition, objectives and functions.
For Mains: Significance, issues related and reforms needed.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the creation of the 22nd Law Commission, which advises the government on complex legal issues.
- The term of the previous law panel had ended in August last year.
- With the cabinet approval, the law ministry will now notify the new panel, which will have a term of three years.

Composition:
1. Apart from having a full-time chairperson, the commission will have four full-time members, including a member-secretary.
2. Law and Legislative Secretaries in the Law Ministry will be the ex-officio members of the commission.
3. It will also have not more than five part-time members.
4. A retired Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court will head the Commission.

Roles and functions:
1. The Law Commission shall, on a reference made to it by the Central Government or suo motu, undertake research in law and review of existing laws in India for making reforms and enacting new legislation.
2. It shall also undertake studies and research for bringing reforms in the justice delivery systems for elimination of delay in procedures, speedy disposal of cases, reduction in cost of litigation, etc.

About the law commission of India:
It is an executive body established by an order of the Government of India.
- Originally formed in 1955, the commission is reconstituted every three years and so far, 277 reports have been submitted to the government.
- The last Law Commission, under Justice B.S. Chauhan (retd.), had submitted reports and working papers on key issues such as simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies and a uniform civil code.

Prior to independence, the First Law Commission was established in 1834 by the British Government under the Chairmanship of Lord Macaulay.

Sources: pib.

7. Biodiversity management committees (BMC)
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Composition, functions and significance.

Context: The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) is set to tell the National Green Tribunal that it created 243,499 biodiversity management committees (BMC) and 95,525 people’s biodiversity registers (PBR) as of January 2020.

Background:
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NGT is hearing a case on the full implementation of the Biodiversity Act, 2002.

**What are Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC)?**

As per the Biological Diversity Act 2002, BMCs are created for “promoting conservation, sustainable use and documentation of biological diversity” by local bodies across the country.

**Composition:**

It shall consist of a chair person and not more than six persons nominated by the local body, of whom not less than one third should be women and not less than 18% should belong to the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes.

- The Chairperson of the Biodiversity Management Committee shall be elected from amongst the members of the committee in a meeting to be chaired by the Chairperson of the local body.
- The chairperson of the local body shall have the casting votes in case of a tie.

**Functions:**

The main function of the BMC is to prepare People’s Biodiversity Register in consultation with the local people. The Register shall contain comprehensive information on availability and knowledge of local biological resources, their medicinal or any other use or any other.

Sources: pib.

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**8. Cauvery Water Management Authority (CMA)**

**What to study?**

For Prelims and Mains: Composition, mandate, functions and significance of CWMA.

**Context:** Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have strongly objected to Karnataka’s bid to seek approval for the Mekedatu dam project at the fifth Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) meeting in New Delhi.

Following the objections, the CWMA dropped the discussion on Karnataka’s application.

**What is Mekedatu Project?**

A multi-purpose balancing reservoir project over Mekedatu, built at a cost of Rs 5,912, was aimed at solving the drinking water problems of Bengaluru and Ramnagar district. This project was also touted as one that could generate hydroelectricity to meet the power demand in the state.

**Why does Tamil Nadu object?**

1. The state contended that “the proposed reservoir would affect the natural flows of the river Cauvery.
2. It argued that Cauvery was already a deficit basin and the construction of the project, or any other project “would drastically affect the lower riparian State in getting their due share of waters.

**About CWMA:**

It has been created as per the Cauvery Management Scheme earlier framed by Centre and approved by Supreme Court.

**Composition and Powers of CMA:**

1. The authority will comprise a chairman, a secretary and eight members.
2. Out of the eight members, two will be full time, while two will be part time members from centre’s side.

www.insightsonindia.com
3. Rest four will be part time members from states.

Functions:
- The main mandate of the CMA will be to secure implementation and compliance of the Supreme Court’s order in relation to “storage, apportionment, regulation and control of Cauvery waters”.
- CMA will also advise the states to take suitable measures to improve water use efficiency.
- It will do so by promoting use of micro-irrigation, change in cropping patterns, improved farm practices and development of command areas.
- The CMA will also prepare an annual report covering its activities during the preceding year.

Role of Central Government:
The central government will provide help in implementation of the modified award in case of any of the state/UT parties (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Puducherry) do not cooperate in implementing the decision or direction of the tribunal. Initially, centre will contribute Rs. 2 crore for the functioning of the authority.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. Central Consumer Protection Authority

What to study?
For Prelims: CCPA- objectives, composition and functions.
For Mains: Significance and the need for CCPA.

Context: The government is all set to establish a Central Consumer Protection Authority.

What is the Central Consumer Protection Authority?
The authority is being constituted under Section 10(1) of The Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
Aim: To protect the rights of the consumer by cracking down on unfair trade practices, and false and misleading advertisements that are detrimental to the interests of the public and consumers.
It will be headquartered in the National Capital Region of Delhi but the central government may set up regional offices in other parts of the country.

Powers and Functions:
1. Inquire or investigate into matters relating to violations of consumer rights or unfair trade practices suo motu, or on a complaint received, or on a direction from the central government.
2. Recall goods or withdrawal of services that are “dangerous, hazardous or unsafe.
3. Pass an order for refund the prices of goods or services so recalled to purchasers of such goods or services; discontinuation of practices which are unfair and prejudicial to consumer’s interest”.
4. Impose a penalty up to Rs 10 lakh, with imprisonment up to two years, on the manufacturer or endorser of false and misleading advertisements. The penalty may go up to Rs 50 lakh, with imprisonment up to five years, for every subsequent offence committed by the same manufacturer or endorser.
5. Ban the endorser of a false or misleading advertisement from making endorsement of any products or services in the future, for a period that may extend to one year. The ban may extend up to three years in every subsequent violation of the Act.
6. File complaints of violation of consumer rights or unfair trade practices before the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, and the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission.

Composition:
- It will have a Chief Commissioner as head, and only two other commissioners as members — one of whom will deal with matters relating to goods while the other will look into cases relating to services.
- The CCPA will have an Investigation Wing that will be headed by a Director General.
- District Collectors too, will have the power to investigate complaints of violations of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and false or misleading advertisements.
For manufacture, selling, storage, distribution, or import of adulterated products, the penalties are:

1. If injury is not caused to a consumer, fine up to Rs 1 lakh with imprisonment up to six months.
2. If injury is caused, fine up to Rs 3 lakh with imprisonment up to one year.
3. If grievous hurt is caused, fine up to Rs 5 lakh with imprisonment up to 7 years.
4. In case of death, fine of Rs 10 lakh or more with a minimum imprisonment of 7 years, extendable to imprisonment for life.

Sources: Indian Express.

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

### 1. What is Dividend Distribution Tax?

**What to study?**

*For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, significance, features and need.*

**Context:** Dividend Distribution Tax shifted to individuals instead of companies, says FM.

**What is it?**

It is a tax levied on dividends that a company pays to its shareholders out of its profits.

**How is it applied?**

The Dividend Distribution Tax, or DDT, is taxable at source, and is deducted at the time of the company distributing dividends.

- The dividend is the part of profits that the company shares with its shareholders.
- The law provides for the Dividend Distribution Tax to be levied at the hands of the company, and not at the hands of the receiving shareholder.
- However, an additional tax is imposed on the shareholder, who receives over Rs. 10 lakh in dividend income in a financial year.

**Is Dividend Distribution Tax applicable to private companies?**

Under Section 115-O, the Income Tax Act, any domestic firm which is declaring or distributing dividend has to pay DDT at the rate of 15 per cent on the gross amount of dividend.

**Is Dividend Distribution Tax fair?**

Market participants, especially brokers, have been calling for long to scrap the DDT. The tax makes markets unattractive as it leads to significant taxation of corporate earnings, they argue.

Other than Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT), the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) and Long-Term Capital Gains (LTCG) tax are other major taxes levied on market instruments.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 2. Insurance cover on bank FDs, deposits increased to ₹5 lakh

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: What is Deposit Insurance? How is it regulated?*

*For Mains: Reforms needed.*

**Context:** In Budget 2020, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed to increase the limit of insurance cover in case of bank failure on deposits to ₹5 lakh from ₹1 lakh. The proposal come in the wake of crisis at Mumbai-based urban cooperative bank, PMC Bank.

**What is deposit insurance? How is it regulated in India?**

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

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

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

Who are insured by the DICGC?
The corporation covers all commercial and co-operative banks, except in Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Lakshadweep and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Besides, Only primary cooperative societies are not insured by the DICGC.

The DICGC does not include the following types of deposits:
1. Deposits of foreign governments.
2. Deposits of central/state governments.
3. Inter-bank deposits.
4. Deposits of the state land development banks with the state co-operative bank.
5. Any amount due on account of any deposit received outside India.
6. Any amount specifically exempted by the DICGC with previous approval of RBI.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA)
What to study?
For Prelims: PTA- features and applications.
For Mains: Significance of the move and it’s implications.

Context: The government has announced that it was abolishing in “public interest” an anti-dumping duty that was levied on imports of a chemical called PTA.

Implications:
Domestic manufacturers of polyester have called the move a huge relief for the industry, claiming they had been fighting to remove the duty for four-and-a-half years.

What is PTA?
- Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA) is a crucial raw material used to make various products, including polyester fabrics.
- PTA makes up for around 70-80% of a polyester product and is, therefore, important to those involved in the manufacture of man-made fabrics or their components.
• This includes products like polyester staple fibre and spun yarn. Some sportswear, swimsuits, dresses, trousers, curtains, sofa covers, jackets, car seat covers and bed sheets have a certain proportion of polyester in them.

What led to the government decision?
1. There has been persistent demand that they should be allowed to source that particular product at an affordable rate, even if it means importing it.
2. Easy availability of this “critical input” at competitive prices was desirable to unlock “immense” potential in the textile sector, seen as a “significant” employment generator.
3. The duty had meant importers were paying an extra $27-$160 for every 1,000 kg of PTA that they wanted to import from countries like China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Korea and Thailand.
4. Removing the duty will allow PTA users to source from international markets and may make it as much as $30 per 1,000 kg cheaper than now.

Why was it imposed in the first place?
The companies, which submitted that they accounted for over 50% of the domestic PTA industry, had argued that some countries had been exporting the product to India at prices lower than its value in their own domestic markets. This dumping of PTA into the Indian market had a “significant” adverse impact on the domestic industry, they argued.

Why was the move controversial?
1. Companies using PTA to manufacture polyester products claimed that the move went against the government’s vision of making the textiles sector a globally competitive industry. According to them, the move left them with limited domestic suppliers of PTA. The companies had alleged that the product’s cost had become more expensive domestically, which made their own products pricier and less attractive for their domestic and international buyers.
2. This had led to a drop in exports of some of these products during 2014-16, and an increase in imports of the products they had been producing, as there was no safeguard against imports of cheaper versions of these downstream polyester-based products.
3. On top of this, the domestic industry had argued that domestic PTA producers had not only been unable to ramp up capacity to cater to demand for the product, shutdowns of their manufacturing facilities once a year for maintenance purposes had also led to shortages of the raw material. PTA users claim that they had not been manufacturing as much polyester as they were capable of, operating at 70% of their capacity at any given time.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Cooperative banks under RBI

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

Context: Union Cabinet has approved to bring regulation of cooperative banks under Reserve Bank of India. In order to achieve this, the Cabinet approved amendments to Banking regulation act. The amendments will apply to all urban co-operative banks and multi-state cooperative banks.

As per the changes:
1. Cooperative banks will be audited according to RBI’s norms.
2. RBI can supersede the board, in consultation with the state government, if any cooperative bank is under stress.
3. Appointments of chief executives will also require permission from the banking regulator, as is the case for commercial banks.

Why this was necessary?
This was felt necessary in the wake of the recent Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank crisis. Cooperative banks have 8.6 lakh account holders, with a total deposit of about ₹5 lakh crore. Besides, Urban cooperative banks reported nearly 1,000 cases of fraud worth more than ₹220 crore in past five fiscal years.

**How cooperative banks are regulated?**
Cooperative banks are currently under the dual control of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and RBI. While the role of registrar of cooperative societies includes incorporation, registration, management, audit, supersession of board and liquidation, RBI is responsible for regulatory functions such maintaining cash reserve and capital adequacy, among others.

**What are co-operative banks?**
Co-operative banks are **financial entities established on a co-operative basis and belonging to their members**. This means that the **customers of a co-operative bank are also its owners**.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**5. Select Committee recommendations on Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill**

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

**Context:** 15 major changes have been suggested in a report presented by the Select Committee on Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill. The bill **prohibits commercial surrogacy and allow only altruistic surrogacy**.

**Background:**
The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha in August 2019, but had to be referred for re-assessment to the select committee in November 2019, as several Rajya Sabha members found certain clauses contentious such as allowing only altruistic surrogacy with a near relative as a surrogate.

**Key Recommendations:**
1. Keep an **option for compensating the surrogate mother beyond medical expenses and insurance coverage** that includes taking care of her nutritional food requirements, maternity wear, etc. that is vital for the wellbeing and upkeep of the surrogate mother.
2. The controversial clause of “close relative” has been done away with and instead the committee has recommended the term to be replaced with a “willing woman”.
3. **Who can opt?** Single women, including a widow and divorcée, between the ages of 35 and 45 years, should be able to opt for surrogacy.
4. **Increase insurance cover** for the surrogate mother from the 16 months proposed in the Bill to 36 months.
5. In order to protect the interests of the child born through surrogacy, the order regarding the parentage and custody of the child, issued by a Magistrate, shall be **the birth affidavit for the surrogate child**.

**Need for regulation:**
*India has emerged as a surrogacy hub* for couples from other countries and there have been reports concerning unethical practices, exploitation of surrogate mothers, abandonment of children born out of surrogacy, and rackets involving intermediaries importing human embryos and gametes. *The 228th report of the Law Commission of India* has recommended prohibiting commercial surrogacy and allowing altruistic surrogacy by enacting suitable legislation.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**What to study?**
For Prelims: Overview of UCPMP.
For Mains: Features, need for and significance.

Context: Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) has yet again “requested companies to abide by Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP)”.

Background:
There have been several instances of breach of the voluntary Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP) by pharma companies. There has also been the demand from the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and doctors to make it mandatory.

What is UCPMP Code?
It is a voluntary code issued by the Department Of Pharmaceuticals relating to marketing practices for Indian Pharmaceutical Companies and as well medical devices industry.

Applicability: At present, the UCPMP Code is applicable on Pharmaceutical Companies, Medical Representatives, Agents of Pharmaceutical Companies such as Distributors, Wholesalers, Retailers, and Pharmaceutical Manufacturer’s Associations.

Key features and provisions:
1. No gifts, pecuniary advantages or benefits in kind may be supplied, offered or promised, to persons qualified to prescribe or supply drugs, by a pharmaceutical company or any of its agents.
2. As regards travel facilities, the UCPMP Code prohibits extending travel facility inside the country or outside, including rail, air, ship, cruise tickets, paid vacations, etc., to HealthCare Professionals and their family members for vacation or for attending conference, seminars, workshops, CME programme etc. as a delegate. The Code also provides that free samples of drugs shall not be supplied to any person who is not qualified to prescribe such product. Meaning thereby that free samples can only be supplied to persons qualified to prescribe such product.
3. It also prescribes additional conditions that are to be observed while providing samples.
4. Further, as per the UCPMP Code, in order to appoint Medical Practitioners/HCPs as Affiliates there should be written contract, legitimate need for the services must be documented, and criteria for selecting affiliates must be directly related to the identified need.
5. The UCPMP Code also provides that the number of affiliates retained must not be greater than the number reasonably necessary to achieve the identified need and that the compensation must be reasonable and reflect the fair market value of the services provided.

Need of hour:
Experts working in the area have long demanded that in the context of unethical marketing and promotion, the DoP should immediately implement a mandatory mechanism for company disclosures of payments towards doctors and professional bodies, including via third parties. The disclosures, which should be made at intervals and put in the public domain, should include the amount spent, individual or entity to which payment was made, and the reason for payment, including any services rendered.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Disha law
What to study?
For Prelims: what are they?
For Mains: Significance and the need for the law, issues surrounding death sentence.

Context: The Andhra Pradesh state government is preparing to implement the Disha Bill once it gets the nod of the President.
As per the law, the state has to equip itself with facilities like forensic laboratories, special courts, and public prosecutors.
Background:
Last year, the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly had passed the Andhra Pradesh Disha Bill, 2019 (Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2019).

Key features of the Bill:
1. It envisages the completion of investigation in seven days and trial in 14 working days, where there is adequate conclusive evidence, and reducing the total judgment time to 21 days from the existing four months.
2. It prescribes life imprisonment for other sexual offences against children and includes Section 354 F and 354 G in IPC.
3. In cases of harassment of women through social or digital media, the Act states two years imprisonment for the first conviction and four years for second and subsequent convictions. For this, a new Section 354 E will be added in IPC, 1860.
4. As per the Bill, the Andhra Pradesh government will establish, operate and maintain a register in electronic form, to be called the ‘Women & Children Offenders Registry’. This registry will be made public and will be available to law enforcement agencies.
5. The government will establish exclusive special courts in each district to ensure speedy trial. These courts will exclusively deal with cases of offences against women and children including rape, acid attacks, stalking, voyeurism, social media harassment of women, sexual harassment and all cases under the POCSO Act.
6. The government will constitute special police teams at the district level to be called District Special Police Team to be headed by DSP for investigation of offences related to women and children.
7. The government will also appoint a special public prosecutor for each exclusive special court.

Need for special law:
Crimes against women constitute murder, rape, dowry death, suicide abetment, acid attack, cruelty against women and kidnapping. ‘Cruelty by husband or his relatives’ accounts for 27.9 per cent of the crimes against women. A total of 3,59,849 cases were reported against women in 2017. (2016, 3.38 lakh, 3.2 lakh cases 2015) The number of cases reported has increased.
- Uttar Pradesh has again topped the list with 56,011 cases of crime against women, followed by Maharashtra with 31,979 cases and West Bengal at 30,002.
- ‘Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty’ comprise 21.7 per cent, followed by ‘kidnapping and abduction of women’ with 20.5 per cent and ‘rape’ with 7.0 per cent of reported cases.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. Special category status
What to study?
For Prelims: SCS- features, implications and criteria.
For Mains: Significance, the need for and concerns associated.

Context: Andhra Pradesh has revived its demand for Special Category Status (SCS).

Background:
It was the bifurcation promise and 15th Finance Commission report that stated that ‘grant of SCS lies in the hands of the Centre’.
SCS was promised to Andhra Pradesh by the then Congress government at the Centre in 2014, at the time of bifurcation which resulted in the formation of Telangana. The then Opposition party BJP too agreed to it and even stated that SCS would be extended by five more years if it was voted to power.

**What is Special Category Status?**
There is no provision of SCS in the Constitution; the Central government extends financial assistance to states that are at a comparative disadvantage against others. The concept of SCS emerged in 1969 when the Gadgil formula (that determined Central assistance to states) was approved.

**Some prominent guidelines for getting SCS status:**
1. Must be economically backward with poor infrastructure.
2. The states must be located in hilly and challenging terrain.
3. They should have low population density and significant tribal population.
4. Should be strategically situated along the borders of neighboring countries.

**Benefits states confer with special category status:**
1. The central government bears 90 percent of the state expenditure on all centrally-sponsored schemes and external aid while rest 10 percent is given as loan to state at zero percent rate of interest.
2. Preferential treatment in getting central funds.
3. Concession on excise duty to attract industries to the state.
4. 30 percent of the Centre's gross budget also goes to special category states.
5. These states can avail the benefit of debt-swapping and debt relief schemes.
6. States with special category status are exempted from customs duty, corporate tax, income tax and other taxes to attract investment.
7. Special category states have the facility that if they have unspent money in a financial year; it does not lapse and gets carry forward for the next financial year.

**Other benefits:**
Besides tax breaks and other benefits, the State with SCS will get 90% of all the expenditure on Centrally sponsored schemes as Central grant. The rest of the 10% will also be given as a loan at zero per cent interest. Usually, the ratio for general category States is 70% loan and 30% grant.

**When was the first Special Category status bestowed?**
First SCS was accorded in 1969 to Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland. Over the years, eight more states were added to the list — Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and, finally, in 2010, Uttarakhand. Until 2014-15, SCS meant these 11 states received a variety of benefits and sops.

**Concerns associated:**
Considering special status to any new State will result in demands from other States and dilute the benefits further. It is also not economically beneficial for States to seek special status as the benefits under the current dispensation are minimal. Therefore, States facing special problems will be better off seeking a special package.
9. Vivad Se Vishwas scheme

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the scheme.
For Mains: Need for and significance.

Context: The vivad se vishwas scheme was announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her budget speech on February 1, 2020. The scheme aims to settle the huge number of pending direct tax cases.

About Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme: The Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill, 2020:
1. The amnesty scheme, at present, covers disputes pending at the level of commissioner (appeals), Income Tax Appellate Tribunals (ITAT), high courts, the Supreme Court and those in international arbitration.
2. It offers a complete waiver on interest and penalty to the taxpayers who pay their pending taxes by March 31.
3. The scheme aims to benefit those whose tax demands are locked in dispute in multiple forums.
4. If a taxpayer is not able to pay direct taxes by March 31st then, he will get further time till June 30th. However, in that case, he would have to pay 10 percent more on the tax.

How much?
1. In case it is just the interest and the penalty which is in dispute, the taxpayer will have to pay 25% of the disputed amount till March 31, and subsequently, it will be 30%.
2. If a taxpayer is not able to pay within the March 31 deadline, he gets a further time till June 30, but in that case, he would have to pay 10% more on the tax.
3. In case it is just the interest and the penalty which is in dispute, the taxpayer will have to pay 25% of the disputed amount till March 31, and subsequently, it will be 30%.

Significance:
The scheme aims to resolve 483,000 direct tax-related disputes pending in various appellate forums.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. Major Port Authority Bill, 2020

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key features of the bill, need for and significance of the provisions.

Context: The Cabinet has given its nod to Major Ports Authority Bill that will replace a 1963 law governing country’s 12 major ports.

Background:
At present the ports are governed by a ports law of 1963. The major port sector has not seen the required level of fixed assets creation to pare the country’s high logistic costs owing to legacy issues including the Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP)’s archaic regulatory grip.

Overview of the Bill:
1. The proposed law is aimed at enhancing the overall efficiencies of the ports.
2. Now ‘major ports’ will get to determine the tariffs for various port-related services as well as the terms for private developers who team up with them.
3. Every port will now be governed by a Port Authority which will have powers to fix reference tariffs for various port services.

4. The Bill also proposes the creation of an adjudicatory board at the apex level for review of port authority’s decisions. It will have the mandate to resolve the disputes between port authorities and the PPP operators.

**Major Ports in India:**
India has 12 major ports -- Deendayal (erstwhile Kandla), Mumbai, JNPT, Marmugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Kamarajar (earlier Ennore), V O Chidambarnar, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Kolkata (including Haldia).

Sources: the Hindu.

## 11. Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) issue

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: What is AGR? How is it calculated? What is contempt of Court?*

*For Mains: What is the impact of latest ruling? Issues and ways to address them.*

**Context:** The Supreme Court has come down heavily on the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) for issuing a notification last month that asked for no coercive action against telecom companies even though they had not paid the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues by the stipulated deadline of January 23.

The Court also initiated contempt proceedings against the telecom companies for not paying the AGR dues.

- The court also asked DoT to immediately withdraw the notification which said that there would be no coercive action against telcos.

**Background:**

Last year, the Supreme Court upheld the definition of Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) calculation as stipulated by the Department of Telecommunications.

The order by the top court means that the telecom companies will have to immediately clear the pending AGR dues, which amount to nearly Rs 1.47 lakh crore.

**What is AGR?**

Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) is the usage and licensing fee that telecom operators are charged by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT).

It is divided into spectrum usage charges and licensing fees, pegged between 3-5 percent and 8 percent respectively.

**How is it calculated and what’s the contention?**

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

**The story so far:**

1. In 2005, the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) challenged the government’s definition for AGR calculation.
2. Later in 2015, the TDSAT said AGR included all receipts except capital receipts and revenue from non-core sources such as rent, profit on the sale of fixed assets, dividend, interest and miscellaneous income, etc.

3. The regulator had also included forex adjustment under AGR apart from ruling that licenses fee will not be charged twice on the same income. It, however, exempted bad debt, foreign exchange fluctuations, and sale of scrap to be calculated for AGR.

4. The government had also raised the issue of under-reporting of revenues to duck charges. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) called out telcos for understating revenues to the tune of Rs 61,064.5 crore.

5. Later, the Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) upheld the DoT’s definition of AGR (factors against which the license fee is payable) with certain exemptions.

6. The DoT, however, filed an appeal before the Supreme Court, citing that the TDSAT had no jurisdiction on the validity of terms and conditions of licenses.

Where does the government stand in this situation?

1. The payout by telecom and non-telecom companies is likely to lead to windfall gains for the central government, which could help it close some of the fiscal deficit gap for the current financial.

2. At the same time, however, the government will be under pressure to ensure that the telecom market does not turn into a duopoly if Vodafone Idea does indeed decide to shut shop.

3. It will also have to manage the payouts to be done by non-telecom companies as most of them, such as Oil India, Power Grid, Gail, and Delhi Metro Rail Corporation are public sector units.

What does this situation mean for customers and lenders?

If Vodafone Idea does exit, an Airtel-Jio duopoly will be created, which could lead to bigger bills, considering it was the cutthroat competition in the sector that made mobile telephony and Internet almost universally affordable.

Challenges for telecom sector:

The AGR issue has triggered panic in the banking industry, given that the telecom sector is highly leveraged. Vodafone Idea alone has a debt of Rs 2.2 lakh crore that it has used to expand infrastructure and fund spectrum payments over the years. The mutual fund industry has an exposure of around Rs 4,000 crore to Vodafone Idea.

Sources: the Hindu.

12. What is the National Security Act?

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features of the act.

For Mains: Criticisms and concerns over its misuse, need for review.

Context: The NSA has repeatedly come under criticism for the way it is used by the police. As per a Law Commission report from 2001, more than 14 lakh people (14,57,779) were held under preventive laws in India.

About National Security Act:

It is a stringent law that allows preventive detention for months, if authorities are satisfied that a person is a threat to national security or law and order.

The person does not need to be charged during this period of detention. The goal is to prevent the individual from committing a crime. It was promulgated on September 23, 1980, during the Indira Gandhi government.

As per the National Security Act, the grounds for preventive detention of a person include:

1. acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, the relations of India with foreign powers, or the security of India.
2. regulating the continued presence of any foreigner in India or with a view to making arrangements for his expulsion from India.
3. preventing them from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community it is necessary so to do.

Duration:
Under the National Security Act, an individual can be detained without a charge for up to 12 months; the state government needs to be intimated that a person has been detained under the NSA.
A person detained under the National Security Act can be held for 10 days without being told the charges against them.

Appeal: The detained person can appeal before a high court advisory board but they are not allowed a lawyer during the trial.

Sources: the Hindu.

13. Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Features, need for and significance of the bill, reforms needed.

Context: Cabinet clears Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill, aims to regulate IVF clinics.

Overview and key features of the Bill:
- It would lead to the creation of a national board to lay down and implement a code of conduct for people working at IVF clinics.
- Determines the minimum standards of physical infrastructure, laboratory, diagnostic equipment and expert manpower to be employed by ART clinics and banks.
- The bill intends to make genetic testing of the embryo mandatory before implantation for the benefit of the child born through ART.
- It also seeks to streamline the cryo-preservation processes for sperm, oocytes and embryo.
- It also proposes to constitute a national registry and registration authority to maintain a central database and assist the national board in its functioning.
- The bill proposes stringent punishment for those “practising sex selection, sale of human embryos or gametes and running agencies/rackets/organisations for such unlawful practices.

Background:
According to a registry maintained by the Indian Council of Medical Research, there are 1,269 ART clinics in India (as on November, 2019). The number swells up to 1,846 when ART clinics and ART banks are taken together.
Maharashtra has the maximum number of ART clinics (266) followed by Tamil Nadu (164), Delhi (113), Karnataka (102), Uttar Pradesh (92) and Gujarat (80).

Need for a legislation in this regard:
The need to regulate the ART services is to protect the affected women and children from exploitation.
Registration with the ICMR is a voluntary exercise at the moment because of which many clinics don’t take the trouble and prefer opacity while offering infertility treatment.

Significance:
The major benefit of the act would be regulation of the assisted reproductive technology services in the country. Consequently, infertile couples will be more ensured and confident of the ethical practices in ART clinics.

What is ART? Why it is in demand?
Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), as commonly understood, comprises procedures such as in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), intra-uterine insemination (IUI), oocyte and sperm donation, cryopreservation and includes surrogacy as well.

**Social stigma of being childless and lengthy adoption processes have increased the demand for ART in India.** It is thus not surprising that the ART industry is expected to grow by a compounded annual growth rate of 10%.

Sources: pib.

### 14. Changes in Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana To Make It Optional For Farmers

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: Overview, key features and facts.*

*For Mains: Significance of the Scheme, need for, challenges present and ways to address them.*

**Context:** Cabinet Approves Changes in *Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana* to address the existing challenges in implementation.

**Changes approved:**

1. Allocation of business to Insurance Companies to be done for three years.
2. Central Subsidy under PMFBY/RWBCIS to be limited for premium rates upto 30% for unirrigated areas/crops and 25% for irrigated areas/crops.
3. Districts having 50% or more irrigated area will be considered as irrigated area/district.
4. Flexibility to States/UTs to implement the Scheme with option to select any or many of additional risk covers/features like prevented sowing, localised calamity, mid-season adversity, and post-harvest losses.
5. For estimation of crop losses/admissible claims, two-Step Process to be adopted based on defined Deviation matrix” using specific triggers like weather indicators, satellite indicators, etc. for each area along with normal ranges and deviation ranges.
6. Enrolment under the Scheme to be made voluntary for all farmers.
7. Central Share in Premium Subsidy to be increased to 90% for North Eastern States from the existing sharing pattern of 50:50.

**Benefits:**

- With these changes it is expected that farmers would be able to manage risk in agriculture production in a better way and will succeed in Stabilizing the farm income.
- Further, it will increase coverage in north eastern region enabling farmers of NER to manage their agricultural risk in a better way.
- These changes will also enable quick and accurate yield estimation leading to faster claims settlement.

**Background:**

Under the PMFBY, which was launched in February 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, *it is mandatory for loanee farmers to take insurance cover under this scheme*. Currently, 58 percent of the total farmers are loanee. Various farmers' body and states were raising some concerns on this.

**About PMFBY:**

Launched in 2016.

*Merged schemes include* National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).

It aims to *reduce the premium burden on farmers and ensure early settlement of crop assurance claim for the full insured sum.*

**Coverage:**
The Scheme covers all Food & Oilseeds crops and Annual Commercial/Horticultural Crops for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are being conducted under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

**Premium:**
- 2% for Kharif crops.
- 1.5% for Rabi crops.
- 5% for commercial and horticultural crops.

Sources: pib.

### 15. Interim order on Mahadayi tribunal’s award

**What to study?**

For Prelims: About the river and it’s origin, overview of the dispute and tribunal’s order.

For Mains: Implications of this judgment, ways to address inter state river water disputes.

**Context:** The Supreme Court has passed an interim order allowing an application by the State of Karnataka to notify the Mahadayi Water Dispute Tribunal’s award.

**What has the Court said?**

The implementation of the award would be subject to the final judgment of the Supreme Court in the civil appeals filed by Karnataka, Goa, and Maharashtra, challenging the allocation of water from the Mahadayi river among them.

**What was the tribunal award?**

1. August 2018 tribunal award had allocated 13.42 TMC water from the Mahadayi river basin to Karnataka.
2. Maharashtra was allotted 1.33 TMC water while Goa was given 24 TMC in the final decision of the tribunal.

The Karnataka government had petitioned the tribunal seeking the release of 7.56 TMC of water for the Kalasa-Banduri Nala project.

**What is Kalasa-Banduri Nala project?**

Undertaken by the Government of Karnataka to improve drinking water supply to the Districts of Belagavi, Dharwad, and Gadag.

It involves building across Kalasa and Banduri, two tributaries of the Mahadayi river to divert 7.56 TMC of water to the Malaprabha river.

**About Mahadayi river?**

- It is a west flowing river.
- Origin: Degaon village, Belgaum district.
- Called Mandovi in Goa.
- Travels 35 km in Karnataka; 82 km in Goa before joining the Arabian Sea.

**What’s the dispute?**

Goa raised objection to Kalasa-Banduri project planned in 1989.

Goa filed a complaint seeking setting up of a tribunal in July 2002.

Goa moved the Supreme Court in 2006 seeking the constitution of a tribunal.

The Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal was set up in November 2010.

Sources: the Hindu.
16. **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Overview of JJ Act, amendments proposed.
- For Mains: Significance, need for amendments, relevance.

**Context:** Recently, a Group of Ministers (GoM) chaired by the Home Minister met to discuss proposed amendments to the *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) (JJ) Act, 2015.*

**About JJ Act:**
- Replaced the 2000 act - *the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.*
- **Aim:** To Comprehensively address children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection.
  - It mandates setting up *Juvenile Justice Boards and Child Welfare Committees* in every district. Both must have at least one woman member each.
  - Also, *the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)* was granted the status of a statutory body to enable it to perform its function more effectively.
  - *The Act included several new offences* committed against children (like, illegal adoptions, use of child by militant groups, offences against disabled children, etc) which are not adequately covered under any other law.
  - All Child Care Institutions, whether run by State Government or by voluntary or non-governmental organisations are to be *mandatorily registered under the Act within 6 months from the date of commencement of the Act.*

**Key changes proposed** - the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2018:
- The Bill provides that instead of the court, the district magistrate will issue adoption orders to address the high pendency of adoption cases.
- The Bill also seeks to transfer all pending matters related to adoption before any court to the district magistrate having jurisdiction over the area.

Sources: the Hindu.

17. **Amendments in Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016 notified**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Key features of the Law, key changes.
- For Mains: Need for this, significance and relevance of the changes.

**Context:** Amendments in Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016 notified.

**Overview** - key changes:
1. As per the new rules, now International medallists/renowned shooters are allowed to keep additional weapons up to a total of twelve under the exempted category, which earlier was seven.
2. If a shooter is renowned in one event, he/she can keep maximum eight (previously it was four), if a shooter is renowned in two events he/she can keep maximum ten (previously it was seven) and if a shooter is renowned in more than two events, he/she can keep maximum twelve (previously it was seven) firearms under the exempted category.
3. Junior target shooters/aspiring shooters are now allowed to possess two weapons (previously one) of any category in which the person is engaged.
4. Apart from the above exemptions, shooters are entitled to possess two firearms as normal citizens under provisions of the Arms Act, 1959.
5. Similarly, by amending the provision under Rule 40 of the Arms Rules, 2016 the quantity of ammunition that can be purchased by the shooters during the year for the practice has also been increased considerably.
6. Through these amendments, it has also been clarified that no licence is required for Indian citizens for acquisitions, possession of small arms falling under the category of curio.

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7. However, appropriate licence as prescribed would be required for use or to carry or transport such small arms.

8. Without the endorsement of such firearms in the prescribed licence of the owner, no ammunition shall be sold for their use.

About the Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019:
1. It seeks to enhance the punishment for existing offences like illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, etc.; illegal acquiring, possessing or carrying prohibited arms or prohibited ammunition; and illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, conversion, import, export, etc., of firearms.

2. It also proposes to define new offences and prescribes punishment for them, such as taking away firearms from police or armed forces, involvement in organized crime syndicate, illicit trafficking including smuggled firearms of foreign make or prohibited arms and prohibited ammunition, use of firearms in rash and negligent manner in celebratory gunfire endangering human life, etc.

3. It seeks to enhance the period of arms license from three years to five years and also to issue arms license in its electronic form to prevent forgery.

Sources: pib.

18. Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2020

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features and overview of provisions.
For Mains: Relevance and significance of the Bill.

Context: Union Cabinet has approved the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2020. The amended bill is reformed version of the draft legislation which was passed by Lok Sabha in August 2019 but its provisions, including that only a close relative of a couple can be a surrogate mother, had invited criticism.

Background: The bill incorporates all recommendations made by a Rajya Sabha select committee, which studied an earlier version of the draft legislation, and is aimed at banning commercial surrogacy and allowing altruistic surrogacy.

Key features of the Bill:
1. It allows any "willing" woman to be a surrogate mother and proposes that widows and divorced women can also benefit from its provisions, besides infertile Indian couples.

2. The bill also proposes to regulate surrogacy by establishing National Surrogacy Board at the central level and, State Surrogacy Board and appropriate authorities in states and Union Territories respectively.
3. The proposed insurance cover for surrogate mother has now been increased to 36 months from 16 months provided in the earlier version.

4. Commercial surrogacy will be prohibited including sale and purchase of human embryo and gametes.

5. Ethical surrogacy to Indian married couples, Indian-origin married couples and Indian single woman (only widow or divorcee between the age of 35 and 45 years) will be allowed on fulfilment of certain conditions.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Institutions of Eminence (IoE) Scheme

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

Context: A high-level meeting to review progress of Institutions of Eminence (IoE) Scheme was held recently.

About the scheme:
Launched in order to empower the Higher Educational Institutions and to help them become world-class teaching and research institutions.

Objectives:
1. **Excellence and Innovation:** To provide for higher education leading to excellence and innovations in such branches of knowledge as may be deemed fit at post-graduate, graduate and research degree levels.
2. **Specialization:** To engage in areas of specialization to make distinctive contributions to the objectives of the university education system.
3. **Global Rating:** To aim to be rated internationally for its teaching and research as a top hundred Institution in the world over time.
4. **Quality teaching and Research:** To provide for high quality teaching and research and for the advancement of knowledge and its dissemination.

Incentives of the scheme:
1. Institutes with IOE tag will be given greater autonomy and freedom to decide fees, course durations and governance structures.
2. The public institutions under IOE tag will receive a government grant of ₹1,000 crore, while the private institutions will not get any funding under the scheme.

Why is it important?
Academic institutions that can impart highest quality education, generate cutting edge research, and attract the best and the brightest from across the globe can have multiplier beneficial effects for the country. So the idea of elevating the best in a sector to an eminent status by granting autonomy is a good one. But to maintain credibility, the process and the selection of these institutions should be above reproach.

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

1. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)

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

Context: States/UTs and districts awarded for best performance under PMMVY.

Key performers:
1. In the category of **best performance since inception of the Scheme** to States/UTs **having population of more than 1 crore** the first position was awarded to the state of Madhya Pradesh, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Haryana in the third position.
2. In the same category **among States/UTs having population of less than 1 crore**, Dadra & Nagar Haveli is in the first position. Himachal stood second and Chandigarh is at the third position.
3. In the **District level awards for States/UTs with population of more than 1 crore**, the first position went to Indore in Madhya Pradesh. In the same category for States/UTs with population under than 1 crore, the first position went to Serchhip in Mizoram.

About PMMVY:
Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a **maternity benefit** rechristened from erstwhile **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)**.
The scheme is a **conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women**.
It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.

Objectives:
1. Promoting appropriate practice, care and institutional service utilization during pregnancy, delivery and lactation.
2. Encouraging the women to follow (optimal) nutrition and feeding practices, including early and Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months.
3. Providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Panel suggests steps to curb child porn

What to study?
For Prelims: Key recommendations, about NCPCR.
For Mains: Significance of these recommendations and concerns.

Context: A parliamentary panel has recommended a **code of conduct for Internet service providers (ISPs)** and strengthening the **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights** to curb child pornography.

Background:
The report was prepared by an ad hoc committee set up by the Rajya Sabha and led by Congress MP Jairam Ramesh.

Key recommendations:
1. Put in place a multi-pronged strategy involving technological, institutional, social and educational as well as State-level measures.
2. There is a need for code of conduct or a set of guidelines for ensuring child safety online.
3. There shall be a greater onus on ISPs to identify and remove child sexual abuse material (CSAM) as well as report such content and those trying to access them to the authorities under the national cybercrime portal.
4. There is also need for strengthening the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) so that it can serve as the nodal body for curbing child pornography. It is suggested that the capabilities required in the NCPCR should include technology, cyberpolicing and prosecution.

**Issues with these recommendations:**
- Some of the recommendations are expected to lead to concerns over privacy and misuse.
- It is believed that asking ISPs to report content in addition to blocking and filtering may not be practical.
- The suggestion to break encryption could also just lead to traffic moving to different platforms.

**Need of hour:**
There is a need to develop a victim-centric strategy instead of just focusing on prosecution.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. **Don’t detain children in jails, lockups, Supreme Court tells police**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: About JJB and JJ Act.
- For Mains: Concerns expressed, present challenges and ways to address them.

**Context:** The Supreme Court has made it clear that the police have no right to detain children in conflict with law in a lockup or a jail.

**Observations made by the Court:**
1. A juvenile in conflict with law, if apprehended, has to be placed immediately under the care of the special juvenile police unit or a designated child welfare officer.
2. The child has to be produced before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB).
3. Once a child is produced before a JJB, bail is the rule. And even if, for some reason, bail is not granted, a child cannot be put behind bars. He has to be lodged either in an observation home or in a place of safety.
4. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 is meant to protect children and not detain them in jail or keep them in police custody.

**Background:**
The order came after the court’s attention was drawn by the recent media reports about “children being detained in police custody and tortured in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh”.

**About the Juveniles Justice Act, 2015:**

**Key provisions:**
1. It establishes a statutory status for the Child Adoption Resources Authority (CARA). It also proposes several rehabilitation and social integration measures for institutional and non-institutional children. It provides for sponsorship and foster care as completely new measures.
2. Mandatory registration of all institutions engaged in providing child care is required according to the Act. New offences including illegal adoption, corporal punishment in child care institutions, the use of children by militant groups, and offences against disabled children are also incorporated in the legislation.
3. The law gives the Juvenile Justice Board the power to assess whether the perpetrator of a heinous crime aged between 16 and 18, had acted as a ‘child’ or as an ‘adult.’ The board will be assisted in this process by psychologists and social experts.
Constitution and composition of JJB:
State Government constitutes Juvenile Justice Boards in the districts time to time, for exercising the powers & to discharge duties, conferred on such Boards in relation to Children in Conflict with Law under this Act and Rule.
Composition: A board should consist of a Metropolitan Magistrate or a Judicial Magistrate of First Class not being Chief Metropolitan Magistrate with at least three years experience and two social workers of whom at least one shall be a woman, forming a bench.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Apiary on Wheels

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

Context: The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises recently flagged off ‘Apiary on Wheels’.

What is it?
It is a unique concept designed by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) for the easy upkeep and migration of Bee Boxes having live Bee colonies.
- It is a platform which can carry 20 Bee Boxes from one place to another without any difficulty.
- It is like an attachment which can be easily connected with a Tractor or a Trolley and may be pulled to any suitable destination.

Background:
The KVIC launched Honey Mission in 2017 and has been training beekeepers, distributing Bee Boxes and helping rural, educated but unemployed youth to earn extra income through beekeeping activities, at their doorstep.

Significance:
- It is a holistic approach to address the challenges faced by the beekeepers.
- It is designed so as to reduce the labour and cost of maintaining and upkeeping Bee Boxes and live bee colonies across India.

Sources: pib.

5. How to treat a child witness?

What to study?
For Prelims: Indian laws and International Conventions in this regard.
For Mains: Need for and significance of these laws, challenges in protection and ways to address them.

Context: In the Bidar school sedition case, spotlight has fallen on reports that police questioned children. What are the international conventions for questioning children? What do Indian laws say on this, and on child witnesses?

What’s the issue?
1. The Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights has pulled up the district police for violations, including repeated questioning of the children.
2. Additionally, a public interest petition has been filed in the Karnataka High Court seeking a departmental inquiry against the policemen who allegedly questioned the children of Shaheen School, aged between 9 and 12, without the consent of their parents or guardians, and also video-recorded them without consent.
3. The PIL referred to a statement by the Shaheen Alumni Association to say that the children were questioned by policemen carrying guns, which created an “intimidating and fearful environment”.

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The PIL has asked for guidelines to be issued to police regarding interrogation of minors in criminal proceedings in accordance with the Juvenile Justice Act and United Nations resolutions.

**What are the international conventions on children in these situations?**

1. **Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1992** was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989. As per the Convention, in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. **In 2009, the ‘United Nations: Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses in Crime: Model Law’** provided a more specific set of guidelines in the context of child witnesses. These guidelines recommend that authorities treat children in a caring and sensitive manner, with interview techniques that “minimise distress or trauma to children”.

**How do Indian laws address the issue of child witnesses?**

Under Section 118 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, there is no minimum age for a witness. Usually during a trial, the court, before recording the testimony of a child witness, determines his or her competency on the basis of their ability to give rational answers.

- A child is usually asked questions like their name, the school they study in, and the names of their parents to determine their competency.
- If the child is very young and does not understand the significance of taking an oath to speak the truth, the judge or the staff explain to the child that he or she should speak the truth, thinking of whichever God they believe in.

**Cases involving children:**

Trials involving children as witnesses have primarily been in cases of child sexual abuse. Other criminal cases where children are examined as witnesses have included those where a parent is the victim of violence at home, in the sole presence of the child.

**What are the laws pertaining to the questioning of children?**

**The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:**

- The Act’s very preamble says that a “child-friendly approach in the adjudication and disposal of matters in the best interest of children” must be adhered to.
- It also requires that interviews of children be done by specialised units of police who are trained to sensitively deal with them.
- The Act prescribes that a Special Juvenile Police Unit is to be constituted by the state government in each district and city, headed by a police officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police, and including two social workers, at least one of whom must be a woman, and both of whom should be experienced in the field of child welfare.
- Their work includes coordinating with the police towards sensitive treatment of children.
- The Act also provides for a Child Welfare Committee in every district to take cognisance of any violations by the authorities in their handling of children.

**The Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act, 2012:**

- It has specific guidelines regarding interviewing children as witnesses.
- It states that interviews should be conducted in a safe, neutral, child-friendly environment, including allowing for them to be done at homes.
- It says a child should not be made to recount the incident in question multiple times.
- The Act also allows for a support person, who could be trained in counselling, to be present with the child to reduce stress and trauma.

Sources: Indian Express.

**6. Hunar Haat**

What to study?

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For Prelims: Features of Hunar Haat and USTTAD scheme.
For Mains: Significance and the need for these scheme, performance analysis.

Context: Held recently in New Delhi.

WHAT IS IT?
Organised by ministry of minority affairs under “USTTAD” scheme at different parts of the country. It is an exhibition of handicrafts and traditional products made by artisans from the minority communities. These Haat aim to provide market exposure and employment opportunities to artisans, craftsmen and traditional culinary experts.

Significance:
“Hunar Haat” have become a successful mission to provide employment and employment opportunities and national as well international markets for thousands of master artisans, craftsmen and culinary experts.

What is USTTAD SCHEME?
USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme aims to preserve heritage of traditional arts and crafts of minority communities and build capacity of traditional craftspersons and artisans and establish linkages of traditional skills with the global market.

Similar programmes by states:
1. Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana- MP.
2. The Rythu Bandhu scheme- Telangana.

Sources: pib.

7. Assistance to Disabled persons for purchasing/fitting of aids/appliances (ADIP) scheme

What to study?
For Prelims: Features of the schemes mentioned below, benefits.
For Mains: Significance and the need for such schemes.

Context: PM will distribute assistive aids and devices to senior citizens (under the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana- RVY) and the physically challenged (Under ADIP Scheme) at a mega distribution camp at Prayagraj.
The objective is to provide assistance through these aids and devices to the daily living and socio-economic development of the Divyangjan (physically challenged) and Senior Citizens.

About the ADIP Scheme- the Assistance to Disabled persons for purchasing/fitting of aids/appliances (ADIP) scheme:
Being implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
Objective: to assist the needy disabled persons in procuring durable, sophisticated and scientifically manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances that can promote their physical, social and psychological rehabilitation, by reducing the effects of disabilities and enhance their economic potential.
Implementation: The scheme is implemented through implementing agencies such as NGOs, National Institutes under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and ALIMCO (a PSU that manufactures artificial limbs).

Eligibility:
A person satisfying all the following conditions are eligible:
1. Indian citizen of any age
2. Has 40% disability or more (must have the requisite certificate)
3. Monthly income, not more than Rs.20000.
4. In the case of dependents, income of parents/guardians should not exceed Rs.20000.
5. Must not have received assistance during the last 3 years for the same purpose from any source. However, for children below 12 years of age, this limit would be one year.

For Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana:

Sources: pib.

8. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY)

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features.
For Mains: Significance.

Context: Various projects sanctioned under the Unit scheme of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY).
- The projects are spread across almost 17 States, leveraging an investment worth 406 Crore rupees.
- These projects envisage the creation of direct and indirect employment for approximately fifteen thousand persons along with employment opportunities in rural areas to be the focus area.

About PMKSY:
It is a comprehensive package aiming to create modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet.
It is an umbrella scheme with its period coterminous with the cycle of 14th finance commission. It has various schemes within its gamut.

Under PMKSY the following schemes are to be implemented:
1. Mega Food Parks
2. Integrated Cold Chain, Value Addition and Preservation Infrastructure
3. Creation/Expansion of Food Processing/Preservation Capacities
4. Infrastructure for Agro Processing Clusters
5. Scheme for Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages
6. Food Safety & Quality Assurance Infrastructure
7. Human Resources and Institutions

Significance:
1. The implementation of PMKSY will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet.
2. It will provide a big boost to the growth of food processing sector in the country.
3. It will help in providing better prices to farmers and is a big step towards doubling of farmers’ income.
4. It will create huge employment opportunities especially in the rural areas.
5. It will also help in reducing wastage of agricultural produce, increasing the processing level, availability of safe and convenient processed foods at affordable price to consumers and enhancing the export of the processed foods.

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

1. Vigilance wing for Health in Kerala

What to study?
For Prelims: Functions of the wing.
For Mains: Need for and significance.

Context: Kerala government has proposed to set up a Vigilance Wing in the Health Department to monitor private practice by doctors and crackdown on quackery.

Composition and functions:
A police officer of the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police is likely to head the Vigilance Wing.
- The Vigilance Wing will detect private practice by medical education service doctors, the crackdown on quackery and unearth ethically dubious financial relationships between State doctors and diagnostic clinics, pharmacies and health care firms in the private sector.
- It will also monitor healthcare advertising and flag false claims aired by healthcare companies to mass-market pharmaceutical and Ayurveda drugs without doctor’s prescription as off-the-shelf cures for a wide range of ailments.
- The wing will also prosecute self-styled healers who exploit their influence in the social media to fuel unhealthy scepticism about government’s vaccination programmes and offer resistance against the State’s efforts to prevent the spread of global viral outbreaks such as the Corona pandemic.

Need:
There were complaints against doctors regarding the violation of private practice ban and matters involving medico-legal issues.
Concerns: Many in the medical community have objected to intrusive vigilance inspections.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. National Deworming Day

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: NDD- features and need, what is deworming and the need for it, and what are Intestinal parasitic worms?

Context: NDD is observed bi-annually on 10th February and 10th August in all states and UTs followed by mop-up activities.

About the National Deworming Day:
1. The National Deworming Day is a single fixed-day approach to treating intestinal worm infections in all children aged 1-19 years.
2. It will mobilize health personnel, state governments and other stakeholders to prioritize investment in control of Soil Transmitted Helminth (STH) infections one of the most common infections.
3. All the children are provided deworming tablet in schools and anganwadis. Besides the deworming tablet, various health promotion activities related to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) are organised in schools and anganwadis.
4. The NDD program is a cost-effective program at scale that continues to reach crores of children and adolescents with deworming benefits through a safe medicine Albendazole.

Background:
India carries the highest burden of worm infestation and 64% of Indian population less than 14 years of age are at risk of Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) or worms’ infestation (WHO). Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) interfere with nutrients uptake in children; can lead to anaemia, malnourishment and impaired mental and physical development. The situation of undernutrition and anaemia which is linked to STH ranges from 40% to 70% in different population groups across the country (WHO). They also pose a serious threat to children’s education and productivity later in life.

About Intestinal parasitic worms:
They are large multicellular organisms, which when mature can generally be seen with the naked eye. They are also known as Helminths. They are often referred to as intestinal worms even though not all helminths reside in the intestines.

Why this is a cause for concern?
Parasitic worms in children interfere with nutrient uptake, and can contribute to anaemia, malnourishment, and impaired mental and physical development. Parasitic worms have also debilitating consequences on the health and education of children, and on their long-term earning potential.

Significance of NDD:
- Anganwadi and school-based mass deworming program is safe, cost-effective, and can reach crores of children quickly.
- Deworming has been shown to reduce absenteeism in schools; improve health, nutritional, and learning outcomes; and increase the likelihood of higher-wage jobs later in life.
- Deworming with the safe and beneficial Albendazole tablet is an evidence-based, globally-accepted, and effective solution to controlling worm infections.

National Deworming Day has, thus, been designed to reach all children, regardless of socio-economic background.

Sources: pib.

3. School Health Ambassador Initiative

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

Context: The central Government launched the School Health Ambassador Initiative.

Overview:
Aim: To spread awareness about the preventive health aspects.
Under the initiative, two teachers will be identified in every government school as ‘health and wellness ambassadors’.
The initiative has been launched as a part of Ayushman Bharat.
It will be jointly run by the Union ministries of Health and Human Resources Development.
The initiative will be linked with other government initiatives such as the Eat Right campaign, Fit India movement and Poshan Abhiyaan for the overall development of children’s health.
**Implementation:**

1. Two teachers will be selected as "health and wellness ambassadors" in every government school to raise awareness about preventive health aspects.
2. These ambassadors will receive support from class monitors, who will serve as "Health and Wellness Messengers".
3. The health and wellness ambassadors will spread awareness regarding preventive health by organising culturally sensitive activity sessions for one hour every week for 24 weeks in a year to promote joyful learning.
4. The NCERT has constituted a National Resource Group (NRG) comprising 40 members who have sound training skills and experience in adolescent health. The NRG will then train the state resource group.

Sources: pib.

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**4. Kangaroo mother care (KMC)**

**What to study?**
- **For Prelims:** Features of KMC.
- **For Mains:** Need for, it’s significance and relevance for India.

**Context:** In News very often.

**About Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC):**
It is the intervention where babies are placed in skin-to-skin contact with their mothers and exclusively breast fed.
It has been recommended worldwide for stable low-birthweight newborns.
WHO recommends that it be continued till baby attains a weight of 2.5 kg or till babies wriggle out.

**KMC has 3 parts:**
1. **Skin-to-skin contact**
   The more skin-to-skin contact between the baby’s front and the mother’s chest, the better. For comfort a small nappy is fine, and for warmth a cap may be used. Skin-to-skin contact should ideally start at birth, but is helpful at any time. It should ideally be continuous day and night, but even shorter periods are still helpful.
2. **Exclusive breastfeeding**
   Direct suckling by the baby from the breasts is all that is needed for most mothers and babies. For very premature babies, expressing milk and addition of some essential nutrients may be needed.
3. **Support to the dyad**
   Whatever is needed for the medical, emotional, psychological and physical well being of mother and baby is provided to them, without separating them. This might mean adding ultramodern equipment if available, or purely intense psychological support in contexts with no resources. It can even mean going home very early.

**Significance:**

1. The results recently published in The Lancet show that kangaroo mother care improved survival by 30% and 25%, in babies till 28 days and six months of age, respectively. **Such care for all infants with low birthweight could substantially reduce neonatal and infant mortality.**
2. Kangaroo mother care benefits are much beyond preventing hypothermia. The care improves exclusive breast feeding, duration of breast feeding, and also reduces infections.
3. It also promotes growth and development of the child and increases mother child bonding, and also reduces stress in both mother and baby.

**Relevance for India:**
About 97% of the world’s low-weight babies are born in developing countries, and India accounts for about 40% of this, implying an urgent need of effective interventions. Therefore, it is imperative that such care is initiated at home in countries such as India. Kangaroo mother care has the potential to prevent thousands of neonatal deaths in our country if 90% coverage can be achieved.

Sources: the Hindu.

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### 5. Worldwide Educating for the Future Index (WEFFI) 2019

**What to study?**
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: India’s performance- challenges and ways to address them.

**Context:** Worldwide Educating for the Future Index (WEFFI) 2019 report was published by The Economist Intelligence Unit.

**About the index:**
Commissioned by the Yidan Prize Foundation.
Developed to assess the effectiveness of education systems in preparing students for the demands of work and life in a rapidly changing landscape.

**Significance:** It is the first comprehensive global index to evaluate inputs to education systems rather than outputs such as test scores and concentrates on the 15-24 age band.

**How are countries ranked?**
Countries are ranked based on their abilities to equip students with skill-based education.
The rankings are based on three categories:
1. Policy environment.
2. Teaching environment.
3. Overall socio-economic environment.

**India’s performance:**
1. Ranked 35th. Jumped five ranks from the 40th rank.
2. Scored 53.
3. India’s growth is attributed to the new national education policy introduced and published in 2019.
4. The policy mentions future-oriented skills such as critical thinking, communication and entrepreneurship.

**Global performance:**
- **Finland** topped the index followed by **Sweden**.
- Among the world’s largest economies, the US, UK, France and Russia fell back in the index while China, India and Indonesia took steps forward.

**Challenges ahead:**
1. Inability of the Indian education system to utilise the opportunity of internationalising the higher education system.
2. A decentralised education system.

Sources: ET.
6. First-ever Khelo India University Games

What to study?
For Prelims: Location of university, about Khelo India programme.
For Mains: Need for attention on this, other measures necessary.

Context: The first-ever Khelo India University Games will take off in Odisha.

What is it?
- It is an aspirational competition for India’s youngsters with the objective of helping them find the balance between sport and education.
- It is the largest ever competition held at the university level in India and will have about 3500 athletes from over 150 universities across the country taking part in it.
- There will be a total of 17 sports namely archery, athletics, boxing, fencing, judo, swimming, weightlifting, wrestling, badminton, basketball, football, hockey, table tennis, tennis, volleyball, rugby and kabaddi.

About Khelo India programme:
Introduced to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in the country and establish India as a great sporting nation.
- It is implemented by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- Under the scheme, the talented players identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels will be provided annual financial assistance of INR 5 lakh per annum for 8 years.

It will be a Central Sector Scheme (Scheme implemented by the Central Government machinery and 100% funding by the union government).

Sources: pib.

7. What is happiness curriculum?

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

Context: On her upcoming visit to India next week along with US President Donald Trump, First Lady Melania Trump will visit a Delhi government school, where she will attend a happiness curriculum class.

What is it?
The curriculum is one of the flagship schemes of the Delhi government in the education sector launched in July 2018 in all MCD schools.
- The curriculum calls for schools in India to promote development in cognition, language, literacy, numeracy and the arts along with addressing the wellbeing and happiness of students.
- It further says that future citizens need to be “mindful, aware, awakened, empathetic, firmly rooted in their identity...” based on the premise that education has a larger purpose, which cannot be in isolation from the “dire needs” of today’s society.

Objectives:
The objectives of this curriculum include developing self-awareness and mindfulness, inculcating skills of critical thinking and inquiry, enabling learners to communicate effectively and helping learners to apply life skills to deal with stressful and conflicting situations around them.

How is the curriculum implemented?
The curriculum is designed for students of classes nursery through the eighth standard.
Group 1 consists of students in nursery and KG, who have bi-weekly classes (45 minutes each for one session, which is supervised by a teacher) involving mindfulness activities and exercise. Children between classes 1-2 attend classes on weekdays, which involves mindfulness activities and exercises along with taking up reflective questions.
**The second group** comprises students from classes 3-5 and the third group is comprised of students from classes 6-8 who apart from the aforementioned activities, take part in self-expression and reflect on their behavioural changes.

**The learning outcomes of this curriculum are spread across four categories:**

1) Becoming mindful and attentive (developing increased levels of self-awareness, developing active listening, remaining in the present).
2) Developing critical thinking and reflection (developing strong abilities to reflect on one’s own thoughts and behaviours, thinking beyond stereotypes and assumptions).
3) Developing social-emotional skills (demonstrating empathy, coping with anxiety and stress).
4) Developing better communication skills and developing a confident and pleasant personality (developing a balanced outlook on daily life reflecting self-confidence, becoming responsible and reflecting awareness towards cleanliness, health and hygiene).

**How assessment is carried out?**
For the evaluation, no examinations are conducted, neither will marks be awarded. The assessment under this curriculum is qualitative, focusing on the “process rather than the outcome” and noting that each student’s journey is unique and different.

Sources: Indian Express.

### 8. ‘A Future for the World's Children’ report

**What to study?**

For Prelims: Key findings of the survey-performance of India and other countries.
For Mains: Concerns expressed, challenges ahead and measures suggested.

**Context:** ‘A Future for the World’s Children' report was recently released by the WHO, UNICEF and the Lancet medical journal. The report calculates the Flourishing Index and Sustainability Index of 180 countries.

**How are the countries ranked?**

1. **Flourishing Index:**
   - **Flourishing is the geometric mean of Surviving and Thriving.**
     - The parameter of Surviving considers maternal survival, survival in children younger than 5 years old, suicide, access to maternal and child health services, basic hygiene, sanitation, and lack of extreme poverty.
     - The parameter of Thriving considers educational achievement, growth and nutrition, reproductive freedom, and protection from violence.

2. **Sustainability Index:**
   - The Sustainability Index ranks countries on the basis of excess carbon emissions compared with the 2030 target.

**Performance of India:**

1. India stands 77th (sustainability index) and is at 131st on a ranking that measures the best chance at survival and well-being for children.
2. India has improved in health and sanitation but has to increase its spending on health.

**Global Scenario:**

1. Children in Norway, the Republic of Korea and the Netherlands have the best chance at survival and well-being.
2. Children in the Central African Republic, Chad, Somalia, Niger and Mali face the worst odds.
3. World-wide the number of obese children and adolescents has increased from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016 — an 11-fold increase, with dire individual and societal costs.
4. The only countries on track to beat the CO2 emission per capita targets by 2030, while also performing fairly (within the top 70) on child flourishing measures are: Albania, Armenia, Grenada, Jordan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uruguay and Vietnam.

Concerns expressed:
No single country is adequately protecting children’s health, their environment and their futures.

Threats: Health and future of every child and adolescent worldwide is under immediate threat from ecological degradation, climate change and exploitative marketing practices that push heavily processed fast food, sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco at children.

Progress reversing: Despite improvements in child and adolescent health over the past 20 years, progress has stalled, and is set to reverse. It has been estimated that around 250 million children under five years old in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential, based on proxy measures of stunting and poverty.

Need of hour:
1. Overhaul approach to child and adolescent health, to ensure that we not only look after our children today but protect the world they will inherit in the future.
2. Stop CO2 emissions with the utmost urgency, to ensure children have a future on this planet.
3. Place children and adolescents at the centre of our efforts to achieve sustainable development.
4. New policies and investment in all sectors to work towards child health and rights.
5. Incorporate children’s voices into policy decisions.
6. Tighten national regulation of harmful commercial marketing, supported by a new Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. H1N1 infection
What to study?
For Prelims: Infection, symptoms and effects of H1N1.
For Mains: Spread and ways to prevent it.

Context: Five judges of the Supreme Court of India have been affected by Swine Flu which is caused by the H1N1 virus.

What is Swine flu (H1N1)?
Also called as pig influenza, swine flu, hog flu and pig flu.
It is an infection caused by any one of several types of swine influenza viruses.
Swine influenza virus is any strain of the influenza family of viruses that is endemic in pigs.
Influenza A (H1N1) virus is the subtype of influenza A virus that is the most common cause of human influenza.
It is an orthomyxovirus that contains the glycoproteins haemagglutinin and neuraminidase.

1. Haemagglutinin causes red blood cells to clump together and binds the virus to the infected cell.
2. Neuraminidase is a type of glycoside hydrolase enzyme which helps to move the virus particles through the infected cell and assist in budding from the host cells.

Spread and Effects:
1. H1N1 influenza (or swine flu) is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs.
2. Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred.
3. Most commonly, these cases occur in people with direct exposure to pigs (e.g., children near pigs at a fair or workers in the swine industry).
4. However, there have been cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu.

**Treatment consists of antivirals:**
Typical treatment includes rest, pain relievers and fluids. In some cases antiviral medication and IV fluids may be required.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. Pigmentary disorder
What to study?
For Prelims: What is pigmentary disorder?
For Mains: Social stigma associated and research needed.

**Context:** Studies to understand the problem of pigmentary disorders is expected to get a major shot in the arm with Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance conferring an Intermediate Fellowship Award on Dr. Rajender K. Motiani, Assistant Professor at Faridabad-based Regional Centre for Biotechnology. The award consists of a grant of Rs 3.60 crore for a period of five years.

**What is pigmentary disorders? Their effects?**
Physiological pigmentation is a critical defense mechanism by which skin is protected against harmful UV radiations. Inefficient pigmentation predisposes to skin cancers, which are one of the leading causes of cancer-associated deaths worldwide.
Further, pigmentary disorders (both hypo and hyper pigmentary) are considered a social stigma and therefore they impart long-term psychological trauma and tremendously hamper mental well-being of patients.

**Significance of the grant?**
- The current therapeutic strategies are not efficient in alleviating pigmentary disorders.
- The research project to be taken up under the award would seek to identify novel targetable molecular players that critically regulate pigmentation process.
- Further, the researchers would try to repurpose commercially available drugs for treatment of pigmentary disorders.
- In long run, this project is expected to have a two pronged benefits for society - protection from UV-induced skin cancers and potential treatment options for pigmentary disorders.

Sources: pib.

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

1. Supreme Court panel recommends several prison reforms
What to study?
For Prelims: Committee constituted for the purpose.
For Mains: Prison reforms- need, concerns, challenges and reforms suggested.

**Context:** Supreme Court panel recommends several prison reforms.

**Key recommendations:**

1. Every new prisoner should be allowed a free phone call a day to his family members to see him through his first week in jail.

2. Modern cooking facilities, canteens to buy essential items and trial through video-conferencing should be made available.

3. Speedy trial remains one of the best ways to remedy the unwarranted phenomenon of over-crowding.

4. There should be at least one lawyer for every 30 prisoners, which is not the case at present.

5. Special fast-track courts should be set up to deal exclusively with petty offences which have been pending for more than five years.

**Background:**
The court had in September 2018 appointed the Justice Roy Committee to examine the various problems plaguing prisons, from overcrowding to lack of legal advice to convicts to issues of remission and parole. The decision was in reaction to a letter written by former Chief Justice of India R.C. Lahoti highlighting the overcrowding of prisons, unnatural deaths of prisoners, gross inadequacy of staff and the lack of trained staff.

**Need for reforms:**
1. NHRC figures show that prisoners cut off from family and friends had a 50% more chance of committing suicide than those outside. The average suicide rate in prisons is over 50% more than in normal conditions.

2. Indian prisons face three long-standing structural constraints: overcrowding, understaffing and underfunding. The inevitable outcome is sub-human living conditions, poor hygiene, and violent clashes between the inmates and jail authorities.

3. In the absence of adequate prison staff, overcrowding of prisons leads to rampant violence and other criminal activities inside the jails.

**Way ahead:**
Indian jails have often been dubbed as a university for grooming criminals due to pathetic and inhumane conditions. In the absence of a robust Whistleblower Protection Act and structural changes to address the issues of overcrowding and understaffing, India’s prisons will continue to be heaven for politically connected criminals and hell for socio-economically disadvantaged undertrials, some regular media uproars notwithstanding.

Fundamental rights of prisoners cannot be placed in the back-burner and the Centre and the states need to be more pro-active in sensitising staff about the need to treat prisoners as humanely as possible.

**Facts for Prelims:**
‘Prisons/persons detained therein’ is a State subject under Entry 4 of List II of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Slapping Section 144 during CAA protests ‘illegal’: Karnataka HC

**What to study?**
For Prelims: What is Section 144? Who and why it is imposed? Implications?
For Mains: Concerns, challenges and ways to address them.

**Context:** The Karnataka High Court has declared as “illegal” the order passed by the Bengaluru City Police Commissioner imposing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.PC) from December 19 to 21, 2019, ahead of a series of pro- and anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) rallies.

**Key observations:**
1. The court held that the order did not stand judicial scrutiny in terms of the parameters laid down by the Supreme Court in the cases of Anuradha Bhasin Vs Union of India and the Ramlila Maidan Incident Vs Union of India.
2. The police commissioner was expected to form an opinion citing reasons in his order for imposing Section 144. But, in the present instance, he has only referred to the recommendations made by eight Deputy Commissioners of Police to invoke Section 144 and ‘there was no indication of independent application of mind by the Commissioner.”

**What is Section 144?**
It gives power to a District Magistrate, a sub-divisional Magistrate or any other Executive Magistrate on behalf of the State Government to issue an order to an individual or the general public in a particular place or area to “abstain from a certain act” or “to take certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his management”.
This order can be passed against a particular individual or general public. The order can be passed even ex parte.
As held by the Supreme Court, mere apprehension of danger is not a sufficient ground to curb citizens’ rights by invoking Section 144 CrPC.

**Implications:**
1. Section 144 restricts carrying any sort of weapon in that area where it has been imposed and people can be detained for violating it. The maximum punishment for such an act is three years.
2. According to the order under this section, there shall be no movement of public and all educational institutions shall also remain closed and there will be a complete ban on holding any kind of public meetings or rallies during the period of operation of this order.
3. Section 144 also empowers the authorities to block the internet access.

**Duration of Section 144 order:**
No order under Section 144 shall remain in force for more than two months but the state government can extent the validity for two months and maximum up to six months. It can be withdrawn at any point of time if situation becomes normal.

**As per the Section, the order can be passed only “if such Magistrate considers”, that the direction is likely to prevent:**
1. obstruction, annoyance or injury to any person lawfully employed.
2. danger to human life, health or safety.
3. disturbance of the public tranquility, or a riot or affray.

**Concerns over its misuse:**
Contradictory approach of Article 19 (1) (b) and (c) of the constitution and section 144 of CrPC is a “reflection of a colonial legacy and the unquestioning adoption of most of the provisions of the 1872 Code of Criminal Procedure by the contemporary Indian State”.
More often than not, the section has been used to curb even peaceful dissent.

**What next?**
The government should make sure that there is no blanket imposition.
Existing checks and balances and judicial oversight are insufficient. Therefore, a thorough review is necessary. Public order and right to peaceful dissent—both should be ensured.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**3. SPICe+ web form**

**What to study?**
For Prelims: Key features of the web form.
For Mains: need for and it’s significance.
Context: As part of the Government of India’s Ease of Doing Business (EODB) initiatives, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified a new Web Form christened ‘SPICE+’ (pronounced ‘SPICE Plus’) replacing the existing SPICE form.

What is it?
SPICE+ would be an integrated Web Form.

- It would offer 10 services by 3 Central Government Ministries & Departments (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Ministry of Labour & Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance) and One State Government (Maharashtra).
- It aims to save as many procedures, time and cost for Starting a Business in India and would be applicable for all new company incorporations.
- The new web form would facilitate onscreen filing and real-time data validation for the seamless incorporation of companies.

Sources: pib.

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. East Asia Summit

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

Context: India is set to host an East Asia Summit conference this week in Chennai with a focus on maritime security cooperation and tackling challenges in the maritime domain. It will be organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in partnership with the governments of Australia and Indonesia.

Significance:
The Conference is expected to serve as a platform for free and open dialogue among all the EAS partners on various issues of maritime security cooperation, and to come up with useful suggestions on tackling challenges in the maritime domain in a cooperative manner.

Background:
This conference is the fourth in a series of EAS Maritime Security Conferences organised by the Indian government -- the first conference was organised in New Delhi in November 2015, the second in Goa in November 2016 and the third in Bhubaneswar in June 2018.

About East Asia Summit:
EAS is an initiative of ASEAN and is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN. It is a forum held annually by leaders of 18 countries in the East Asian, Southeast Asian and South Asian regions. EAS meetings are held after annual ASEAN leaders’ meetings. The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005. There are six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS. These are – Environment and Energy, Education, Finance, Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases, Natural Disaster Management, and ASEAN Connectivity. India endorses regional collaboration in all six priority areas.

Potential:
1. EAS, representing nearly 50 per cent of the world’s population and over 20 per cent of global trade, is a mega gathering and is a testimony to the rise of Asia.

2. EAS is a region of strong and fast growing economies. It is considered the third pole of world economy after the US and Europe. Its four major economic players namely Japan, China, India and Korea are among the twelve largest ranking global economies.

3. Financial and monetary cooperation between ASEAN+6 or EAS countries could be an area of fruitful cooperation in view of the fact that their combined foreign exchange reserves exceed $ 3 trillion.

**Significance for India:**

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

Sources: pib.

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

**1. BIMSTEC**

**What to study?**

For prelims and mains: BIMSTEC- members, objectives, significance and need for reforms.

**Context:** The 2nd Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Disaster Management Exercise was recently conducted in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The focus of the 2nd edition of Exercise is on heritage structures’ protection.

**Background:**

The first edition of the BIMSTEC DMEx was also hosted by India in 2017 with the focus on testing the region’s preparedness and resilience towards effective activation of inter-Governmental interaction/dialogue/agreements for immediate deployment of regional resources for disaster response.

**What is BIMSTEC?**

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

**Why the region matters?**

1. Over one-fifth (22%) of the world’s population live in the seven countries around it, and they have a combined GDP close to $2.7 trillion.
2. Despite economic challenges, all the countries in the region have been able to sustain average annual rates of economic growth between 3.4% and 7.5% from 2012 to 2016.
3. The Bay also has vast untapped natural resources. One-fourth of the world’s traded goods cross the Bay every year.

**Why is BIMSTEC important for India?**

www.insightsonindia.com
As the region’s largest economy, India has a lot at stake.

1. BIMSTEC connects not only South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.
2. For India, it is a natural platform to fulfil our key foreign policy priorities of ‘Neighborhood First’ and ‘Act East’.
3. For New Delhi, one key reason for engagement is in the vast potential that is unlocked with stronger connectivity. Almost 300 million people, or roughly one-quarter of India’s population, live in the four coastal states adjacent to the Bay of Bengal (Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal).
4. And, about 45 million people, who live in landlocked Northeastern states, will have the opportunity to connect via the Bay of Bengal to Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, opening up possibilities in terms of development.
5. From the strategic perspective, the Bay of Bengal, a funnel to the Malacca straits, has emerged a key theatre for an increasingly assertive China in maintaining its access route to the Indian Ocean.
6. As China mounts assertive activities in the Bay of Bengal region, with increased submarine movement and ship visits in the Indian Ocean, it is in India’s interest to consolidate its internal engagement among the BIMSTEC countries.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Brexit Deal

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: What is Brexit? Why does Uk wants it? Implications and challenges ahead, overview of the deal.

Context: Britain has officially left the European Union (EU) and has become the first country to leave the 28-member bloc.
The UK stopped being a member of the European Union (EU) after 23:00 GMT on 31 January 2020.

What is the European Union?
The EU is an economic and political union involving 28 European countries. It allows free trade, which means goods can move between member countries without any checks or extra charges. The EU also allows free movement of people, to live and work in whichever country they choose.
The UK joined in 1973 (when it was known as the European Economic Community) and it will be the first member state to withdraw.

What happens after Brexit day?
After the UK formally leaves the EU, there is still a lot to talk about and months of negotiation will follow. While the UK has agreed the terms of its EU departure, both sides still need to decide what their future relationship will look like.
During the 11-month transition period, the UK will continue to follow all of the EU’s rules and its trading relationship will remain the same.

What needs to be agreed?
- The transition period is meant to give both sides some breathing space while a new free trade agreement is negotiated.
- This is needed because the UK will leave the single market and customs union at the end of the transition. A free trade agreement allow goods to move around the EU without checks or extra charges.
- If a new one cannot be agreed in time, then the UK faces the prospect of having to trade with no deal in place. That would mean tariffs (taxes) on UK goods travelling to the EU and other trade barriers.
Aside from trade, many other aspects of the future UK-EU relationship will also need to be decided. For example:

1. Law enforcement, data sharing and security.
2. Aviation standards and safety.
3. Access to fishing waters.
4. Supplies of electricity and gas.
5. Licensing and regulation of medicines.

What caused Brexit to happen?
So far, there seem to be three theories for what drove so many people to vote Brexit:

1. **Immigrants**: Faced with rising immigration locals worried about their jobs and the erosion of the English way of life wanted their government to clamp down on immigration. This was a revolt against unrestricted immigration from poorer Eastern European states, Syrian refugees residing in the EU and millions of Turks about to join the EU.
2. **Elites**: Faced with decades of economic malaise, stagnant real wages and economic destitution in former industrial heartlands ever since the rise of “Thaterchism” and the embrace of Neoliberal policies by Tony Blair’s New Labour the non-Londoners have decided to revolt against the elite. This isn’t just about being against the EU as it stands, and its free market and free movement of peoples.
3. **Bureaucracy**: Faced with Brussel’s asphyxiating amount of red tape the English people decide to “take back control” of their country’s bureaucracy.

The three theories are obviously intertwined at times and contradictory at others, that’s why it matters who is going to be negotiating the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU.

What is the Brexit deal?
The transition period and other aspects of the UK’s departure were agreed in a separate deal called the withdrawal agreement.

Most of that was negotiated by Theresa May’s government. But after Mr Johnson replaced her in July 2019, he removed the most controversial part - the backstop.

- The backstop was designed to ensure there would be no border posts or barriers between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland after Brexit. If needed, it would have kept the UK in a close trading relationship with the EU.
- Under Mr Johnson’s deal, a customs border will effectively be created between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Some goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain will be subject to checks and will have to pay EU import taxes (known as tariffs).
- These would be refunded if goods remain in Northern Ireland (ie are not moved to the Republic of Ireland).

Sources: the Hindu.

2. **USTR takes India off developing country list**

What to study?
**For Prelims**: What are CVDs? What USTR list means?
**For Mains**: Implications, significance of the list.

**Context**: The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has published a notice, amending lists of developing and least-developed countries that are eligible for preferential treatment with respect to countervailing duties (CVDs) investigations.

- The new lists consist of 36 developing countries and 44 least developed countries.

**Why this is a cause for concern for India?**
India was, until February 10, on the developing country list and therefore eligible for these more relaxed standards. It has now been taken off of that list.

- Countries not given special consideration have lower levels of protection against a CVD investigation.
- This will now make it easier for it to impose countervailing duties (CVDs) on goods from India.
The move has cast a shadow on India being able to restore preferential benefits under the **Generalised System of Preference (GSP)** as part of its trade talks with the US, as only developing countries are eligible for it.

**What is the basis for classification?**
To harmonise U.S. law with the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) Agreement, the USTR had, in 1998, come up with lists of countries classified as per their level of development.
- These lists were used to determine whether they were potentially subject to U.S. countervailing duties.
- The *de minimis* (too small to warrant concern) thresholds and import volume allowance are more relaxed for developing and least-developed countries.
- The *de minimis* standard is usually a subsidy of 1% or less ad valorem and 2 percent for special cases.
- The 1998 rule is now “obsolete” as per the USTR notice.

**What was considered as negligible import volumes?**
1. If a country’s goods constitute less than 3% of all imports of that good into the U.S., it meets the ‘negligible import volumes’ standard. For special cases it is 4%.
2. Imports do not meet the standard, if, individual volumes are less than 3% (special cases: 4%) but the aggregate volume of imports into the U.S. is 7% of all such goods.

**Criteria:**
The USTR used the following criteria to determine whether a country was eligible for the 2% de minimis standard: (1) Per capita Gross National Income or GNI (2) share of world trade (3) other factors such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) membership or application for membership, EU membership, and Group of Twenty (G20) membership.

**Why India was removed from this list?**
India, along with Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam were taken off the list since they each have at least a 0.5% share of the global trade, despite having less than $12,375 GNI (the World Bank threshold separating high income countries from others).
India was taken off the list also because — like Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa — it is part of the G20. Given the global economic significance of the G20, and the collective economic weight of its membership (which accounts for large shares of global economic output and trade), **G20 membership indicates that a country is developed.**

Sources: the Hindu.

**3. UK’s points-based visa policy**

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: Features of the points-based visa policy.*
*For Mains: Advantages and disadvantages.

**Context:** UK has launched the **new points-based immigration system**, which intends to change the way migrants will come to the UK to work, study, visit or join their family.
- Effective from January 1, 2021, the new immigration system affects the EU citizens, who will now be treated at par with non-EU citizens.
- **Non-EU citizens already follow a points-based system** to migrate to the UK.
What’s a points-based policy?
The implementation of the points-based system does not change the status of those EU citizens already in the UK as per the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and those whose status under EUSS is settled. The points-based immigration system will take effect from January 1, 2021 and will end free movement between the UK and EU, treating both EU and non-EU citizens equally.

Under this system, points will be assigned for specific skills, qualifications, salaries or professions and visas will be awarded to those who will have enough points.

How it works?
1. Under this system, both EU and non-EU citizens will need to demonstrate that they have a job offer from an approved sponsor, that the job offer is at the required level and that they speak English.
2. Further, as per the Migration Advisory Committee’s (MAC) recommendations, salary thresholds have been established.
3. Further, a total of 70 points are required to be eligible to apply, with some tradeable characteristics of the system.

The points will be allotted in the following manner:
Offer of job by approved sponsor (20), job at appropriate skill level (20), speaks English at required level (10), salary of £20,480 (minimum) – £23,039 (0), salary of £23,040 – £25,599 (10), salary of £25,600 or above (20), job in a shortage occupation (as designated by the MAC) (20), education qualification: PhD in subject relevant to the job (10) and education qualification: PhD in a STEM subject relevant to the job (20). Out of these characteristics, the first three are not tradeable, which means they are absolutely required to be eligible for visa under the points-based system.

What are the advantages of points systems?
The ability to qualify without an employer sponsor- workers entering under the Australian points system are less dependent on their employers and do not need permission to switch between jobs as they do in the UK; as a result, they are expected to have more bargaining power and to operate in a more competitive labour market.

Criticisms:
The most common criticism of points systems is that they often do not require a job offer and if workers do not have employment lined up, it is difficult to know whether they are actually employable. The system relies on the government’s perception of what skills are valuable, rather than on the views of the employers who are to recruit them.

Other criticisms include the fact that eligibility criteria can be unpredictable if candidate are ranked against each other and a specific number admitted. This is because the bar for admission will be higher in periods when more other people are applying.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. Pakistan retained on 'Grey List' of FATF

What to study?
For Prelims: What is FATF? What are grey and black lists?
For Mains: Implications of this move and significance of FATF decisions.

Context: The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has given an extension of four months to Pakistan to act against organisations involved in terror financing.

• Pakistan will remain in the Grey List.

Key observations:
- All deadlines given to Pakistan to check terror funding have ended and it has failed to complete its action plan in line with an agreed timeline and failed to check terror funding risks emanating from its jurisdiction.
- If Pakistan fails to prosecute, it will be penalised on terror funding acts by June.

Implications:
1. With Pakistan's continuation in the 'Grey List', it will be difficult for the country to get financial aid from the IMF, the World Bank, the ADB and the European Union.
2. This will further enhance problems for the nation which is in a precarious economic situation.
3. Also, there is every possibility that the global body may put the country in the 'Black List' along with North Korea and Iran.

Background:
Pakistan has been under the FATF’s scanner since 2018, when it was put on the greylist for terror financing and money laundering risks, after an assessment of its financial system and law enforcement mechanisms. Pakistan has largely addressed 14 of 27 action items.

What next?
It is theoretically possible that Pakistan is moved out of the greylist. But that would require the votes of at least 15 of the FATF’s 36 voting members.
But, Pakistan needs to continue to work on eight specific areas, including demonstrating it is “identifying and investigating” all terror financing activity in the country, freezing the funds of all designated terrorists and that its prosecutions result in “effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions” against all terror entities in Pakistan.

About FATF:
It is an inter- governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7. Its Secretariat is located at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) headquarters in Paris.
Member Countries: There are 39 member of FATF, representing most financial centres around the world. This includes 2 regional organisations - GCC and EC.
The FATF Plenary is the decision making body of the FATF. It meets three times per year.

Objectives:
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.

FATF lists:
Grey List: Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.
Black List: Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Commonwealth

What to study?
For Prelims: About commonwealth.
For Mains: Relevance of Commonwealth today and the need for reorganization.
Context: The Maldives re-joined the Commonwealth, more than three years after the Indian Ocean island nation quit amid mounting criticism of its human rights.

In 2016, the Maldives pulled out of the Commonwealth. Maldives has been formally reinstated into the Commonwealth as its 54th member state.

About Commonwealth of Nations:
1. The Commonwealth of Nations, at one time known as British Commonwealth, is an organisation of fifty three states that were principally below the colonial rule of British Government. They came into existence with the proclamation of sovereignty of the state from the colonial rule of British Empire and were later given self-governance.
2. It proclaims that the Commonwealth nations are “free and equal.” The insignia of this Commonwealth Association is Queen Elizabeth II who is considered the Supreme of the Commonwealth nations.
3. The member states of the commonwealth are not legally liable or bound to each other. They are rather united by language, history, culture, likeness of the democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
4. Their values are listed down within the Commonwealth Charter and the hands of harmony towards the member states are extended by the Commonwealth Games held every four years.
5. Former British mandates that did not become members of the Commonwealth are Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, British Palestine, Sudan, British Somaliland, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

Key facts:
Former name — British Commonwealth.
Composition: intergovernmental organisation of 53 member states that are mostly former territories of the British Empire.
It operates by intergovernmental consensus of the member states.
Established in 1949 by the London Declaration.
Structure: Head of the Commonwealth — Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of the Commonwealth. The position is symbolic.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. How WHO names a new disease?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Naming procedure, need for and significance.

Context: On February 11, the World Health Organization officially announced COVID-19 as the name for the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

• This comes more than 40 days after WHO was alerted by China about a cluster of pneumonia-like cases seen in the city of Wuhan in Hubei province.

Background:
The WHO had to come up the name in line with the 2015 guidelines between the global agency, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

What does the name COVID-19 stand for?
The “CO” in COVID stands corona, while “VI” is for virus and “D” for disease. The number 19 stands for the year 2019 when the outbreak was first identified.

Why was WHO in a hurry to name the disease?
The urgency to assign a name to the disease is to prevent the use of other names that can be “inaccurate or stigmatising”. People outside the scientific community tend to call a new disease by common names. But once the name gets “established in common usage through the Internet and social media, they are difficult to change, even if an inappropriate name is being used.
Therefore, it is important that whoever first reports on a newly identified human disease uses an appropriate name that is scientifically sound and socially acceptable.

**Why and how did the WHO come up with guidelines to name new diseases?**

In May 2015, the WHO came up guidelines on how to name a new disease.

1. The WHO identified the best practices to name new human diseases in consultation and collaboration with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
2. The main aim behind this exercise was to “minimise unnecessary negative impact of disease names on trade, travel, tourism or animal welfare, and avoid causing offence to any cultural, social, national, regional, professional or ethnic groups”.

**What best practices did the guidelines suggest?**

1. According to the guidelines, name of a new disease should consist of a combination of terms.
2. These terms consist of a generic descriptive term based on clinical symptoms (respiratory), physiological processes (diarrhoea), and anatomical or pathological references (cardic).
3. It can refer to specific descriptive terms such as those who are afflicted (infant, juvenile, and maternal), seasonality (summer, winter) and severity (mild, severe).
4. The name can also include other factual elements such as the environment (ocean, river), causal pathogen (coronavirus) and the year the new disease is first detected with or without mentioning the month.
5. The year is used when it becomes “necessary to differentiate between similar events that happened in different years”.
6. Besides, the WHO has also listed out the terms that should be avoided while naming a new disease. This includes, geographic locations, people’s names, species of animal or food, references to culture, population, industry or occupation, and terms that incite undue fear.

**Background:**

*There are a few disease names that mentions the geographic location* — cities, countries or regions — where the disease, Zika etc.

*Few diseases carry the name of the person who first identified the disease.* Chagas disease is named after the Brazilian physician Carlos Chagas, who discovered the disease in 1909.

*Some diseases carry the name of animals* — bird flu (H5N1) and swine flu (H1N1). The 2009 H1N1 pandemic was commonly referred to as swine flu.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 3. Saudi hosts G20 financial leaders

**What to study?**

**For Prelims:** G20- objectives and significance.

**For Mains:** Significance, membership, issues present and the need for reforms.

**Context:** G20 meeting was held recently in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia).

- Saudi Arabia is the first Arab nation to hold the G20 presidency.
- Theme: “Realizing Opportunities of the 21st Century for All”.

**Focus areas:**

1. Action plan to shield the world economy from the impact of Coronavirus Epidemic.
2. Discuss ways to achieve a fairer global taxation system for the digital era.
3. Discuss global economic outlook and possible policy responses to support growth and safeguard against downside risks.

**What is G20?**
An informal group of 19 countries and the European Union along with representatives of the IMF and the World Bank. Represents about two-thirds of the world’s population, 85% of global gross domestic product, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade. 

Genesis: Amid 2008 Financial Crisis the world saw the need for a new consensus-building at the highest political level. It was decided that the G20 leaders would begin meeting once annually.

Members:
The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.

Sources: pib.
GENERAL STUDIES – 3

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

1. What is CRR or cash reserve ratio?

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

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has exempted banks from maintaining cash reserve ratio (CRR) for loans to retail and micro, small and medium enterprises for five years, if these loans are extended between January 31 and July 31, 2020.

Background:
At present, CRR is 4% of net demand and time liabilities. Banks do not earn any interest for maintaining CRR with the RBI.

What is CRR?
- It is a certain minimum amount of deposit that the commercial banks have to hold as reserves with the central bank.
- The percentage of cash required to be kept in reserves, vis-a-vis a bank’s total deposits, is called the Cash Reserve Ratio.
- The cash reserve is either stored in the bank’s vault or is sent to the RBI. Banks do not get any interest on the money that is with the RBI under the CRR requirements.

Cash reserve ratio is:
1. It is also referred to as the amount of funds which the banks have to keep with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
2. It's a vice-versa process.
3. If a central bank increases CRR then the available amount with the banks decreases or comes down.
4. The CRR is used by RBI to wipe out excessive money from the system.

There are two primary purposes of the Cash Reserve Ratio:
1. Since a part of the bank’s deposits is with the Reserve Bank of India, it ensures the security of the amount. It makes it readily available when customers want their deposits back.
2. Also, CRR helps in keeping inflation under control. At the time of high inflation in the economy, RBI increases the CRR, so that banks need to keep more money in reserves so that they have less money to lend further.

How does Cash Reserve Ratio help in times of high inflation?
At the time of high inflation, the government needs to ensure that excess money is not available in the economy.
- To that extent, RBI increases the Cash Reserve Ratio, and the amount of money that is available with the banks reduces. This curbs excess flow of money in the economy.

When the government needs to pump funds into the system, it lowers the CRR rate, which in turn, helps the banks provide loans to a large number of businesses and industries for investment purposes. Lower CRR also boosts the growth rate of the economy.

Sources: the Hindu.
2. What are Masala Bonds?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Features and significance of Masala Bonds.

Context: Asian Development Bank (ADB) has listed its 10-year masala bonds worth Rs 850 crore on the global debt listing platform of India INX. The proceeds would be used to support local currency lending and investment in India.

Background:
India INX is the country’s first international exchange, located at International Financial Services Centre, GIFT City in Gujarat. ADB’s masala bonds are listed on both Luxembourg exchange and India INX.

What are Masala Bonds?
They are bonds issued outside India by an Indian entity or corporate. These bonds are issued in Indian currency than local currency. Indian corporates usually issue Masala Bonds to raise funds from foreign investors. As it is pegged into Indian currency, if the rupee rates fall, investors bear the risk. The first Masala bond was issued in 2014 by IFC for the infrastructure projects in India.

How does Masala Bonds help bond issuer?
As Masala bonds are issued directly in Indian rupees, the investor needs to bear the exchange rate risks. Rupee rate falls will not affect the issuer of Masala Bonds. In simpler words, as Masala Bonds are rupee-denominated bonds, the risk goes directly to the investor.

Who is eligible to invest in Masala bonds?
Investors from outside of India who would like to invest in Indian assets can invest in Masala bonds. Indian entities like HDFC, NTPC and Indiabulls Housing have raised funds via Masala Bonds.
On September 29, 2015, RBI allowed Indian corporates to raise money through issuance of rupee bonds outside of India. These are also called Masala Bonds.

It was named Masala Bond to give it a local flavour and unique identity since it brings Indian culture and cuisine to mind.

The framework for issuance of rupee bonds overseas falls within the External Commercial Borrowings (ECB) policy.

**WHAT ARE ITS CHARACTERISTICS?**

- The minimum tenure of these bonds is 3 years; call/put option, if any, will be available after completion of 3 years.
- Bonds are issued in rupees and can be settled overseas in foreign currency.
- Bonds can either be placed privately or listed on exchanges as per host country’s regulations.
- The maximum amount that any eligible borrower can raise through issuance of these bonds under automatic route is INR 50 billion or its equivalent during a financial year. This limit is over and above the amount permitted to be raised under the automatic route by an entity eligible to raise External Commercial Borrowings (ECB).
- The all-in-cost of such borrowings would be as per prevailing market conditions and comparable with the cost at which the borrowing company is able to raise money in India.
- ‘Withholding tax’ of 5% is payable by borrowers over and above the coupon of bonds.
- Any corporate or body corporate in India can use this mode of raising money.
- Any investor from a Financial Action Task Force (FATF) compliant jurisdiction outside India can purchase these bonds.
- Indian banks can act as arrangers and underwriters.

**ADVANTAGES**

**FOR INVESTOR**
- Less documentation—No need to register as foreign portfolio investor (FPI) in India.
- Lower tax—The Finance Ministry has cut the withholding tax on interest income of such bonds to 5% from 20%, making it attractive for investors.
- Operational convenience—The masala bonds can be settled in foreign currency through the international custodians like Euroclear or Clearstream.

**FOR BORROWERS**
- Cheaper cost of funds—If the company issues any bond in India, it earns an interest rate of 7.5%-8.00% whereas, Masala Bonds outside India is issued below 7.00% interest rate.
- No currency risk—Companies issuing Masala Bonds do not have to worry about rupee depreciation, which is usually a big worry while raising money in overseas markets.
1. Yellow Rust

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: What is Yellow Rust, how it occurs, spread, impact and prevention?

Context: Yellow Rust was recently detected in wheat crops in parts of Punjab and Haryana.

What is Yellow Rust?
It is a disease that appears as yellow stripes of powder or dust on leaves and leaf sheaths of the wheat crop.

How it occurs?
This occurs when the rust colonies in the leaves drain the carbohydrates from the plant and reduce the green leaf area.
Rain, dew and fog favour the disease’s development.

Spread:
The disease can spread rapidly under congenial conditions and affects crop development, and eventually the yield.
Yield due to the disease can be affected by between 5 and 30 per cent.

Where else is it observed in India?
In India, it is a major disease in the Northern Hill Zone and the North-Western Plain Zone and spreads easily during the onset of cool weather and when wind conditions are favourable.

Disease management:
Breeding resistant varieties is the most cost-effective method to control this rust.
These resistance genes, however, have become ineffective due to the acquisition of virulence to that particular resistance gene rendering the variety susceptible.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Locust attacks

What to study?
For Prelims: What are locusts, how they affect crops? Affected countries.
For Mains: Concerns, effects, challenges and ways to address them.

Context: During the past few weeks, major locust attacks have been observed in several countries in western and southern Asia and in eastern Africa.

Which countries are affected?
The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has currently identified three hotspots of threatening locust activity, where the situation has been called “extremely alarming” — the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea area, and southwest Asia.

1. The Horn of Africa has been called the worst-affected area, where the FAO has said there is “an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods”.
2. Locust swarms from Ethiopia and Somalia have travelled south to Kenya and 14 other countries in the continent.
3. In the Red Sea area, locusts have struck in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Yemen.
4. In southwest Asia, locust swarms have caused damage in Iran, India, and Pakistan.
5. **Pakistan and Somalia** have recently declared *locust emergencies*.

**What are locusts?**

Locusts are a group of short-horned grasshoppers that multiply in numbers as they migrate long distances in destructive swarms (up to 150km in one day).

**Four species of locusts are found in India:** Desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*), Migratory locust (*Locusta migratoria*), Bombay Locust (*Nomadacris succincta*) and Tree locust (*Anacridium sp.*).

**How do they inflict damage?**

- The swarms devour leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, bark and growing points, and also destroy plants by their sheer weight as they descend on them in massive numbers.
- The desert locust is regarded as the most destructive pest in India as well as internationally, with a small swarm covering one square kilometre being able to consume the same amount of food in one day as 35,000 people.

Sources: Indian Express.

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3. **Soil Health Cards (SHC) scheme**

**What to study?**

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

**Context:** In the second phase of the scheme’s implementation, 11.69 crore Soil Health Cards were distributed to farmers in two years.

And the scheme has led to a decline of 8-10% in the use of chemical fertilizers and also raised productivity by 5-6%.

**About the scheme:**

Launched in 2015.

Under the scheme, the government plans to *issue soil cards to farmers which will carry crop-wise recommendations of nutrients and fertilisers required for the individual farms.*

This will help farmers to improve productivity through judicious use of inputs.

**About the Soil Health Card:**

1. A Soil Health Card is used to assess the current status of soil health and, when used over time, to determine changes in soil health that are affected by land management.
2. It displays soil health indicators and associated descriptive terms. The indicators are typically based on farmers’ practical experience and knowledge of local natural resources.
3. The card lists soil health indicators that can be assessed without the aid of technical or laboratory equipment.

**What it contains?**

It will contain the status of his soil with respect to **12 parameters, namely** N,P,K (Macro-nutrients); S (Secondary-nutrient); Zn, Fe, Cu, Mn, Bo (Micro-nutrients); and pH, EC, OC (Physical parameters). Based on this, the SHC will also indicate fertilizer recommendations and soil amendment required for the farm.

Sources: pib.

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4. **Farmers Producer Organisations**

**What to study?**

*For Prelims: What are FPOs?*

*For Mains: Need for and significance.*
Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch 10,000 Farmers Producer Organisations (FPOs) all over the country, on 29 February, in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh.

What are FPOs?
It is a Producer Organisation (PO) where the members are farmers. Small Farmers’ Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is providing support for the promotion of FPOs.
- FPOs help in the collectivization of such small, marginal and landless farmers in order to give them the collective strength to deal with such issues.
- Members of the FPO will manage their activities together in the organization to get better access to technology, input, finance and market for faster enhancement of their income.

Support by the Government:
The government has launched a new dedicated Central Sector Scheme titled “Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)” with a clear strategy and committed resources to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs.

Need for and significance of FPOs:
- Nearly 86% of farmers are small and marginal with average land holdings in the country being less than 1.1 hectares.
- These small, marginal and landless farmers face tremendous challenges during agriculture production phase such as for access to technology, quality seed, fertilizers and pesticides including requisite finances.
- They also face tremendous challenges in marketing their produce due to lack of economic strength.
FPOs help in the collectivization of such small, marginal and landless farmers in order to give them the collective strength to deal with such issues.

What are the essential features of a PO?
1. It is formed by a group of producers for either farm or non-farm activities.
2. It is a registered body and a legal entity.
3. Producers are shareholders in the organization.
4. It deals with business activities related to the primary produce/product.
5. It works for the benefit of the member producers.
6. A part of the profit is shared amongst the producers.
7. Rest of the surplus is added to its owned funds for business expansion.

Sources: pib.

5. Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK)

What to study?
For Prelims: What are KVKs? Objectives and functions.
For Mains: Need for and significance.

Context: 11th National Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Conference was recently inaugurated.

What are KVKs- “farm science center”:
A Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) is an agricultural extension center in India.
Usually associated with a local agricultural university, these centers serve as the ultimate link between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and farmers, and aim to apply agricultural research in a practical, localized setting.
All KVKs fall under the jurisdiction of one of the 11 Agricultural Technology Application Research Institutes (ATARIs) throughout India.
Activities:
KVKS provide several farm support activities like providing technology dissemination to farmers, training, awareness etc.
To achieve these, KVKS undertake:
1. Farm advisory service.
2. Training programme for different categories of people.
3. Training programme for the extension functionaries.
4. Front line demonstration.
5. On farm testing.

Sources: the Hindu.

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

1. Pesticides Management Bill 2020

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

Context: Union Cabinet has approved the Pesticide Management Bill 2020 to promote the use of organic pesticides in the country.

Key provisions:
1. The bill will empower farmers to get all the information regarding pesticides including their strengths and weaknesses and the risk and alternatives involved, as the data would be made available in open source, in a digital format and in all languages.
2. The bill will also include the provision of compensating the farmers in case of losses due to the use of spurious or low quality of pesticides.
3. The union government may form a central fund to take care of the compensation.
4. Any person who wants to import, manufacture, or export pesticides would have to register under the new bill and provide all details regarding any claims, expected performance, efficacy, safety, usage instructions, and infrastructure available to stock that pesticide. The information will also include details on the pesticide’s potential effects on the environment.
5. The bill also plans to regulate pesticides-related advertisements to check misleading claims by industries and manufacturers.

Need for a fresh law:
The current state of regulation of pesticides in India, using the extant law called Insecticides Act 1968, has not caught up with post-modern pest management science nor has taken cognizance of a huge body of scientific evidence on the ill effects of synthetic pesticides. Therefore, it is high time that new legislation is brought in. Besides, the acute pesticide poisoning deaths and hospitalisations that Indian farmworkers and farmers fall prey to are ignominious by now. It is not just human beings but wildlife and livestock that are poisoned routinely by toxic pesticides as numerous reports indicate.

Pesticides usage in India:
India is the fourth-largest producer of pesticides in the world, with the market segmentation tilted mainly towards insecticides, with herbicides on the increase in the recent past.
It is reported that eight states consume more than 70% of the pesticides used in India.
Amongst the crops, paddy accounts for the maximum share of consumption (26-28%), followed by cotton (18-20%), notwithstanding all the hype around Bt technology.
There are 292 pesticides registered in the country, and it is estimated that there are around 104 pesticides that are continued to be produced/ used in India that have been banned in two or more countries in the world.
The industry has grown to be an INR 20,000 crores business in India, with the top 3 companies having a market share of 57%.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. SUTRA PIC

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the programme.
For Mains: Need for and significance of indigenous cow breeds.

Context: The government has unveiled a programme to research on ‘indigenous’ cows - SUTRA PIC.

About SUTRA PIC- Scientific Utilisation Through Research Augmentation-Prime Products from Indigenous Cows:
- It is led by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- It is supported by the Department of Biotechnology, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Ministry for AYUSH (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homoeopathy) among others and the Indian Council of Medical Research as partners.

It has five themes:
1. Uniqueness of Indigenous Cows.
5. Prime-products from indigenous cows-based utility items.

Aims and objectives:
- Scientific research on the complete characterisation of milk and milk products derived from Indian indigenous cows.
- Scientific research on nutritional and therapeutic properties of curd and ghee prepared from indigenous breeds of cows by traditional methods.
- Development of standards for traditionally processed dairy products of Indian-origin cows, etc.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. PM KISAN

What to study?
For Prelims: Features of the scheme.
For Mains: Significance and performance of the scheme.

Context: PM-KISAN Scheme completes one year on February 24, 2020.
So far, over 8 crore 46 lakh farmers covered under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi. Central Government transfers Rs.6,000 in three tranches every year to beneficiaries.

About Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:
The scheme was started with a view to augment the income of the farmers by providing income support to all landholding farmers’ families across the country, to enable them to take care of expenses related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs.
Under the Scheme an amount of Rs.6000/- per year is transferred in three 4-monthly installments of Rs.2000/- directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.
The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiaries rests with the State / UT Governments.
Ambit:
The Scheme initially provided income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers’ families across the country, holding cultivable land upto 2 hectares. Its ambit was later expanded w.e.f. 01.06.2019 to cover all farmer families in the country irrespective of the size of their land holdings.

Exceptions:
Affluent farmers have been excluded from the scheme such as Income Tax payers in last assessment year, professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants etc and pensioners pensioners drawing at least Rs.10,000/- per month (excluding MTS/Class IV/Group D employees).

Sources: pib.

Topics: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. REIT and InvIT

What to study?
For Prelims: Features of InvIT and REIT.
For Mains: Need for and significance of InvIT and REIT.

Context: The proposal in the Union Budget to tax dividend in the hands of unit holders/ investors would hurt future InvITs and REITs, say real estate and infrastructure industry officials and analysts.

Why and how?
• Such a decision is contrary to the government’s move to encourage InvITs and REITs to provide tax stability to long-term infrastructure investors.
• Uncertainty in the tax regime would hurt the sentiment of foreign investors who are already wary of the stability of tax regime in India, they added.
• The resultant tax burden on the part of investors will put at risk plans for raising about $100 billion with regard to InvITs and REITs.

What are Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvIT)?
It is like a mutual fund, which enables direct investment of small amounts of money from possible individual/institutional investors in infrastructure to earn a small portion of the income as return.
1. InvITs can be treated as the modified version of REITs designed to suit the specific circumstances of the infrastructure sector.
2. They are similar to REIT but invest in infrastructure projects such as roads or highways which take some time to generate steady cash flows.

What are Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT)?
A REIT is roughly like a mutual fund that invests in real estate although the similarity doesn’t go much further.
1. The basic deal on REITs is that you own a share of property, and so an appropriate share of the income from it will come to you, after deducting an appropriate share of expenses.
2. Essentially, it’s like a group of people pooling their money together and buying real estate except that it’s on a large scale and is regulated.

Why need InvITs and REITs?
1. Infrastructure and real estate are the two most critical sectors in any developing economy.
2. A well-developed infrastructural set-up propels the overall development of a country.
3. It also facilitates a steady inflow of private and foreign investments, and thereby augments the capital base available for the growth of key sectors in an economy, as well as its own growth, in a sustained manner.
4. Given the importance of these two sectors in the country, and the paucity of public funds available to stimulate their growth, it is imperative that additional channels of financing are put in place.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Blue dot network

What to study?
For Prelims: Meaning, members and features.
For Mains: Need for and significance.

Context: The first meeting of the Blue Dot Network’s embryonic steering committee was held recently in Washington, with Australia and Japan as partners.

What is the Blue dot network?
The U.S., Australia and Japan announced the network during the November 4, 2019, Indo-Pacific Business Forum in Bangkok. The initiative aligns with the G20’s Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment, particularly on governance, environmental standards and transparency.

- It is a new U.S.-led certification plan.
- A "blue dot" will be awarded to projects the initiative endorses.
- The Network will not itself directly invest in projects.
- At present the project is led by the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (boasting access to $60 billion in capital), in partnership with the government-owned Japan Bank for International Cooperation and Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs.
- Once fully up and running, the new network will bring together governments, the private sector and other organizations behind a set of high-quality global infrastructure development standards.

Significance:
It will act as a globally recognized seal of approval for major infrastructure projects, letting people know the projects are sustainable and not exploitative.

Here’s how the network will work:

- Any country or company can participate in the network, as long as it agrees to adhere to the network’s high standards of promoting quality, private sector-led investment. Projects that seek to be certified by the Blue Dot Network will complete an online application.
- Countries, companies and local communities will all benefit from the Blue Dot Network. When projects are certified by the Blue Dot Network, communities and investors can be confident about the high standards and sustainability of the infrastructure.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. National Rail Transportation Institute (NRTI)

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: NRTI- objectives, functions and significance.

Context: Railway Board of India and the University of Birmingham have announced the launch of a joint masters programme in Railway Systems Engineering and Integration in the academic year 2020-2021 by the National Rail Transportation Institute (NRTI).

Significance:
• This initiative will benefit NRTI students by providing them access to world-class expertise and facilities in railway systems at the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education (BCRRE).
• BCRRE will also gain valuable insights into India’s transport sector and get involved in related research and development issues in India.

Background:
The initiative has been taken under the Centre of Excellence for Next-Generation Transportation Systems which was set up by an MoU between the NRTI and the University of Birmingham in 2019.

About National Rail Transport Institute:
It was set up as a deemed to be university and has been operational since 2018 and is India’s first to focus on transport-related education, multidisciplinary research and training. It is situated in Vadodara, Gujrat.

Functions:
1. It is specifically established to create a resource pool of best-in-class professionals for the railway and transportation sector through institutional partnerships for collaborating on developing curriculum, research projects and executive education programs.
2. It aims to develop interdisciplinary Centres of Excellence, bringing together academicians, scientists and engineers from various backgrounds and plans to leverage its academic and industry partnerships and collaborations.

Sources: pib.

4. Chatbot ASKDISHA

What to study?
For Prelims: What is it, key features, languages covered.
For Mains: Significance of e- governance, potential.

Context: The Indian Railways Catering & Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC) has powered voice-enabled ASKDISHA Chatbot to converse with customers in the Hindi language. The customers can now ask queries to ASKDISHA in Hindi by voice as well as text.

What is ASKDISHA Chatbot?
It is an Artificial Intelligence-based chatbot.
It is a special computer programme designed to simulate conversation with users, especially over the internet. Initially launched in the English language in October 2018. Developed by Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). The aim is to resolve queries of railway passengers over the internet pertaining to various services offered.

Services provided:
Since its initial launch, passengers seeking help on the reservation of tickets, cancellation, enquiry of refund status, fare, PNR search, train running status, enquiry about retiring rooms and tourism products have been benefited.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Investment models.

1. Vadhavan port and landlord model

What to study?
For Prelims: Major ports in India and about landlord model.
For Mains: Need for and significance of this model.
Context: The Union Cabinet has approved a proposal to set up a major port at Vadhavan near Dahanu in Maharashtra with a total cost of ₹65,545 crore.

Key facts:
1. This will be 13th major port in India.
2. With the development of this port, India will become one of the countries in the top-10 container ports in the world.
3. A special purpose vehicle (SPV) will be formed with Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) as the lead partner, with equity participation equal to or more than 50% to implement the project.
4. The port will be developed on the landlord model.

How many major ports are there in India currently?
Currently, India has 12 major ports at Deendayal (erstwhile Kandla), Mumbai, JNPT, Mormugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Kamarajar (earlier Ennore), VO Chidambaranar, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Kolkata (including Haldia).

What is landlord model?
1. In the landlord port model, the publicly governed port authority acts as a regulatory body and as landlord while private companies carry out port operations—mainly cargo-handling activities.
2. Here, the port authority maintains ownership of the port while the infrastructure is leased to private firms that provide and maintain their own superstructure and install own equipment to handle cargo.
3. In return, the landlord port gets a share of the revenue from the private entity.
4. The role of the landlord port authority would be to carry out all public sector services and operations such as the award of bids for cargo terminals and dredging.

Need:
- Currently, most major port trusts in India carry out terminal operations as well, resulting in a hybrid model of port governance.
- The involvement of the port authorities in terminal operations leads to a conflict of interest and works against objectivity.
The neutrality of the landlord port authority is a basic requirement for fair competition between port service providers, particularly the terminal operators.

Sources: pib.

2. Railways’ corporate train model

What to study?
For Prelims: Features.
For Mains: Need for and significance of the model.

Context: The Kashi Mahakal Express is the country’s third ‘corporate’ train after the two Tejas Express trains between Delhi-Lucknow and Mumbai-Ahmedabad started over the past few months.

What is Corporate train model?
This is a new model being actively pushed by Indian Railways to ‘outsource’ the running of regular passengers trains to its PSU, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC).

How does the model work?
In this model, the corporation takes all the decisions of running the service—fare, food, onboard facilities, housekeeping, complaints etc. Indian Railways is free from these encumbrances and gets to earn from IRCTC a pre-decided amount, being the owner of the network.

This amount has three components- haulage, lease and custody.
1. Haulage charge includes use of the fixed infrastructure like tracks, signalling, driver, station staff, traction and pretty much everything needed to physically move the rake.
2. **Lease charges on the rake** have to be paid as Indian Railways coaches are leased to its financing arm, the **Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC)**.

3. **Custody charge** has to be paid for keeping the rake safe and sound while it is in the custody of the PSU. IRCTC has to pay Indian Railways a sum total of these three charges, roughly Rs 14 lakh for the Lucknow Tejas runs in a day (up and down) and then factor in a profit over and above this. This money is payable even if the occupancy is below expectation and the train is not doing good business.

**Benefits and significance for customers and managers:**
1. Being a corporate entity with a Board of Directors and investors, IRCTC insists that **the coaches it gets from Railways are new and not in a run-down condition**, as is seen in many trains. The quality of the coaches has a direct bearing on its business.
2. In this model, IRCTC also has **full flexibility to decide the service parameters and even alter them without having to go to Railway ministry or its policies**.
3. To that end, **the business of running trains can be run with the independence needed to run a business with profit motive**. This creates **the environment for enhanced service quality and user experience for the passengers**.
4. IRCTC gets **the freedom to decide even the number of stoppages it wants to afford on a route**, depending on the needs of its business model.

**What is Indian Railways’ benefit from this model?**
Indian Railways doesn’t have to suffer the losses associated with running these trains thanks to under-recovery of cost due to low fares and its own hefty overheads. The lease on its coaches is also taken care of.

Sources: Indian Express.

**Topics:** Science and Technology - developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

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**1. Global Go To Think Tank Index**

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: All about the index.*
*For Mains: Key findings and significance, ways and means to improve.*

**Context:** Global Go To Think Tank Index has been released.

**About the index:**
- The Index is released by University of Pennsylvania each year since 2008.
- It evaluates public-policy research analysis and engagement organisations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues.
- It claims to enable policy makers and the public to make informed decisions on public policy.

**Definition of think-tanks:**
The report defined "think tanks" as public-policy research analysis and engagement organisations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy.

**How are they ranked?**
Nomination and Ranking Criteria included think tank’s leadership, staff reputation, quality and reputation of the research and analysis produced, ability to recruit and retain elite scholars, analysts, academic performance, reputation, the impact of a think-tank’s research and programs on policymakers and reputation with policymakers.

**Top players:**
• The list was topped by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace of US, followed by Belgium’s Bruegel and French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).
• UK’s Chatham House was ranked 6th on the list.

Performance of institutions in India:
1. **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)** has been placed at No. 16. CSE climbed up two notches in the 14th version of the report.
2. The organisation also moved up three places among ‘best independent think tanks’ to be at No.123 in the world and **sixth among Indian think tanks**.
3. Globally, it was ranked **41 of 60 organisations committed to energy and resource policy**.
4. India’s **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)** has jumped more than 90 places to 27th position among 176 global think tanks.
5. **Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation** was the **highest-ranked Indian think tank with a political party affiliation in the world**, getting a rank of 31st, among 38 such institutions.
6. **India Foundation and Vivekananda International Foundation** were ranked 36th and 37th on that list.

Way ahead:
The 2020 report raised some critical threats and opportunities that think tanks across the globe face. It called upon such organisations to develop national, regional, and global partnerships and create new, innovative platforms to deliver for an ever-expanding audience of citizens, policy makers and businesses.

Background:
India has the second-largest number of think tanks at 509. The US has the highest number at 1,871.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. **Sophisticated Analytical & Technical Help Institutes (SATHI)**

What to study?
**For Prelims and Mains: SATHI- key features, need for and significance.**

Context: The Department of Science & Technology has launched a unique scheme called **“Sophisticated Analytical & Technical Help Institutes(SATHI)”**.

About the scheme:
**Aim:** To address the need for building shared, professionally managed and strong S&T infrastructure in the country which is readily accessible to academia, start-ups, manufacturing, industry and R&D labs etc.

Implementation:
- These Centres are expected to house major analytical instruments to provide common services of high-end analytical testing, thus avoiding duplication and reduced dependency on foreign sources.
- These would be operated with a transparent, open access policy.
- DST has already set up three such centres in the country, one each at IIT Kharagpur, IIT Delhi and BHU.

Objectives of the Scheme:
- To address the problems of accessibility, maintenance, redundancy and duplication of expensive equipment in the institutions.
- This will also foster a strong culture of collaboration between institutions and across disciplines to take advantage of developments, innovations and expertise in diverse areas.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. **Vikram Sarabhai**

What to study?
**For prelims: Key contributions of Vikram Sarabhai.**
www.insightsonindia.com

InsightsIAS
For mains: Contributions of India and Indians to the development of space technology.

Context: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) are conducting various events at national level in a year long programme to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai.

About Vikram Sarabhai and his contributions:
Vikram Sarabhai was born on August 12, 1919. Sarabhai was instrumental in forming India’s future in astronomy and setting up the country’s space research facilities.

Key contributions:
1. Based on his persuasion, the Indian government agreed to set up the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR) in 1962.
2. Sarabhai was the first chairman of the committee. The INCOSPAR was restructured and renamed as Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 1969.
3. Sarabhai founded the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad in the year 1947. The laboratory started its operation from RETREAT, Sarabhai’s residence in Ahmedabad. Its first topic of research was cosmic rays.
4. He also set up India’s first rocket launch site in Thumba, a small village near the Thiruyananthapuram airport in Kerala.
5. Vikram Sarabhai was also responsible for bringing cable television to India. His constant contact with NASA paved a way for the establishment of Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in 1975.
6. Sarabhai was the mastermind behind building India’s first satellite, Aryabhata.
7. He was one of the founding members of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA).
8. Vikram Sarabhai received the Padma Bhushan in 1966 for his contribution to India’s progress. He was also awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1972, posthumously.

Sources: pib.

4. India develops new vaccine to control classical swine fever

What to study?
For Prelims: About CSF, symptoms and prevention, the new vaccine.
For Mains: Significance and the need for new vaccines.

Context: The Indian Institute of Veterinary Research (IVRI) of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed a new vaccine to control classical swine fever.

About the vaccine and its significance:
It is a live attenuated CSF cell culture vaccine (indigenous strain). The indigenously developed vaccine will help in saving rabbits as the currently used vaccine (lapinized CSF vaccine) is produced by sacrificing large numbers of rabbits. Besides, the new vaccine gives immunity for two years as compared to 3 to 6 months protection under the currently used vaccines. The new vaccine will be a part of the government’s One Health Initiative.

What is Classical Swine Fever (CSF)?
Hog Cholera or Classical swine fever (CSF) is a contagious viral disease of domestic and wild swine. It happens due to the viruses that bring viral diarrhea in pigs and ailments in sheep.
The disease does not harm humans but all-important precautions are advised to follow.

Concerns for India:
- Classical Swine Fever (CSF) is one of the biggest pigs’ diseases in India. It causes a loss of about 400 crores of rupees per year in India. This has led to a decrease in the population of pigs in 2019.
India currently requires 22 million doses of the CSF (Classical Swine Fever) vaccine every year. However, currently, only 1.2 million doses are being produced. The reason behind its less production is that only 50 doses can be prepared from the spleen of a rabbit.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Reverse osmosis (RO)

What to study?
For Prelims: What is Osmosis and RO? TDS in water.
For Mains: Why was it banned? Issues and alternatives available.

Context: The Union Environment Ministry has issued a notification to comply with the NGT order which prohibited the use of reverse osmosis (RO) purifiers in places where total dissolved solids (TDS) in the supplied water are below 500 mg per litre. The NGT had ordered a ban on RO filters on the grounds that they wasted water and that, in the process of removing salts, they often deprived drinking water of essential salts, which could affect the nutritional intake of the people.

Background:
Current BIS regulations consider 500 mg/litre—1,200 mg/litre of total dissolved solids, which consist of salts and some organic matter, as acceptable.

Osmosis and RO:
Osmosis involves ‘a solvent (such as water) naturally moving from an area of low solute concentration, through a membrane, to an area of high solute concentration.
A reverse osmosis system applies an external pressure to reverse the natural flow of solvent and so seawater or brackish water is pressurised against one surface of the membrane, causing salt-depleted water to move across the membrane, releasing clean water from the low-pressure side’.

What are the problems with RO plants?
Deposition of brine (highly concentrated salt water) along the shores.
Affects fauna and flora: Hyper salinity along the shore affects plankton, which is the main food for several of these fish species. The high pressure motors needed to draw in the seawater end up sucking in small fish and life forms, thereby crushing and killing them — again a loss of marine resource.
Construction of the RO plants required troves of groundwater. Freshwater that was sucked out and is replaced by salt water, rendering it unfit for the residents around the desalination plants.
Cost and time: On an average, it costs about ₹900 crore to build a 100 MLD-plant and, as the Chennai experience has shown, about five years for a plant to be set up.
Energy needed: To remove the salt required, there has to be a source of electricity, either a power plant or a diesel or battery source. Estimates have put this at about 4 units of electricity per 1,000 litres of water. It is estimated that it cost ₹3 to produce 100 litres of potable water.

Is RO water healthy?
There are concerns that desalinated the RO water may be short of vital minerals such as calcium, magnesium, zinc, sodium, potassium and carbonates.
Most RO plants put the water through a ‘post-treatment’ process whereby salts are added to make TDS around 300 mg/l.

Are there technological alternatives?
Low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technique works on the principle that water in the ocean 1,000 or 2,000 feet below is about 4º C to 8º C colder than surface water. So, salty surface water is collected in a tank and subject to high pressure (via an external power source). This pressured water vapourises and this is trapped in tubes or a chamber. Cold water plumbed from the ocean depths is passed over these tubes and the vapour condenses into fresh water and the resulting salt diverted away.
**Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion:** It will draw power from the vapour generated as a part of the desalination process. This vapour will run a turbine and thereby will be independent of an external power source. While great in theory, there is no guarantee it will work commercially. For one, this ocean-based plant requires a pipe that needs to travel 50 kilometres underground in the sea before it reaches the mainland.

Sources: the Hindu.

**6. Station WiFi Programme**

**What to study?**

**For Prelims:** Key features.

**For Mains:** Significance of the programme, why has it been stopped now?

**Context:** Five years after it started the ‘Station’ programme to bring free public Wi-Fi to 400 busiest railway stations in India, Google has decided to gradually wind down the service globally.

- However, users in India will be able to continue using the existing facilities at the over 400 stations via RailTel, Google’s partner in India for the programme.

**Why?**

- Google believes that better data plans and improving mobile connectivity have made it “simpler and cheaper” for users to get online.
- India, specifically now has among the cheapest mobile data per GB in the world, with mobile data prices having reduced by 95% in the last 5 years, as per TRAI in 2019. Today, Indian users consume close to 10 GB of data, each month, on average.
- Besides the Indian government’s continuous impetus for internet penetration through the Digital India programme, private sector initiatives such as Vodafone’s SuperWi-fi coupled with the entry of Reliance Jio 4G services have drastically brought down the cost of internet subscription. This has been instrumental to the growth of internet users in India.
- Above all, the challenge of varying technical requirements and infrastructure among partners across countries has also made it difficult for Station to scale and be sustainable.

**Background:**

- The programme was kick-started in India in 2015 as a partnership between Google, Indian Railways and RailTel to bring fast, free public WiFi to over 400 of the busiest railway stations by mid-2020.
- However, the company crossed that number by June 2018, following which more locations were added across the country in partnership with telecommunication companies, ISPs and local authorities.

Sources: the Hindu.

**7. Ease 3.0 for tech-enabled banking**

**What to study?**

**For Prelims and Mains:** EASE features, need for, significance and impact.

**Context:** FM Nirmala Sitharaman launches Ease 3.0 for tech-enabled banking. This move is expected to change the customer’s experience at the Public Sector Banks (PSBs).

**What is it?**

**Ease (Enhanced Access and Service Excellence) 3.0 reform agenda** aims at providing smart, tech-enabled public sector banking for aspiring India.

New features that customers of public sector banks may experience under EASE 3.0 reforms agenda include facilities like:

1. **Palm Banking** for "End-to-end digital delivery of financial service".
2. "**Banking on Go"** via EASE banking outlets at frequently visited spots like malls, stations, complexes, and campuses.
The idea behind EASE 3.0 agenda:
The Ministry has the idea of establishing paperless and digitally-enabled banking at places where people visit the most.
The government aims to focus on digitalization in the Public Sector Banks (PSBs) among themes that include responsible banking, PSBs as Udyami Mitra, customer responsiveness, credit take-off, and deep financial inclusions.

Background:
PSB Reforms EASE Agenda is a common reform agenda for PSBs aimed at institutionalizing clean and smart banking.
It was launched in January 2018, and the subsequent edition of the program — EASE 2.0 built on the foundation laid in EASE 1.0 and furthered the progress on reforms.

In EASE 2.0, the government had proposed pushing liquidity in the public sector banks, reconstituting the management committee and possible mergers among the ideal partners in the Indian banking sector.

8. National Technical Textiles Mission
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the mission, what are technical textile?

Context: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the setting up of a National Technical Textiles Mission at an total outlay of ₹1,480 Crore.
Aim: To position the country as a global leader in technical textiles and increase the use of technical textiles in the domestic market.

Key facts:
The Mission will be implemented for four years from 2020-2021 and will have four components:
1. The first component will focus on research and development and innovation and will have an outlay of ₹1,000 crore. The research will be at both, fibre level and application-based in geo, agro, medical, sports and mobile textiles and development of bio-degradable technical textiles.
2. The second component will be for promotion and development of market for technical textiles. The Mission will aim at taking domestic market size to $40 billion to $50 billion by 2024.

Sources: the Hindu.
3. The third component will focus on export promotion so that technical textile exports from the country reach from the ₹14,000 crore now to ₹20,000 crore by 2021-2022 and ensure 10% average growth every year till the Mission ends.

4. The last component will be on education, training and skill development.

**What are technical textiles?**
Technical textiles are defined as textile materials and products manufactured primarily for their technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic and decorative characteristics. **Technical textiles include** textiles for automotive applications, medical textiles, geotextiles, agrotextiles, and protective clothing.

Sources: the Hindu.

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**National Science Day**

**What to study?**
- For Prelims: Raman Effect, NSD and other achievements of CV Raman.
- For Mains: Significance of the day.

**Context:** 28th February is celebrated as National Science Day (NSD) in India. NSD is celebrated to commemorate discovery of the ‘Raman Effect’, which led to Sir C.V. Raman winning the Noble Prize. The first National Science Day was celebrated on February 28, 1987.

**Theme:**
This year, the theme for National Science Day 2020 is "Women in Science", which aims to appreciate the contribution of women in the field of science.

**What is Raman Effect?**
A phenomenon in spectroscopy discovered by the eminent physicist Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman in 1928. **Raman Effect is a change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules.**
- When a beam of light traverses a dust-free, transparent sample of a chemical compound, a small fraction of the light emerges in directions other than that of the incident (incoming) beam.
- Most of this scattered light is of unchanged wavelength. A small part, however, has wavelengths different from that of the incident light; its presence is a result of the Raman Effect.

**Raman’s experiment:**
The violet light of the solar spectrum is isolated with a violet filter and passed through the liquid sample. Most of the light emerging from the liquid sample is the same color as the incident violet beam: the so-called Rayleigh scattered light (the scattering of light by particles in a medium, without change in wavelength. It accounts, for example, for the blue colour of the sky, since blue light is scattered slightly more efficiently than red).

However, Raman, along with K S Krishnan was able to show that some of the scattered light was a different color, which they could isolate by using a green filter placed between the observer and the sample.

Sources: pib.
Topics: Awareness in space.

1. NASA’s Voyager 2 spacecraft

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Key features, objectives and accomplishments of Voyager 1 and 2.

Context: NASA has managed to fix its Voyager-2 probe remotely, almost 11.5 billion miles away from its location.

Background:
The probe has reportedly been acting in an unexpected manner as it failed to carry out a maneuver as planned on January 25. Moreover, the glitch in the probe was detected by the spacecraft’s fault detection software which was relayed to NASA.

Accomplishments so far:
Voyager 2 is the only probe ever to study Neptune and Uranus during planetary flybys. It is the second man-made object to leave the heliosphere. Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to have visited all four gas giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — and discovered 16 moons, as well as phenomena like Neptune’s mysteriously transient Great Dark Spot, the cracks in Europa’s ice shell, and ring features at every planet.

What is Interstellar space?
Scientists use the heliopause to mark where interstellar space begins, although depending on how you define our solar system it can stretch all the way to the Oort Cloud, which begins 1,000 times farther away from the sun than Earth’s orbit.

The Heliosphere:
The heliosphere is a bubble around the sun created by the outward flow of the solar wind from the sun and the opposing inward flow of the interstellar wind. That heliosphere is the region influenced by the dynamic properties of the sun that are carried in the solar wind—such as magnetic fields, energetic particles and solar wind plasma. The heliopause marks the end of the heliosphere and the beginning of interstellar space.

About Voyager mission:
- Launched in the 1970’s, and the probes sent by NASA were only meant to explore the outer planets — but they just kept on going.
- Voyager 1 departed Earth on 5 September 1977, a few days after Voyager 2 and left our solar system in 2013.
- The mission objective of the Voyager Interstellar Mission (VIM) is to extend the NASA exploration of the solar system beyond the neighborhood of the outer planets to the outer limits of the Sun’s sphere of influence, and possibly beyond.
- The Voyager spacecraft are the third and fourth human spacecraft to fly beyond all the planets in our solar system. Pioneers 10 and 11 preceded Voyager in outstripping the gravitational attraction of the Sun but on February 17, 1998, Voyager 1 passed Pioneer 10 to become the most distant human-made object in space.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Solar Orbiter Mission

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Objectives, features and significance of the mission.

Context: Solar Orbiter mission was launched recently.
- The mission is a collaboration between ESA (the European Space Agency) and NASA.
- The spacecraft was launched from Cape Canaveral on a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket.

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About Solar Orbiter:
Solar Orbiter is a mission dedicated to solar and heliospheric physics.
It was selected as the first medium-class mission of ESA’s Cosmic Vision 2015-2025 Programme. This is the first mission that will provide images of the sun’s north and south poles using a suite of six instruments on board that will capture the spacecraft’s view.
It is a seven-year mission and will come within 26 million miles of the sun. It will be able to brave the heat of the sun because it has a custom titanium heat shield coated in calcium phosphate so that it can endure temperatures up to 970 degrees Fahrenheit.

Objectives:
- Solar Orbiter will be used to examine how the Sun creates and controls the heliosphere, the vast bubble of charged particles blown by the solar wind into the interstellar medium.
- The spacecraft will combine in situ and remote sensing observations to gain new information about the solar wind, the heliospheric magnetic field, solar energetic particles, transient interplanetary disturbances and the Sun’s magnetic field.

Solar Orbiter will set about answering four top-level science questions:
1. What drives the solar wind and where does the coronal magnetic field originate from?
2. How do solar transients drive heliospheric variability?
3. How do solar eruptions produce energetic particle radiation that fills the heliosphere?
4. How does the solar dynamo work and drive connections between the Sun and the heliosphere?

Significance:
Understanding the sun’s magnetic field and solar wind are key because they contribute to space weather, which impacts Earth by interfering with networked systems like GPS, communications and even astronauts on the International Space Station. The sun’s magnetic field is so massive that it stretches beyond Pluto, providing a pathway for solar wind to travel directly across the solar system.

Journey ahead:
It will take Solar Orbiter about two years to reach its highly elliptical orbit around the sun. Gravity assists from Earth and Venus will help swing the spacecraft out of the ecliptic plane, or the space that aligns with the sun’s equator, so it can study the sun’s poles from above and below.
The mission will work in tandem with NASA’s Parker Solar Probe, which is currently orbiting the sun on a seven-year mission and just completed its fourth close approach of the star.

Background:
Solar Orbiter follows the Ulysses spacecraft, another collaboration between ESA and NASA that launched in 1990 and also flew over the sun’s poles. Ulysses completed three passes of the sun before its mission ended in 2009, but its view was limited to what it could see from the sun’s equator.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Very Large Telescope
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: About VLT and it’s features, what is Betelgeuse? Significance of the findings, about Orion.
**Context:** Using the European Space Organisation’s (ESO) Very Large Telescope (VLT), astronomers have noticed the unprecedented dimming of Betelgeuse, a red supergiant star (over 20 times bigger than the Sun) in the constellation Orion.

**Along with the dimming, the star’s shape has been changing as well,** as per recent photographs of the star taken using the VISIR instrument on the VLT.

**What is happening to Betelgeuse and why is it significant?**

Betelgeuse was born as a supermassive star millions of years ago and has been “dramatically” and “mysteriously” dimming for the last six months. According to a report in Sky and Telescope, among the brightest night time stars, Betelgeuse ranks 10th, but by the last week of December 2019, its brightness had dimmed so low, that the star was ranked as the 21st brightest, “a remarkable decline — and a historic low.”

- Astronomers do not think that Betelgeuse is dimming because it is going to explode. They have other hypotheses that may explain the reasons for Betelgeuse’s change in shape and dimming. The two scenarios they are working on are a cooling of the surface due to exceptional stellar activity or dust ejection towards earth.

**About VLT:**

It is the world’s most advanced optical instrument, consisting of four Unit Telescopes with main mirrors of 8.2m diameter and four movable 1.8m diameter Auxiliary Telescopes.

- The telescopes can work together, to form a giant ‘interferometer’, the ESO Very Large Telescope Interferometer, allowing astronomers to see details up to 25 times finer than with the individual telescopes.
- **Location:** Atacama Desert, Northern Chile.
- The VLT consists of four individual telescopes. They are generally used separately but can be used together to achieve very high angular resolution.
- The four separate optical telescopes are known as Antu, Kueyen, Melipal, and Yepun, which are all words for astronomical objects in the Mapuche language.

**How it works? Significance:**

The light beams are combined in the VLTI using a complex system of mirrors in underground tunnels where the light paths must be kept equal to distances less than 1/1000 mm over a hundred metres.

- With this kind of precision the VLTI can reconstruct images with an angular resolution of milliarcseconds, equivalent to distinguishing the two headlights of a car at the distance of the Moon.
- Individual telescope help see objects that are four billion (four thousand million) times fainter than what can be seen with the unaided eye.

Sources: Indian Express.

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4. GISAT-1 — Geo Imaging Satellite

**What to study?**

**For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance.**

**Context:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is preparing to launch GISAT-1, a new earth observation satellite, in the first week of March.

- It will be the first of two planned Indian EO spacecraft to be placed in a geostationary orbit of around 36,000 km.
- It will apparently be in a fixed spot looking over the Indian continent at all times.
- It will have high-resolution cameras which will help to monitor any changes in borders and the overall geographical condition of the country, etc.
Background:
Earth Observation Satellites of ISRO has been successfully able to establish many operational applications in the country. Both at Central and State level, there are large number of users who utilise space based inputs for various purposes.

Some of the important missions of ISRO, in terms of IRS series of satellites, that has enabled unique applications of space based imaging are, Cartosat-1 & 2, Resourcesat-1 & 2, Oceansat-1 & 2, Risat-1, Megha-Tropiques, SARAL, Scatsat, INSAT series, and host of other satellites.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Aditya- L1 mission

What to study?
For prelims and mains: Key features, objectives and significance of the mission.

Context: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is preparing to send its first scientific expedition to study the Sun. Named Aditya-L1, the mission, expected to be launched early next year, will observe the Sun from a close distance, and try to obtain information about its atmosphere and magnetic field.

About Aditya- L1 mission:
What is it? It is India’s first solar mission.
It will be launched using the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) in XL configuration.
The space-based observatory will have seven payloads (instruments) on board to study the Sun’s corona, solar emissions, solar winds and flares, and Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs), and will carry out round-the-clock imaging of the Sun.

Objectives:
1. Study the sun’s outer most layers, the corona and the chromospheres.
2. Collect data about coronal mass ejection, which will also yield information for space weather prediction.

Significance of the mission:
The data from Aditya mission will be immensely helpful in discriminating between different models for the origin of solar storms and also for constraining how the storms evolve and what path they take through the interplanetary space from the Sun to the Earth.

Position of the satellite:
In order to get the best science from the sun, continuous viewing of the sun is preferred without any occultation/ eclipses and hence, Aditya- L1 satellite will be placed in the halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the sun-earth system.

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.

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.

Effects On satellites: 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.

Safety and preparedness: 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.

Sources: Indian Express.

6. Artemis Program
What to study?
For Prelims: Key features and objectives of Artemis.
For Mains: Significance and relevance of the mission for future space programmes.

Context: United States space agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) announced that it will begin to accept applications for astronauts under its Artemis programme from March 2 to March 31, 2020.

Eligibility:
- The space agency has listed several requirements in order to qualify for training under the Artemis programme: one must be a US citizen and have a master’s degree in a STEM (Science, technology, engineering and mathematics) field from an accredited institution.
- Candidates must also have completed at least 1,000 hours of pilot-in-command time in jet aircrafts or have two years of related experience.
- Another mandatory requirement is to pass NASA’s long-duration spaceflight physical test.

What is Artemis?
Artemis- Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence and Electrodynamics of Moon’s Interaction with the Sun. It is NASA’s next mission to the Moon.
Objective: To measure what happens when the Sun’s radiation hits our rocky moon, where there is no magnetic field to protect it.
Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and goddess of the Moon in Greek mythology.

Significance of the mission: With the Artemis program, NASA will land the first woman and next man on the Moon by 2024.
Mission details:
NASA’s powerful new rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS), will send astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft nearly a quarter million miles from Earth to lunar orbit.

- Astronauts will dock Orion at the Gateway and transfer to a human landing system for expeditions to the surface of the Moon.
- They will return to the orbital outpost to board Orion again before returning safely to Earth.

Artemis 1, 2 and 3:
The agency will fly two missions around the Moon to test its deep space exploration systems. NASA is working toward launching Artemis I, an uncrewed flight to test the SLS and Orion spacecraft together, followed by the Artemis II mission, the first SLS and Orion test flight with crew. NASA will land astronauts on the Moon by 2024 on the Artemis III mission and about once a year thereafter.

Scientific objectives:
1. Find and use water and other critical resources needed for long-term exploration.
2. Investigate the Moon’s mysteries and learn more about our home planet and the universe.
3. Learn how to live and operate on the surface of another celestial body where astronauts are just three days from home.
4. Prove the technologies we need before sending astronauts on missions to Mars, which can take up to three years roundtrip.
Quantum computing gets funds

What to study?
For Prelims and mains: What is it? Significance.

Context: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman’s Union Budget for 2020-21, presented on February 1, 2020, proposed Rs 8,000 crore over five years for National Mission on Quantum Technologies and Applications.

What are Quantum Technologies?
Quantum technologies comprise quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum optics, quantum information processing, quantum internet and quantum artificial intelligence.

Need for special attention:
The interest and excitement about quantum computer is because of its power to dabble with complex calculations involved in fields like cyber-security which digital computers now deal with. Quantum communications can enhance (cyber) security, provide unique fingerprints and also increase available bandwidth for internet networks.

**What is a quantum computer?**
- Quantum computers work by harnessing the properties of quantum mechanics.
- Quantum computers use logical units called quantum bits, or qubits for short, that can be put into a quantum state where they can simultaneously represent both 0 and 1.

**Difference between classical and quantum computers?**
- Classical computers process information in a binary format, called bits, which can represent either a 0 or 1.
- While the bits in a classical computer all operate independently from one another, in a quantum computer, the status of one qubit effects the status of all the other qubits in the system, so they can all work together to achieve a solution.

**How the result is obtained?**
While a conventional computer outputs the same answer to a problem every time you run a calculation, the outputs of a quantum computer are probabilistic. That means it does not always produce the same answer. So to use a quantum computer, you have to run a calculation through the system thousands or even millions of times, and the array of outputs converge around the answer that is most likely to be correct.

Sources: down to earth.

### 2. International IP Index 2020

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: About the IIP Index and performance of India and its neighbours.*
*For Mains: Performance analysis of India and challenges ahead, measures needed to ensure transparency and enhance protection.*

**Context:** The International IP Index 2020 has been released by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Global Innovation Policy Center (GIPC).

**What is IIP index?**
Released by GIPC, the Index evaluates the IP infrastructure in each economy based on 45 unique indicators, which are critical to the growth of effective IP systems.

**The indicators encompass 8 categories of IP protection:** patents, copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets, commercialization of IP assets, enforcement, systemic efficiency, and membership and ratification of international treaties.

**Performance of India:**
1. Ranked 40 out of 53 global economies.
2. Last year India was ranked at 36th position out of 50 countries.
3. India also continues to score well in the Systemic Efficiency indicator, scoring ahead of 28 other economies in these indicators.

**Observations made on India:**
1. Since the release of the 2016 National IPR Policy, the Government of India has made a focused effort to support investments in innovation and creativity through increasingly robust IP protection and enforcement.
2. Implementation of the policy has improved the speed of processing for patent and trademark applications, increased awareness of IP rights among Indian innovators and creators.
3. India has made significant progress towards establishing stronger IP protections—but the “job is not yet done”.
4. In 2019, the Delhi High Court used dynamic injunctions to disable access to copyright-infringing content online, resulting in an increase in India’s score on two of the copyright-related indicators. As a result, India scores ahead of 24 other economies in the copyright indicators.

Way ahead for India:
To continue this upward trajectory, much work remains to be done to introduce transformative changes to India’s overall IP framework and take serious steps to consistently implement strong IP standards. GIPC has identified several challenges for India. Prominent among them being patentability requirements, patent enforcement, compulsory licensing, patent opposition, regulatory data protection, transparency in reporting seizures by customs, and Singapore Treaty of Law of TM and Patent Law Treaty.

Global performance:
Top five economies: The US, the UK, Sweden, France and Germany.

The need for protection of IP rights:
1. Intellectual Property Creates and Supports High-Paying Jobs.
4. Intellectual Property Helps Generate Breakthrough Solutions to Global Challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Genome India project

What to study?
For prelims: What is genome sequencing and how is it done?
For Mains: Significance, need and challenges to the project.

Context: The government has cleared an ambitious gene-mapping project, called Genome India Project.

Overview of Genome India Project:
The Rs 238-crore Genome India Project will involve 20 leading institutions including the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru and a few IITs. The first stage of the project will look at samples of “10,000 persons from all over the country” to form a “grid” that will enable the development of a “reference genome”. The IISc’s Centre for Brain Research, an autonomous institute, will serve as the nodal point of the project.

Significance:
The project is said to be among the most significant of its kind in the world because of its scale and the diversity it would bring to genetic studies.
- The data generated would be accessible to researchers anywhere for analysis. As the genetic landscape differs across the world, it is necessary that genetic data is shared in order to derive greater knowledge from information and serve the purpose of enabling better treatment outcomes.
- The initiative will pave the way for identifying genes and genetic variations for common diseases, treating Mendelian disorders, enabling the transformation of the Precision Medicine landscape in India, and thus improving the healthcare of the general population in our country.

Need for genome sequencing:
Mapping the diversity of India’s genetic pool will lay the bedrock of personalised medicine and put it on the global map. Considering the diversity of population in our country, and the disease burden of complex
disorders, including diabetes, mental health, etc., once we have a genetic basis, it may be possible to take action before the onset of a disease.

**What is genome sequencing?**
A genome is an organism’s complete set of DNA, including all of its genes. Genomics is an interdisciplinary field of science focusing on the structure, function, evolution, mapping, and editing of genomes. Genomics also involves the sequencing and analysis of genomes through uses of high throughput DNA sequencing. Advances in genomics have triggered a revolution in discovery-based research and systems biology to facilitate understanding of even the most complex biological systems such as the brain.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 4. Muktoshri- arsenic-resistant rice

**What to study?**
*For Prelims: What is Muktoshri? Arsenic contamination- effects. For Mains: Increasing arsenic contamination- issues, concerns, WHO guidelines.*

**Context:** West Bengal government’s rice research centre has come up with a new variety of rice called Muktoshri that can be grown in arsenic prone areas.
It was developed jointly by the Rice Research Station at Chinsurah, coming under West Bengal’s Agriculture Department and the National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow.

**Background:**
West Bengal has a high concentration of arsenic in groundwater, with 83 blocks across seven districts having higher arsenic levels than permissible limits.

**Arsenic- Key facts:**
Arsenic is naturally present at high levels in the groundwater of a number of countries. It is also present in rocks and soils.
Arsenic is highly toxic in its inorganic form.

**Permissible limit:**
World Health Organization’s provisional guideline value for arsenic in drinking water is 0.01 mg/l (10 μg/l). The permissible limit of arsenic in India in the absence of an alternative source is 0.05 mg/l (50 μg/l).

**Harmful effects:**
- Contaminated water used for drinking, food preparation and irrigation of food crops poses the greatest threat to public health from arsenic.
- Long-term exposure to arsenic from drinking-water and food can cause cancer and skin lesions.
- It has also been associated with cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
- In utero and early childhood exposure has been linked to negative impacts on cognitive development and increased deaths in young adults.

**What’s the difference between organic arsenic and inorganic arsenic?**
Atoms of arsenic bond with other elements to form molecules — if carbon is one of these elements, then the arsenic compound is an organic compound. If there is no carbon present, then the arsenic compound is in an inorganic compound.
**Inorganic arsenic is a known human carcinogen** — it is this form of arsenic that is linked with increased risks of cancer and other health effects.

Sources: the hindu.
1. Green India Mission

What to study?
For Prelims: GIM- Key features, NAPCC.
For Mains: Performance analysis of GIM, challenges and concerns highlighted, need for reforms.

Context: A sum of Rs 343.08 crore has been released under the Green India Mission (GIM) for undertaking afforestation activities over an area of 126,916.32 hectare (ha) in 13 states, according to the Economic Survey 2019-20.

About Green India Mission:
GIM is one of the eight missions launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).
- GIM, launched in February 2014, is aimed at protecting, restoring and enhancing India’s diminishing forest cover and responding to climate change by a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures.

Objectives of the Mission:
1. To protect, restore and enhance India’s falling forest cover.
2. To respond to climate change through a combination of adaptation as well as mitigation measures.
3. To increased forest-based livelihood incomes.
4. To enhance annual Carbon sequestration by 50 to 60 million tonnes in the year 2020.

Goals:
1. Improvement in quality of forest cover and ecosystem services of forests /non-forests, including moderately dense, open forests, degraded grassland and wetlands (5 m ha).
2. Eco-restoration/afforestation of scrub, shifting cultivation areas, cold deserts, mangroves, ravines and abandoned mining areas (1.8 m ha).
3. Improvement in forest and tree cover in urban/peri-urban lands (0.20 m ha)
4. Improvement in forest and tree cover on marginal agricultural lands/fallows and other non-forest lands under agroforestry/social forestry (3 m ha)
5. Management of public forest/ non-forests areas (taken up under the Mission) by the community institutions
6. Adoption of improved fuelwood-use efficiency and alternative energy devices by project-area households.
7. Diversification of forest-based livelihoods of about 3 million households living in and around forests.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. World Wetlands Day 2019

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Significance of the day, wetlands conservation related issues.

Context: World Wetlands Day is celebrated on February 2 each year to mark the Day the Convention on Wetlands was adopted in the Iranian City of Ramsar in 1971. India is a party to the Convention since 1982 and committed to the Ramsar approach of wise use of wetlands. The theme for 2020 is ‘Wetlands and Biodiversity’.

Status of wetlands in India:
The bad news is that India’s cities have lost 25 ha of wetland for every one sq. km’s increase of built-up area in the last four decades.
The good news is that 10 more wetland sites around India have been added to the Ramsar Convention, rendering them sites of ‘national importance’.
Wetlands in India:
The country has over 757,000 wetlands with a total wetland area of 15.3 million ha, accounting for nearly 4.7% of the total geographical area of the country. India has 37 Ramsar sites now, covering an area of 1.07 million ha. The latest additions include Maharashtra’s first Ramsar site, the Nandur Madhmeshwar bird sanctuary; three more from Punjab (in Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal); and six more from Uttar Pradesh (in Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar).

Significance of wetlands:
Wetlands provide a wide range of important ecosystem services, such as food, water, groundwater recharge, water purification, flood moderation, erosion control, microclimate regulation, landscape aesthetics and, of course, livelihood opportunities. They are in fact a major source of water and the principal place from which India’s cities receive their freshwater.

Threats:
- Increasing urbanisation has significantly reduced the amount of area under wetlands.
- According to an assessment undertaken by Wetlands International South Asia (WISA), between 1970 and 2014, cities have rapidly degraded wetlands, to the tune of 25 ha per sq. km of built-up area.
- The biggest offenders were the metropolitans of New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and Hyderabad, which treat wastelands as their private dumping grounds.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Kerala’s ban on CFL and filament bulbs from November 2020

What to study?
For Prelims: Differences between LED, CFL and filament bulbs.
For Mains: Why the ban? Implications and significance.

Context: Kerala will impose a ban on the sale of compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) and incandescent (filament) bulbs starting November this year as part of sustainable energy policy. This is in line with the government project of ‘Filament-free Kerala’ envisaged in 2018 as part of the state’s Urja Kerala mission.

What is filament-free Kerala project?
- It will be implemented by the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) and the Energy Management Centre, Kerala.
- Consumers in the state can place orders for LED bulbs on the KSEB website in exchange for existing filament bulbs.
- Nine-watt LED bulbs are being sold at reduced prices by the government to encourage usage. Last year, Peelikode in Kasaragod district became the first panchayat in the country to be completely filament-free.
- The project is also part of the long-term sustainable energy policy to reduce the dependence on conventional energy sources and instead maximise potential on renewable sources like solar and hydel power.

Key differences between LED and CFL:
- The major difference between the CFL and LED is that in CFL the emission of light is because of the ionisation of mercury vapour. The mercury vapour when ionise produces ultraviolet rays. These rays when collides with phosphorous coating tube generates visible light.
- Whereas in the LED it is because of the PN junction diode. When the forward current applies across the diode, the recombination of the charge carrier takes place. This charge carrier gives energy in the form of the heat and light.

Rationale behind the ban:
www.insightsonindia.com
1. The CFL uses mercury vapour which is dangerous for the environment and living beings.
2. Also, it requires additional components like ballast, tungsten tube coated with barium, etc., which increases their cost.
3. The destruction of the LED is easier than the CFL because LED does not have any harmful metal which pollutes the environment.
4. The brightness of LED is more as compared to CFL because LED emits light only in one direction.

**Why LED?**
The LED is better than the CFL in every aspect. The LED saves up to 80 percent of the electricity bill even though their cost is very less. It is recyclable, and their brightness remains same even after using it for a long time.

Sources: Indian Express.

### 4. Protected Special Agricultural Zone’ (PSAZ)

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: PSAZ- features, need for and significance.*

**Context:** Tamil Nadu CM declares **Cauvery Delta as Protected Special Agriculture Zone.** A law in this regard will be enacted soon.

**The protected zone will include** Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam districts and delta regions of Trichy, Ariyalur, Cuddalore and Pudukkottai.

**Significance:**
PSAZ is aimed at protecting the Cauvery delta region for the future, fulfilling TN’s food requirements and ensuring the welfare of delta farmers.
It has recognised farmer concerns about hydrocarbon exploration and accorded primacy to food security.

**Need for:**
The delta, which produces 33 lakh tonnes of grains in 28 lakh acres, has seen multiple protests for a decade over methane, hydrocarbon, oil and natural gas projects, which required acquisition of fertile lands and well drilling — proposals which triggered fears of groundwater contamination.

**Challenges ahead:**
Tamil Nadu now has to enact legislation to protect a vast region, largely in the coastal area, from industries that would affect farming.
The State has its challenges:
1. In 2017, a government notification delineated 45 villages covering about 23,000 hectares in Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts in the delta, as a Petroleum, Chemical and Petrochemical Investment Region, with an eye on over ₹90,000 crore in investments. **The proposed PSAZ raises a question mark on this ambitious scheme.**
2. The government may have to brave central pressure and litigation from companies which pumped in money for exploration.
3. The decision may also have implications for the State’s investment climate.

Sources: the Hindu.

### 5. Global conservation list

**What to study?**
*For Prelims and Mains: Implications and significance of the move, about CMS.*

**Context:** India will be moving to include the Asian Elephant and the Great Indian Bustard in **global conservation list**- the list of species that merit heightened conservation measures.
• The list will be debated at the 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), an environment treaty under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
• The COP is scheduled to be organised from February 17 to 22 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
• India has been designated the President of the COP for the next three years.

Implications and significance:
Having the elephant and the Great Indian Bustard in the list — more formally known as Appendix 1 — would coax countries neighbouring India, where wild animals such as tigers and elephant foray into, to direct more resources and attention to protecting them. There are now 173 species in the Appendix 1.

About CMS:
In order to protect the migratory species throughout their range countries, a Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), has been in force, under the aegis of United Nations Environment Programme. Also referred to as the Bonn Convention, it provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats and brings together the States through which migratory animals pass, the Range States, and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.

Classification of species:
Under this convention, migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on Appendix I and Parties strive towards strictly protecting these animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them. Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in Appendix II of the Convention.

CMS is only global and UN-based intergovernmental organization established exclusively for conservation and management of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.

What are migratory species? Why protect them?
• Migratory species are those animals that move from one habitat to another during different times of the year, due to various factors such as food, sunlight, temperature, climate, etc.
• The movement between habitats, can sometimes exceed thousands of miles/kilometres for some migratory birds and mammals. A migratory route can involve nesting and also requires the availability of habitats before and after each migration.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. Jal Jeevan Mission

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the mission.
For Mains: challenges and concerns in water conservation, ways to address them.

Context: Rajasthan government has sought changes in the norms for Central assistance for the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in order to reduce the financial burden on the States. The flagship Central scheme at present stipulates the share in 50:50 ratio.

Background:
Rajasthan, where only 12% households are currently getting piped water supply, has formulated new action plans for implementing JJM by rejuvenating the sources of water to provide connections to about 98 lakh households.
The JJM is being implemented under the State Water and Sanitation Mission, which is already functional, and different sources, including rainwater harvesting, have been tapped.

Way ahead:
The State, which had only 1.01% of the country’s surface water, has been trying hard to supply drinking water to geographically difficult areas and expected more assistance from the Centre to achieve the targets of JJM. Unless the steps are taken to increase surface water, the dark zones would expand across the State.

About Jal Jeevan Mission:
The Mission was announced in August 2019.
The chief objective of the Mission is to provide piped water supply (Har Ghar Jal) to all rural households by 2024. households by 2024.

Key features:
• It aims to create local infrastructure for rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household waste water for reuse in agriculture.
• The Jal Jeevan Mission is set to be based on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater for agriculture and source sustainability.
• The Jal Jeevan Mission will converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

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

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Future of Earth 2020

What to study?
For Prelims: The five risks and other key findings.
For Mains: Concerns and challenges ahead, ways to address them.

Context: The Future of Earth 2020 report has been released by the South Asia Future Earth Regional Office, Divecha Centre for Climate Change, Indian Institute of Science. The report was prepared with the aim of reducing carbon footprint and halting global warming below 2 degree Celsius by 2050.

Five global risks:
The report lists five global risks that have the potential to impact and amplify one another in ways that may cascade to create a global systemic crisis. They are:
1. Failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation.
2. Extreme weather events.
3. Major biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse.
5. Water crises.
Key observations:

**Interrelation of risk factors:** Extreme heat waves can accelerate global warming by releasing large amounts of stored carbon from affected ecosystems, and at the same time intensify water crises and/or food scarcity.

**Biodiversity loss and its impact:** The loss of biodiversity weakens the capacity of natural and agricultural systems to cope with climate extremes, increasing our vulnerability to food crises.

The five years from 2014 to 2018 were *the warmest recorded over land and ocean since 1880.*

**Concerns and Challenges ahead:**

Major assessments in last two years have all argued that time is running out to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- This has inspired declarations of a climate crisis or climate emergency by the leaders of more than 700 cities, States and governments.
- Yet, during 2019, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached more than 415 ppm.

**Anthropogenic factors:** Humans have now “significantly altered” 75% of our planet’s land area; about a quarter of species in assessed plant and animal groups are threatened.

**Strains on food production** are expected to increase, as a result of various forces including climate change, biodiversity loss, and a global population on the rise.

**Denial of climate change:** Right-wing populism, a breed of politics that exploits people’s fears during times of economic decline and growing inequality, and that focuses on nationalist tendencies to clamp down on borders and reject immigrants, is on the rise around the world. This often leads to a denial of climate change facts or impacts.

**The digital platforms** such as social media, search engines and e-commerce algorithms, tend to favour the spread of information designed to engage with emotion over reason, which can cause the propagation of “fake news”, and can lead to social harms like an erosion of trust in vaccines.

**Environmental health and education:**

New thinking about conservation is needed. *The National Education Policy* will address the question of environmental health and education at the school level.

Children in the last four years of secondary education will have a reasonable grounding to be sensitive towards the environment. Without it no government rules and policies can be helpful

Sources: the Hindu.

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### 8. State of India’s Birds 2020

**What to study?**

For Prelims: Key findings.

For Mains: Concerns expressed and ways to address them, conventions in this regard.

**Context:** The research titled ‘State of India’s Birds 2020’ (SoIB), put together by over ten institutions and numerous citizen scientists, was released recently at the ongoing *United Nations 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.*

**Key findings:**

1. Over 50 per cent of the 867 species studied, exhibit a population decline in the long term while 146 are at great risk in the short term.
2. The populations of raptors (eagles, hawks, kites, etc.), migratory seabirds and birds that live in specialised habitats were the most affected in the past decades.
3. The number of birds in the Western Ghats, which is considered one of the world’s foremost biodiversity hotspots, also declined by almost 75 per cent since 2000.
4. *Indian Peafowl, the national bird, has shown a dramatic increase in both abundance and distribution across the country.* The number of house sparrows has also stabilised nationwide, although there is still a marked decline in their population in cities.
5. 126 species, including the peafowl, house sparrow, Asian Koel, rose-ringed parakeet and the common tailorbird, are expected to increase in numbers, primarily due to their ability to survive in human habitats.

How was the study carried out?
The data for these birds was collected through the citizen science app ‘eBird’, which received a record ten million entries by approximately 15,500 citizen scientists. Cornell University’s Laboratory of Ornithology hosts the app, while its India-specific portal is curated and customised by Bird Count India, an informal group of birdwatching enthusiasts, ornithologists, naturalists and conservationists dedicated to documenting Indian birds.

Concerns:
This assessment makes it very clear that our birds are in overall decline, in some cases catastrophically so. Several spectacular birds, many of them endemic to the sub-continent, face a growing threat from loss of habitat due to:

- Human activity.
- The widespread presence of toxins, including pesticides.
- Hunting and trapping for the pet trade.

Categorisation:
1. It categorises 101 species as ‘High Conservation Concern for India’.
2. 319 species are classified under the ‘Moderate Conservation Concern’ category. These species must be carefully monitored to rapidly detect and act upon signs of continuing decline.

What next?
This information should also translate into many voices being raised for bird conservation, both among conservation bodies, and the general public.
Many urgent policy measures need to be adopted immediately. Conservation action must be taken immediately to identify causes of decline and implement measures to halt and reverse the trend for these species.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. Species included in Appendix I of UN Convention on Migratory Species:
What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Conservation status of these species, inclusion in the list and its significance.

Context: The Great Indian Bustard, Asian Elephant and Bengal Florican have been included in Appendix I of UN Convention on Migratory Species.
- This was done at the ongoing 13th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in Gandhinagar (Gujarat).

About Asian Elephant:
- Found in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar.
- IUCN status: Endangered.
- It is also listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

About Great Indian Bustard:
- It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world.
- Its largest populations are found in the Indian state of Rajasthan.
- State bird of Rajasthan.
- It is classified as ‘Critically Endangered’ on the IUCN Red List.
- It is also listed in Appendix I of CITES and Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
About Bengal Floridian:
In India it is found in Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It has been listed as ‘Critically Endangered’ on the IUCN Red List. The bird is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act of India, 1972 and Appendix I of CITES.

Sources: pib.

10. Jalyukta shivar
What to study?
For Prelims: Features of the programme.
For Mains: Significance and why was it scrapped?

Context: Maharashtra government has scrapped the Jalyukta Shivar- the flagship water conservation project.

What is Jalyukta Shivar?
Launched in December 2014 after Maharashtra experienced consecutive droughts. Aimed at rolling out measures that could potentially mitigate water scarcity in the most drought-prone villages in a systematic manner.

Features:
• The project targeted strengthening and streamlining existing water resources like canals, bunds and ponds by arresting maximum run-off rainwater during monsoon.
• Tasks to widen and deepen natural water streams and connect them to nearby water storage facilities like earthen or concrete check-dams was proposed.

What necessitated this?
Nearly 52 per cent of the state’s geographical area is prone to drought, either naturally or due to poor rainfall. This includes Marathwada and adjoining areas of Madhya Maharashtra and large parts of Vidarbha.

Was Jalyukta Shivar beneficial?
By January 2019, the scheme had transformed 16,000 drought-prone villages of Maharashtra. The irrigation cover had been increased by 34 lakh hectares. In the process, thereby, increasing the crop yield each year, particularly the kharif crops. Until mid-2019, interventions resulted in stocking of water measuring 24 lakh trillion cubic metre.

Sources: Indian Express.

11. World Air Quality Report 2019
What to study?
For Prelims: About the report and key findings.
For Mains: Concerns and challenges and ways to address them.

Context: World Air Quality Report 2019 was released by the pollution tracker IQAir and Greenpeace. The ranking is based on a comparison of PM 2.5 levels. Bangladesh emerged as the most polluted country for PM 2.5. Pakistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan and India followed behind respectively.

Background:
PM 2.5 includes pollutants such as sulfate, nitrates and black carbon. Exposure to such particles has been linked to lung and heart disorders and can impair cognitive and immune functions.

Performance of India:
1. Twenty-one of the world's 30 cities with the worst air pollution are in India.
2. Six cities from India are in the top ten.
3. Ghaziabad, an area close to New Delhi in northern Uttar Pradesh state, is ranked as the world's most polluted city, with an average PM 2.5 concentration measurement of 110.2 in 2019.
4. National air pollution in India decreased by 20% from 2018 to 2019, with 98% of cities experiencing of varying levels of improvement.
5. The report points to economic slowdown, favorable weather conditions, and efforts towards cleaning the air as reasons behind the decrease.
6. The report also points India's launch of the country's first National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) which aims to reduce PM 2.5 and the bigger particulate PM 10 air pollution in 102 cities by 20-30% by 2024 compared to 2017 levels.

South Asia:
1. South Asia continues to be of particular concern, with 27 of the 30 most polluted cities in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh.
2. However, South Asia has seen improvements from the previous year.
3. Chinese cities have overall seen marked improvements in recent years, with average concentrations of pollutants falling 9% from 2018 to 2019, according to the report.

Climate crisis and urbanization:
There are clear indications that climate change can directly increase the risk of exposure to air pollution.
- It impacts air quality in many cities through desertification and increased frequency of forest fires and sandstorms.
- Greenhouse gas emissions, with the burning of fossil fuel a key driver of the climate crisis, is also a major cause of dirty air.
- Many countries are still dependent on coal for their energy production, the biggest contributor to PM 2.5 emissions.
- Exacerbating the problem is rapid urbanization in industrializing Southeast Asian cities, which is also a major cause of air pollution and poses severe challenges to managing PM 2.5 levels.

Effects of air pollution:
- According to the World Health Organization, air pollution causes an estimated 7 million premature deaths a year globally, mainly as a result of increased mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancers and respiratory infections.
- It is estimated that more than 80% living in urban areas which monitor air pollution are exposed to air quality levels that exceed WHO guideline limits, with low- and middle-income countries most at risk.

Sources: Indian Express.

12. 1000 springs initiative
What to study?

www.insightsonindia.com
For Prelims: Features of the scheme.
For Mains: Springs- untapped potential and significance.

Context: Launched recently.

About 1000 springs initiative:
It is an online portal on GIS-based Spring Atlas with the hydrological and chemical properties of the springs mentioned.
Aim: To improve access to safe and adequate water for the tribal communities living in difficult and inaccessible part of rural areas in the country.
It is an integrated solution around natural springs.

Key features:
It includes the provision of infrastructure for piped water supply for drinking; provision of water for irrigation; community-led total sanitation initiatives; and provision for water for backyard nutrition gardens, generating sustainable livelihood opportunities for the tribal people.

Implementation:
Under this initiative, more than 70 young tribal youths from the rural belt of three districts of Odisha namely, Kalahandi, Khandamal and Gajapati have been trained as barefoot hydro geologists by combining traditional and scientific knowledge for identification and mapping of springs, and undertaking rejuvenation and protection measures in their habitations.

What are Springs?
Springs are natural sources of groundwater discharge and have been used extensively in the mountainous regions across the world.

Potential:
In the central and eastern Indian belt with more than 75% tribal population, it remains largely unrecognized and under-utilized.

Significance of this initiative:
The initiative will help in harnessing the potential of perennial springs’ water to address the natural scarcity of water in tribal areas.

Sources: pib.

13. Delhi water doesn’t conform to ISO standards

What to study?
For Prelims: What are ISO standards, key findings of the report.
For Mains: Significance of the report, concerns and measures to address them.

Context: The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has submitted its report to the Supreme Court of India on drinking water standards in Delhi.

Key findings:
- None of the drinking water samples randomly collected from across Delhi conforms to the ISO standards of purity in one or more requirements.
- All the drinking water samples drawn from Delhi were non-conforming in one or more requirements as per IS 10500:2012 [specification for drinking water].
• One of the main reasons for contamination in Delhi was leaking pipes.

**Background:**
On January 13, the court ordered the pollution control board and the BIS to conduct a random check of water quality in Delhi and submit a report in a month.

**What next?**
The court has asked the BIS to suggest measures to improve water purity and asked it for reports on the samples taken from the other cities.

Sources: the Hindu.

**Topics:** Disaster and management.

1. **Northern European Enclosure Dam (NEED)**

What to study?
*For Prelims: NEED- features and geographical location.*
*For Mains: Need for, significance, challenges involved and issues of feasibility.*

**Context:** A mammoth Northern European Enclosure Dam (NEED) has been proposed to protect millions of people and important economic regions of 15 Northern European Countries from rising seas as a result of climate change.

**About the proposed dam:**
Two dams of a combined length of 637 km will be constructed.
- First dam will be built between northern Scotland and western Norway, measuring 476 km and with an average depth of 121 m and maximum depth of 321 m.
- The second dam will be built between France and southwestern England, of length 161 km, and average depth of 85 m and maximum depth of 102 m.

**Costs involved:**
Researchers have estimated the total costs associated with NEED at between €250 billion and €550 billion. If construction is spread over a 20-year period, this will work out to an annual expense of around 0.07%-0.16% of the GDP of the 15 Northern European countries that will be involved.

**Implications:**
The construction will “heavily impact” marine and terrestrial ecosystems inside and outside the enclosure, will have social and cultural implications, and affect tourism and fisheries.

**Need for such measures:**
- Such protection efforts are required if mitigation efforts fail to limit sea level rise.
- And, *separating the North and Baltic Seas from the Atlantic Ocean* may be the “most viable option” to protect Northern Europe against unstoppable sea level rise (SLR).
• While NEED may appear to be “overwhelming” and “unrealistic”, it could be “potentially favourable” financially and in scale when compared with alternative solutions to fight SLR.

Way ahead:
Such mega-enclosures could potentially be considered in other regions of the world, including the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Irish Sea, and the Red Sea.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention

1. What is Anticipatory bail?

What to study?
For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, features, significance and issues involved.

Context: A constitution bench of the Supreme Court has ruled that an anticipatory bail cannot be limited to a fixed time period and can continue till the end of the trial.

Background:
The judgment came in a reference made by a three-judge bench in the case of Sushila Aggarwal v. State of NCT of Delhi regarding the scope of Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) which provides for grant of anticipatory bail.

Observations made by the Court:
1. If there are any special circumstances necessitating a limit on the tenure of anticipatory bail, it is open for the court to do so. Nothing in Section 438 CrPC compels or obliges courts to impose conditions limiting relief in terms of time.
2. When Parliament has not thought it appropriate to curtail the rights of the citizens, it would be not appropriate for the SC to curtail powers granted to courts with regard to anticipatory bail.
3. Anticipatory bail application could be moved by a person even before filing of FIR.
4. The court, while granting anticipatory bail, should examine seriousness and gravity of the offence to impose any condition on the petitioner, if necessary.

Need:
Arbitrary arrests continue to be a pervasive phenomenon in the country and therefore, discretionary power of courts to grant anticipatory bail should not be curtailed and the protection should continue till end of trial. Besides, the spectre of arbitrary and heavy-handed arrests, too often to harass and humiliate citizens.

What is Anticipatory Bail?
The provision of anticipatory bail under Section 438 was introduced when CrPC was amended in 1973. Section 438 is a procedural provision concerned with personal liberty of each individual, who is entitled to the benefit of the presumption of innocence. As opposed to ordinary bail, which is granted to a person who is under arrest, in anticipatory bail, a person is directed to be released on bail even before arrest made.

Who can apply?
S. 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, lays down the law on anticipatory bail. Sub-section (1) of the provision reads: “When any person has reason to believe that he may be arrested on an accusation of having committed a non-bailable offence, he may apply to the High Court or the Court of Session for a direction under this section; and that Court may, if it thinks fit, direct that in the event of such arrest, he shall be released on bail.”
The provision empowers only the Sessions Court and High Court to grant anticipatory bail.
Significance:
The reason for enactment of Section 438 in the Code was parliamentary acceptance of the crucial underpinning of personal liberty in a free and democratic country. Parliament wished to foster respect for personal liberty and accord primacy to a fundamental tenet of criminal jurisprudence, that everyone is presumed to be innocent till he or she is found guilty. Life and liberty are the cherished attributes of every individual. The urge for freedom is natural to each human being.
In the 1980 Gurbaksh Singh Sibbia vs State of Punjab case, a five-judge Supreme Court bench led by then Chief Justice Y V Chandrachud ruled that S. 438 (1) is to be interpreted in the light of Article 21 of the Constitution (protection of life and personal liberty).

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Maharashtra tops list of States hit by global medical data leak

What to study?
For Prelims: Key findings.
For Mains: Concerns, challenges and preparedness.

Context: Greenbone Sustainable Resilience, a German cybersecurity firm, has published a report on medical data leak. This is the second report.

Key findings:
1. Medical details of over 120 million Indian patients have been leaked and made freely available on the Internet.
2. Leaks include a massive number of records, including images of CT scans, X-rays, MRIs and even pictures of the patients.
3. The report also places Maharashtra at the top of the States affected by the leak. Followed by Karnataka.

Ranking of the countries:
This is the second edition of the report and it classifies countries in the “good”, “bad” and “ugly” categories based on the action taken by their governments after the first report was made public. India ranks second in the “ugly” category, after the U.S.

Concerns:
- The leak is worrying because the affected patients can include anyone from the common working man to politicians and celebrities. In image-driven fields like politics or entertainment, knowledge about certain ailments faced by people from these fields could deal a huge blow to their image.
- The other concern is of fake identities being created using the details, which can be misused in any possible number of ways.

Issues to be addressed:
The report says the leak was facilitated by the fact that the Picture Archiving and Communications Systems (PACS) servers, where these details are stored, are not secure and linked to the public Internet without any protection, making them easily accessible to malicious elements.

Why maintain privacy?
Any communication between a doctor and a patient is privileged one. A doctor or a hospital is thus ethically, legally and morally bound to maintain confidentiality.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. SyRI- an identification mechanism

What to study?
**For Prelims: Key features.**

**For Mains: Significance of Dutch ruling, need for and implications.**

**Context:** In a first anywhere in the world, a court in the Netherlands recently stopped SyRI- a digital identification scheme for reasons of exclusion.

**Implications worldwide:**
This has a context for similar artificial intelligence systems worldwide, especially at a time when identity, citizenship and privacy are pertinent questions in India.

**Firstly, what was the scheme SyRI all about?**

**SyRI (System Risk Indicator)** was developed by Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs developed in 2014 to weed out those who are most likely to commit fraud and receive government benefits.

It allowed government agencies to share 17 categories of data about welfare recipients such as taxes, land registries, employment records, and vehicle registrations with a private company.

1. The company, called “The Intelligence Agency”, used an algorithm to analyse data for four cities and calculate risk scores. The selective rollout was conducted in low-income and immigrant neighborhoods, which have a higher number of beneficiaries.
2. Elevated risk scores were sent to relevant government arms, which stores these on government databases for a maximum of two years. The government, in that time period, could open an investigation on the targeted person.

**Why the Court ruled against it?**

A Dutch district court ruled against this scheme because of data privacy and human rights concerns.

The court said using new technology to control fraud was acceptable, it held SyRI was too invasive and violative of the privacy guarantees given by European Human Rights Law as well as the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation.

Legal criticism had mounted on this case of algorithmic governance, alleging that the algorithm would begin associating poverty and immigrant statuses with fraud risk.

The court found that opaque algorithmic decision-making puts citizens at a disadvantage to challenge the resulting risk scores.

**Government’s defence:**

The Dutch government defended the programme in court, saying it prevented abuse and acted as only a starting point for further investigation instead of a final determination. The government also refused to disclose all information about how the system makes its decisions, stating that it would allow gaming of the system.

**How relevant is this for India?**

Similar to the Supreme Court’s Aadhaar judgment setting limits on the ID’s usage, the Hague Court attempted to balance social interest with personal privacy.

However, the Aadhaar judgment was not regarding algorithmic decision-making; it was about data collection. The ruling is an example of how a data protection regulation can be used against government surveillance.

The court ruled that SyRI was violative of principles of transparency and data minimisation laid out in their General Data Protection Regulation.

Sources: Indian Express.

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**4. Clause 6 in Assam Accord**

**What to study?**

For Prelims: What is Clause 6 of Assam Accord?

For Mains: Concerns expressed over this clause, ways to address them.
**Context:** Three major communities, perceived to be migrants in Assam, have expressed concern over the recommendations of the high-powered committee on the implementation of **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985.** These communities are the Bengal-origin or Bengali-speaking Muslims (referred to as Miyas), the Bengali Hindus and the Gurkhas.

**What are the concerns being expressed?**
Implementation of this clause would lead to exclusion of these communities from the list of indigenous communities. More than 80% of these have been living in Assam for centuries.

**Background:**
A 13-member panel set up to study the implementation of the Assam Accord’s Clause 6, which relates to the protection of the Assamese identity, recently submitted its report.

**What is Clause 6?**
Clause 6 states: “Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.”
However, no government has passed any legislation since 1985 to provide constitutional protection to the Assamese people as envisaged under Clause 6.

**Assam Accord:**
The Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. A Six year agitation demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants was launched by the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) in 1979 concluded with the signing of the Assam Accord.

Sources: the Hindu.

**Topics:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

### 1. Public Safety Act

**What to study?**
*For prelims: Key features of the act.*
*For mains: Issues related, why it is called a draconian law, need for reforms.*

**Context:** The Jammu and Kashmir administration has slapped **the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA)** against former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Ministers Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah besides two political stalwarts from the National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party.

**What happens after PSA is used?**
**Within four weeks of passing the detention order,** the government has to refer the case to **an Advisory Board.**
This Advisory Board will have to give its recommendations within eight weeks of the order. If the Board thinks that there is cause for preventive detention, the government can hold the person up to two years.

**The person detained has limited rights.** Usually when a person is arrested, they have the right to legal representation and can challenge the arrest. But, when a person is arrested under the PSA, they do not have these rights before the Advisory Board unless sufficient grounds can be established that the detention is illegal. There have been cases where the High Court has interfered and quashed the detention.
**According to Section 13(2),** the detaining authority need not even inform the detained individual as to the reason for the action, if it decides that it goes against public interest.

**What is the J&K PSA?**
The **Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA)** received the assent of the J&K Governor on April 8, 1978. The Act was **introduced as a tough law to prevent the smuggling of timber and keep the smugglers “out of circulation.”**
The law allows the government to detain any person above the age of 16 without trial for a period of two years. The PSA allows for administrative detention for up to two years “in the case of persons acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State”, and for administrative detention up to one year where “any person is acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order”.

**Detention orders under PSA can be issued by Divisional Commissioners or District Magistrates.**

**Section 22 of the Act** provides protection for any action taken “in good faith” under the Act: “No suit, prosecution or any other legal proceeding shall lie against any person for anything done or intended to be done in good faith in pursuance of the provisions of this Act.”

Under **Section 23 of the Act**, the government is empowered to “make such Rules consistent with the provisions of this Act, as may be necessary for carrying out the objects of this Act”.

### Why is it often referred to as a “draconian” law?

1. Right from the beginning, the law was **misused widely, and was repeatedly employed against political opponents by consecutive governments until 1990.** After the emergence of militancy, the J&K government frequently invoked the PSA to crack down on separatists.

2. **In August 2018**, the Act was amended to allow individuals to be detained under the PSA outside the state as well.

3. The detaining authority **need not disclose any facts** about the detention “which it considers to be against the public interest to disclose”.

4. The **terms under which a person is detained under PSA are vague** and include a broad range of activities like “acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State” or for “acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order”.

5. The vagueness provided in the act **gives unbridled powers to the authorities.** The detainees, therefore, are effectively debarred from contesting the legality of their detention.

6. PSA **does not provide for a judicial review of detention.** To checkmate the J&K High Court orders for release of persons detained under the act the state authorities issue successive detention orders. **This ensures prolonged detention of people.**

7. PSA has been used against human rights activists, journalists, separatists and others who are considered as a threat to the law & order. **Right to dissent is stifled by these Acts.**

Sources: The Hindu.

**Topics: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.**

### 1. What are joint commands?

**What to study?**

**For Prelims:** What are joint commands, their features?

**For Mains:** Need for and significance of joint commands.

**Context:** Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) office is working on a tentative timeline for the establishment of **joint commands among the three defence services** — Army, Navy and Air Force — beginning with an Air Defence Command.

**What are joint commands?**

- It is a **unified command** in which the resources of all the services are unified under a single commander looking at a geographical theatre.

- Meaning, a single military commander, as per the requirements, will have the resources of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force to manage a security threat.

**Functions of joint command:**

- The commander of a joint command will have the freedom to train and equip his command.

- He will have logistics of all the services at his beckoning.

However, the three services will retain their independent identities as well.
Joint command at present:

There are **two tri-services commands at the moment**.

1. The joint command at the moment, the **Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)**, is a theatre command, which is headed by the chiefs of the three services in rotation. It was created in 2001 after a Group of Ministers had given a report on national security following the Kargil War.

2. **The Strategic Forces Command** was established in 2006 and is a functional tri-services command.

What is the structure right now?

There are **17 commands, divided among the three services**.

- The Army and the Air Force have seven commands each, while the Navy has three commands.
- These commands report to their respective services, and are headed by three-star officers.
- Though these commands are in the same regions, but they are no located together.

Need for joint commands?

The leader of a unified command has control over more varied resources, compared to the heads of the commands under the services now. And **the officer commanding will have access to the Air Force’s fighter jets and can use them if needed**.

Through such integration and jointness the three forces will be able to avoid duplication of resources. The resources available under each service will be available to other services too. The services will get to know one another better, strengthening cohesion in the defence establishment.

Do militaries of other countries have such commands?

Several major militaries are divided into **integrated theatre commands**.

- **China’s People’s Liberation Army has five theatre commands**: Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern and Central. Its Western Theatre Command is responsible for India.
- **The US Armed Forces has 11 unified commands**, of which seven are geographic and four functional commands. Its geographic commands are Africa, Central, European, Indo-Pacific, Northern, Southern and Space. Cyber, Special Operations, Transportation and Strategic are its functional commands.

Sources: Indian Express.

### 2. National Investigation Agency (NIA):

**What to study?**

- For Prelims: NIA- objectives, composition and functions.
- For Mains: Amendments- criticisms, concerns and way ahead.

**Context**: The Delhi High Court has sought response of the Centre and the AAP government on a PIL seeking National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe under the unlawful activities law UAPA into the violence in northeast Delhi over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

**Background**: A petition filed has urged the court to direct the Centre to order the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to find out the "anti-national forces" behind the agitations and to probe the role of People's Front of India (PFI) which is allegedly "funding, motivating and supporting the protests".

**About NIA**: It acts as the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency. It is empowered to deal with terror related crimes across states without special permission from the states. Established under the National Investigation Agency Act 2008.

**Governing Body**: Ministry of Home Affairs.

**Jurisdiction**: 

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1. A State Government may request the Central Government to hand over the investigation of a case to the NIA, provided the case has been registered for the offences as contained in the schedule to the NIA Act.

2. Central Government can also order NIA to take over investigation of any scheduled offense anywhere in the India.

**Composition:**
Officers of the NIA are drawn from the Indian Police Service and Indian Revenue Service.

**Special NIA Courts:**
Various Special Courts have been notified by the Central Government of India for trial of the cases registered at various police stations of NIA under Section 11 and 22 of the NIA Act 2008.

Any question as to the jurisdiction of these courts is decided by the Central Government.
These are presided over by a judge appointed by the Central Government on the recommendation of the Chief Justice of the High Court with jurisdiction in that region.

Supreme Court of India has also been empowered to transfer the cases from one special court to any other special court within or outside the state if the same is in the interest of justice in light of the prevailing circumstances in any particular state.

The NIA Special Courts are empowered with all powers of the court of sessions under Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 for trial of any offense.

An appeal from any judgement, sentence or order, not being an interlocutory order, of a Special Court lies to the High Court both on facts and on law.

State Governments have also been empowered to appoint one or more such special courts in their states.

Sources: the Hindu.
FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. A.P. flags off country’s first ‘fruit train’:
   - A ‘fruit train’, said to be the first of its kind in the country, was recently flagged off from Tadipatri Railway Station in Andhra Pradesh.
   - The fruit train was carrying a load of 980 metric tonnes of locally grown bananas to the Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Mumbai, from where the consignment will be exported to Iran.
   - This is the first time in India that an entire train is being sent to the gateway port (JNPT) for export.
   - This helps save both time and fuel as 150 trucks would have been required to send a consignment of this size by road to JNPT, which is over 900 km away, before the temperature-controlled containers are loaded on ships.

2. Tyler Prize for the environment
   **Context:** The Tyler Prize 2020 has been awarded to two pioneers who quantified the economic value of our natural environment. Of two, one is from India- **Pavan Sukhdev**.
   **About the Prize:**
   1. Established in 1973 by the late John and Alice Tyler.
   2. This global environmental prize recognizes individuals who have contributed in an outstanding manner to the scientific knowledge and public leadership to preserve and enhance the environment of the world.
   3. Recipients encompass the spectrum of environmental concerns, including environmental policy, health, air and water pollution, ecosystem disruption and loss of biodiversity, and energy resources.

3. New mascot for National Games: flame-throated bulbul
   **Context:** The flame-throated bulbul, also called the Rubigula, was chosen as the mascot of the 36th National Games to be held in Goa because it is the State bird.
   **Key facts:**
   - **Endemic** to southern peninsular India.
   - **IUCN status:** Least Concern.

4. Ujh Multipurpose (National) Project
   The project is planned to be constructed in Kathua District of J&K on the River Ujh which is a major tributary of River Ravi.
   The project, after completion, will enhance the utilization of waters of Eastern Rivers allotted to India as per the Indus Water Treaty.
   The Ujh river originates in Kailash mountains (near Bhaderwah hills, part of the Pir Panjal Range) at an altitude of 4,300 metres (14,100 ft).
   **Four streams**, Bhini, Sutar, Dunarki and Talan join Ujh at Panjtirthi.

5. Burhi Dihing river
   **Context:** A stretch of the eastern Assam's Burhi Dihing River was recently on fire for the last two days due to a leakage in the underwater oil pipeline.
   **Key facts:**
   Dihing or Burhi Dihing is a large tributary of the Brahmaputra River in Upper Assam.
   **Originates** in the Eastern Himalayas (the Patkai Hills) in Arunachal Pradesh and flows through Tinsukia and Dibrugarh Districts in Assam to its confluence with the Brahmaputra at Dihingmukh.

6. Mukti Caravan
   **Context:** It was recently flagged off in Rajasthan.
**Significance**: It is mobilising people against child trafficking with the focus on generating awareness about preventive procedures in place to combat forced labour, exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

**Objective**: Led by the child labour survivors, the caravan will reach out to villages and towns prone to human trafficking. The participants will distribute pamphlets and hold discussions with the people at public places and organise activities such as skits, poem recitation and screening of short films with an appeal to take action against trafficking.

**Organisers**: The Kailash Satyarthi Children’s Foundation (KSCF) and Rajasthan Police have joined hands to run the campaign, which will be joined by the Superintendents of Police in the districts of their jurisdiction.

7. **nCoV outbreak declared a State calamity in Kerala**
   - Kerala has declared the novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection a State calamity.
   - So far, there have been three confirmed cases.
   - The decision will help ensure that the outbreak is controlled.

8. **Bhutan’s new tourism fee**
   - Bhutan will now impose a “sustainable development fee” (SDF) on Indian, Bangladeshi and Maldivian tourists.
   - The new levy, however, will not be applicable across Bhutan. To promote tourism in the less popular Eastern Bhutan, the SDF will not be levied on tourists travelling to 11 districts in the region.
   - The decision has been taken to protect the ecology of the country, amid a spike in visitors from India.
   **Background**: So far, tourists from the three countries had been exempt from a levy that other nationals had to pay — $250 per person per day during the peak season, and $200 per person per day during the low season. The low season is in the winter from December to February, and during the rains from June to August.

9. **Longest Spaceflight by a Woman: Christina Koch**
   **Context**: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut Christina Koch landed on the Earth on 6th February, 2020 after a record stay of 328 days on the International Space Station.
   - The previous longest single spaceflight by any woman was 289 days by Peggy Whitson, also an American, who set that record in 2017.
   - Valery Polyakov of Russia holds the combine (i.e. for both men and women) record for the longest single spaceflight in history (438 days).

10. **Lucknow Declaration**
   - It is a joint declaration adopted as an outcome of the first India-Africa Defence Ministers’ Conclave which was held along the side-lines of the DefExpo 2020.
   - Aim: The Conclave was conducted with the aim of exporting India-made equipment to the African continent in keeping with long-standing defence partnerships since the 1950s.
   **The Declaration calls for** deeper cooperation in the domain of defence industry including through investment, joint ventures in defence equipment software, digital defence, research & development, provisioning of defence equipment, spares and their maintenance on sustainable and mutually beneficial terms.

11. **Mt. Aconcagua:**
   **Why in News?**
   A 12-year old Mumbai student, Kaamya Karthikeyan has set a record of becoming the youngest in the world to summit Mt. Aconcagua.
   **About Mt. Aconcagua:**
It is the highest peak of the Andes Mountains in Argentina, South America. It is the highest mountain outside of Asia, with a summit elevation of 6,960.8 metres. The mountain is one of the so-called Seven Summits of the seven continents.

12. Pangolin

Why in News?

Pangolins could be responsible for the spread of the deadly coronavirus in China, scientists have said after they found the genome sequence separated from the endangered mammals 99 per cent identical to that from infected people.

Background:

Birds and animals are in the centre of the debate about how the virus originated. In the beginning, snakes were blamed for the virus. Chinese health experts later contended that the virus originated from bats, but whether there are more intermediate carriers between bats and humans requires further investigation. The virus was believed to have been spread from Wuhan’s Hunan seafood wholesale market.

About Pangolin:

- It is the only scaly mammal on the planet.
- According to Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), it is also the most illegally traded vertebrate within its class (Mammalia).
- Protection Status: Chinese pangolin has been listed as “critically endangered” by UN affiliated International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List. Indian pangolin (Manis crassicaudata) has been listed as “endangered” in IUCN Red List. It is also a Schedule I category protected animal, under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972).

13. Sham Singh Atariwala

- Sham Singh Attariwala (1790 - 1846) was a general of the Sikh Empire.
- Attariwala participated in many campaigns, including the Battles of Multan, Kashmir and the Frontier Province.
- Owing to his courage and influence over the Khalsa army, Sham Singh was nominated to the Council of Regency set up by Maharani Jind Kaur for the minor sovereign Maharaja Duleep Singh.
- During the first Anglo-Sikh war, he crossed the Sutlej, vowing to lay down his life rather than return in defeat.

Context: 174th death anniversary of Sikh General Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala observes on Feb 10th.

14. Chindu Yakshaganam

Chindu Yakshaganam, a.k.a Chindu Bhagavatam is a form of theatre practised by members of the Chindu Madiga community.

- It is a form of entertainment in villages across Telangana, with the artists skilfully depicting classic tales from the epics and entertaining the masses.
- The art form probably started when people enacted acts of hunting, wars and other acts of valour.
- The Chindu community has traditionally been a nomadic community.

15. Gagarin Research and Test Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC)

It is in Moscow, Russia.

Why in News?
Four Indian pilots have begun astronaut training here. The full programme includes basic or generic astronaut training followed by activities specific to the first Indian human space mission, Gaganyaan.
At the end of all training modules in India and Russia, one or two of the four will be finally named to circle the earth in the first crewed Gaganyaan, which is planned around 2022.

16. Integrated Air Defence Weapon System

- The Integrated Air Defence Weapon System, also known as the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System (NASAMS), provides integrated air missile defence and is currently deployed around Washington, DC.
- The IADWS system includes radar, launchers, targeting, and guidance systems, advanced medium-range air-to-air missile (AMRAAM) and Stinger missiles, and related equipment and support.

Why in News?
The U.S. Department of State has approved the potential sale of a $1.867 billion Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) to India.

17. J.R.D. Tata

It was on February 10, 1929 that India got its first pilot in Jehangir R.D. Tata, who qualified with number 1 on his flying licence, giving birth to Indian aviation.

- J.R.D’s licence, then called an ‘aviators certificate’, was issued by The Aero Club of India and Burma, an associate of the Royal Aero Club of Great Britain, which was authorised to issue licences by the British Empire’s Federation Aeronautique Internationale.
- The Aero Club of India and Burma was recognised by Federation Aeronautique Internationale as a sporting authority.
- Though not the first to register, J.R.D was the first Indian to pass out with ‘No. 1’ endorsed on his flying licence. Purushottam Meghji Kabali is by various aviator accounts considered to be the first Indian pilot.

18. Exercise AJEYA WARRIOR – 2020

Context: The fifth edition of the Joint Military Exercise AJEYA WARRIOR – 2020 between India and the United Kingdom will be conducted at Salisbury Plains, United Kingdom in February 2020.

- The aim of this exercise is to conduct company level joint training with emphasis on counter terrorist operation in urban and semi-urban areas.
• The first edition of the exercise was conducted in 2013 at Belgaum, Karnataka.

19. World Pulses Day
• Established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to recognize the importance of pulses as a global food.
• It has been designated on February 10 each year since 2019 by the seventy-third session of the United Nations General Assembly on December 20, 2018.

20. Safer Internet Day
This year, February 11 is being observed as Safer Internet Day (SID).
The SID initiative first began in Europe, but is now recognised in around 150 countries worldwide.
Aim: To increase awareness about emerging online issues, such as cyberbullying, and chooses a topic reflecting current concerns.
• This year, the theme is “Together for a better internet”.
• It is organised by the Insafe/INHOPE network of awareness centres, that is spread across 30 countries and is funded by the Connecting Europe Facility program (CEF) of the EU.
• In India, the New Delhi-based NGO DISC (Developing Internet Safe Community) Foundation is the SID Committee.

21. Storm Ciara
• It is a latest storm to hit Northern Europe.
• It is expected to hit Ireland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany.
• In Germany, it is being referred to as ‘Sabine’. The storm has two names because there isn’t yet a pan-European system in place for labeling weather systems.

22. International Day of Women and Girls in Science
February 11 was the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.
It was established by the United Nations to promote equal access to and participation in science for women and girls.
Key facts:
1. According to a 2018 fact sheet prepared by UNESCO on women in science, just 28.8% of researchers are women.
2. It defines researchers as “professionals engaged in the conception or creation of new knowledge”. In India, this drops to 13.9%.
3. Between 1901 and 2019, 334 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to 616 Laureates in Physics, Chemistry and Medicine, of which just 20 have been won by 19 women. The double Laureate is Marie Curie.
4. In 2019, the American mathematician Karen Uhlenbeck became the first woman to win the Abel Prize, following 16 male mathematicians.
5. The Fields Medal so far has also been awarded to only one woman mathematician, the late Maryam Mirzakhani of Iran, as opposed to 59 men since 1936.

23. Indian nationals living abroad
• There are over 1.36 crore Indian nationals living abroad, as per the latest data.
• The highest number of Indians abroad are living in the United Arab Emirates, where the 34,20,000 Indians comprise about one-fourth of all Indians abroad.
• The UAE is followed by Saudi Arabia (25,94,947), the US (12,80,000), Kuwait (10,29,861), Oman (7,79,351), Qatar (7,56,062), Nepal (5,00,000), UK (3,51,000), Singapore (3,50,000) and Bahrain (3,23,292).
24. UNHCR launches '2 Billion Kilometers to Safety' campaign

- The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR has announced a new global campaign urging people worldwide to cover the total distance travelled by refugees each year - 2 billion kilometers - by running, jogging or walking.
- The "2 Billion Kilometers to Safety" campaign vies to encourage people to support refugees by championing individual acts of solidarity.
- The goal is to acknowledge the resilience and strength of refugees.

25. Five-day working week for Maha govt employees

Maharashtra government has announced five-day working week for its officers and employees from February 29.

- Employees will now work 45 minutes more Monday to Friday to avail of the weekend off.
- The five-day week is followed by the central government, in Rajasthan, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.
- It will not apply to government offices covered under the Factories Act and the Industrial Disputes Act and to those that are considered essential services.

26. Kerala imposes ₹13 price cap on bottled water

Bottled drinking water has come under a price cap in Kerala, with the State making it an essential commodity and fixing a ceiling of ₹13 per litre.

Including bottled water in the list of essential commodities enables price control.

27. About CAT

The Central Administrative Tribunal was established by an Act of Parliament namely Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 as sequel to the 42nd amendment of the Constitution of India inserting Article 323 A.

Functions: The tribunal adjudicates disputes and complaints with respect to Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the persons appointed to the Public Services and Posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State or of any other Local Authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.
Composition: The Tribunal is headed by the Chairman and 65 Members, 33 from Judicial (including Chairman) and 33 from the Administrative stream. The Chairman is normally a retired Chief Justice of a High Court.

28. Assam is proposing a census of indigenous Muslim groups

Assam’s Welfare of Minorities and Development Department has announced plans to hold a census of four communities broadly known as “Assamese Muslims” — Goriya, Moriya, Deshi, and Julha.

Why? The government plans to set up a corporation to look after the welfare of these communities who number an estimated 16 lakh in Assam’s 3.3-crore population.

29. Madhav National Park

Located in Madhya Pradesh. It was named after Madho Rao Scindia, the Maharaja of Gwalior belonging to the Scindia dynasty of the Marathas.

It is a combination of dry deciduous & dry thorn forests. It make home for different variety of antelopes like Nilgai, Chinkara, and Deer, and carnivours such as leopard, wolf, jackal, fox, wild pig, etc.

30. Urban bent-toed gecko

- It is a new species of lizard discovered in Guwahati, Assam.
- Scientific name: Cyrtodactylus urbanus.
- Urbanization is a major threat to the survival of geckos.

31. Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS)

Why in News?
The Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS), though home to more than half the number of tigers present in Kerala, may not be notified as a tiger reserve as the proposal lacks public support.

About Wayanad wildlife sanctuary:
- Located in Kerala.
- It is the second largest wildlife sanctuary in Kerala.
- The ‘Status of Tigers in India’ report released last year had estimated the tiger population of Wayanad as between 75 and 80 individuals.
- The sanctuary is now an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.
- It is bounded by protected area network of Nagarhole and Bandipur of Karnataka in the northeast, and on the southeast by Mudumalai of Tamil Nadu.

32. Punjab Kinnow

- The Punjab Agri Export Corporation recently launched the ‘Punjab Kinnow’ brand at the kinnow festival in Abohar.
- This brand of kinnow, which is considered the ‘king fruit’ of Punjab, is also said to be “pesticide-free”.
- Punjab being the largest producer of kinnow in the country, such branding will attract more consumers.

33. ERONET

Context: The Election Commission of India has been awarded ‘Silver’ for Excellence in Government Process re-engineering for digital transformation for the year 2019-20.
The award was given in recognition of ERONET.
Key facts:
1. ERONET is a common database for all States and UTs with data of 91 crore electors.
2. It provides bedrock of electoral roll in providing various web services to Conduct of Elections applications of Election Commission of India.
3. It automates the process of electoral roll management starting from elector registration, field verification of electors, decision support system for Electoral registration officers and for providing extensive integrated value-added services.

34. Ra’ad-II missile
Context: Pakistan conducted a successful flight test of the air launched nuclear-capable cruise missile Ra’ad-II.
Key facts:
- It has a range of 600 km.
- The system is equipped with state-of-the-art guidance and navigation systems ensuring engagement of targets with high precision.

Pakistan's development of the Ra’ad could be seen as an attempt to match India’s BrahMos cruise missile.

35. Kala Kumbh
- With an objective to promote Geographical Indication (GI) crafts and heritage of India, the Ministry of Textiles is organising Kala Kumbh – Handicrafts Thematic Exhibition in various parts of the country through the Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts).
- The exhibitions are sponsored by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH). EPCH was established under Companies Act in the year 1986-87 and is a non-profit organisation, with an object to promote, support, protect, maintain and increase the export of handicrafts.

36. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses
Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses has been renamed as Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.
- IDSA is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Defence.
- Dedicated to objective research and policy-relevant studies on all aspects of defence and security.

37. India to host AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2022
India will host the 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup.
This was announced by the Women's Committee of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Background:
- The AFC Women's Asian Cup is a quadrennial competition in women's football for national teams which belong to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).
- The competition also serves as a qualifying tournament for the FIFA Women's World Cup.

38. Lockheed Martin helicopters
Context: Cabinet Committee on Security clears procurement of 24 US multi-role helicopters for Indian Navy.
The 24 Lockheed Martin helicopters will be procured through the foreign military sales (FMS) route from the US government.
- The multi-role helicopters will be equipped with Hellfire missiles and torpedoes, and are meant to help the Indian Navy track submarines in the Indian Ocean, where China is expanding its presence.

39. Pakke tiger reserve
Why in News? Arunachal Pradesh State government is planning to build a 692.7 km highway through the Pakke Tiger Reserve (PTR) in East Kameng district.
Named the East-West Industrial Corridor, the highway aims to connect Bhairab Kunda in West Kameng district and Manmao in Changlang district along Arunachal Pradesh’s border with Assam.

Key facts:
- Pakke Tiger Reserve is also known as Pakhui Tiger Reserve.
- This Tiger Reserve has won India Biodiversity Award 2016 in the category of ‘Conservation of threatened species’ for its Hornbill Nest Adoption Programme.
- It is bounded by Bhareli or Kameng River in the west and north, and by Pakke River in the east.
- Neighbours: Papum Reserve Forest in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam’s Nameri National Park, Doimara Reserve Forest and Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The main perennial streams in the area are the Nameri, Khari and Upper Dikorai. West of Kameng River is Sessa Orchid Sanctuary.

40. Olive Ridley turtles

Why in News? Preparations are almost done at the Rushikulya rookery on the Odisha coast to welcome and protect olive ridley turtles during mass nesting.

Security: To provide security to mother turtles as well as the eggs from human and predator intervention, the forest department is erecting an over 5-km-long fence of metal net from Gokharkuda to Bateswar. This stretch is the most preferred location for mass nesting in the Rushikulya rookery.

Key facts:
- The Olive Ridleys are the second smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- They inhabit warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.
- It is well known for its arribadas or annual mass nestings.
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable.
- Protection under CITES Appendix 1 and the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.
- Operation Kachhapa: Launched by the Wildlife Protection Society of India in collaboration with the Orissa State Forest Department and the Wildlife Society of Odisha and other local NGOs.

41. Rohtang pass

Located on the eastern Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas.
- It connects the Kullu Valley with the Lahaul and Spiti Valleys of Himachal Pradesh.
- The pass lies on the watershed between the Chenab and Beas basins.

42. Surajkund International Crafts Mela

What is it? It is unique as it showcases the richness and diversity of the handicrafts, handlooms and cultural fabric of India, & is the largest crafts fair in the world.
- This is 34th time the Surajkund Mela will be held at Faridabad.
• The Mela is organized by the Surajkund Mela Authority & Haryana Tourism in collaboration with Union Ministries of Tourism, Textiles, Culture and External Affairs.
• Theme state: For the 34th Surajkund International Crafts Mela-2020, the state of Himachal Pradesh has been chosen to be the Theme State.
• The main motto behind this festival is to promote handicrafts, handlooms with the aid of craftsmen invited from all over the country. So basically this craft festival is a platform for artists across the globe to showcase their culture and talent.

43. Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary

Context: The decks have been cleared to notify the Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka’s Chamarajanagar district as a tiger reserve. The approval from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is expected any time now.

• The sanctuary presently has about 20 tigers.
• Once notified, Chamarajanagar district will have the rare distinction in the country of having three tiger reserves. It already has Bandipur and Biligiri Ranganatha Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve within its territorial limits.
• Also, with this, Karnataka will have six tiger reserves, the others being Nagarhole, Bhadra, and Anshi-Dandeli, apart from Bandipur and BRT Tiger Reserves.

44. Crasedotropis gretathunbergae

It is a new species of land snail discovered recently. It is named in honour of Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg.

• The new species comes from tropical rainforests and is sensitive to drought and extreme temperatures.
• The snails were found during a field course conducted by Taxon Expeditions at Kuala Belalong Field Studies Centre in Brunei.
• Features: The two-millimetre-long snails have dark grey tentacles, a pale body and a concave shell, whose outer part is greenish-brown.

45. Places in News- Idlib

Why in News? The nine-year-old war in Syria is currently raging in the northwestern province of Idlib, with rapidly escalating tensions between government forces of President Bashar al-Assad and the Turkish military.

Where is it located?
Idlib is a city in northwestern Syria, 59 kilometers southwest of Aleppo, which is the capital of the Idlib Governorate.

46. SERB Women Excellence Award-2020

• Dr Niti Kumar, Senior Scientist from Division of Molecular Parasitology and Immunology, CSIR-CDRI, Lucknow has received SERB Women Excellence Award-2020.
• This award is given to women scientist below 40 years of age who have received recognition from national academies.
• The women researchers will be supported by research grant of 5 lakhs per annum for 3 years by Science and Engineering Research Board, Department of Science & Technology, Government of India (SERB-DST).
47. International Judicial Conference
Held recently in New Delhi.
- The Conference discussed the changes being introduced by the Government of India to bring Gender Equality in recruiting women in military services, selection process of fighter pilots.
- It also discussed on freedom of women to work in mines at night.
- The Conference also focused on the need for technology to deliver rapid justice.

48. World’s largest cave fish discovered in Meghalaya
- World’s largest species of cave fish has been discovered in Meghalaya’s Jaintia Hills.
- The cave fish is around one and a half feet in length and has no eyes and is white due to a lack of melanin pigmentation.

49. Yongle Blue Hole (YBH)
Why in News?
Carbon more than 8,000 years old lies deep inside a yawning sinkhole in the South China Sea.
About YBH:
- It is the deepest known marine cavern.
- Located in the Xisha Islands of the South China Sea (SCS).
- It measures roughly 300 metres from top to bottom.
- Its waters are mostly isolated from the surrounding ocean and receive little fresh water from rainfall, making it a rare spot to study the chemistry of oxygen-deprived marine ecosystems.

50. German court scraps ban on assisted suicide:
Germany’s highest court has ruled that a 2015 law banning professional assisted suicide was unconstitutional, saying in a landmark decision that people have “the right to a self-determined death”.
Significance: The ruling is a major victory for the terminally ill patients, doctors and assisted suicide organisations who brought the case, complaining that the existing law went too far. The court said the right to a self-determined death included “the freedom to take one’s life and seek help doing so”.

51. What is Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR)?
Context: The Mizoram government has sought the revision of the boundary with Assam, based on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR), 1873 and the Inner Line of the Lushai Hills Notification of 1993.
What is BEFR?
The BEFR allows Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland not to let non-resident Indians in without an inner-line permit for a temporary stay.
Key facts:
- Mizoram used to be the Lushai Hills district of Assam before being made a Union Territory in 1972 and a State in 1987.
- Mizoram shares a 123-km border with southern Assam and has been claiming a 509-square mile stretch “occupied” by the neighbouring State.

52. ICoSDiTAUS-2020:
It is an international conference on standardisation of Diagnosis and Terminologies in AYUSH held recently in Delhi.
The Conference adopted the “New Delhi Declaration on Collection and Classification of Traditional Medicine (TM) Diagnostic Data”.
- The declaration emphasised the commitment of the countries to Traditional Medicine as a significant area of health care. It further sought the opportunity for including traditional systems of medicine like...
Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha in the International Classification of Diseases of WHO, which is the standard diagnostic tool for health management across the world.

ICoSDiTASU2020 is the biggest ever international event dedicated to standardisation of Diagnosis and Terminologies of Traditional Medicine in terms of the broad level of participation covering virtually all the continents.

The conference succeeded in taking forward the objective of expanding the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) into the realm of traditional medicine systems at a conceptual level with all the countries endorsing.

53. Indradhanush:

Indradhanush is a joint military exercise between the air forces of India and the United Kingdom.

The focus of this edition of the exercise, being held in India, is ‘Base Defence and Force Protection’.

54. RAISE 2020:

It is a maiden summit on Artificial Intelligence to spearhead social empowerment, inclusion and transformation.

- The event named RAISE 2020 ‘Responsible AI for Social Empowerment 2020’ will be held in April in New Delhi.
- This is India’s first Artificial Intelligence summit to be organized by the Government in partnership with the industry and the academia.
- The summit will be a global meeting of minds to exchange ideas and charter a course to use AI for social empowerment, inclusion and transformation in key areas like healthcare, agriculture, education and smart mobility amongst other sectors.

55. Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Web Portal:

The MIEWS Dashboard and Portal is a ‘first-of-its-kind’ platform for ‘real time monitoring’ of the prices of tomato, onion and potato (TOP).

It also generates alerts for intervention under the terms of Operation Greens (OG) scheme.

- The portal would disseminate all relevant information related to TOP crops such as prices and arrivals, area, yield and production, imports and exports, crop calendars, crop agronomy, etc. in an easy to use visual format.
- The MIEWS system is designed to provide advisories to farmers to avoid cyclical production as well as an early warning in situations of gluts.

56. What is 2020 CD3, a mini-moon?

**Context:** Astronomers have observed a small object orbiting Earth, which they have dubbed a 2020 CD3, “mini-moon” or the planet’s “second moon”.

**Key features:**

- It is actually an asteroid, about the size of a car; its diameter is about 1.9-3.5 m. It is called a Temporarily Captured Object (TCO).
- And unlike our permanent Moon, the mini-moon is temporary; it will eventually break free of Earth’s orbit and go off on its own way.
What is Henneguya salminicola?
It is a non-oxygen breathing animal discovered recently. It is a fewer-than-10-celled microscopic parasite that lives in salmon muscle. It relies on anaerobic respiration (through which cells extract energy without using oxygen). It does not have a mitochondrial genome. Mitochondria is the “powerhouse” of the cell, which captures oxygen to make energy.

National School of Drama:
Set up by the Sangeet Natak Akademi as one of its constituent units in 1959. In 1975, it became an independent entity and was registered as an autonomous organization under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, fully financed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Bharat Rang Mahotsav, or the 'National Theatre Festival', established in 1999, is the annual theatre festival of National School of Drama (NSD), held in New Delhi, today it is acknowledged as the largest theatre festival of Asia, dedicated solely to theatre.

ICGS Varad:
Context: The Indian Coast Guard’s Offshore Patrol Vessel, ICGS Varad has been commissioned into service. Key facts:
- ICGS Varad is the fifth in the series of seven offshore patrol vessels, being constructed by Larsen and Toubro as a part of their 2015 contract with the Union Ministry of Defence.
- The vessel is the first major defence ship to clear all the sea trials in one single sea sortie, creating a record of sorts in the Indian shipbuilding industry.
- The ICGS Varad will be deployed at Paradip in Odisha, under the operational control of the North-Eastern Region’s Coast Guard.
- ICGS Varad will be deployed for the surveillance of India’s Exclusive Economic Zone.