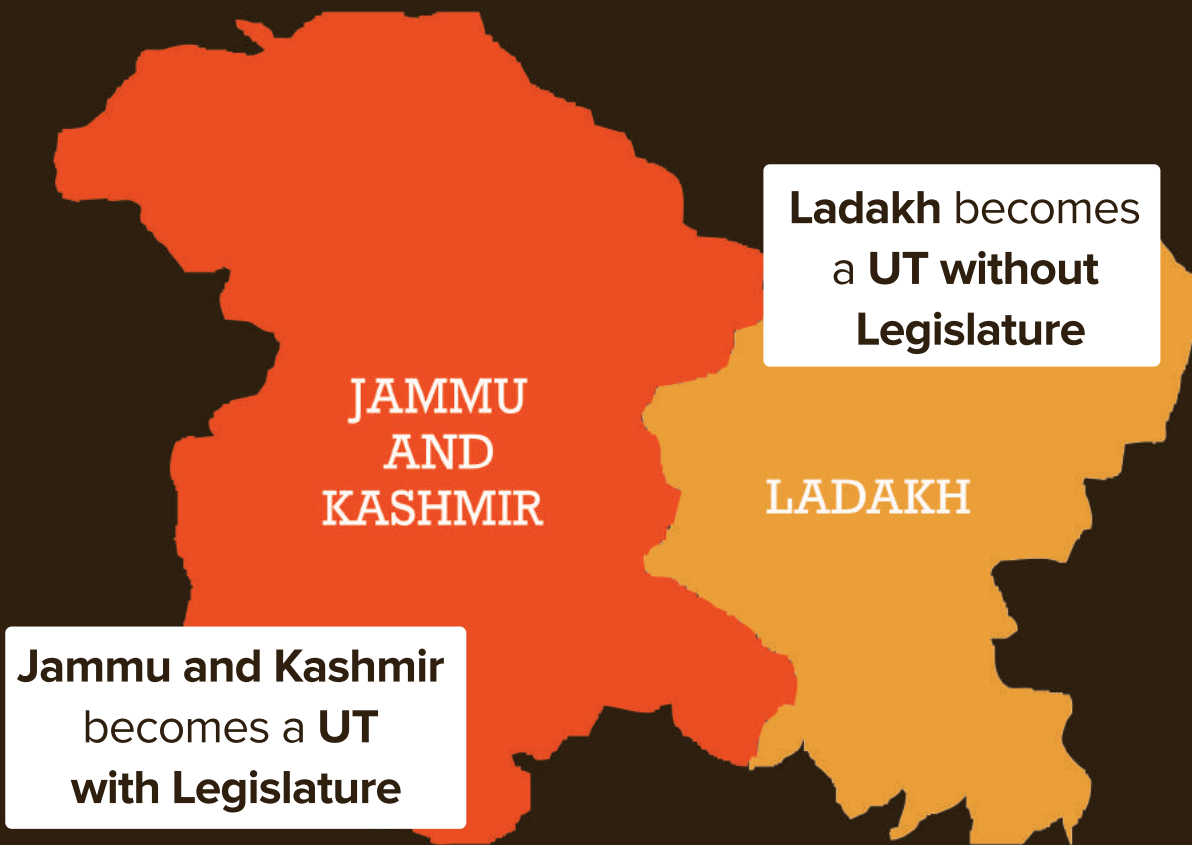


Article 370

From State to Union Territory

ARTICLE 370



National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Fault lines in Assam's NRC



Anti-Lynching Laws

Defeating Mobocracy



Merger of Banks

Is it the panacea for India's economic woes?



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Shaping the responses to global challenges

INCREDIBLE RESULTS

CSE 2018 Results

11 Ranks in Top 50

28 Ranks in Top 100

183 Ranks in the Final List



Rank 11
Puja Priyadarshni



Rank 16
Dhodmise Trupti Ankush



Rank 21
Rahul Jain



Rank 24
Anuraj Jain

CSE 2017

5 Ranks
in top 50

34 Ranks
in top 100

236 Ranks
in the final list



Rank 3
Sachin Gupta



Rank 6
Koya Sree Harsha



Rank 8
Anubhav Singh



Rank 9
Soumya Sharma



Rank 10
Abhishek Surana

CSE 2016

5 Ranks
in top 50

34 Ranks
in top 100

236 Ranks
in the final list



Rank 2
Anmol Sher
Singh Bedi



Rank 5
Abhilash Mishra



Rank 12
Tejaswi Rana



Rank 30
Prabhash Kumar



Rank 32
Avdesh Meena

CSE 2015

5 Ranks
in top 50

34 Ranks
in top 100

236 Ranks
in the final list



Rank 20
Vipin Garg



Rank 24
Khumanthem
Diana Devi



Rank 25
Chandra Mohan
Garg



Rank 27
Pulkit Garg



Rank 47
Anshul Agarwal

CSE 2014

5 Ranks
in top 50

34 Ranks
in top 100

236 Ranks
in the final list



Rank 4
Vandana Rao



Rank 5
Suharsha Bhagat



Rank 16
Ananya Das



Rank 23
Anil Dhameltya



Rank 28
Kushaal Yadav



Rank 39
Vivekanand T.S.

CSE 2013

5 Ranks
in top 50

62 Ranks
in the final list



Rank 9
Divyanshu Jha



Rank 12
Neha Jain



Rank 23
Prabhav Joshi



Rank 40
Gaurang Rathil



Rank 46
Udita Singh

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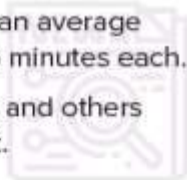
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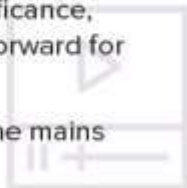
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POLITY

1. **Deliberate, don't disrupt: On Budget session**

Context:

- Vice President has urged all political parties to include code of conduct for MPs and MLAs in their election manifestoes

Details

- The Vice President of India and the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has called upon all political parties to incorporate a code of conduct for people's representatives, including MPs and MLAs, in their election manifestos.
- The code of conduct should include stipulations that the members would not enter the well of the house, nor resort to sloganeering and disruptions or any other unruly behavior such as tearing papers and throwing them in the House.

Background

- In the past lawmakers have taken the route of organised disruption of legislative business.
- It has become common among the political parties and legislators to demonstratively advertise their points of view without recourse to debate.
- A number of crucial bills have taken an inordinate time to be enacted due to disruption, while others were not enacted despite a broad consensus — such as the Women's Reservation Bill — due to the behaviour of a few naysayers.
- Many sessions of Parliament in the recent past saw little business being done due to repeated disruption.

In this context, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu's exhortation to political parties to incorporate a model code of conduct for their legislators in State Assemblies and in Parliament is welcome.

Inference

- If indeed parties adopt a code, it will go a long way in making parliamentary work meaningful.
- Otherwise, the general public will lose interest in the procedural aspects of parliamentary democracy and limit their participation to just voting in the elections.

Need for deliberation not disruption

- The current Budget session sailed through with minimal disruption. Yet the high productivity during the session came without sufficient deliberation over crucial bills, several of which were rushed through without vetting by parliamentary standing and select committees.

- These committees have in the past been useful in expanding discussion over laws with civil society and experts from various streams of the larger society.

* They have also facilitated an enhanced cross-party coordination over issues.

- By not sending a single Bill among the 28 that were introduced and passed to a standing or select committee for scrutiny, the current session accentuated the trend that has minimised the importance of such committees over the last few years.

Key Stats

- Unlike the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-2014), when 71% of the bills were referred to such committees, in the 16th Lok Sabha, they constituted only a fourth of the overall number of bills.
- Time spent on debates in the current session in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha was barely a third of the overall business. This does not augur well for lawmaking.

Conclusion

- As Mr. Naidu has also pointed out correctly, deliberation is an important component of parliamentary democracy apart from legislation and accountability of lawmakers. All three aspects must cohere for a thoroughgoing procedural democracy.

2. **Fast-Track Courts (FTC)**

Background

- FTC's are set up with the major objective of enabling quick and efficient disposal of cases.
 - * They are established to expeditiously dispose of long pending cases in the Sessions Courts and long pending cases of Under trial prisoners.
- The term of scheme on the Fast Track Courts were recommended by the Eleventh Finance Commission
- They were actualized though an executive scheme (as opposed to a statute of the legislature)
- Fast-track courts (FTCs) have been around for a long time, with the first ones being established in the year 2000.

Context:

- Smriti Irani, Minister for Women and Child Development, informed the Rajya Sabha that the government has proposed to set up 1,023 fast-track courts to clear the cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act

Stats

- To quote the Ministry of Law and Justice, at the end of March, there were 581 FTCs operational in the country, with approximately 5.9 lakh pending cases, Uttar Pradesh having the most number of cases.
- However, 56% of the States and Union Territories, including Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, had no FTCs.
- In terms of money, ₹870 crore was released by the Centre between 2000-2001 and 2010-2011 towards these FTCs.

Views of Legal luminaries

- Former Supreme Court chief justice KG Balakrishnan has said the fast track courts were quite successful in reducing the backlog of cases
- Leading lawyer and rights activist Colin Gonsalves says fast-track courts have not turned out to be a "very satisfactory system of delivering justice".
- India's Law Commission sums up the paradox: "Justice delayed is justice denied and at the same time justice hurried is justice buried."

Allocation of cases varies from state to state

- In a survey of FTCs conducted by National Law University Delhi, it was observed that there is a huge variation in the kinds of cases handled by these courts across States, with certain States primarily allocating rape and sexual offence cases to them and other States allocating various other matters.
 - * FTCs in Delhi mostly deal with cases of rape with and without murder, sexual assault against women, and cases involving vulnerable victims.
 - * But in West Bengal, the FTCs presently deal with all types of cases

Has increase in Judges led to reduction in Pendency of cases?

While the Centre is promising to set up FTCs across the country, the moot question is: will a mere increase in the number of judges lead to a direct reduction in pendency of cases?

- Data collated from the Supreme Court's 'Court News' between 2010 and 2017 show otherwise. For instance, in Karnataka, the number of working judges increased between 2012 and 2017 (with occasional dips in certain years) but pendency did not reduce.
- Similarly in other States, such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Delhi and West Bengal, increase or decrease in the number of judges did not affect pendency of cases.

Hence, there are several other factors that have an impact on disposal of cases.

Why FTC have not met intended objective?

- The original concept of fast-track courts envisaged the hiring of additional judges and new infrastructure, including courtrooms, technological facilities and libraries, this has not happened and fast-track courts now function with existing infrastructure and no additional judges.
- Several FTCs lacked technological resources to conduct audio and video recordings of the victims
 - * Designated Vulnerable Victims Deposition Complexes, where testimonies can be conducted, are set up only in few court complexes. Since a different level of sensitivity is required to hear and handle such cases, such designated rooms provide a conducive atmosphere and great comfort to vulnerable victims to share their thoughts in a free manner.
 - * It is of utmost concern that witnesses are sometimes threatened by the system and so do not appear before the courts. This shows that the way the system treats victims who seek legal redress has to be readdressed.
- Inadequate staff and IT infrastructure, frivolous adjournments and over-listing of cases in the cause list are some of the variables.
 - * In addition, designated staff working solely in a FTC is not always present. Sometimes, staff from other (regular) courts end up working in FTCs as well. Staff working in some FTCs are on contractual appointments; so they can leave at any time
- In the police part of the system, there are no designated investigating officers who only investigate cases filed in FTCs.
 - * Investigating officers also do normal policing duties, so their time is shared. Additionally, if an accused is in custody (rather than on bail), then police tend to work faster.
 - * Further if offences take place in different parts of the country, then also it takes more time.
- The forensic science laboratories, which are crucial to the working of FTCs, are highly understaffed and not well-equipped.
 - * They deal with reports relating to both regular courts and FTCs.
 - * This leads to delay in submitting expert reports to courts.
- Furthermore, given the vacancies in subordinate courts across the country, it also needs to be seen whether States will hire additional judges or appoint FTCs from the current pool of judges. For instance, in the case of commercial courts, several States designate special judges from the current pool of judges.

- * Such a move could prove to be problematic as it would increase substantially the workload of the remaining judges.
- In the United Kingdom, where the concept was first experimented with, the courts are backed by special laws. The system is time-bound and gives a definite time to file pleadings, evidence, and dispose of the case.

Steps to be taken by the Govt

For the FTCs to become successful, States will need to take stock of the issues at the ground level.

- It is important that States engage with the principal and senior district judges to get a sense of issues the courts are facing in various districts. Equal attention must be paid to both the metropolitan and far-flung non-metropolitan areas.
- Critical issues such as inadequate court staff, improper physical and IT infrastructure and understaffed forensic labs, which affect the day-to-day functioning of the FTCs, must be comprehensively addressed.
- For wholesome effectiveness, even the corresponding parts of the system, such as the investigation, filing of charge sheet, the forensic reports and appeals must also be fast-tracked

Conclusion

- Merely increasing the number of FTCs to overcome their shortage is not the answer. The need is to revamp the system based on micro-level studies with the stakeholders.
- The FTCs cannot be allowed to routinely function like ordinary courts. Further both internal as well as external factors affecting FTCs should be considered while deciding the issue of delay in justice.

3. Giving voice sample does not violate privacy, says SC

Context:

- In a significant judgment, the Supreme Court held that a judicial magistrate is empowered to order a person to give a sample of his voice for the purpose of investigation.
- The judgment came while answering an issue whether a judicial order compelling a person to give a sample of his voice violates the fundamental right to privacy under Article 20(3) of the Constitution.
- The appeal was filed by Ritesh Sinha against a 2010 order of a magistrate court in Uttar Pradesh allowing police to get his voice sample.

Details:

- A three-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, said directing a person to part with his voice sample to police was not a violation of his fundamental right to privacy.

- It was held that it is not a violation of the fundamental right against self-incrimination.
- It was reasoned that a voice sample was given for the reason of comparison with other voices in order to see if they matched and were of the same person.
- A voice sample by itself is not incriminating evidence.
- The Chief Justice compared a voice sample with other impressions like specimen handwriting, or impressions of his fingers, palm or foot collected by police during investigation.
- The 87th Report of the Law Commission of India in 1980 describes a voice print as a "visual recording of voice". Voiceprints resemble fingerprints, in that each person has a distinctive voice with characteristic features dictated by vocal cavities and articulates.
- The judgment authored by Chief Justice Gogoi said "the fundamental right to privacy cannot be construed as absolute and must bow down to compelling public interest".

4. Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2019

Context

- The Himachal Pradesh Assembly passed a Bill against conversion by force, inducement or through marriages solemnised for the "sole purpose" of adopting a new religion.

Details

- The Bill seeks to repeal the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2006, which is on similar lines.
- The Bill prohibits conversion by misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, inducement, marriage or any fraudulent means.
 - * Any marriage for the sole purpose of conversion will also be declared null and void under Section 5 of the Bill.
- As per the Bill, anyone seeking to convert will need to give a month's notice to the district magistrate, stating that the person is converting on his/her own.
- The priest who performs conversion ceremony will also give a month's notice in advance. Those re-converting to their "parent religion" are exempted from this provision.

Penal Provisions

- The new Bill proposes stringent punishments — up to seven years in jail compared to the three years under the existing law.
- According to the new Bill, if Dalits, women or minors were made to convert, the jail term will be between two-seven years.

5. Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019

context:

- The Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha
- It amends the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956. The Act provides for the adjudication of disputes relating to waters of inter-state rivers and river valleys.

Why the change?

- The main purpose is to make the process of dispute settlement more efficient and effective.
- The amendment is bringing a time limit for adjudicating the disputes. All disputes would now have to be resolved within a maximum of four-and-a-half years.
- The multiplicity of tribunals has led to an increase in bureaucracy, delays, and possible duplication of work.
 - * The replacement of five existing tribunals with a permanent tribunal is likely to result in a 25 per cent reduction in staff strength, from the current 107 to 80, and a saving of Rs 4.27 crore per year.

How it will work?

In the existing mechanism

- Under the Act, a state government may request the central government to refer an inter-state river dispute to a Tribunal for adjudication.
 - * If the central government is of the opinion that the dispute cannot be settled through negotiations, it is required to set up a Water Disputes Tribunal for adjudication of the dispute
- Under the current law, the tribunal has to give its award within three years, which can be extended by another two years.
- In practice, tribunals have taken much longer to give their decisions.

Under the new system, the Centre would set up a DRC once states raise a dispute.

Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC)

- Under the Bill, when a state puts in a request regarding any water dispute, the central government will set up a Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC), to resolve the dispute amicably.
 - * The DRC will comprise of a Chairperson, and experts with at least 15 years of experience in relevant sectors, to be nominated by the central government.
 - * It will also comprise one member from each state (at Joint Secretary level), who are party to the dispute, to be nominated by the concerned state government.

- The DRC will seek to resolve the dispute through negotiations, within one year (extendable by six months), and submit its report to the central government.
 - * If a dispute cannot be settled by the DRC, the central government will refer it to the Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal. Such referral must be made within three months from the receipt of the report from the DRC.

If the DRC fails to settle the dispute, it would be referred to the permanent Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal (ISRWDT)

ISRWDT

- The central government will set up an Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal, for the adjudication of water disputes. This Tribunal can have multiple benches.
 - * All existing Tribunals will be dissolved, and the water disputes pending adjudication before such existing Tribunals will be transferred to the new Tribunal.
- Composition: The Tribunal will consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, three judicial members, and three expert members.
 - * They will be appointed by the central government on the recommendation of a Selection Committee. Each Tribunal Bench will consist of a Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson, a judicial member, and an expert member.
 - * The central government may also appoint two experts serving in the Central Water Engineering Service as assessors to advise the Bench in its proceedings. The assessor should not be from the state which is a party to the dispute.

Time frames:

- Under the Act, the Tribunal must give its decision within three years, which may be extended by two years.
- Under the Bill, the proposed Tribunal must give its decision on the dispute within two years, which may be extended by another year.

Data bank:

- Under the Act, the central government maintains a data bank and information system at the national level for each river basin.
- The Bill provides that the central government will appoint or authorise an agency to maintain such data bank.

Decision of the Tribunal:

- Under the Act, the decision of the Tribunal must be published by the central government in the official gazette. This decision has the same force as that of an order of the Supreme Court.
 - * The Bill removes the requirement of such publication. It adds that the decision of the Bench of the Tribunal will be final and binding on the parties involved in the dispute.
- The Act provided that the central government may make a scheme to give effect to the decision of the Tribunal.
 - * The Bill is making it mandatory for the central government to make such scheme.

Supreme Court

- Supreme Court in the past while hearing a civil suit in the Cauvery dispute, had said the decision of that tribunal could be challenged before it through a Special Leave Petition under Article 136 of the Constitution.

Concerns

- Opposition Parties allege that the proposed legislation has no provision for consultation with states and was an assault on the federal structure.

6. Polygraph, Narcoanalysis Tests**Polygraph Test**

- It is based on the assumption that physiological responses that are triggered when a person is lying are different from what they would be otherwise.
- Instruments like cardio-cuffs or sensitive electrodes are attached to the person, and variables such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration, change in sweat gland activity, blood flow, etc., are measured as questions are put to them.
- A numerical value is assigned to each response to conclude whether the person is telling the truth, is deceiving, or is uncertain.

Narcoanalysis

- It involves the injection of a drug, sodium pentothal, which induces a hypnotic or sedated state in which the subject's imagination is neutralised, and they are expected to divulge true information.
- The drug, referred to as "truth serum" in this context, was used in larger doses as anaesthesia during surgery, and is said to have been used during World War II for intelligence operations.

More recently, investigating agencies have sought to employ these tests in investigation, and are sometimes seen as being a "softer alternative" to torture or 'third degree' to extract the truth from suspects.

Concerns

- However, neither method has been proven scientifically to have a 100% success rate, and remain contentious in the medical field as well.

Are Indian investigators allowed to put suspects through these tests?

- In *Selvi & Ors vs State of Karnataka & Anr* (2010), a Supreme Court Bench comprising Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan and Justices R V Raveendran and J M Panchal ruled that no lie detector tests should be administered "except on the basis of consent of the accused".
 - * The Bench took into consideration international norms on human rights, the right to a fair trial, and the right against self-incrimination under Article 20(3) of the Constitution
- Those who volunteer must have access to a lawyer, and have the physical, emotional, and legal implications of the test explained to them by police and the lawyer, the Bench said.
- It said that the 'Guidelines for the Administration of Polygraph Test on an Accused' published by the National Human Rights Commission in 2000, must be strictly followed.
- The subject's consent should be recorded before a judicial magistrate, the court said.
- The results of the tests cannot be considered to be "confessions", because those in a drugged-induced state cannot exercise a choice in answering questions that are put to them.
- However, any information or material subsequently discovered with the help of such a voluntarily-taken test can be admitted as evidence, the court said.
 - * Thus, if an accused reveals the location of a murder weapon in the course of the test, and police later find the weapon at that location, the statement of the accused will not be evidence, but the weapon will be.

Context

- Gokulnath Shetty retired deputy manager of Punjab National Bank (PNB), refused to give his consent for the test, stating among other reasons, that it could have an adverse effect on his health.
- He also cited a Supreme Court judgment that makes it mandatory to obtain the consent of the accused for such tests.

Why has the CBI sought to use these tests in the PNB case?

- The CBI has said that it has been unable to ascertain Shetty's "other motives and details of undue pecuniary advantage obtained by him".

- Shetty is alleged to have issued fraudulent Letters of Understanding in favour of Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, and their firms in violation of bank rules.

7. Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2019

Context:

- Parliament has passed a Bill which seeks to increase the number of Supreme Court judges from the present 30 to 33 with a view to reducing pendency of cases.

Details

- The Bill amends the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956.
- The Current judges in the Supreme Court is at 30 judges (excluding the Chief Justice of India).
- The Bill increases this number from 30 to 33.

Background

- Initially the Constitution of India provided for a supreme court with a chief justice and 7 judges.
- As the work of the court increased and cases began to accumulate, parliament increased the number of Judges (including the CJI) from the original 8 in 1950 to 11 in 1956, 14 in 1960, 18 in 1978, 26 in 1986 and 31 in 2009.

8. Article 370

370. Temporary provisions with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir

(1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,

(a) The provisions of Article 238 shall not apply in relation to the State of Jammu and Kashmir;

(b) The power of Parliament to make laws for the said State shall be limited to

- * those matters in the Union List and the Concurrent List which, in consultation with the Government of the State, are declared by the President to correspond to matters specified in the Instrument of Accession governing the accession of the State to the Dominion of India as the matters with respect to which the Dominion Legislature may make laws for that State; and
- * such other matters in the said Lists as, with the concurrence of the Government of the State, the President may by order specify Explanation For the purposes of this article, the Government of the State means the person for the time being recognized by the President as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers for the time being in office under the Maharajas Proclamation dated the fifth day of March, 1948 ;

(c) The provisions of Article 1 and of this article shall apply in relation to that State;

(d) such of the other provisions of this Constitution shall apply in relation to that State subject to such exceptions and modifications as the President may by order specify: Provided that no such order which relates to the matters specified in the Instrument of Accession of the State referred to in paragraph (i) of sub clause (b) shall be issued except in consultation with the Government of the State: Provided further that no such order which relates to matters other than those referred to in the last preceding proviso shall be issued except with the concurrence of that Government

(2) If the concurrence of the Government of the State referred to in paragraph (ii) of sub clause (b) of clause (1) or in the second proviso to sub clause (d) of that clause be given before the Constituent Assembly for the purpose of framing the Constitution of the State is convened, it shall be placed before such Assembly for such decision as it may take thereon

(3) Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this article, the President may, by public notification, declare that this article shall cease to be operative or shall be operative only with such exceptions and modifications and from such date as he may specify: Provided that the recommendation of the Constituent Assembly of the State referred to in clause (2) shall be necessary before the President issues such a notification

What is Article 370?

- Article 370 is a constitutional provision that gave Jammu and Kashmir its special status.
- The provision was incorporated in Part XXI of the Constitution: Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions.
 - * As evident from the title of the Part, it was supposed to be a temporary provision and its applicability was projected to last till the formulation and adoption of the State's constitution.
- It restricts the Parliament's legislative powers with respect to state of J&K.

Application of 370

- However, the State's constituent assembly dissolved itself on 25 January 1957 without recommending either abrogation or amendment of the Article 370, leaving the status of the provision on a cliffhanger.
- The provision was later held to have acquired permanent status by way of rulings of the Supreme Court of India and the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir.
- This implied that to apply a central law to the state on subjects included in the Instrument of Accession, mere "consultation" with the state government is required.
- However, to apply a central legislation to matters other than defence, foreign affairs and communications, 'concurrence' of the state government was mandatory.

Jammu and Kashmir Constitution

- Article 3-> Relationship of the State with the Union of India:-The State of Jammu and Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India.
- In the Preamble to the Constitution, not only is there no claim to sovereignty, but there is categorical acknowledgement about the object of the J&K Constitution being "to further define the existing relationship of the state with the Union of India as its integral part thereof.

Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019.

1. (1) This Order may be called the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019.

(2) It shall come into force at once, and shall thereupon supersede the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954 as amended from time to time.

2. All the provisions of the Constitution, as amended from time to time, shall apply in relation to the State of Jammu and Kashmir and the exceptions and modifications subject to which they shall so apply shall be as follows:-

To article 367, there shall be added the following clause, namely:-

"(4) For the purposes of this Constitution as it applies in relation to the State of Jammu and Kashmir-

(a) References to this Constitution or to the provisions thereof shall be construed as references to the Constitution or the provisions thereof as applied in relation to the said State;

(b) references to the person for the time being recognized by the President on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly of the State as the Sadar-i-Riyasat of Jammu and Kashmir, acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers of the State for the time being in office, shall be construed as references to the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir;

(c) references to the Government of the said State shall be construed as including references to the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir acting on the advice of his Council of Ministers; and

(d) in proviso to clause (3) of article 370 of this Constitution, the expression "Constituent Assembly of the State referred to in clause (2)" shall read "Legislative Assembly of the State".

Has Article 370 been scrapped?

- The Presidential order signed by the President of India has not scrapped Article 370.
- But invoking this very article special status of Jammu & Kashmir has been withdrawn.
- Thus Article 370 is very much on the statute book.
- In other words, the move by the government gives full applicability of the Indian Constitution in Jammu and Kashmir. Earlier, only a set of limited provisions such as foreign relations, communication and defence had jurisdiction over Jammu and Kashmir.

What is the status of Article 35-A?

- Since Presidential Order of August 5 has extended all the provisions of the Constitution to Kashmir, Fundamental rights chapter has now been extended and therefore some discriminatory provisions of Article 35-A may not be in accordance with prescribed Rules.
- Therefore the President can also declare this to be inapplicable

Background

- Article 35A of the Indian Constitution is an article that empowers the Jammu and Kashmir state's legislature to define "permanent residents"
- The provision mandates that no act of the State legislature coming under the ambit of Article 35A can be challenged for violating the Indian Constitution or any other law of the land.

Who Are Permanent Residents?

- The rights are given in the state Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir.
 - * as a person who was a state subject on May 14, 1954
 - * who had been a resident of the state for 10 years
 - * Has lawfully acquired immovable property in the state
- The state legislature can alter the definition of a permanent resident by passing a law with a two-third majority.
- Permanent residents are given a Permanent Resident Certificate which forms the basis of their rights in the state.
- It also has a provision to recognize as permanent residents, people who had migrated to Pakistan and returned, though subject to certain conditions.

Rights and Privileges

- Special Rights and privileges are given in the following four categories:
 - * Employment under the state government/ State Public Sector Jobs
 - * Acquisition of immovable property in the state
 - * Settlement in the state
 - * Right to scholarships and such other forms of aid as the state government may provide

Why removal was a necessity?

By reorganising Kashmir's political status, Modi govt is addressing a colonial mess

- In Africa and Asia, there are countless territorial conflicts. The Indo-Tibetan frontier opened up by Curzon remains a contested boundary dispute between India and China. More broadly, the buffers and protectorates constructed by the Raj to limit conflict with Russia are now zones of political contestation between India and a rising China.

| BEFORE | NOW |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special powers exercised by J&K | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No special powers now |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dual citizenship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single citizenship |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate flag for Jammu & Kashmir | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tricolour will be the only flag |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 360 (Financial Emergency) not applicable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 360 will be applicable |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No reservation for minorities such as Hindus and Sikhs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minorities will be eligible for 16% reservation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian citizens from other states cannot buy land of property in J&K | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People from other states will now be able to purchase land or property in J&K |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTI not applicable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTI will be applicable |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duration of Legislative Assembly for 6 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assembly duration in Union Territory of J&K will be for 5 years |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a woman from J&K marries out of states, she would lose the citizenship of the state | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a woman marries out of state or country, she will still retain all her rights and Indian citizenship |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panchayats did not have any rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panchayats will have the same rights as in other states |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to Education (RTE) was not applicable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in the state will benefit from RTE |

- The Durand Line drawn between India and Afghanistan in 1893, a few years before Curzon arrived in India, remains disputed between Kabul and Islamabad. Even the Taliban, nurtured by Pakistan as an instrument to gain influence in Afghanistan, does not accept the Durand Line.
- Many other peripheries of the Raj, from Balochistan in the west to Xinjiang and Kashmir in the north to Tibet and the eastern Himalayan regions between India, upper Burma and China are all in turmoil of varying degrees.

Part of the problem lies in the nature of the frontiers that the Subcontinent inherited from the Raj.

The land borders of India were not defined by a single line; but by what Curzon identifies as the three-fold frontier.

- There was the “administrative frontier” that marked out regions that the Raj governed to the fullest extent.
- Beyond that was the “frontier of active defence” like the Durand Line
- A third was the “strategic frontier” consisting of the outer boundaries of protectorates over which the Raj exercised a measure of control.

Confusion over Control of territories

- While the British Raj, Czarist Russia and Qing China found ways to live with ambiguities in remote corners of the empire, the new nationalist regimes that succeeded them have had much more difficulty.
- The Partition of the Subcontinent, based on religious considerations, added an explosive dimension to an already complex inheritance.
- The successor states to the empires laid formal claims to tracts of territory that had an ambivalent status, but have struggled to realise them.

The colonial past has left territories that are claimed by many countries with significant challenges

- Pakistan has struggled to find stability on its western border lands — where the Baloch and the Pashtun continue to challenge its claims.
- China reacted furiously when Delhi in 1975 ended Sikkim’s protectorate status and integrated it with India. It took nearly three decades for China to accept the new reality.
 - * Beijing continues to claim the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh.
 - * But the arguments with China are now mostly political. After instigating trouble in each other’s territory for a period, Delhi and Beijing are now committed to managing the dispute peacefully, while expanding the broader relationship.
 - * There is frequent spike in military tensions, but there has been no shooting war.

- India has had greater success with Bangladesh. Early on in his first term, Prime Minister Narendra Modi seized the opportunities to settle the disputes with Dhaka on the land and maritime boundary inherited from the Partition.

Conclusion

- But unlike Dhaka and Beijing, Rawalpindi is not really prepared for a peaceful resolution. Repeated efforts by Indira Gandhi (1972), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999), and Manmohan Singh (2005-07) ended in failure. The inherent difficulty of negotiation has been compounded by Pakistan’s use of terrorism and Kashmir’s ambiguous political status within the Indian Union.
- In confronting Pakistan’s terrorism and reorganising the political status of Kashmir, the Modi government has set a new policy template.
- The key to its success lies in finding early political reconciliation within Kashmir and persuading the Pakistan army that its interests are better served by stable, peaceful and a legitimate frontier with India.

Criticisms

Due process

- The process of revocation of Article 370, which ties the state with India, needed the approval of J&K’s Constituent Assembly. In the absence of such an assembly, it can be removed with the concurrence of the state legislative assembly. But the assembly does not exist at the moment either, and the notification suggests that it was the Governor’s concurrence that was obtained to render the provisions irrelevant. This is clearly not sufficient.
- The process has been pushed through without consultations with Kashmir’s political leaders, who have been under detention.
- Further, the reorganization of states requires the consent of the state assembly concerned.
- In this case, J&K has been bifurcated, and statehood diluted to UT status, without any deliberations in the assembly

Article 3 of the Constitution

- It says that before parliament can consider a Bill that diminishes the area of a state or changes its name, the Bill must be “referred by the President to the Legislature of that State for expressing its views thereon”.
- This is an essential safeguard of India’s federal system and has clearly not been followed in this case.
- In parliament, Home Minister invoked that since the J&K assembly was dissolved and the state is under Central rule, it is parliament which gets to exercise the prerogatives of the assembly.

- This move will strain India's social fabric not only in its impact on Jammu and Kashmir but also in the portents it holds for federalism, parliamentary democracy and diversity.
- The Centre's abrupt move disenfranchised people on a matter that directly affects their life and sentiments.

Kashmiris seek greater democracy.

- Like all Indian citizens, Kashmiris seek greater democracy.
- Elements keen to destabilize India would seek to build a narrative that Delhi is taking away powers from the local level. It is important that the process of turning the state into a UT does not lead to alienation.

Deepen Communal and religious lines

- While Ladakhi Buddhists, for instance, are now celebrating the fulfilment of their long pending demand for Union Territory's status, the voices of Kargilis who are still under a strict curfew are yet to be heard.
- They may not support this decision because 'a Union Territory without a legislature' not only negates the idea of decentralisation of power to the grassroots (the undergirding principle of the autonomous hill council) but could well lead to a shifting of the loci of power to Leh, resulting in losing whatever gains they have assiduously made over the years.

Instrument of Accession

- In Kashmir's Instrument of Accession in Clause 5, Raja Hari Singh, ruler of J&K, explicitly mentioned that the terms of "my Instrument of Accession cannot be varied by any amendment of the Act or of Indian Independence Act unless such amendment is accepted by me by an Instrument supplementary to this Instrument".
- Clause 7 said "nothing in this Instrument shall be deemed to commit me in any way to acceptance of any future constitution of India or to fetter my discretion to enter into arrangements with the Government of India under any such future constitution".
- Originally it was India's stated policy that wherever there was a dispute on accession, it should be settled in accordance with the wishes of people rather than a unilateral decision of the ruler of the princely state.
 - * In India's acceptance of the loA, Lord Mountbatten stated that "it is my Government's wish that as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and her soil is cleared of the invader, the question of the State's accession be settled by a reference to the people".

Elections in Jammu and Kashmir were delayed

- The three independent observers appointed by the Election Commission — to assess the readiness for assembly elections in Jammu & Kashmir — are learnt to have conveyed to the poll panel that the situation is conducive for elections immediately after Lok Sabha polls.

Why Jammu and Kashmir is special?

- Former MP Karan Singh, son of Maharaja Hari Singh, wrote in An Examined Life: "The right wing seems to resent that J&K carries a special status. That has always surprised me. We are a great country, we should be large-hearted. J&K came to India under complex and difficult circumstances. Now after all these years to ask why it holds a special position is baffling. It will always be special because it was born out of a special historical event and subsequent political developments. In England they have all sorts of governing systems... we should feel so lucky that J&K, a Muslim-majority state became a part of India despite the religion-led Partition. Cherish that; relish that; honour that."
- In November 1963, in a debate in Parliament, when Hari Vishnu Kamath argued that Kashmir was "not fully" integrated, Nehru asserted that it was, indeed, "fully integrated" with India. He said: "The House will remember that we have some restrictions with respect to NEFA and other places; outsiders cannot buy land. This is also in some other districts, the hill districts of Assam. This is to protect them."

Looking at these arguments from the past, the people, the local political parties in Jammu and Kashmir and the political parties in India should have been taken into confidence for bringing about an end to a legislation that was indeed the bridge between India and the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Challenges

- The first, and most obvious result could be a worsening of the law and order situation in the Kashmir Valley.
 - * The recent pre-emptive deployment of additional forces into Jammu and Kashmir enables the state government to deal appropriately with any situation.
 - * If large-scale protests do erupt, how they are handled will be extremely important.
- Pakistan will undoubtedly step up its support to terror activities in Kashmir.
 - * Pakistan can be expected to fish actively in the troubled waters of Kashmir. Buoyed by the recent statements of United States President Donald Trump on mediation, Pakistan will attempt to internationalize the issue of Kashmir.
 - * However, there are limits to Pakistan's response. Hobbled by international pressure and a dire financial situation, Pakistan needs to keep its actions calibrated to ensure that the situation does not escalate to a conventional conflict.
 - * The Indian Army's deployment along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir is extremely robust, and will not allow large-scale infiltration.
- It is also essential to not look at tackling the situation purely through a security approach. If the government's action aims to find a resolution to the Kashmir conflict, it has to take the local population into confidence.

- It must also be understood that narratives are more than verbal messages; they also need visible actions to show the sincerity of the political leadership in finding a just solution.
 - * The decision of the government must not be painted in terms of victory or defeat, but as a win-win for everyone.
 - * The advisory to various state governments to ensure the safety and security of the residents of Jammu and Kashmir is a step in the right direction.

It must now be followed up by a genuine outreach to the people of the state.

Union Territory Status

- There were seven union territories (UTs) specified under Part II of the First Schedule to the Constitution of India, viz. Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Puducherry.
- Except for the National Capital Territory of Delhi and Puducherry, UTs did not have their own legislature until now.
- Now, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has also been added along with Delhi and Puducherry to be a UT with a legislature.

Article 240 of the Indian Constitution

- According to Article 240, the president of India has the power to make regulations for UTs not having their own legislature.

Is it right to give a state Union territory status? Yes

- A delegation headed by Chewang Rigzin, President, Ladakh Buddhist Association approached the then Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and submitted a memorandum in New Delhi on 4th May, 1949 which concludes as under:- "Ladakh is not prepared to go to Pakistan whatever the result of the plebiscite may be".
 - * Frederic Drew, who served as Governor of Ladakh in the 19th Century had rightly observed that "the territories of J&K have no other bond of cohesion than the fact of Maharaja's rule, no simple name for it exists".
 - * Ladakhis since then have consistently been demanding separate region from Jammu and Kashmir State and asking for the status of Union Territory for the area
- Jammu and Kashmir is strategically important for India.
 - * With the United States seeking a quick exit from, and willing to let the Inter-Services Intelligence-sponsored Taliban to control Afghanistan (and China deeply embedded in the power play), the heartland of central Asia has rarely been as adverse to Indian interests since 1989, when the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan.

Kashmir could, in these circumstances, become even more vulnerable to external elements than it was in the 1990s.

- * The situation emerging in the western neighbourhood and the possible re-ascendance of the Taliban in Afghanistan call for greater attention and care to be taken in what will remain as J&K after bifurcation. Making it a Union Territory with a legislature makes a lot of strategic sense.
- * In the interest of security this is a good move. Once all the security measures are met, we can give statehood as it happened with Goa and Arunachal Pradesh in the past
- It will insulate Ladakh from the happenings in the other two regions and provide for greater development of the region.
- Ladakh remained critical for India's national security. Imagine, without Ladakh, the China's People's Liberation Army would be sitting on the southern foothills of the Himalayas. It has been self-harming to have ignored Ladakh thus far.
 - * Ladakh's unique geographical location should offer India a huge counter-offensive potential in terms of leveraging connectivity to the Eurasian region and China
- 'My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir' (1986)
 - * It is a book penned by Ex-Governor of J&K Jagmohan during 1984-1990
 - * "Article 370 is nothing but a breeding ground for the parasites at the heart of the paradise. It skins the poor. It deceives them with its mirage. It lines the pockets of the 'power elites'".

Conclusion

- Geographically and metaphorically, Jammu and Kashmir is the crown of secular India — a Muslim majority region in a Hindu majority country. Its people and leaders had chosen secular India over Islamic Pakistan, a fact that Islamists never reconciled with.
- The new doctrine will have to persuade the majority of the people of Jammu and Kashmir that greater integration with India will provide them with more opportunities, provide more freedom and space, and strengthen their rights much more than the alternatives proposed by other mainstream parties or separatists.
- Going forward India should take people of J&K into confidence, bring development which includes all sections of society and restore statehood as per its initial promise.

Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019

- It is an act by the Indian Parliament where the State of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two union territories — Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.
 - * The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will have a legislative assembly,

- * Whereas the Union Territory of Ladakh will not have a legislative assembly and will be administered by the Lieutenant Governor alone.
- The Union Territory of Ladakh will include the districts Leh and Kargil which will, in effect, cease to be part of the existing state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The remaining territories will remain with Jammu and Kashmir after the bifurcation.
- Representation in the House of People: Out of the six Lok Sabha seats in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, five will remain with the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and one will go to the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- The Election Commission may conduct Lok Sabha elections for both the Union Territories as per the allocation of seats specified in the Delimitation of Parliamentary Constituencies Order, 1976 as amended by this act.

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir

- The Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly will have a tenure of five years unless it's dissolved earlier by the L-G.
- Provisions contained under Article 239a of the constitution that are applicable to Puducherry shall be applicable here as well.
 - * This allows the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir to function as a legislative assembly under an administrator appointed under the said Article. In this case, it will be the LG."
- The delimitation of constituencies following the bifurcation may be determined by the Election Commission.
 - * The constituencies will be re-organised through a de-limitation exercise under the 2002 Act of Parliament.
 - * For the purpose of delimitation, the 2011 census figures will be taken as benchmark
- The number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir shall be increased from 107 to 114.
 - * The state assembly currently has 111 seats, of which 46 are in the Valley, 37 in Jammu and the remaining four are in the Ladakh division.
 - * Of these, 24 seats would be deemed to be vacant till the time Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir comes under the jurisdiction of the Indian state.
- With this, the existing legislative council in Jammu and Kashmir stands abolished. "Every member thereof ceases to be such member and all bills pending in the Legislative Council shall lapse."
- Four sitting members of the council of states (Rajya Sabha) representing the existing state of Jammu and Kashmir shall be deemed to have been elected to fill the seats allocated to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Their term of office remaining unaltered.
- The High court of the existing state of Jammu and Kashmir will be the common High Court of the two Union Territories
- The new Assembly shall have reservation for Scheduled Caste and Tribes as in other parts of the state.

Legislative powers of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir

- The Legislative Assembly may make laws for the whole or any part of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the state list except on subjects "public order" and "police" which will remain in the domain of the Centre vis-a-vis the LG.
- In case of inconsistencies between laws made by Parliament and laws made by the Legislative Assembly, earlier law shall prevail and law made by the Legislative Assembly shall be void.

Role and powers of the Lieutenant Governor

- The Governor of the existing State of Jammu and Kashmir shall be the Lieutenant Governor for the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and Union territory of Ladakh for such period as may be determined by the President.
- Appointment of L-G in Ladakh: The President shall appoint the L-G under article 239.
 - * The L-G will be assisted by advisors appointed by the Centre since the Union Territory will not have a Legislative Assembly.
- In the case of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the L-G shall "act in his discretion" on issues which fall outside the purview of powers conferred on the Legislative Assembly, in which he is required to exercise any judicial functions, and/or matters related to All India services and the Anti-Corruption Bureau

UNSC Resolution 47 on Kashmir

- It focuses on the complaint of the Government of India concerning the dispute over the State of Jammu and Kashmir that India took to the Security Council in January 1948.

Who were the UNSC members who oversaw the issue?

- The UN Security Council increased the size of the investigating council to include six members along with permanent members of the UNSC.
- Along with the five permanent members, China, France, UK, US & Russia, non-permanent members included Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Syria and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

What happened at the UNSC?

- India's position was that it was ready to hold a plebiscite, a direct vote in which an entire electorate votes on a specific proposal, to know of the people's desire and accept the results of the vote.
- Pakistan denied its involvement in the conflict and counter-accused India.

- UNSC ordered for the conflict to cease and to create conditions for a “free and impartial plebiscite” to decide whether Jammu and Kashmir would accede to India or Pakistan.

What did the UNSC order Pakistan to do?

- The UNSC ordered that Pakistan was to withdraw its tribesmen and Pakistan nationals who had entered “the State for the purpose of fighting” and to prevent future intrusions and to prevent “furnishing of material aid to those fighting in the State”.
- The UNSC also stated that it gave “full freedom to all subjects of the State, regardless of creed, caste or party, to express their views” and the freedom to vote on the issue of the accession of the State.
- It was also ordered Pakistan to cooperate with maintaining peace and order.

What did the UNSC order India to do?

- The UNSC had a more comprehensive set of orders for India. It said that after the Pakistani army and tribesmen had withdrawn from the State and the fighting had ceased, India was to submit a plan to the Commission for withdrawing forces from Jammu and Kashmir and to reduce them over a period of time to the minimum strength required for civil maintenance of law and order.
- India was ordered to appraise the Commission of the stages at which steps had been taken to reduce military presence to the minimum strength and to arrange remaining troops after consultations with the Commission.
- Among other instructions, India was ordered to agree that till the time the Plebiscite Administration found it necessary to exercise the powers of direction and supervision over the State forces and police, these forces would be held in areas to be agreed upon with the Plebiscite Administrator.
- It also directed India to recruit local personnel for law and order and to safeguard the rights of minorities.

How did India & Pakistan react to the UNSC Resolution 47?

Both countries rejected Resolution 47.

- India’s contention was that the resolution ignored the military invasion by Pakistan and placing both nations on an equal diplomatic ground was a dismissal of Pakistan’s aggression and the fact that the Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh had signed the Instrument of Accession.
 - * India also objected to the Resolution’s requirement that did not allow India to retain military presence which it believed it needed for defence.
 - * The Resolution’s order to form a coalition government, would also put Sheikh Abdullah, the Prime Minister of the Princely State of Jammu & Kashmir, in a difficult position.

- * India also believed that the powers conferred on the Plebiscite Administrator undermined the state’s sovereignty.

- * India also wanted Pakistan to be excluded from the operations of the plebiscite.

- Pakistan on the other hand, objected to even the minimum presence of Indian forces in Kashmir, as allowed by the resolution.

- * It also wanted an equal representation in the state government for the Muslim Conference, which was the dominant party in Pakistani-held Kashmir.

- * Despite their differences with the provisions of Resolution 47, both India and Pakistan welcomed the UN Commission and agreed to work with it.

Pakistan Angle

Steps taken by Pak

- Pakistan’s National Security Committee (NSC) has taken the decision to downgrade diplomatic ties with New Delhi
 - * Islamabad announced it was expelling the Indian ambassador as part of the downgrading of diplomatic ties, snapping bilateral trade and observe August 15 as a black day in supposed solidarity with the people of Jammu & Kashmir is a serious setback for diplomatic relations.
- Pakistan has closed air space corridor which will affect Air India flights
- Pakistan suspended the Samjhauta Express and the Thar Express trains amid tensions between the two neighbouring countries
- Pakistan raised the Kashmir issue at the United Nations, mobilise the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and send envoys to friendly capitals.
- India is well placed to deal with Pakistan on the diplomatic front given the changed international context.
 - * India’s economic clout has grown enormously in the last couple of decades, and given doubts in the Western world about Pakistan’s overt and covert support to Islamist terror, New Delhi has the space to deal with Islamabad’s efforts to “internationalise” the Kashmir issue.

Examples of expulsion from the past

- India withdrew its High Commissioner to Pakistan after the 2001 Parliament attack, but chose not to send back the Pakistani envoy at the time.
- However, the Pakistani High Commissioner was expelled by India after the Kaluchak terror strike in 2002.
 - * In May 2002, terrorists killed seven bus passengers and 25 army men and their family members.

- In 2003, India expelled Jalil Abbas Jilani, Deputy high commissioner and Pakistan's acting high commissioner, from New Delhi, accusing him of espionage.
 - * Pakistan retaliated by sending back the Indian acting high commissioner Sudhir Vyas.

In fact, even after the 2001 Parliament attack, India and Pakistan managed to have their High Commissioners back in place by March 2003

Conclusion

- Diplomacy is a mechanism to ensure that channels of communication remain open. While India and Pakistan have used back channels in recent years, the presence of seasoned diplomats in Delhi and Islamabad has always benefited the two countries.
- Pakistan needs to understand this.

The UN's limited impact

How has UNSC looked at the Kashmir issue?

- First, the UNSC does not have any agenda item explicitly termed "Jammu and Kashmir". The only agenda item on its mandate is "The India Pakistan Question".
- Second, UNSC Resolutions 209, 210, 211, 214 and 215 of September 1965 focused on a ceasefire during the war and demanded that the two sides cooperate with UNMOGIP.
- Third, the last formal resolution under the agenda item titled "The India Pakistan Question", was UNSC Resolution 307 of 21 December 1971, which noted India's unilateral declaration of a ceasefire in the western theatre during that war, Pakistan's acceptance of it, and, demanded a durable cessation of all hostilities.

Pakistan's Reorganization

- Pakistan has itself carried out restructuring in the parts of Kashmir it occupied in 1948: military control and demographic changes in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), or what Pakistan calls Azad Jammu and Kashmir; elections in which its national parties, the Pakistan People's Party, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf take part, and an ongoing process to dilute Gilgit-Baltistan's autonomous status.
 - * In 1970 the territory of present day Gilgit-Baltistan was made into a separate administrative unit in Pakistan under the name "Northern Areas".
 - * In January 2019, Pakistan's Supreme Court passed an order involving Gilgit-Baltistan to which India objected on the ground that the court had no jurisdiction over an area belonging legally to India.

- Pakistan has done all this without any UN pushback.
- In addition, its sustained support of terror groups inimical to India has discredited its protests on the Kashmir issue.
- Given that four permanent members of the UNSC have already accepted Kashmir's reorganisation as an "internal matter" — and China's dissent is mainly on the issue of the reorganisation of Ladakh and Aksai Chin — there is little expectation that the UNSC petition by Pakistan will make any headway.

Ineffectiveness of the UN over many other similar disputes.

- Russia's control of Crimea has only strengthened since 2014 despite a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution, UNSC statements and a "package of measures".
- When the U.S. decided, in 2017, to declare Jerusalem as Israel's capital, it lost a vote in the UNGA, but suffered no real action as a consequence of changing the decades-old status quo. Neither has Israel, despite UN censure of the Gaza bombings, and settlements in the West Bank; nor has
- China changed after UNSC resolutions on Tibet and UNGA petitions on Xinjiang

China and its quasi-colony

Context

- The 15 members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) engaged in closed-door informal consultations in response to a letter written by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to the President of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), backed by a request from China, on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

Outcome of the meeting

- There is no official record of the proceedings nor does the informal exchange result in any outcome document.
- In this case, the only consensus that had the backing of the majority of members was that India and Pakistan should resolve matters bilaterally.
- China's attempts to get the president of the UNSC to issue an informal statement to the media, was curiously backed by the UK, perhaps in the hope of scoring some brownie points with the large domestic constituencies of Pakistanis.
- The UK might also have hoped to curry some favor with China to further its mercantilist interests in the face of an imminent Brexit meltdown.

Human right violations in Pakistan

- Pakistan's Permanent Representative Maleeha Lodhi made a dishonest and propagandist statement to the media making allegations against India, claiming that "the voice of the people of Kashmir was being heard in the UNSC".

- But, Islamabad's own track road in Baluchistan and the fact that it sponsors terrorism in Afghanistan and India is not a secret.
- Pakistan has a long-held policy to create unrest and tensions in neighbouring countries especially in India and Afghanistan by backing jihadist groups.

Pakistan meanwhile should first permit the voice of the Baloch people to be heard, along with that of the oppressed in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Why this has become a major concern for Pakistan?

- The Indian government's bold step to revoke the special status of J&K, long overdue, has given Pakistan and its cohorts in J&K a big jolt.
- It has hurt vested interests in the Valley who, for generations, have siphoned off the wealth of the state and waltzed with separatists at the same time.

India's reaffirmation on resolving border dispute with China

- Earlier, the external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, had clearly conveyed, during his visit to Beijing, that the decisions were internal to India and aimed at providing good governance, promoting social justice and ensuring economic development in J&K.
- He had also pointed out to the Chinese that the constitutional change in India had no bearing on the boundary issue or the Line of Actual Control with China.

China's deviation tactics

- China is facing global censure for its unbridled human rights violations in Xinjiang province, the mass incarceration of Uighurs in so-called re-education camps and the razing of mosques and other historical places that give the Uighurs their distinct identity.
- The daily images on television screens around the world of the mass unrest in Hong Kong must be galling for a regime that takes pride in its ability to use force to quash dissent and seeks, with vaulting ambition, to emerge as the number one power in the world.
- The long-drawn public protests in Hong Kong are a reaction to the progressive erosion of the special status accorded to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the terms of its Basic Law, which protects Hong Kong's capitalist system, the independence of the judiciary and the media.
- Apart from its undying commitment to Pakistan, it is to deflect scrutiny of its own actions in Xinjiang and Hong Kong that China would have decided to support Pakistan's request and also to have its permanent representative masquerade as a spokesman for members of the UNSC.

What China needs to note is, Unlike China's opaque political functioning and decision-making processes, national media control, suppression of dissent and draconian internal security laws, the change in J&K's constitutional status was done through an open political process — a publicly aired parliamentary debate and voting.

China's silence when Pakistan made changes in Pakistan occupied Kashmir

China has never commented when Pakistan unilaterally changed the status of regions in PoK exposes its deep bias.

- Gilgit-Baltistan was re-designated by Pakistan as Northern Areas in 1970.
- In 1974, Pakistan unilaterally overturned a law of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir prohibiting outsiders from owning property, and encouraged large-scale settlement by Sunnis in predominantly Shia-populated Gilgit-Baltistan
- Pakistan once again unilaterally issued the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order in 2009, without any consultation with the people, with a view to giving itself and China a freer hand to develop Chinese link through PoJ&K to Gwadar.

Besides allowing the presence of China's military and civilian personnel close to India's border.

On changes in Tibet

- One should recall that in 1965, when China reorganised the erstwhile Tibet region into the Tibet Autonomous Region, giving it a provincial status, India was not apoplectic, like China has been following the designation of Ladakh as a union territory.
- Based on the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, India has always refrained from making statements concerning the internal situation of China.

Options with India to weaken china's call

- India has multiple choices — reiterating India's claim over Aksai Chin as an unsettled territorial issue on the agenda of the special representatives,
- eliminating Huawei from 5G trials,
- placing curbs on China's economic inroads into India in sensitive sectors,
- making a statement on developments in Hong Kong because of our concerns on the security of our community there,
- Inviting a Taiwan minister to India officially and giving the Dalai Lama a major platform to speak in Delhi, with an Indian minister in the audience

Conclusion

- The global community will no doubt take positive note of the steps being taken by India to restore normalcy in J&K through restoration of landlines, phased lifting of restrictions and the re-opening of government offices and schools.
- And, as Pakistan remains mired in its medieval ways, the world will soon see visible evidence of rapid development in J&K, which will contrast sharply with the backwardness of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.



The graphic features a central illustration of a person on a laptop screen, surrounded by icons representing various subjects: a rocket, a clock, a lightbulb, a newspaper, a smartphone, a calendar, and a microscope. The text to the right of the illustration provides details about the webinar program.

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ECONOMY

1. ANUBHAV Awards, 2019

- The Anubhav portal was created in 2015 with a vision to preserve the rich experience of retired officials in digital form.
- It is envisaged that their rich experience will be preserved for future generation to learn and explore knowledge on various aspects of governance, culture & development history of a particular region.
- The Anubhav Awards were instituted in 2016 to encourage more retirees to submit their write-ups regarding their experience of working with the government on the portal.
- The current awards series was the fourth annual series of awards.

About All India Pension Adalat

- The Pension Adalats were also organised by various ministries and departments at different parts of the country.
- The Pension Adalat brings all stakeholders on a common table i.e., the aggrieved pensioner, the concerned department, the bank or CGHS representative, wherever relevant, so that such cases can be settled across the table within the framework of extant rules.
- States and UTs are also conducting such Pension Adalats.
- It is an initiative of the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare.

Context:

- A Minister of State presents ANUBHAV awards, 2019. The Minister also inaugurated the All India Pension Adalat organised on the occasion

2. Bond Yields

What are bonds?

- A bond is an instrument to borrow money. A bond could be floated/issued by a country's government or by a company to raise funds.
- Of course, because government bonds (also referred to as G-secs in India or Treasury in the US or Gilts in the UK) come with the sovereign's guarantee, they are considered one of the safest investments.
- As a result, they also pay the least return on investment (or rate of return or interest rate). Investments into corporate bonds tend to be riskier because the chances of failure (and, as a result, the chances of the company not repaying the loan) are higher.

What are bonds yields?

- Simply put, the yield of a bond is the rate of return that it earns. But in bonds, the rate of return is not fixed – it changes with the price of the bond.
- Every bond has a face value and a coupon payment. There is also the price of the bond, which may or may not be equal to the face value of the bond. And then there is the yield, which is the effective rate of interest that one earns when one buys a bond.

Example

- Now suppose the face value of a 10-year G-sec is Rs 100, and its coupon payment is Rs 5. Buyers of this bond will give the government Rs 100 (the face value); in return, the government will pay them Rs 5 every year for the next 10 years and will pay back their Rs 100 at the end of the tenure.
- In this instance, the bond's yield or the effective rate of interest is 5%.
- The yield is the investor's reward for parting with Rs 100 today, but for staying without it for 10 years.

Why and how do yields go up and down?

- Suppose there was just one bond, and two buyers (people willing to lend to the government).
- The actual selling price of the bond may in such a scenario go from Rs 100 to Rs 105 or Rs 110 because of the bidding war between the two buyers.
- Importantly, even if one buys the same bond at Rs 110, the coupon payment of Rs 5 will not change.
- Thus, as the price of the bond increases from Rs 100 to Rs 110, the yield falls to 4.5%.

What does their movement signify?

- The way bond yields function, especially G-sec yields, implies that they are in close sync with the prevailing interest rate in an economy.
- With reference to the above example, only if the interest rate in the broader economy is 5% will the bond's selling price be the same as the bond's face value. If there is any discrepancy, the market will ensure it is removed.
- For instance, if the prevailing interest rate is 4% and the government announces a bond with a yield of 5% (that is, a face value of Rs 100 and coupon of Rs 5) then a lot of people will rush to buy such a bond to earn a higher interest rate.
 - * This increased demand will start pushing up bond prices, even as the yields fall.

- * This will carry on until the time the bond price reaches Rs 125 — at that point, a Rs-5 coupon payment would be equivalent to a yield of 4%, the same as in the rest of the economy

What is happening to bond yields at present and what does it signify?

- The global economy has been slowing down for the better part of the last two years. Some of the biggest economies are either growing at a slower rate (such as the US and China) or actually contracting (such as Germany).
- As a result, last week, US Treasury bond yields fell sharply as the news of Germany and China slowing down came through. Reason: investors, both inside the US and outside, figured that if growth prospects are plummeting it makes little sense to invest in stocks or even riskier assets.

What is yield inversion and what does it mean?

- Broadly speaking, the fall in the yields of 10-year government bonds shows that the demand for money in the future would fall. That is why future interest rates are likely to be lower. The demand for money being lower in the future, in turn, suggests that the growth will be weaker.
- So government bond yields falling typically suggests that economic participants expect growth to slow down in the future.

What is a yield curve and what does it signify?

- A yield curve is a graphical representation of yields for bonds (with an equal credit rating) over different time horizons.
 - * Typically, the term is used for government bonds – which come with the same sovereign guarantee. So a yield curve in US treasuries shows how the yields change when the tenure (or the time for which one lends to the government) changes.
- If bond investors expect the US economy to grow normally, then they would expect to be rewarded more (that is, get more yield) when they lend for a longer period. This gives rise to a normal – upward sloping – yield curve.
 - * The steepness of this yield curve is determined by how fast an economy is expected to grow. The faster it is expected to grow the more the yield for longer tenures.
- When the economy is expected to grow only marginally, the yield curve is “flat”.
- However, a yield inversion makes the yield curve inverted. Again, this shows, that bond investors expect the future growth to fall; in other words, the demand for money would be much lower than what it is today and hence the yields are also lower.

3. “Centre of Excellence” for Citrus Fruit

- It is located at Lunglei and is availing Israeli technology
- It has started providing planting material and training to farmers with collaboration from Israel and some of the officers of Mizoram have already received their training from Israel.
- A tripartite collaboration of the Government of Israel, State Government of Mizoram and the Union Government, with the Ministry of DoNER performing the role of facilitator and coordinator.
- The technical support, planting material and capacity building is being provided by Israel and the Centre specializes in exclusively dealing with the processing of Citrus Fruits.

4. CSR: On Companies Act amendments

Context:

- Parliament has passed amendments to the Companies Act to strengthen laws governing corporate social responsibility (CSR).

What does the law state?

- Corporate Social Responsibility was introduced through Section 135 of the Companies Act of 2013.
- These laws state that companies with a net worth of ₹500 crore or revenue of ₹1,000 crore or net profit of ₹5 crore during the immediately preceding fiscal should spend 2% of their average net profit in the last three years on activities related to social development
- It includes sanitation, education, eradication of hunger, poverty and malnutrition, conservation of heritage, art and culture, and vocational training such as setting up grooming outlets or training centres for sewing.

What are the changes in the law?

- Till now, if a company was unable to fully incur the CSR expenditure in a given year, it could carry this amount forward and spend it in the next 12 months, in addition to the money for that year.
- Under the new legislation, any unspent amount will have to be deposited into an escrow account within 30 days of the end of that fiscal.
- This amount will have to be spent within three years from the date of its transfer, failing which it will be put into a fund, which could even be the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

What are the penalties?

- Companies violating CSR norms will attract fines ranging from ₹50,000 to ₹25 lakh, with the officers concerned liable for imprisonment of up to three years, according to the Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

Key Stats

- Filings with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs show that in 2017-18, only a little over half of those liable to spend on CSR have filed reports on their activity to the government.
- The other half either did not comply or simply failed to file. The average CSR spend by private companies was just ₹95 lakh compared to ₹9.40 crore for public sector units.

Objections to the proposed amendments

- The proposed changes come in an environment where profit has become a dirty word. Starting from the budget, which increased taxes on the rich, this is seen as another move aimed at penalizing the private sector.
 - * There's a sense that the government is unloading its responsibilities on the private sector.
 - * The new provisions are also tantamount to raising taxes on companies as they would be penalized for not spending the full CSR amount. The move will also increase costs for companies.
- Key amendments to the relevant sections of the Companies Act have now made non-compliance with CSR norms a jailable offence for key officers of the company
 - * But the committee, headed by the Corporate Affairs Secretary has proposed that non-compliance be de-criminalised and made a civil offence.

Conclusion

- It should be recognized that CSR is not the main business of a company and in these challenging times they would rightly be focusing their energies on the business rather than on social spending.
- The government should be careful to not micromanage and tie down businesses with rules and regulations that impose a heavy compliance burden.
- Else it might end up with the opposite of what it intends — to rope in corporates as citizens to promote social inclusion.

5. Development Banks**Context**

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's press conference, announcing a slew of measures to boost the economy and financial market sentiments, had an interesting idea of setting up a development bank.

What are development banks?

- Development banks are financial institutions that provide long-term credit for capital-intensive investments spread over a long period and yielding low rates of return, such as urban infrastructure, mining and heavy industry, and irrigation systems.
- Such banks often lend at low and stable rates of interest to promote long-term investments with considerable social benefits.

- Development banks are also known as term-lending institutions or development finance institutions.

How are funding requirements met?

- To lend for long term, development banks require correspondingly long-term sources of finance, usually obtained by issuing long-dated securities in capital market, subscribed by long-term savings institutions such as pension and life insurance funds and post office deposits.
- Considering the social benefits of such investments, and uncertainties associated with them, development banks are often supported by governments or international institutions.
- Such support can be in the form of tax incentives and administrative mandates for private sector banks and financial institutions to invest in securities issued by development banks.

Development banks and Commercial banks

- Development banks are different from commercial banks which mobilise short- to medium-term deposits and lend for similar maturities to avoid a maturity mismatch — a potential cause for a bank's liquidity and solvency.
- The capital market complements commercial banks in providing long-term finance. They are together termed as the Anglo-Saxon financial system.

Types of banking models

- Historically, in the U.K. and the U.S., such a debt market took root to fund expansion of the market economy and colonial investments in the 19th century, such as financing of railways worldwide. This market was mostly sweetened by fiscal sops to promote Britain's global political and commercial interests.
- Industrialization of continental Europe and Asia was, however, financed under the aegis of German-type universal banks (providing long- and short-term credit) and state-sponsored (or guaranteed) development banks underwriting the risks of long-term credit.
- For instance, the earliest and ubiquitous saving institution, namely the post office bank (mostly government-owned and managed), mobilized national savings and channeled them into development banks for long-term investments whose social rates of return were higher than the assured interest rates for depositors.
- Alexander Gerschenkron, a Ukrainian economic historian at Harvard University, famously theorised that the greater the backwardness of a country, the greater the role of the state in economic development, particularly in providing long-term finance to catch up with the advanced economies in the shortest possible time.

USA's Economic Depression

- In the context of the Great Depression in the 1930s, John Maynard Keynes argued that when business confidence is low on account of an uncertain future with low-interest rates, the government can set up a National Investment Bank to mop up the society's savings and make it available for long-term development by the private sector and local governments.

How it all started in India?

- Following foregoing precepts, IFCI, previously the Industrial Finance Corporation of India, was set up in 1949. This was probably India's first development bank for financing industrial investments. In 1955, the World Bank prompted the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) — the parent of the largest private commercial bank in India today, ICICI Bank — as a collaborative effort between the government with majority equity holding and India's leading industrialists with nominal equity ownership to finance modern and relatively large private corporate enterprises.
- In 1964, IDBI was set up as an apex body of all development finance institutions.

Government's Role in Financing

As the domestic saving rate was low, and capital market was absent, development finance institutions were financed by

- lines of credit from the Reserve Bank of India (that is, some of its profits were channelled as long-term credit); and
- Statutory Liquidity Ratio bonds, into which commercial banks had to invest a proportion of their deposits.
- In other words, by sleight of government hand, short-term bank deposits got transformed into long-term resources for development banks.

Fall of development banks

- However, development banks got discredited for mounting non-performing assets, allegedly caused by politically motivated lending and inadequate professionalism in assessing investment projects for economic, technical and financial viability.
- After 1991, following the Narasimham Committee reports on financial sector reforms, development finance institutions were disbanded and got converted to commercial banks.
- The result was a steep fall in long-term credit from a tenure of 10-15 years to five years.
- The development of the debt market has been an article of faith for over a quarter-century, but it has failed to take off — as in most of Europe and industrializing Asia, where the bank-centric financial system continue to prevail

Examples from the world

- China's Development Banks — the Agricultural Development Bank of China, China Development Bank, and the Export-Import Bank of China — have been at the forefront of financing its industrial prowess.
 - * After the global financial crisis, these institutions have underwritten China's risky technological investments helping it gain global dominance in IT hardware and software companies.
- Germany's Development Bank, KfW, has been spearheading long-term investment in green technologies and for sustainable development efforts requiring long-term capital.

Conclusion

- In this light, the Finance Minister's agenda for setting up a development bank is welcome. However, a few hard questions need to be addressed in designing the proposed institution. How will it be financed?
- If foreign private capital is expected to contribute equity capital (hence part ownership), such an option needs to be carefully analysed, especially in the current political juncture.
- The design of the governance structure is fraught with dangers with many interest groups at work. One sincerely hopes that the political and administrative leadership carefully weigh in the past lessons to lay a firm foundation for the new institution.

6. Farm Pond

- A farm pond is a large hole dug out in the earth, usually square or rectangular in shape, which harvests rainwater and stores it for future use.
- It has an inlet to regulate inflow and an outlet to discharge excess water.
- The pond is surrounded by a small bund, which prevents erosion on the banks of the pond.

Why it has become a necessity in India?

- With an increased variability of monsoons and rapidly depleting groundwater tables, large parts of India are reeling under water stress.
- A number of peninsular regions like Bundelkhand, Vidarbha and Marathwada have been facing recurring drought-like situations.
- There is the need to implement innovative water management measures, stressing particularly the importance of rainwater harvesting both at the household and community levels.

Benefits of farm ponds:

- Farm ponds can be cost-effective structures that transform rural livelihoods. They can help enhance water control, contribute to agriculture intensification and boost farm incomes.

- They also helped in providing supplemental irrigation in the kharif season and an enhanced irrigation coverage in rabi.
- Farm ponds retained water for 8-10 months of the year; thus farmers could enhance cropping intensity and crop diversification within and across seasons. The area used to cultivate vegetables and other commercial crops also increased.
- 'It is useful as drinking water for cattle's during drought situation.
- It can be used for spraying pesticides.
- It conserves soil and moisture.

Need for inlet, outlet provisions

- Most of ponds being constructed in Maharashtra does not have inlet and outlet provisions and their walls are raised above the ground level by only a few feet.
- They cannot arrest the excess run-off as there is no inlet, and therefore they cannot be used effectively for rainwater harvesting.
- Further, farmers line them at the bottom with plastic, restricting seepage and converting the ponds into intermediate storage points.
- Such farm ponds have an adverse impact on the water tables and accelerate water loss.

Conclusion

- They occupy a large portion of farmers' lands. However, this can be compensated for by rearing fish in the pond, effectively utilizing the bunds for vegetable and/or tree plantations, etc.
- Overall, farm ponds can act as effective harvesting structures and also yield healthy financial returns. But if they are promoted merely for on-farm storage of groundwater and canal water, they could accelerate, rather than reduce, the water crisis in the countryside.

7. FDI Policy Reform- Tinkering for optics

Context

- The Union cabinet cleared a raft of changes in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) regulations, including easing rules for overseas single-brand stores and permitting FDI through the automatic route in contract manufacturing and all areas of coal mining.
- The government, clearly concerned by the economic slowdown and persistently weak investment activity, has sought to provide a policy fillip to attract more foreign capital into sectors that it sees as having a multiplier effect particularly in terms of job creation.

Single-Brand Retail

- In single-brand retail, the government allowed companies to conduct online retail trading prior to opening of physical stores, subject to the condition that brick-and-mortar stores come up within two years from the date it starts online operations.

- To provide greater flexibility and ease of operations to foreign single-brand retail entities with more than 51% FDI, the cabinet decided that all procurements made from India by the entity for that single brand shall be counted towards local sourcing of 30%, irrespective of whether the goods procured are sold in India or exported.
- Further, the current cap of considering exports for five years only was removed, to give an impetus to exports.
- So far, only incremental sourcing of the single brand entity was taken into account while current sourcing was not considered. From now on, total sourcing, including by group companies, will be considered for meeting the 30% local sourcing norm.

Contract Manufacturing

- The cabinet allowed 100% FDI in contract manufacturing, allowing large foreign electronics and pharmaceutical companies to directly invest in local or foreign contract manufacturers. This will give a big boost to the government's Make in India policy.
- Manufacturing activities may be conducted either by the investee entity or through contract manufacturing in India under a legally tenable contract, whether on Principal to Principal or Principal to Agent basis

Coal Sector

- As per the present FDI policy, 100% FDI under automatic route is allowed for coal & lignite mining for captive consumption by power projects, iron & steel and cement units and other eligible activities permitted under and subject to applicable laws and regulations.
 - * Further, 100% FDI under automatic route is also permitted for setting up coal processing plants like washeries subject to the condition that the company shall not do coal mining and shall not sell washed coal or sized coal from its coal processing plants in the open market and shall supply the washed or sized coal to those parties who are supplying raw coal to coal processing plants for washing or sizing.
- The Union cabinet has now allowed 100% FDI under the automatic route for coal mining as well as sale and export of coal.
- This is expected to end the monopoly enjoyed so far by Coal India Ltd (CIL), which is often considered lacking capability to mine the coalfields.

Significance

- The changes in FDI policy will result in making India a more attractive destination, leading to benefits of increased investments, employment and growth
- Online sales will lead to creation of jobs in logistics, digital payments, customer care, training and product skilling

- Further, manufacturing through contract contributes equally to the objective of Make in India. FDI now being permitted under automatic route in contract manufacturing will be a big boost to Manufacturing sector in India.
- In the coal sector, for sale of coal, 100% FDI under automatic route for coal mining, activities including associated processing infrastructure will attract international players to create an efficient and competitive coal market.
- The reforms are part of India's strategy to become part of the global supply chain amid its disruption due to the US-China trade war.

A closer examination, however, raises several concerns about the ultimate attractiveness of these changes.

- For instance, the tweaks to investment norms on coal appear at first flush to be a win-win for both the economy at large and the coal industry, but the environmental costs of focusing on one of the most polluting fossil fuels needs focus
- This is predicated on the prospect of seeing an influx of both capital and modern technology into mining and processing, as well as raising domestic supply of the key raw material for power, steel and cement production thereby cutting costly and burgeoning imports.
 - * But for foreign mining companies to make a beeline to pitheads, several related regulatory and market challenges will have to be addressed post-haste.
- While domestic thermal power plants have had to rely on increased imports in recent times, many of the electricity producers themselves are in financial stress. How much additional investments may actually accrue is not clear.

Steps that needs to be taken up

- Large miners will need economies of scale and so require access to large contiguous fields with minimal bureaucratic constraints on operations.

8. GI Tag to new Products

Palani Panchamirtham from Palani Town in Tamil Nadu:

- Palani Panchamirtham is an abishega Prasadam and is one of the main offerings in the Abisegam of Lord Dhandayuthapani Swamy, the presiding deity of Arulmigu Dhandayuthapaniswamy Temple, situated in palani Hills, in Dindigul District.
- It is a combination of five natural substances, namely, banana, jaggery sugar, cow ghee, honey and cardamom in a definite proportion.
- It is prepared in a natural method without addition of any preservatives or artificial ingredients and is well known for its religious fervour and gaiety.
- This is the first time a temple 'prasadam' from Tamil Nadu has been bestowed with the GI tag.

Tawlhlohpuan from Mizoram:

- Tawlhlohpuan, a medium to heavy, compactly woven, good quality fabric from Mizoram.
- It is known for warp yarns, warping, weaving & intricate hand-made designs.
- Tawlhloh, in Mizo language, means 'to stand firm or not to move backward'.
- Tawlhlohpuan is produced throughout the state of Mizoram, Aizawl and Thenzawl town being the main centre of production.
- It holds high significance in the Mizo society.

Mizo Puanchei from Mizoram:

- Mizo Puanchei is a colourful Mizo shawl/textile, from Mizoram.
- It is considered as the most colourful among the Mizo textiles.
- It is an essential possession for every Mizo lady and an important marriage outfit in the state.
- It is also the most commonly used costume in Mizo festive dances and official ceremonies.
- The weavers insert the designs and motifs by using supplementary yarns while weaving.

Tirur Betel leaf from Kerala:

- Tirur betel vine from Kerala, is mainly cultivated in Tirur, Tanur, Tirurangadi, Kuttippuram, Malappuram and Vengara block panchayaths of Malappuram District.
- It is valued both for its mild stimulant action and medicinal properties.
- It is commonly used for making pan masala for chewing, it has many medicinal, industrial and cultural usages and is considered as a remedy for bad breath and digestive disorders.

Dindigul Lock:

- The famous Dindigul locks are known throughout the world for their superior quality and durability, so much so that even the city in Tamil Nadu is called Lock City.
- The abundance of iron in this region is the reason for the growth of the lock-making industry.
- Though machine-made locks are easily available, government institutions like prisons, godowns, hospitals and even temples use the older pattern locks.
- These lock manufacturing units are limited to an area of 5 km in and around Dindigul.
- There are over 50 varieties of locks made by the artisans using raw materials such as MS flat plates and brass plates procured from the nearby towns, including Madurai and Salem.

Kandangi saree:

- The Kandangi saree, manufactured in Karaikudi taluk in Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu.
- The original Kandangi saree is manually made using a winding machine, loom, shuttle and bobbin.
- It is a team effort of the families who live in the town of Karaikudi and it forms part of their livelihood.
- These sarees are characterised by the large contrast borders, and some of them are known to have borders covering as much as two-thirds of the saree.
- The sarees are usually around 5.10 meters – 5.60 meters in length.
- The Kandangi sarees exude brilliant colours like bright yellow, orange, red and a minimal black in the traditional pattern of stripes or checks with broad borders woven in coarse cotton.
- Over the years, more interesting colours have been introduced for the saree, which is worn in a particular manner.

9. Increasing investment to stimulate growth**Introduction**

India's current economic slowdown is due to a combination of two underlying trends.

- First, there is the short-run cyclical slowdown exhibited by a number of high-frequency indicators, reflecting a significant fall in demand, especially for sectors such as automobiles, consumer durables and housing.
- Second, there is the more serious long-term fall in investment and savings rates. Raising growth requires that attention be paid to both cyclical and structural dimensions of the problem.

Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF)

- As per RBI, Gross capital formation refers to the 'aggregate of gross additions to fixed assets (that is fixed capital formation) plus change in stocks during the counting period.'
 - * It consists of resident producers' investments, deducting disposals, in fixed assets during a given period.
 - * GFCF is not a measure of total investment, because only the value of net additions to fixed assets is measured, and all kinds of financial assets are excluded, as well as stocks of inventories and other operating costs
- Fixed asset refers to the construction, machinery and equipment.
 - * They are tangible or intangible assets produced as outputs from production processes that are used repeatedly, or continuously, for more than one year.

- The most important exclusion from GFCF is land sales and purchases.
- Any rise or increase in GFCF means an increase in investment in fixed assets which gets translated into higher rate of economic growth in long run.

Stats

- When it comes to the Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) relative to GDP at current prices, a steady fall has been visible since 2011-12, when it was 34.3%. By 2017-18, it had fallen by 5.7% points, to a level of 28.6%.
- Assuming an Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) of 4, this meant a fall of nearly 1.4% points in the potential growth rate. The fall consisted of sectoral decreases in the household, private corporate and public sectors
- It is noticeable that the fall in the household sector's investment rate got arrested by 2015-16.
 - * However, by then, the rate had already fallen by 6.3% points.
 - * From 2016-17, the sector's investment rate even showed some recovery.
- In contrast to the household sector rate, the private corporate sector investment rate did not show any fall up to 2015-16 when, at 11.9%, it was in fact higher than the corresponding rate for 2011-12 (11.2%).
 - * It fell in the subsequent years, but only by 0.7% points.
 - * This near-constancy runs counter to what industry leaders have been saying and what other data sources such as CMIE indicate, casting some doubts on the veracity of the figures.
- In the case of the public sector, the rate fell by 0.3% points between 2015-16 and 2017-18.
- Thus, the period from 2011-12 to 2017-18 can be seen as consisting of two parts:
 - * 2011-12 to 2015-16, when the household sector investment rate fell sharply;
 - * 2015-16 to 2017-18 when the investment rates of the private corporate and public sectors fell marginally.

Fall in household savings rate

- The Gross Domestic Savings Rate also fell between 2011-12 and 2017-18 by 4.1% points, from 34.6% of GDP to 30.5%. However, this fall was entirely due to the household sector, with the private corporate and public sectors showing increases in their savings rates by margins of 2.2% points and 0.2% points, respectively.
- Throughout the period from 2011-12, the savings rate of the private corporate sector increased, reducing its dependence on the surplus savings of the household sector.

- Given this pattern, at present, all the surplus savings of the household sector is available for the public sector. With private corporate sector's investment demand being largely met by its own savings, public sector's borrowing requirements can be fully financed using the surplus from the household sector, supplemented by net inflow of foreign capital without any fear of crowding out.

In 2018-19, the real GDP growth rate was 6.8%. Two critical policy challenges need to be addressed.

- First, a countercyclical policy should increase growth rate to its current potential of 7%-7.5% and then
- Second structural reforms should raise the potential growth itself to above 8.5% if India is to attain a size of \$5 trillion by 2024-25.

More capital expenditure

- From the monetary side, reducing the repo rate by a cumulated margin of 110 basis points in 2019 has not as yet induced a noticeable growth response.
- Complementary fiscal stimulus, in the form of additional public sector investment, may prove to be more effective.
 - * However, given the fiscal deficit constraint, there is limited flexibility for increasing center's capital expenditure directly.
- There may be some expansion, if additional dividends from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) flow to the government. Further, there may be some possible additional disinvestment. However, care should be taken to deploy all of these additional funds for capital expenditure.

Prescription to meet slowing demand is to increase government expenditure.

- In the current situation, there can be an increase in government expenditure but it has to be directed towards an increase in investment expenditure.
- A similar effort may be made by State governments and non-government public sector enterprises to increase capital expenditures. All these measures may also crowd in private investment.
 - * Another area that needs immediate attention is the financial system, which must be activated to lend more.
- Thus, this fiscal push, together with the already-initiated monetary stimulus, may help raise the growth rate.

Conclusion

On the structural reforms that are needed to push the economy onto a sustained high growth path, much can be said.

- We need a re-look at the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM) Act.

- * The government should actually move towards reducing the revenue deficit to zero.
- * This can happen if the Centre focusses more on items on the Union list.

- Once this is achieved, the Central Government can be given full freedom over fiscal deficit, as the entire deficit will be directed towards meeting capital expenditures. This was described as the 'golden rule' in U.K.

10. Jal Jeevan Mission

- The Jal Jeevan Mission, under the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation will focus on:
 - * Piped water supply to rural households
 - * It will focus on integrated demand and supply-side management of water at the local level
 - * Creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, and management of household wastewater for reuse in agriculture.
 - * The Jal Jeevan Mission aims converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country

Significance

- It is expected to create huge business opportunities for corporates.
- The move would provide employment to millions of people and may kick-start the investment cycle.
- Such investment results in job creation and ancillary economic activities

Concerns

- Some analysts express doubt on the availability of huge funds for these projects.

11. Kisan Network App

- It is a mobile application for farmers designed by Gurugram-based enterprise
- Farmers would be able to obtain useful tips and information in order to boost both productivity and income.
- The Kisan Network app, presently available only in Hindi

Features

- The Kisan Network comprises a page where farmers can secure both text and audio-visual content about all the available government schemes that farmers can leverage, as well as modern agricultural practices, like mixed cropping, micro irrigation, and mulching.
- The highlight of the application is its weather forecast component. Just by giving access to their location, farmers can obtain weather predictions.

- Another useful feature of the app is the identification of crop diseases. In case of crops being infested with pests or defects, the farmer can upload a picture of it to access data on the details of the problem including ways to resolve it.
- The app also shows the farmers the nearest mandi based on their need to buy seeds, fertilisers, and other materials.
- And, in case they need any other specific advice on guidance, the farmers have an option to get in touch with agronomists, academicians, and other experts through The Kisan Network.

12. Merger of Banks

Context

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a big consolidation of 10 public sector banks to be merged into four.

Background

- It was the Narasimham Committee in the late 1990s that recommended consolidation through a process of merging strong banks.
- What the committee also recommended was shutting down the weaker banks and not merging them with the strong ones as is being done now.

Under the scheme of amalgamation

- Punjab National Bank (PNB), Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC) and United Bank of India to be merged (PNB will be the anchor bank);
 - * These three banks are technologically compatible as they use Finacle Core Banking Solution (CBS) platform.
 - * The amalgamated entity — to be called Punjab National Bank — will become the second-largest public sector bank in India, after the State Bank of India.
 - * It will also become the second-largest bank in India in terms of its branch network, with a combined total of 11,437 branches.
- Canara Bank and Syndicate Bank to be merged (anchor bank - Canara Bank).
 - * The merger also has the potential to lead to large cost reductions due to network overlaps, adding that the similar business cultures of the two banks would also facilitate a smooth transition.
- Indian Bank will be merged with Allahabad Bank (anchor bank - Indian Bank);
- Union Bank of India, Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank to be merged (anchor bank - Union Bank of India); and

In place of 27 public sector banks in 2017, now there will be 12 public sector banks after the latest round of consolidation of PSU banks. This is second wave of the government's efforts to revive the economy as slowdown in impacting the economy. After the first wave dealing with FDI and FPI reforms.

How have previous bank mergers fared?

- 2018 the government had merged Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank with Bank of Baroda, creating the third-largest bank by loans in the country.
- The government said this merger has been “a good learning experience” as profitability and business of the merged entity has improved.

Reforms initiated

- In order to make the management accountable to the boards of the banks, a Board Committee would be made in charge of appraising the performance of officers of the rank of general managers and above, including the managing director.
- The banks have also been allowed to recruit Chief Risk Officers from the market, at market-linked compensation to attract the best available talent.
- To enable Succession Planning, Boards to decide system of Individual Development Plans for all senior executive positions
- To ensure sufficient tenure, Boards given flexibility to prescribe Residual Service of two years for appointment of GM and above
- Other reform measures were aimed at increasing the engagement of Non-Official Directors
 - * People for the post of non-official director will have to be at least a graduate, aged less than 67, and with 20 years of experience in various fields, including agriculture, rural economy, banking, cooperation, economics, business management, human resources, finance, corporate law and information technology.
 - * They will help in improving the quality of deliberation on the boards, leading to their efficient management and better profitability ratios
 - * Any director in non-official capacity will be appointed for up to six years, or two terms.
 - * Candidates who have successfully led reputed organisations or brought turnaround in failing organisation will be preferred

Significance

- This consolidation offers the promise of economies of scale, leveraging of pooled resources, manpower, brands, better utilisation of branch networks and increased efficiencies which will lead to the creation of big banks with an enhanced capacity to give credit
- There are too many banks in India with sizes that are minuscule by global standards with their growth constricted by their inability to expand
 - * With the merger these big banks, would now be able to compete globally and increase their operational efficiency by reducing their cost of lending.

- In the near term, this will certainly benefit the largest shareholder, the government, more, with fewer banks to focus on and to assign capital
- Large banks will entail cost advantages by way of elimination of branch overlap, eliminating redundancies in administrative infrastructure, better manpower planning, optimum funds management, and savings in IT and other fixed costs.

Managing the NPAs

- In terms of resolution of NPAs there is some merit in having the merger because there are coordination problems involved when you have multiple banks trying to resolve NPAs which are common to all of them.
- The middle and senior management who are deputed for meetings, have discussions with their counterparts from other banks.
- And then they have to go back to the top management for a decision, come back again for a meeting, and it goes on and on.
- Therefore, the resolution of NPAs becomes difficult when you have so many banks trying to arrive at an understanding amongst themselves.
- So, to the extent that the discussion is happening among fewer banks, the resolution of NPAs will be facilitated.

Appointing the top management gets easy for the Govt

- The most important rationale is that the multiplicity of banks was making enormous demands on the bandwidth of the Finance Ministry in terms of appointments of chairmen, managing directors, executive directors, independent directors.
- Even though they have the banks board bureau to advise them on appointments, the process is extremely time-consuming. There were long delays in making the senior appointments, as a result of which these banks have been incurring substantial costs.
- When the bank does not have a person at the top or persons at the top, or even directors in play, it exacts its own cost on the bank.
- And so, collapsing the number of banks makes it easier for the Ministry to monitor the banks on its watch

Consolidation of Private Banks in pipeline?

- A lesser number of banks means, hopefully, speedier decision-making across banks.
- And the other thing which it can trigger is some consolidation in private sector banks. Because the private sector banks would now be falling behind in terms of scale compared to some of these banks. And therefore, to some extent, this can force the private sector banks to think of a similar consolidation.

Concerns

- The key reforms to be made are at the board level, including in appointments, especially of government nominees.
 - * These are often political appointees, with little exposure to banking.
 - * Surely, such practices need to be curbed as the definition of global banks is not just about size but also professionalism in governance.
- It is possible that the current mergers may face more friction than the last one — of BoB, Dena and Vijaya.
 - * In that case, a large, well-capitalised strong bank absorbed two much smaller entities.
 - * In the present case, the mergers are mostly among larger banks, Example: Canara and Syndicate
 - * The absorbing bank not necessarily in strong health. Example Punjab Bank riddled with fraud issues
- It is no secret that public sector banks are overstaffed.
 - * The success of these mergers, therefore, will hinge on how well these banks handle the sensitive issue of staff rationalisation.
 - * The All India Bank Employees Association has already raised the red flag.
- Merger related issues including HR/IT related synchronisation, branch rationalisation and realigning NPAs could impact interim profitability
- Due to high bad loans of the merged entities, profitability could be impacted in the near term.
- The largest of the mergers that has been proposed, which PNB is combining with two other entities, is going to give the bank which is about one third the size of the 50th largest bank in the world, which is low in ranking on the Global Standards.
- The correlation between size and efficiency is suspect beyond a certain minimum size.
- Evidences have also shown that in the Indian context large public sector banks underperform in relation to private banks, which are much smaller.
 - * The Price To Book Value Ratio of HDFC Bank is close to 4, whereas the price to book value of SBI is around 1.25.
 - * Therefore, the suggestion that getting bigger is going to, in itself, give some benefits is not validated by experience, either internationally or within India.
- Whenever a merger of such scale happens, the senior management gets distracted in terms of trying to make sure who gets what.
 - * And therefore, in the short term, there is going to be some amount of disruption.

The biggest argument against big banks is that they can become too big to fail.

- The financial sector is all inter-connected and a risk in any part of the system is a risk to the entire system. If a large bank were to fail, it could bring down the whole financial sector with it, as was evident from the near death experience following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, which triggered the global financial crisis.
- No country can therefore afford the failure of a big bank. The tacit knowledge that the sovereign will be forced to rescue it encourages irresponsible behaviour by big banks.

A look at numbers

Conclusion

- The government’s move comes at the right time, with the NPA or bad loans problem appearing to have bottomed out.
- But India’s banking reforms will be complete only when the next set of governance reforms show in board driven and professionally run banks, which are free to operate without policy constraints or hounding by probe agencies and when the government reduces its equity.
- That should be the next milestone.

Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR)

- PCR is the ratio of provisioning to gross non-performing assets, and indicates the extent of funds a bank has kept aside to cover loan losses.
- Higher the PCR, lower is the unexposed part of the bad debts.

Strength in numbers
 Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a series of mergers involving public sector banks on Friday. The move cut down the number of such banks from 27 in 2017 to 12. A look at the banks that will be merged:

| Banks to be merged | Size of merged entity | Total business |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Punjab National Bank, Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank | 2nd largest PSB | ₹18 lakh cr. |
| Canara Bank and Syndicate Bank | 4th largest PSB | ₹15.2 lakh cr. |
| Union Bank, Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank | 5th largest PSB | ₹14.6 lakh cr. |
| Indian Bank and Allahabad Bank | 7th largest PSB | ₹8,08 lakh cr. |

13. Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019

Context

- President Ram Nath Kovind gave assent to the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, that aims to make Indian roads safer, reduce corruption and use technology to overhaul the country's transportation system.

What was the need?

- India's Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 has remained in hibernation, unable to meet the needs of a large economy that is witnessing rising travel demand, fast-paced motorization, major shifts in technology and deteriorating road safety.
- Hence it required changes to meet the growing

demands.

- The amendments will improve road safety, facilitate citizens in their dealings with transport departments, and strengthen rural transport, public transport and last mile connectivity through automation, computerization and online services.

Road Safety

- In the area of road safety, amended act increases the penalties to act as deterrent against traffic violations. Stricter provisions are being proposed in respect of offences like juvenile driving, drunken driving, driving without licence, dangerous driving, over-speeding, overloading etc.
- Stricter provisions for helmets have been introduced along with provisions for electronic detection of

Riding without a helmet
Old: Fine of ₹100; ₹300 for second offence
New: Fine of ₹1,000 and suspension of licence for 3 months

More than one pillion rider
Old: ₹100; ₹300 for second offence
New: Fine of ₹1,000

Not wearing seatbelt*
Old: Fine of ₹100 to ₹300
New: Fine of ₹1,000

Speeding
Old: Fine of ₹400; ₹1,000 for second offence
New: Fine of ₹1,000-4000; impounding of licence for second offence

Drunken driving
Old: 6 months in jail or fine of ₹2,000; for second offence within 3 months, jail up to three years or fine of ₹3,000
New: 6 months in jail or fine of ₹10,000; for second offence, two years in jail or fine of ₹15,000

Causing accident
Old: 3 months in jail or ₹500 fine; for second offence, 6 months in jail or ₹1,000 fine
New: 6 months in jail or fine of ₹5,000; for second offence, 1 year in jail or fine of ₹10,000

Driving without licence
Old: Fine of ₹500
New: Fine of ₹5,000

*Offence includes not securing children below 14 years with a seatbelt or a child restraint system

violations. Penalty regarding motor vehicles is to be increased by 10 % every year.

Vehicle Fitness

- The Amended act mandates automated fitness testing for vehicles. This would reduce corruption in the transport department while improving the road worthiness of the vehicle.
 - * Penalty has been provided for deliberate violation of safety/environmental regulations as well as body builders and spare part suppliers.
 - * The process for testing and certification for automobiles is proposed to be regulated more effectively.
- The testing agencies issuing automobile approvals have been brought under the ambit of the Act and standards will be set for motor vehicle testing institutes.
- The amended act also provides for compulsory recall of defective vehicles and power to examine irregularities of vehicle companies.

National Road Safety Board

- The amended act provides for a National Road Safety Board, to be created by the central government through a notification.
- The Board will advise the central and state governments on all aspects of road safety and traffic management including standards of motor vehicles, registration and licensing of vehicles, standards for road safety, and promotion of new vehicle technology.

Motor Vehicle Accident Fund

- The amended act requires the central government to constitute a Motor Vehicle Accident Fund, to provide compulsory insurance cover to all road users in India.
- It will be utilized for: treatment of persons injured in road accidents as per the golden hour scheme, compensation to representatives of a person who died in a hit and run accident, compensation to a person grievously hurt in a hit and run accident, and compensation to any other persons as prescribed by the central government.
- The amended act provides for a scheme for cashless treatment of road accident victims during golden hour.

Taxi aggregators:

- The amended act defines aggregators as digital intermediaries or market places which can be used by passengers to connect with a driver for transportation purposes (taxi services).
- The amended act provides guidelines for Aggregators. At present there are no rules in many states for regulating aggregators, taxis etc.

Some of the other amendments are less promising.

- Studies show that sustained, zero tolerance enforcement of even small fines reduces violations, while stringent penalties are either not enforced or lead to more bribery.

Way forward

- Going forward, the Centre must deliver on its promise that the amended Act will help reduce dependence on personal vehicles, and present its National Transport Policy without delay.
- States must be incentivized to provide clean, comfortable and affordable services for all users, including people with disabilities. It is relevant to point out that the National Urban Transport Policy of the UPA failed to achieve this.
- New regulation can certainly shake up the status quo, facilitating transparent investment by any intending operator and removing vested interests, particularly in inter-State and multi-State coach services.

Putting accident victims at the centre of vehicles law

Introduction

- It is well known that India is one of the most accident-prone countries in the world, accounting for nearly 1,50,000 deaths — 10% of all motor vehicles-related fatalities worldwide.
- However, the debate often revolves around how to minimize road accidents by incorporating deterrents into laws and ignores the interests of the victims.

Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019

- The amended Act gives the victims some respite as it provides for an enhanced insurance compensation of ₹5 lakh in case of death of a person in a traffic accident and ₹2.5 lakh where there is "grievous hurt".
- The compensation to be awarded following hit-and-run accidents has also been raised to ₹2 lakh when a victim dies and ₹50,000 when he/she suffers a grievous injury.
- Additionally, the Act now requires insurance companies and the government to notify schemes relating to cashless treatment during the 'Golden Hour' — the period of first 60 minutes from the occurrence of an accident when the risk of fatality can be minimised to the greatest extent.
- Further, it mandates compulsory insurance of all road users, including pedestrians, who will be covered through a 'Motor Vehicle Accident Fund'.
- Lastly, it also provides for interim relief to be provided to the claimants.

Institutional Flaws

- The National Crime Records Bureau does not collate data pertaining to the socio-economic and demographic profile of victims of traffic accidents is a testament to the relative apathy shown by the state machinery.

- A sharp increase in fines has little chance of improving safety.

Therefore these provisions, well-intentioned, are no doubt steps in the right direction. However, much more needs to be done if the accident victims are to be provided complete justice.

Unsettled Issues

1. First, closer attention needs to be paid to the formula used to calculate the quantum of compensation.

- In the case of Arun Kumar Agarwal & Anr v. National Insurance Co. Ltd & Ors (2010), the deceased was a homemaker.
- The Accident Claim Tribunal reduced the amount of compensation from the calculated sum of ₹6 lakh to a sum of ₹2,60,000, stating that she was unemployed.
- In light of the same, on appeal, the Supreme Court commented that: "The time has come for the Parliament to have a rethink on properly assessing homemakers' and householders' work and suitably amending the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act... for giving compensation when the victims are women and homemakers."
- The amended Act, however, does not account for such nuances.

2. Second, many of the problems with the Motor Vehicles Act highlighted by the apex court in the case of Jai Prakash v. M/S. National Insurance Co. & Ors (2009) either remain unaddressed or are inadequately addressed by the amended version.

- For instance, though vehicle users who don't give passage to emergency ambulance vehicle are liable to be punished with fines, such punitive measures are likely to remain ineffective in the absence of an effective implementation mechanism.
- Further, other factors that lead to a poor response time, including lack of road infrastructure, also need to be taken into account.

3. Another problem highlighted by the apex court for which the new Act does not provide any remedy is that of procedural delays on the part of tribunals in claims settlement.

- The provision for interim compensation is bound to bring some respite to the victims but another unaddressed concern makes this stipulation susceptible to criticism.

4. An absence of in-built safeguards in the compensation mechanism allows for the money to be frittered away by unscrupulous relatives, touts and agents, especially in cases where the victim or his nearest kin are poor and illiterate.

- It is to address this concern that the Supreme Court in Jai Prakash suggested payment in the form of monthly disbursements of smaller amounts over a

longer period of time to victims or their kin, as against a lump-sum award.

- This has been overlooked by the new Act.

Way forward

- Understandably, many of the points raised above cannot be specified statutorily.
- Hence, the government needs to notify an institutional framework which encourages advocacy for victims and facilitates access to the various services.

14. Mukhya Mantri Krishi Ashirwad Yojna

Context

- The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has called for introducing structural reforms in the agricultural sector along with financial assistance schemes like Direct Benefit Transfer to make agriculture profitable and sustainable.
- He inaugurated the Mukhya Mantri Krishi Ashirwad Yojna of the Jharkhand Government,

About the scheme

- Under the scheme, all the small and marginal farmers of the state, who have arable land up to a maximum of 5 acres, will be given a grant-in-aid at the rate of Rs. 5000 / – per acre per year, which will also reduce their dependence on loans.
- This amount would be given in two installments through Direct Benefit Transfer to the beneficiary's bank account.
- This is in addition to PM Kisan Nidhi Yojana under which each small & marginal farmer's family having combined landholding/ ownership of up to two hectares is paid Rs. 6,000 per year.
- Direct Benefit Transfer would eliminate middlemen and ensure that every penny of the financial assistance given by the government reaches the beneficiaries.
- Government of India has taken a firm resolve to double the income of farmers by 2022.

15. Pashmina Products Receive BIS Certification

Context:

- Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has published an Indian Standard for identification, marking and labeling of Pashmina products to certify its purity.

Details:

- The certification is intended to help curb the adulteration of Pashmina and also protect the interests of local artisans and nomads who are the producers of Pashmina raw material.
- It will also assure purity of the product for customers.
- It is also intended to discourage counterfeit or substandard product in the market.

- It will also encourage the younger generation of the community to continue in this profession.
- It will ensure better prices for the goat herding community in Ladakh as well as for the local handloom artisans producing genuine Pashmina products.
- The ministry is processing a proposal for funding of Rs. 20 crore for a de-hairing plant for Leh which along with this initiative will lead to progress in the Pashmina sector in Ladakh.

About Pashmina

- Pashmina is a type of fine cashmere wool.
- Textiles made out of it were first woven in Kashmir.
- Pashmina comes from the Persian word for “made from wool”.
- It was first called “cashmere” because westerners first encountered it in Kashmir.
- The wool is taken from various breeds of Cashmere goat.
- Ladakh produces 50 MT of the finest grade of Pashmina in the world (12-15 microns).

Pashmina Herders

- The nomadic Pashmina herders live in the hostile and tough terrain of Changthang.
- They are dependent on Pashmina for their livelihood.
- Currently, there are 2400 families rearing 2.5 lakh goats.

About Changthangi or Pashmina goat

- It is a special breed of goat indigenous to the high altitude regions of Ladakh.
- The goat grows a thick, warm undercoat which is the source of Kashmir Pashmina wool.
- The goats are generally domesticated and reared by nomadic communities called the Changpa in the Changthang region of Greater Ladakh.

16. PM Ujjwala Yojana- Cooking with gas, not wood

Introduction

Please read about the scheme here:

<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/lpg-every-indian-household/>

Illiteracy and misinformation the core problem

- Few people in the rural set up believed food cooked on a chulha was healthier and tastier. In contrast, rotis cooked on gas cause indigestion
- They view that cooking with solid fuels was healthy for the person cooking too: fumes purified the eyes because they caused tears, and in blowing into a traditional stove, a woman did kasrat (exercise).

Using cleaner fuels such as LPG is essential to reduce rural

air pollution and improve health. What can policymakers do to achieve exclusive use of clean fuels in rural India? Three strategies could work:

- Communicating the harms of solid fuels and the benefits of cleaner fuels;
- Reducing the cost of LPG cylinder refills in rural areas; and
- Promoting gender equality within households, particularly in cooking and related tasks.

Information outreach need of the hour

- A large Anti-Tobacco Style Campaign communicating that solid fuels harm respiratory health may change these beliefs. Similarly, advertisements that food cooked on gas can be as tasty and healthy as food cooked on a chulha would be helpful.
- Reducing LPG prices in rural areas, where residents are poorer and solid fuels are easier to access, would also help. One way is to build on the targeting experience of the National Food Security Act.
 - * Under this Act, 75% of rural households are classified as priority households and entitled to subsidised rations. Another 10% of extremely poor households are classified as Antyodaya households, eligible for higher grain amounts at even lower prices.
 - * If priority households could become eligible for even higher subsidies in a revamped LPG pricing regime, and Antyodaya households could become eligible for LPG cylinders free of cost, exclusive LPG use would likely be higher.
- Finally, public policy must recognise that in households men should take be taking equal responsibility along with the women
 - * Men rarely cook or make dung cakes in rural households. Current Ujjwala messaging, which focuses on the benefits of clean fuels for women, reinforces this inequality.
 - * Advertisements showing that gas is so good that even men can cook with it will challenge both misinformation on LPG and gender inequalities in household tasks.

17. Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention

Access (PAiSA)

Context

- Deendayan Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), a flagship mission under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has been conferred the prestigious SKOCH Governance Gold Award for its Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention Access (PAiSA).

PAISA

- Launched in November 2018, PAISA is a centralized IT platform which simplifies and streamlines release of interest subvention under the Mission.
- It offers end to end online solution for processing, payment, monitoring and tracking of interest subvention claims from banks on a monthly basis.
- Claims for subvention are uploaded by banks through their CBS (Core Banking Solution) in respect of the beneficiaries of the Self Employment Programme, which are verified and approved by the ULB and State concerned.
- The approved claim amount gets credited directly to the beneficiary's loan account through DBT mode.
- SMS is also sent to the beneficiary's mobile number intimating the credit of subvention amount.

SKOCH Award

- It was instituted in 2003, is the highest civilian honor in the country conferred by an independent organization.
- It recognizes people, projects and institutions that go the extra mile to make India a better nation.
- SKOCH Award covers the best of efforts in the area of digital, financial and social inclusion.

18. Rajaswa Gyan Sangam

- It is an annual conference of tax administrators
- There are various issues when it comes to tax collection like Litigation Management, Strategies for Revenue Maximisation, Tax Evasion, Taxpayer Services, GST and Customs Reforms and Modernisation.
- The objective of the Conference is to enable a two-way communication between the policy-makers and the senior officers in the field offices with a view to increase revenue collection and facilitate effective implementation of law and policies in key result areas.
- Issues arising in implementation of policies and strategies to achieve targets in core functional areas will also be discussed.

19. RBI transfer 'surplus' to government**Context**

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Board has approved a transfer of Rs 1,76,051 crore to the government, including a surplus or dividend of Rs 1,23,414 crore, and a one-time transfer of excess provisions amounting to Rs 52,637 crore.

Bimal Jalan Committee

- The outflow from the RBI's reserves was limited to this amount only because the Bimal Jalan Committee,

appointed to recommend the economic capital framework for the RBI, decided to keep a major part of the reserves locked up and out of the reach of the government while opening up the remainder with strict stipulations.

- The Committee has recommended, and rightly so, that the Currency and Gold Revaluation Reserve Account (₹6.91 lakh crore as of June 30, 2018), at least half of which was eyed by the government, represents unrealised gains and hence is not distributable to the government.
- In the case of the Contingency Reserve (built out of retained earnings), which was ₹2.32 lakh crore as of the same date, the committee said that it should be maintained within a band of 6.5-5.5% of total assets.
- It left it to the RBI board to decide the precise percentage it was comfortable within this band and transfer the excess to the government. As it happened, the board, in its meeting, decided to peg this ratio at 5.5% thus enabling it to transfer a sum of ₹52,637 crore to the government immediately
- The committee should also be complimented for clearly specifying that the revaluation reserve cannot be used to bridge shortfalls in other reserves.

The RBI transfers its surplus to the government every year. So what is special about the pay out this time?

- Yes, the RBI does transfer its surplus annually to the government, the owner of the institution, after making adequate provisions for contingencies or potential losses. The profit that is distributed has varied, averaging over Rs 50,000 crore over the last few years.
- The RBI Board accepted the recommendations of a committee headed by former Governor Bimal Jalan on transfer of excess capital. Based on the panel's report, the Central Board decided to transfer a surplus of Rs 1.23 lakh crore and Rs 52,637 crore of excess provisions made over the years
- This marks the first time the RBI will be paying out such a huge amount, a one-off transfer.

How does a central bank like the RBI make profits?

- intervenes for instance to buy or sell foreign exchange; Open Market operations, when it attempts to prevent the rupee from appreciating; as income from government securities it holds; as returns from its foreign currency assets that are investments in the bonds of foreign central banks or top-rated securities; from deposits with other central banks or the Bank for International Settlement or BIS; besides lending to banks for very short tenures and management commission on handling the borrowings of state governments and the central government.

- The RBI is a “full service” central bank— not only is it mandated to keep inflation or prices in check, it is also supposed to manage the borrowings of the Government of India and of state governments; supervise or regulate banks and non-banking finance companies; and manage the currency and payment systems.
- Its expenditure is mainly on the printing of currency notes and on staff, besides the commission it gives to banks for undertaking transactions on behalf of the government across the country, and to primary dealers, including banks, for underwriting some of these borrowings.

Why are these called transfers to the government, rather than dividends?

- That is because the RBI is not a commercial organisation like banks and other companies owned or controlled by the government to pay a dividend to the owner out of the profit generated. Though it was promoted as a private shareholders’ bank in 1935 with a paid-up capital of Rs 5 crore, the government nationalised it in January 1949, making the sovereign the “owner”.
- What the RBI does is transfer the surplus — excess of income over expenditure —to the government.
- Under Section 47 of the RBI Act, “after making provision for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, contributions to staff and superannuation funds and for all other matters for which provision is to be made by or under this Act or which are usually provided for by bankers, the balance of the profits shall be paid to the Central government”.
- This is done in early August by the Central Board.

Is it right for the Government to request RBI to share its profits?

- In principle, it could be argued that the government as sovereign owns the RBI and hence there is nothing wrong if it decides to tap the central bank’s reserves.
- Yet, that it actually chose to do so is unfortunate because these reserves represent inter-generational equity built up over several years by the RBI by squirrelling away a part of its annual surplus.
- It is morally unacceptable that any one government can swallow even a part of such funds to help meet its expenditure in a particular year.
- The reserves, as the Jalan Committee has pointed out, represent the country’s savings for a ‘rainy day’, which is a monetary or financial crisis.

How do other central banks manage the transfer of surplus?

- Like in India, central banks in both the UK and US decide after consultations with the government.

- But in Japan, it is the government that decides.

What can the government do with this huge surplus?

- Normally, the money is transferred to the Consolidated Fund of India from which salaries and pensions to government employees are paid and interest payments done, besides spending on government programmes.
- The large payout can help the government cut back on planned borrowings and keep interest rates relatively low.
- Besides, it will provide space for private companies to raise money from markets.
- And if it manages to meet its revenue targets, the windfall gain can lead to a lower fiscal deficit.
- The other option is to earmark these funds for public spending or specific projects, which could lead to a revival in demand in certain sectors and boost economic activity.

Why do central banks hold back on transferring large amounts?

- Especially after the global financial crisis when central banks had to resort to unconventional means to revive their economies, the approach has been to build adequate buffers in the form of higher capital, reserves and other funds as a potential insurance against future risks or losses.
- A higher buffer enhances the credibility of a central bank during a crisis and helps avoid approaching the government for fresh capital and thus maintain financial autonomy.

20. RBI’s Goldilocks cut: On repo rate cut

Context

- In its monetary policy review, the Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI decided to cut the repo rate by 35 Basis Points (BPS).
- The Reserve Bank of India has reduced policy rates four times since February. The cumulative year to date reduction is 110 basis points.

Repo Rate

- Repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks. 100 bps make a full percentage point.
- As such, if the repo falls, all interest rates in the economy should fall. And that is why common people should be interested in the RBI’s monetary policy.

Why does monetary policy matter?

In any economy, economic activity, which is measured by gross domestic product or GDP, happens by one of four ways.

- One, private individuals and households spend money on consumption.

- Two, the government spends on its agenda.
- Three, private sector businesses “invest” in their productive capacity.
- And four, the net exports — which is the difference between what all of them spend on imports as against what they earn from exports.

At the heart of any spending decision taken by any of these entities lies the question: What is the cost of money?

- Monetary policy essentially answers that question. In every country, the central bank is mandated to decide the cost of money, which is more commonly known as the “interest rate” in the economy.
- While various factors make it difficult for a central bank to exactly dictate interest rates, as a thumb rule, RBI’s decision on the repo rate sets the markers for the rest of the economy

Why 35 BPS?

The expectation was of either a 25 or 50 basis points one.

- Given the extent of the slowdown in the economy, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) deemed the former as too low but taking into account factors such as the turbulence in the global financial markets and the rupee’s fall in the last few days, the latter was seen as too high.
- In the event, the MPC settled on a median and unconventional 35 basis point cut, which keeps the powder dry for further cuts this financial year.

But the interest rate for consumer loans has not reduced. Why?

- In the real world, the “transmission” of an interest rate cut (or increase) is not a hundred per cent. And that is why, even though when the RBI cut by 35 bps, lay consumers may only receive a much lower reduction in the interest rate on their borrowings.
- This is due to a lot of factors — but primarily, it has to do with the health of the concerned commercial bank.

So, how does RBI decide the interest rate?

- The first is to ensure price stability in the economy. The interest rate anchors the prices in an economy.
 - * The RBI continuously maps prices, inflation (which is the rate of increase in prices), and expectations of inflation (of households) to decide if it should increase or decrease interest rates.
- The other related concern for a central bank is to take care of economic growth. For instance, economic growth is anaemic at present and partly as a consequence, the inflation rate has been below 4% for several months now. The RBI is, therefore, cutting interest rates to incentivise people to consume more and businesses to invest more.

Way forward

- The slowdown now is part cyclical — which can be addressed by a rate cut — and part structural, for which reforms are an absolute necessity.
- Therefore, unless the government responds with its own measures, the RBI’s efforts to support growth may go in vain.

21. Sabka Vishwas-Legacy Dispute Resolution Scheme, 2019

- The Sabka Vishwas Scheme, 2019 is a scheme proposed in the Union Budget, 2019, and introduced to resolve all disputes relating to the erstwhile Service Tax and Central Excise Acts, which are now subsumed under GST, as well as 26 other Indirect Tax enactments
- The scheme will be for taxpayers who wish to close their pending disputes, with a substantial relief provided by the government.

The two main components of the Scheme are dispute resolution and amnesty.

- The Dispute Resolution component is aimed at liquidating the legacy cases of Central Excise and Service Tax that are subsumed in GST and are pending in litigation at various forums.
- The Amnesty Component of the Scheme offers an opportunity to the taxpayers to pay the outstanding tax and be free of any other consequence under the law.

How does it work?

- For all the cases pending in adjudication or appeal – in any forum - this Scheme offers a relief of 70% from the duty demand if it is Rs.50 lakhs or less and 50% if it is more than Rs. 50 lakhs.
- The same relief is available for cases under investigation and audit where the duty involved is quantified and communicated to the party or admitted by him in a statement on or before 30th June, 2019.
- Further, in cases of confirmed duty demand, where there is no appeal pending, the relief offered is 60% of the confirmed duty amount if the same is Rs. 50 lakhs or less and it is 40%, if the confirmed duty amount is more than Rs. 50 lakhs.
- Finally, in cases of voluntary disclosure, the person availing the Scheme will have to pay only the full amount of disclosed duty.

Significance

- The most attractive aspect of the Scheme is that it provides substantial relief in the tax dues for all categories of cases as well as full waiver of interest, fine, penalty

- In all these cases, there would be no other liability of interest, fine or penalty. There is also a complete amnesty from prosecution.

22. SEBI's liberalized norms for FPIs

Context

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), based on the recommendations of the H.R. Khan committee, eased several regulatory restrictions that are likely to make life easier for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs).

Background

- FPIs have been withdrawing from Indian equities after the finance minister introduced higher tax surcharge on the super-rich in the budget in July.
- In the past two months, FPIs have sold Indian shares worth \$3.07 billion, while they were net buyers of shares worth \$11.3 billion till June.

Foreign investors who have been fleeing the country since the Union budget have something to cheer about finally.

Measures taken by SEBI

- Among a slew of measures, the financial markets regulator has simplified the registration process for FPIs by doing away with the broad-based eligibility criteria, which required a minimum of at least 20 investors in a foreign fund, and certain documentary requirements.
- FPIs can now also engage in the off-market sale of their shares with fewer restrictions.
- Further, SEBI has allowed entities registered at an international financial services centre to be automatically classified as FPIs. This might help foreign investors bypass some of the restrictions.
- Mutual funds with offshore funds too can invest in India as FPIs to avail certain tax benefits now.
- Central banks that are not members of the Bank of International Settlements are also allowed to register as FPIs and invest in the country under the new norms.

Changes in Classification

- Till now, Sebi classified FPIs into three categories, with the easiest set of compliance norms for Category-I FPIs and the strictest for Category-III FPIs.
- The classification of an FPI depends on the way the offshore entity is regulated in its home market or the number of investors in the fund. The most well-regulated FPIs fall into Category-I.
- Sebi removed the concept of Category-III FPIs.
- There will now be only two categories of FPIs, said Sebi. However, Sebi has not elaborated how the two categories of FPIs will be decided.

Conclusion

- But given the broader trend of capital flowing out of emerging markets across the world, it remains to be seen whether SEBI's present move will yield immediate benefits.
- Even if it fails to do so, the move will still help Indian markets become more attractive to foreign investors in the long-run.
- In a world of globalised capital markets, where many nimble emerging markets compete to attract capital from the developed world, India cannot afford to be seen as flip-flopping on its commitments.

23. State Rooftop Solar Attractiveness Index (SARAL)

Context

- The Union Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy (IC) and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, launched the State Rooftop Solar Attractiveness Index

What is it?

- SARAL is the first of its kind index to provide a comprehensive overview of state-level measures adopted to facilitate rooftop solar deployment.
- SARAL has been designed collaboratively by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation (SSEF), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) and Ernst & Young (EY).
- It was launched during the Review Planning and Monitoring (RPM) Meeting with States and State Power Utilities.

SARAL currently captures five key aspects –

- robustness of policy framework,
- implementation environment,
- investment climate,
- consumer experience and
- Business ecosystem.

Ranking

- The State of Karnataka has been placed at the first rank in the Index that evaluates Indian states based on their attractiveness for rooftop development.
- Telangana, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh have got 2nd, 3rd and 4th rank respectively.

Significance

- It encourages each state to assess the initiatives taken so far, and what it can do to improve its solar rooftop ecosystem.
- This will help states to channelize investments that can eventually help the sector grow.

- In addition, such an exercise is likely to create a more conducive environment for solar rooftop installations, encourage investment and lead to accelerated growth of the sector

24. Tirur Vettilla obtains GI tag

- Tirur Vettilla (Betel Leaf) from the state of Kerala has obtained GI (Geographical Indication) tag
 - * Grown in Tirur and nearby areas of Malappuram district
- It is unique for its significantly high content of total chlorophyll and protein in fresh leaves.
 - * The antioxidant capacity is more in Tirur betel leaf adding to its medicinal properties.
 - * It's shelf period is also more compared to other betel leaves
- This betel leaf is more pungent due to presence of Eugenol

Other important Facts

- The IPR Cell of Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has received National IP Award, 2019 of Government of India its efforts in the facilitation of GI Registration.
 - * The Indian Intellectual Property Office confers National Intellectual Property (IP) Award
 - * It comes under the administrative control of Ministry of Commerce and Industry
 - * It is awarded to outstanding innovators, organisations and companies in the field of patents, designs, trademarks and geographical indications on the occasion of World IP Day (26 April) every year.
- The other products received the GI tag before with the initiative of the IPR cell of the KAU are Kaipad rice, Pokkali rice, Wayanad Jeerakasala rice, Wayanad Gandhakasala rice, Vazhakulam pineapple, Marayur jaggery, Central Travancore jaggery and Chengalikodan nendran.

25. Uber for tractors

Context

- India's agriculture ministry has developed a farm equipment rental app for Indian farmers, which lets them hire tractors, rotavator and other farm related machinery on rent for with flexible tenures.

Details

- The new app – "Uber for tractors" would enable farmers to have affordable access to cutting-edge technology at their doorsteps.
- The app is reportedly similar to Uber and looks to bring a similar convenience to farmers.

- The mobile app seeks to efficiently connect farmers with custom hiring centres CHCs, just like Uber connects passengers to cabs.
- There are more than 38,000 custom hiring centres (CHCs) across the country, which rent out 2.5 lakh pieces of farm equipment every year.
- Once the app is officially launched, farmers who wish to hire equipments can register using their names, addresses and mobile numbers, and then punch in their requirements.
- The app also includes a rating system wherein the feedback from both the CHC and the farmers, allowing customers to make informed decisions.
- The app will also create an invaluable database for policy-makers, who can track the use and cost of equipment.
- The system would also help to track the usage of new technology that the government wants to promote, such as the Happy Seeder that aims to prevent stubble burning that causes air pollution, or solar dryers that can help farmers process and preserve their produce.
- Successful demos have already been conducted in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab.

26. UDAN - Giving wings to better air connectivity

Introduction

- Civil aviation is a central subject and one that barely got significant attention from the States until recently.
- It is evident from the fact that very few States in India have active civil aviation departments. This is also due to the reason that States have had a passive role, invariably, having had to look up to the Central government for the development of airports and enhancing air connectivity. However, in the last four years, the situation has changed considerably.
- The cooperation of States is seen as a major factor in the growth of the civil aviation sector. The Regional Connectivity Scheme, UdeDeshkaAamNaagrik (UDAN), has become a game changer as this flagship programme has a built-in mechanism to develop stakes of State governments in the growth of the sector.

Key policy interventions

Thirty States and Union Territories have already signed memoranda of understanding with the Central government. The policies of States and Centre are now being interlinked to make flying accessible and affordable. Here are some policy intervention suggestions to jump-start the aviation market.

1. For any airline in India, the cost of Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) forms about 40% of the total operational cost.

- Keeping petroleum products out of the purview of Goods and Services Tax (GST) may be a policy imperative for the State governments but this is a step that adversely impacts the expansion of air services to the States.
- States have very high rates of value-added tax (VAT) on ATF — sometimes as high as 25% — which has dampened the growth trajectory of civil aviation. ATF is a small component of overall petroleum products and deserves to be treated separately.

Impact

- The airline industry is capital-intensive and works on very thin profit margins. Therefore, relief on ATF is a major incentive for airlines to augment their operations.
- For States, it would be a notional revenue loss which can be offset by enhanced economic activities as a result of increased air connectivity to the region.
- Therefore Reducing VAT on ATF is the biggest lever States can operate, which will enable them in being an equal partner in steering sector policy.

2. Airport development

The second area is in the development and management of airports. There are many regional airports which can be developed by States on their own or in collaboration with the Airports Authority of India (AAI).

In this, there have been different models of public-private-partnership which can be leveraged to develop infrastructures.

Impact

- Land involves huge capital and is a scarce resource. Innovative models can be explored to create viable 'no-frill airports'. These functional airports can open up regions and change the way people travel.

3. Linking the hinterland

Third, States and the Central government can play a crucial role in supporting airlines to develop air services in the remote regions.

- To reduce operational cost of airlines and airport operators, incentives from State governments have been sought: some in the form of financial support such as VAT reduction; sharing of viability gap funding with airlines, and non-financial incentives such as providing security and fire services free of cost to airport operators.
- Similarly, under the scheme, the Union government has declared concessions on excise duty on ATF and made budgetary allocations for airport development.

- This unique scheme has been successful in encouraging airlines to operate on regional unconnected routes instead of trunk routes. Market appetite and aspirations of remote areas can match the plans of airlines where States play a catalytic role.

Steps to be taken

- Convergence is an element in governance which is often overlooked due to a compartmentalisation in implementation.
- States may converge their relevant schemes relating to tourism, health, and insurance for supporting air connectivity to supplement the objectives of regional connectivity.

Conclusion

- Currently the penetration of the aviation market in India stands at 7%. There is potential to be among the global top three nations in terms of domestic and international passenger traffic.
- For this States need to create a conducive business environment to facilitate the strong aspirations of a burgeoning Indian middle class to fly at least once a year. It would boost ticket sales from the present level of eight crore domestic tickets.
- Developing airports, incentivising airlines and pooling resources of both the Union and State governments can accelerate the harmonised growth of the Indian civil aviation sector which would be equitable and inclusive.

27. US Federal Reserve's rate cut

Context

- The US Federal Reserve has announced a quarter-percentage-point cut in interest rates — the first rate cut by the US central bank in 11 years

Why has US Fed cut rates?

- The Fed has cited concerns about the global economy and muted US inflation as reasons for the move, and signaled a readiness to lower borrowing costs further if needed.
- Financial markets had widely expected the quarter-percentage-point rate cut, which lowered the US central bank's benchmark overnight lending rate to a target range of 2.00% to 2.25%.

Why Fed's rate cut is significant?

- The cut in interest rates is the first time since the 2008 financial crisis.
- What is ironic is that this move comes despite a strong US economy and indicators such as job market data showing renewed buoyancy.
- The rate cut follows months of pressure from US President Donald Trump, who has been pushing the American central bank for a cut in rates.

US rate cut impact on India

- A rate cut in the US is good for emerging market economies and is projected to catalyze a debt and equity market rally in countries such as India.
- Typically, emerging economies such as India tend to have higher inflation and thereby higher interest rates than those in developed countries such as the US and Europe.
 - * As a result, FIIs would want to borrow money in the US at low-interest rates in dollar terms and then invest that money in bonds of emerging countries such as India in Rupee terms to earn a higher rate of interest.
 - * When the US Fed cuts its interest rates, the difference between interest rates of the two countries increases, thus making India more attractive for the currency carry trade.
- A rate cut cycle means a weaker dollar, which is good for the US but may not be so for the rest of the world.
 - * It has been seen in the past that as the dollar weakens due to lower growth tendencies, the rupee has tended to strengthen which will pose a conundrum for us as exports will come under pressure with a double whammy – slower demand due to lower global growth and a stronger rupee.
 - * This will not be good for the current account deficit (CAD).
- Lower interest rates and a weaker dollar also means stronger gold, as the metal will continue to shine under such circumstances. From the Indian point of view greater investment demand for gold can surface putting pressure on a pressurised trade deficit.

28. World Biofuel Day**Context**

- World Biofuel Day is observed every year on 10th of August to create awareness about the importance of non-fossil fuels as an alternative to conventional fossil fuels and highlight the various efforts made by Government in the biofuel sector.
- This year the theme of the World Biofuel Day is "Production of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil (UCO)".

Harmful impact of UCO

- In India, the same cooking oil is used for repeated frying which adversely affects the health due to formation of polar compounds during frying. These polar compounds are associated with diseases such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, liver diseases among others.

- UCO is either not discarded at all or disposed of in an environmentally hazardous manner choking drains and sewerage systems.

Steps taken by the Govt

- The National Policy on Biofuels, released by the Government of India in 2018, envisages production of biofuel from UCO.
- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is implementing a strategy to divert UCO from the food value chain and curb current illegal usage.
- To facilitate the production of Biodiesel from UCO, the Oil Marketing Companies shall float an Expression of Interest (EOI) for procurement of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil across 100 cities.
 - * The purpose of inviting this EOI is to encourage the applicants to set up Biodiesel producing plants from Used Cooking Oil (UCO), processing plants and further utilizing the existing potential of UCO based Bio-diesel in India.

Significance

- Biofuels have the benefits of reduction of import dependence, cleaner environment, additional income to farmers and employment generation.
- Biofuel programme also compliments Government of India's initiatives for Make in India, Swachh Bharat and increasing farmer's income. A number of initiatives have been undertaken to increase production and blending of biofuels since 2014.
- The benefits of transformation of UCO will help bring health benefits as there would be no recycling of the UCO, employment generation, infrastructural investment in rural areas & cleaner environment with reduced carbon footprint.

29. World Skills Kazan 2019**Context:**

- The world's biggest international vocational skills competition, World Skills Kazan 2019 got underway with a grand ceremony at Kazan, Russia

Details

- An initiative of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under the aegis of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), World Skills India is integral to the vision of building a Skilled India, exposing young talent to the best-in-class technology, techniques and skills amongst different trades.


The key objectives of World Skills India are to:

- Promulgate skills in the society and motivate the youth to pursue vocational education.

- Champion skills and learning for work through local, regional, national and international skills competition and contribute to the society.
- Invite sponsorships to organize the local, regional, national and international skills competitions and also host international competitions.
- Establish links and a long-term association with the WSI secretariat along with development of cooperation with the Government of India, state Governments, registered vocational skills training and awarding bodies.

One School One Country

- Before the opening ceremony, the competing teams came together to present their national cultures under the One School-One Country initiative.
- The initiative aims to promote cultural exchange between the participating countries and to raise the profile of skills and different career pathways.



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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. An end to arms control consensus

Background

- The decade of the 1980s saw heightened Cold War tensions. Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 provided the U.S. an opportunity to fund a (barely) covert jihad with the help of Pakistan.
- President Ronald Reagan called the USSR "an evil empire" and launched his space war initiative.
- Soviet deployments in Europe of SS-20 missiles were matched by the U.S. with Pershing II and cruise missiles.

Cold War talks

In 1985, the two countries entered into arms control negotiations on three tracks.

- The first dealt with strategic weapons with ranges of over 5,500 km, leading to the START agreement in 1991 that limited both sides to 1,600 strategic delivery vehicles and 6,000 warheads.
- A second track dealt with intermediate-range missiles, of particular concern to the Europeans, and this led to the INF Treaty in 1987.
- A third track, Nuclear and Space Talks, was intended to address Soviet concerns regarding the U.S.'s Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) but this did not yield any concrete outcome.

Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

- It is a 1987 arms control agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate and permanently renounce all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers.
 - * The treaty did not cover sea-launched missiles
- It was signed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev
- The treaty marked the first time the superpowers had agreed to reduce their nuclear arsenals, eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons, and utilize extensive on-site inspections for verification.

How INF helped?

- The INF Treaty was hailed as a great disarmament pact even though no nuclear warheads were dismantled and similar range air-launched and sea-launched missiles were not constrained.
- Further, since it was a bilateral agreement, the treaty did not restrict other countries, but this hardly mattered as it was an age of bipolarity and the U.S.-USSR nuclear equation was the only one that counted.

- By 1991, the INF had been implemented. The USSR destroyed a total of 1,846 missiles and the U.S. did the same with 846 Pershing and cruise missiles.
- Associated production facilities were also closed down. In keeping with Reagan's dictum of 'trust but verify', the INF Treaty was the first pact to include intensive verification measures, including on-site inspections.

End of the Cold War

- It led to break-up of the USSR in end-1991, the arms race was over. Former Soviet allies were now joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and negotiating to become European Union (EU) members.
- The U.S. was investing in missile defence and conventional global precision strike capabilities to expand its technological lead. Importantly, some of these were blurring the nuclear-conventional divide.

Context

- The process for bringing an end to this treaty was called in October 2018, when President Donald Trump announced that U.S. was considering a withdrawal. On August 2 2019, the U.S. formally quit the pact.

How it all began?

- In 2001, when the U.S. announced its unilateral withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), a keystone of bilateral nuclear arms control was removed.
- The INF Treaty had been under threat for some time. The U.S. had started voicing concerns about the Novator 9M729 missile tests nearly a decade ago. As Russia began production, formal allegations of violation of the INF Treaty were raised by the Obama administration in 2014.
 - * Russia denied the allegations and blamed the U.S. for deploying missile defence interceptors in Poland and Romania, using dual-purpose launchers that could be quickly reconfigured to launch Tomahawk missiles.
- Basically, Russia believes that nuclear stability began getting upset since the U.S.'s unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. As the U.S. used its technological lead to gain advantage, Russia became more dependent on its offensive nuclear arsenal and began its modernization and diversification.
- The U.S.'s 2017 National Security Strategy and the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) the following year reflected harsher-than-before assessment of its security environment and sought a more expansive role for nuclear weapons, in a break from the policies that had been followed since the end of the Cold War.

- * Russia was seen as a 'disruptive power' pushing for a re-ordering of security and economic structures in Europe and West Asia in its favour.
- * China was identified for the first time as a strategic competitor that was seeking regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region in the near-term and "displacement of the U.S. to achieve global pre-eminence in the future".
- The 2018 NPR envisaged development of new nuclear weapons, including low-yield weapons. The Nevada test site, which has been silent since 1992, is being readied to resume testing with a six-month notice.
- With the geopolitical shift to the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. believes that the INF Treaty was putting it at a disadvantage compared to China which is rapidly modernising and currently has 95% of its ballistic and cruise missile inventory in the INF range. Against this political backdrop, the demise of the agreement was a foregone conclusion.

Consequences

- The 2011 New START was a successor to the START framework of 1991 and limited both sides to 700 strategic launchers and 1,550 operational warheads. It lapses in February 2021 unless extended for a five-year period.
 - * Mr. Trump has already labelled it "a bad deal negotiated by the [Barack] Obama administration."
 - * He has indicated that a decision on the agreement will be taken in January 2021, after the 2020 election.
 - * Given his dislike for it, if he is re-elected, it is clear that the New START will also meet the fate of the INF Treaty.
- The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a "zero-yield" treaty. This means that the agreement prohibits all nuclear explosions that produce a self-sustaining, supercritical chain reaction of any kind whether for weapons or peaceful purposes.
 - * Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency Lt. Gen. Robert Ashley declared that "Russia probably is not adhering to the nuclear testing moratorium in a manner consistent with the 'zero-yield' standard" imposed by the CTBT
 - * Many have interpreted Lt. Gen. Ashley's statement as preparing the ground for a resumption of nuclear explosives testing. Taken together, these ominous pointers indicate the beginning of a new nuclear arms race.
- This means that, for the first time since 1972, when the Strategic Arms Limitation Act (SALT) I concluded, strategic arsenals from the U.S. and Russia will not be constrained by any arms control agreement.

Conclusion

- A new nuclear arms race could just be the beginning. Unlike the bipolar equation of the Cold War, this time it will be complicated because of multiple countries being involved.
- Technological changes are bringing cyber and space domains into contention.
- All this raises the risks of escalation and could even strain the most important achievement of nuclear arms control — the taboo against the use of nuclear weapons that has stood since 1945.

2. Falaq

- Iran unveiled Falaq, a locally upgraded radar system with a range of 400 km that could help defend against cruise and ballistic missiles and drones.
- The Falaq is an improved version of the Gamma, a system that military experts said was of Russian origin.
- The announcement comes at a time of rising tension between Iran and United States.
 - * Iran shot down a U.S. military surveillance drone in the Gulf with a surface-to-air missile in June.
 - * Tehran says the drone was over its territory, but Washington says it was in international airspace.

3. Fortifying the Africa outreach

Context

- Two important Indian dignitaries have begun their respective visits to Africa. President Ram Nath Kovind is visiting Benin, Gambia and Guinea-Conakry and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh arrived to Maputo. It indicates enhanced priority to Africa assigned by India.

Stats

- India has substantive economic engagement with Africa. Its trade with Africa totalled \$63.3 billion in 2018-19. India
- By 2017, India had cumulatively extended 152 Lines of Credit worth \$8 billion to 44 African countries.
- India has also unilaterally provided free access to its market for the exports of 33 least developed African countries.
- India was ranked the third largest trading partner of Africa having edged past the United States in 2019

An area that needs Introspection

- Although these statistics are impressive, they are well below the potential for India-African economic synergy and are often dwarfed by the corresponding Chinese data.
- There seems to be a visible disconnect between Indian developmental assistance to and India's economic engagement with Africa.
- The time has now come to have a more comprehensive and sustainable engagement.

Reciprocity is a must in the Indian Africa Relationship

- India is neither a rich country nor has its hands been tainted by a history of slavery, colonisation and the exploitation of Africa.
- In fact, it is a developing country with similar domestic challenges of poverty, infrastructure deficit and underdevelopment.
- India's funds committed and seats in our prestigious academic institutions offered to Africa are at the expense of the tax-paying Indians.
- India's aid to Africa should be reciprocated by acknowledgement and quid pro quo in terms of goodwill (beyond the easy-flowing official rhetoric), and institutional preference.

India cannot simply be a cash cow for Africa, particularly when its own economy is slowing down.

Steps forward

We need to ask ourselves these: for all the development billions spent, how many mega-projects did Indian companies get and how many natural resources does India have access to in Africa? We should reorient our developmental profile to be more economically productive. To this end, a number of steps can be considered:

- First, we need to take direct control of our development programme instead of handing our funds to intermediaries such as the African Union, the African Development Bank Group and the Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement (TEAM 9), whose priorities are often different from India's.
 - * To make an impact, our aid should be disbursed bilaterally and aligned with national priorities of the recipient state, which should be a substantial stakeholder and co-investor in schemes and projects from initiation to operation.
- Second, India's development assistance should prefer the countries with its substantial interests, both existing and potential.
 - * For instance, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Ghana, Angola and Algeria are India's top six trading partners in Africa, accounting for nearly two-thirds of its trade and half its exports to the continent; yet, they do not figure commensurately in India's developmental pecking order.
 - * India's own needs for raw materials, commodities and markets should be factored in its aid calculus.
- Third, we ought to prefer aiding countries which are willing to help us — from access to their natural resources to using our generics.
- Fourth, the aided project selected should be compatible with local requirements. They should be cost-effective, scalable, future ready and commercially replicable.
- Fifth, for greater transparency, India should prefer its public sector to implement the aid projects.

- Sixth, the Indian Head of Mission in the recipient African state must be an integral part of the aid stream including project selection, co-ordination and implementation.

* Apart from empowering our diplomacy, this would ensure better harmonisation between our aid and economic objectives.

- Finally, the aforementioned should not distract us from our duty to provide the needed humanitarian assistance to Africa: to be rendered promptly and with sensitivity, but without noise.

4. Free fall: On the Afghan conflict

Context

- The suicide attack at a crowded wedding hall in Kabul killed at least 63 people and injured more than 180 others is yet another tragic reminder of the perilous security situation in Afghanistan.
- The blast was claimed by the local arm of the Islamic State (IS)

Background

- U.S. and the Taliban are preparing to announce a peace agreement to end the 18-year-long conflict
- The government in Kabul, backed by the U.S. and the international community, is fighting to preserve the existing system, which despite its faults, at least offers a semblance of democracy.
- But the government is a failure in ensuring safety and security of the people. The Taliban, which controls the mountainous hinterlands, wants to expand its reach to the urban centres.

Peace will remain elusive to people of Afghanistan

- But if the IS attack is anything to go by, Afghans will not be able to live in peace irrespective of the consensus reached between the Taliban and the U.S.
- It's now a three-way conflict in Afghanistan — the government, the Taliban insurgents and the global terrorists.
- The IS, which has declared a province (Khorasan) in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar, has emerged as the third player.
- Attacks against civilians, especially the Shia minority, is the central part of its brutal military tactics. Afghanistan's Hazara Shias were the target of the wedding hall bombing as well.

Concerns

- This complex, mutually destructive nature of the conflict is the biggest challenge before any attempt to establish order and stability in Afghanistan.
- What if the Taliban, which ran most of Afghanistan according to its puritanical interpretation of the Islamic law from 1996 to 2001, turns against Kabul once the Americans are out?

- What if the country plunges into a multi-party civil war as it did after the Soviet Union pulled out in 1989?

Future prospect of the peace deal

- As part of a potential peace deal, the U.S. is ready to pull troops from Afghanistan in return for assurances from the Taliban that they will not allow the Afghan soil to be used by transnational terrorists such as the IS and al-Qaeda.
- It will be left to the Taliban and the government to have their own peace talks and settle differences.
- Arguably, a peace deal or at least a ceasefire between the Taliban and the Kabul government would allow both sides to rechannel their resources to fighting terrorist groups.

Conclusion

- The IS has demonstrated an ability to survive and strike in Afghanistan despite the U.S.'s heavy air campaign in the east. Ideally, the international community should have strengthened the hands of the Kabul government against all kind of terrorists, before seeking a settlement with the insurgents.
- They should have helped alter the balance of power in the conflict. But it does not seem likely now. And Afghanistan is in a free fall.

5. G7

- The G7 or 'Group of Seven' are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- It is an intergovernmental organisation that was formed in 1975 by the top economies of the time as an informal forum to discuss pressing world issues.
- The G7 was known as the 'G8' for several years after the original seven were joined by Russia in 1997.
- The Group returned to being called G7 after Russia was expelled as a member in 2014 following the latter's annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine.
- The G7 nations meet at annual Summits that are presided over by leaders of member countries on a rotational basis.
 - * The G7 does not have a formal constitution or a fixed headquarters.
 - * The decisions taken by leaders during annual Summits are non-binding.
- The current G7 Summit being held in France is the 45th, and the next one will be held in the United States in 2020.
 - * The host country typically gets to invite dignitaries from outside the G7 to attend the Summit.

Context

- Modi was invited to attend the Summit as a special guest of French President Emmanuel Macron.

What the G7 does?

The G7 Summit is an informal gathering that lasts two days, in which leaders of member countries discuss a wide range of global issues.

- The Group was initially formed as an effort by the US and its allies to discuss economic issues, which in the late 1970s included battling a global oil crisis
- Since then, the G7 has discussed issues affecting every decade, such as financial crises, and has aimed to tackle specific challenges, such as the economic changeover of ex-Soviet bloc nations, terrorism, arms control, and drug trafficking, among others.
- The groundwork for the Summit, including matters to be discussed and follow-up meetings, is done by the "sherpas", who are generally personal representatives or members of diplomatic staff such as ambassadors.
 - * The sherpa for Prime Minister Modi at the current Summit is former Union Minister Suresh Prabhu.

G7 and G20

- The G20 is a larger group of countries, which also includes G7 members. The G20 was formed in 1999, in response to a felt need to bring more countries on board to address global economic concerns.
 - * Apart from the G7 countries, the G20 comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, and Turkey.
 - * Together, the G20 countries make up around 80% of the world's economy.
- As opposed to the G7, which discusses a broad range of issues, deliberations at the G20 are confined to those concerning the global economy and financial markets.

Big Takeaway for India:

- For India, getting invited to be a part of the G7 summit, even though it is not a member of the grouping, came as a special gesture from the host country France, which is keen on furthering strategic ties with India.
- This invite came at an opportune time for India as it gave the Prime Minister the right platform to engage with the top leaders and present India's viewpoint on the Kashmir issue, especially since Pakistan has launched a smear campaign against India at all major global platforms.
- All the G7 members were supportive of India's stand and there was no reference to the Kashmir situation in the joint statement. This can be seen as a diplomatic victory for India and an endorsement of its position, considering that the G7 joint statement did make a reference to the ongoing political turmoil in Hong Kong.

- It was an anti-climax for Pakistan at the G7 because its all-weather ally – China, which is not a part of the grouping, was not there to push for its case just as it did at the UNSC.
- Even the European countries, which are otherwise hawkish on the Kashmir issue, chose not to bring up the Kashmir issue and in fact, close partners like France have openly embraced India's stand.
- This shows that the European powers see India as a major trading and investment partner and they respect India's sensitivities, which was tactfully conveyed by the Prime Minister.
- The opportunity given to PM Modi to speak on digital transformation, technology and environment sustainability is an indication that India is being seen as a major player in these domains.

6. Henley Passport Index

- Prepared by Henley and Partners, a London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm, the Henley Passport Index claims to be the "original ranking of all the world's passports".
- The index gathers data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) that manages inter-airline cooperation globally.
- The Henley Passport Index is updated in real time according to countries' visa policy changes. It covers 227 destinations and 199 passports.
- The index receives data from the IATA on a fixed day every year that forms the basis of the index.
- This data is supplemented by accounting for real-time changes in visa policies using publicly available sources to prepare a visa list, which is a list of destinations that a passport can access visa-free, through a visa on arrival, e-visa or with a traditional visa.
- The strength of a passport is defined as the countries to which holders are eligible to travel without a visa. This implies that passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival, an electronic travel authority, or a visitor's permit when entering the destination country.

Context India's latest ranking

- According to the Henley Passport Index 2019, the strength of the Indian passport has weakened considerably in the last decade.
- India slipped nine places on the list, from 77 in 2010 to 86 in 2019 down five places from 81 in 2018.
- In the last decade, only eight nations granted visa-free-access to Indian nationals.
- India ranks below other BRICS countries, with which are at a similar stage in their economic development.

Global ranking

- Singapore has the strongest passport.
- Afghanistan holds the weakest passport, with a score and ranking of 25 and 109, respectively.
- Syria and Pakistan follow with rankings of 107 and 106 and scores of 29 and 30, respectively.

How are passport ranks and scores interpreted?

- The score is the sum of the number of countries accessible by that passport holder without requiring pre-departure government approval for visa-types including a visitor's permit, visa on arrival or an Electronic Travel Authority (ETA).
 - * For every territory/country that a passport holder of a particular country/territory is able to access through these visa-types (without pre-departure government approval), a value of 1 is attributed to it.
 - * A value of 0 is attributed to a score when a passport holder has to seek pre-departure government approval for visa-types including e-visa (visas applied for online and received) and visa on arrival. Therefore, the total score becomes the sum total for all the values of 1.
- For instance, a passport holder from Singapore and Japan can travel to 189 countries/territories without requiring pre-departure government approval.

What assumptions does the index make?

- The index assumes that the passport is valid, belongs to an adult who is a citizen of the issuing country and that it is not diplomatic, emergency or temporary in nature.
- It also assumes that the person travelling is doing so alone, rather than in tourist groups and meets all the basic requirements for entry such as hotel reservations.
- Furthermore, the traveller is assumed to be arriving and departing from the same airport and is seeking a short stay (between three days-several months) for business and tourist purposes only.

What does this mean for Indian passport holders?

- India has a score of 58. That is the number of destinations an Indian passport holder can travel to today, without pre-departure government approval.
- That is the same as a citizen of any country, on an average, could travel to 13 years ago.

Significance

- Passport rankings point towards the strength of diplomatic relations between countries.

7. India- Bahrain relations

Context

- PM Modi is the first Indian PM to visit Bahrain. This was the third leg of his three-nation tour



Introduction

- India and Bahrain have enjoyed outstanding, worthy relationship since Ancient times.
- Our Exchanges dates back to that of Indus valley Civilization in India and Dilmun (Telmun) Civilization in Bahrain.
 - * Dilmun is associated with ancient sites on the islands of Bahrain
- Traders from Bahrain exchanged goods like the Bahraini pearls with Indian spices.

Diaspora Relationship

- India and Bahrain have had economic and trade relations for over several centuries; these relations received fresh impetus from the oil boom of the early seventies.
 - * Presence of nearly 350,000 Indian nationals who are an important anchor of our bilateral relations with Bahrain.
- The Indian expatriate community enjoys great goodwill from the Bahraini authorities and the employers alike.
 - * It is no secret that Indians are preferred over other expatriates from the subcontinent.
 - * The main reasons for this include the trust factor, strong work ethics and the "apolitical" orientation of Indian expatriates.

Economic Relationship

- India's main items of exports to Bahrain are mineral fuels, mineral oils, inorganic chemicals, organic or inorganic compounds of precious metals of rare earth, Elam/radii/isotopes, cereals, nuts, fruits, articles of apparel and clothing accessories etc., while
- Main Items of import from Bahrain are crude oils, mineral fuels, their bituminous substance, distillation, aluminum, fertilizers, ores/slugs/ ashes of aluminum, iron and copper, pulp, salt, printed books, newspapers etc.

Strategic Relationship

- Bahrain has always advocated India to play a major role in International Affairs and has also supported India's candidature for UNSC Permanent seat.

Details

- India and Bahrain agreed to collaborate in the areas of space technology, solar energy and culture exchange
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Bahrain's National Space Science Agency agreed to collaborate in the area of space technology.
- The two sides agreed on cooperation of the Kingdom with the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
 - * The ISA, launched in 2015 by Prime Minister Modi and then French President Francois Hollande at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, is a major global initiative for contributing to the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through rapid and massive deployment of solar energy.

Shri Krishna Temple in Bahrain

- PM Modi launched the renovation of 200-year-old Sree Krishna temple in Bahrain
- The temple is estimated to have been established around 1817 and was built by Thathai Bhatia Hindu community
- It is considered to be the first and the oldest temple in the Gulf countries

The King Hamad Order of the Renaissance

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been conferred The King Hamad Order of the Renaissance by King of Bahrain
- While receiving the award Modi said: "I feel very honoured and fortunate to be awarded The King Hamad Order of the Renaissance. I am equally honoured by your majesty's friendship for me and for my country. I humbly accept this prestigious honour on behalf of 1.3 billion Indians".

8. Manasarovar

Context:

- The Chinese government has taken initiatives to improve the material comforts of the pilgrims undertaking trek to the high altitude Kailash Manasarovar.

Kailash Manas Sarovar Yatra:

- Lake Manasarovar or Mapam Yumtso is one of the highest body of freshwater lake in the world.
- It is fed by the Kailash Glacier.
- It is present near Mount Kailash in Tibet Autonomous Region.
- The Manasarovar Lake is revered a sacred place in four religions: Bön, Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism.

- Lake Manasarovar has long been viewed by the pilgrims as being nearby to the sources of four great rivers of Asia, namely the Brahmaputra, Ghaghara, Sindhu and Sutlej.
- Pilgrimage tours are organized regularly from India.

Details:

- The Yatra involves trekking at high altitudes of up to 19,500 feet, under inhospitable conditions, including extreme weather, and rugged terrain, and may prove hazardous for those who are not physically and medically fit.
- The yatri (pilgrims) travel four to five days to get to the Pass. If conditions are improved, their journey could be made less exhausting.
- The Yatra is organized with the support of the state governments of Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Sikkim; and the cooperation of Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

9. Narendra Modi's Bhutan visit

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bhutan, which is a bid to diversify India's partnership with the kingdom from the hydro-power sector to enhanced trade and linkages in space and education.

Background

- The relationship between India and Bhutan is built on traditional closeness, one that is unique in today's world. Open borders, close alignment and consultation on foreign policy, and regular, open communications on all strategic issues are the hallmark of the relationship that has maintained its consistency for the past many decades.
- Bhutan's unequivocal support to India on strategic issues has meant a lot to India on the international stage and at the United Nations.
- On the security front Bhutan has helped India in 2003 to drive out ULFA rebels or support for India's stand against Chinese troops on the Doklam plateau.
- India's assistance to Bhutan's planned economy, to constructing its highest revenue earner of hydropower generated electricity, and then buying the electricity generated has also ensured a symbiotic and mutually beneficial base to the relationship, which has been nurtured by the leaders in both countries, in a manner Mr. Modi called "exemplary".

A new blueprint for cooperation

- The two countries inked 10 MoUs in the fields of space research, aviation, IT, power and education to infuse new energy in their ties.
- The Prime Minister invited more students to visit India for studies in traditional areas such as Buddhism and newer areas like space research

RuPay Card

- The RuPay Card was launched in Bhutan by making a transaction at Simtokha Dzong, which functions as a monastic and administrative centre.
- This will further enhance our relationship in digital payments, trade and tourism.

Ground Earth Station and SATCOM network

- Modi and Tshering also jointly inaugurated the Ground Earth Station and SATCOM network, developed with assistance from Isro for utilization of South Asia Satellite in Bhutan
- The network was being used for broadcast applications on a 24x7 basis as well as for meeting the social and administrative requirements of Bhutan

India should not take the relationship with Bhutan for granted

- In the past few years, ties came under a strain over India's sudden change in its power purchasing policy, rigid rates and refusal to allow Bhutan to join the national power grid and trade with third countries like Bangladesh. These issues are being addressed now.
- Another concern that could create differences is over Bhutan's worry that too much trade, transport and tourism from India could put its environment at risk.
 - * India's plans for a Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) in the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal grouping have been held up, and a Bhutanese proposal to levy entry charges on Indian tourists could cause differences with India.
- Earlier generations of Bhutanese students never looked beyond India, but in recent years young Bhutanese have shown a preference for education destinations in Australia, Singapore and Thailand.

Conclusion

- There is thus much to repair in the ties. More importantly, India will have to remain alert to strategic powers which are courting Bhutan assiduously, as is evident from the high-level visits from China and the U.S.
- In a world of growing options, it remains in India's and Bhutan's best interests to make each other's concerns a top priority.

10. 'Order of Zayed'

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was honored with the 'Order of Zayed', the UAE's highest civilian award

Details

- The award in the name of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding father of the UAE

- * It acquires special significance as it was awarded to Prime Minister Modi in the year of the birth centenary of Sheikh Zayed
- It has been awarded as a mark of appreciation for his efforts to boost bilateral ties between the two nations.
 - * It underlines the new good will, trust and personal intimacy between PM Modi and the UAE leadership.
- The award has earlier been bestowed on several world leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, Queen Elizabeth II and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

11. President of India in Guinea

Context:

- The President Mr. Ramnath Kovind was on a visit to Benin, Gambia and Guinea.
- On 1st August, he reached landed in Conakry, Guinea, becoming the first Indian Head of State to visit the West African country.

Details:

- President Kovind met the President of Guinea, Prof Alpha Conde.
- Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to reformed multilateralism and for comprehensive reforms of the UN Security Council to make it more representative, accountable, transparent, inclusive and effective.
- President Conde conveyed support for India's candidacy as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the term 2021 – 2022.
- MoUs were signed on:
 - * cooperation in the field of traditional system of medicine and homeopathy (between both governments)
 - * for Participation in the e-VBAB Network Project (between the Govt. of Guinea and Telecommunications Consultants India Limited)
 - * on cooperation in the field of renewable energy (between both governments)
- President Ram Nath Kovind has also been conferred with the National Order of Merit, the highest award of Guinea,

12. Pulling a Vietnam in Afghanistan

Context:

- There are striking similarities between the U.S.' attempt at an exit from the war in Afghanistan and earlier in Vietnam.

Vietnam War:

- The U.S.'s involvement in Vietnam goes back to the last years of French colonial rule.
- The U.S. first backed France against the Viet Minh guerrillas.

- After France exited Vietnam in 1954, the S. backed South Vietnam against the communist-led North.
- Initially, the U.S. involvement was limited to advisory roles but later it was steadily escalated.
- At its peak, in 1968, American troop deployment in Vietnam reached 549,500 personnel.
- However, by the late 1960s, it became evident to American leaders that they could not win the Vietnam War.
 - * By then, the American public opinion also had largely turned against the war.
 - * Besides, the South Vietnamese regime that the U.S. had supported was unpopular, oppressive and weak at the same time
- President Richard Nixon assigned Henry Kissinger, the National Security Adviser, to hold talks with the communist North Vietnam, seeking 'peace with honour'.
- The goal was not to defeat North Vietnam but to stop them from taking over the South.
- Nixon started by reducing U.S. troop presence in Vietnam and shifting the focus from direct participation in land war to training and advisory roles.
- When talks were deadlocked, the U.S. offered to pull out of the South as a compromise.
- In 1973, the U.S., North Vietnam and representatives of South Vietnam and Viet Cong, the communist guerillas from the South, signed the Paris Peace Accords.
- The North and the South agreed to a ceasefire and continue holding peace talks, while the S. agreed to pull troops out of Vietnam

Afghanistan's Similarities with Vietnam:

- The U.S. went into Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, launching its war on terror.
- At the peak of the war here, there were over 1, 00,000 troops.
- Despite the massive deployment of troops and superior air power, the U.S. got stuck in the war and failed to stabilize the country.
- After 18 years of fighting, the U.S. has realized that it cannot win the Afghan war.
- The American goal is no longer defeating the Taliban but to stop them from taking over Kabul.
- The role of veteran diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad is comparable to that of Henry Kissinger.
- Just as Nixon wanted to get out of Vietnam, President Donald Trump too wants to get out of Afghanistan.
- Here also, the U.S. is negotiating from a position of weakness.

- America's allies in Afghanistan stand divided:
 - * The government in Kabul, which the U.S. backs, is known for infighting and chronic corruption.
 - * The security forces are struggling to ensure basic security to the public, even in the capital city.
- U.S. President Barack Obama had started pulling out most troops and moving the remainder to training and advisory roles.
 - * The Afghan war is also unpopular in America.
 - * Trump campaigned to wind down America's foreign interventions.

Challenges:

- Taliban:
 - * Taliban remains offensive despite multiple rounds of talks with the U.S representatives in Doha, Qatar.
 - * The main demand of the Afghan insurgents is a complete U.S. troop withdrawal.
 - * The U.S. has already made a big compromise in its rush for an exit deal by agreeing with the Taliban demand that the Afghan government should be kept away from the peace process.
 - * Further, U.S. continued to hold talks even in the absence of a ceasefire.
- Apprehension about Afghanistan's fate after the complete withdrawal of U.S.
 - * Taliban is an anti-modern, anti-woman, anti-minority fundamentalist machine, whose earlier regime was notorious for excessive sectarian violence.
 - * In Vietnam, the peace did not last long. In the two years after the U.S. pulled out, the communists captured Saigon and the government crumbled.

Solution:

- According to recent reports, the U.S. and the Taliban have agreed to a road map for peace.
- The deal envisages the US's withdrawal in return for the Taliban's assurance that Afghanistan would not be used by terrorists.

Conclusion:

- The Taliban is part of the problem, not a solution.
- US needs to be more cautious before yielding to the Taliban's demands.

13. SpaceCom (U.S. launches command for space warfare)

Context

- There are various domains of warfare like land, air, sea, and cyber which are vital war-fighting spheres

- A new and an Independent domain was formally launched by United States (US) President Donald Trump called the Space Command

Details

- Currently it is the Air Force which focuses on space warfare, the new command will be developing specialised systems and preparation modules.
- This is because the US military chiefs see China and Russia making advancements in the military final frontier
 - * China has illustrated it can target satellites with missiles
 - * Russia has stated that it aims to create space-based laser weaponry.
- Therefore the SPACECOM will focus on defending American interests in space, such as the hundreds of satellites used for communication and surveillance.

14. U.S. to open Greenland consulate

Context

- The Trump administration is planning to open a U.S. consulate in Greenland for the first time in decades
- President Donald Trump sparked a diplomatic dispute with Denmark after he proposed that the U.S. buy Greenland and the Danish government rejected the idea

Details

- Greenland which is part of Denmark is the world's largest island which is placed between the Atlantic and Arctic oceans.
- Greenland's economy depends of fisheries and related industries, as well as annual subsidies provided from Denmark, which handles its foreign affairs and defence matters.
 - * Greenland's 56,000 residents are mainly Inuits, the aboriginal People, the indigenous Community Who are concentrated on the West Coast in small towns and hamlets or remote coastal settlements where life revolves around fishing and the hunting of seals and whales.

Economic Importance

- Due to global warming, it is believed that oil and other mineral wealth could become more accessible in the Arctic — and Greenland.
- The island, whose capital Nuuk is closer to New York than the Danish capital Copenhagen, boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth.
- Greenland harbours some of the largest deposits of rare-earth metals, including neodymium, praseodymium, dysprosium and terbium, along with uranium and the byproducts of zinc.

Examples from the past

- Thomas Jefferson secured Louisiana from the French in 1803.
- President Andrew Johnson bought Alaska from Russia in 1867
- President Woodrow Wilson's administration purchased Virgin Islands in 1917 for \$25 million from Denmark — then known as the Danish West Indies

15. What will happen if Pakistan closes its airspace to India?Context

- After opening its airspace to all civilian traffic, Pakistan has threatened to close it again to flights taking off from India, apparently to punish New Delhi for removing the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Pakistan had closed its airspace on February 26 after Indian Air Force war jets hit a terrorist camp in Balakot, and opened up to all civilian aircraft only on July 16.

Impact on India

- Longer flights: Flight times for aircraft to and from India that normally use Pakistani airspace for transit are likely to increase by at least 70-80 minutes on average.
 - * If Pakistan were to shut down its airspace again, westbound flights taking off from airports in northern India, such as Delhi, Lucknow, Jaipur, Chandigarh, and Amritsar, will be worst affected.
 - * These flights will have to fly south towards Gujarat or Maharashtra, and then turn right over the Arabian Sea on their way to destinations in Europe, North America, or West Asia.
- Refueling, cancellations: The last time, Air India's non-stop flights from Delhi to Chicago had a planned stoppage in Europe for refuelling. IndiGo's flight from Delhi to Istanbul, which is the first non-stop flight on this route by an Indian carrier, was forced to make a refuelling stop at Doha.
 - * SpiceJet, which was the only Indian airline flying the Delhi-Kabul route, had cancelled the flight.
- Losses for airlines, costlier tickets
 - * Indian carriers will suffer losses as flight times increase and more fuel is burnt. The last time around, Indian carriers lost a total of around Rs 700 crore due to the Pakistani action. The largest chunk of losses was suffered by flag carrier Air India.
 - * For passengers, tickets could get more expensive, as airlines will look to pass on at least some of the increased costs to fliers.

Impact on Pakistan

- But more than anyone else, it is Pakistan itself that will suffer. The last time it shut its airspace, the Pakistani Civil Aviation Authority took a blow of almost \$50 million in revenue.
 - * This is a sum that Pakistan can hardly afford, given the precarious state of its economy.
- Its fiscal deficit was 8.9% of gross domestic product in June 2019, compared with 6.6% a year earlier. The deficit is now at its highest in nearly three decades, the report said.
- The International Monetary Fund's first quarterly review of a bailout programme for Pakistan is looming. Pakistan must increase government revenue by more than 40% in the fiscal year that beginning in July 2019, as part of the conditions for the \$6 billion loan. The loan from the IMF could be in jeopardy if the government continues to miss its revenue targets.
- In this situation, voluntarily taking a hit by closing its airspace to India makes very little sense.

16. Yemen CrisisYemeni Revolution

- The Yemeni Uprising (intifada), and also known as the Yemeni Revolution of Dignity followed the initial stages of the Tunisian Revolution and occurred simultaneously with the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 and other Arab Spring protests
- In its early phase, protests in Yemen were initially against unemployment, economic conditions and corruption, as well as against the government's proposals to modify Yemen's constitution.
- The protesters' demands then escalated to calls for the resignation of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.
- Saleh signed a power-transfer agreement brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council in Riyadh where Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi took over as president after Presidential elections in 2012.
 - * President Hadi struggled to deal with a variety of problems, the continuing loyalty of many military officers to Mr Saleh, as well as corruption, unemployment and food insecurity.
- There was continuous threats both from Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Houthi militants.

Houthis

- The Houthis are members of a rebel group, also known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), who adhere to a branch of Shia Islam known as Zaidism.
- Zaidis make up one-third of the population and ruled North Yemen under a system known as the imamate for almost 1,000 years until 1962.
- The Houthis take their name from Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi.

- * He led the group's first uprising in 2004 in an effort to win greater autonomy for their heartland of Saada province, and also to protect Zaidi religious and cultural traditions from perceived encroachment by Sunni Islamists.
- In 2011, the Houthis joined the protests against then President Saleh and took advantage of the power vacuum to expand their territorial control in Saada and neighboring Amran province.
- In 2014, Houthi fighters swept into the capital of Sana'a
- The 2015 Houthis declared themselves in control of the government, dissolving Parliament and installing an interim Revolutionary Committee led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a cousin of Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi.

Saudi Arabian war in Yemen

- Saudi Arabia started the attack in March 2015 after Shia Houthi rebels captured parts of Yemen, including the capital city Sana'a.
- Riyadh saw the Houthis as Iranian proxies and was worried they would establish stable rule in its backyard.
- For the sake of legitimacy, the Saudis claimed they were fighting on behalf of the globally recognised government of Yemen, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi who is reported to be residing in Riyadh.
- But the war has reached a bloody stalemate as the Houthis still remain powerful in northern Yemen and the government controls the southern parts, including Aden.

Grave violations of Human Rights

The Saudi-led coalition's intervention in Yemen is proof of how things can go wrong with an ill-conceived, poorly strategized and geopolitics-driven military interference that cares little about human lives.

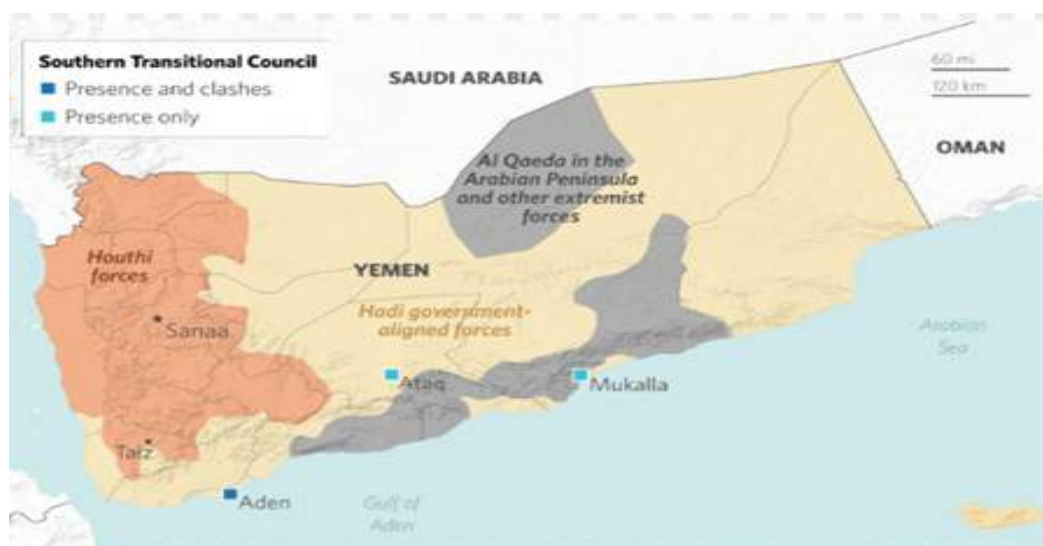
- After four years of war, the Saudis have not met their declared goal — pushing back the Shia Houthi rebels from the capital Sana'a and restoring the ousted government
- On the contrary, the war has pushed Yemen into what the UN calls the worst humanitarian crisis.
- Thousands have been killed, tens of thousands displaced and about two thirds of the country's 28 million people do not have enough to eat. And now, there is a rebellion within the coalition.

Southern Transitional Council (STC)

- It is a secessionist organization in Yemen.
- It was formed by a faction of the Southern Movement
 - * The Southern Movement also known as the Southern Separatist Movement, or South Yemen Movement, and colloquially known as al-Hirak
- The Southern Movement was established in 2007, during the term of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, and it has called for and worked toward the separation of southern Yemen from the rest of the nation (as it previously was until 1990).

A triangular War unfolding in Yemen

- The Southern Transitional Council (STC), a militia group that was fighting the Houthis as part of the Saudi-led coalition, turned against their masters and captured the presidential palace in Aden as well as the city's main port.
- In return, Saudi jets targeted STC fighters before a tenuous ceasefire set in.
 - * The Shia Houthis, who the Saudis claim are backed by Iran, are controlling much of the country's north including Sana'a.



- * Yemen's internationally-backed government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, the Saudi ally, is controlling the south, though Mr. Hadi is running the purported administration from Saudi Arabia.
- * The STC wants the south to be an independent entity, like it was till the Yemeni unification in 1990.

Differences of opinion in the mode of Operation between Saudi and UAE

- In the past the Saudi and UAE stayed together in propping up the military dictatorship of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, in countering the spread and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world, in opposing the Iran nuclear deal and on blockading Qatar.
- But when it comes to Yemen, the Saudis see the Hadi government and Sunni Islamic parties, including the Islah, as allies who could stabilise and rebuild the whole country after the Houthis are defeated, while
- UAE, already frustrated by the coalition's failure to defeat the rebels, counts on the STC and is staunchly opposed to the Islah party, which has ties to the Brotherhood.

- * The UAE has already pulled out of the Yemen war leaving it to Saudi Arabia to defeat the Houthis.
- * And with their continued backing to the STC, the Emiratis appear less concerned about defeating the Houthis than maintaining their influence in southern Yemen.

Way forward

- This should be a moment of reckoning for Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince and the main architect of the Yemen intervention. He has lost the war and his coalition is crumbling, while Yemen is left with unimaginable human suffering.
- If Saudi Arabia has geopolitical concerns about Iran's growing influence, it should address them directly with Tehran, not by punishing the people of Yemen.
- It is time for a nationwide ceasefire and talks with all stakeholders under the mediation of a willing UN to find a political settlement to the crisis.

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SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Anti-Lynching Laws

Rajasthan Protection from Lynching Bill, 2019

Context

- 'The Rajasthan Protection from Lynching Bill, 2019' was passed by the Vidhan Sabha by a voice vote

What was the need?

- After 2014, 86% cases of mob lynching reported in the country happened in Rajasthan
- The Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code have provisions to deal with the cases of mob lynching incidents but they are not adequate.
- It will prevent spreading of hatred or incitement to mob lynching by creating special offences against such acts.

Definition of a mob

- The Bill defines the mob as a group of two or more individuals.
- It also defines lynching as "an act or series of acts of violence or those of aiding, abetting or attempting an act of violence, whether spontaneous or preplanned, by a mob on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation or ethnicity".

Key features

- The Bill also empowers the State police chief to appoint a state coordinator of the rank of Inspector General of Police to prevent the incidents of lynching in the State with the district Superintendents of Police acting as the district's coordinator, to be assisted by a Deputy Superintendents of Police, for taking measures to prevent incidents of mob violence and lynching.
- The Bill also enlists various other offences related to the lynching such as dissemination of offensive materials, propagation of hostile environment and obstructing legal processes, which would be punishable with jail terms varying from three to five years.
- The Bill also stipulates the provision of compensation to victims by the State government as per the Rajasthan Victim Compensation Scheme.
- It also binds the State government to take necessary measures to rehabilitate the victims of mob lynching, suffering displacements from their native places.

Penal Provisions

- In cases of the victims suffering simple injuries, the Bill proposes imprisonment up to seven years and a fine up to ₹1 lakh.

- For the offence of an assault by mob, leading to the victim suffering grievous hurts, the Bill provides for jail terms up to 10 years and a fine of ₹25,000 to ₹3 lakh.
- For hatching a conspiracy of lynching or aiding, abetting or attempting such an offence, the Bill seeks to punish the offenders in the same manner as if he actually committed the offence of lynching.

West Bengal (Prevention of Lynching) Bill, 2019

Context

- As per the Supreme Court direction to take action against lynching, West Bengal Assembly passed a Bill to prevent and punish mob assaults and lynching.

Definition

- It defines lynching as any attempt or act of violence by a mob on the "grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, ethnicity, or any other ground".

Details

- The legislation prescribes the appointment of a Nodal Officer for periodic assessment of local intelligence inputs on potential flashpoints
- It mandates that lynching incidents be investigated by an officer not below the rank of an inspector.
- It also calls for witness protection and compensation for victims, adding that any allegation of threat, coercion or inducement of witnesses must be brought to the notice of a court within 24 hours.

Penal Provisions

- The legislation pitches for a jail term, which may vary from three years to life for those involved in assaulting and injuring a victim.
- Those found guilty of assisting or interfering with the accused will be punished with imprisonment of up to three years and fined a maximum Rs 1 lakh.
- In case of death of the victim, persons responsible for the incident would be punished with rigorous life imprisonment and fine up to Rs 5 lakh

Fight against hate crime and Lynching

Introduction

- The USA Senate has passed Justice for Victims of Lynching Act in 2018
 - * It took the United States Senate 100 years to approve a bill to make lynching a federal crime.

- It would classify lynching—defined as bodily injury on the basis of perceived race, color, religion or nationality—a federal hate crime in the United States.
- The U.S. bill describes lynching as “the ultimate expression of racism in the United States”.

When will the Indian Parliament here recognise, similarly, that lynching is “a bias-motivated act of terror” and “the ultimate expression of communal hatred in India”?

Lynching is an act of creating fear in the minds of a community

- The number of lynch murders in the U.S. mentioned in the bill averages around 55 annually, but despite these small numbers, these performative acts of violence succeeded in instilling intense fear among all African-Americans for decades.
 - * Therefore the hate lynching is designed as an act to terrorize an entire community
- The same purpose is being served by lynching in India; again performative acts of hate violence, but now using modern technology, video-graphing of mob lynching, widely circulating these images through social media, and celebrating these as acts of nationalist valour.
 - * These have similarly instilled a persistent sense of everyday normalised fear in the hearts of every Indian from the targeted minority community.
 - * It is this which indeed makes lynching an ultimate act of terror.

Some noteworthy initiatives in Lawmaking

- The Uttar Pradesh Law Commission (UPLC) took the initiative to recommend a draft anti-lynching law. It commends a law which closely follows in almost every major detail the first law against lynching passed in this country, a remarkable ordinance introduced by the Manipur government
- Both the Manipur statute and the UPLC draft create a new crime of Dereliction of duty by police officials, holding a police officer guilty of this crime if he or she “omits to exercise lawful authority vested in them under law, without reasonable cause, and thereby fails to prevent lynching”.
 - * Dereliction also includes the failure to provide protection to a victim of lynching; failure to act upon apprehended lynching; and refusing to record any information relating to the commission of lynching. This crime carries the penalty of one to three years and a fine.
 - * The UPLC goes further to include also a new crime of dereliction of duty by District Magistrates.
- A noteworthy observation in the text of the United States bill is that it records that at least 4,742 people were lynched in the U.S. between 1882 and 1968, but 99% of all perpetrators remain unpunished.

- * It is significant to remember that the first anti-lynching legislation proposed as far back as in 1918 in the U.S. targeted state officials for failing to provide equal protection under the laws to anyone victimised by a mob.

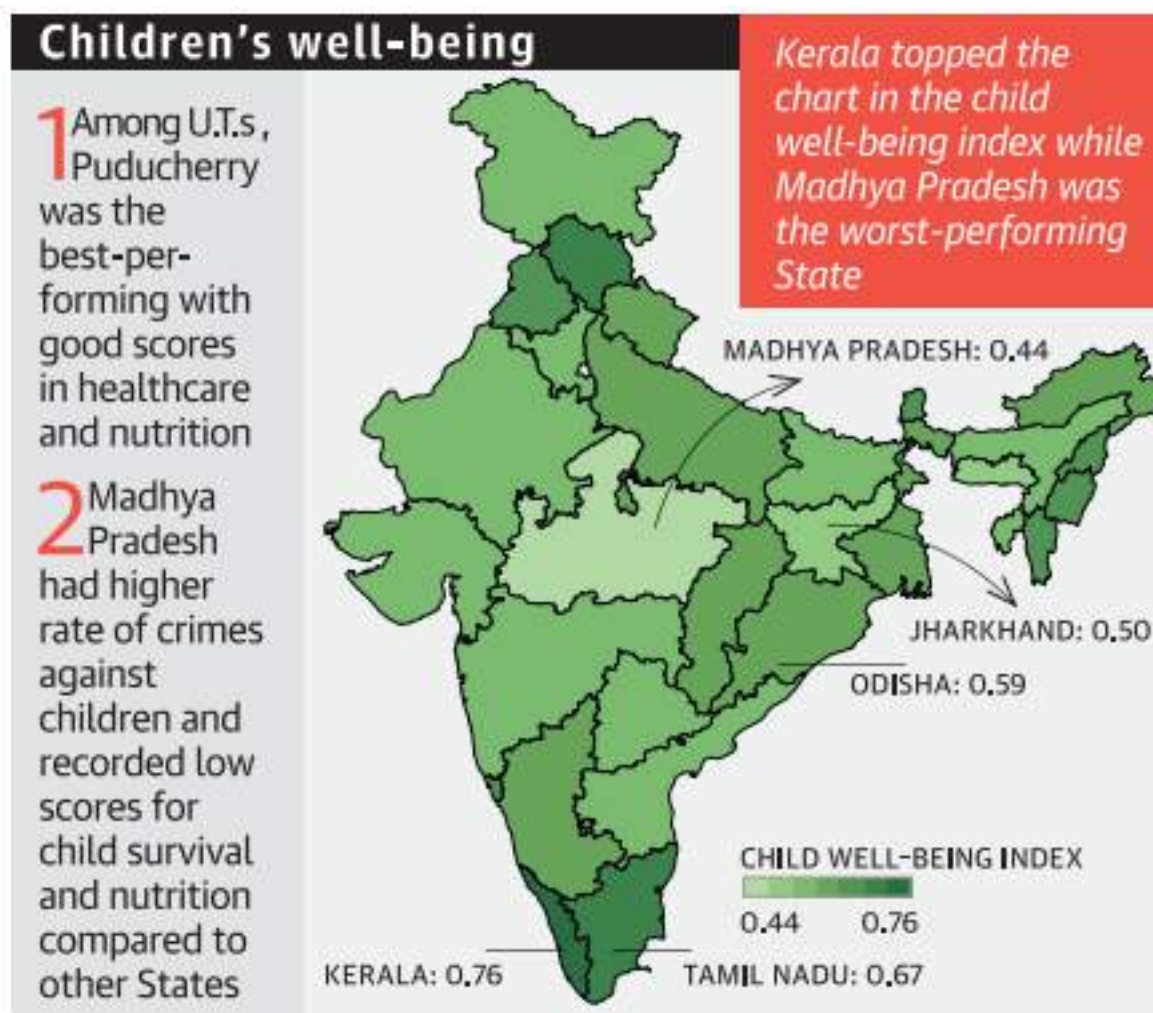
Recommendations by UPLC

- Both the Manipur law and UPLC recommendations also lay down elaborate duties of police officials in the event of lynching.
 - * These include taking all reasonable steps to prevent any act of lynching including its incitement and commission;
 - * to that end making all possible efforts to identify instances of dissemination of offensive material or any other means employed in order to incite or promote lynching of a particular person or group of persons; and
 - * Making all possible efforts to prevent the creation of a hostile environment against a person or group of persons.
- Both sensitively and expansively lay down official duties to protect victims and witnesses.
 - * They state that a victim shall have the right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any court proceeding and shall be entitled to be heard at any proceeding in respect of bail, discharge, release, parole, conviction or sentence of an accused, and to file written submissions on conviction, acquittal or sentencing.
 - * They also explicitly require the Superintendent of Police to inform the victim in writing of the progress in the investigation.
 - * The victim shall have the right to receive a copy of any statement of the witness recorded during investigation or inquiry and a copy of all statements and documents.
- Where the UPLC goes further than the Manipur statute is in laying down the right to compensation.
 - * It places the duty squarely on the Chief Secretary to provide compensation to victims of lynching within 30 days of the incident.
 - * It states that while computing compensation, the State government must give due regard to bodily, psychological and material injuries and loss of earnings, including loss of opportunity of employment and education, expenses incurred on account of legal and medical assistance.
 - * It also lays down a floor of ₹25 lakh in case lynching causes death

2. Campaign Angikaar & E-Course on Vulnerability Atlas

Context

- Minister of State (I/C) for Housing and Urban Affairs launched “angikaar” a campaign for change management and e-Course on Vulnerability Atlas of India.



About the campaign Angikaar

- Angikaar has been launched for social behaviour change, focusing on issues such as water & energy conservation, waste management, health, tree plantation, sanitation and hygiene for beneficiaries of completed houses under PMAY (U)
- This will be done through community mobilisation and IEC activities. For this purpose, the campaign will converge with schemes and Missions of other Ministries dealing with these subjects.
- The convergence would especially focus on Ujjwala for gas connection and Ayushman Bharat for health insurance to the beneficiaries of PMAY (U).

E-course on Vulnerability Atlas

- The e-course on Vulnerability Atlas is offered by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs in collaboration of School of Planning & Architecture (SPA), New Delhi and Building Materials & Technology Promotion Council (BMTPC).
- It is a unique course that offers awareness and understanding about natural hazards, helps identify regions with high vulnerability with respect to various hazards (earthquakes, cyclones, landslides, floods, etc.) and specifies district-wise level of damage risks to the existing housing stock.

- The e-course will be a tool for effective & efficient disaster mitigation & management in the field of Architecture, Civil Engineering, Urban & Regional Planning, Housing & Infrastructure Planning, Construction Engineering & Management and Building & Materials Research.

3. Child Well-Being Index

Context:

- Child well-being index, a tool designed to measure and track children's well-being comprehensively has been released.

Details:

- The report released by the non-government organisation World Vision India and research institute IFMR LEAD.
- The report is an attempt to look at how India fairs on child well-being using a composite child well-being index.
- The India child well-being index is a crucial report that can be mined both by the Government and civil organisations to achieve the goal of child well-being and we will use this report effectively.

- This report provides insights on health, nutrition, education, sanitation and child protection.
- The dimensions of the index include healthy individual development, positive relationships and protective contexts.
- Focusing on the three key dimensions, 24 indicators were selected to develop the computation of the child well-being index.
- The report highlights the multi-dimensional approach towards measuring child well-being — going beyond mere income poverty.

Significance of the report:

- The report is important considering that 40 per cent of the country's population is made of children between the ages of 1 and 18.
- The report, calls for States to look at their respective scores on the dimensions of child well-being, and to prepare for priority areas of intervention with specific plans of action.
- It also hopes to trigger policy level changes, seek better budgetary allocations and initiate discussions with all stakeholders, which can help in enhancing the quality of life of all children in the country.
- One of the primary objectives of this index is to garner attention to the under-researched theme of child well-being in India, and inspire further academic and policy conversations on related issues.

Performance of the states:

- Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Puducherry topped the charts in the child well-being index.
- Meghalaya, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh featured at the bottom.
- Among the Union Territories, Puducherry led the way and Dadra and Nagar Haveli featured at the other end.
- Kerala bagged the top spot due to its exceptional performance in health, nutrition and education facilities.
- Kerala also performed better in addressing malnutrition and ensuring child survival and access to a healthy environment in terms of clean drinking water and sanitation facilities.

Way forward:

- Children have the potential to transform the country, but if neglected, they will exacerbate the burden of poverty and inequality. It is imperative that all stakeholders prioritise and invest in the well-being of children. The research has brought to the fore compelling insights on child well-being in India. Some of the key indicators that need to be studied in the future include mobile usage, digital access, financial literacy, mental health and quality of relationships per se, between parents/peers and children.

4. Finding the data on missing girls

Stats on Female feticide and Sex ratio at Birth

- Female Feticide continues to increase at an alarming rate, as per the Sample Registration System (SRS) data released in July 2019 for the period 2015-2017.
 - * Female feticide is undergoing abortion after finding out that the sex of the fetus is a Girl
- The Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) has been dropping continuously since Census 2011, coming down from 909 girls per thousand boys in 2011-2013 to 896 girls in 2015-2017, to quote the yearly SRS Statistical Reports.
- In the 2014-2016 period, of the 21 large States, only two — Kerala and Chhattisgarh — had an SRB of above 950 girls per 1000 boys.
- Thus at present, about 5% of girls are 'eliminated' before they are born, despite the promises of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme.

Health Management Information System (HMIS)

HMIS is an online portal that provides information on health indicators in India. HMIS compiles data from state- and district-level health authorities, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), the District Level Household Survey (DLHS), and the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, among other sources.

- It is a fundamentally flawed source that largely considers home deliveries and births in government institutions.
- Data from the HMIS are incomplete and not representative of the country as a whole as births happening in private institutions are under-reported.
- The HMIS report itself acknowledges that based on the estimated number of births, the number of reported births is much less in both the years considered — 2015-16 and 2018-19.
 - * The differences among the three points of delivery become evident when SRB is calculated using data from National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4).
 - * Of the 2.5 lakh reported births in the 2010-2014 period, the distribution of births at home, government hospitals and private hospitals was 21%, 52% and 27% respectively and the corresponding SRB figures were 969, 930 and 851.
 - * Thus, private hospitals had a disproportionate excess of male children births, which the HMIS sample excludes.

Emphasis should have been on SRS over HMIS

- Taking into consideration the SRS estimates, the Niti Aayog acknowledged the seriousness of the problem in its latest report.

* It is to be noted here that sources in the Niti Aayog confirmed that they did consider HMIS data but found after statistical examination that it was unreliable and therefore used SRS.

- However, despite all the officially acknowledged facts, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani claimed in the Lok Sabha that SRB has improved from 923 to 931 girls. She was quoting data from the HMIS

A look at performance of Zones

- Further, even when we only consider institutional deliveries in government hospitals, the SRB is falling.
- The worst regional SRB for government sector was for Northern India (885 girls per thousand boys).
- The picture was somewhat better for Central India (926) Southern India (940) while the performance of Eastern India (965) and Western India (959) was even better.
- In the Northeast, where the government is the dominant health-care provider, the government sector SRB rivalled that of the private sector (both are 900).

Reasons for continuing menace of Female feticide

- Massive expansion of ultrasound clinics in remote corners in bigger states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar
- Absence of a stringent implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act), practically anyone who wants to determine the sex of the foetus is able to get it done illegally
- Therefore, the increased deterrence in States like Maharashtra, Haryana and Rajasthan in recent years has been undermined by the laxity of the biggest States.
- The Central Supervisory Board established under the PCPNDT Act has not met for over one-and-a-half years but ideally they should have met at least thrice during this period.
- For too long, institutional births have been the goal of the government. That data for the private sector are more skewed has not been articulated in the NFHS reports or adequately dealt with by the Health Ministry.

Conclusion

- The Supreme Court has been continuously reminding medical associations since 2002 of their obligation to follow the law, its latest reminder being the formidable 92-page judgment against the Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecological Societies of India (FOGSI) in 2019.

- The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has to ensure that private hospitals don't profit from discrimination against girls before birth.

5. Honor Killing

Abduction and murder of Kevin Joseph

- Honour killing is defined as the killing of a relative, especially a girl or woman, who is perceived to have brought dishonour on the family.
 - * It is the murder of a woman or girl by male family members.
- The term 'honour killing' is also being used widely to describe the class of murders that family members commit while seeking to impose on young couples their medieval view that all marriages should be within their community.

Existing Laws

Existing Penalties under Indian Penal Code:

- Sections 299-304: Penalises any person guilty of murder and culpable homicide not amounting to murder. The punishment for murder is life sentence or death and fine. The punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder is life imprisonment or imprisonment for upto 10 years and fine.
- Section 307: Penalises attempt to murder with imprisonment for upto 10 years and a fine. If a person is hurt, the penalty can extend to life imprisonment.
- Section 308: Penalises attempt to commit culpable homicide by imprisonment for upto 3 years or with fine or with both. If it causes hurt, the person shall be imprisoned for upto 7 years or fined or both.
- Section 120A and B: Penalises any person who is a party to a criminal conspiracy.
- Sections 107-116: Penalises persons for abetment of offences including murder and culpable homicide.
- Section 34 and 35: Penalises criminal acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention.

Supreme Court Judgements

The Supreme Court, which has been intervening repeatedly to preserve the freedom of marital choice of individuals, once remarked that there is no 'honour' in 'honour killing'. Various judgments have highlighted the need to come down on such crimes, as well as the social structures that keep such a communal outlook alive.

- Supreme Court ruling in Lata Singh v. State of U.P. (2006) ordering "stern action" against all those threatening or carrying out threats against couples. The Supreme Court reiterated the fact that inter-caste marriages are not banned as per Hindu Marriage Act and is in national interest. It is illegal to stop them in any way.

- In fact, the apex court, in *Bhagwan Dass v. Delhi* in May 2011, deemed honor killings in the “rarest of rare” category of crimes that deserve the death penalty.
- In *Armugam Servai vs. State of Tamil Nadu*, Supreme Court said that Khaps are illegal and must be rooted / stamped out.
- Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, speaking against honour killings has said “Two adults are free to marry and no third party has a right to harass or cause harm to them”

Context

- The Principal Sessions Court, Kottayam, Kerala, has passed a judgment awarding life imprisonment to 10 men involved in the abduction and murder of Kevin Joseph, a 23-year-old Dalit Christian

Background

- Kevin was abducted by a group led by Shyanu Chacko, the principal accused and brother of Neenu
- The court ruled that it was an ‘honour killing’ based on Neenu’s testimony that her family was vehemently against the marriage as Kevin was a Dalit.

Court’s Judgment

- The court rightly chose not to award the death penalty. Instead it handed down two separate life terms, one each for kidnapping with intention to threaten the victim with death, and for murder.
- Even though there is a Supreme Court judgment allowing trial courts to deem ‘honour killings’ as those that fall under the ‘rarest of rare cases’ category, the trial judge chose to take note of the fact that the accused were young and had no previous criminal background.

Issue Area

- Discrimination against Dalits is not limited to Hindu communities listed as Scheduled Castes, but extends to those who have converted to other religions too.

Conclusion

- At a time when caste groups have become politically organised and caste associations attract the young and the educated, there is a need for a redoubled effort to eliminate the evils of a stratified society.
- In particular, administrators must give full effect to the various preventive, remedial and punitive measures recommended by the Supreme Court.
- The Centre may also examine the need for a comprehensive law to curb killings in the name of honour and prohibit interference in matrimonial choice of individuals.

Rajasthan Prohibition of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2019

Context

- The Bill was passed in the Rajasthan Assembly to curb incidents of ‘honour killing’ in the State with the provision of punishment of death penalty or life imprisonment for murdering couples in the name of family honour.

Stats

- In the state of Rajasthan there have been 71 cases of illegal diktat given by ‘Khap Panchayats’ (caste councils which function like kangaroo courts) were registered and 10 cases of honour killing occurred in which four men and eight women were killed.

Provisions of the Bill

- The Bill says, “Whoever causes death of a couple or either of them on the basis that marriage of such couple has dishonored, or brought disrepute to the caste, community or family shall be punished with death, or with imprisonment for life, which shall mean imprisonment for the remainder of that person’s natural life, and with fine which may extend to ₹5 lakh.”
- According to the Bill, Sub Divisional Magistrate or the District Magistrate shall receive any request or information from any person or persons seeking protection from any unlawful assembly, or from any other person who is likely to or who have been objecting to any lawful marriage.
- It says no person or group shall assemble at any time with the view or intention to deliberate on or condemn any marriage, not prohibited by law, on the basis that such marriage has dishonored the caste or community tradition or brought disrepute to all or any of the persons forming part of the assembly or the family or the people of the locality concerned.

Punishment

- If the couple or either of them is grievously hurt, the punishment will be from 10 years rigorous imprisonment to imprisonment for life and with fine of maximum ₹3 lakh
- whereas the punishment will be three to five years imprisonment with fine which may extend to ₹2 lakh in case of simple injuries

6. National Trust

- The National Trust is a Statutory Body under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

- It is set up under the “National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Retardation and Multiple Disabilities” Act (Act 44 of 1999).

The National Trust has been set up to discharge two basic duties – legal and welfare.

- Legal duties are discharged through Local Level Committee (LLC) set up at district level under the chairmanship of the District Collector / District Magistrate and providing legal guardianship.
- Welfare duty is discharged through the schemes and activities.
 - * The schemes and activities of the National Trust inter-alia include training, awareness and capacity building programmes and shelter, care giving and empowerment.

The objectives of the National Trust in particular are:

- to enable and empower persons with disability to live as independently and as fully as possible within and as close to their community as possible;
- to facilitate the realization of equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of persons with disability;
- to extend support to its registered organisations to provide need based services; and
- To evolve procedures for appointments of guardians and trustees for persons with disabilities.

7. Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019

Context

- Parliament approves bill providing death penalty for sexual assault against children. The Bill amends the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.

Penetrative sexual assault

- Under the Act, a person commits “penetrative sexual assault” if he: (i) penetrates his penis into the vagina, mouth, urethra or anus of a child, or (ii) makes a child do the same, or (iii) inserts any other object into the child’s body, or (iv) applies his mouth to a child’s body parts. The punishment for such offence is imprisonment between seven years to life, and a fine.
- The Bill increases the minimum punishment from seven years to ten years. It further adds that if a person commits penetrative sexual assault on a child below the age of 16 years, he will be punishable with imprisonment between 20 years to life, with a fine.

Aggravated penetrative sexual assault:

- The Act defines certain actions as “aggravated penetrative sexual assault”. These include cases when a police officer, a member of the armed forces, or a public servant commits penetrative sexual assault on a child. It also covers cases where the offender is a relative of the child, or if the assault injures the sexual organs of the child or the child becomes pregnant, among others.

- * Currently, the punishment for aggravated penetrative sexual assault is imprisonment between 10 years to life, and a fine.

- The Bill adds two more grounds to the definition of aggravated penetrative sexual assault. These include: (i) assault resulting in death of child, and (ii) assault committed during a natural calamity, or in any similar situations of violence.
- The Bill increases the minimum punishment from ten years to 20 years, and the maximum punishment to death penalty.

Aggravated sexual assault:

- Under the Act, “sexual assault” includes actions where a person touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of a child with sexual intent without penetration.
 - * “Aggravated sexual assault” includes cases where the offender is a relative of the child, or if the assault injures the sexual organs of the child, among others.
- The Bill adds two more offences to the definition of aggravated sexual assault.
 - * These include: (i) assault committed during a natural calamity, and (ii) administering or help in administering any hormone or any chemical substance, to a child for the purpose of attaining early sexual maturity

Pornographic purposes:

- Under the Act, a person is guilty of using a child for pornographic purposes if he uses a child in any form of media for the purpose of sexual gratification. The Act also penalises persons who use children for pornographic purposes resulting in sexual assault.
- The Bill defines child pornography as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a child including photograph, video, digital or computer generated image indistinguishable from an actual child.

Concerns

- The Bill provides for death penalty for the rape of minors. The intention of the Bill is to have a deterrent effect; but it can be argued that the introduction of the death penalty may backfire in cases of child sexual abuse and even have a catastrophic effect.
- Often, the perpetrators of abuse are family members and having such penalty in the statute book may discourage the registration of the crime itself.
- Also, it may threaten the life of the minor as the maximum punishment for murder is also the death sentence.

| Offence | POCSO Act, 2012 | 2019 Bill |
|---|---|--|
| Use of child for pornographic purposes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximum 5 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum 5 years |
| Use of child for pornographic purposes resulting in penetrative sexual assault | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum 10 years Maximum life imprisonment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum 10 years (in case of child below 16 years 20 years) Maximum life imprisonment |
| Use of child for pornographic purposes resulting in aggravated penetrative sexual assault | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life imprisonment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum 20 years Maximum life imprisonment or death |
| Use of child for pornographic purposes resulting in sexual assault | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum six years Maximum Eight years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum Three years Maximum Five year |
| Use of child for pornographic purposes resulting in aggravated sexual assault | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum Eight years Maximum 10 year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum Five years Maximum Seven years |

8. 'San-Sadhan' Hackathon

Context

- The government has called for applications for its latest initiative under the Swachh Bharat Mission, called the 'San-Sadhan' Hackathon, an initiative to ease lives of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) by making toilets smarter, more accessible, and easier to use.
- In this hackathon, the government is looking for smart, scalable and innovative solutions for economical toilets for individual and community use in rural and urban contexts.

Details

- The initiative is being organized jointly by the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, in collaboration with Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and 91springboard.
- The Hackathon invites researchers, start-ups, student innovators, technology enthusiasts, and industry experts to participate.
- This hackathon is a great opportunity to win exciting prizes and get handholding and mentoring support by ministry, industry experts and ecosystem enablers.

9. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019

Definition of a transgender person

- The Bill defines a transgender person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth.
- It includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons with socio-cultural identities, such as kinnar and hijra.
- Intersex variations is defined to mean a person who at birth shows variation in his or her primary sexual characteristics, external genitalia, chromosomes, or hormones from the normative standard of male or female body.

Prohibition against discrimination:

The Bill prohibits the discrimination against a transgender person, including denial of service or unfair treatment in relation to:

- education
 - * Educational institutions funded or recognised by the relevant government shall provide inclusive education, sports and recreational facilities for transgender persons, without discrimination.

- employment;
 - * No government or private entity can discriminate against a transgender person in employment matters, including recruitment, and promotion.
 - * Every establishment is required to designate a person to be a complaint officer to deal with complaints in relation to the Act.
- healthcare;
 - * The government must take steps to provide health facilities to transgender persons including separate HIV surveillance centres, and sex reassignment surgeries.
 - * The government shall review medical curriculum to address health issues of transgender persons, and provide comprehensive medical insurance schemes for them.
- right to reside, rent, or otherwise occupy property;
 - * Every transgender person shall have a right to reside and be included in his household.
 - * If the immediate family is unable to care for the transgender person, the person may be placed in a rehabilitation centre, on the orders of a competent court.
- Certificate of identity for a transgender person:
 - * A transgender person may make an application to the District Magistrate for a certificate of identity, indicating the gender as 'transgender'.
 - * A revised certificate may be obtained only if the individual undergoes surgery to change their gender either as a male or a female.
- access to, or enjoyment of goods, facilities, opportunities available to the public;
- right to movement;
- opportunity to hold public or private office;
- Access to a government or private establishment in whose care or custody a transgender person is.

Offences and penalties:

The Bill recognizes the following offences against transgender persons:

- forced or bonded labour (excluding compulsory government service for public purposes),
- denial of use of public places
- Physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic abuse.

Penalties for these offences vary between six months and two years, and a fine.

National Council for Transgender persons (NCT):

The Council will advise the central government as well as monitor the impact of policies, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons. It will also redress the grievances of transgender persons.

The NCT will consist of:

- Union Minister for Social Justice (Chairperson);
- Minister of State for Social Justice (Vice- Chairperson);
- Secretary of the Ministry of Social Justice;
- One representative from ministries including Health, Home Affairs, and Human Resources Development.
- Other members include representatives of the NITI Aayog, and the National Human Rights Commission.
- State governments will also be represented.
- The Council will also consist of five members from the transgender community and five experts from non-governmental organisations.

Impact

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

Concerns

- The government has made rules without consulting the transgender community
- Intersex persons lead a very different life compared to a transgender.
 - * An ideal Bill would be different and have separate provisions for transgender, transsexual and intersex persons.

| SALIENT FEATURES | COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definitions do not differentiate between transgenders, transsexuals, intersex persons and genderqueer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community differentiates between transgender, transsexual and intersex persons and dismisses the 'one-solution first all' idea |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibition against discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, public facilities etc. Also prevents forced labour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of enforceability dilutes provision, Lived experiences riddled with discrimination |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificate of identity can be obtained at the DM's office and a revised certificate is to be obtained if sex is changed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shuns provision as impinging on their right to self-determination. Fear it'll lead to bureaucratic discrimination |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government welfare measures and provisions of healthcare, including HIV surveillance centres, and sex reassignment surgeries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step forward but medical community lacks knowledge of transgender bodies |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transgender persons may only change their first name | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prefer to take Guru's name since many have severed ties with their birth family |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting up of a National Council for Transgender persons (NCT), including various Ministers and five transgender persons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desire greater representation in decision making that affects them directly |

10. Unnao Rape Case

Introduction

- A MLA from Uttar Pradesh Kuldeep Singh Sengar, his brother Atul Singh and their accomplices is alleged to have gangraped a 17 Year old Girl on the promise that they will help her get a job in June 2017.

Timeline of Events

Since that day in June 2017, for two years, the Unnao rape survivor has battled multiple tragedies in her traumatic fight for justice

- April 3, 2018: The victim's father was beaten up by some persons allegedly at the behest of Sengar
- April 8: The victim tries to immolate herself outside CM Yogi Adityanath's residence, alleging police inaction
- April 9: The victim's father dies in custody allegedly owing to police torture after he was arrested.
- July 4, 2019: The victim's uncle convicted in a 19-year-old case and sentenced to 10 years jail term on a case filed by Sengar's brother, Atul Singh.
- July 17: The victim and her family write a letter to the Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi expressing threat and danger to their lives allegedly by Sengar and his men.
- July 28: An over-speeding truck rams into the car in which the victim, her family and their lawyer were travelling, killing her two aunts, leaving the victim and the advocate critically injured.
- August 1: SC directs transfer of all five cases registered in connection with the incident from a court in Uttar Pradesh to a court in Delhi.

Challenges faced by the Complainants:

- Sexual assault complainants are most likely disbelieved, blamed for what happened to her, and denigrated and rubbished if she is a Dalit or Adivasi, or from a community perceived as marginal.
- If she persists in keeping with the justice system, its menacing indifference may even demoralize
- There might be some relief and care if her family supports. But if they don't or cannot, because they are themselves under pressure to keep quiet, she is left feeling abandoned, friendless and tainted.
- Many a time, a protest or a campaign or the continued presence of women's groups, Dalit groups and progressive political and civil rights interventions alone have made it possible for even an FIR to be registered.

Brazen show of power and subjugation of institutions to the whims of the power elite

- It is a case where the law enforcement machinery systematically hounds the victim, a powerful accused who is able to spread fear even from inside jail. And a political regime that, at the very least, turns a blind eye to horrific injustice.
- The family did not get any relief from State government agencies, which appear to have been complicit in the cover-up, with the MLA belonging to the ruling party.
- In the Unnao case, muscle, money power and the right political alignment weighed heavily against the girl.
- It is a glaring example of alleged administrative failure to deliver justice and protect the victim

Challenges to the Constitution:

- When a woman approaches an elected representative of the people for assistance, exercising her right to state redressal and assistance, she realizes that her claims are not transactable in a civic sense, but only in a violently sexual sense.
- Not only is her bodily integrity violated, but also a series of constitutionally guaranteed rights, including the right to life and livelihood.
- Irony is that the violators are those who have taken an oath in the name of the Constitution.
- The Constitution is seldom viewed as enunciating shared civic values and morality.
- Rather, it exists as a formal and ornamental document that affirms not so much our sovereign democratic selves, but the privileges we have gained as elected representatives.

Caste society

- Such male entitlement and power are affirmed by the caste society.
- Birth based superiority cannot be sustained unless it is renewed day in and day out through a combination of patent lies and brute force.
- In the Unnao instance, and in other such instances, sexual brutality is thus not an afterthought: it is the quintessential form of political privilege and social authority in our social context.
- Our criminal justice system is yet to reckon with such routinized and habitual criminality.

Conclusion

- The Supreme Court has ordered the State government to pay a ₹25 lakh compensation to the family.
- This may bring some relief, even though justice has been inordinately delayed. Despite the increased focus on women's rights, nothing changes on the ground.
- Till such crimes continue with impunity and patriarchal mindsets don't change, as a diverse and plural society, India would have failed the girl, and every woman.

11. UP, Delhi and Rajasthan among worst performers in breastfeeding**Context:**

- According to a report-card released by the Union Health Ministry, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Punjab fare the worst when it comes to the practice of breastfeeding.

Background:

- The World Health Organisation says that if breastfeeding was scaled up to near-universal levels, lives of about 8 lakh children could be saved every year.

- Globally, only 40% infants are exclusively breastfed for the first six months.
- While breastfeeding is a natural act, it is also a learned behaviour, according to WHO.

Details:

- The report notes that these states have the lowest rate for breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusive breast feeding for six months and complementary breastfeeding from six to nine months.
- States that top the report card include Mizoram, Sikkim, Odisha and Manipur.
- These regions also show good indicators in terms of the other parameters where children are breast fed exclusively for six months etc.

Advantages of Breastfeeding:

Breastfeeding contributes to:

- The health and well-being of mothers.
- The spacing of children.
- The reducing the risk of ovarian cancer and breast cancer.
- The growth of family and national resources
- Breastfeeding is one of the most cost-effective intervention which addresses both survival and growth of the child.
- Early initiation of breastfeeding within an hour of birth can prevent neonatal mortality.
- Exclusive breastfeeding for six months can reduce under-five deaths significantly.

Conclusion:

- Counselling and practical support to women, both during the time of birth and later, and linking them to community workers are key to promoting breastfeeding.

World Breastfeeding Week 1st - 7th August**Context**

- The Food and Nutrition Board, under the Women and Child Development Ministry is observing the World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) by organizing a number of activities.

Details:

- The theme is "Empower Parents, Enable Breastfeeding".
- This year's focus is on protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding.
- Activities planned:
 - * Annaprashan Ceremony
 - * Quiz competition on IYCF

About World Breastfeeding Week

- This is celebrated in the first week of August (1st – 7th August) every year.
- It was first observed in 1992 by World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA).
- It is now observed in 120 nations by the UNICEF and the WHO.
- The chief aim is to encourage breastfeeding and improve the health of babies around the world.

Objectives of WBW:

- To create awareness among parents about breastfeeding
- Encourage parents to adopt breastfeeding
- Creating awareness about the importance of initiation and exclusive breastfeeding, and adequate and appropriate complementary feeding
- Providing advocacy material about the importance of breastfeeding

12. Why is age of marriage different for men and women?**Context**

- The Delhi High Court took up a plea that sought a uniform age of marriage for men and women.
- A bench comprising Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice C Hari Shankar issued a notice to the Centre and the Law Commission of India, seeking their response to the public interest litigation filed by advocate and BJP spokesperson Ashwini Kumar Upadhyaya.

Current Law

- Currently, the law prescribes that the minimum age of marriage is 21 and 18 years for men and women, respectively.
 - * For Hindus, Section 5(iii) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
 - * The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 also prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.
- The minimum age of marriage is distinct from the age of majority, which is gender-neutral.
- An individual attains the age of majority at 18 as per the Indian Majority Act, 1875.

Why a minimum age?

- The law prescribes a minimum age of marriage to essentially outlaw child marriages and prevent abuse of minors.

- * Child marriages are not illegal but can be declared void at the request of the minor in the marriage.

- Personal laws of various religions that deal with marriage have their own standards, often reflecting custom.

- * In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid under personal law.

How the law evolved?

- The Indian Penal Code enacted in 1860 criminalized any sexual intercourse with a girl below the age of 10.
- The provision of rape was amended in 1927 through the Age of Consent Bill, 1927, which made marriages with a girl under 12 invalid.
 - * The law had faced opposition from conservative leaders of the nationalist movement such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Madan Mohan Malaviya who saw the British intervention as an attack on Hindu customs.
- In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act set 16 and 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for women and men respectively.
- The law, popularly known as Sarda Act after its sponsor Harbilas Sarda, a judge and a member of Arya Samaj, was eventually amended in 1978 to prescribe 18 and 21 years as the age of marriage for a woman and a man, respectively.

Two genders, two ages

- In a consultation paper of reform in family law in 2018, the Law Commission argued that having different legal standards “contributes to the stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands”.
 - * The Law Commission paper recommended that the minimum age of marriage for both genders be set at 18.
 - * “The difference in age for husband and wife has no basis in law as spouses entering into a marriage are by all means equals and their partnership must also be of that between equals,”
- Women’s rights activists too have argued that the law perpetuates the stereotype that women are more mature than men of the same age and therefore can be allowed to marry sooner.
- The international treaty Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), also calls for the abolition of laws that assume women have a different physical or intellectual rate of growth than men.

The challenge in court

- Upadhyaya, the petitioner in the Delhi High Court case, has challenged the law on the grounds of discrimination.
 - * He alleges that Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, which guarantee the right to equality and the right to live with dignity, are violated by having different legal age for men and women to marry.
- Two Supreme Court rulings could be significant to the context of this argument.
 - * In 2014, in National Legal Services Authority of India v Union of India, the Supreme Court while recognising transgenders as the third gender said that justice is delivered with the “assumption that humans have equal value and should, therefore, be treated as equal, as well as by equal laws.”
 - * In 2019, in Joseph Shine v Union of India, the Supreme Court decriminalised adultery and said that “a law that treats women differently based on gender stereotypes is an affront to women’s dignity.”

13. Women Transforming India Awards

- NITI Aayog has launched a Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) for providing an ecosystem for budding & existing women entrepreneurs across the country. SIDBI has partnered with NITI Aayog to assist in this initiative.
- As an enabling platform, WEP is built on three pillars- Iccha Shakti, Gyaan Shakti & Karma Shakti
 - * Iccha Shakti represents motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to start their business
 - * Gyaan Shakti represents providing knowledge and ecosystem support to women entrepreneurs to help them foster entrepreneurship
 - * Karma Shakti represents providing hands-on support to entrepreneurs in setting-up and scaling up businesses.

Benefits & Highlights

- In addition to providing services such as free credit ratings, mentorship, funding support to women entrepreneurs, apprenticeship and corporate partnerships.
- WEP will encourage entrepreneurs to share their entrepreneurial journeys, stories & experiences to nurture mutual learning.

- WEP platform, as a driver of change, will also promote offline initiatives and outreach programmes to promote entrepreneurial spirit among potential women entrepreneurs, in collaboration with partner organizations.
- Also, WEP offers incubation and acceleration support to women founded / co-founded startups through its various partners who handhold women entrepreneurs registered with WEP and provide them necessary support to help them start and scale-up.

Eligibility

- Women Entrepreneurs who are at ideation stage, have just started off with their startups or are an established startup can register under the scheme to take the benefit.
- Corporates, NGOs, research organisations, Incubator, Accelerator, etc. who can provide support in any form to the the women entrepreneurs.

Context

- The NITI Aayog will launch the Fourth Edition of Women Transforming India (WTI) Awards in the capital.

14. World Tribal Day**Context:**

- The Khadi and Village Industry Commission (KVIC) distributed 50 leather kits and 350 Bee-Boxes with live bee colonies in tribal-dominated village in Sirohi district of Rajasthan on World Tribal Day (9 August).

Key Points:

- KVIC announced on the occasion that it is launching a new programme ‘Leather Mission’ from the tribal-dominated village of Chandala.
- Under this new programme, KVIC will give Leather Kits to leather artisans from across India.
- It will not only increase their incomes but will also inspire the traditional leather artisans who had migrated to other jobs from their traditional skill to adopt this vocation again.
- Honey Mission has proved as a game-changer in the lives of tribals, farmers, SC/STs and unemployed youths.
- It has not only increased the income of the bee-keeping farmers, but has also increased the yield of the crops by up to 30 percent due to cross-pollination of the honey-bees.

International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples

- The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on 9 August each year to protect the rights of the world's indigenous population.
- This event recognizes the achievements and contributions that indigenous people make to improve world issues such as environmental protection.
- It was first pronounced by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1994.
- The day is observed as the international day of Indigenous people across the world and World Adivasi Day in India, to promote and safeguard the interest, culture, customs and traditions of Indigenous people.
- 2019 Theme: Indigenous Languages

IAS टेबलेट कार्यक्रम

सर्वोत्तम व्याख्यान की
कहीं भी और कभी भी उपलब्धता



500 से अधिक घंटों का प्रारंभिक और मुख्य परीक्षा के पाठ्यक्रम को आवृत्त करता हुआ व्याख्यान



हमारे मार्गदर्शकों द्वारा प्रत्येक छात्र हेतु मार्गदर्शन और व्यक्तिगत प्रतिपुष्टि



मानक पुस्तकों सहित समय और अद्यतन अध्ययन सामग्री



पुनरीक्षण नोट्स के साथ चर्चित मुद्दों पर सप्ताह में दो बार लाइव वेबिनार व्याख्यान



साप्ताहिक वेबिनार, चर्चित मुद्दे, समसामयिकी पत्र /पत्रिका और प्रैक्टिस सेट का छात्र पोर्टल उपलब्ध

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research (FEDOR)

- It was built by Russia to assist space station astronauts
- Fedor stands 180 cm tall and weighs 160 kg.
- It copies human movements, which will enable it to perform tasks that are risky for astronauts
 - * Fedor was originally intended as a rescue robot for the emergency situations
- While Fedor is Russia's first robot in space, other countries have previously sent theirs.

Robots of other countries

- In 2011, NASA sent up Robonaut 2, a humanoid developed with General Motors that had a similar aim of working in high-risk environments
- In 2013, Japan sent up a small robot called Kirobo, developed with Toyota. It was able to hold conversations in Japanese.

2. Indian National Science Academy (INSA)

- The Indian National Science Academy is the apex body of Indian scientists representing all branches of science and technology.
- INSA promotes science and its use in India.
- It was originally established in 1935 and was known as the 'National Institute of Sciences of India' until the present name was adopted in 1970.
- The Government of India recognised it in 1945 as the premier scientific society representing all branches of science in India.
- In 1968, it was designated as the adhering organisation in India to the International Council for Science (ICSU) on behalf of the Government of India.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.

3. Japan approves growing human organs in animals for the first time

Context:

- The government has given permission to the scientists in Japan to begin trying to grow human organs in animals.

Details:

- This is the first study of its kind in the country that has received approval after Japan changed its rules on implanting human cells into animals.
- Japan had previously required researchers to terminate animal embryos implanted with human cells after 14 days and prevented the embryos from being placed into animal wombs to develop.

Procedure:

- The cutting-edge, but controversial research involves implanting modified animal embryos with human "induced pluripotent stem" (iPS) cells that can be coaxed into forming the building blocks of any part of the body.
- It is the first step in what researchers caution is a very long path towards a future where human organs for transplant could be grown inside animals.
- The research involves generating animal embryos — mice, rats or pigs — that lack a particular organ such as a pancreas.
- The modified embryos are then implanted with human iPS cells that can grow into the missing pancreas. The embryos would be transplanted into wombs where they could theoretically be carried to term with a functioning human pancreas.

Significance:

- It is the first step in what researchers caution is a very long path towards a future where human organs for transplant could be grown inside animals.
- The technique involves genetically modifying sheep or pig embryos so they cannot grow a specific organ.
- Human stem cells are then injected into the embryo in the hope that the DNA will fill in the missing code.
- The hybrid embryos would then be implanted back into the original animal or a surrogate, and the baby animal would be born with a human organ.
- If successful, it could mean an unlimited supply of organs for transplants or even a cure for Type 1 diabetes, if an entirely new pancreas could be created.








Concerns:

- Implanting animal embryos with human cells creates what is known as a chimera - an entity with both animal and human cells.

- The process throws up complex ethical issues, particularly over concerns that it may not be possible to completely control which organs are formed in the animal by the human iPS cells.
- Rules on the process differ by country: the US has no federal restrictions on creating chimeras, while other countries prohibit chimeras being kept alive behind two weeks.
- Ethicists fear that chimeras with human brain or reproductive cells would pose serious questions about the nature of the animal being tested.

Prelims Test Series

22 tests covering the entire syllabus of
General Studies Paper-I and CSAT Paper

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
|  General studies paper I : 13 Module-wise Tests |  General studies paper II (CSAT): 6 Module-wise Tests |  3 complete simulated full-length tests (GS+CSAT) |
|  Special emphasis on current affairs |  Micro-level analysis of the paper and all India ranking after each test |  Paper discussion for all tests – Live and recorded videos will be provided |
|  Available in both online and offline mode | | |

SECURITY AND DEFENCE

1. Assam's final NRC

Context

- More than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants in Assam were left out of the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) that was published to conclude a Supreme Court-monitored exercise that took five years and ₹1,220 crore.

Process of NRC

- Updating the NRC was a mammoth exercise involving about 52,000 Assam government officials working for a prolonged period.
- All decisions of inclusion and exclusion were taken by these statutory officers in an objective and transparent manner
- The applicants were provided adequate opportunities of being heard at every stage of the process conducted as per statutory provisions and due procedure followed at every State

Recourse

- State Home Department officials said though the NRC was called 'final', the 19,06,657 people excluded would have opportunities to be back on the citizens' list if they appeal against their exclusion and establish their citizenship via courts.
- Each excluded person will have 120 days to file an appeal at any of the existing 100 Foreigners' Tribunals — 200 more are to be established within a month — which in turn will have to dispose of the cases within six months.
- The appellant then has the option of approaching the High Court and Supreme Court.
- Someone who is not only excluded from the final NRC but also loses his or her case in a Foreigners Tribunal, however, faces possible arrest, and the prospect of being sent to a detention centre.

How do those excluded back up their claims for inclusion?

- They will need to prove that they or their ancestors were citizens on or before March 24, 1971.
- This is the cutoff date in the Assam Accord of 1985, agreed upon by the Centre, the state and the All Assam Students' Union, at the end of a six-year movement against migration from Bangladesh.

If even legal recourse fails for those excluded, will they be deported?

- Although the Assam movement was for deportation, Bangladesh has never officially acknowledged that any of its citizens migrated illegally to Assam.
- The state also has six detention camps (with plans to build more) for illegal migrants within existing jails, and proposes to build a seventh with a capacity for 3,000.

- These cannot, however, be expected to accommodate all the exclusions, which could finally run into lakhs.

If not deported or detained in a camp, how would life change for the finally excluded individuals?

- They would officially be non-citizens, but what happens to them remains a grey area. India has no fixed policy for "stateless" persons, Home Ministry sources said.
- The only aspect that is more or less clear is that a "stateless" person will not have voting rights.
- As of now, nothing is clear about their rights to work, housing and government healthcare and education.

Timeline

The following is the timeline of the immigration issue in Assam since Independence to the publication of the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) on Saturday, August 31, 2019.

- 1950: Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act comes into force following influx of refugees from then East Pakistan to Assam after partition.
- 1951: First Census of Independent India conducted.
- Based on Census, first NRC compiled.
- 1957: Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act repealed.
- 1964-1965: Influx of refugees from East Pakistan due to disturbances in that country.
- 1971: Fresh influx due to riot and war in East Pakistan. Independence Bangladesh comes into existence.
- 1979-1985: Six-year-long Assam agitation, spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) for detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of foreigners.
- 1983: Massacre at Nellie in Central Assam which claimed the lives of over 3,000 people. Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act passed.
- 1985: Assam Accord signed by the Centre, the state, AASU and AAGSP in the presence of then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. It stated, among other clauses, that foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall be expelled.
- 1997: Election Commission decides to add 'D' (doubtful) against names of voters whose claim to Indian citizenship is doubtful.
- 2005: Supreme Court strikes down IMDT Act as unconstitutional. Tripartite meeting among Centre, state government and AASU decides to update 1951 NRC. But no major development takes place.

- 2009: Assam Public Works (APW), an NGO, files case in Supreme Court praying for deletion of foreigner's name in electoral rolls and updation of NRC.
- 2010: Pilot project starts in Chaygaon, Barpeta to update NRC. Project successful in Chaygaon. Four killed in violence in Barpeta. Project shelved.
- 2013: Supreme Court takes up APW petition, directs Centre, state to begin the process for updating NRC. NRC State Coordinator's office set up.
- 2015: Updation of NRC process begins.
- 2017: On December 31 midnight, Draft NRC published with names of 1.9 crore of total 3.29 crore applicants.
- July 30, 2018: Another Draft NRC published, 40 lakh of 2.9 crore people excluded.
- June 26, 2019: Publication of Additional Draft Exclusion List of 1,02,462 released.
- August 31, 2019: Final NRC released.

Conclusion

- Genuine citizens must be protected and included in the NRC list
- Till all the loopholes are plugged, none of the excluded members should be sent to a detention camp.

Detention Centers

Background

- Delhi Police recently has told the Supreme Court that nearly 500 illegal Bangladeshi migrants have been deported from the capital in the past 28 months.
- The Minister of State for Home, Nityanand Rai, informed the Lok Sabha that State governments have been instructed from time to time to set up detention centres.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has also drawn up a manual for States and Union Territories.
- At present, there are six detention centres in Assam, the highest among the States.

What are detention centres?

- Detention centres are set up to house illegal immigrants or foreigners who have completed their jail sentence but their deportation process to the country concerned has not been initiated or completed.
- It is also set up to accommodate foreign convicts in criminal cases who have completed their jail terms and await deportation.
- According to the MHA, these holding camps are also "to restrict the movement of foreigners staying back illegally and thereby ensure that they are physically available at all times for expeditious repatriation or deportation".

What does the Home Ministry manual say?

- The MHA framed a 'Model Detention Centre/Holding Centre/Camp Manual', which was circulated to all States and Union Territories
- State governments have been instructed from time to time (2009, 2012, 2014 and 2018), to set up detention centres.
- Under Section 3(2)(c) of The Foreigners Act, 1946, the Central Government has the powers to deport foreign nationals staying illegally in the country.
- These powers have also been entrusted to State governments under Article 258(1) of the Constitution and under Article 239(1) for administrators of Union Territories.

Power of the Union to confer powers, etc, on States in certain cases

(1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, the President may, with the consent of the Governor of a State, entrust either conditionally or unconditionally to that Government or to its officers functions in relation to any matter to which the executive power of the Union extends

Concerns

- State does not make any distinction, for all practical purposes, between detention centres and jails; and thus between detainees and ordinary inmates
- It found there was no clear legal regime governing the rights and entitlements of detainees.
- Consequently, the jail authorities appear to apply the Assam Jail Manual to them, but deny them even the benefits, like parole, waged work etc., that the inmates get under the jail rules.
- The detention centres are therefore de facto, if not de jure, administered under the Assam Jail Manual, and the detainees are treated in some ways as convicted prisoners, and in other ways are deprived even of the rights of convicted prisoners

It was in the context of this petition that on November 5, 2018, the Centre informed the Supreme Court that it was framing new guidelines for keeping foreign nationals in detention centres across the country.

What are some of the guidelines?

There are 39 points in the manual.

- The manual says that States require "no specific approval" from the Home Ministry to set up "detention centres /holding centres/ camps".
- It lays down that centres should be set up outside the jail premises and their numbers and size should be decided by the States keeping in view the actual number of foreigners to be housed as well as the progress in deportation proceedings.

- The MHA has said the detention centres should be designed for inmates to maintain standards of living in consonance with “human dignity”.
 - * Well-lit, airy rooms adhering to basic hygiene standards and equipped with electricity, water and communication facilities are to be provided at the centre.
 - * The order says that detention centres should also have open spaces for detainees to move around and segregated accommodation for men and women.
 - * The MHA manual has addressed these concerns saying no restrictions shall be imposed to meet family members.
 - * It also asks States to pay special attention to the needs of women, nursing mothers, transgenders and open a crèche in the camp.
- Other than CCTVs and round-the-clock security personnel, the manual adds, the centre’s boundary wall should be at least 10 feet high and ringed with barbed wires with strict access control measures. There should also be a periodic security audit by the appropriate authorities.

2. Chief of Defence Staff

Context

- As India celebrated 73rd Independence Day Prime Minister Narendra Modi hoisted the national flag at the ramparts of the historic Red Fort in Delhi and came up with a landmark announcement for the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff to provide “effective leadership at the top level” to the three wings of the armed forces, and to help improve coordination among them.

Present Military Architecture

- We have Chief of Army Staff General Bipin Rawat, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh, and Chief of Air Staff Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa.

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)

- The CDS is a high military office that oversees and coordinates the working of the three Services, and offers seamless tri-service views and single-point advice to the Executive (Prime Minister) on long-term defence planning and management, including manpower, equipment and strategy, and above all, “jointmanship” in operations.
- The CDS, being above the three Service Chiefs, is expected to play this role by optimizing procurement, avoiding duplication among the services and streamlining the process.
 - * India being a nuclear weapons state, the CDS will also act as the military advisor to the Prime Minister on nuclear issues.

- * In most democracies, the CDS is seen as being above inter-Service rivalries and the immediate operational preoccupations of the individual military chiefs.
- * The role of the CDS becomes critical in times of conflict.

Why it is required?

- To provide single-point military advise to government
- Better manage country’s strategic resources & nuclear arsenal
- Bring synergy among Army, Navy & IAF by resolving inter-service doctrinal, planning, procurement & problems
 - * Branch rivalry will be subsumed
- Streamline long-term defence planning & procurement process
- Truly integrate Service HQs with defence ministry & reduce civil-military divide
- The CDS is expected to bridge such dangerous gaps and reduce response time.
- It is envisaged he will keep the Defence Minister, continuously and fully briefed and effectively advised, be part of the adjunct apparatus of the Cabinet Committee on Security Affairs, and better link the three services in terms of planning, coordination and execution.

What necessitated this move currently?

- Pulwama and Balakot, the repeated offers for mediation in Kashmir by the U.S. President, the imminent pull-out of American troops from Afghanistan, which would leave Pakistan and its proxies the dominant players on the ground with a strong chance of blowback into Kashmir, as well as the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A, are factors that have come together to confer urgency to taking this step.

Committees that have suggested similar measures

The proposal for a CDS has been there for two decades.

- Right after the 1999 Kargil War that a high-level committee headed by KSubrahmanyam, international strategic affairs expert
 - * It was set up to examine the gaps in the country’s security system in the wake of the conflict, had recommended that the three services should have a Chief of Defence Staff.
 - * The committee had recommended that the CDS would be a five-star military officer and should be the single-point military adviser to the defence minister
 - * However, lack of consensus and apprehensions among services meant it never moved forward.

- Besides the high-level committee on Kargil War, a Group of Ministers (GoM) that was formed in 2001 to explore reforms necessary for the improvement of India's national security had also favoured creating the post of Chief of Defence Staff.
- In 2012, the Naresh Chandra committee recommended the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) as a midway to allay apprehensions over the CDS.
- The CDS is also one of the 99 recommendations made by the Lt General D.B. Shekatkar (retd) Committee which submitted its report in December 2016 which had 34 recommendations pertaining to the tri-services.

What is the current status?

- In the absence of a CDS, presently the seniormost of the three Chiefs functions as the Chairman COSC.
- But it is an additional role and the tenures have been very short.
- For instance Air Chief Marshal (ACM) B.S. Dhanoa took over as the Chairman COSC on May 31 from outgoing Navy Chief Adm Sunil Lanba. However, ACM Dhanoa will be in the role for only few months as he is set to retire on September 30 after which the baton will pass to Army Chief Gen Bipin Rawat who will then be the seniormost.
- Gen Rawat too is set to retire on December 31 after three years in office.

Why it was not sanctioned in the past?

- First, is the political leadership's fear. They were of the apprehension that the Defence Services will become too powerful and subvert civilian control over the military, a military coup will occur.
 - * Harcharanjit Singh Panag a retired lieutenant general of the Indian Army said "Despite the political control over the armed forces clearly established in Constitution, the politicians have this lurking fear. They do not want the executive military power to be concentrated in the hands of a single person – the Chief of Defence Staff."
 - * It also needs to be mentioned that Army Chiefs in different countries have staged military coups but no CDS has ever done so.
- Second, the opposition of the civilian bureaucracy to any arrangement in which their dominance and stranglehold over the higher defence set up is diminished.
- Third, the feeling among the smaller Services, particularly the Air Force, of Army dominance in defence policy formulation.
 - * Some fear that a CDS may lead to a situation like the one that prevailed before 1947, when the Army was the dominant Service.

- * After the 1971 war, Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal had threatened to resign if it was decided to have a Chief of Defence Staff in India
- Fourth, is the inhibitions of serving Service Chiefs that their position would get undermined if the CDS were to be appointed
 - * Each Service has its own ethos, and the Chiefs feel that under a CDS, they will be rendered virtual nonentities.

Who at present advises India's Prime Minister on military matters?

- In effect it is the National Security Adviser. This has been especially so after the Defence Planning Committee was created in 2018, with NSA Ajit Doval as its chairman, and the foreign, defence, and expenditure secretaries, and the three Service Chiefs as members.

Global Picture

Most countries with advanced militaries have such a post, albeit with varying degrees of power and authority.

- The United States Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS), for example, is extremely powerful, with a legislated mandate and sharply delineated powers.
 - * He is the most senior military officer and military adviser to the President, and his remit extends to the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the Defence Secretary.
 - * The Chiefs of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and National Guard too, are members of the JCSC. All, including the CJCS, are four-star officers, but by statute only the CJCS is designated as the "principal military adviser".
- The U.K. from which the Indian armed forces and the Defence Ministry are modelled on has a Permanent Secretary, equivalent to the Defence Secretary, and also a CDS.
 - * The U.K. Government guidelines state that the CDS is the professional head of the British armed forces and, as military strategic commander, is responsible for how operations are carried out.
 - * He is also the most senior military adviser to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Prime Minister.

Challenges

- The appointment of the CDS will make the armed forces more effective. However, the mere creation of the office is not enough.
- This will need to be augmented by restructuring of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and creating integrated theatre commands.

- The CDS has to have good understanding of the global security environment and functioning of the three services.
 - * It should not be a rotational appointment; the government must select one after interviewing top officials of the three services.
- Ingrained with a mindset shaped by conflicts and face-offs on its land frontiers and near-continuous internal armed conflicts, India's security landscape has been naturally dominated by the Indian Army
 - * Balancing this reality with a realisation that both maritime and air power are going to play an increasingly important role in India's rise as a leading power will be among the initial strategic challenges any CDS faces.
 - * To begin with, and to assuage the fears of the smaller services, it may be wise to not let an Army officer to first tenet this post.
- Finally, an important aspect of any reorganisation should look at the inter-se relations between the military and the Ministry of Defence. This needs to focus on capacity, expertise, decision-making powers and aligning responsibility and accountability.
 - * The relations between the civilian bureaucracy and the military are among the biggest fault-lines in the defence apparatus and remedial actions are required, on both sides, to create a professional, well-developed and qualified bureaucracy which integrates both civilian-military expertise.

Conclusion

- Balancing national interests, shedding his own service affiliations, and looking after the interests of all the three services will always be a tough act. He must also have the world view and political awareness necessary to engage with diverse stakeholders.
 - * This will happen only after years of joint-service assignments, an exposure to working with government and educational interludes in a military career.
- With PM's announcement, Gen (retd) VP Malik, who was the Army chief during Kargil War, tweeted, "Thank you PM Modi for announcing historic step of institution of CDS. This step will make our national security more effective and more economical. It will ensure better jointmanship and multi-disciplinary coordination. Salute!"
- The CDS is imperative for efficient, economical and effective functioning of our higher defence organization in both peace and war.
- The creation of the CDS will need to be followed up with further reforms to reconfigure the armed forces to meet India's aspirations to be a global power.

3. China issues white paper on national defence

Context

- The Chinese State Council Information Office has released a white paper titled China's National Defense in the New Era

What is it?

- It is the official defence policy of china and has offered details of its military reforms and break-up of defence expenditure.
- The document offers an insight into Beijing's view of the changes in the international security situation.
- It discusses its policy objectives, along with the reform, missions and tasks that its armed forces are undertaking. The fundamental goal of China's national defense in the new era is to resolutely safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests

Beijing is ready to display some of the muscle it's prepared to flex in order to secure its interests.

- The history of China was based on Deng Xiaoping's dictum of an earlier era, "Hide your strength, bide your time and never take the lead" has been consigned to the dustbin of history.
- Even a cursory read suggests that this adaptation involves the ability to project military power across much of the eastern hemisphere. What stands out in the paper is the explicit position taken by China on its willingness to use force in a variety of scenarios.
- Taiwan's insistence on its autonomy, anathema to a Beijing that sees it as a rebel province, has been highlighted as one potential provocation.
 - * There's a mention of "external separatist forces" with regard to Tibet and Xinjiang.
 - * But the forces seeking Taiwan's "independence" are identified as the "gravest immediate threat", with the use of force not being ruled out.
- The white paper gave greater clarity to Chinese views on the South China Sea where the Chinese said that the islands were an inalienable part of China.
 - * Other powers seen as trying to thwart its claims in the South China Sea are to be fended off.
- This is quite assertive, given that its past white papers only had anodyne statements on peace, "win-win cooperation" and so on.

Changes brought about by the Chinese

The white paper encapsulates People's Liberation Army (PLA) striving to transform itself from a quantity-and-scale model to that of quality and efficiency. This entails a shift in focus from manpower to firepower and from personnel-intensive to science and technology-intensive forces

- PLA has been downsized in terms of soldiers, but is far better equipped with modern technology than it was some years ago.
- The PLA is claimed to be savvy with cloud services, the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence
- Greater attention has been paid to safeguarding interests in outer space, electromagnetic space and cyberspace.
- Its equipment-development policy and approach to combat, therefore, are evolving from mechanisation to “intelligentised warfare” and “informatisation”.
 - * That has led to a reassessment of training methods to ensure greater interoperability among forces.
 - * These are developments that New Delhi should be watching closely and factoring into its defence planning, given that they have a direct impact on India’s security interests.
- Its budgetary slice-up points to investments not only in digital enablement, but also enhanced naval heft, with its operational locus shifting from mere “offshore waters defense” to a combination of this and “open seas protection”.

Nuclear Policy

- The white paper has reiterated that “China is always committed to a nuclear policy of no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances, and not using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states or nuclear weapons free zones unconditionally.”

On India

India gets only 18 mentions in the 17,696-word document.

- On Doklam, all it says is that the PLA will take “effective measures to create favourable conditions for the peaceful resolution of the... standoff”
- More than the Himalayan region, it is China’s ambitions in the Indian Ocean that our defence planners should be wary of. China spends three times what India does on defence, and signs of its seaward thrust are apparent

Conclusion

- China has issues with every countries on the Periphery. This idea of white paper as a transparent policy layout is a smokescreen, a mask, a camouflage used by China as a country of Peace. What matters is action on ground and not words statements made on paper.

4. Homeland Security Conference

- It is organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI)
- It sees participation from senior officials of the GOI, the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and various State Police Forces (SPFs), defence force, intelligence agencies, domestic and global players, etc.

- Theme of the 2019 edition: Innovation Led Cyber Crime Management
- The programme aims to bring together stakeholders from the Government, Intelligence & Police Forces, Industry, Academia & Think Tanks to promote development and implementation of systems and concepts to combat cyber-crime, encourage ‘Make-in-India’ for Cybersecurity and provide platform to Indian startups for understanding the requirements of Government agencies and support them to promote indigenous expertise in cyber security.
- It also has workshops for law enforcement agencies, and exhibition on homeland security.

Context

- Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh spoke at the Homeland Security 2019 conference. He presented 35 Smart Policing Awards.
- 2019 is the 11th edition of the conference.

5. How the forces protect VIPs?

Context

- The Government has recently downgraded the security cover of former PM Manmohan Singh, from Special Protection Group (SPG) to Z plus of the CRPF.

How does the government decide the level of protection an individual needs?

- The Home Ministry takes the decision based on inputs from intelligence agencies, which include the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing.
- They largely give a subjective measure of threat to life or injury to a person from terrorists or any other group, based on information from their sources.
- Certain individuals, by dint of their position in government, are automatically entitled to security cover. These include the Prime Minister and his immediate family.
- The Home Minister and officials such as the National Security Adviser too generally get security cover on the basis of their position.

A defined structure to whom security cover has to be provided is the need

- Since none of the intelligence agencies in India is accountable to any statutory body, barring the internal oversight of the Home and External Affairs Ministries, VIP security is sometimes seen as open to manipulation.
- A number of protectees, it has been alleged, are under security cover for political reasons and not necessarily due to any real threat.

What are the various protection levels?

There are largely six types of security covers: X, Y, Y plus, Z, Z plus and SPG.

- While SPG is meant only for the PM and his immediate family, other categories can be provided to anyone about whom the Centre or state governments have inputs about facing a threat.
- The X category on an average entails just one gunman protecting the individual;
- Y has one gunman for mobile security and one (plus four on rotation) for static security;
- Y plus has two policemen on rotation for security and one (plus four on rotation) for residence security;
- Z has six gunmen for mobile security and two (plus eight) for residence security;
- Z plus has 10 security personnel for mobile security and two (plus eight) for residence security.

How does it work?

- There are various kinds of cover within these levels. These include security of residence, mobile security, office security and inter-state security.
- Different VIPs are given different kinds of cover depending on threat perception.
- For example, if the Chhattisgarh CM is assessed to be facing a threat from Maoists only in his state, the Centre may choose to give him residence and mobile security only in his state, and appropriate security by the concerned state police when he travels out. Similarly, some may have a threat only when they travel, so they are given an escort force.
- Then, different forces may be engaged for residence and mobile security. Many protectees get residence security from state police and mobile security from a Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)

Who are SPG? Whom do they protect?

- The SPG is a force raised specifically for the protection of the PM, former PMs and their immediate family.
 - * The force is currently 3,000 strong and protects only four people — PM Narendra Modi, Congress president Sonia Gandhi, her son Rahul Gandhi and her daughter Priyanka Gandhi.
- The elite force is highly trained in physical efficiency, marksmanship, combat and proximate protection tactics and is assisted by all central and state agencies to ensure foolproof security.
- SPG Special Agents assigned to the PM security detail wear black, Western-style formal business suits, with sunglasses, and carry a two-way encrypted communication earpiece, and concealed handguns.

Why was SPG Created?

- The SPG was raised in 1985 in the wake of the killing of PM Indira Gandhi in 1984.
- Earlier, Delhi police (before 1981) and Special Task Force (raised by the Intelligence Bureau in 1981) provided residence and proximate security to the PM.

- Following Indira Gandhi's killing, a review committee of secretaries recommended formation of a special group under a designated officer and for STF to provide immediate security cover both in New Delhi and outside as a short-term measure.
- In 1985, the Birbal Nath Committee set up by the Home Ministry recommended raising a Special Protection Unit (SPU), and 819 posts were created under the Cabinet Secretariat.
- The SPU was then re-christened SPG and the post of Inspector General of Police was re-designated as director.

SPG Act

- For three years, SPG functioned under executive orders. In 1988, Parliament passed the SPG Act. Then, the Act did not include former prime ministers.
- When V P Singh came to power in 1989, his government withdrew SPG protection given to his predecessor Rajiv Gandhi.
 - * After Rajiv's assassination in 1991, Singh faced much criticism and the SPG Act was amended to offer protection to all former PMs and their families for at least 10 years.
- In 2003, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government again amended the SPG Act to bring the period of automatic protection down from 10 years to "a period of one year from the date on which the former prime minister ceased to hold office" and beyond one year based on the level of threat as decided by the government

How do these protection levels compare with VIP protection in other countries?

- In the US, the security of the President and his family is handled by the Secret Service, which also looks after the safety of the vice president, his immediate family, former presidents, their spouses, and their minor children under age 16.
 - * It also provides security to major presidential and vice presidential candidates and their spouses, and foreign heads of state; security for the White House, the Treasury Department building, the vice president's residence, and foreign diplomatic missions in Washington, DC.
- In the UK, VIP security, including of the PM, is handled by the Protection Command under London's Metropolitan Police Service.
 - * It has two branches: Royalty and Specialist Protection (RaSP), providing protection to the Royal Family, the PM and government officials, and Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection (PaDP), providing security to government buildings, officials and diplomats.

6. India's doctrine of Nuclear No First Use

Context

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said while India has strictly adhered to Atal Bihari Vajpayee's doctrine of 'No First Use' (NFU) of nuclear weapons, "what happens in future depends on the circumstances".

What is this doctrine, and how did it come into being?

- In 2003, when Vajpayee was India's Prime Minister, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) met to review the progress in operationalizing the country's nuclear doctrine
- Among the major points in the doctrine was "a posture of No First Use", which was described as follows: "Nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere".
- However, the doctrine made it clear that India's "nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage".
- Also, "in the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons".

The doctrine also said:

- Nuclear retaliatory attacks can only be authorised by the civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority.
 - * The Nuclear Command Authority comprises a Political Council and an Executive Council.
 - * The Political Council is chaired by the Prime Minister.
 - * The Executive Council is chaired by the National Security Advisor. It provides inputs for decision making by the Nuclear Command Authority and executes the directives given to it by the Political Council.
- India would not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.
- India would continue to put strict controls on the export of nuclear and missile related materials and technologies, participate in the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty negotiations, and continue to observe the moratorium on nuclear tests.
- India remains committed to the goal of a nuclear weapons free world, through global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament.

Factors against revisiting our nuclear doctrine:

- This chipping away at India's nuclear-weapons use posture is strategically unsound and diplomatically questionable. It plays into the hands of Pakistan, which has forever sought a notional parity with India

- All the gains enjoyed by us in the international community by the restraint of our nuclear posture would be frittered away. These do not merely constitute intangibles but entailed the termination of sanctions, support for our entry into the multilateral nuclear export control regimes as well as our civil nuclear cooperation agreements.
- Makes crises more stable because adversaries do not have to fear that India will initiate nuclear use and threaten the survivability of their own nuclear forces, which might tempt them to use nuclear weapons early and massively against India
- It would enormously complicate and increase the expenditure incurred by us in regard to our command and control mechanisms which would have to be reconfigured to engage in calibrated nuclear war fighting.
- It would facilitate the painting of South Asia as a nuclear flashpoint and thereby encourage foreign meddling.

India should not have NFU

- Firstly, NFU implies probable large-scale destruction in own country economically
- Secondly, in India there is hardly any debate on security policy issues, much less on the NFU policy. Inputs indicate that the Indian public in totality is not in sync with the policy. Some call it a cause of concern; others call it 'the Panipat Syndrome' of allowing the enemy to defeat us on our own soil.
- Thirdly, to fight a war with constraints which jeopardise the future of a country is also morally wrong; no leadership has the right to place its population at peril without exhausting other options and opting only for NFU.
- Global context - Viewed in a global context, at present, very few countries adhere to NFU.
- Need of ambiguity for deterrence - Ambiguity in nuclear weapons posture is necessary to create confusion in the minds of India's adversaries. Dread is at the heart of successful nuclear deterrence.

The following could be some moves in this direction:

- Government must restore faith in itself by doing what it says and not shying from biting the bullet. Firmness must be shown in all its actions.
- Periodic statements about the nurturing and up gradation of our nuclear arsenal and systems including alternate command structure.
- An indication that our nuclear arsenal will be large enough to take care of all adversaries will have to be taken up.

7. Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM)

- It is a missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in association with Bharat Electronics Limited and Bharat Dynamics Limited for the Indian Army
- The missile has a strike range of 25 km to 30 km.
- It uses solid-fuel propellant and has the capability of engaging multiple targets.
- The systems are equipped with indigenously developed phased array radar, Inertial Navigation System, Data Link and RF seeker.

- The system is being developed for the Indian Army with search and track on move capability with very short reaction time.
- This missile is an all-weather, all-terrain surface-to-air missile equipped with electronic counter measures against jamming by aircraft radars.

Context

- India successfully test-fired a Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QRSAM) with 30-kilometre range from a test range off the Odisha coast.
- The missile successfully engaged its target during the flight test and met all the desired parameters.

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ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Amazon's Rainforest Fire

Context

- The largest tropical rainforest in the world, Amazon Which produces approximately 20 per cent of the oxygen in the earth's atmosphere and is called the "lungs of the planet" saw environmental catastrophe with its forest's burning.
- The repeated forest fires have been spotted even by satellites in space, and have led to worries over a significant rise in greenhouse gas emissions, because of the reduced absorption of carbon dioxide.

Amazon's spread

- The Amazon basin, spanning 7.4 million square kilometers, covers nearly 40 percent of Latin America and is spread across nine countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela. About 60 percent of it is in Brazil.
- The Amazon forest, of which 2.1 million sq km are protected zones, is home to a biodiversity sanctuary that is unique in the world.
- A quarter of the Earth's species are found there, namely 30,000 types of plants, 2,500 fish, 1,500 birds, 500 mammals, 550 reptiles and 2.5 million insects, according to the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO).

Importance of Amazon forest to the world

- A National Geographic report said the Amazon rainforest influences the water cycle not only on a regional scale, but also on a global scale.
 - * The rain produced by the Amazon travels through the region and even reaches the Andes mountain range. Moisture from the Atlantic falls on the rainforest, and eventually evaporates back into the atmosphere.
 - * The report said the Amazon rainforest has the ability to produce at least half of the rain it receives. This cycle is a delicate balance.
- The Amazon basin, spread across millions of hectares in multiple countries, hosts massive sinks of sequestered carbon, and the forests are a key factor in regulating monsoon systems.
- The rainforests harbour rich biodiversity and about 400 known indigenous groups whose presence has prevented commercial interests from overrunning the lands.

What's causing the fire in Amazon?

Deforesting the Amazon is a long, slow process. People clear the land by cutting down the vegetation during the rainy season, letting the trees dry out and burning them during the dry season. Fully clearing the dense forest for agricultural use can take several years of slashing and burning.

- Forest fire is not an exceptional phenomenon in Amazon. The rainforest experiences regular and widespread fires at this time of the year due to dry season.
 - * But environmentalists across the world believe that this disaster is indeed man-made and President Bolsonaro's anti-environment approach is leading to large scale deforestation in Amazon
- The dramatic scale of this year's fires is the result of a significant acceleration of deforestation for the lumber industry, for agriculture or for other human activities.

Economics Vs Climate

- The fragile legacy of the forests is now imperiled, as President Jair Bolsonaro has spoken in favor of "reasonable" exploitation of these lands.
- Although the forest code has not been changed, his comments have emboldened illegal expansion into forests.
- Armed Gangs have threatened the local tribal community with their leaders being murdered and the president denying any violence, questioning the satellite data, are depressing developments in the forest land
- Most nations tend to view their land and forests through the narrow prism of short-term economic gain

Concerns

- The massive fire is alarming as it not only threatens the rich biodiversity of the forest but also threatens the atmosphere due to the release of massive amounts of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide.
- The rainforest recycles its own water to produce a portion of the region's rain, so deforestation makes rains less frequent, extending the dry season.
- Besides being the lungs of the planet, the Amazon rainforest is also home to indigenous communities whose lives and homelands are under threat due to encroachment by the Brazil government, foreign corporations and governments with economic interests in the resource-rich region, and local farmers.

How the international community has reacted?

- The European Union has reacted sharply to this development.
- French President Emmanuel Macron called for G7 leaders to discuss the environmental crisis in Brazil
- Norway has also suspended donations of \$1.2 billion supporting projects to curb deforestation in Brazil.
- Germany has also suspended 35 million euros (\$39 million) in funding of Amazon preservation in Brazil due to increasing deforestation.

Steps that can be initiated

- As the custodian of forests in about 5 million sq km of Amazon land, Brazil has everything to gain by engaging with the international community on meeting the opportunity cost of leaving the Amazon undisturbed.
- Globally, there is tremendous momentum to save the Amazon forests. Brazil must welcome initiatives such as the billion-dollar Amazon Fund backed by Norway and Germany, which has been operating for over a decade, instead of trying to shut them down.
- Remedial funding, accounting for the value of environmental services, is the most productive approach, because forest removal has not helped agriculture everywhere due to soil and other factors.
- One estimate by the World Bank some years ago noted that 15 million hectares had been abandoned due to degradation.

Conclusion

- Brazil's President must recognise that rainforests are universal treasures, and the rights of indigenous communities to their lands are inalienable.
- The international community must use diplomacy to convince Mr. Bolsonaro that no other formulation is acceptable.

'Legal Amazon'

- It is the legal denomination that includes some areas of Brazil that don't have the Amazon biome, but are very close to the Amazon.
- 'Legal Amazon' was created in the 1950s for tax breaks.
- Many of the fires (being reported) are on land that has already been deforested for many years and is traditionally burnt every year.
- It is something similar to the agricultural burning

2. Anshupa Lake

- It is a fresh water lake on the left bank of the Mahanadi River
- Ansupa is spread over almost 2 sq km. It is also the wintering ground for 32 species of migratory birds

- Ansupa is famous for its sweet water fish, especially labeo bata locally known as pohala.

Chilika Lake

- Chilika Lake is India's largest brackish water lagoon.
- In 1981, Chilika became the first Ramsar site in India.
- It is the largest wintering ground for migratory waterfowls on the Indian subcontinent.
 - * Lakhs of tourists visit the lake to watch endangered Irrawaddy dolphins and migratory birds during winter.

Context

- The Odisha Wetland Authority has approved implementation of an integrated management plan for Chilika, country's largest brackish water lagoon, and Ansupa, State's largest freshwater lake

Significance

- The five-year management of lakes is intended at strengthening livelihood of thousands of fishermen relying on the two water-bodies.
- Besides, tourism promotion and conservation of ecology will be taken up.

3. Bandipur adds value worth Rs.6,405 cr.**Context:**

- The economic evaluation of tiger reserves was released by the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Details:

- Bandipur National Park was established in 1974 as a tiger reserve under Project Tiger.
- It is a national park located in the Indian state of Karnataka, which is the state with the second highest tiger population in India.
- The study is authored by the Centre for Ecological Services Management at the Indian Institute of Forest Management.
- It estimates the economic valuation of Bandipur and nine other tiger reserves in the country.
- The objective, states the report, is to enhance tiger conservation by highlighting the holistic economic benefits of protected areas.
- Researchers have used an array of methods to determine the economic, scientific, educational, cultural and recreational services of tiger parks.

Economic valuation of Bandipur Tiger Reserve:

- If monetary values could be assigned to tiger reserves, then the Bandipur Tiger Reserve would record a staggering Rs. 6,405.7 crore annually, says the report.
- For every rupee spent on the reserve, the rate of return through various tangible and non-tangible benefits is an incredible 700%.

- The park also contributes nearly 1,121 billion litres of water to the Cauvery, while the forests prevent soil loss and nutrient loss that would have cost Rs. 82.59 crore to rectify.
- Similarly, monetary values are assigned to various other benefits including biological control of disease, encouragement to pollination and others.
- The report estimates that 3.06% of the flow benefits are accrued at the local level, while 16.01% are at the national level.
- At the global level the reserve's forests store 1.2 crore tonnes of carbon, apart from sequestering 3.45 lakh tonnes of carbon annually, which leads to savings of social costs.

4. **Canine Distemper Virus (CDV)**

Background

- The Prime Minister's announcement that tiger numbers have increased in the country may be good news.
- But the loss of habitat, a decline of prey and poaching continues to be a threat to tigers' survival.
- Along with these, a potential virus — Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) — that can be transmitted from CDV-infected dogs living in and around wildlife sanctuaries has started to raise concern among wildlife biologists.

Canine Distemper Virus (CDV)/ Hardpad Disease

- Canine distemper is a contagious and serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems of puppies and dogs.
- It is caused by a single-stranded RNA virus of the family Paramyxoviridae (the same family of the viruses that causes measles, mumps, and bronchiolitis in humans).

How is canine distemper spread?

- Puppies and dogs most often become infected through airborne exposure (through sneezing or coughing) to the virus from an infected dog or wild animal.
- The virus can also be transmitted by shared food and water bowls and equipment.
- Mother dogs can pass the virus through the placenta to their puppies.
- Because canine distemper also impacts wildlife populations, contact between wild animals and domestic dogs can facilitate the spread of the virus.

What are the symptoms of canine distemper?

- Initially, infected dogs will develop watery to pus-like discharge from their eyes.

- They then develop fever, nasal discharge, coughing, lethargy, reduced appetite, and vomiting.
- As the virus attacks the nervous system, infected dogs develop circling behavior, head tilt, muscle twitches, convulsions with jaw chewing movements and salivation ("chewing gum fits"), seizures, and partial or complete paralysis.

How is canine distemper prevented?

- Vaccination is crucial in preventing canine distemper.
- A series of vaccinations is administered to puppies to increase the likelihood of building immunity

Stats

- A recent study published in Threatened Taxa notes that 86% of the tested dogs around Ranthambhore National Park in Rajasthan carried CDV antibodies in their bloodstream.
- This means that the dogs are either currently infected or have been infected sometime in their life and have overcome the disease.
- This finding points out that there is an increased risk of disease transfer from the dogs to tigers and leopards that live in the park.

Last year, over 20 lions from the Gir forest succumbed to the viral infection and now a guideline has been prepared by the National Tiger Conservation Authority to prevent the spillover of the disease to wild animals.

Steps that needs to be taken

- The main aim should be to vaccinate the free-ranging and domestic dogs that are not owned by any particular person in the village around national parks. A lot of NGOs have started animal birth control programmes. They need more support from the government
- The disease needs to be recognised and more targeted studies need to be initiated to collect baseline data on CDV from wherever they are reported from in wild carnivores.
 - * Understanding the role of domestic animals as contributors to a local CDV reservoir is imperative precursor in considering control measures.

5. **Clouded Leopard/ Neofelis Nebulosa**

- IUCN: Vulnerable
- The clouded leopard is found from Nepal, Bangladesh, and Assam (eastern India) through Indochina to Sumatra and Borneo, and northeastward to southern China
- It is the state animal of Meghalaya.

Dampa Tiger Reserve

- It is a tiger reserve in Mizoram

Context

- A study is being conducted to understand their habitats and migration corridors
- In India, the Dampa tiger reserve was chosen as the study site

6. Composite Water Management Index (CWMI 2.0)

Context

- To supplement the efforts of Jal Shakti Ministry, NITI Aayog has prepared the second Round of CWMI 2.0

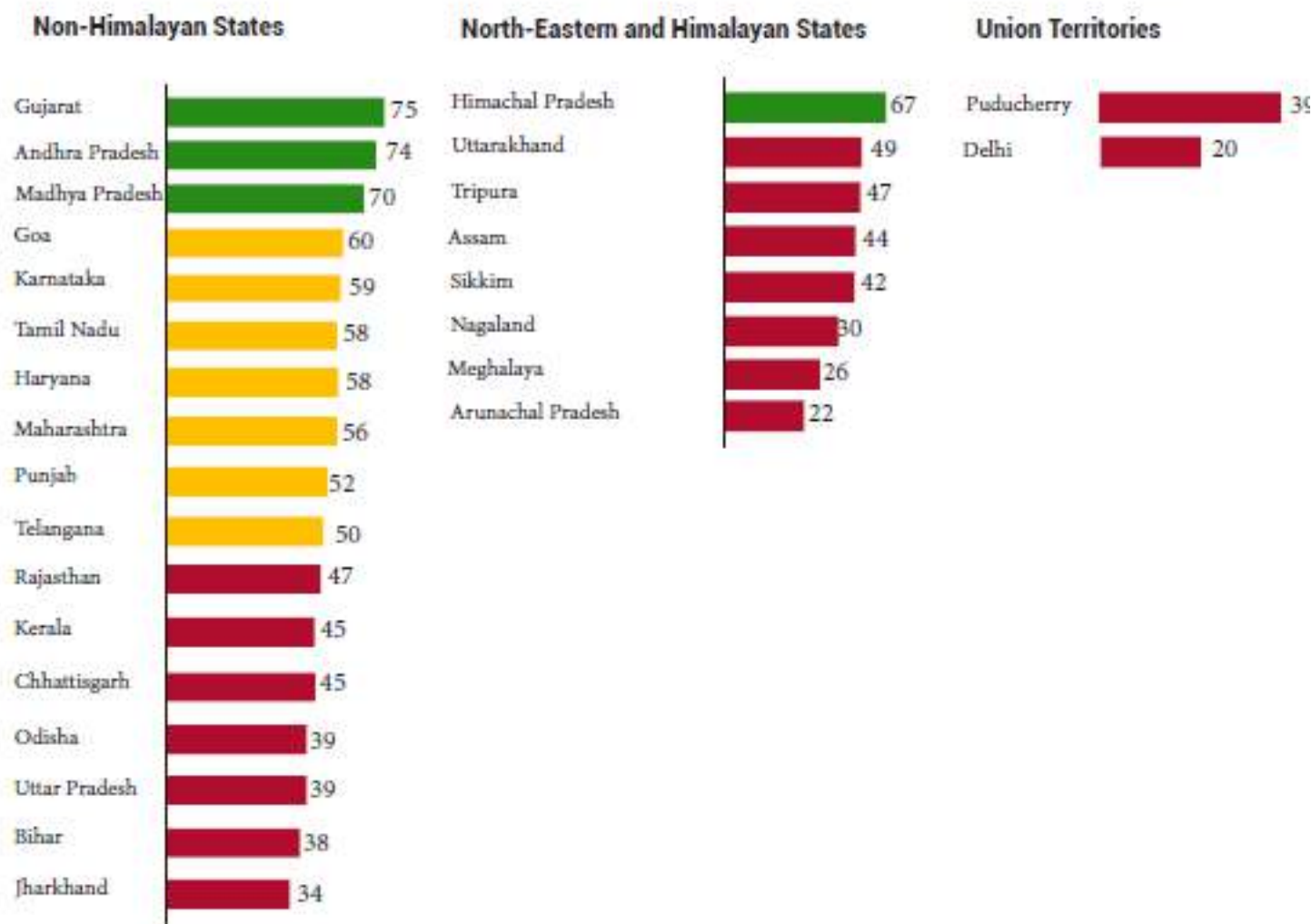
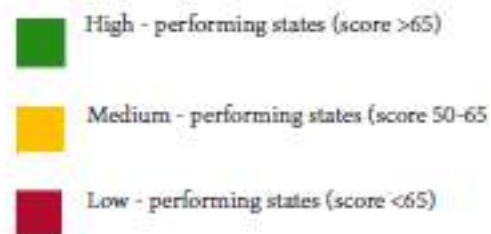
Background

- NITI Aayog first launched and conceptualized the Composite Water Management Index in 2018 as a tool to instill the sense of cooperative and competitive federalism among the states.

- This was a first ever attempt at creating a pan-India set of metrics that measured different dimensions of water management and use across the lifecycle of water.
- The report was widely acknowledged and provided actionable guidance to States on where they were doing well absolutely and relatively and what they needed to focus on to secure their water future.

What is it?

- It is water data collection exercise in partnership with Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ministry of Rural Development and all the States/ Union Territories.



- The index would provide useful information for the States and also for the concerned Central Ministries/ Departments enabling them to formulate and implement suitable strategies for better management of water resources.

CWMI 2.0 ranks various states for the reference year 2017-18 as against the base year 2016-17.

- Gujarat hold on to its rank one in the reference year (2017-18), followed by Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- In North Eastern and Himalayan States, Himachal Pradesh has been adjudged number 1 in 2017-18 followed by Uttarakhand, Tripura and Assam.
- The Union Territories have first time submitted their data and Puducherry has been declared as the top ranker.
- In terms of incremental change in index (over 2016-17 level), Haryana holds number one position in general States and
 - * Uttarakhand ranks at first position amongst North Eastern and Himalayan States.
- On an average, 80% of the states assessed on the Index over the last three years have improved their water management scores

7. Glyptothorax Gopii and Garra Simbalbaraensis

Glyptothorax Gopii

- It is a new species of catfish found in Mizoram's Kaladan River.
- Glyptothorax gopii (measuring 63 mm standard length without caudal fin) is dark brown on its dorsal surface, and its ventral surface is yellowish-light brown.
- It has been named to celebrate the contribution of taxonomist K.C. Gopi.
- It has an axe-shaped anterior nuchal plate (bone below dorsal fin), which makes it distinct from other species of the genus Glyptothorax.
- The elliptical thoracic adhesive apparatus and plicae (folds of tissue) present on the ventral surfaces of the pectoral-fin spine help the fish cling to rocks.

Garra Simbalbaraensis

- It was found in Himachal Pradesh's Simbalbara River.
- Garra simbalbaraensis (measuring 69 mm standard length without caudal fin) has a yellowish-grey color fading ventrally.
- It takes its name from the Simbalbara River.
- It has a prominent unilobed and rounded proboscis with tubercles that help the fish in maneuverability.

Other features:

- Both fish are hill stream fauna and are equipped with special morphological features to suit rapid water flow.
- Experts suggest that the origin or evolution of the fishes in the Himalayas and north-eastern parts of India must have been the consequence or after-effects of orogenic events (geological movement) at various stages in the Himalayas' uplift.
- Detailed surveys can provide valuable information about the evolutionary trends and many rare groups of fishes can be discovered.

8. Kaundinya Forests

- Kaundinya Wildlife Sanctuary is a wildlife sanctuary and an elephant reserve situated in Andhra Pradesh
- The sanctuary has dry deciduous forests with thorny scrubs interspersed with trees.
- These forests have small ponds, tanks and the Kaundinya and Kaigal tributaries of Palar River.
 - * Palar rises in the Nandi Hills in Chikkaballapura district of Karnataka
 - * It flows through states of Karnataka, Andhra and Tamilnadu
- The sanctuary is situated in region where the Kolar Plateau ends and slopes down into the plains of Tamil Nadu

9. Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS)

- It is a wildlife sanctuary and estuary located in Andhra Pradesh.
- Declared a sanctuary in 1989, the KWS is spread across 194.84 hectares in Krishna and Guntur districts.
- It is one of the rarest eco-regions of the world because it harbors vast tracts of pristine mangrove forests.

Context

- In Andhra Pradesh, the Forest Department has identified 308.84 hectares of revenue land for inclusion in the Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS).

Details

- The decision has been taken on the recommendation by the National Board for Wildlife, compensating for the land being diverted for setting up a Missile Test Launch Facility.
- The Missile Test Launch Facility is being established by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in Nagayalanka mandal in Krishna District.
- The huge chunk of revenue land adjacent to the existing sanctuary is now supporting a moderately dense mangrove cover in Nagayalanka mandal, geographically near the confluence point of the river Krishna and the Bay of Bengal.

- Of the total 154.42 hectares of forest land to be diverted to the DRDO, 45 acres falls in the heart of the sanctuary where it proposes build a road facility that connects to the test and technical facility of the project.
- The stretch of 308.84 hectares of revenue land adjacent to the KWS has been identified as per the recommendations of the National Board for Wildlife.
- The final notification exercise to include the area in the sanctuary has almost been completed.

10. Heracles Inexpectatus

- It is a giant fossil parrot species from New Zealand
 - * The bird would have stood about one metre (39 inches) tall and weighed up to seven kilograms (15.5 pounds)
 - * The parrot has been named Heracles inexpectatus to reflect its Herculean size and strength -- and the unexpected nature of the discovery.
- Heracles likely lived in subtropical forests which were rich in laurels, palms and podocarp trees.
- Heracles belongs to a group of ancient parrots native to New Zealand, which includes the kakapo, a critically endangered flightless bird which still exists in the country.
- The kakapo is the heaviest parrot alive today although it is about half the weight of Heracles.

Context

- The remains of a super-sized parrot that stood more than half the height of an average human and roamed the earth 19 million years ago have been discovered in New Zealand.
- Evidence of the parrot was unearthed in fossils near St Bathans in southern New Zealand, an area that has proved a rich source of fossils from the Miocene period

11. Vaquita/ Phocoena Sinus

- IUCN: Critically Endangered
- The vaquita is the world's smallest cetacean -- the group of mammals that includes porpoises, dolphins and whales.
- It is also the world's most endangered marine mammal species.
- It is found only in the shallow waters of the northern Gulf of California, Mexico.

Threats

- Vaquita are often caught and drowned in gillnets used by illegal fishing operations in marine protected areas within Mexico's Gulf of California.

- Millions of dollars have been spent compensating local fishermen for not fishing and to increase efforts to implement vaquita-safe fishing gear.
 - * Undermining of compensation schemes and resistance to the use of the smart fishing gear are all contributing to the vaquita's demise

Context

- The vaquita, which means "little cow" in Spanish, is perilously close to extinction.

12. Wild Buffaloes

- The wild water buffalo, also called Asian buffalo, Asiatic buffalo and wild Asian buffalo, is a large bovine native to the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia.
- It is classified as "Endangered" in the IUCN Red List and is listed under Schedule 1 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- The estimated population of the wild buffaloes (*Bubalus arnee*) in the Northeast is around 3,000-4,000, the largest in the country and accounting for 92% of the world population.
- In India, the species is largely restricted to in and around Kaziranga, Manas and Dibru-Saikhowa National Parks, Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary and Bura Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary and in a few scattered pockets in Assam; and in and around D'Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh.
- A small population survives in Balpakram National Park in Meghalaya, and in Chhattisgarh in the Indravati National Park and the Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary.

Context:

- Around the end of monsoon in October, five female wild buffaloes will be trans-located from Assam to Chhattisgarh.

Details:

- The wild buffaloes will travel more than 1,500 km crossing five States — the longest such translocation in the country ever.
- They will be moved from Assam to the Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary in Raipur district.
- It is to help revive the waning population of Chhattisgarh's State animal and expand its territory across States.
- While the government will provide the infrastructure, the Wildlife Trust of India will provide technical support.
- 20-25 buffaloes of Indravati National Park in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh, also frequently travel to neighbouring Kolamarka Conservation Reserve in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, as keeping them in one place is not sustainable.

- Wild buffaloes (*Bubalus arnee*)

Concerns:

- Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary in Raipur district in Chhattisgarh has just nine buffaloes, including three females, left.
- The survival hazard of inbreeding, continuing lineage and increasing male population have necessitated the translocation.
- Their revival across central India – a historical habitat, depends on hassle-free translocation, successful breeding and subsequent restocking of other habitats in the region.
- Major challenge is the translocation of the buffaloes, which are heavy and grow horns more than a metre long.

13. World Elephant Day

- It is an international annual event observed on August 12.
- It is dedicated to the preservation and protection of the world's elephants.
- The goal of International Elephant Day is to create awareness of the urgent plight of African and Asian elephants, and to share knowledge and positive solutions for the better care and management of captive and wild elephants.
- African elephants are listed as "Vulnerable" and Asian elephants as "Endangered" on the IUCN Red List of threatened species.
- This day highlights need for better protection for wild elephants, improving enforcement policies to prevent the illegal poaching and trade of ivory, conserving elephant habitats, better treatment for captive elephants, etc.

14. The taproot of conservation justice

Background

- The Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a piece of social legislation which aims to address the historical injustice that our forest dwelling communities have had to face for nearly 150 years by providing them with security of tenure over land for cultivation and habitation through individual rights.
- It also provides access to a variety of resources through more than a dozen types of community forest rights.
- The FRA also empowers forest dwelling communities to protect, regenerate, conserve and manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use.
- It has the provision for creating critical wildlife habitats within protected areas which currently is the strongest conservation provision among existing laws of the country.

What the FRA is?

- The FRA very clearly states that forest dwellers who are either Scheduled Tribes or Other Traditional Forest Dwellers are only entitled to claim both individual and community forest rights through a clear process of submitting a claim and after its verification and subsequent approval or rejection. For the rejected cases, an appeal process has been outlined.
- The FRA aims to only confirm tenure and access rights which in some sense the forest dwellers have been exercising de facto but under severe restrictions and control especially by the forest department.
- The FRA does not sanction any fresh clearance of forest, as individual rights over land will only be granted if the forest dweller was in possession of that parcel of land on December 13, 2005.
- It also limits the extent of land that can be granted to the area that was occupied on December 13, 2005 and places an upper limit of four hectares per claimant for individual rights.

Why the FRA is criticized?

- One of the key arguments of the petitioners has been that it is beyond the legislative competence of Parliament to enact the FRA as 'land' is a state subject.
 - * Weak as this is, if this argument of the petitioners is accepted, the Wildlife Protection Act and the entire architecture of forest laws will have to be dismantled as ultra vires as all of them deal with 'land', including the Indian Forest Act and the Forest (Conservation) Act.
- Wildlife conservationists fear that the law will make it impossible to create "inviolable spaces", or areas free of human presence, for the purposes of wildlife conservation
- Few activists ask if this law acting as a land distribution scheme that will lead to the handing over of forests to tribals and forest dwellers

Way forward

- The FRA has been savagely criticized as a land distribution legislation, which it is not. The FRA, by design, has tremendous potential to strengthen the conservation regime across India by recognizing rights of forest dwellers over land and community forest resources, a key factor for conservation to succeed as shown both by research and practice in many countries.
- By democratizing forest governance and conservation through the provision of rights and authority to local communities and gram sabhas for conservation and management of forests, the FRA will empower gram sabhas of the forest dwelling communities to halt the destruction of forests, as especially highlighted in the Niyamgiri case.

- Implementing the FRA in letter and spirit with empathy for forest dwellers will be a decisive step by India to achieve conservation justice.

15. IPCC special report on climate change

Context

- The IPCC approved and accepted Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems at its 50th Session in August 2019.

Climate crisis is damaging the ability of the land to sustain humanity

- About a quarter of the Earth's ice-free land area is subjected to what the report describes as "human-induced degradation".
 - * Rapid agricultural expansion has led to destruction of forests, wetlands and grasslands and other ecosystems. Soil erosion from agricultural fields, the report estimates, is 10 to 100 times higher than the soil formation rate. This has created spinoff effects.
- The report said that land is heating up faster than the oceans. The average surface temperature is now 1.5C higher than in the late 19th century.
- This is affecting food security, as heat, drought, and changes in rainfall damage crops.
- About 23% of global human-caused greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, forestry and other land uses.
 - * Land use change, such as clearing forest to make way for farms, drives these emissions.
- Therefore the IPCC report warns that clean energy, clean transport and reduction emissions alone will not cut global emissions enough to avoid dangerous warming beyond 2 degrees Celsius. It points out that the global food system is responsible for 21 to 37 per cent of the world's GHG emissions.

Steps to be taken

- One of the most effective ways of degraded area development is conservation and an efficient use of natural resources, and this can best be achieved through watershed development adopting ridge-to-valley approach.
- The report says there is scientific evidence which says that certain diets have a lower carbon footprint.
 - * The UN report points out that global meat consumption must fall to curb global warming, reduce growing strains on land and water and improve food security, health and biodiversity.

- * Another compelling reason not to espouse a purely plant-based diet is that billions of poor people around the world depend on fish, and to a lesser extent meat, for protein and nutrients that may not be readily available elsewhere.

- This means going for much more climate-sensitive food, and less wastage.
 - * Scientific studies have shown that alternative grains like millets and sorghum could help the country cope better with the impact of global heating on agriculture and variations in supply, than continuing to rely on water-intensive rice and wheat.

16. Lessons after the great deluge

Introduction

- The unique geography of Kerala, has resulted in a land with a vast riverine network.
- There are no less than 44 fast flowing rivers that drain the rainwater Kerala is blessed with into the Arabian Sea.
- It is a lifeline that supports a very fertile land, some of the most singular flora, fauna and also a people and their lives in a symbiotic way.

Large-scale urbanisation

- However, this drainage basin has seen massive urbanisation over the last two decades with the erstwhile wisdom of coexistence with the State's waterways beginning to fade away.
- This linear development which has been along major road networks, has completely ignored the varying and ecologically sensitive landscape.
- Substantial portions of revenue lands in the State are wetlands and forests, which has resulted in a shortage of buildable land parcels.
- This in turn is creating huge pressure on these ecologically fragile areas for conversion to government-supported infrastructure projects as well as private profit-making enterprises.

Laws not implemented

- Not surprisingly, all landslide and flood-affected areas in the State are in Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ-1), as categorised by the Madhav Gadgil report.
- The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report that was prepared by the UN for Kerala following the massive flooding of 2018 looks at some of the gaps in law and policy.
- The State Action Plans on Climate Change elucidate measures for disaster-risk reduction in the wake of an increasing frequency of heavy rainfall in turn leading to more flooding and landslides.

- Though plans and laws such as Integrated Water Resources Management or Coastal Regulation Zone Notification hold key solutions to natural disasters that are linked to water management, most of them are not implemented or followed to the letter.
- A lack of holistic and coordinated measures within planning departments has resulted in further problems. Also missing are key pieces of legislation for housing and land use in fragile zones which allow buildability but with sensitive development.

Dilution of laws

- The need of the hour is for a review and revision of building bye-laws for urban and rural areas in accordance with bettering environmental sustainability.
- In 2017, a judgment of the High Court of Kerala mandating the inclusion of a clause in building rules, and which said that 'natural drains and streams shall not be obstructed by this development/building permit', has yet to come into effect.
- Further, the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008 — it has immense potential to preserve such land as natural watershed buffers — has suffered too many dilutions even as rampant reclamation of paddy lands continues.
- The absence of a databank on paddy lands and wetlands as mandated by the law, has only exacerbated the issue.

Master plan focus

There are, however, cities and regions the world over that deal most successfully with heavier precipitation in much less favourable topography than Kerala's. The dire need is for watershed-based master planning and development legislated guidelines for each major river basin, especially those that impact densely populated settlements. Primarily, such master plans should focus on these areas.

- First, there must be a demarcation of ecologically sensitive zones using existing village survey maps and public participation.
 - * There must be clear land use plan for these zones specifying flood plains, protected forest areas, agricultural and plantation zones, with details of the types of crops, building usages permitted and the density of buildings permitted.
- Second, to compensate owners in non-buildable areas, there must be strategies such as Transfer of Development Rights to buildable zones in cities.
- Third, the master plan should focus on permitting only ecologically sensitive building strategies for these areas by proposing new construction techniques.

- * Controlled development can be proposed using building height rules, floor area ratio control, and restrictions on cutting and filling natural land.
- Fourth, strategies to make sure that all infrastructure projects are carried out in a scientific manner with strict scrutiny must be specified.
 - * This should include roads built on difficult terrain and all public infrastructure projects in wetlands and the High Ranges.

Expertise Requirement

- Such an intensive and sensitive hydrology-driven master plan requires much specialised expertise and experience which may not be readily available in our homegrown available pool of resources.
- The State should not shy away from acquiring the most appropriate skills to implement this urgently given the massive damage to life and property it now faces both in the short and long term.
- A complete overhaul of processes to hire technical expertise which allows access to necessary skills, and with a long-term vision of capacity building of local agencies, is the way forward.
- Strategies and techniques followed elsewhere cannot just be transferred or we have carbon copy solutions from Europe, we must learn from each experience in order to collectively formulate strategies that address our needs.

Way forward

- Legal processes and bye-laws need revisions.
- The water footprint needs to be reinstated, and the relationship with water resources rebuilt.

17. Rare tarantula sighted in Villupuram district

Context:

- Researchers have sighted a critically endangered species of tarantula for the first time beyond its known habitat in the Eastern Ghats.

Details:

- The spider is commonly known as the Peacock Parachute Spider or Gooty Tarantula.
- It belongs to the genus Poecilotheria and is known to be endemic to India.
- It is the only blue species of the genus Poecilotheria.
- The known habitat of Peacock Parachute Spider is in degraded forests near Nandyal in Andhra Pradesh.
- The spider was spotted by a team of researchers of the Puducherry-based Indigenous Biodiversity Foundation (IBF) in the Pakkamalai Reserve Forests near Gingee in Tamil Nadu.






- The species was found at different locations in the reserve forests.
- The species had so far not been sighted in any other part of India or Sri Lanka except its known habitat in Andhra Pradesh.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has categorised it as Critically Endangered.
- Tarantulas are biological pest controllers and there is a huge demand for them by collectors in the pet trade.

Threats





- Its habitat is rapidly degrading due to logging and firewood harvesting.
- Another threat identified by IUCN assessors is specimen collection for the pet trade.
- Population size is unknown, but the combination of its small natural range and the habitat threats indicate

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HEALTH ISSUES

1. Fit India Movement

Context

- The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the Fit India Movement at a ceremony in New Delhi on the occasion of National Sports Day.
- The Prime Minister urged the people of the country to make fitness their life style.

Details

- The nation-wide campaign aims to encourage people to inculcate physical activity and sports in their everyday lives
- A committee comprising government officials, members of Indian Olympic Association (IOA), national sports federations, private bodies and fitness promoters was also formed to advise the government on the Fit India Movement.
- The movement is not just central government's but of all state governments, panchayats and local bodies.



2. Janaushadhi Sugam

- The "Jan Aushadhi Suvridha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin" will now be available at only One Rupee per pad.

- "Janaushadhi Sugam" mobile application would have user-friendly options like- to locate nearby Janaushadhikendra, direction guidance for location of the Janaushadhikendra through Google Map, search Janaushadhi generic medicines, analyse product comparison of Generic vs Branded medicine in form of MRP & overall Savings, etc.

Significance

- This is an important step in ensuring the health security for the section of Indian women who still use unhygienic aids during menstrual period due to non-affordability of sanitary pads available in the market.
- This will ensure 'Swachhta, Swasthya and Suvridha' for the underprivileged women of the country.

3. Kalaazar

- The term "kala-azar" comes from India where it is the Hindi for black fever.
- A chronic and potentially fatal parasitic disease of the viscera (the internal organs, particularly the liver, spleen, bone marrow and lymph nodes) due to infection by the parasite called Leishmania donovani.
- Leishmania donovani, the agent of kala-azar, is transmitted by sandfly bites in parts of Asia (primarily India), Africa (primarily Sudan) and South America (primarily Brazil)
- The disease is one of the Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD)
- Kala azar is the second largest parasitic killer in the world.
- The disease is also known as Indian leishmaniasis, visceral leishmaniasis, leishmania infection, dum-dum fever, black sickness, and black fever.

What are Signs & Symptoms of Kala-Azar?

- Recurrent fever intermittent or remittent with often double rise
- loss of appetite, pallor and weight loss with progressive emaciation
- Splenomegaly – spleen enlarges rapidly to massive enlargement, usually soft and nontender(not painful)
- Liver – enlargement not to the extent of spleen, soft, smooth surface, sharp edge
- Lymphadenopathy – not very common in India
- Skin – dry, thin and scaly and hair may be lost. Light coloured persons show grayish discolouration of the skin of hands, feet, abdomen and face which gives the Indian name Kala-azar meaning "Black fever"
- Anaemia – develops rapidly
- Weakness

4. National Essential Diagnostics List

Context:

- India has got its first National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL) finalized by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

Details:

- India has become the first country to compile such a list that would provide guidance to the government for deciding the kind of diagnostic tests that different healthcare facilities in villages and remote areas require.
- The list is meant for facilities from village till the district level.
- NEDL builds upon the Free Diagnostics Service Initiative and other diagnostics initiatives of the Health Ministry.
- The list also encompasses tests relevant for new programs such as Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs) under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- In addition to tests, corresponding In-Vitro Diagnostic (IVD) products have also been recommended.

Background:

- In India, diagnostics (medical devices and in vitro diagnostics) follow a regulatory framework based on the drug regulations under:
 - Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940
 - Drugs and Cosmetics Rules 1945
 - Medical Device Rules, 2017

Reasons behind the Move:

- Diagnostics serve a key role in improving health and quality of life.
- Low cost, inaccurate diagnostics, with no regards to quality, have made their way into the health care system
- The current system is equipped to manage only the few notified devices.
- The list aims to bridge the current regulatory system's gap that do not cover all the medical devices and IVDs.

Advantages of the List:

- The list will provide an expanded basket of tests at different levels of the public health system.
- Implementation of the list would enable improved health care services delivery through
- Evidence based care
- Improved patient outcomes
- Reduction in out-of-pocket expenditure
- Effective utilization of public health facilities
- Effective assessment of disease burden, disease trends, surveillance, and outbreak identification

- Addressing the crisis of antimicrobial resistance

Key Challenges:

- Adoption by States and harmonization with local standard diagnostic protocols and treatment guidelines.
- Provision of requisite infrastructure, processes and human resources.
- Ensuring quality of tests and adequate utilization of EDL tests for making informed decisions for treatment protocols.

5. No formalin found in fish imported to Goa: minister

Context:

- Regular checks were being conducted on fish imported to Goa and the state's Health Minister has confirmed that no trace of formalin has been found in fish brought to the state from outside.

Formalin:

- Formalin is a toxic, colourless solution that is derived by dissolving formaldehyde gas in water.
- Formaldehyde is highly reactive and flammable gas.
- Formalin is a cancer-inducing chemical used to illegally preserve fish.
- It is used in the manufacture of pesticides, fertilisers, glue, paper and paint, among other products.
- It irritation in the eyes, throat, skin and stomach. In the long run, continued exposure to formalin can result in cancers and also harm to the kidneys and liver.

Details:

- Formalin increases the shelf life of fish (highly perishable), therefore, is used as a preservative.
- Some amount of formalin is naturally formed while fish is transported with ice, but these are usually bound with tissues and not a risk.
- If fish is laced externally with formalin, it remains free and can cause serious health issue.
- In July 2018, the state government had banned the import of fish from outside in view of the scare of formalin (formaldehyde), being found in it.
- Since then, the state government was taking services of the Quality Council of India (QCI) to conduct random checks on fish brought on the state borders and various local markets.
- It is found that no added formalin has been detected in any samples of fishes imported to Goa so far.

6. PET bottles have no toxic Chemicals

Context

- A comprehensive evaluation by the CSIR-Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore has determined PET bottles are safe.

Details

- There has been a debate internationally on whether PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) bottles, leach harmful chemicals when exposed to high temperatures.
- The CFRTI analysis, commissioned by an industry body, concluded that antimony, arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, lead, mercury, selenium and zinc were Below their Detection Limits (BDL) of 0.001 mg/kg.
- Bisphenol-A was below its detection limit of 0.02 mg/kg.
 - * BPA is a synthetic organic compound and used in the manufacture of PET bottles but is now phased out after research found a link between the presence of BPA and the disruption of hormone regulation, as well as breast cancer.
- The CFTRI scientists found that the presence of metals, BPA and pthalates were below detection limit.
- The analysis found that no chemicals breached the EU-specified norms.
- In most cases the EU standards are similar to the ones specified by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.
- The studies further confirmed that antimony does not leach out of PET bottles. These findings further establish that no endocrine disruption happens from the use of PET bottles.

7. The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019**Definition**

- The Bill defines surrogacy as a practice where a woman gives birth to a child for an intending couple with the intention to hand over the child after the birth to the intending couple.

Regulation of surrogacy:

The Bill prohibits commercial surrogacy, but allows altruistic surrogacy.

- Altruistic surrogacy involves no monetary compensation to the surrogate mother other than the medical expenses and insurance coverage during the pregnancy.
- Commercial surrogacy includes surrogacy or its related procedures undertaken for a monetary benefit or reward (in cash or kind) exceeding the basic medical expenses and insurance coverage.

Purposes for which surrogacy is permitted:

Surrogacy is permitted when it is:

- for intending couples who suffer from proven infertility;
- altruistic;

- not for commercial purposes;
- not for producing children for sale, prostitution or other forms of exploitation; and
- For any condition or disease specified through regulations.

Eligibility criteria for intending couple:

The intending couple should have a 'certificate of essentiality' and a 'certificate of eligibility' issued by the appropriate authority.

- A certificate of essentiality will be issued upon fulfilment of the following conditions:
 - * a certificate of proven infertility of one or both members of the intending couple from a District Medical Board;
 - * an order of parentage and custody of the surrogate child passed by a Magistrate's court; and
 - * Insurance coverage for a period of 16 months covering postpartum delivery complications for the surrogate.
- The certificate of eligibility to the intending couple is issued upon fulfilment of the following conditions:
 - * the couple being Indian citizens and married for at least five years;
 - * between 23 to 50 years old (wife) and 26 to 55 years old (husband);
 - * they do not have any surviving child (biological, adopted or surrogate); this would not include a child who is mentally or physically challenged or suffers from life threatening disorder or fatal illness; and
 - * Other conditions that may be specified by regulations.

Eligibility criteria for surrogate mother:

To obtain a certificate of eligibility from the appropriate authority, the surrogate mother has to be:

- a close relative of the intending couple;
- a married woman having a child of her own;
- 25 to 35 years old;
- a surrogate only once in her lifetime;
- Possess a certificate of medical and psychological fitness for surrogacy. Further, the surrogate mother cannot provide her own gametes for surrogacy.

National and State Surrogacy Boards:

The central and the state governments shall constitute the National Surrogacy Board (NSB) and the State Surrogacy Boards (SSB), respectively. Functions of the NSB include,

- advising the central government on policy matters relating to surrogacy;
- laying down the code of conduct of surrogacy clinics; and

- Supervising the functioning of SSBs.

Offences and penalties:

- undertaking or advertising commercial surrogacy;
- exploiting the surrogate mother;
- abandoning, exploiting or disowning a surrogate child; and
- Selling or importing human embryo or gametes for surrogacy.
- The penalty for such offences is imprisonment up to 10 years and a fine up to 10 lakh rupees. The Bill specifies a range of offences and penalties for other contraventions of the provisions of the Bill.

8. The risks of legalising cannabis

Context

- There is a growing movement in the West to legalize cannabis, with rumblings of the same in India.
- India should carefully weigh the risks and benefits of cannabis before blindly following suit with the West.

Introduction

- In India, cannabis, also known as bhang, ganja, charas or hashish, is typically eaten (bhang golis, thandai, pakoras, lassi, etc.) or smoked (chillum or cigarette).
- The major psychoactive constituent in cannabis is Δ -9 Tetra Hydro Cannabinol (THC).
 - * Compounds which are structurally similar to THC are referred to as cannabinoids.
- Its potency depends on the content of its principal active constituent THC, though cannabis contains more than 500 other chemicals.

Indian Milieu

- In India, there is a tradition of using cannabis in many religious contexts.
- Ayurvedic texts refer to cannabis as a treatment for several maladies,
 - * In the Atharva-veda, the 'bhang' plant finds a notable mention as one of nature's five sacred, distress-relieving plants.
- But what is often overlooked is that it is categorised as Upavisha Varga (sub poisonous), and its recreational use has been described as toxic.

Regulations in the west

- In the US, the use of marijuana (a more addictive derivative) for medicinal purposes is legal in a number of states, whereas its use for recreational purpose has also been legalised in some states.
- Canada has legalized its use for recreational as well as medicinal purposes.
- Europe recognizes the use of marijuana for recreational purposes as a crime, but its use for medical purposes is permitted in many countries.

There are many misconceptions about cannabis.

- First, it is not accurate that cannabis is harmless.
 - * Its immediate effects include impairments in memory and in mental processes, including ones that are critical for driving.
 - * Long-term use of cannabis may lead to the development of addiction of the substance, persistent cognitive deficits, and of mental health problems like schizophrenia, depression and anxiety.
 - * Exposure to cannabis in adolescence can alter brain development.
 - * Cannabis smoking is associated with an increased risk of bronchitis, pneumonia and respiratory distress, as also transient ischemic attacks, stroke, myocardial infarctions and cannabis arteritis.
- A second myth is that if cannabis is legalised and regulated, its harms can be minimised.
 - * With legalization comes commercialization. This comes at a cost which we have seen with tobacco and alcohol over the last century.
 - * The morbidity and mortality associated with tobacco and alcohol rank amongst the top 10 in terms of the global disease burden. Tobacco, too, was initially touted as a natural and harmless plant that had been "safely" used in South American religious ceremonies for centuries.
 - * The tobacco industry invented cigarettes for ease of use, altered the acidity of tobacco to make it less harsh, added other chemicals to improve its taste, mass-produced cigarettes, and sold them using sophisticated advertising.
 - * It manipulated knowledge about the adverse effects of tobacco despite being aware of these effects, and successfully staved off legal battles for decades.
 - * No amount of taxation of the tobacco industry can compensate for the health toll on billions of tobacco users over the last century. Despite knowledge of the risks of smoking, cigarettes remain legal and the tobacco industry continues to thrive. This also highlights the point that once out, the genie cannot be put back into the bottle.

How the business works?

- It's important to make a distinction between legalisation, decriminalisation and commercialisation.
 - * While legalisation and decriminalisation are mostly used in a legal context, commercialisation relates to the business side of things.
 - * The goal of commercialisation is to sell as much of the product, and the cannabis industry is steadily growing in the U.S.

- In fact, as the sale of tobacco products have shown signs of a decline in the West, some tobacco companies have entered the cannabis market.
 - * Altria, the maker of Marlboro cigarettes, has invested \$1.8 billion (₹12,400 crore) in the cannabis grower Cronos Group.
- These commercial entities will bring their wealth of experience navigating the law, their successful marketing, their well-oiled lobbying, and deep pockets to influence the government to maximise profit and minimise risk to their commercial enterprise.
- In the U.S., cannabis is being incorrectly advertised as being “natural” and “healthier than alcohol and tobacco”.
 - * Commercial entities also understand that targeting the young assures them lifelong customers.
 - * A new array of cannabis products in the form of ice creams, sweets, and even soft-drinks are becoming available.
- The West also says that legalising and regulating cannabis will “undermine criminal markets”.
 - * Congress MP Shashi Tharoor echoed this in 2018.
 - * Yet, as we have seen in Colorado, the black market has only increased.

If risks outweigh benefits, why did the US and Canada legalise it?

- With an increasing number of youth (though a minority) supporting legalisation, most policymakers don't see it a battle worth fighting, even though justified.
- In the US, public opinion was built on decades of misinformation, racial discrimination, police excesses, degree of punishment, incarceration in jail, craving for liberty, etc.
- Also, policymakers seem to be excited about another source of revenue.

Impact on India

- India has a history of misuse of even prescription drugs that are otherwise beneficial.
- In Indian context, when prescription drugs are grossly misused, how can we ensure disciplined use of cannabis?
- It is obvious that arguments of medicinal or industrial use are simply smokescreens to fool policymakers and swing public support.
- India is struggling to control the three addictive substances of tobacco, alcohol and areca nut.
 - * As per the Global Adult Tobacco Survey, 270 million Indians use tobacco and it kills around 1.35 million Indians every year.
 - * Nearly 30% of India's adult population is using alcohol, leading to 3.3 million deaths.

- Legalisation of cannabis is not only going to worsen these alarming statistics, but also serve as a gateway for one of these carcinogens.

Considering alternatives

- In 1961, driven by Western nations, the UN sponsored an international treaty to prohibit the production and supply of drugs including cannabis. India resisted and negotiated exceptions, loopholes, and deferrals.
- It is ironic that the West is now legalising cannabis and other drugs. Given that some in India are clamouring for the same, the country should carefully consider all the risks, and consider alternatives.
 - * One, it could decriminalize cannabis but forbid commercialisation.
 - * Two, if India were to liberalize its policy on cannabis, it should ensure that there are enough protections for children, the young, and those with severe mental illnesses, who are most vulnerable to its effects.
 - * Finally, treatments for those who become addicted to cannabis should be offered.

ART AND CULTURE

1. Gallery of Confiscated and Retrieved Antiquities

Context

- The Minister of State for Culture & Tourism (Independent charge), inaugurated 'Gallery of Confiscated and Retrieved Antiquities' at Purana Qila in New Delhi

Details

- The Gallery is located in the arched cells of Purana Qila.
- It is curated by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- It displays confiscated and retrieved antiquities to public.

Some of the exclusive exhibits showcased in the gallery are

- Bronze sculptures of Parvati and Sridevi of Chola Period (brought back in 2016),
- Standing Buddha (returned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the year 1999),
- Terracotta Mother Goddess of Mauryan period (brought back in the year 2016),
- Brahma-Brahmani (confiscated by Central Bureau of Investigation),
- Mithuna (seized in New York and brought back in the year 2010)
- Kashmiri Harwan tile (returned to India by Consulate General of India, New York in the year 2016)

Conclusion

- As per the Antiquity and Art Treasures Act, 1972 and rules 1973, it is the duty of Archaeological Survey of India to stop theft, illegal export and regulates domestic trade of antiquities.
- So far, ASI, has retrieved 44 stolen antiquities from USA, Australia, Singapore, Germany, Canada and England and 119 more antiquities are in the process of retrieval.
- Owing to the efforts of ASI no theft has been reported from any Centrally Protected Monument or site museum under ASI during last few years.

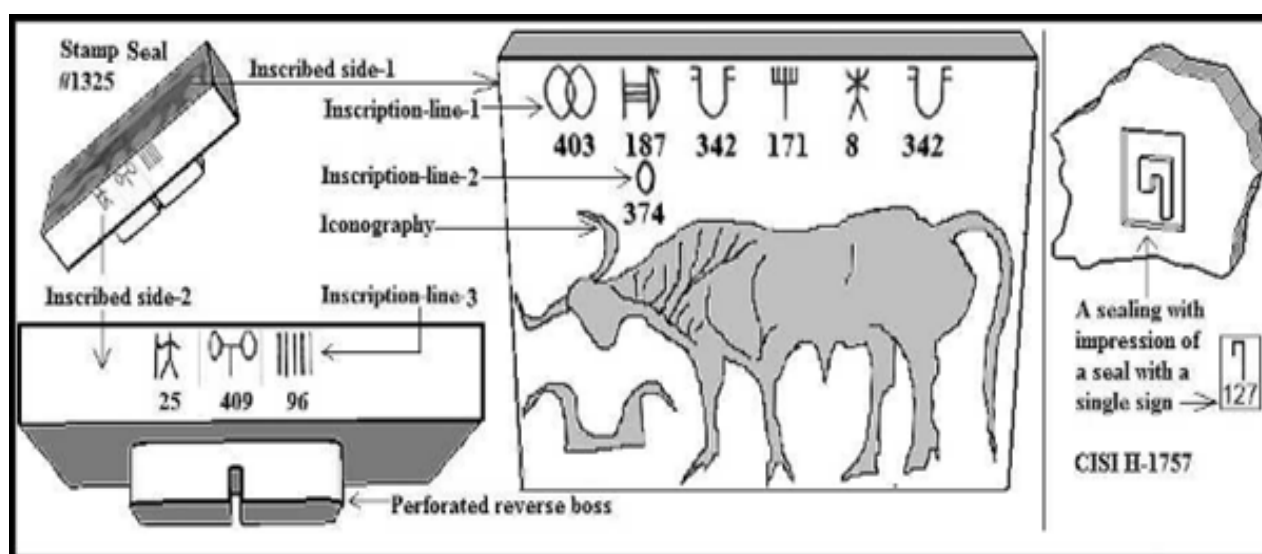
2. Indus Valley seals carried meaning like modern coins do, shows study

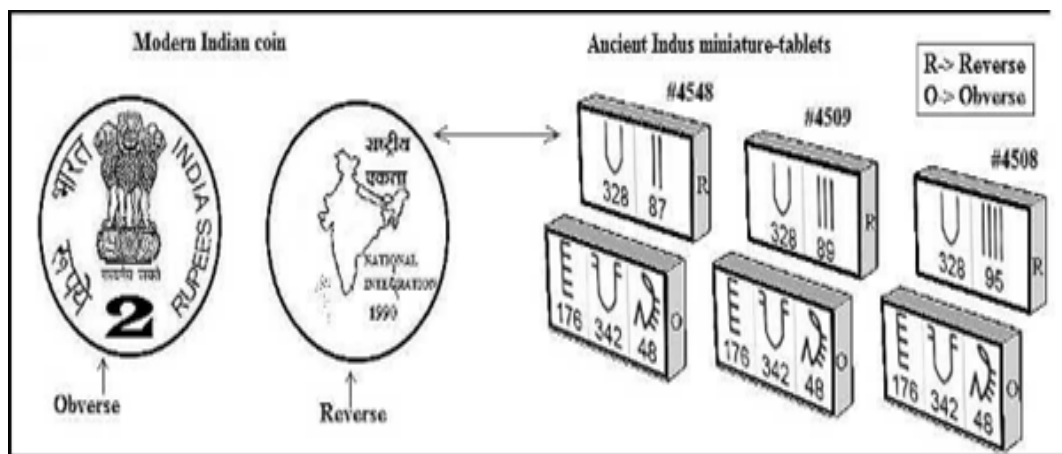
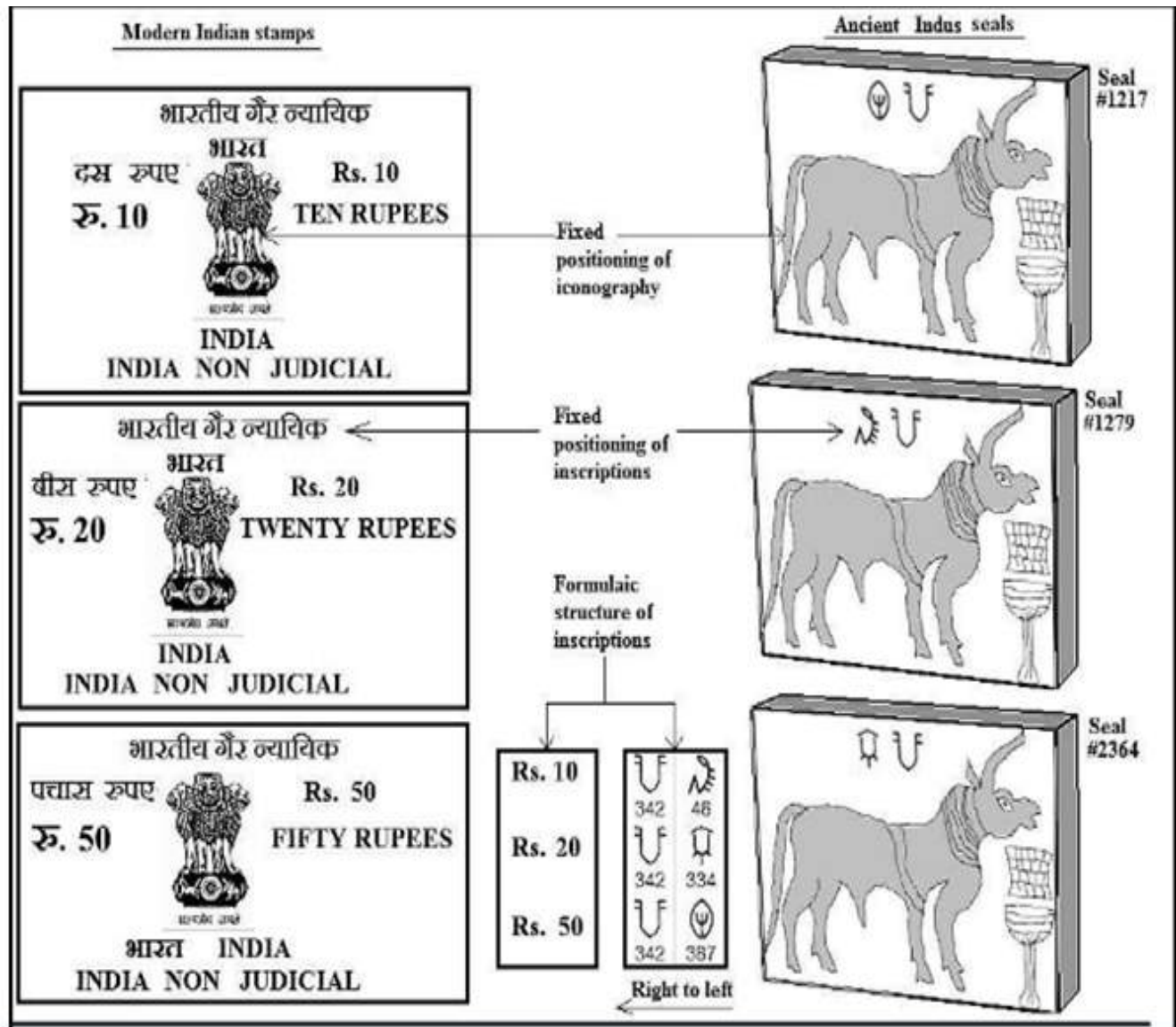
Context:

- A research paper titled Interrogating Indus inscription to unravel their mechanism of meaning conveyance, was recently published in Palgrave Communications, a Nature group journal.

Issue:

- Nearly 4,000 ancient Indus inscriptions such as inscribed objects, including seals, tablets, ivory rods, pottery shards, etc., have been discovered.
- These mysterious legacies of the Indus Valley civilization have not been deciphered due to
 - * The absence of bilingual texts





- * Extreme brevity of the inscriptions
- * Ignorance about the language(s) encoded by Indus script.

Details:

- The research paper mainly focuses on understanding how Indus inscriptions conveyed meanings, rather than on deciphering what they conveyed.
- The paper claims that a majority of the Indus Valley inscriptions were written logographically (by using word signs) and not by using phonograms (speech sounds units).
- It points out that the inscriptions can be compared to the structured messages found on stamps, coupons, tokens and currency coins of modern times.
- In the publication, signs are classified into nine functional classes.
- Epigraphic analysis claims that the inscribed seals and tablets were used in some administrative operation that controlled the commercial transactions prevalent in the trade-savvy settlements of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation.
- It is said that these inscriptions can be compared to the messages found on stamps, coupons, tokens and currency coins of modern times, where we expect formulaic texts that encode certain type of information in some pre-defined ways, rather than freely composed narrative.
- A common perception among some scholars is that the Indus script is logo-syllabic, where one symbol can be used as a word sign at one time and as a syllable-sign at another. This method, where a word-symbol also gets sometimes used only for its sound value, is called the rebus principle. For example, you can combine the pictures of a honey bee and a leaf to signify the word "belief" (bee+leaf).
- However, according to the research paper, the inscriptions found on the Indus seals and tablets have not used rebus as the mechanism to convey meaning.

It is believed that this work could serve as a basis in the future for the deciphering of the script.

3. Kondapalli Toys

Context:

- Kondapalli toy makers claim that, though platforms such as Lepakshi, Amazon and MyStateBazaar endorse the products promoting the craft, such a promotion has barely helped them in their sustenance.

Kondapalli toys:

- Kondapalli Toys are the toys made of wood in Kondapalli of Krishna district, a village nearby Vijayawada in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

- Bommala Colony translates to Toys Colony in Kondapalli is the place where the art of crafting takes place.
- These toys have received a Geographical Indication Tag.
- These toys are one of the variety of toys assembled in the houses during the festivals of Sankranti and Navratri and is referred as "Bommala Kolu".
- The art of crafting is a 400 year old tradition.
- The artisans who make the toys are referred as Aryakhastriyas, who have their mention in the Brahmanda Purana.
- They are said to have migrated from Rajasthan in the 16th century to Kondapalli and claims their origin to Muktharishi, a sage endowed with skills in arts and crafts by Lord Shiva.

Details:

- The art form which has got patronage from the rulers in ancient times is in decline due to
 - * Lack of profits
 - * Time taking to produce toys
 - * Influence of western art
 - * Fact those younger generations not encouraged towards this art.
- Competition from Chinese machine made toys is their main obstacle.
- They spend 10-20 hours-a-day making a dozen miniature buffaloes that are sold for a mere Rs. 300.
- While they toil their lives away making these toys, sustaining themselves in this competing age is major challenge
- Adding to their troubles is the scarcity of the 'Tella Poniki' wood, which gives the toys its unique character. No other wood can be a replacement to make these toys as Tella Poniki is malleable and can be easily chiseled into the desired shape.

Way forward:

- The toys have a great demand both in abroad and in India.
- If the government sanctions us funds a timely manner, imparts training to the younger generation, coupled with an incentive, the craft can regain its lost glory.

4. Mogao Caves

- It is also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas
- It is Carved into the cliffs above the Dachuan River, the Mogao Caves south-east of the Dunhuang oasis, Gansu Province, comprise the largest, most richly endowed, and longest used treasure house of Buddhist art in the world.

- The Mogao Caves were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987.
- Mogao Grottoes are a treasure house of art, architecture, sculpture and painting with 735 grottoes, over 45,000 square meters of murals and 2,000 painted sculptures.

Significance

- The murals and Buddha figures in these caves tell the historical and cultural ties between Chinese and Indian civilisations, and witness the light of inter-civilisational exchanges and mutual learning.
- Indian-style sculptures can be seen in the Mogao Grottoes built during the 4th to 6th centuries. The moves of the most commonly seen Apsara figure in Dunhuang murals are similar to those in Indian classical dances.
- Dunhuang also keeps many ancient Buddhist sutras written in Sanskrit and Pattra-Leaf Scripture, a wealth of information for China-India cultural exchanges.

5. Nila Gumbad

- The Nila Gumbad is one of the earliest Mughal era structure built in the 1530's.
- Its name is derived from the turquoise blue tiles that cover its dome
- In 2017, Nila Gumbad was declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Monument as part of the extended Humayun's Tomb World Heritage Site.

Context

- Minister of State for Culture and Tourism has opened the entry for Nila Gumbad at Humayun Tomb Complex for general public during his visit.

6. Prachi River Valley Civilisation

Context

- A team from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was camping at Bharatihuda
- They had discovered ancient artefacts and grain during excavations in Cuttack district in Odisha in 2018
- The age of the settlement was arrived at after radiocarbon dating of charcoal samples found at the site by the Inter University Accelerator Centre (IUAC) in New Delhi using Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS).

Prachi River Valley Civilization

- It flourished 3000 to 4000 years ago at Bharatihuda in the state of Odisha. Prachi Valley is believed to be the birth place of Vaishnavism in Odisha.
- Every civilization we know sustained lived flourished around a river the prachi valley civilization too prospered around the river Prachi.

* The Prachi River is considered the holiest river in the region and originates from the river Kuakhei which is a tributary of river Mahanadi.

* There are around 350 to 400 monuments including temples, maths, ghats, structures and sites constructed during 7th century to 15th century AD along the 60 km stretch of the river

• Archaeological evidence reveals that the Prachi Valley Civilization predates, preexisted both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

• Presently the parts of the modern day districts of Puri, Khurda, Cuttack and Jagatsingpur comprise the Prachi valley region

Conclusions drawn from the Site

• There existed a rural settlement that had thrived at the site about 3600 years ago.

• They worshiped single specimen of the Sun motif found arrayed in chocolate-slipped pottery.

* Devotees from different parts of Odisha as well as the neighbouring States congregated at Chandrabhaga on the shore of the Bay of Bengal on the occasion of Magha Saptami to pay homage to Sun God

• The world famous Sun temple of Konark, located some 30 kilometres from the excavation, was built in the 13th century CE. The tradition of Sun worship seems to have evolved with human settlements in the region

• The excavated remains indicate existence of Chalcolithic culture in the valley as attested by the presence of mud structural remains, large quantity of potsherds, ground and polished stone tools, bone tools, beads of semi-precious stones, terracotta objects, huge quantity of faunal remains and carbonized grains.

• The inhabitants practiced agriculture and animal husbandry as attested by the findings of domesticated variety of rice and jute and evidence of domesticated cattle among the faunal remains as well as terracotta bull figurine.

7. Relics found by ASI in Maharashtra's Phupgaon

Context

• The recent excavation carried out by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at Maharashtra's Phupgaon has revealed evidence of an Iron Age settlement in the Vidarbha region.

About the site

• The site is situated in the vast meander of the river Purna, a major tributary of Tapi, which used to be a perennial river, but at present is completely dried-up due to the dam construction in the upper stream.

• The site is situated about 20 m away from the river bed and its one-third portion has been subjected to frequent erosion during the heavy water current in the earlier times.

- The river Purna, a major tributary of the river Tapi, has witnessed several archaeological sites on its either side of the banks.
- A number of cultural remains in the form of various antiquities and pottery have unraveled the nature of those settlements ranging from Paleolithic to the late medieval period.

Significance

- The excavation is significant as it indicates the presence of sedentary (permanent) settlement, belonging to the Iron Age of Vidarbha.
- The settlement comes under the category of a small village with evidence of a small agro-pastoral community with evidence of craftsmanship in the form of beads of agate-carnelian, jasper, quartz and also usage of other artifacts like hopscotch, wheel, and barrel-shaped beads.
- The finding from Phupgaon indicates its contemporaneity with other Iron Age settlements of Vidarbha like Naikund, Mahurjhari, Bhagimori, and Thakalkat.

8. Shyamoli

- 'Shyamoli' is an experimental mud-house built at Santiniketan in 1935.
- It is the heritage house of Rabindranath Tagore that has been recently renovated by the Archaeological Survey of India as a deposit work and is a property of Visva-Bharati at present.
- Rabindranath, out of a traumatic and claustrophobic childhood-experience of his own education at school within the boundaries of four walls, set up a school for children at Santiniketan in 1901.
- He then built 5 new houses at the Northern corner of the Santiniketan ashram which is now known as Uttarayana and named them Konark, Udayan, Shyamali, Punascha and Udichi.
- History says that Shri. Rabindranath Tagore stayed in these houses at various points of time and took special interest in the planning of the houses according to his requirements.
- He hoped that Shyamali would encourage poverty-stricken families of rural Bengal to have earthen roofs instead of thatched roofs prone to be destroyed in fire. Large and empty earthen vessels were intentionally placed inside the thick mud walls and roof of one of the rooms of Shyamali for the purpose of introducing a natural cooling system.
- Rabindranath immortalised this house by publishing a book of Poems entitled 'Shyamali' in 1936.

GEOGRAPHY

1. GJ 357 d

- It is super-Earth planet discovered by NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)
- The exoplanet orbits a diminutive dwarf star and is 22% larger than the Earth.
- There are two other exoplanets in the system.
- The super-Earth has a thick atmosphere and may possess water.

2. Kajin Sara Lake

Context

- A newly-discovered lake named as Kajin Sara in Manang district in Nepal located at an altitude of 5,200 meters is likely to set a new world record of being the world's highest lake.

Details

- It is located at Singarkharka area of Chame rural municipality.
- Currently, Tilicho lake in Nepal, which is situated at an altitude of 4,919 metres in the Himalayan nation, holds the title.

3. Mapping of Soil Worms

Context

- A team of over 50 researchers collected over 6,500 soil samples from all seven continents of the world and found that there are about 57 billion nematodes for every human being on Earth.

Soil Worms:

- Soil worms (nematodes) are roundworms and their size can vary from a tiny 0.2 millimetre to a few metres.
- There are 57 billion nematodes for every human being on Earth.
- Their total biomass comes to around 300 million tonnes which is about 80% of the combined weight of Earth's humans.

Details of the Mapping:

- The study was done only on the top 15 cm of soil.
- At 38% of the total, sub-Arctic regions have the highest abundance of nematodes.
- Soil organic matter content is the key driver for nematode abundance.
- The low temperature and high moisture in the sub-Arctic regions reduce the decomposition rate of organic matter.
- This leads to accumulation of organic matter and the nematodes happily thrive on them

- The temperate region has the next highest abundance followed by the tropical regions.

Soil Worms in Indian soils:

- Soils from Western and Eastern Ghats of India and the Himalayas were used for the study.
- Many nematicides (a substance used to kill nematode worms) have been indiscriminately used in our agricultural fields, posing a major threat to their survival.
- Biological control methods can be used to save these important organisms.

Ecological Importance of Soil Worms:

- Nematodes play a crucial role in the environment as they are responsible for production of about 19% of ammonia of the soil.
- They are also important bio indicators of soil ecosystem health.
- Nematodes are responsible for around 2.2% of the total carbon emission from soils.
- Predicting climate change requires that we understand global carbon and nutrient cycles.
- Improving our understanding of these organisms at a global level is critical if we are going to understand and address climate change.

4. Perseid Meteor Shower

Meteoroid

- The small pieces of rocks which move around the sun are called meteoroids. A meteoroid is a small rock or particle of debris in our solar system.

Meteor

- A meteor is the streak of light that you see in the sky when a small piece of cometary or asteroidal material enters the atmosphere at high speed and burns up because of the frictional heating from the piece's collision with the atoms and molecules in the atmosphere.
- A meteoroid that burns up as it passes through the Earth's atmosphere is known as a meteor.
- A meteor is popularly termed a 'shooting star' or 'falling star'.

Meteorite

- The part of a meteoroid or asteroid that survives the passage through our atmosphere and reaches the Earth's surface.

- Largest Meteor Crater: A meteor crater in Arizona (USA) is 4,200 ft (1,300 m) deep is the largest meteor crater in the world. It was formed over 10,000 years ago.

Meteor Shower

- Well, comets, like Earth and the other planets, also orbit the sun.
- Unlike the nearly circular orbits of the planets, the orbits of comets are usually quite lop-sided.
- As a comet gets closer to the sun, some of its icy surface boils off, releasing lots of particles of dust and rock.
- A meteor shower happens when Earth passes through the path of a comet.
- When this happens, the bits of comet debris, most no larger than a grain of sand, create streaks of light in the night sky as they burn up in Earth's atmosphere.
- On any night, there are several small meteors which shoot across the sky. However, during a meteor shower, tens to hundreds of meteors can be seen each hour

Perseid Meteor Shower

- Meteor showers are generally named after the constellation in which they appear to originate; thus the Perseids appear to originate in the constellation Perseus and the Leonids in the constellation Leo.
- The Perseids occur as the Earth runs into pieces of cosmic debris left behind by the comet Swift-Tuttle.
- Meteors are best seen on a cloudless night, when the entire sky is visible, and when the Moon is not extremely bright. Chances of a successful viewing are higher from locations far away from the lights of cities. Pollution and monsoon clouds make the Perseids difficult to view from India.

Context

- Several meteor showers can be seen around the year. Among the brightest and best known of them is the Perseid Meteor Shower, which has been active from July 17 onward, and can be seen until August 26.
- According to the International Meteor Organisation, the Perseid Showers will be followed in 2019 by
 - * the Orionids (between October 2 and November 7, peaking around October 21-22),
 - * the Leonids (from November 6-30, peaking around November 16-17),
 - * the Geminids (from December 4-17, peaking around December 13-14), and
 - * The Ursids (from December 17-26, peaking around December 21-22).

EDUCATION

1. NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement)

Context

- Union HRD Minister launches NISHTHA to build capacities of government teachers across the country

Details

- It is a training programme which will motivate and equip teachers to encourage and foster critical thinking in students
- Standardized training modules are developed at national level for all States and UTs.
 - * However, States and UTs can contextualize the training modules and use their own material and resource persons also, keeping in view the core topics and expected outcomes of NISHTHA.
- The training Modules for NISHTHA have been developed through a consultative process involving the suggestions from the States and UTs and CBSE, KVS, NVS, School Principals and Non-Governmental Organizations, such as Kaivalya Foundation, Tata Trust, Azim Premji Foundation and Aurobindo Society.
- This mega capacity building programme has been integrated with technology to ensure smooth facilitation, availability of digital content and technology enabled teaching methods to support the teachers.
 - * A Mobile App and Learning Management System (LMS) based on MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) have been developed by NCERT
- In order to ensure sustainable impact on classroom transactions, this integrated training programme is embedded with post training interventions including provision of mentoring.

Impact

- This integrated programme aims to build the capacities of around 42 lakh participants covering all teachers and Heads of Schools at the elementary level in all Government schools, faculty members of State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) as well as Block Resource Coordinators and Cluster Resource Coordinators in all States and UTs.

2. 'Samagra Shiksha-Jal Suraksha' Drive

Context

- Union HRD Minister will launch 'Samagra Shiksha-Jal Suraksha' drive to create awareness about Water Conservation among all school students in the country.

About the drive

- It is a time bound campaign with a mission mode approach.
- This concept of water conservation is essential for students so that they can understand the importance of water and how it is shaping their lives meaningfully, thereby enabling them to participate in water conservation activities in their day to day lives.
- MHRD has launched the 'Samagra Shiksha-Jal Suraksha' drive to promote water conservation activities for School Students, so that they can become competent, conscientious and committed water citizens of our nation

Five Major Objectives:

- To educate students learn about conservation of water
- To sensitize Students about the impact of scarcity of water
- To empower Students to learn to protect the natural sources of water
- To help every Student to save at least one litre of water per day
- To encourage Students towards judicious use and minimum wastage of water at home and school level

3. Shagun

Context

- Union Human Resource Development Minister launched one of world's largest Integrated Online Junction for – School Education 'Shagun'

About the initiative

- School Education Shagun (URL: <http://shagun.govt.in/>) is an over-arching initiative to improve school education system
- This is done by creating a junction for all online portals and websites relating to various activities of the Department of School Education and Literacy in the Government of India and all States and Union Territories.
- Shagun is coined from two different words- 'Shala' meaning Schools and 'Gunvatta' meaning Quality.
- This online junction of different websites and portals into a single platform will enhance the accessibility of information relating to schools and will ensure a holistic approach to transform education sector.
- The portal seeks to connect approximately 92 lakh teachers and 26 crore students.

Major focus of the portal

- Reinforcing and cleaning the data of the Integrated Online Junction through feedback from Stakeholders
- Ensuring full inter-operability among the websites, portals and applications which are already hosted in the junction
- Creating high quality e-contents, including quizzes and puzzles to enhance learning and also for teachers in aiding classroom transactions
- Using artificial intelligence and deep machine learning in a variety of ways to enhance the quality of school education including for designing evidence-based inventions.

4. TechEx**Context**

- Union Human Resource Development Minister inaugurated the TechEx – technology exhibition at IIT Delhi

About TechEx

- TechEx was organized to demonstrate products and prototypes developed under the two flagship schemes of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) namely IMPacting Research, INnovation and Technology (IMPRINT) and Uchhatar Avishkar Yojana (UAY).
- TechEx is a unique effort, which offers an excellent platform to the researchers to showcase their work and inspire them to do their best in their respective domains.
- Some prominent among the exhibits were non-invasive and low-cost rapid TB diagnostics, artificial pancreas for closed loop blood glucose control of type-I diabetic patients, affordable cancer diagnosis/treatment, electric vehicle charger, etc.

IMPRINT scheme

- It was launched in November, 2015 with a view to providing solutions to the most relevant engineering challenges by translating knowledge into viable technology (products or processes) in 10 selected technology domains.
- The domains are namely health care, energy, sustainable habitat, nano-technology hardware, water resources and river systems, advanced materials, Information and Communication Technology, manufacturing, security and defence, and environmental science and climate change.

UchhatarAvishkar Yojana (UAY)

- UchhatarAvishkar Yojana (UAY) was announced in 2015 with a view to promoting innovation of a higher order that directly impacts the needs of the Industry and thereby improves the competitive edge of Indian manufacturing.
- UAY projects are funded jointly by MHRD, participating Ministries and the Industry

- The scheme focusses on a viable industry-academic collaboration where industry shares a part of the cost of research.

5. Urkund

- URKUND is a completely automated system against plagiarism (Anti-plagiarism software)
- URKUND's system checks all documents against three central source areas:
 - * The Internet
 - * Published material such as Journals, Books etc.
 - * Previously submitted student material (e.g. memoranda, case studies and examination works)

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

- It is a global partnership of national governments, United Nations Agencies, multilateral development banks, the private sector and academic institutions that aims to promote resilience of infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks.
- The CDRI will serve as a platform where knowledge is generated and exchanged on different aspects of climate and disaster resilience of infrastructure.
- The CDRI will focus on resilient economic infrastructure (like transport, telecom, energy, and water), social infrastructure (like health and education) and ecological infrastructure, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable.

The CDRI will be developed around following thematic areas:

- risk governance and policy;
- risk identification and estimation;
- standards and regulation;
- institutional mechanisms for capacity development;
- application of emerging technologies;
- recovery and reconstruction;
- Social and community capacities.

Major Impact:

- It will create a mechanism to assist countries to upgrade their capacities and practices, with regard to infrastructure development in accordance with their risk context and economic needs.
- This initiative will benefit all sections of society. Economically weaker sections of society, women and children, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and hence, will be benefitted from the improvement of knowledge and practice in creating disaster resilient infrastructure.
- It will also benefit all areas with high disaster risk. In India, the north-eastern and Himalayan regions are prone to earthquakes, coastal areas to cyclones and tsunamis and central peninsular region to droughts.

Context

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given ex-post facto approval for the Establishment of an International Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) along with its supporting Secretariat Office in New Delhi.

2. Kerala Landslides

Context

- Landslides caused by heavy rain wreaked havoc in Kerala claiming human lives and destroying vast tracks of agricultural lands

Natural Causes

- Rising ocean temperatures are resulting in large fluctuations in the monsoon winds, so it occasionally ends up in surges of moisture from the Arabian Sea being dumped over peninsular India.
 - * The rise in extreme rainfall events over India from 1950 to 2018 is about threefold.
- Meteorological data indicate that Malappuram received 512% and 248% excess rainfall on August 7 and 8, respectively.
 - * In Wayanad, the rain was beyond normal by 312% and 867%, respectively, on the same days.
- Extreme rain events caused by climate change and inadequate early warning measures have made matters worse.

Reasons for Landslide- Anthropological causes

- There is rampant exploitation of the Western Ghats by the various quarrying and construction companies for extracting minerals.
 - * The two factors that lead to landslides are triggering factors and the co-operative factors
 - * The triggering factor in this case is obviously the heavy rainfall and one of the major co-operative factors that lead to the landslides is quarrying and Quarrying causes rapid landscape changes.
- In a research conducted by Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), it was found that 25 out of the 31 locations which experienced landslides came under the Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ), identified by the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) in 2011.
 - * The Gadgil report, as it is popularly known as, recommended strict regulation on development activities including quarrying, mining and infrastructure projects such as roads, railways lines.
- Post-Disaster Needs Assessment conducted by the United Nations Development Programme in the wake of the 2018 floods and the draft Rebuild Kerala road map have made it clear that current land use pattern, changes in land cover, blocking of natural drains by way of constructions and poor agricultural practices including monocropping have all exacerbated the risk of landslides.

- At Puthumala, unscientific constructions that interrupted natural drains played a role in multiplying the magnitude of minor slides that generally occur in forest areas
- Most regions with a slope of more than 20 degrees are prone to landslides. Eight per cent of Kerala is classified as a critical zone for mass movements.
 - * Further, since the 19th century, over 50% of land with tropical forests and grasslands has been converted to monoculture plantations and agricultural fields.
 - * This has made the terrain much more vulnerable to landslides
- Construction of resorts and high rises has increased in landslide-prone areas.

Environmental norms for mining diluted

- In 2017, Kerala Govt brought in a major amendment to the Kerala Minor Mineral Concession (KMMC) Rules, 2015, as far as permissible limits for quarrying operations were concerned.
 - * The new amendment brought in made no distinction between quarrying using explosives and quarrying without using explosives.
- It further reduced the minimum permissible distance limit from 100 metres to 50 metres from residential buildings, reservoirs, tanks, canals, rivers, bridges, and other public works.
- In February 2018, the state government brought in another amendment to KMMC Rules, 2015.
 - * This time it scrapped the No Objection Certification (NOC) required from the District Collector for the mining of sand and clay, thereby easing the rules for acquiring licenses.

Impact on the agricultural Sector

- Landslides have affected large plantation areas forcing companies to close down estates
- Tea plantations in Munnar covering seven estates— is anticipating 20-25 per cent crop loss due to the 18-19-inch downpour.
- Inundation in several low-lying areas has affected the cardamom crop
- Rubber Board officials said that the heavy rains have hampered tapping in many plantations

Way forward

- An improvement in weather forecast models and early warning systems would reduce the human losses.
- All activities that trigger landslides should be regulated strictly, Institutions and bureaucrats who grant permission for these projects with absence of due process should be held accountable for the loss of human lives and property.
- A multisector approach should be envisaged to formulate a comprehensive land use policy

- Scientists believe that micro-level mapping of landslide prone areas and efficient disaster management system in a people-oriented manner are the need of the hour.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award

- These awards are given to recognize the achievements of persons in the fields of adventure. The awardees will be facilitated by President Ram Nath Kovind at the Rashtrapati Bhawan on August 29.
- They will receive statuettes, certificates and award money of Rs 5 lakh each.
- The award is given in four categories namely, land, water, air adventure and lifetime achievement.
 - * This year, National Selection Committee was constituted under the chairpersonship of Youth Affairs Secretary.
- The awards are given to encourage young people to develop the spirit of endurance, risk-taking, cooperative teamwork and quick, ready and effective reflexes in challenging situations and to provide an incentive to them for getting exposed to the adventure activities.

Context

- The names of the winners of the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awards were announced by the government

2. Underground Bunker Museum

- The bunker was created in the 19th century which dates back to the pre-World War I era
- It was used to fire cannons at approaching enemy ships

Current Status

- The 15,000 square feet underground bunker museum has virtual reality booths in which visitors can "time travel" to the 19th century
- The bunker resembles a fort and is made up of 13 rooms, which can be accessed by passing through a 20-foot-tall gate
- The underground passage has a proper drainage system and inlets for fresh air and light.

Context

- President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated the underground Bunker Museum at Raj Bhavan in Mumbai.

3. World Youth Conference on Kindness

- The first World Youth Conference on Kindness is being organized by the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development

- This conference was organized with the aim to impart critical competencies (i.e. empathy, compassion, mindfulness, and critical inquiry) in global youth to inspire, empower and enable them to transform themselves and build long-lasting peace in their communities.
- Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, the conference aimed to provide global youth and policymakers an innovative, engaging and inspiring platform to come together and discover ground-breaking pathways to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Theme of the conference – 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: Gandhi for the Contemporary World: Celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi'.

Context:

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, inaugurated the first World Youth Conference on Kindness

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following statements:

1. CAG can be removed by the President in the manner, same as removal of a Supreme Court Judge.
2. CAG is eligible to hold any office, under the Government of India or of any state, once he retires/resigns as a CAG.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

2. As per the recent Tiger Census report, which of the following states has the highest number of tigers?

- A. West Bengal
- B. Karnataka
- C. Uttarakhand
- D. Madhya Pradesh

3. Consider the following statements with respect to River Godavari:

1. It flows through Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.
2. Manjra is a right bank tributary of River Godavari.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

4. Consider the following statements:

1. El Niño is a climate pattern that describes the unusual warming of surface waters in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean
2. During the Positive IOD, the eastern equatorial Indian Ocean off Sumatra in Indonesia becomes colder than normal.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

5. Consider the following statements:

1. Komodo dragon is the world's largest lizard species.
2. It is classified as Extinct in the IUCN Red List.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

6. Consider the following statements:

1. ICRA is a professional investment information and credit rating agency established by the Government of India.
2. ICRA credit ratings are assigned on an Indian credit rating scale for Indian Rupee dominated debt obligations.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

7. Consider the following statements:

1. Equalisation levy is a direct tax.
2. This new tax is levied on non-resident digital advertising companies

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

8. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution deals with the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in the states of:

- A. Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura
- B. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh
- C. Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram
- D. Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and Mizoram

9. Consider the following statements:

1. Deepor Beel is a wetland on the western edge of Guwahati.
2. It is listed as a Ramsar Site.

Which of the given statement is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

10. Consider the following statements

1. Anandamath is a novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.
2. It is based on Faraizi Revolt.

Which of the given statement is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

11. The oath of office to the Governor is administered by:

- A. The President of India
- B. The Chief Justice of the concerned state high court
- C. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- D. None of the above

12. Which of the following is/are correct about earthquakes?

- 1. An earthquake's point of initial rupture is called its focus or hypocenter.
- 2. The epicenter is the point at ground level directly above the hypocenter.

Which of the given statement is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

13. In the context of international trade, consider the statements about INSTEX mechanism.

- 1. It is a payment channel with Iran to circumvent US sanctions.
- 2. It is an initiative formulated by the ASEAN countries.
- 3. India is also a signatory to the mechanism.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 2 only

14. With reference to the The Right Of Children To Free And Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2019, Consider the following statements

- 1. There will not be any regular examination till eighth standard.
- 2. Holding back of students in the same class will not be permitted till eighth standard.
- 3. No child shall be expelled from a school till the completion of elementary education.

Which of the given statement is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

15. What are the expected benefits of the Recapitalization scheme announced for Public Sector Banks?

- 1. Increasing lending to MSMEs through time-bound automated processing and transparent status-tracking.
- 2. Meet the production credit requirements of the farmers
- 3. Increasing access to banking services from home and mobile through digital banking and enhanced customer ease.

Which of the given statement is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. All statements are correct

16. With reference to the Madras Mahajana Sabha formed in 1884, who were the founding members?

- 1. Ramaswami Mudhaliyar
- 2. Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetty
- 3. Anandacharlu

Choose the correct option?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3 only

17. Which of the following countries are members of the European Union at present?

- 1. Belarus
- 2. Iceland
- 3. Greece

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 3 only

18. Which rebellion was led by the two brothers, Sidhu and Kanhu?

- A. Santhal Rebellion
- B. Kuka Rebellion
- C. Mappila Rebellion
- D. Ramosi Rebellion

19. With reference to Walvis Bay, which of the following statements are correct?

- 1. It is located on the west coast of the African continent.
- 2. Recently, China opened a port terminal near the Bay.
- 3. The Bay is located near Mali.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

20. Which of the following organizations published the 'Global Risks Report, 2019'?

- A. International Monetary Fund
- B. United Nations Environment Program
- C. World Economic Forum
- D. World Bank

21. Consider the statements about the World Trade Organization:

1. It is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations.
2. WTO agreements negotiated and signed by the bulk of the world's trading nations and ratified in their parliaments.
3. The primary purpose of the WTO is to open trade for the benefit of all.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

22. Which of the following languages have been recognized as classical languages by the Government of India?

1. Tamil
2. Odiya
3. Braj bhasha

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

23. Which of the following were founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy?

1. Brahmo Samaj
2. Tattwabodhini Sabha
3. Atmiya Sabha

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

24. The concept of Tirthankaras is related with which of the following philosophies?

- A. Buddhism
- B. Jainism
- C. Sikhism
- D. Bhakti Movement

25. Consider the statements about Reserve Bank of India:

1. The Reserve Bank of India was established in the year 1857.
2. The Central Office of the Reserve Bank was initially established in Calcutta but was permanently moved to Mumbai.
3. Though originally privately owned, since nationalization in 1949, the Reserve Bank is fully owned by the Government of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are NOT correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 2 and 3 only

26. Which of the following sites in India have been recognized as Wetlands of International Importance by the Ramsar convention?

1. Bhitakarnika
2. Rudrasagar
3. Sundarban

Options:

- A. 1 Only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

27. Which of the following states in India shares boundary with only one more Indian state?

1. Sikkim
2. Tripura
3. Meghalaya

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

28. What is the similarity shared by between Ammu Swaminathan, Sucheta Kriplani and Hansa Mehta?

- A. Presidents of the Indian National Congress
- B. Members of the Constituent Assembly
- C. Delegates of the Round Table Conferences.
- D. Signatories to the Lahore Pact

29. Arrange the following National Parks in India from north to south:

1. Valley of Flowers
2. Bandipur
3. Velavadar
4. Sariska

Options:

- A. 1-2-4-3
- B. 4-2-1-3
- C. 1-4-2-3
- D. 1-4-3-2

30. Which of the following languages in India have been included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution?

1. Bodo
2. Sindhi
3. Maithili

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

31. Which of the following books were NOT authored by Jawaharlal Nehru?

1. The Discovery of India
2. Glimpses of World History
3. Hind Swaraj

Options:

- A. 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

32. Dampa Tiger Reserve is located in which state?

- A. Nagaland
- B. Assam
- C. Meghalaya
- D. Mizoram

33. Consider the following statements:

1. Godavari is India's second largest river
2. It originates near Triambakeshwar in Maharashtra

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

34. Consider the following statements:

1. The "Apex Body for Disaster Management" in India is the National Disaster Response Force
2. NDRF is a specialised force constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

35. Consider the following statements:

1. CITES is a multilateral treaty to protect endangered animals only.
2. CITES is legally binding on the Parties.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

36. Consider the following statements:

1. Bills introduced by Ministers are referred to as government bills.
2. Government bills are backed by the government.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

37. "Tanyeishang", recently seen in news is:

- A. A traditional way of salt making practiced in Nagaland
- B. A traditional timekeeping method followed by the Manipuri rulers
- C. A traditional form of painting practiced by tribes in Assam
- D. None of the above

38. The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve includes which of the following National Parks?

1. Nagarhole national park
2. Bandipur national park
3. Silent Valley national park

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

39. Consider the following statements:

1. The source of Krishna River is at Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra.
2. The river empties into the Arabian Sea.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

40. Consider the following statements:

1. Rotavirus disease is caused by a virus that is highly contagious.
2. Rotavirus damages the cells that line the small intestine and causes gastroenteritis

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

41. What is the importance of 'Falaq' in international security?

- A. It is a nuclear powered sub marine commissioned by India
- B. It is an anti-satellite system developed by Israel.
- C. It is a locally upgraded radar system developed by Iran.
- D. It is a missile developed by North Korea.

42. With reference to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), consider the following statements:

1. FSSAI is an autonomous body established under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
2. The authority consists of a Chairperson and twenty-two members out of which 50% shall be women.
3. It has published 'The Pink Book: Your Guide for Safe and Nutritious Food at Home'.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1 and 3 only

43. The Kanchenjunga landscape is shared by which of the following countries?

1. India
2. Nepal
3. Bhutan

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

44. Consider the following statements:

1. Soil worms (nematodes) are roundworms and their size can vary from a tiny 0.2 millimetre to a few metres.
2. Nematodes are responsible for around 2.2% of the total carbon emission from soils.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only is correct
- B. 2 only is correct
- C. Both 1 and 2 are correct
- D. Neither 1 nor 2 is correct

45. Consider the following statements:

1. 'Operation Sagar Rani' was launched to create awareness and find evidence of formalin adulteration in fishes.
2. It was launched in the state of Goa.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

46. Consider the following statements:

1. Formaldehyde is highly reactive and flammable gas.
2. Formaldehyde occurs naturally in plants and animals as a result of their own metabolism.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

47. Consider the following statements:

1. Uranium is a radioactive chemical element.
2. Largest viable deposits of Uranium are found in India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

48. Ambubachi Mela is

- A. an annual festival held on Makar Sankranti in Kerala, at the shrine of Sabarimala.
- B. an annual chariot festival popular in the state of Odisha

- C. a festival of the Jaintia tribe, celebrated in the month of July for good health, property and bumper harvest
- D. a festival to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess at the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati

49. Consider the following statements:

1. Agenda 21 is an action plan of the United Nations with regard to sustainable development.
2. It is a non-binding action plan.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

50. Basel Convention deals with:

- A. Sustainable Development
- B. Trans-boundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal
- C. Ozone layer depletion
- D. Trans-boundary Movements of Genetically Modified Organisms

51. Consider the following statements:

1. The Liaquat–Nehru Pact was a bilateral treaty between India and Pakistan.
2. The pact agreed to guarantee full right to the minorities and to accord them the status of citizens.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

52. Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary is located in

- A. Chattisgarh
- B. Odisha
- C. Maharashtra
- D. Assam

53. Consider the following statements:

1. Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram is an initiative targeting livelihood generation for tribal population by harnessing the wealth of forest.
2. Van Dhan Kendras are the implementing agencies of Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

54. Green Mahanadi Mission has been launched in

- A. Odisha
- B. Chattisgarh
- C. West Bengal
- D. Andhra Pradesh

55. "Rama Chiluka" is the state bird of

- A. Tamil Nadu
- B. Andhra Pradesh
- C. Karnataka
- D. Kerala

56. Consider the following statements:

1. Ganga Vriksharopan Abhiyan was initiated as part of the Forest Interventions in Ganga (FIG) component of Namami Gange Programme.
2. Under the program, plantation activities are being carried out, all along the banks of the River Ganga with participation of local people.
3. It is being organised in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

57. With reference to the importance of 'kolam' in the cultural landscape of India, consider the following statements.

1. It is a traditional way of drawing practiced across the North Eastern states.
2. It is believed to bring prosperity to homes.
3. It is made using rice flour.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3 only

58. With reference to the Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme, consider the following statements:

1. KALIA is a Central Sector Scheme
2. The scheme was launched to accelerate agricultural prosperity and eliminate poverty.
3. Under the scheme, both landed and landless farmers will be assisted with financial aid

Which of the given statement/s is/are NOT correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only

- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1 and 3 only

59. A population of Tiwa tribe inhabit which among the following states of India?

- A. Tamil Nadu
- B. Assam
- C. Punjab
- D. Madhya Pradesh

60. Consider the following statements:

1. Kondapalli toys are made in Odisha.
2. Thanjavur dolls are made in Tamil Nadu.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only is correct
- B. 2 only is correct
- C. Both 1 and 2 are correct
- D. Neither 1 nor 2 is correct

61. With reference to the Santhal Rebellion, consider the following statements:

1. The Santhals, led by the brothers, Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu started a rebellion against the British in 1855-56.
2. Santhals are a tribal group concentrated in the state of Gujarat.
3. They engaged in guerrilla warfare.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3 only

62. With reference to the e-Court Mission Mode Project (MMP), consider the following statements:

1. It was conceptualized with a vision to transform the Indian judiciary by making use of technology.
2. The services offered by e-Courts include automation of Case Management Processes and creation of National Judicial Data Grid agencies.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

63. Which of the following authorities comprise the Nuclear Command Authority of India?

- A. A Political Council and an Executive Council
- B. A Political Council only

- C. An Executive Council only
- D. The President and the Chief Justice of India

64. Which of the following products of Tamil Nadu have been awarded with a GI tag?

1. Palani Panchamirtham
2. Toda Embroidery
3. Kolhapur Jaggery

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1 and 3 only

65. Which of the following states in India share international border with Bhutan?

1. Assam
2. Arunachal Pradesh
3. West Bengal

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3 only

66. Consider the following statements about the visible spectrum of light.

1. The Red colour has the highest wavelength.
2. The Violet colour has the highest frequency.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

67. With reference to the festival of Navroz, consider the following statements:

1. It is a festival followed by the Jain community.
2. It is celebrated on the birthday of the first Thirtankara.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

68. The four holy places, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, known as Char Dham are situated in which state of India?

- A. Himachal Pradesh
- B. Haryana

- C. Uttarakhand
- D. Uttar Pradesh

69. Consider the following statements:

1. Lake Chilka is the largest brackish water lagoon in the world.
2. It was the first lake from India to be designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

70. Consider the following statements:

1. Loktak lake is the largest fresh water lake in North Eastern India.
2. It has the only floating national park in the world.

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

71. Consider the following pairs:

- A. Palani Panchamritam : Tamil Nadu
- B. Tawlhlohpuan: Assam
- C. Mizo Puanchei : Mizoram
- D. Tirur betel: Kerala

72. Consider the following statements:

1. 'Shyamoli' is an experimental mud-house built at Santiniketan in 1935.
2. It is the heritage house of Rabindranath Tagore.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

73. Consider the following statements:

1. Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) is a defence contractor owned by the Indian government.
2. It is called the Fourth Arm of Defence.
3. It is the largest defence equipment manufacturer in India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only

- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

74. Consider the following statements:

1. UDAN Scheme is a part of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP).
2. It is funded jointly by the Gol and the state governments.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

75. Consider the following statements:

1. The Moplah Rebellion of 1921 erupted in the Malabar region of present-day Kerala.
2. The Khilafat Movement meetings in Malabar incited communal feelings among the Moplahs.
3. The rebellion was aimed against the British as well as the Hindu landlords of Malabar.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

76. Consider the following statements:

1. Koodiyattam is a classical dance of India
2. It is a combination of ancient Sanskrit theatre with elements of Koothu a Tamil/Malayalam performing art

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

77. Consider the following statements:

1. Radcliffe Line was revealed on the 15th of August 1947.
2. The Radcliffe Line was the boundary demarcation line between the Indian and Pakistani portions of the Punjab and Bengal provinces of British India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

78. Consider the following statements:

1. Jagoi is an Indian classical dance form.
2. Its region of origin is Manipur.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

79. Which of the following constitutes restructured assets/loans?

- A. Loans with extended repayment period
- B. Loans with reduced interest rate
- C. Converting a part of the loan into equity
- D. All of the above

80. Consider the following statements:

1. SCO is a European political, economic, and military organisation.
2. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

81. Consider the following statements:

1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period.
2. Central Statistics Office (CSO) is responsible for the compilation of GDP.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

82. What is the importance of NISHTHA programme in India's education sector?

- A. It is a scheme to promote sports education in schools.
- B. It is a financial inclusion programme to bring every student in Indian Universities under institutionalised banking systems.
- C. It is an initiative by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to educate children of inaccessible tribal hamlets across India.
- D. It is an initiative to train more than 42 lakh teachers and principals of primary and elementary government schools across the country.

83. Consider the following statements with reference to Guru Ravidas:

1. Guru Ravidas was born in the 6th century in present-day Tamil Nadu.
2. He was a social reformer and a part of the Bhakti movement.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

84. With reference to Greenland, consider the following statements:

1. Greenland is the world's largest island.
2. It is an autonomous territory of the United Kingdom.
3. The U.S. has a military base on the island.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1 and 2 only

85. Consider the following statements about Kutch region in Gujarat:

1. Kutch is the largest district in India.
2. Rann Utsav is an annual festival held in the region.
3. Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary is located in the Kutch region.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 2 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3 only

86. Consider the following statements:

1. CPEC is a joint project between Pakistan and China involving a network of highways, railways and oil and gas pipelines and fiber optic cables from China to the Pakistani coast.
2. The CPEC is part of China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative'.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

87. The National Health Mission comprises which of the following components?

1. National Rural Health Mission
2. National Urban Health Mission
3. Tertiary Care Programmes
4. Human Resources for Health and Medical Education

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

88. Consider the following statements:

1. Financial Action Task Force is an organ of the United Nations.
2. It is headquartered in Paris.
3. It is involved in developing policies to combat money laundering and terror financing.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

89. Consider the following statements:

1. Oxytocin is a hormone secreted by the pituitary glands.
2. It acts as both, a hormone as well as a brain neurotransmitter.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

90. Consider the following statements:

1. Composite Water Management Index (CWMI) is released by NITI Aayog.
2. Gujarat has topped the rankings for two years in a row.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

91. Consider the following statements:

1. Asia Pacific Group is an inter-governmental organization working to implement international standards for the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing in the Asia Pacific region.

2. India and Pakistan are the members of Asia Pacific Group.

3. The APG directly assists its members in introducing Anti Money Laundering legislation.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

92. Consider the following statements:

1. The Mogao Caves also known as Caves of the Thousand Buddhas is located in Maharashtra.

2. The caves are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

93. Consider the following statements:

1. The Sea of Azov is the shallowest sea in the world.

2. There is a constant outflow of water from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea.

3. The Sea of Azov is linked by the narrow Strait of Kerch to the Black Sea.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

94. Consider the following statements with reference to the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE):

1. NCTE is a statutory body.

2. NCTE has decided to conduct the first-ever performance appraisals of the 19,000 teacher education institutions.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

95. Consider the following statements about Clouded Leopard:

1. Clouded leopard is an endemic species of India.

2. It is listed as 'Critically Endangered' on the IUCN Red List.

3. They are found in the Dampa tiger reserve in Mizoram.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3 only

96. What is the importance of 'Robonaut 2' programme?

- A. It is a child friendly interactive robot for teaching fundamental school subjects.
- B. It is a model developed for firefighting and other rescue operations.
- C. It is a humanoid robot sent to the space by NASA.
- D. None of the above are correct.

97. In the interest of which of the following, the Constitution of India provides for a reasonable restriction against the right to freedom of Speech and expression?

1. Friendly relations with foreign States.
2. Public order.
3. Sovereignty and integrity of India.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 2 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

98. Consider the following statements:

1. Central Vigilance Commission is a constitutional body.
2. The body was created on the recommendations of the Santhanam Committee.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

99. Consider the following statements:

1. Advisory Board for Banking Frauds is the first level of examination of all large fraud cases before recommendations are made to the investigative agencies by the public sector banks.
2. Advisory Board for Banking Frauds is set up by the Reserve Bank of India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

100. Consider the following statements with respect to Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS):

1. The SDDS is a global benchmark for disseminating macroeconomic statistics to the public.
2. The practice is mandatory for all IMF members.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

101. As per the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, Blue Whales are classified as:

- A. Vulnerable
- B. Near Threatened
- C. Critically Endangered
- D. Endangered

102. Consider the following statements:

1. Bioplastics are plastic materials produced from renewable biomass sources, such as vegetable fats and oils, corn starch.
2. All bioplastics are biodegradable.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

103. Consider the following statements:

1. The Press Council of India is a statutory body that governs the conduct of the print media.
2. It is a quasi-judicial body.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

104. Consider the following statements with respect to Article 352:

1. It can be proclaimed only when the security of India or a part of it is threatened by war, external aggression or armed rebellion.
2. It can have no effect on the Fundamental Rights of the citizen.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

105. Which of the following commissions was constituted to examine the Centre State Relationship?

- A. Narendran Commission
- B. Sarkaria Commission
- C. Kothari Commission
- D. Mandal Commission

106. Consider the following statements about Mitra:

1. Mitra is a lunar impact crater.
2. It is on the edge of another crater called Mach.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only.
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

107. Consider the following statements about Congo Fever:

1. Congo fever is a viral haemorrhagic fever.
2. Ticks of the genus Hyalomma are the principal vector of Congo fever.
3. Human-to-human transmission can also occur.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

108. Consider the following statements:

1. BS-VI emission norms are equivalent to Euro VI emission standards.
2. India decided to transition from BS V norms to BS VI norms with effect from April 1, 2020.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

109. Consider the following statements:

1. Bimal Jalan Committee was constituted by the government of India to review of the Reserve Banks Economic Capital Framework (ECF) and propose a suitable profits distribution policy.
2. The committee's recommendations are binding on RBI.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

110. IUCN Red List of Threatened species lists the Grizzled Giant Squirrel under which of the following category?

- A. Near Threatened
- B. Endangered
- C. Critically Endangered
- D. Least Concern

111. Consider the following statements:

1. Gooty Tarantulas are biological pest controllers.
2. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has categorised it as Critically Endangered.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

112. Consider the following statements:

1. TRAFFIC is a wildlife trade monitoring network.
2. It is a joint program of WWF and IUCN.
3. TRAFFI Censures that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

113. Consider the following statements:

1. Ain-i-Akbari was written by Abul Fazl in the Persian language.
2. It is a detailed document about the life and ancestors of the Mughal emperor Akbar.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

114. Consider the following statements:

1. The Sports Day of India marks the birth anniversary of the legendary hockey player Major Dhyan Chand.
2. On Sports Day, the President of India honours eminent sports personalities with awards including Khel Ratna, Arjuna Awards, Dronacharya Awards and Dhyan Chand Award.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

115. Consider the following statements:

1. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an intergovernmental body of the United Nations.
2. Its membership is restricted to the members UN alone.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

116. Consider the following statements:

1. CAMPA funds are kept in interest bearing non-lapsable Public Account.
2. CAMPA funds cannot be used for payment of salary, travelling allowances, medical expenses, etc.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

117. Consider the following statements with respect to Kandangi sarees:

1. The Kandangi sarees are manufactured in the state of Andhra Pradesh.
2. It has been given a Geographical Indication Tag.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

118. Which of the following states was the first to introduce a law against "Mob Lynching"?

- A. Manipur
- B. Madhya Pradesh
- C. West Bengal
- D. Rajasthan

119. Consider the following statements:

1. Nominal GDP is GDP evaluated at current market prices.
2. Nominal GDP is called inflation-adjusted GDP.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

120. Consider the following statements with respect to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

1. SAARC comprises of eight Member States
2. Maldives was the last country to join SAARC
3. The Secretariat of SAARC is in Kathmandu

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

121. Consider the following statements:

1. The Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) is triggered by RBI when banks breach certain regulatory requirements like minimum capital, return on asset and quantum of non-performing assets..
2. PCA is taken, so as to restore the financial health of banks .

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWER KEYS

| | |
|----|---|
| 1 | A |
| 2 | D |
| 3 | C |
| 4 | C |
| 5 | A |
| 6 | B |
| 7 | C |
| 8 | A |
| 9 | C |
| 10 | A |
| 11 | B |
| 12 | C |
| 13 | A |
| 14 | C |
| 15 | D |
| 16 | B |
| 17 | D |
| 18 | A |
| 19 | B |
| 20 | C |

| | |
|----|---|
| 21 | D |
| 22 | B |
| 23 | C |
| 24 | B |
| 25 | A |
| 26 | C |
| 27 | D |
| 28 | B |
| 29 | D |
| 30 | C |
| 31 | A |
| 32 | D |
| 33 | C |
| 34 | B |
| 35 | A |
| 36 | C |
| 37 | B |
| 38 | D |
| 39 | B |
| 40 | C |

[CLICK HERE TO READ EXPLANATION](#)

| | |
|----|---|
| 41 | C |
| 42 | D |
| 43 | C |
| 44 | C |
| 45 | A |
| 46 | C |
| 47 | A |
| 48 | D |
| 49 | C |
| 50 | B |
| 51 | C |
| 52 | A |
| 53 | C |
| 54 | A |
| 55 | B |
| 56 | D |
| 57 | C |
| 58 | A |
| 59 | B |
| 60 | B |

| | |
|----|---|
| 61 | C |
| 62 | C |
| 63 | A |
| 64 | C |
| 65 | D |
| 66 | C |
| 67 | D |
| 68 | C |
| 69 | B |
| 70 | C |
| 71 | B |
| 72 | C |
| 73 | D |
| 74 | C |
| 75 | D |
| 76 | B |
| 77 | B |
| 78 | C |
| 79 | D |
| 80 | B |

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| | |
|-----|---|
| 81 | C |
| 82 | D |
| 83 | B |
| 84 | C |
| 85 | D |
| 86 | C |
| 87 | D |
| 88 | C |
| 89 | C |
| 90 | C |
| 91 | D |
| 92 | A |
| 93 | D |
| 94 | C |
| 95 | C |
| 96 | C |
| 97 | D |
| 98 | B |
| 99 | A |
| 100 | C |

| | |
|-----|---|
| 101 | D |
| 102 | A |
| 103 | C |
| 104 | A |
| 105 | B |
| 106 | C |
| 107 | D |
| 108 | A |
| 109 | D |
| 110 | A |
| 111 | C |
| 112 | D |
| 113 | A |
| 114 | C |
| 115 | A |
| 116 | C |
| 117 | B |
| 118 | A |
| 119 | A |
| 120 | B |
| 121 | C |

[CLICK HERE TO READ EXPLANATION](#)

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. The Dam Safety Bill is a conflict between bringing about uniformity in operational safety across India and Central encroachment upon the sovereignty of the states. Discuss.
2. With almost every international company and a few domestic ones expressing concerns over the government's insistence on requiring the personal data of Indian residents to be processed only within the country it seems that India's approach of requiring data localization by default is faulty. Critically Analyse.
3. India's many conflictual pasts should teach people understanding and appreciation, rather than revenge or retribution. Examine the statement in reference to Tipu Sultan on his achievements and his excesses.
4. Criminalisation is a key deterrent against triple talaq. Social reform must follow legal change. Critically Analyse.
5. The deployment of troops in the state of Jammu and Kashmir to stop any activity which can disturb peace is a good move and needs to be appreciated but any changes per se on the constitutional aspect will require a multi stakeholder approach and consensus. Analyse the statement and suggest way forward.
6. The spice industries in India will be adversely affected if India opens the gates to Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Critically analyse.
7. Rural Tourism is an under explored sector in India, despite the vast and diverse opportunities. Discuss.
8. Organic Farming in India is an ancient practice. But its ability to redress the grievances of farmers is limited. Critically analyse.
9. What are the salient features of 'Sustainable Development'? Analyze the 'United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' and suggest measures for the sooner achievement of those goals.
10. What are Genetically Modified (GM) organisms and GM foods? What are the main issues of concern for human health and the environment?
11. The performance of Parliament has witnessed a decline in terms of the number of bills passed and the overall time utilized for discussing the bills. Does it mean that democracy is under risk? Critically analyse.
12. India's federal character is enriched and not betrayed by the special status provided to some States in the Constitution. Critically analyse.
13. The social structure of India does not permit women to rise to leadership roles, particularly in the field of Politics. Discuss.
14. India's hope for a permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council can be realised only by recognizing itself as a champion of the demands of the global south. Discuss.
15. River water linking project will help reduce inter-state water disputes, but at the cost of degrading the environment. Discuss.
16. National Commission for Scheduled Castes may have helped the Scheduled Caste community from many difficulties. But the mitigation of the social stigma associated with the discriminatory practices needs a much wider effort. Discuss.
17. Discuss the contributions of Indian handicrafts to Indian economy. What are the challenges they face?
18. India's medical faculty has expressed strong disapproval against licensed community health providers being permitted to independently prescribe specific medicines for primary and preventive healthcare. Do you think that National Medical Commission Act, 2019 would encourage quackery? Discuss.
19. What is the Green New Deal proposal? Would it be instrumental in bringing about a qualitative difference to the ailing Indian economy? Evaluate the prospects.
20. Discuss the objectives of Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)? What is India's role in GFDRR?

21. Coverage of irrigation is an important factor impacting the socio-economic conditions of Indian states. Critically analyse.
22. The neighbourhood countries have started to recognize India as a benevolent elder brother rather than an aggressive big brother. Discuss.
23. What are the adverse effects of formalin used in fish? Discuss the measures taken and the need for complete ban.
24. The growing e-commerce sector in India demands for policy reforms for it to flourish. Analyse and suggest the way forward.
25. Deterrence has its own limitations and it has to be supplemented by exhaustive measures that include an overhaul of the criminal justice administration. With respect to the recently passed POCSO bill 2019, evaluate the probable ramifications of 'death penalty' provision in the Act.
26. With the frequency of disasters on the rise, localized management plans need to be drawn out for mobilizing resources to tackle disasters, natural or otherwise. Discuss the steps taken by the government and suggest the way ahead.
27. The Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2019 dilutes National Human Rights Commission's Autonomy. Critically examine.
28. Comment on the significance of Rural Tourism in Indian Economy and discuss the government initiatives in the rural tourism sector.
29. In modern India, poverty, insufficiency and class conflicts are slowly giving way to a confident, inclusive, empowered nation. Discuss.
30. Globalisation affects different countries differently. Do you agree with the statement? Justify your answer with reference to India.
31. A sense of impunity associated with illegal stone quarrying and wetland encroachment often lead to disasters such as landslides and floods. Suggest measures to regulate such activities.
32. The achievements of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is comparable with those of the space agencies of the most developed countries. Discuss.
33. Artificial Intelligence (A.I) is a huge leap forward in the world of technology. What are the prospects for India's leadership in the sector of A.I?
34. Indian martial arts like Gatka, Lathi Khela and Kalari Payattu need to be revived with a perspective of fitness as well as preservation of our tradition. Discuss.
35. With rapid industrialization and exponential population growth, there has been a crunch for farmland in India. The proposition of organic farming in India's Rural Economy has the potential to arrest the problem. Discuss.
36. Appointment of a Chief of Defence staff is the most significant defence policy reform in decades. Comment.
37. The Jal Jeevan Mission would provide employment to millions of people and may kick-start the investment cycle. Explain. Also analyse the implementation challenges.
38. To rescue India from a structural slowdown, issues like human development, state capacity and the reform of factor markets must be addressed. Elucidate.
39. In the backdrop of RBI imposing fines on banks and financial institutions for a lack of compliance culture, discuss the importance of a culture of compliance for financial institutions and banks, in addition to the technology to support it in order to avoid risks.
40. Critically comment on the consequences of linking Aadhaar to social media accounts. Suggest measures to strike a balance between the right to privacy and rising concerns about spreading fake news and cybercrimes.
41. Special status given to some states have helped in the reduction of secessionist demands of ethnic groups. Critically Analyse.

42. What are the likelihoods of India gaining a permanent seat in the UNSC? Suggest measures to expedite the UNSC reforms in favour of India.
43. An outright ban of Oxytocin is not the solution to its misuse in the dairy sector. Discuss the implications of such a ban.
44. Big data innovations, using large data sets from mobile phone tracking to satellite platforms reveal patterns, trends, and associations of disaster risks. Discuss the importance of Big Data in confronting complex disasters.
45. Throw light upon the significance that Amazon rainforests hold for the health of the world environment and discuss the impact of the fires in the Amazon rainforest on the environment and its wild life.
46. What are the steps involved in Money Laundering? Discuss the need to bring about amendments to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.
47. Diversification of jobs from agriculture to other sectors is inevitable for the stability of rural economy in India. Discuss.
48. Quality of teachers play a huge role in reducing the rate of dropouts from schools. Suggest measures to reform the teacher education sector in India.
49. The National Medical Commission (NMC) Act 2019 aims to improve access to quality and affordable medical education, and ensure availability of adequate medical professionals in all parts of the country, but remains silent a number of crucial issues. Discuss.
50. Discuss the role and contribution of Differential Voting Rights in the growth of Start-up ecosystem in India.
51. A repeat of the shocking train of intense floods, landslides, financial losses and manifold human tragedies in Kerala has brought focus on the bottom-up democratic process with the full involvement of local communities for deciding on safeguarding this global biodiversity hotspot, as recommended by the Gadgil Committee. Elucidate.
52. It is the responsibility of the government to closely scrutinise the interplay of technological advances and the right to privacy in the present digital age. Critically Examine.
53. Illiteracy and misinformation are the core problems coming in the way of successful implementation of PM Ujjwala Yojana. Discuss and suggest measures overcome the issues.
54. What are development banks? Can development banks re-industrialize India and de-stress the banking sector? Discuss.
55. Discuss the need for a comprehensive law in India, prohibiting interference in matrimonial choice of individuals and to curb killings in the name of honour.
56. In Indian society, that is highly diverse, yet unequal, society, with multitude of regional variations, ensuring social justice has proven to be an unsurmountable challenge. The social justice project in India needs to transform and move beyond reservations. Comment.
57. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy capping the investment in digital media at 26% would adversely impact both existing digital platforms as also affect new platforms that may be looking to expand. Critically comment.
58. What is GI Tag? Instances show that GIs are certainly valuable for India but the various other initiatives must go hand in hand to save the vanishing Indian GI products. Discuss with examples.
59. On the wider regional role on interstate conflicts that threatens regional peace and security, the inability of SAARC to play any role beyond issuing a cautionary statement tells a lot about the low level of SAARC as an actor in promoting peace and preventing conflict. Examine
60. What are Non-Banking Financial Companies? Discuss the issues currently being faced by the NBFCs in India.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Name: Keerthi Vasan V

AIR: 29 (CSE 2017)

Chairperson: Air Marshal Ajit Bhonsle sir

Duration: 20 – 25 minutes

Hometown: Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu

Keerthi Vasan V

Optional Subject: Political Science and International Relations

Work Experience: No work experience

Education: B.Tech in Civil Engineering, National Institute of Technology

Hobbies: Digital Poster designing, Watching English web series

Air Marshal Ajit Bhonsle sir**Service: Air Marshal, Indian Air Force**

- Prior to joining UPSC, he held the Office of Chief of HQ, Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and also as Deputy Chief of Joint Operations, Doctrines, Organization & Training
- Air Marshal Ajit Bhonsle has participated in the Sri Lanka Indian Peace Keeping Force Operations, Siachin operations and Kargil operations and has 5200 hours of flying experience.
- Air Marshal Ajit Bhonsle is an avid traveller and takes keen interest in performing arts, culture and culinary. An animal lover, he is fond of golf, swimming and equestrian sports Educational Background

Education Background

- An alumnus of Bhonsala Military School, National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College, College of Defence Management and National Institute of Defence Studies, Japan. post graduate Diploma in Mass Communication from IIMC, Delhi.
- M.Sc. Defence Studies from University of Madras, Masters in Business Management from IGNOU and Osmania University and M.Phil from Tokyo.

Interview

Chairman gives few instructions: That this interview is to determine your functional suitability for the services. He also asks the candidate to use paper and the pencil kept on the table to note down the points before answering.

Educational background and skillset

- Chairman: I have seen pictures of 10 pointees (Class X CGPA) only in flex boards of various institutes. This is the first time I am meeting one in person. Does any institute have your photograph printed on a flex board? (Keerthi Vasan got 10.00/10.00 (CGPA) in 10th Standard)

- People who are good in academics are generally 'dull' when it comes to social or administrative responsibilities. What about you?
- The training process would make you a good administrator. But, what qualities of a good administrator do you think that you already have?
- What do you mean by 'Objective Decision Making'? (Follow up question from the previous answer)

Questions based on DAF and follow-up questions

- What was your contribution in Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan? (DAF based)
- What is Kanchipuram famous for?
- What are the issues with respect to the saree weavers in Kanchipuram?
- How can you utilise Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan to address these issues?

Follow-up questions (International Relations)

- You studied in Maharishi International School. What is 'International' about this school?
- What was the proportion of Foreign students in your class?
- How has India-Nepal relations evolved in the recent past?
- There was a News in today's paper with respect to Nepal. Did you read the news? What was it about?
- Don't you think China would overshadow India in such a economic grouping?
- Is the current Nepal PM pro-China or pro-India?
- Do you think morality is relevant in domestic as well as international administration?

About State Government, schemes and governance

- Most of the states perform well at the level of policy formulation, but fail at policy implementation. But in TN we are able to see good performance at both levels. What could be the reasons behind this?
- Can you name a few schemes where implementation has been good?
- The TN farmers protest in Delhi was unique in its own way. What made it unique?
- Why do you think that they approached the central government? Don't we see a dichotomy here compared to the earlier observation? (Of better policy implementation)
- Why do you think the Indian government had to interfere in the domestic issue of Sri Lanka during the civil war?
- Was there any pressure from the state government?

Questions based on Hobby

- What is this 'web series'? Is it different from any other regular series? (DAF based)
- What is your favorite genre?
- Which one is your favorite series? (Answer was GoT)
- So you want to know who finally gets the throne?

Economy related questions

- What are the major functions of the RBI?
- The RBI governor was summoned recently by the PSC. Why?
- Is the monetary policy committee's mandate implementable in the longer run?
- Don't you think government appointees to MPC affects it's independence?
- Is the RBI really independent today?

Chairman: Thank you Mr. Keerthi. Your interview is over. What other plans do you have for the day?

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- A detailed roadmap for Interview Preparation with a special focus on Detailed Application Form (DAF).
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- Performance analysis and evaluation of strengths and weaknesses.

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