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Category: ART AND CULTURE

1. Restoration of Ajmer Dargah

Context:

The Dargah of Ajmer is undergoing restoration and redevelopment of the interiors of the Mehfil Khana, widening of gates, structural consolidation, facade work in the courtyards, cleaning of stone surfaces, and new terracing in lime concrete.
Ajmer Dargah:
- Dargahs are the tomb or shrine of an Islamic saint.
- Ajmer’s Dargah of Moinuddin Chishti was built in the 13th century.
- Moinuddin Chishti is remembered as Khwaja Garib Nawaz, or the benefactor of the poor.
- The dargah distributes degh ka khana (food from a cauldron).
- The food is prepared in two big deghs, which were made during Mughal emperor Akbar’s reign.

Architecture of the Dargah:
- In 1579, Akbar reconstructed the sanctum sanctorum and built the dome.
- The tomb was constructed in wood, later covered with a stone canopy.
- It was renovated in later years by Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Jahanara.
- The square structure of the royal darbar (Mehfil Khana), was built in 1888 AD.
- The Dargah was organically built with various materials, ranging from brick and marble to sandstone.

Restoration Work:
- The massive restoration work is undertaken as part of a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative.
- The patterned ceiling will be designed on the lines of Kashmiri Khatambandh (a woodwork ceiling with a carved geometric pattern), and Mughal stone inlay flooring.
- Work is also going on at the famous Shahjahani Gate, built by the Mughal emperor Shahjahan to mark the expansion of the dargah complex beyond the Buland Darwaza.

Cleanliness of the Monument:
- The project under the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan also revolves around sanitation, cleanliness, and waste management within the dargah’s periphery.
- The work entails providing clean drinking water for pilgrims, building toilets, and kiosk management.
- Every day, seven tones of rose petals are wasted. For the flower-waste disposal, a compost waste converter has been installed.
- The team is working on the revival of wudu (Islamic ritual purification) points so that pilgrims can wash their hands, face and feet before offering namaz.

Category: HISTORY

1. Mamallapuram to host Modi-Xi meet in October

Context:
- The historic coastal town of Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) in Tamil Nadu is expected to be the venue for the second India-China informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping.
- The leaders are likely to make a visit to the ancient monuments in the coastal town.
- Mamallapuram also hosted the Defence Expo 2018 or known as Defexpo, the Union Defence Ministry’s annual event with international participation.

Mamallapuram:
- Pallava king Narasimhavarman I (630 AD – 668 AD), also called Mahamalla or Mamalla founded the city of Mamallapuram or Mahabalipuram which is named after him.
- He had defeated and killed Pulakesin II of Chalukya dynasty in 642 AD, took control of Vatapi, the Chalukya capital and assumed the title ‘Vatapikonda’.
- The Shore temple of Mamallapuram was built during the reign of Pallava king Narasimhavarman II, also known as Rajasimha (700 – 728 AD).
- There is one each Shiva shrine facing east and west and a middle shrine of Vishnu in Anantashayana pose.
- The presence of three main shrines is a unique feature. It is probable that the shrines were not all built at the same time.
- There are sculptures of Nandi the bull (Shiva’s mount) along the walls of the temple.
- There is evidence of a water reservoir and a gopuram.
- Other monuments at the site are the rathas (chariot temples), mandapas, and rock relief sculptures such as the Descent of the Ganges (penance of Arjuna).
- The monuments of Mamallapuram had been classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- The site has been identified by the Ministry of Tourism as one of the 17 sites in 12 clusters for development under Iconic Tourist Sites Development Project.

Hubei Provinical Museum:

- The first informal summit between both the leaders was held in Wuhan in China during April, 2018.
- During the first informal summit, the leaders had made a visit to the Hubei provincial museum.

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY

1. Assam to Move Supreme Court for NRC Reverification in Select Districts

Context:

- The Assam government would approach the Supreme Court again for a reverification process of the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) in a couple of districts.

Background:

- The statement came after the publication of the final NRC list that excluded more than 19 lakh individuals.
- Earlier, the state government asked for a reverification of 20% of the cases in border districts and 10% in other districts.
- However, the Supreme Court denied that request.

Anomalies found:

- The state government has raised concerns over several technical flaws in the process that may have caused the exclusion of Bengali Hindu refugees who had crossed over to Assam before 1971.
- It is alleged that many NRC officials did not recognise refugee certification issued before 1971.
- It is doubted that many people did not appeal against their exclusion when the draft NRC had released. Unofficial count goes up to 3 lakhs.
- The NRC authority has registered many cases where the documents submitted were questionable.
- It is alleged that deletions were low in border areas where populations were high while it was higher in tribal areas.
The opposition party has asked the authorities to start the process of filing appeals only after providing certified copies to those excluded from the NRC, citing reasons for their exclusion.

Not ‘Stateless’ People:

- Ministry of External Affairs assured that those individuals excluded from the final list of the NRC will not become stateless or a foreigner and they will continue to enjoy equal rights available to all Indians.
- It was added that the implementation of the NRC was a scientific and non-discriminatory process done in accordance with the democratic traditions of India, which leaves no room for bias and injustice.
- Those who are not in the final list will not be detained till they have exhausted all the remedies available under the law.
- The Government will follow ‘equal rights for all’ and ‘respect for the rule of law’ and would support those appealing for reconsideration of their applications.

Global Response:

- UN High Commissioner for Refugees had expressed concern and urged India not to leave anyone as a stateless subject.
- However, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh reiterated that the NRC was an internal matter of India that would not affect Bangladesh.
- He added that the excluded individuals will not be deported to Bangladesh, as India has maintained so.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. India Facing Prolonged Slowdown: Former Prime Minister

Context:

- Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the 5% growth in India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) signalled a prolonged slowdown.

Concerns Raised:

- Singh’s statement came after a slow GDP growth rate of 5% was reported for the first quarter of 2019-20 financial year.
- He said the state of the economy was deeply worrying pointing to the near 0% growth of the manufacturing sector.
- He projected a gloomy picture of the economy illustrated by a depressed demand and consumption, lower tax revenues, job losses in formal and informal sector, negative investor sentiment and tax terrorism.
- He claimed that the economy had not fully recovered from the all-round mismanagement of the government, blunders of demonetisation and a hastily implemented GST.
- He also attacked the government for taking ₹1.76 lakh Cr. from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reserves, eroding the autonomy of the independent institutions and credibility of government data. The resilience of the RBI will be tested after this record transfer to the government.
- Budget announcements and rollbacks have shaken the confidence of international investors.
- India has not been able to increase its exports to take advantage of opportunities that have arisen in

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global trade due to geopolitical realignments.

Concerns in Rural India:

- He shared the concern about farmers not receiving adequate prices and declining rural incomes.
- He added that the low inflation rate comes at the cost of our farmers and their incomes, by inflicting misery on over 50% of India’s population.

Way Forward:

- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman refused to respond to Dr. Singh’s statement.
- The Minister said that the government is responding to the industry requirements in terms of employment.
- She added that the Centre was responding to issues raised by various sectors separately.
- She has already held consultations with the automobile industry.
- The government hopes that the monsoon would meet the basic requirements for agriculture.
- The government wants all vehicles to have their due market share and it should not be confused with the promotion of Electric Vehicles (EVs).

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Project to Naturally Treat Wastewater

Context:

- Delhi Government will commission a pilot project to naturally treat 10 lakh litres of wastewater per day.

Details:

- The ₹1.85 Cr. project will be undertaken by the Irrigation and Flood Control Department in Ghoga village, north Delhi.
- The treated water will be supplied by a pipeline to a 2 acre dry water body at a distance of 1.2 km from the project.
- In the test runs, the blackish water turned clean as it passed through the system.

Water Shortage in Delhi:

- The city faces a water shortage with requirement of about 1,120 million gallons per day (MGD) and average production of about 930 MGD.
- Polluted water cannot recharge groundwater as percolation into the ground is less due to sludge and waste present in it.

Mechanism of Natural Treatment:

- The water from the Ghoga drain first goes into a ‘sedimentation-cum-biodigester tank’, where heavy suspended solids settle as the wastewater flows through criss-cross dividers in the tank.
- The water then passes through one of the four chambers of wetlands, which have plants and rocks.
- There will be a sand carbon filter too.
- The bacteria present in the roots of the plant (Canna indica) breaks down the chemicals and heavy metals in the water.
• The anaerobic and aerobic reactions will digest the pollutants.

Benefits:

• The Biological Oxygen Demand [BOD] level is radically reduced from 330 PPM to 40 PPM.
• It will also help recharge the groundwater. Recharging the groundwater will help raise the water table and reduce the water crisis.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. A New Ethics for a Sustainable Planet

Context:

In the background of recurring natural calamities, it is required to formulate a new sustainable policy for the future of the planet.

Natural Calamities:

• Brazil’s Amazon forests are ablaze with dozens of fires.
• Most of them were set intentionally by loggers and others seeking greater access to forest land.
• The fires are paving the way for a global climate catastrophe.
• How long the fires can continue is unclear.
• Many cities in Europe and elsewhere have seen high temperatures never before experienced.
• Heat waves have also accelerated melting of glaciers in Greenland at a rate that was not anticipated by scientific models until much later this century.

Reasons behind Climate Change:

• Energy and transport sectors are mainly responsible for the accumulation of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere.
• Deforestation, industrial agricultural systems, changes in land use patterns and desertification are also major drivers of climate change.
• Agriculture, forestry and other land use activities accounted for around 23% of the total net anthropogenic emissions of GHGs during 2007-2016.

IPCC Report:

• The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently brought out a special report on Climate Change and Land that covers desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems.
• The report makes it clear that unless land is managed in a sustainable manner, the diminishing chance that humanity will survive climate change will become smaller still.
Land management:

- Land provides food, water, livelihoods, biodiversity and a range of other benefits from its ecosystems.
- However, decades of poor land management in the agricultural system is a huge concern.
- Soils have become depleted with heavy use of chemicals.
- Farms have few or no friendly insects.
- Monoculture has led to a reduction in the use of indigenous crop varieties with useful characteristics.
- Groundwater is depleted.
- Polluted farm runoffs are contributing to contaminated water bodies and destroying biodiversity.
- The system no longer supports agricultural households, and it has eventually led to farmer suicides.

Are the Global Powers Withdrawing from their Responsibilities?

- European leaders and civil society in many places are organising protests to oppose policies that encourage the fires.
- However, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has stated that they are an internal matter and that they were actually started by the very non-governmental organisations who are now shouting “fire”.
- U.S President Donald Trump has withdrawn from the Paris Climate Agreement stating that it is against the national interests of the U.S.
- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a vocal critic of European integration, is uncertain about climate change.
- He accepts funding from groups which deny climate change while also saying that he would ask the U.S. to take climate change more seriously.
- These policies may appear to be part of a nationalist ideology.
- But these actions have consequences that goes beyond national boundaries and impact all creatures that share life on the planet.

Way Forward:

- Better management of farm land entails implementing more sustainable agricultural practices such as:
  - Reducing chemical input drastically.
  - Using natural methods of agro ecology.
  - These methods would reduce emissions and enhance resilience to warming.
  - Conversion of grassland to cropland need to be avoided.
  - Equitable management of water should be brought in for agriculture.
  - Other methods include:
    - Crop diversification
    - Agroforestry
    - Investment in local and indigenous seed varieties that can withstand higher temperatures.
    - Practices that increase soil carbon and reduce salinisation.

Sustainable Food Systems

- Sustainable food systems involve the following factors:
  - Reducing food waste. It is estimated that a quarter of the food produced is being wasted.
  - Eating locally grown food.
  - Cutting meat consumption.
  - Stopping deforestation.
  - Conserving mangroves, peatland and other wetlands.
Land Use Policy for Future:

- Land use policy should incorporate the following factors:
  - Better access to markets for small and marginal farmers.
  - Empower women farmers.
  - Expand agricultural services.
  - Strengthen land tenure systems.
  - Sustainable land management can reduce inequality and poverty.
  - It will also help societies adapt better to climate change and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Fresh template needed:

- The narrow lens of nationalism is no longer serving us in thinking about how to address the transnational challenges of climate change and land.
- We need a new planetary ethics that supports alternative systems for a sustainable future of earth.
- It needs to cultivate the growth of ecological sensibilities, support pluralism, enhance the quality of life, shift values away from consumerism and create new identities and cultures that transcend conventional boundaries.

Successful Models:

- There have been successful civil society movements that have transcended borders. Ex.: La Via Campesina, the Transition Network, and Bioregionalism.
- More recently, Fridays for Future and Fossil Fuel Divestment are part of such evolving initiatives.
- The Great Transition Initiative focus on seeing our place as part of the web of life, instead of at its centre. Our sensibilities have to shift just as Copernicus changed the perception of the earth from the centre of the universe to being one among many planets.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Adequacy of Counter Measures against Economic Slowdown

Context:

The counter measures declared by the Union Government against the economic slowdown may not be adequate for a revival of the economy.

The Role of Fiscal Policy in Economics:

- In 2005, a Nobel laureate in economics claimed that the fiscal policy, associated with profligacy, had no role at all and the problem of depression has been solved.
- A few years later, the S. fiscal deficit raised three-fold and the world fall into an economic slowdown.
- Then he stated that it is alright to rely on fiscal policy in the face of an impending crisis.

Factors of Higher Growth Rate:

- Our experience of the five years of very high growth over 2003-08, when the economy grew at its fastest ever, tells us that three factors had played a role in it.
- Unusually high rates of agricultural growth.
- Record levels of public investment.
• Higher level of exports.

The State of Economy in India:

• After the Budget had been presented, the government met industrialists for policy inputs.
• Some of the tax proposals were rolled back in a press conference held a few weeks later.
• The government revealed its anxiety about the state of the economy.
• At present, India has an economy in which growth has been declining for close to two and a half years.

Counter Measures taken by the Government:

• Three sets of announcements were made by the Finance Minister recently:

1. Concessions impacting upon the automobile sector.

2. Proposals for the banking sector.

• Infusion of capital upto ₹70,000 Cr. into the public sector banks is one of the most significant measures related to banking. This is expected to contribute to a potential ₹5 lakh Cr. expansion of credit.
• A proposal to ensure that loan decisions taken by bankers are treated as economic decisions and not as instances of corruption when a loan goes awry.
• There was the announcement that public sector banks will pass on more of the policy rate cuts that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has effected in several rounds.

3. Change in the practice of the Income Tax (IT) Department regarding the procedure adopted for issuing an IT notice.

Are the Counter Measures Adequate?

• Addressing the problems of any one sector (automobiles) when several are equally stressed is not fair governance.
• There have been reports of severe stress in the agricultural sector, packaged foods industry, etc.
• Change brought in for IT notice could address the issue of tax terrorism.
• But only a thorough social audit of the processes adopted by the tax authorities can establish whether it would be sufficient to ensure that honest firms are not suffering and that the government receives all the revenue due to it.
• Industrialists are under pressure to not speak out against government officials.
• The compulsory retirement of income tax personnel for malpractice recently point to not everything being well within that department.
• Some of the proposals for the banking sector are quite sound.
• But, if the government’s intention was to reverse the slowing of growth they are unlikely to make much of a difference.
• Public sector banking has been hobbled by the colonial attitude that India’s public servants cannot be trusted.
• It leads to a continuous surveillance that is not conducive to their exercising initiative in lending.
• At the same time, the non-performing assets (NPA) crisis points to the role of political pressure on banks in the past.

Other Challenges:
Even if the **lending rates** are set to be lowered, it may not revive the economy.

Generally, the potential of **monetary policy** in reversing sluggishness in the economy is considered to be weak.

There is a belief among economists that a **rise in the rate of interest** can hold back a decision to invest by raising the cost of finance.

On the other hand, an interest **rate reduction** can do little in the absence of an urge among investors to commit capital.

A lack of understanding of the factors governing investment is evident in the suggestion often seen in the press that the government must ‘revive animal spirits’ in the economy.

**Animal spirits** were originally imagined as the spontaneous urge to either undertake investment or hold back from it.

The expectation of future profits is the key element here for **potential investors**.

The government can have a role only if it can affect **long-term profit expectations**.

The government accepts that the economy needs more growth but insists that this can only come via **private investment**.

But the private sector awaits an improvement in growth before deciding whether to invest.

The package announced by the Finance Minister did not relate to either **agriculture, public investment or export**.

**Exports** depend to an equal extent on factors beyond India’s control. But the government could have addressed the other two factors.

It had nothing for the **rural sector** as well, which clearly needs attention.

The government is reluctant to step up **public investment** because of **fiscal constraints**.

**Way Forward:**

- A proposal for a near-automatic adjustment of **public sector banks passing on the policy rate** cuts announced by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is welcome.
- But, the banks are worried about the **risk attached to some loans**. The risk premium based on their prime lending rate, which itself depends on factors other than the policy rate.
- The decision **should be left to the banks**.
- Government needs to take proactive steps focusing on **private investment**.
- Long term infusion of capital in the banking sector should have been accompanied by **governance reforms** enforcing honest behaviour and secure the public banks from political pressure.
- There should be an expansion of **the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**, with attention paid to building assets that most strongly impact agricultural output.
- Government should increase **public investment** by managing the fiscal constraints.

**Category: POLITY**

1. **The Aftermath of NRC**

**Context:**

The publication of the **final National Register of Citizens** may not end the issue of illegal immigration to Assam. There also exists an uncertainty about the fate of those who have been excluded from the list.

**Fate of the Excluded People:**

- The list leftover **9 million** people staring at statelessness including a serving MLA, a former MLA, and retired Army men.
- Those left out are not foreigners until the **tribunals** set up to determine their fate pronounce them so. The process could go all the way to the Supreme Court.
The administration is readying detention centres, but only a veritable ‘prison state’ can house such numbers.

Concerns:

- The errors are suspected to be more procedural than targeted.
- Assistance from the State government and political parties should have been forthcoming from the time the updating exercise was rolled out on the ground in 2015.
- It was mostly left to organisations and concerned activists to come to the aid of thousands of issues regarding documentation.
- The centre’s plan for a Citizenship Amendment Bill to extend citizenship to non-Muslims alone would add to the worry.
- Even those whose names appear on the list have no assurance that they will not be deemed ‘illegal immigrants’ sometime in the future. They have no prospect of permanent security and dignity of citizenship.
- Estimates of the number of ‘illegal immigrants’ from Bangladesh range from five to ten million. But the Bengali-origin Assamese have long maintained that the estimates are grossly exaggerated.
- The process of NRC was monitored and driven by the Supreme Court of India, in ways that did little to defend the constitutional rights of the residents of Assam.
- The burden of proof was shifted to the residents to prove that they were citizens, based on documents such as those linked to birth, schooling and land ownership which impoverished and unlettered rural residents anywhere would find hard to muster.
- Even when residents succeeded in producing these documents, they were often rejected for small discrepancies, such as in the English-language spelling of Bengali names or in the age even though it is well-known that most rural people do not know their dates of birth.
- Many of them do not have legal land records. And in the middle of the NRC process, an arbitrary category was introduced of the ‘indigenous’ Assamese, who were treated much more leniently even when they could not produce the required documents.
- The Foreigner Tribunals (FTs) have operated in openly hostile and arbitrary ways. The presiding officers of FTs are often lawyers with no judicial experience and appointed with no security of tenure by the State government, follow no due process, and are reportedly driven by informal targets to maximise the numbers of persons who they deem to be ‘foreigners’.
- There is also the enormous workload that the appeals will engender. There are only 100 at present. Further, it is not just people whose names have been excluded from the NRC whose cases will be considered by the FTs.
- Anxieties about land, culture and migration have created entrenched fissures in the social and political life of Assam.
- Home Minister had earlier stated about extending the NRC to all of India. If it is being done with amendments to the citizenship law, it would mean the destruction of the secular Constitution of India.

Assamese Sub-Nationalism

- Assamese sub-nationalism was never communal but language-based. Its supporters do not worry whether Bengalis are Hindu or Muslim.
- The Government’s plan to disenfranchising or deporting Bengali Hindus (through the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill) goes against this concept.
- The Assam agitation was clear in its demand of ‘detection, deletion (from electoral rolls) and deportation’.
- However, there is no clarity on Bangladesh accepting those who will be declared ‘illegal immigrants’ at the end of this process.
Hope for those who were excluded:

- The **Home Ministry** has **extended the time to file appeals** against exclusion in the Foreigners Tribunal from 60 to 120 days.
- The State government and many political parties have **promised to offer legal help** to those excluded.
- India has thus far maintained that the NRC update is the **nation’s internal matter**, and Bangladesh has never acknowledged any illegal crossings across its borders.

Alternative Roadmaps:

- Instituting a **system of work permits and incentives** as a renewed attempt to push Bangladesh to take in some of the declared foreigners.
- Other ‘friendly’ **State governments** may volunteer to share some of the burden of suspected immigrants.
- The Supreme Court could still consider limited **reverification** of those who were excluded, though it had earlier rejected the plea for the same.

Category: **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

1. **Pakistan’s Irresponsible Rhetoric**

   **Context:**
   
   In the aftermath of massive changes with respect to Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistani leadership continues to deliver immature statements while the Indian counterparts are maintaining a responsible rhetoric.

   **Immature Statements by Pakistan:**

   - **Statement by Pakistan Prime Minister** Imran Khan threatening war and violence against India and in Jammu and Kashmir are **irresponsible, escalatory and dangerous**.
   - He has even spoken about the **possibility of a nuclear war**, while a Minister went to the extent of announcing a time frame for starting a war. Several diplomats have called for **jihad**.
   - Pakistan’s reputation as a **reckless nuclear power** is reinforced in all this.
   - Their military has tested a **surface-to-surface missile** amid the tensions.
   - It is also continuing support for Islamist **terrorist outfits**.

   **Real Issue of Pakistan:**

   - An ambition to be equivalent with India in terms of **military power** has ruined Pakistan economically, though the generals and clerics that controls it has benefitted.
   - These vested interests have placed **Kashmir** as central to Pakistan’s national identity that they understand as exclusive and Islamist.
   - Pakistan is trying to catch the world’s attention in the recent course of affairs.

   **India’s Mature Response:**

   - India has set for itself high standards as a **democratic secular polity** and a **responsible nuclear power**.
   - India has also **ruled out any talks** with political leaders in J&K, separatists or mainstream.
   - Since 2014, India has also rejected any role for Pakistan on the question of J&K.
   - Indian Ministers have been saying that the only point to be discussed with Pakistan is the return of
parts of the region that is under its control

- However, India has also indicated that it would be open to reviewing its ‘no first use’ nuclear doctrine.

Global Powers Not Interested?

- India calculates that global powers are caught up in their own crises and have no interest to be involved in any India-Pakistan dispute.
- India has also ruled out the option of mediation by any other country in its relations with Pakistan.

Conclusion:

- Since India has disrupted the equilibrium in Kashmir, we must now work harder to restore it and reach out to Pakistan.
- Politicians must continue to restrict themselves from making irresponsible statements like the Pakistan counterparts are doing.

F. Tidbits

1. Recyclable Idols for Ganesh Chaturthi

- Tirupati has taken the initiative of ‘recyclable’ idols for Ganesh Chaturthi festival.
- There are two huge idols in the temple town which need no immersion as they will be dismantled and distributed among the devotees after the festival.
- A 30-foot idol made of two lakh clay bangles is placed on the city outskirts.
- Another huge idol in the city is made of dry coconut (copra).

2. Russia to Train Indian Astronauts

- Russia will help in four or five critical areas of Gaganyaan including training of Indian astronauts at Russian facilities beginning this year.
- Russia will also help in adapting their technology based on Indian requirements. The partnership will reduce time delay and the margins of error.
- The process of astronaut selection will begin shortly.
- They will go through a 15-month training at the end of which further selection will be made.
- There will be further six to eight months advanced training in India prior to the actual launch.
- A special ISRO unit will be established in the embassy in Moscow to facilitate increased cooperation between India and Russia in view of the Gaganyaan programme.
- Space cooperation will be reviewed at the highest level during the summit meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin later this week in Vladivostok.

- The difference between space launches and human launches is that space launches tend to aim for the optimum whereas human launches aim for perfection.

3. Aadhaar System for NRIs

- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has said its systems will be ready within three months to issue Aadhaar cards to NRIs with Indian passports without the mandatory 180 day waiting period.
- The scheme was announced in the Budget.
- Appropriate technological changes will be implemented and an appointment facility will be provided where people outside the country also can apply for a time slot and specify the place in India, where
they would like to collect their Aadhaar card.

- After the fourth Aadhaar Seva Kendra (ASK) in Hisar, the UIDAI which has made operational two more in Bhopal and Chennai.
- UIDAI is confident of meeting its target of opening 114 such centres in the coming months at an estimated cost of ₹300-₹400 Cr. to facilitate enrolment, updating and other activities.

4. 80 Years After Second World War, Germany Asks Poland’s Forgiveness

- German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier asked Poland’s forgiveness for World War II crimes.
- Poland suffered some of the worst horrors of Second World War II. Nearly six million Poles died in the conflict that killed more than 50 million people overall.
- The figure includes the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. Half of them were Polish.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Longest Electrified Railway Tunnel

- Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu dedicated nation’s longest electrified tunnel connecting Venkatachalam and Obulavaripalle in Andhra Pradesh.
- The 6.7 km long tunnel between 6.6 km between Cherlopalli and Rapuru would provide viable rail connectivity between the Krishnapatnam Port and the hinterland for seamless movement of freight.
- The newly constructed tunnel will help in reducing the travel time by 5 hours.
- LED lighting provided at 10 m intervals inside the tunnel.
- Fail safe earthing arrangements are provided for safety of personnel working in tunnel.
- The tunnel, built at a cost of ₹437 Cr., has 44 trolley refuges and 14 cross passages in a horseshoe design.

2. Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB)

- The Fourth General Assembly of the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) will take place in Bengaluru.
- India will take over as A-WEB’s chair for 2019–21.
- Representatives from election bodies in over 50 countries will congregate in to share their electoral experience.
- The Election Commission of India will hold an international conference on ‘Initiatives and Challenges of Social Media and Information Technology in Elections’.
- Since the formation of A-WEB in 2013, India has been its executive board member
- The A-WEB has 115 members and 20 regional associations or organisations as associate members.
- The members include 24 from Asia, 37 from Africa, 31 from America, 17 from Europe, and six from Oceania.
- The EC of India will continue to remain on the executive board of the A-WEB for 2021–23.

3. Shiva temples of Delhi

- Kalkaji Kali temple, Delhi: It is one of the earliest known places where Shivratri was celebrated in Delhi.
- The first Kali temple was built by Raja Kedarnath of Akbar’s court in the 16th century.
- Naraina Vihar, Delhi: The temple is said to be about 120 years old. But its history goes back to the times of Narainpal, a grandson of the Anangpal of the Tomar dynasty.
- Other temples in Old Delhi are: the Gauri Shankar Mandir of Gangadhar, a Maratha soldier of the British army in the 18th century, Manakchand’s Shivalaya (built in 1845) and Bada Shivalaya (built in 1816 during Akbar Shah’s reign).
Ghanteshwar Mahadev Shivalaya, Dhumimal’s Shivalaya and Pandit Hari Ramji-ka-Shivalaya came up during Bahadur Shah Zafar’s time.
Mankameshwar temple in Agra is surrounded by water.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Which of the following organizations releases the Special Report on Climate Change and Land?

a) World Meteorological Organization
b) Climate Action Network
c) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
d) Global Atmosphere Watch

Ans: c

Explanation:
The Special Report on Climate Change and Land is released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Q2. Consider the following statements with reference to Ajmer Dargah:

1. A Dargah is the tomb or shrine of an Islamic saint.
2. Ajmer Dargah was built as the mausoleum of Nizamuddin Auliya.
3. It has a square structure of the royal darbar called Mehfil Khana.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) 1 and 2 only
d) 1 and 3 only

Ans: d

Explanation:
Ajmer Dargah was built as the mausoleum of Moinuddin Chishti.

Q3. Which of the following historic sites has the rock cut relief sculpture known as Penance of Arjuna or the Descent of the Ganga?

a) Halebidu
b) Mahabalipuram
c) Muziris
d) Adichanellur

Ans: b

Explanation:
The rock-cut relief sculpture known as Penance of Arjuna or the Descent of the Ganga is located at
Q4. Consider the following statements about the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB):

1. The A-WEB was founded in the year 1957.
2. India has been a member since its inception.
3. It has 115 members and 20 regional associations or organisations as associate members.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 3 only

Ans: c

Explanation:

A-WEB was officially inaugurated in 2013 only.

I. UPSC Mains Practise Questions

1. A convergence between global powers is imperative for the formulation of policies against climate change. Discuss in the context of Brazil’s initial refusal of international support in the Amazon fire crisis. (250 words, 15 marks)

2. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has been at the forefront of solving humanitarian crises across the world. Illustrate with suitable examples. (250 words, 15 marks)