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Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)

Providing citizenship to persecuted minorities

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)

Hyderabad Rape-Murder Case

Due Process vs Instant Justice

OPERATION TWIST

Operation Twist

Special Open Market Operations (OMO) by RBI

2+2 Dialogue (India-US)

Dialogue between the Defence and External Affairs ministers

RISAT -2BR1

Radar Imaging Earth Observation Satellite

INCREDIBLE RESULTS

CSE 2018 Results

11 Ranks in Top 50 | **28 Ranks in Top 100** | **183 Ranks in the Final List**

Rank 11
Pujya 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

8 Ranks in top 50 | **18 Ranks** in top 100 | **215 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
Avdhesh Meena

CSE 2015

5 Ranks in top 50 | **14 Ranks** in top 100 | **162 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

6 Ranks in top 50 | **12 Ranks** in top 100 | **83 Ranks** in the final list

Rank 4
Vandana Rao

Rank 5
Suharsha Bhagat

Rank 16
Ananya Das

Rank 23
Anil Dhameliya

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 Rathi

Rank 46
Udita Singh

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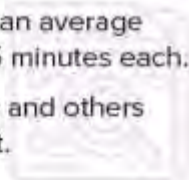
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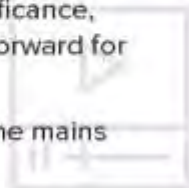
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POLITY

1. Arms (Amendment) Act, 2019

Context

- The Arms (Amendment) Act, 2019 amended some provisions of the Arms Act, 1959.
- It seeks to decrease the number of licensed firearms allowed per person and increase penalties for certain offences under the Act.

Features

- License for acquiring firearms: Under the Arms Act of 1959, a license must be obtained to acquire, possess, or carry any firearm. A person can obtain a license for up to three firearms (with certain exceptions, such as for licensed firearms dealers).

  * The Amendment act of 2019, reduces the number of permitted firearms from three to one. This includes licenses given on inheritance or heirloom basis.

  * It provides a time period of one year to deposit the excess firearms with the officer-in-charge of the nearest police station or with a licensed firearm dealer as specified.

  * If the owner is a member of the armed forces, the firearm may be deposited with a unit armoury.

- The Amendment act of 2019 increases the duration of the validity of a firearm license from three years to five years.

- Ban on firearms: The Arms Act of 1959 bans manufacture, sale, use, transfer, conversion, testing or proofing of firearms without license. It also prohibits shortening of firearm barrel or conversion of imitation firearms into firearms without a license.

  * The Amendment act of 2019 additionally prohibits obtaining or procuring un-licensed firearms, and the conversion of one category of firearms to another without a license.

New offences

The Amendment act of 2019 adds news offences. These include:

- forcefully taking a firearm from police or armed forces, punishable with imprisonment between 10 years and life imprisonment, along with fine,

- Using firearms in a celebratory gunfire which endangers human life or personal safety of others, punishable with imprisonment of up to two years, or fine of up to one lakh rupees, or both.

  * Celebratory gunfire refers to use of firearms in public gatherings, religious places, marriages or other functions to fire ammunition.

Penal Provisions

- The Arms Act of 1959 specifies the punishment for: (i) dealing in un-licensed firearms, including their manufacture, procurement, sale, transfer, conversion, (ii) the shortening or conversion of a firearm without a licence, and (iii) import or export of banned firearms. The punishment for these offences is between three years and seven years, along with a fine.

  * The Amendment act of 2019 increases the punishment to between seven years and life imprisonment, along with a fine.

- The Arms Act of 1959 punishes acquisition, possession or carrying of prohibited ammunition without a license, with imprisonment between five and ten years, along with fine.

  * The Amendment act of 2019 increases the punishment to imprisonment between seven and 14 years, along with fine. A court may impose a punishment of lesser than seven years, with recorded reasons.

- If any individual or group, involves or aids in Illicit Trafficking of firearms and ammunition, that individual or group shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than ten years but which may extend to imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine.

  * "Illicit Trafficking" means the import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms and ammunition into, from or within the territory of India, if the firearms and ammunition are not marked in accordance with the provisions of this Act or are being trafficked in contravention of the provisions of this Act including smuggled firearms of foreign make or prohibited arms and prohibited ammunition.

Key Stats

- According to an estimate, India has a total of around 35 lakh gun licences.

- Thirteen lakh people have licences to carry weapons in Uttar Pradesh, followed by militancy-hit Jammu and Kashmir, where 3.7 lakh people possess arms licences, most of which were taken on grounds of personal security.

Why are people in Punjab unhappy?

- The Punjab government's position is that over 50 per cent of the state's farmers stay in remote villages and need arms to protect themselves.

- Villagers close to the Pakistan border are also insecure about infiltrators.

- Some Punjab residents still keep the guns they had acquired during the days of militancy in the 1980s and 1990s. Many residents inherited vintage weapons from their ancestors, which they do not want to part with.

Significance of Amendment Act

- The Amendment assumes significance in recent times as law enforcement agencies have indicated a growing nexus between possession of illegal firearms and commission of criminal offences.

- The trans-border dimensions of illegal arms trafficking are causing threat to internal security and to prevent the usage of illicit firearms so trafficked, the amendment provides higher punishment which could act as deterrent

2. Anglo-Indians Reservations

Context

- Parliament passed the Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill, doing away with the provision for nomination of Anglo Indians to Lok Sabha

Who are Anglo-Indians?

- The Anglo-Indian community in India traces its origins to an official policy of the British East India Company to encourage marriages of its officers with local women.

  * The children who were born to a mixed parentage of Indians and the British come under this category.

  * Anglo-Indians made a significant contribution to the Railways in India. They initially came to India to lay Railway tracks.

- The term Anglo-Indian first appeared in the Government of India Act, 1935.

- In the present context, Article 366(2) of the Constitution of India states: "An Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only…"

Constitution

- Article 331 of the Constitution says: "Notwithstanding anything in Article 81, the President may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community is not adequately represented in the House of the people, nominate not more than two members of that community to the House of the People."

- Article 333 deals with representation of the Anglo-Indian community in Legislative Assemblies. It says: "Notwithstanding anything in Article 170, the Governor of a State may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community needs representation in the Legislative Assembly of the State and is not adequately represented therein, [nominate one member of that community to the Assembly]."

- The Anglo-Indian members of parliament enjoy the same powers as others, but they cannot vote in the Presidential election because they are nominated by the President.

Govt Stand

- The decision not to renew this provision was based on the view that the community is doing well and does not need these political reservations.

Ministry of Minority Affairs report (2013) on the situation of Anglo-Indians.

- Based on surveys conducted among people belonging to the community in a number of cities, the report documented poor economic and social conditions for too many.

- Among the major challenges and problems faced by people of the community, the report observed, the most significant ones related to identity crisis, lack of employment, educational backwardness, lack of proper facilities and cultural erosion.

- The document also explicitly commended the assistance Anglo-Indians receive from their nominated MPs and MLAs, stating that "representatives of the Anglo-Indian community in the State Assemblies and local leaders of the community are working hard for the welfare and progress of the community".

Conclusion

- A radical decision like that involving scrapping of reservations ought to have been based on a thorough examination of the position of the community as a whole, and not on the status of some eminent individuals.

- The costs to the state here are minimal. So the Government needs to rethink about this decision.

3. Political Parties Registration Tracking Management System (PPRTMS)

- Registration of political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

- An association seeking registration under the said Section has to submit an application to the Election Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation, as per the guidelines prescribed by the Commission in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

- In order to enable applicants to track the status of the application, the Commission has launched PPRTMS

How does it work?

- The salient feature in the PPRTMS is that the applicant, who is applying for party registration from 1st January, 2020 will be able to track the progress of his/her application and will get status update through SMS and e-mail.

- The status can be tracked through the Commission's portal at link https://pprtms.eci.gov.in

4. Section 144 CrPC- Protest and order

- Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) empowers the magistrate of any state or union territory in India to pass an order prohibiting the gathering of four or more people in a specified area.

- The various provisions of Section 144 makes it possible to book all the members of such gathering termed as 'unlawful assembly' under the charges of having engaged in rioting.

- The ultimate purpose of Section 144 is to maintain peace and order in the areas where trouble could erupt to disrupt the regular life. 144 CrPC prohibits the conducting of some events which are otherwise allowed during regular times.

Why Section 144 is necessitated?

- Section 144 is imposed in a given region in emergency situations or cases of nuisance or perceived danger of some event that has the potential to create a troubled situation or damage to human lives or property.

- In general we can say Section 144 prohibits public gathering.

Duration of Section 144 order

- As per the rules specified for the implementation of Section 144 in a given jurisdiction, no order can remain in force for a period of more than 2 months.

- Under the state government's discretion, it can choose to extend the validity for two more months with the maximum validity extendable to six months.

- Once the situation becomes normal, Section 144 levied can be withdrawn.

Why is the use of power under Section 144 criticized so often?

- The criticism is that it is too broad and the words of the section are wide enough to give absolute power to a magistrate that may be exercised unjustifiably. The immediate remedy against such an order is a revision application to the magistrate himself.

- An aggrieved individual can approach the High Court by filing a writ petition if his fundamental rights are at stake. However, fears exist that before the High Court intervenes, the rights could already have been infringed.

- In the name of public order political views are being suppressed

- The apex court has often said an order under Section 144 has to be reasonable and be "minimal". It meant that the order should be limited to specific localities, and in response to a particular situation.

  * But Imposition of Section 144 to an entire state, as in UP, has also drawn criticism since the security situation differs from area to area.

Supreme Court Judgments

- Babulal Parate vs State of Maharashtra and Others.

  * A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court refused to strike down the law, saying it is "not correct to say that the remedy of a person aggrieved by an order under the section was illusory".

- It was challenged again by Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya in 1967 and was once again rejected, with the court saying "no democracy can exist if 'public order' is freely allowed to be disturbed by a section of the citizens".

- In another challenge in 1970 (Madhu Limaye vs Sub-Divisional Magistrate), a seven-judge Bench headed by then Chief Justice of India M Hidayatullah said the power of a magistrate under Section 144 "is not an ordinary power flowing from administration but a power used in a judicial manner and which can stand further judicial scrutiny".

  * The court, however, upheld the constitutionality of the law. It ruled that the restrictions imposed through Section 144 cannot be held to be violative of the right to freedom of speech and expression, which is a fundamental right because it falls under the "reasonable restrictions" under Article 19(2) of the Constitution. The fact that the "law may be abused" is no reason to strike it down, the court said.

Does Section 144 provide for communications blockades too?

- The rules for suspending telecommunication services, which include voice, mobile internet, SMS, landline, fixed broadband, etc, are the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017.

- These Rules derive their powers from the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885, Section 5(2) of which talks about interception of messages in the "interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India".

- Under the 2017 Rules, directions to "suspend the telecom services shall not be issued except by an order made by the Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs in the case of Government of India or by the Secretary to the State Government in-charge of the Home Department in the case of a State Government (hereinafter referred to as the competent authority)…"

- The Rules also say that in case the confirmation does not come from a competent authority, the orders shall cease to exist within a period of 24 hours. Clear reasons for such orders need to be given in written, and need to be forwarded to a Review Committee by the next working day.

Net loss- Internet Shutdown

Background:

Provisions:

- The state's order imposing the Internet ban are made under the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017 under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, or Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

- This law requires the executive, among other things, to provide a reasoned order when it directs the withdrawal of the Internet.

CAA protests:

- Following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, most residents in the Kashmir Valley region have not had access to the Internet. A total communication and information blockade was placed on the region.

- While certain limited channels of communication have been opened up, access to the web remains elusive. By many accounts, this might well be one of the longest bans imposed on the Internet by a democratic government.

- The Internet was shut down in Delhi and several States as a response to growing protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019. Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh were entirely cut off, and parts of Assam, West Bengal, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh were deprived of Internet access.

- After protests against the CAA began, other States are also experiencing shutdowns.

Concerns:

- Given the growing ubiquity of the Internet, the state's increasingly whimsical use across India of blockades on the web is a concern.

- In spite of the fact that only a "minuscule minority" are likely to commit violence, the chosen medium to address the situation has been a wide-ranging ban on the Internet on an entire populace indicating an action disproportionate with the intentions.

- A recent report underscores that 67% of the documented cases of web shutdowns around the world in 2018 took place in India. Since 2015, internet shutdowns have been rising.

- To permit a blanket closure of the Internet, given its impact not only on free speech, but also on other rights, including on people's rights to livelihood and health, would amount to a virtual effacement of civil liberty.

Effects in Kashmir:

Issue of right to freedom of expression:

- The blackout of the Internet impinges on the right to freedom of expression.

- Given the fact that Today, publishing a newspaper without access to the Internet is almost an impossible task, journalists have been hamstrung by the absence of the Internet.

Hence denial of access to the web poses a direct threat on the liberties of the press.

Access to Government schemes:

- There are also other deleterious results that have emanated out of the measure. These include a denial of the right to health care caused by people's inability, among other things, to access government schemes such as Ayushman Bharat given the need for internet for online verification of beneficiaries.

Economic Damage:

- The shutdown has inflicted startling economic damage on the region. Even conservative estimations released by the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry show that the State economy has suffered a loss of no less than ₹15,000 crore since the dilution of Article 370 and the subsequent shutdown of communication channels.

- A report shows that, with jobs already hard to come by in the region, has seen a staggering 80% drop in employment among start-ups in Kashmir that rely on the Internet.

- The connectivity blockade applied on J&K is proving lethal to entrepreneurship, crippling a new generation running start-ups and promoting women's employment.

- People working in the technology-based gig economy dominated by companies like Swiggy, Dunzo, Amazon, Uber and Ola depend on the Internet for their livelihoods. An internet shutdown would lead to loss of work for the vulnerable section.

- The Internet has become a means for business and occupation for thousands of small and individual-owned enterprises which sell their products and services online, especially those staffed by women and home-based workers. An internet shutdown would adversely affect these small units.

Issue of rights:

- An even greater principle at stake is the promise of free speech preserved in Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution.

- Today, publishing a newspaper without access to the Internet is almost an impossible task. Hence, much like the restrictions that were struck down in Sakal Papers, a blanket ban placed on the web will also transgress the guarantee of free speech.

Concerns regarding Education:

- Internet is a mode of access to education for students from far-flung areas who do courses and take exams online. The low cost and wider reach character of internet-enabled education can ensure equitable access to education.

- Access to the Internet is important to facilitate the promotion and enjoyment of the right to education. An internet shutdown infringes on the vital right to education of children.

Will affect the ease of living:

- The Internet provides access to transport for millions of urban and rural people. Internet is also a mode to access health care for those who avail of health services online. Internet shutdowns would erode much of the progress made in improving the ease of living.

Effects in other states:

- There have been concerns that routine shut down of the Internet is directed to block criticism of the government.

- A disrupted Internet is dealing a blow to digital financial transactions across several States, to e-governance initiatives, and economic productivity.

Government's stand:

In its defence of internet shutdown in Kashmir, the government makes two primary arguments.

- First, it claims, that there is no obligation on it to disclose the orders through which the restrictions have been imposed.

- Second, it contends that judges must grant the state substantial leeway in matters of national security. Once the executive believes on the basis of "some material" that freedom ought to be restricted, the court must not review the validity of such measures, even when those actions involve a wholesale blocking of the Internet.

  * The terrorists have used internet not only to radicalize the youth of Kashmir but also to communicate and shore finances for their activities. The internet shutdown would limit the abilities of the terrorist groups to launch attacks on the forces in the backdrop of the abrogation of Article 370.

  * While justifying certain restrictions imposed in the region, the administration has held that least restrictive measures have been levied keeping in mind the inconvenience it may cause to people.

- In the case of recent internet shutdowns in the backdrop of CAA protests, the government claims that these drastic measures are necessary given that countering rumours and false news require counteractive actions. This measure will also avoid inciting speeches being circulated.

Way forward:

- Though there are concerns regarding restrictions, it does not mean that there can be no restrictions ever placed on the web.

- Disruption of connectivity should be resorted to only in the face of specific threats.

- A disruption is an extreme measure, and should be allowed only for a specific threat, and as an interim measure only as it is official communications that fill the information vacuum.

  * A case in point is the spreading of rumours on child lifters on social media, which resulted in several lynchings.

- The judiciary needs to determine whether the executive has provided a reasoned order when it directs an Internet ban.

Kerala High court case:

- The Kerala High Court's decision holding access to the net a fundamental right that could not be denied arbitrarily has stated that internet blockades affects education and skill-building.

- The law demands that any measure taken by the state in restricting a fundamental right is necessary and proportionate to the goal that it seeks to achieve.

- The court pointed out that the apprehension of a gadget being misused is not a legitimate ground for denial of service, and the government should act on specific complaints.

5. **Strength in numbers: On judge vacancies**

Context

- In a judicial order, the Supreme Court has said that two hundred and thirteen names recommended for appointment to various High Courts are pending with the government/Supreme Court Collegium.

A look at stats

Empty chairs

38% of all sanctioned posts for judges in High Courts are lying vacant as of December 1, 2019. The six HCs with most vacancies:

Name of High Court	Sanctioned strength	Working strength	Vacancies	% of vacancies
A.P.	37	15	22	59.46
Rajasthan	50	21	29	58
J&K	17	8	9	52.94
Patna	53	27	26	49.06
Orissa	27	14	13	48.15
Gujarat	52	28	24	46.15

What does the judicial order state?

- The order states that at least the names on which the Supreme Court Collegium, the High Courts and the governments had agreed upon should be appointed within six months.

- It emphasized that the appointments required a continuous, collaborative and integrated process, where the government is an important consultee.

- The order is significant, coming at a time when inordinate delays in the appointment of High Court judges and depleting numbers in the higher judiciary threaten to affect the justice delivery mechanism.

How does the system work?

- At each level of the appointment process of judges to the higher judiciary, prior to the names reaching the Prime Minister and President for final approval, there are time periods specified.

- The Memorandum of Procedure states that appointments should be initiated at least six months before a vacancy arises and six weeks of time is then specified for the State to send the recommendation to the Union Law Minister, after which the brief is to be sent to the Supreme Court collegium in four weeks.

- Once the collegium clears the names, the Law Ministry has to put up the recommendation to the Prime Minister in three weeks who will, in turn, advise the President.

- Thereafter no time limit is prescribed and the process, seemingly, comes to a standstill.

Is the government compelled to listen to SC?

- When the Supreme Court sends names to the Government for the appointment of Judges, the government may ask the Supreme Court to reconsider its decision.

- But if the collegium has now repeated its recommendations, emphasising that there is nothing adverse against the judges in terms of their "conduct, competence and integrity" and that there is no reason to agree with the government, then under the present procedure, the government is bound to accept the recommendation.

Why there is delay in appointment process?

- The government and the Supreme Court collegium seem to disagree on recommendations for judicial appointments quite frequently these days.

- The equation between the court and the Union Government has been strained by the Court's decision to strike down as unconstitutional in 2015 the move to set up a National Judicial Appointments Commission which would have been responsible for appointments and transfers to the higher judiciary in place of the Supreme Court collegium.

- Since then, reports of delays in appointments have become increasingly commonplace, with both sides testy over the procedure.

Conclusion

- Vacancies in the higher judiciary threaten every aspect of the justice delivery system, the government may disrupt the process through delays, but it is for the court to take an increasingly firm hand to ensure that the collegium system that it fought so hard to protect, despite flaws, actually functions effectively.

6. Should the creamy layer norm be extended to SC/STs?

Context

- The Central government has asked the Supreme Court of India to refer to a seven-judge Bench the question whether the creamy layer concept should apply (or not) to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes while giving them reservation in promotions.

Why reservation was given to SC/STs?

- Reservation in politics, services and institutions is given to SCs particularly because they were denied the right to property, education and industries for nearly 2,000 years. Besides they were treated as untouchables.

- Discrimination continues even today in society. The argument was that to provide them the safeguard [against discrimination] and compensate them to some extent for past exclusions, they should be given representation as per their population share.

- Because otherwise, due to persisting discrimination in services, enterprises and agriculture, they won't get their due share.

What is creamy layer?

- The 'means-test and creamy layer' first finds expression in the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in Indra Sawhney versus Union of India, delivered by a nine-judge Bench on November 16, 1992.

- The judgment recorded lawyers describing the 'creamy layer' as "some members of a backward class who are highly advanced socially as well as economically and educationally. They constitute the forward section of that particular backward class — as forward as any other forward class member. They lap up all the benefits of reservations meant for that class, without allowing benefits to reach the truly backward members of that class".

- The Indra Sawhney judgment had upheld the government's move, based on the Mandal Commission report, to give a 27% reservation to Other Backward Classes. But it held that the creamy layer (socially advanced persons) "can be and must be excluded from backward classes".

- The court said "economic criterion could be adopted as an indicium or measure of social advancement" in order to identify members of a creamy layer in a class or a group.

- The court asked the Central government to fix the norms for income, property, and status for identifying the creamy layer. In 1993, the creamy layer ceiling was fixed at ₹1 lakh. It was subsequently increased to ₹2.5 lakh in 2004, ₹4.5 lakh in 2008, ₹6 lakh in 2013, and at ₹8 lakh since 2017.

Nagaraj Case

- In 2006, the five-judge Bench, in Nagaraj, laid down three conditions for the promotion of SCs and STs in public employment.

- The court held that the government cannot introduce quota in promotion for its SC/ST employees unless it proves that the particular community was backward, inadequately represented and providing reservation in promotion would not affect the overall efficiency of public administration. The opinion of the government should be based on quantifiable data.

- The judgment in Nagaraj also held that the creamy layer was applicable to SCs and STs in government promotions.

Jarnail Singh case

- In Jarnail Singh, a five-judge Bench led by then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra upheld the 2006 Nagaraj case verdict's reasoning that the creamy layer principle was based on the right to equality.

- The court held that quota benefits should go to the weakest of the weak and not be snatched away by members of the same class who were in the "top creamy layer". Justice Rohinton F. Nariman, who wrote the judgment in the Jarnail Singh case, said the creamy layer concept ensured that only the genuinely deserving members of an SC/ST community get reservation benefits.

- The 2018 judgment, while modifying the part in the Nagaraj verdict which required States to show quantifiable data to prove backwardness, rejected the Centre's argument that Nagaraj had misread the creamy layer concept ushered in by Indra Sawhney by applying it to SCs and STs.

- Justice Nariman had observed in this judgment for the court: "The whole objective of reservation is to see that backward classes of citizens move forward so that they may march hand in hand with other citizens of India on an equal basis. This will not be possible if only the creamy layer within that class bag all the coveted jobs in the public sector and perpetuate themselves, leaving the rest of the class as backward as they always were."

- The 2018 judgment said that when the court applied creamy layer to SCs and STs in the Nagaraj case, it did not tinker with the Presidential List under Articles 341 or 342 of the Constitution. The caste, group or sub-group named in the List had remained intact.

- In 2018, a five-judge Bench in the Jarnail Singh case unanimously agreed with a 2006 judgment of another five-judge Bench in the M. Nagaraj case, which had upheld the application of the creamy layer principle in promotions.

Why creamy layer concept should be applied to SC/ST's?

- Creamy layer is required because majority of seats reserved in the central and state institutions and the employment opportunities are taken away by the established and the economically better. By taking away these seats the poor in the community miss the opportunity of moving up the economic ladder.

Creamy layer should not be applied to SC/ST's

- We have to recognise that while both OBCs and SCs get reservation, the social reality under which Dalits live and the situation under which OBCs live are very different.

  * For the OBC's it is only economic backwardness but for the Dalits it is social discrimination

- The reservation policy is against discrimination; it is not based on economic consideration because the discrimination is independent of your economic standing.

- Women are asking for reservation. Have they ever raised the issue that relatively better-off women should not get political reservation? Because they are discriminated based on gender, poor or non-poor.

- The point is that the reason for reservations for Dalits is not economic backwardness. It is the stigma that comes on account of the untouchable status. And even though legally untouchability has been abolished, there is a lot of data that show that people still practise untouchability. So the stigma that comes on account of an untouchable status... reservation is only a tiny remedial measure for that

- The economically better-off also face discrimination, in service and many other spheres. They also need a safeguard and that safeguard is the affirmative action policy.

  * Since they are economically better-off, don't give them economic advantages like subsidies. They can afford that but you cannot extend this argument to say reservation should be withdrawn for the better-off.

Reservation in Promotion

- According to statistics there is huge discrimination once a person gets into service.

- There are about 12,000 cases lying with the SC/ST Commission, complaining about discrimination in service. Therefore, they need protection in promotion.

- The Supreme Court and government should further undertake a study.

Government's Stand

- The government has asked the Chief Justice of India, Sharad A. Bobde, to refer judgment of a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in Jarnail Singh versus Lachhmi Narain Gupta to a larger Bench of seven judges for a review.

- The government wants the Supreme Court to reconsider its stand that socially, educationally and economically advanced "cream" of Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) communities should be excluded from the benefits of reservation in government services.

- The government believes that the 'creamy layer' will become a ruse to deprive the backward classes of the benefit of reservation. The Attorney-General of India, K.K. Venugopal, said the SC/ST community as a whole still continues to bear the yoke of centuries' old backwardness

Way forward

- Under the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Protection of Civil Rights Act, it is the government's responsibility to undertake a study every five years, to bring out the nature of discrimination and untouchability faced by Dalits. The government's SC/ST Commission report is supposed to have a separate chapter on untouchability.

- Therefore we need a data-based, evidence-based approach to judging reservations. We need to have greater transparency and data-based evidence to support any claims.

7. No State-wise minority classification, says Supreme Court

Background

- A petition was filed in Supreme Court to frame guidelines to "identify and define" religious minorities in every State, especially where Hindus are in a minority, to protect their culture and interests.

Context

- The Supreme Court dismissed the petition to recognize Hindus as minorities in the States where they are low in population.

Details

- The Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde said that Religion has no borders. "The States have been carved language-wise. But religion is beyond all borders, especially political borders. It has to be taken on a pan-India basis," the Chief Justice observed.

- The observation came on a petition that said the Hindus were not declared a minority community in several States, and they were deprived of the benefits of the status.

  * Attorney General, for the government, submitted that Hindus were a minority in eight States.

- For the purposes of Articles 29 (protection of the interests of minorities) and 30 (the right of minorities to administer educational institutions) of the Constitution, it was necessary that the religious and linguistic minorities be determined State-wise on the basis of the numeric proportions of various communities in each State, the advocate said.

8. Fractured verdicts and the Governor's role

Context:

- Political crisis in Maharashtra.

Background:

- A prolonged stalemate was witnessed in Maharashtra over the formation of a government as no single party had a majority of its own resulting in a hung assembly after the Assembly election.

- A pre-poll alliance of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Shiv Sena had a clear majority, but the Sena broke the alliance over unresolved issues related to the sharing of power.

- Even as a post-poll combination was being worked out, Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's controversial decision to administer the oath to Devendra Fadnavis of the Bharatiya Janata Party as Chief Minister and Ajit Pawar of the NCP as Deputy Chief Minister was taken to court by the Shiv Sena, the NCP, and the Congress.

- After the Supreme Court of India ordered an early floor test, Ajit Pawar resigned. Mr. Fadnavis followed suit, admitting that he did not have the required majority.

- A new post-poll combination, between the Sena, NCP and the Congress and some independents, has formed the government.

- The developments have brought focus on the role of the Governor in such circumstances

Governor's role in case of a hung Assembly

- The Constitution envisages that the Governor acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, except in those situations in which he is, by or under the Constitution, required to act in his discretion (Article 163).

- It is clear that in identifying a candidate who, in his opinion, is in a position to command a majority, the Governor has to make his own decision, subject, of course, to democratic norms. This is why one often sees the Governor of a State inviting leaders for discussions as part of efforts to explore the possibility of forming a government.

- When the Governor appoints the Chief Minister in this way, it is accompanied by a stipulation that the appointee proves his or her majority within a specified time on the floor of the House.

Preferred order for the process of appointing CM

- The Governor may invite the leader of the largest single party first. However, if it is clear that the largest single party has no potential ally or enough independent members to ensure a majority, he may also invite the leader of the largest pre-poll combination or alliance.

- If there is no combination or alliance, he may invite leaders one by one in the order of their size in the new Assembly. During this process, a post-poll combination may emerge, if anyone of them agrees to form a government. The Governor may insist on letters of support from those outside the leader's party who are willing to join or extend support to him.

How does the Governor ascertain the majority?

- In the past, there were instances of party leaders parading legislators supposedly supporting them in Raj Bhavan, and Governors doing a headcount or verifying signatures.

- This approach has been deprecated by courts, and there is a consensus now that the floor of the Assembly is the only place where the majority is to be decided.

- Normally, under Article 174, the Governor summons the House only on the advice of the Council of Ministers but will be within his constitutional rights to cause the House to be convened if there is a reason to believe that there is a doubt about the incumbent's majority.

- The Governor may advise the Chief Minister to summon the Assembly, if it is not in session, to demonstrate his support.

Guidance to the Governor:

The Sarkaria Commission recommendations:

- The Sarkaria Commission on inter-State relations dealt with this issue.

- The Commission's report suggests the following orders for Governors to follow:

    * An alliance formed prior to the election;

    * The largest single party staking claim with the support of others, including independents;

    * A post-electoral coalition, with all partners joining the government;

    * A post-poll coalition, with some joining the government, and others extending support from outside.

- As general principles, the Sarkaria Commission says the Governor should look for a party or combination that commands the widest support in the Assembly, and that "his task is to see that a government is formed, and not to try to form a government which will pursue policies which he approves".

- The Sarkaria Commission recommends that a person, who has been appointed Chief Minister without a clear majority, should seek a vote of confidence in the Assembly within 30 days. "This practice should be strictly adhered to with the sanctity of a rule of law," it says.

- Similarly, when the majority of the Chief Minister is contested by a significant number of legislators, the Governor should not risk a determination of his own outside the House, and it would be prudent "to cause the rival claims to be tested on the floor of the House".

Principles evolved by the Supreme Court:

- Some pivotal judgments of the Supreme Court have dealt with these issues.

- The key principle that ought to guide the Governor is set out in the R. Bommai vs. Union of India case (1994). The proper course, the court said, for testing the strength of a ministry is a floor test which alone is the constitutionally ordained forum. Even though this verdict was in the context of the imposition of President's rule in different States, the principle holds good for any situation in which Governors have to decide on the appointment of a Chief Minister or continuance of a regime based on its numerical strength in the House.

- In Rameshwar Prasad (2005), the court ruled that there was nothing wrong with installing a post-poll combination and that the Governor could not decline the formation of a government on the ground that it was being done through unethical means.

- In 1998, in an unusual and trend-setting order (Jagdambika Pal vs. Union of India and Ors), the Supreme Court ordered a 'composite floor test' involving two rival claimants — Kalyan Singh and Jagdambika Pal. A significant aspect of the court's order was that it was made clear that the floor test would be the only item on the agenda of the House.

- In a case examining the validity of the Governor advancing a session of the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly on his own, a Constitution Bench cautioned Governors against acting on internal party developments or "entering the political thicket".

Way forward:

- The court has so far justified its intervention by way of ordering floor tests, reasoning that such orders were necessary to preserve constitutional and democratic values.

- In its recent order in the Maharashtra case, the court observed: "In a situation wherein, if the floor test is delayed, there is a possibility of horse-trading, it becomes incumbent upon the court to act to protect democratic values."

- Such cases raise the issue of "boundaries between the court's jurisdiction and parliamentary independence". There is a need for a clear demarcation of jurisdiction between the two.

- The acts of Governors in seeking letters of support, requiring Chief Ministers to prove their majority, and entertaining letters of withdrawal of support have so far been based on convention. Whether such acts are justifiable may require adjudication. In the latest case too, the question of whether the Maharashtra Governor's decision to invite one claimant, rather than another, based on an unsubstantiated letter of support is correct, is open to adjudication. This needs to be dealt with in a comprehensive manner.

- A set of written instructions or guidelines for Governors to act in such situations needs to be prepared at the earliest.

9. RS MPs want more time to speak

Context

- Landmark 250th Parliamentary session of the Rajya Sabha.

Details:

- During its landmark 250th session, the Rajya Sabha hosted a debate on the "Role of Rajya Sabha in Indian polity and way forward" in which 28 members and Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke.

- A fourth of the members who participated in the debate called for uniform representation for all States for reflecting true federalism since the Upper House is the Council of States. They also demanded that each member be given a minimum time of five minutes to convey views meaningfully.

Current Practice:

- Currently, members are given time according to the strength of their party in the House. Which means that Independent or nominated members get less time like MPs from smaller parties.

- Currently, the North-Eastern States, barring Assam which has seven seats, have only one seat each. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of members at 31.

Suggestions:

Equal time to speak:

- Members want uniform allocation of time to all without referring to the strength of the party in the house. The current practice of allotting time according to the strength of their party in the House was leading to inadequacy of time for some members.

- The inadequacy of time was raised by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh among others. He argued that the nominated members be allowed more time so that the House can benefit from their special expertise.

More representation for smaller States:

- Some members argued that population should not be the basis for representation in the Upper House and would serve as the wrong benchmark.

- It was suggested that even smaller States should have six members at the very least.

- Members cited the example of the U.S. Senate which has two members from each State giving equal space to every State irrespective of their size.

- Many members argued that if a State is represented by a single member, then he/she should be allocated more time to speak.

Way forward:

- The Rajya Sabha Secretariat is pulling out the rule books and going through the precedents to tackle the demand from members that they be allocated more time in debates.

- The secretariat is also looking into a demand for an increase in representation from smaller States.

- Fixing a minimum time limit for each member is doable, but for equal representation for all States, legal opinion has to be taken and will be a long-drawn exercise which can be done only if there is a political will.

10. 6 years on, Lokpal is yet to get prosecution wing

Context

- Almost six years after the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, was signed into law, several key provisions needed for the anti-corruption ombudsman to function have still not been operationalized.

- The process of constituting the Lokpal's inquiry and prosecution wings has not yet begun

Background:

Lokpal and Lokayuktas:

- Lokpal is the national anti-corruption ombudsman established under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013 to inquire and investigate into allegations of corruption against public functionaries who fall within the scope and ambit of the above Act and ensure accountability on the part of public officials.

- This body is constituted to check the menace of corruption in India.

- The Lokpal has jurisdiction over the central government to inquire into allegations of corruption against its public functionaries and for matters connected to corruption.

- The Lokayukta performs the same function at the state level.

Composition:

- Lokpal consists of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members, 50% of whom are judicial members, who are or have been Judges of the Supreme Court or Chief Justices of a High Court. The other half being non-judicial members are people of impeccable integrity and outstanding ability having special knowledge and expertise of not less than twenty-five years in matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.

- 50% of the members of Lokpal shall be SC/ST/OBCs, minorities and women.

- Selection of chairperson and members of Lokpal would be through a selection committee consisting of PM, Speaker of Lok Sabha, leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, Chief Justice of India or a sitting Supreme Court judge nominated by CJI.

Jurisdiction:

- The Lokpal has jurisdiction to inquire into allegations of corruption against anyone who is or has been Prime Minister, or a Minister in the Union government, or a Member of Parliament, as well as officials of the Union government under Groups A, B, C, and D.

* The Lokpal, however, cannot inquire into any corruption charges against the Prime Minister if the allegations are related to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy, and space, unless a full Bench of the Lokpal, consisting of its chair and all members, considers the initiation of a probe, and at least two-thirds of the members approve it.

* Such a hearing should be held in camera, and if the complaint is dismissed, the records shall not be published or made available to anyone.

- Also covered are chairpersons, members, officers and directors of any board, corporation, society, trust or autonomous body either established by an Act of Parliament or wholly or partly funded by the Union or State government.

- All entities (NGOs) receiving donations from foreign source in the context of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) in excess of Rs 10 lakh per year are under the jurisdiction of Lokpal.

Functioning:

- If the Lokpal receives a complaint under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, then it can initiate the investigation. If the complaint is found to be true in the investigation then the Lokpal can ask the government to take disciplinary action against the accused public servants or can file a corruption case in a special court.

- A complaint under the Lokpal Act should be in the prescribed form and must pertain to an offence under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, against a public servant. There is no restriction on who can make such a complaint.

Preliminary Inquiry:

- When a complaint is received, the Lokpal may order a preliminary inquiry by its Inquiry Wing, or refer it for investigation by any agency, including the CBI, if there is a prima facie case.

- Before the ordering of an investigation by the agency, the Lokpal shall call for an explanation from the public servant to determine whether a prima facie case exists. This provision, the Act says, will not interfere with any search and seizure that may be undertaken by the investigating agency.

- The Lokpal, with respect to Central government servants, may refer the complaints to the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). The CVC will send a report to the Lokpal regarding officials falling under Groups A and B and proceed as per the CVC Act against those in Groups C and D.

- The Inquiry Wing or any other agency will have to complete its preliminary inquiry and submit a report to the Lokpal within 60 days. It has to seek comments from both the public servant and "the competent authority," before submitting its report. There will be a 'competent authority' for each category of public servants. For instance, for the Prime Minister, it is the Lok Sabha, and for other Ministers, it will be the Prime Minister. And for department officials, it will be the Minister concerned.

- A Lokpal Bench consisting of no less than three members shall consider the preliminary inquiry report, and after giving an opportunity to the public servant, decide whether it should proceed with the investigation.

- It can order a full investigation, or initiate departmental proceedings or close the proceedings. It may also proceed against the complainant if the allegation is false. The preliminary inquiry should normally be completed within 90 days of receipt of the complaint.

What happens after the investigation?

- The agency ordered to conduct the probe has to file its investigation report in the court of appropriate jurisdiction, and a copy before the Lokpal.

- A Bench of at least three members will consider the report and may grant sanction to the Prosecution Wing to proceed against the public servant based on the agency's charge sheet. It may also ask the competent authority to take departmental action or direct the closure of the report.

Declaration of assets and liabilities:

- Public servants will have to declare their assets and liabilities in a prescribed form. If any asset(s) found in their possession is/are not declared, or if misleading information about these is furnished, it may lead to an inference that assets were acquired by corrupt means.

Concerns:

The long delay in operationalizing the Lokpal:

- The movement to ensure accountability through an anti-corruption ombudsman has been long. The term Lokpal was coined in 1963 but it was not until January 2014 that the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act came into force.

- It took five years to appoint the first chairperson and members of the Lokpal.

Key provisions still not in place:

- Almost six years after the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 was signed into law, several key provisions needed for the anti-corruption ombudsman to function have still not been operationalized.

- The process of constituting the Lokpal's inquiry and prosecution wings has not yet begun.

- The process of the constitution of Inquiry Wing of Lokpal is yet to be initiated in consultation with the government of India. The Lokpal would find it difficult to investigate complaints that do fall within its mandate as it has no inquiry wing or regulations for inquiries.

- Regarding the setting up of a special wing to prosecute public servants for corruption, as mandated by the Act, the process of the constitution of Prosecution Wing of Lokpal is yet to be initiated in consultation with the government of India.

Complaint format not yet finalized:

- The Lokpal has not yet notified a format for filing complaints. The lack of this may lead to many complaints filed being dismissed.

Investigation regulations not yet notified:

- The regulations on how to conduct preliminary investigations have not been notified.

- Section 60 of the Act gives the Lokpal the power to make regulations on "the manner and procedure of conducting preliminary inquiry or investigation". It also deals with making regulations on the website display of the status of all complaints along with records and evidence. Till now, no regulations have been made by the Lokpal under Section 60.

Lack of rules for disclosure of assets and liabilities:

- The rules for the disclosure of assets and liabilities by public servants have not been notified. This is a key provision as the amassing of assets disproportionate to the known sources of income is often the basis for a complaint.

- The draft rules of 2017 were referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee, which submitted its recommendations to the government in July 2018. The Centre is yet to submit an Action Taken Report to the Rajya Sabha

11. Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019

- President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019

What is Citizenship?

- Citizenship defines the relationship between the nation and the people who constitute the nation.

- It confers upon an individual certain right such as protection by the state, right to vote and right to hold certain public offices, among others, in return for the fulfilment of certain duties/obligations owed by the individual to the state.

Citizenship in India

- The Constitution of India provides for single citizenship for the whole of India.

- Under Article 11 of the Indian Constitution, Parliament has the power to regulate the right of citizenship by law. Accordingly, the parliament had passed the Citizenship act of 1955 to provide for the acquisition and determination of Indian Citizenship.

- Entry 17, List 1 under the Seventh Schedule speaks about Citizenship, naturalization and aliens. Thus, Parliament has exclusive power to legislate with respect to citizenship.

- Until 1987, to be eligible for Indian citizenship, it was sufficient for a person to be born in India.

  * Then, spurred by the populist movements alleging massive illegal migrations from Bangladesh, citizenship laws were first amended to additionally require that at least one parent should be Indian.

- In 2004, the law was further amended to prescribe that not just one parent be Indian; but the other should not be an illegal immigrant.

Who is an illegal migrant in India?

Under the Act, an illegal migrant is a foreigner who:

- Enters the country without valid travel documents like a passport and visa, or

- Enters with valid documents, but stays beyond the permitted time period.

Illegal migrants may be put in jail or deported under the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920.

The scenario before the passing of the Act

- Under the existing laws, an illegal migrant is not eligible to apply for acquiring citizenship. They are barred from becoming an Indian citizen through registration or naturalisation.

  * The Foreigners Act and the Passport Act debar such a person and provide for putting an illegal migrant into jail or deportation.

- A person can become an Indian citizen through registration.

  * Section 5 (a) of Citizenship act of 1955: A person of Indian origin who is ordinarily resident in India for seven years before making an application for registration;

  * And they should have lived in India continuously for 12 months before submitting an application for citizenship.

- Under the Citizenship Act, 1955, one of the requirements for citizenship by naturalization is that the applicant must have resided in India during the last 12 months, as well as for 11 of the previous 14 years.

What the Act intends to do?

- The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 aims to make changes in the Citizenship Act, the Passport Act and the Foreigners Act if the illegal migrants belong to religious minority communities from three Neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- Simply put, the Citizenship Amendment Act will grant the illegal non-Muslim migrants the status of legal migrants despite them having come to India without valid documents and permission.

Features of CAA 2019

- The Act seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to make Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, eligible for citizenship of India. In other words, the Act intends to make it easier for non-Muslim immigrants from India's three Muslim-majority neighbours to become citizens of India.

- The amendment relaxes the requirement of naturalization from 11 years to 5 years as a specific condition for applicants belonging to these six religions.

- The cut-off date for citizenship is December 31, 2014, which means the applicant should have entered India on or before that date.

- The Act says that on acquiring citizenship:

  * Such persons shall be deemed to be citizens of India from the date of their entry into India, and

  * All legal proceedings against them in respect of their illegal migration or citizenship will be closed.

- It also says people holding Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards – an immigration status permitting a foreign citizen of Indian origin to live and work in India indefinitely – can lose their status if they violate local laws for major and minor offences and violations.

Exception

- The Act adds that the provisions on citizenship for illegal migrants will not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

  * These tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District.

- It will also not apply to the areas under the Inner Line Permit under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873.

Criticism

It is against Muslims

- The fundamental criticism of the Act has been that it specifically targets Muslims. Thus, the religious basis of citizenship not only violates the principles of secularism but also of liberalism, equality and justice.

  * It fails to allow Shia, Balochi and Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan and Hazaras in Afghanistan who also face persecution, to apply for citizenship.

  * A key argument against the CAA is that it will not extend to those persecuted in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, from where Rohingya Muslims and Tamils are staying in the country as refugees.

  * Neither is religious persecution the monopoly of three countries nor is such persecution confined to non-Muslims.

It violates Article 14

- Critics argue that it is violative of Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to equality.

  * The CAA is in the teeth of Article 14, which not only demands reasonable classification and a rational and just object to be achieved for any classification to be valid but additionally requires every such classification to be non-arbitrary.

  * The Act is an instance of class legislation, as classification on the ground of religion is not permissible.

Why North East is objecting to CAA?

- In the Northeastern states, the prospect of citizenship for massive numbers of illegal Bangladeshi migrants has triggered deep anxieties, including fears of demographic change, loss of livelihood opportunities, and erosion of the indigenous culture.

- The Act appears to violate the Assam Accord, both in letter and spirit.

  * The Assam Accord, signed between the then Rajiv Gandhi-led central government and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), had fixed March 24, 1971, as the cutoff date for foreign immigrants. Those illegally entering Assam after this date were to be detected and deported, irrespective of their religion.

  * The Citizenship Amendment Act moved the cutoff date for six religions to December 31, 2014, something that is not acceptable to the Assamese-speaking people in Brahmaputra Valley, who insist that all illegal immigrants should be treated as illegal.

- There is also an economic problem. If tens of thousands leave Bangladesh and start staying legally in Assam and North East, the pressure will first show in the principal economic resource—land.

* Also, since these will be legitimate citizens, there will also be more people joining the queue of job hopefuls that can potentially lower opportunities for the indigenous and the locals.

- It also boils down to the political rights of the people of the state. Migration has been a burning issue in Assam.

  * There is a view that illegal immigrants, who will eventually become legitimate citizens, will be determining the political future of the state.

Other issues surrounding CAA

- CAA does not consider Jews and atheists. They have been left out of the Act.

- The basis of clubbing Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh together and thereby excluding other (neighbouring) countries is unclear.

  * A common history is not a ground as Afghanistan was never a part of British India and was always a separate country.

- Countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar, which share a land border with India, have been excluded.

  * The reason stated in the 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' of the Act is that these three countries constitutionally provide for a "state religion"; thus, the Act is to protect "religious minorities" in these theocratic states.

  * The above reasoning fails with respect to Bhutan, which is a neighbor and constitutionally a religious state with the official religion being Vajrayana Buddhism.

  1. Non-Buddhist missionary activity is limited, construction of non-Buddhist religious buildings is prohibited and the celebration of some non-Buddhist religious festivals is curtailed. Yet, Bhutan has been excluded from the list.

  * Focus only on religious persecution:

  1. On the classification of individuals, the Act provides benefits to sufferers of only one kind of persecution, i.e. religious persecution neglecting others.

  2. Religious persecution is a grave problem but political persecution is also equally existent in parts of the world. If the intent is to protect victims of persecution, the logic to restrict it only to religious persecution is suspect.

  * The seemingly unconstitutional provisions of the CAA will deny equal protection of laws to similarly placed persons who come to India as "illegal migrants" but in fact grant citizenship to the less deserving at the cost of the more deserving.

  1. The provisions of CAA might lead to a situation where a Rohingya who has saved himself from harm in Myanmar by crossing into India will not be entitled to be considered for citizenship, while a Hindu from Bangladesh, who might be an economic migrant and have not faced any direct persecution in his life, would be entitled to citizenship.

  2. Similarly, a Tamil from Jaffna escaping the atrocities in Sri Lanka will continue to be an "illegal migrant" and never be entitled to apply for citizenship by naturalization.

  * There is also a reduction in the residential requirement for naturalization — from 11 years to five. The reasons for the chosen time frame has not been stated.

Arguments put forward by supporters of the Act

It is not against Muslims

- The Ahmediyas and Rohingyas can still seek Indian citizenship through naturalization (if they enter with valid travel documents).

  * In any case, since India follows the principle of non-refoulment (even without acceding to the Refugee Convention 1951), they would not be pushed back.

  * If a Shia Muslim is facing persecution and is in India seeking shelter, his case to continue to reside in India as a refugee shall be considered on its merits and circumstances.

  * With regard to Balochi refugees, Balochistan has long struggled to be independent of Pakistan and including Balochis in the CAA could be perceived as interference in Pakistan's internal affairs.

  * The CAA, therefore, does not exclude Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to apply for Indian citizenship. They can continue to do so in the same way singer Adnan Sami, for example, applied for citizenship.

- It is important to note that even minorities shall not be granted automatic citizenship. They would need to fulfill conditions specified in the Third Schedule to the Citizenship Act, 1955, namely, the good character requirement as well as physical residence in India

- Harish Salve, one of India's biggest names in national and international law, has stated that the Citizenship Amendment Act is not anti-Muslim

  * Salve stated that the countries specified in the CAA have their own state religion and Islamic rules. He added that Islamic majority nations identify their people as per who follows Islam and who does not. Addressing governance problems in neighbouring countries is not the purpose of the CAA.

  * Over the issue of Rohingyas, Salve stated that a law that addresses one evil does not need to address all the evils in all countries. It is notable here that Myanmar, though a Buddhist majority nation, does not have a state religion and Myanmar does not feature in CAA bill.

The Act is not a violation of Article 14

Sovereign space

- To begin with, the justiciability of citizenship or laws that regulate the entry of foreigners is often treated as a 'sovereign space' where the courts are reluctant to intervene.

    * Thus in Trump v Hawaii No. 17-965, 585 U.S. (2018), the US Supreme Court upheld travel ban from several Muslim countries holding that regulation of foreigners including ingress is "fundamental sovereign attribute exercised by the government's political departments largely immune from judicial control."

    * Indian courts have generally followed a similar reasoning. In David John Hopkins vs. Union of India (1997), the Madras High Court held that the right of the Union to refuse citizenship is absolute and not fettered by equal protection under Article 14.

    * Similarly in Louis De Raedt vs. Union of India (1991), the Supreme Court held that the right of a foreigner in India is confined to Article 21 and he cannot seek citizenship as a matter of right.

With respect to North East

- Citizenship Amendment Act does not dilute the sanctity of the Assam Accord as far as the cut-off date of March 24, 1971, stipulated for the detection/deportation of illegal immigrants is concerned.

- Citizenship Amendment Act is not Assam-centric. It is applicable to the whole country. Citizenship Amendment Act is definitely not against National Register of Citizens (NRC), which is being updated to protect indigenous communities from illegal immigrants.

- Further, there is a cut-off date of December 31, 2014, and benefits under Citizenship Amendment Act will not be available for members of the religious minorities who migrate to India after the cut-off date.

Historical Connections

- The Act does not give a carte blanche to Hindus and Christians and Sikhs from other countries to come to India and get citizenship. Just these three countries. Why?

- Because each of these has been civilizationally tied with India. The circumstances in which they were partitioned from India have created a situation where Hindus and other minority population have been dwindling ever since the partition took place.

- Regarding including other countries in the neighborhood the argument could be that we can deal with them separately if the need arises as we did in the case of persecuted Sri Lankan Tamils.

Conclusion

The parliament has unfractured powers to make laws for the country when it comes to Citizenship. But the opposition and other political parties allege this Act by the Government violates some of the basic features of the constitution like secularism and equality. It may reach the doors of the Supreme Court where the Supreme Court will be the final interpreter. If it violates the constitutional features and goes ultra-wires it will be struck down, if it is not we will continue to have the law.

But one thing that is most important is, an equilibrium has to be attained by New Delhi as this involves neighboring countries too. Any exaggerated attempt to host the migrants should not be at the cost of goodwill earned over the years. India being a land of myriad customs and traditions, a birthplace of religions and the acceptor of faiths and protector of persecuted in the past should always uphold the principles of Secularism going forward.

Nehru-Liaquat Pact

- It was an agreement between the Governments of India and Pakistan regarding Security and Rights of Minorities that was signed in Delhi in 1950 between the Prime ministers of India and Pakistan, Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan

- The need for such a pact was felt by minorities in both countries following Partition, which was accompanied by massive communal rioting.

- In 1950, as per some estimates, over a million Hindus and Muslims migrated from and to East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), amid communal tension and riots such as the 1950 East Pakistan riots and the Noakhali riots.

Under the Nehru-Liaquat pact

- refugees were allowed to return unmolested to dispose of their property

- abducted women and looted property were to be returned

- forced conversions were unrecognized

- minority rights were confirmed

What did India and Pakistan agree upon?

- "The Governments of India and Pakistan solemnly agree that each shall ensure, to the minorities throughout its territory, complete equality of citizenship, irrespective of religion, a full sense of security in respect of life, culture, property and personal honour, freedom of movement within each country and freedom of occupation, speech and worship, subject to law and morality," the pact said.

- "Members of the minorities shall have equal opportunity with members of the majority community to participate in the public life of their country, to hold political or other office, and to serve in their country's civil and armed forces. Both Governments declare these rights to be fundamental and undertake to enforce them effectively."

CAA protests: Protecting minors

Background

- As protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 rocked the country there have been several instances of police clashing with and detaining protesters. In several cases, those detained were minors under 18 years.

What does the Juvenile Justice Act say about detention of minors?

- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 has specific procedures and rules in relation to children found to be in conflict with the law.

  * "child" means a person who has not completed eighteen years of age;

  * "child in conflict with law" means a child who is alleged or found to have committed an offence

- Section 107. Child Welfare Police Officer and Special Juvenile Police Unit. Any child alleged to be in conflict with law is apprehended by the police, the child shall be placed under the charge of the special juvenile police unit or the designated child welfare police officer.

  * In every police station, at least one officer, not below the rank of assistant sub-inspector, with aptitude, appropriate training and orientation may be designated as the child welfare police officer to exclusively deal with children either as victims or perpetrators, in co-ordination with the police, voluntary and non-governmental organisations.

  * To co-ordinate all functions of police related to children, the State Government shall constitute Special Juvenile Police Units in each district and city, headed by a police officer not below the rank of a Deputy Superintendent of Police or above and consisting of all police officers designated under sub-section (1) and two social workers having experience of working in the field of child welfare, of whom one shall be a woman.

- Section 10: As soon as a child alleged to be in conflict with law is apprehended by the police, such child shall be placed under the charge of the special juvenile police unit or the designated child welfare police officer, who shall produce the child before the Board without any loss of time but within a period of twenty-four hours of apprehending the child excluding the time necessary for the journey, from the place where such child was apprehended:

  * Provided that in no case, a child alleged to be in conflict with law shall be placed in a police lockup or lodged in a jail.

What are the statutory bodies responsible for protecting the rights of children in India?

- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) is a statutory body set up in 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development

- State Commissions for the protection of child's rights are also to be established under its supervision.

- The objective of the commission is to protect, promote and defend child rights in India including the rights adopted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 — with an accession by India in 1992.

  * The Commission's Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

  * In order to touch every child, it seeks a deeper penetration to communities and households and expects that the ground experiences gathered at the field are taken into consideration by all the authorities at the higher level.

What are the powers of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)?

- The powers given to the commission are extremely broad.

- It examines and reviews the safeguards provided under any law for the protection of child rights and recommends measures to the government.

- It can present a report annually, or as it deems fit, for implementation of these measures.

- The commission can also inquire into the violation of child rights and recommend initiation of proceedings in such cases. While inquiring into such matters, the NCPCR has the powers of a civil court. In addition it has a host of other powers in terms of commissioning research and framing policy for child protection and safety.

Other Functions

- Undertake and promote research in the field of child rights.

- Spread child rights literacy among various sections of society and promote awareness of the safeguards available for protection of these rights through publications, media, seminars and other available means.

At the time of civil unrest

- Guidelines of the NCPCR in respect to children's rights in areas of civil unrest, state that police and military authorities should avoid blanket characterization of adolescent boys as security threats and that "they" (authorities) should take any arbitrary detention, mistreatment, or torture of children extremely seriously, investigate any reports of grave violations immediately, and take action against personnel involved.

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ECONOMY

1. Antibiotics in Crops

Context

- The Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare had said in Parliament that Aureofungin, Kasugamycin, Validamycin, and a combination of Streptomycin & Tetracycline are antibiotics registered under the Insecticide Act 1968 for use as pesticides to combat certain fungal and bacterial diseases in plants.

Details

- The use of above pesticides is regulated under the Insecticide Act 1968

- While registering the pesticide, the label and leaflets are also approved which contains the details of crop, disease/pest against which it is recommended, dose rate, directions about use, chemical composition, toxicity triangle, precautions to use and packaging specifications.

- Pesticides are toxic substances but they do not pose any adverse effect on human beings, animals and the environment if they are used as per the label and leaflet approved by the Registration Committee.

- Pesticides are registered for use in the country by the Registration Committee only after satisfying about their efficacy and safety to human health, animal and environment

Indiscriminate use of antibiotics is worrying

- It is worrying as the practice may lead to the development and spread of Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR), already a pressing concern worldwide; at least 10 million people are likely to die of AMR every year by 2050.

- When used in crops, unspent antibiotics find their way into the surrounding environment.

- Microorganisms exposed to this increasing load of antibiotics in soil and water can develop resistance to it.

- The resistance can spread to other bacteria through transfer of genetic material. When humans or animals get infected by such resistant microorganisms, their treatment becomes difficult as well as expensive.

2. Araku's aroma all set to spread overseas

Context:

Efforts to pass on the benefits of the growing coffee industry in Araku valley to the locals.

Background:

- The Central government has accorded the prestigious 'Geographical Indication' (GI) tag to Araku Valley Coffee along with four other varieties of Indian coffee. Others are Coorg Arabica Coffee, Chikmaglur Coffee and Bababudangriris Arabica Coffee of Karnataka and Waynad Robusta Coffee.

- The GI tag is primarily the certification of products of agricultural, natural or manufactured (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.

- The GI tag will help all the five coffee brands get maximum market and price for their premium products across the globe. Indian coffee is highly valued in the world market and sold as a premium product in Europe.

- Among the five, Araku Valley Arabica Coffee, produced through an organic method, is famous for its rich blend of good taste and invigorating aroma as well as purity. The coffee from the hilly areas of Visakhapatnam district and Odisha is produced by tribals through the 'integrated coffee development project'.

- The tribals use organic, green manures and adopt organic pest management practices.

Concerns:

- Araku's coffee is world-famous, but its farmers who are mainly tribals are still struggling.

- While coffee grown in Araku is sold at premium prices, farmers growing it don't even get Rs 100 a kilo for the same coffee fruit. The major profit is siphoned off by the middlemen.

Way forward:

- By sourcing coffee directly and keeping middlemen at bay, and supplying the products straight to the consumers through online orders, a start-up has made it a point to pass on benefits to the tribal people.

- Further by engaging tribal people in the area for green coffee bean roasting and grinding, there is scope for value addition locally which will not only increase the local employment opportunities but also give the farmers higher returns.

- Need to train tribal people on scientific methods, in collaboration with the Coffee Board, on how to enhance yield and produce better quality coffee.

3. Carbon tax waiver for coal mooted

Context:

- A proposal by the Prime Minister's office to waive off the Carbon tax on coal.

Details:

- Presently a carbon tax of ₹400 per tonne is levied on the production and import of coal.

- The objective of the carbon tax is to make the coal-based thermal power producers bear some responsibility for the air pollution caused by its operations. This would increase the cost of coal-based power and in turn make the other environmentally friendly alternatives like solar and wind energy economically viable in the long term. This would incentivize the move towards greener sources of power.

- The present proposal is to waive off the carbon tax levied on coal.

Significance:

Improve the financial health of coal-based thermal plants:

- The coal-based thermal power plant utilities and distribution companies have been struggling given the emerging renewable options in the market and government's support policy to encourage the renewable sources of power. A significant portion of the current Non-Performing assets with Public sector Banks involves the power sector companies.

- India's coal industry has been lobbying for government help, citing high debt levels and burgeoning payment dues from government-owned power distribution companies.

- The savings as a result of the waiving off would improve the financial health of coal-based thermal power plant utilities and distribution companies.

Finance Anti-pollution gear:

- Considering the high polluting nature of the coal-based power plants, the Environment Ministry has in place a stringent emission standard for coal-based thermal power plants.

- Over half of India's coal-fired plants are set to miss a phased deadline starting December 2019 to cut emissions of sulphur oxides, which have been proven to contribute to lung disease.

- One of the major reasons stated was the lack of financial resources to invest in anti-pollution equipment.

- The proposal will help power producers to finance pollution-curbing equipment.

Concerns:

- The proposal would make coal more competitive in price with solar and wind energy. This would renew interest in the sector again at the cost of the emerging renewable options.

- The renewed interest would also affect India's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) to reduce emission intensity given the highly polluting nature of the coal-based power plants.

- India is struggling with some of the world's worst air pollution levels. Air pollution from coal-fired power plants is large and varied (nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter (PM), mercury) and contributes to a significant number of negative environmental and health effects. Coal combustion affects not only the human respiratory system but also the cardiovascular and nervous system.

4. eBkray

Context

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman launched eBkray, an e-auction platform to enable online auction of attached assets by banks.

Details

- The eBkray platform provides navigational links to all PSB e-auction sites, property search feature and presents single-window access to information on properties up for e-auction, comparison of similar properties, and also contains videos and photographs of the uploaded properties.

Significance

- The purpose of this portal is to enhance user experience through seamless access to information by the search based on the type and location of the property put up for e-auction by the banks in India.

- The platform also helps the buyer to easily navigate to the bank e-auction site after a notified property is selected.

- It also helps the user to search property using State-wise, District-wise and bank-wise details.

5. Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA)

Context

- In its letter to NITI Aayog anticipating lower supplies, the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies has cited the diversion of ethanol for bio-fuel blending by oil marketing companies, and recent floods in Maharashtra and Karnataka that have adversely affected sugarcane crop in the region.

- Anticipating shortage of domestic supplies, they have sought a reduction in duty to make it cost-effective for them to import Extra Neutral Alcohol from global markets.

What is it?

- Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA) is the primary raw material for making alcoholic beverages.

- It is a colourless food-grade alcohol that does not have any impurities. It has a neutral smell and taste, and typically contains over 95 per cent alcohol by volume.

- It is derived from different sources — sugarcane molasses and grains — and is used in the production of alcoholic beverages such as whisky, vodka, gin, cane, liqueurs, and alcoholic fruit beverages.

- Like ethanol, ENA is a byproduct of the sugar industry, and is formed from molasses that are a residue of sugarcane processing.

Uses

- ENA also serves as an essential ingredient in the manufacture of cosmetics and personal care products such as perfumes, toiletries, hair spray, etc.

- Given its properties as a good solvent, ENA also finds industrial use and is utilised in the production of some lacquers, paints and ink for the printing industry, as well as in pharmaceutical products such as antiseptics, drugs, syrups, medicated sprays

6. Global Gender Gap Index

- It was first published in 2006 by the World Economic Forum.

- The Index measures the extent of gender-based gaps in

  * Economic participation and opportunity – outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment

  * Educational attainment – outcomes on access to basic and higher level education

  * Political empowerment – outcomes on representation in decision-making structures

  * Health and survival – outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio

- The analysis presented is based on "a methodology integrating the latest statistics from international organizations and a survey of executives"

- The Report aims to serve "as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics".

Context:

- The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020 has been released.

Global Rankings

- Iceland, Norway, and Finland occupy the top three spots in the Report.

- Iceland topped the gender parity rankings, redressing 87.7% of the gender gap.

India's ranking

- India has dropped four points from 2018, to take the 112th rank on the Index.

- This poor performance of India, raises questions over women's access to equal opportunity and resources against the access that men have in the Indian society.

- It also raises questions over government policies that are designed to promote equal access to opportunities and resources for both genders.

Concern over India's economic gender gap

- Of significant concern is the economic gender gap, with a score of 35.4%, at the 149th place, among 153 countries, and down seven places since the previous edition, indicating only a third of the gap has been bridged.

- The participation of women in the labour force is also among the lowest in the world, and the female estimated earned income is only one-¬fifth of the male income.

Concern over India's gender divide in health & survival

- An alarming statistic is India's position (150th rank) on the very bottom of the Health and Survival sub-index, determined largely by the skewed sex ratio at birth, violence, forced marriage and discrimination in access to health.

- It is on the educational attainment (112th rank) and political empowerment (18th rank) fronts that the relative good news is buried.

Way Forward:

- The Gender Gap Index definitely presents India with an opportunity to make the necessary changes without further delay.

- Doing what the government is currently doing is clearly not going to be sufficient; it needs to engage intimately with all aspects indicated by the Index to improve the score, and set targets to reduce the gender gap in the foreseeable future.

- It will have to drastically scale up efforts it has introduced to encourage women's participation, and increase opportunities for them.

- To do so it also needs to make sure there is actual implementation at the ground level.

7. Green Window for Green Energy Finance

Context:

- The Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) is planning to set up a dedicated "Green Window to serve the unserved segments of renewable energy."

Details:

- The IREDA Green Window would provide a significant boost to the renewable energy market.

- This is a new financing approach to boost investment in clean energy.

- The Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA), the country's premier public finance institution, is considering an allocation of $20 million in seed funding to set up its pioneering "Green Window" aimed toward catalysing private investment and expanding the Indian clean energy market.

- A green window is a financing approach designed to leverage limited government funds to attract private capital to achieve climate and clean energy goals. The IREDA Green Window builds on the globally successful green bank model.

- About Green Windows:

  * Green windows, like green banks, are public entities created to work with the private sector to increase investment in green energy and bring clean energy financing into the mainstream.

  * They are innovative and new tools that have been successful in the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Malaysia and the United States.

8. Head on Generation (HOG) Technology

Context:

- Railway Ministry announced that it would be upgrading all existing Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches with the Head on Generation (HOG) technology

LHB coaches

- The LHB coaches have been built in India at the Asansol-based Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) after the Railways purchased their technology from the German manufacturer Linke Hofmann Busch in 1996.

- These coaches were originally designed to operate on the End on Generation (EOG) principle.

- Under the EOG system, the train's 'hotel load' (the load of air conditioning, lights, fans, and pantry, etc.) is provided with electricity from two large diesel generator sets, which supply 3-phase power at 750 Volts 50 Hz to the entire length of the train

- Each coach then picks up the power supply through a 60 KVA transformer, bringing down the voltage to 110 volts at which level the equipment in the compartment is run.

HOG

- As opposed to the older EOG system, the HOG system runs the hotel load by drawing electricity from the overhead electric lines through the pantograph.

- The power supply from the overhead cable is 750 volts at single-phase, and a transformer with a winding of 945 kVA converts it to a 750 Volts 50 Hz output at 3-phase. This energy is then provided to the compartments.

Significance

- It would cause the trains to become more cost-efficient and less polluting.

  * The system would bring down yearly CO2 and NOx emissions

  * The reduction in emissions could also help the Railways accrue carbon credits, and trade them on the international market.

- Since the HOG-fitted trains do not require power from diesel generators at all, they only have one emergency generator car attached, instead of two regular generator cars. The Railways has said that the extra space created would now be used for an LSLRD (LHB Second Luggage, Guard & Divyaang Compartment) meaning more passengers can be accommodated.

- The new technology HOG will be available at ₹6 per unit as compared to end EOG system, in which cost of power is ₹22 per unit.

  * It will result into a foreign exchange saving of about ₹1,400 crore per year as it will reduce dependence on diesel.

- The power generator cars which used to make huge noise and emit fumes will no more be there. In place of two such generator cars there will be one standby silent generator car to be used for emergency

9. Hybrid-Annuity Model (HAM)

- Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) has been introduced by the Government to revive PPP

- It is a mix of the EPC (Engineering, Procurement and Construction) and BOT (Build, Operate, Transfer) models

- As per the design, the government will contribute to 40% of the project cost in the first five years through Annual Payments (Annuity). The remaining payment will be made on the basis of the assets created and the performance of the developer.

  * Here, hybrid annuity means the first 40% payment is made as fixed amount in five equal installments whereas the remaining 60% is paid as variable annuity amount after the completion of the project depending upon the value of assets created.

  * As the government pays only 40%, during the construction stage, the developer should find money for the remaining amount.

Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Model

- Under this model, the cost is completely borne by the government. Government invites bids for engineering knowledge from the private players. Procurement of raw material and construction costs are met by the government.

- The private sector's participation is minimum and is limited to the provision of engineering expertise.

- A difficulty of the model is the high financial burden for the government.

Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) Annuity Model

- Under BOT annuity, a developer builds a highway, operates it for a specified duration and transfers it back to the government.

- The government starts payment to the developer after the launch of commercial operation of the project.

- Payment will be made on a six month basis.

Context

- The Sarai 14 MLD Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) in Haridwar is the first STP to be completed under the Hybrid Annuity (HAM) Based Public Private Partnership Model.

10. Independent Director's Databank

Context

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs, with the objective of strengthening the institution of Independent Directors under the Companies Act, launched the Independent Director's Databank in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act, 2013

- The Databank can be accessed at www.mca.gov.in or www.independentdirectorsdatabank.in

Details

- It is a platform for the registration of existing Independent Directors as well as individuals aspiring to become independent directors.

- It will be maintained by the Indian Institute for Corporate Affairs (IICA)

- Companies also may register themselves with the databank to search, select and connect with individuals who possess the right skills and attitude for being considered for appointment as Independent Directors as the Databank is expected to become a comprehensive repository of both existing independent directors as well as individuals eligible and willing to be appointed as Independent Directors.

- The present independent directors are also required to pass a basic online proficiency self-assessment test which will available from March 2020

Significance

- The various e-learning capsules and videos available in the system will enable Individual users to easily acquire knowledge from diverse resources, develop distinct skills and assess their understanding on company operations, regulations and compliances.

- It provides for a wide array of e-learning courses on various topics including the Companies Act, Securities laws, basic accountancy, board practices, board ethics and board effectiveness.

11. Infrastructure Investment Trust

Context

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the proposal of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, authorizing National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to set up Infrastructure Investment Trust(s) (InvIT) as per InvIT Guidelines issued by SEBI.

Implementation

- NHAI currently addresses its funding requirement through ToT (toll-operate-transfer, partnering NIIF (National Investment and Infrastructure Fund), issuance of bonds to LIC and central budgetary allocations.

- InvITs are instruments similiar to mutual funds and are designed to pool small sums of money from a number of investors to invest in assets that give cash flow over a period of time.

- Through the InvIT route, NHAI will now have another funding route by mobilizing additional resources through capital markets to monetize its completed and operational National Highways projects.

- NHAI is expected to monetise projects that have a toll collection track record of atleast one year or were NHAI reserves the right to levy toll on the identified highway

- By monetising existing road infrastructure through InvIT route, NHAI can channelise new investments to greenfields projects

12. Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD)

Context

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has decided to take up a project "Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD)" with funding from the World Bank.

Details

- The main objective of this project is on-site collection of accident data through app-based software and analyse data for the identification of black spots and other accident-prone areas.

  * This project is proposed on IT based system for capturing the spot accident data using mobile app and tablets configured for this purpose.

- This data can then be utilized for various purposes like finding the causes of the accidents and remedial measures to improve the road infrastructure, to record the accidents data for the use of police, health services and other concerned departments.

Some of the other initiatives of the Government:

- Advocacy/Publicity campaign on road safety through the electronic media and print media to create awareness.

- Issue of Guidelines for the protection of Good Samaritans.

- Setting up of model driving training Institutes in States.

- Launch of mobile app for highway users i.e. "Sukhad Yatra 1033" which enables highways users to report potholes and other safety hazards on National Highways including accidents.

- Observance of Road Safety Week every calendar year for spreading awareness and strengthening road safety.

- Safety standards for automobiles have been improved.

- High priority has been accorded to identification and rectification of black spots (accident-prone spots) on national highways.

13. International Seminar on Climate Smart Farming Systems

Context

- The three day 'International Seminar on Climate Smart Farming Systems' for BIMSTEC countries was organized by the Department of Agricultural Research & Education, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmer's Welfare and Indian Council of Agricultural Research began today in New Delhi.

Details

- The objective of this International Seminar is to have experience sharing to enable improvement of tropical smallholder farming systems for greater productivity and resilience to climate change through ecological approaches.

- Some of the success stories shall be shared as case studies for the benefit of the BIMSTEC countries.

Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)

- It is an approach that helps to guide actions needed to transform and reorient agricultural systems to effectively support development and ensure food security in a changing climate.

- CSA aims to tackle three main objectives:

  * sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes;

  * adapting and building resilience to climate change; and

  * Reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions, where possible.

Significance

- CSA is an approach for developing agricultural strategies to secure sustainable food security under climate change.

- CSA provides the means to help stakeholders from local to national and international levels identify agricultural strategies suitable to their local conditions

14. Investor Education & Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA)

IEPF fund

- The IEPF fund has been set up under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs for promotion of investor awareness and protection of investor interests.

- The IEPF is monitored by a trust, which decides how the money will be utilised for specific activities of investor awareness and education.

- Unclaimed dividend, refund of application money, matured company deposits and debentures, and interest on them are moved to the IEPF fund if not claimed within seven years.

IEPFA

- It was established in 2016 by the GOI for the administration of the Investor Education and Protection Fund under the provisions of section 125 of the Companies Act, 2013.

- The Authority is entrusted with the responsibility of administration of the Investor Education Protection Fund (IEPF), make refunds of shares, unclaimed dividends, matured deposits/debentures, etc. to investors and to promote awareness among investors.

- Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs is the ex-officio Chairman of the Authority. Apart from the Chairperson, the Authority comprises five members, the CEO and other officers and staff.

Context

- IEPFA signs MOU with Bank of Baroda for Investor Awareness

15. Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

- MIDH is a centrally sponsored scheme for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo.

Objectives of the MIDH

- To promote the holistic growth of horticulture sector, including coconut through area-based regionally differentiated strategies which include research, technology promotion, extension, post-harvest management, processing and marketing in consonance with comparative advantage of each State/region and its diverse agri-climatic features.

- To encourage aggregation of farmers into farmer groups like Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs)/Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and FPCs to bring economy of scale and scope.

- To enhance horticulture production.

- To augment farmers' income.

- To strengthen nutritional security.

- To improve productivity by way of quality germ-plasm, planting material and water use efficiency through micro-irrigation.

- To support skill development and create employment generation opportunities for the rural youth in horticulture and post-harvest management, especially in the cold chain sector.

16. National Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme

Introduction

- India was a food grain importing country at the time of Independence and today it is self-sufficient to feed its population. But this is intricately tied to the groundwater resources of the country.

- Today, no country in the world is as dependent on groundwater to sustain its water needs as India. The country consumes about a quarter of global groundwater, which is more than the next two countries combined, USA and China.

- Though huge investments have been made over the decades for surface water-based schemes for irrigation and drinking supply, groundwater remains the lifeline of water security. But reckless exploitation of aquifers is gravitating India towards a water disaster.

Concerns with over exploitation

- The economic and social consequences of groundwater overexploitation has led to mounting economic burden on farmers owing to relentless construction of deeper new wells, increased energy cost to lift water, enhanced water salinity and spread of geogenic contaminants — arsenic, fluoride, salinity — and ingress of seawater in freshwater aquifers in coastal areas.

- The likely impact on environment and ecology are diminishing flow of non-glacier fed rivers, drying up of wetlands, changes in hydraulic behaviour of aquifers—particularly in the multi-aquifer setup in the Indo-Ganga-Brahmaputra Plains.

Groundwater Resource Mapping

- It is often referred to as aquifer mapping provides a holistic understanding of aquifers and ways of its sustainable use.

- On the basis of the recommendations of the 12th Plan Working Group on Sustainable Groundwater Management of the erstwhile Planning Commission, the ambitious National Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme (NAQUIM) was launched in 2012

NAQUIM

- Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) is implementing NAQUIM for aquifer mapping in the country

- The programme aims to cover more than 25 million km2 that have been delineated as "hydrogeologically mappable".

- NAQUIM also promotes participatory groundwater management.

17. National Energy Conservation day

Context

- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under the guidance of Ministry of Power, Government of India, organised the 29th National Energy Conservation Awards.

About the event

- The National Energy Conservation Day is being celebrated every year on December 14 since 1991. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under the Ministry of Power, spearheads the celebrations every year.

- The objective of such initiatives is to reduce energy intensity in our country by optimizing energy demand and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) which are responsible for global warming and climate change.

- BEE recognizes and encourages endeavours of industries in reducing energy consumption by felicitating them with National Energy Conservation Awards. BEE also awards prizes to the national winners of the annual National Painting Competition on Energy Conservation.

About BEE

- It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Power, Government of India.

- It assists in developing policies and strategies with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.

- It coordinates with designated consumers, designated agencies, and other organizations to identify and utilize the existing resources and infrastructure, in performing the functions assigned to it under the Energy Conservation Act.

18. National Public Procurement Conclave

Context

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in partnership with Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is organising the National Public Procurement Conclave (NPPC) to offer opportunities to the MSMEs to interact with industry bigwigs from the public procurement sector.

Details

- It will provide an opportunity for industry, academia and Government organizations to interact and also serve as a platform for sellers on GeM to showcase their products and services.

- The key features of the conclave are panel discussions on role of MSMEs, Startups and women in public procurement.

Government e-marketplace (GeM)

- It is a state-of-the-art public procurement platform that introduces transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.

- It ensures cashless, paperless and contactless transactions, which are in line with the objectives of the digital India initiative.

- All verifications are done through online integration.

- GeM promotes inclusiveness and ease of doing business with the Government.

- It is a transparent online marketplace that not only speeds up public procurement but also ensures substantial savings for the Government.

19. NCLAT order- Key Takeaways

National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)

- The NCLAT was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 for hearing appeals against the orders of National Company Law Tribunal.

- The NCLAT is also the appellate tribunal for hearing appeals against:

  * Orders passed by NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC).

  * Orders passed by Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India under Section 202 and Section 211 of IBC.

  * Any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

- Benches of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) are set up in various States depending on the case load and other relevant factors.

Context

- NCLAT reinstated Cyrus Pallonji Mistry to the position of Executive Chairman of Tata Sons and Director of the Tata Group of companies for the remainder of his tenure.

Background

- Cyrus Mistry is the younger son of Indian billionaire and construction magnate Pallonji Mistry. In 1930s Mistry's grandfather, Shapoorji Mistry, first acquired a stake in Tata Sons.

- The Mistry family holds 18.5 per cent stake in the company and comprises the largest block of shares held by a single party.

- Mistry joined the board of Tata Sons in 2006, a year after his father retired from it.

- Mistry was unceremoniously sacked both as Executive Chairman and Director in 2016.

Details

- The NCLAT held Mistry's sacking and the subsequent appointment of N Chandrasekaran to the top post at Tata Sons illegal, prejudicial, and oppressive.

- It set aside a July 2017 order by the Mumbai bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which had upheld Mistry's removal from his positions at Tata Sons and other Group companies.

What does the law mandate?

- The NCLAT was constituted under Section 410 of The Companies Act, 2013 to hear appeals against the orders of the NCLT(s).

- It is also the appellate tribunal for orders passed by the NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016, and for orders passed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) under Sections 202 and 211 of the IBC.

Minority shareholders

- The appellate tribunal directed Tata Sons to consult all its minority shareholders before making any appointments in the future to the posts of Executive Chairman, Independent Director, and Director on the boards of Group companies.

- The NCLAT direction will empower the minority shareholders, and will force Independent Directors to take their objections more seriously.

- The Code for Independent Directors, which is part of The Companies Act, 2013, says that one of their functions is to "safeguard the interests of all stakeholders, particularly the minority shareholders".

Will Mistry return?

- Although the NCLAT passed an order restoring Mistry to the top position at Tata Sons, the execution of the order has been suspended for four weeks.

- This will allow the Tata Group to challenge the NCLAT decision before the Supreme Court.

20. NITI Aayog's index of UN goals

Context

- NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index.

Background:

- The SDGs are a set of 17 broad-based global goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and intended to be achieved by 2030.

- The UN has developed 232 indicators to measure compliance by member nations.

India:

- India, being home to about one-sixth of the world's population, is key to the achievement of the SDGs.

- The NITI Aayog is the coordinating agency for SDG in India. To monitor the progress made by the states in terms of the SDG indicators, NITI Aayog has come up with the India SDG index. The SDG index considers 100 indicators.

- Compared to 2018 baseline index the 2019 edition considers a higher number of indicators which would give a more comprehensive view of the progress made by India.

Details:

- Kerala is ranked first in terms of the progress made towards SDG. The four southern states are among the front-runners along with Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

- Bihar is at the bottom of the NITI Aayog's SDG Index.

- Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim have shown the most improvement.

Positives:

- NITI Aayog has given India an overall score of 60 points, recognizing the major improvements in:

    * Affordable and clean energy

    * Sanitation

    * Peace, justice and strong institutions

- The Swachh Bharat Mission has contributed largely to the high scores on the sixth SDG — clean water and sanitation.

Concerns:

- The all-India scores with respect to ending hunger and achieving gender equality stand at a dismal 35 and 42 points respectively. Most states have fallen short of the goals set in the above domains.

SDG 2:

- The second SDG concerning ensuring zero hunger shows a sharp divergence in the performance of States. Kerala, Goa and parts of the north-east scored above 65 while 22 of the States and Union Territories have scored below 50.

- The central Indian States of Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Chhattisgarh have scored below 30, showing high levels of hunger and malnutrition.

SDG 5:

- Almost all states have fared poorly in respect of the SDG 5 which talks about achieving gender equality.

Long road ahead. Kerala and Chandigarh had the highest composite SDG score of 70, while Bihar fared the worst with a score of 50. COMPOSITE SDG INDEX 50 70. Himachal Pradesh (69), Sikkim (65), Telangana (67), Andhra Pradesh (67), Karnataka (66), Tamil Nadu (67), Kerala (70)

- The indicators considered include crimes against women, eradicating sex selection and discrimination against daughters, and access to reproductive health schemes, as well as indicators showing women's economic and political empowerment and leadership.

- The low sex ratio of 896 females per 1000 males, a 17.5% female labour participation rate, and the high level of spousal violence have contributed to a low score.

21. Operation Twist

- Operation Twist is the name given to a monetary policy tool that the US Federal Reserve had initiated to influence the prevailing rate of interest in the markets.

- The tool essentially aims at changing the shape of the yield curve (hence the name — twist) through simultaneous buying and selling of long- and short-term government bonds.

- The US conducted the original "Operation Twist" in 1961 and again in 2011. The key aim, in both scenarios, was to lower long-term interest rates.

- The financial tool also helps in either reducing liquidity in the market or increasing it, based on the simultaneous sale and purchase of bonds.

- Operation Twist was first introduced to the world by the US in a bid to lower long-term interest rates and to provide a boost to the economy by making credit cheaper for businesses, industries and other borrowers.

Context

- In India, the RBI put through its version of Operation Twist by buying ₹10,000 crore worth of 10-year government bonds while selling four shorter-term government bonds adding up to the same value.

- The intent is to moderate high long-term interest rates in the market and bring them closer to the repo rate.

Details

- The central bank has decided to purchase Rs 10,000 crore worth of one security — the 6.45 per cent GS 2029. This is a long term 10-year bond.

- On the sell side, it has proposed to sell four securities for a total of Rs 10,000 crore — 6.65 per cent GS 2020, 7.80 per cent GS 2020, 8.27 per cent GS 2020 and 8.12 per cent GS 2020.

Why Operation Twist now?

- India's economy is reeling under pressure due to a slew of factors including a slump in demand and lower consumption. The central bank has cut 135 basis points throughout 2019, but has achieved little in terms of boosting demand.

- It is mostly because Indian banks are failing to transmit the cumulative rate cut passed on by the RBI in 2019.
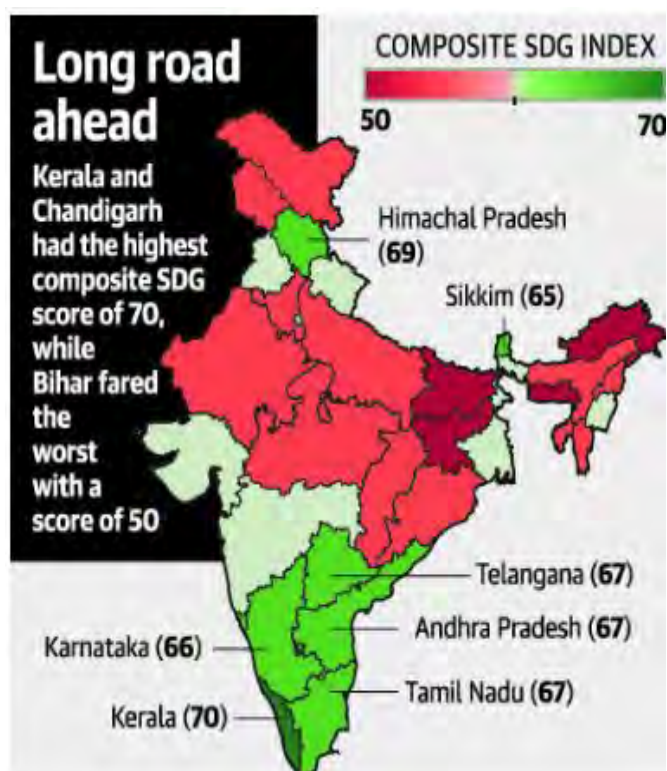
- It may be noted that banks did not succeed in passing on lower interest rates to customers despite RBI's mandate to link lending rates with its external benchmark.

- But with rising inflation and fiscal pressure, the RBI went for Operation Twist, which aims to get yields of long-term bonds lower without a cut in key interest rate.

- The central bank is keen that long-term rates are brought down to kickstart investment and revive the economy.

- The idea is that business investment and housing demand were primarily determined by longer-term interest rates.

22. Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme

- It is offered by the Government of India (GoI) to Public Sector Banks (PSBs) for purchasing high-rated pooled assets from financially sound Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) / Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)

- The scheme would cover NBFCs / HFCs that may have slipped into SMA-0 category during the one year period prior to 1.8.2018, and asset pools rated "BBB+" or higher

  * SMA-0 accounts are the Special Mention Accounts (SMA) against which the principal or interest or any other amount wholly or partially is overdue between 1-30 days.

Duration

- The window for one-time partial credit guarantee offered by GoI will remain open till 30th June, 2020 or till such date by which Rs. 1,00,000 crore assets get purchased by the Banks, whichever is earlier.

- Power has been delegated to the Finance Minister to extend the validity of the Scheme by up to three months taking into account its progress.

Significance

- It is expected that this measure would provide liquidity to the NBFC Sector and, in turn, enable them to continue to play their role in meeting the financing requirements of the productive sectors of economy including MSME, retail and housing, thereby spurring economic growth.

23. Pehchan Scheme

- 'Pehchan' cards scheme is a part of the initiative of Union Textile Ministry to register and provide identity cards to handicraft artisans and link them to a national database.

- It is a new upgraded ID card for artisans that will be linked with their Aadhaar numbers and bank accounts so that they can receive direct cash transfer benefit.

24. 'Phase One' Agreement- USA and China

Context

- The United States and China announced a "Phase One" agreement under which the US will reduce some tariffs in exchange for increased Chinese purchases of American farm and energy goods.

Details

- US will be maintaining 25 per cent tariffs on approximately $250 billion of Chinese imports, along with 7.5 per cent tariffs on approximately $120 billion of Chinese imports.

- It will require structural reforms and other changes to China's economic and trade regime in the areas of intellectual property, technology transfer, agriculture, financial services, and currency and foreign exchange

  * The agreement addresses unfair currency practices by committing to refrain from competitive devaluations and exchange rate targeting.

Significance

- China and the United States, the world's two largest economies, must deal with bilateral economic and trade relations with the big picture in mind.

- Reaching the agreement will serve the fundamental interests of the people of the two countries and the world, and is expected to bring positive influences on areas including economy, trade, investment and the financial market

Challenges

- It would bring only temporary relief

- A trade deal that took nearly two years to reach and inflicted global economic damage in the process does little to resolve the United States' biggest concerns about China's trade practices, including its use of industrial subsidies and state-owned enterprises to dominate global industries like steel and solar panels

25. Pronab Sen Panel

Context

- The government has reportedly constituted a 28-member panel to review how India computes its economic indicators.

What was the need of constituting this committee?

- Doubts have been cast on the quality of Indian statistics, with none-too-subtle hints made of attempts by the government to dress up the big indicators.

- The holding back of various survey findings added to suspicions of bad news being suppressed.

- A crisis of unemployment and falling consumption had been hidden, alleged critics.

Details

- It will have as members experts from a wide variety of institutions, including the Reserve Bank of India, finance ministry, Niti Aayog, and the United Nations

- The key objective of the review exercise is to help India's key numbers on the economy regain credibility.

Significance

- It would aid the cause of economic management.

26. Railway unveils a new signalling system

Context:

- Modernization of the signalling system in the Indian railways.

Details:

- The Railways will roll out its new signalling system from April 2020 onwards.

- This is expected to be a pilot project for pan-India implementation of the nearly ₹78,000 crore project to modernize the signalling system.

Significance:

- The new signalling system is expected to make train travel faster and safer.

- The implementation of these new systems will also improve safety, reduce congestion, increase line capacity and improve punctuality.

- The system will act as a pilot for signal modernization across the 70,000 km network of the Railways.

Technology:

- The modernization of the signalling system will include implementation of technologies such as the automatic train protection system that helps in adhering to permissible speed limits without driver intervention and the 4G-based mobile train radio communication system, which can be used for emergency communications.

- A centralized traffic control system similar to the air traffic control system is being envisaged.

- A remote diagnostic and predictive maintenance system will also be implemented to supplement the proposed upgrade.

27. Railways 'RailWire' Wi-Fi goes Live in 5500 Railway Stations

Context

- The Railways has successfully completed the work of providing free public Wi-Fi at 5500 stations across the country.

What is RailWire?

- RailWire is a retail Broadband initiative of the RailTel.

- It envisages extending broadband and application services to the public. RailTel is working to establish bringing fast and free Wi-Fi at all stations (except the halt stations)

- The Wi-Fi at stations has been provided in association with Google as the technology partner.

About RailTel:

- RailTel Corporation a "Mini Ratna (Category-I)" PSU of Ministry of Railways, is the largest neutral telecom services providers in the country owning a Pan-India optic fiber network covering all important towns & cities of the country and several rural areas covering 70% of India's population.

- RailTel is in the forefront in providing nationwide Broadband Telecom & Multimedia Network in all parts of the country in addition to modernization of Train operations and administration network systems for Indian Railways.

- With its Pan India high capacity network, RailTel is working towards creating a knowledge society at various fronts and has been selected for implementation of various mission-mode Govt. of India projects in the telecom field.

28. Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Product (RoDTEP)

Context:

- The Government of India (GoI) has introduced Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Product (RoDTEP) scheme to replace the existing Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS).

Details:

- The RoDTEP scheme will be monitored by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and comes into effect from January 1, 2020.

- Both MEIS and RoDTEP are schemes designed to incentivise exports from India by reducing duties paid on exports. It will refund taxes and duties on exports thus providing an additional export credit.

The following are the other announcements covered under RoDTEP:

- The MEIS scheme will be applicable only until December 31, 2019.

- It will create a fully automated procedure for Input Tax Credit (ITC) in GST to avoid double taxation.

- MoF has allocated a budget of Rs.1700 crore to provide higher insurance cover through Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC), to increase the lending opportunities from banks.

- Privileged Textile and other export sectors that are applicable for an incentive of up to 2% of MIES shall be replaced with RoDTEP scheme.

29. Rohtang Tunnel named after Vajpayee

- The government named the strategic tunnel under Rohtang Pass in Himachal Pradesh after former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in a tribute to him on his 95th birth anniversary.

- The historic decision to construct the strategic tunnel below the Rohtang Pass was taken in 2000 when Vajpayee was the Prime Minister.

- The tunnel connects Manali in Himachal Pradesh to Leh, Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.

- The 8.8-km-long tunnel will be the world's longest above an altitude of 3,000 metres and will reduce the distance between Manali and Leh by 46 kilometres.

- The construction of the strategic tunnel will be completed by 2020. Once thrown open, the tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to remote border areas of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh which otherwise remain cut off from the rest of the country for about six months during winters.

- The project is being implemented by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

30. Seeds Bill 2019

Context

- It is a bill which seeks to replace the old Seed Act of 1966. The bill is now under Parliament's consideration.

Need of the bill

- According to the government, a new Seeds Bill is necessary to enhance seed replacement rates in Indian agriculture, specify standards for registration of seed varieties and enforce registration from seed producers to seed retailers.

- A law regulating seed production and trade is needed to ensure that farmers are protected against spurious seeds, and that seed producers are obliged to put only seeds of good and reliable quality on the market.

Background

- In 1994, India signed the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

- In 2002, India also joined the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) Convention.

- Both TRIPS and UPOV led to the introduction of some form of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) over plant varieties. Member countries had to introduce restrictions on the free use and exchange of seeds by farmers unless the "breeders" were remunerated.

Balancing Conflicting Aims

TRIPS and UPOV, however, ran counter to other international conventions.

- In 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provided for "prior informed consent" of farmers before the use of genetic resources and "fair and equitable sharing of benefits" arising out of their use.

- In 2001, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) recognized farmers' rights as the rights to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seeds. National governments had the responsibility to protect such farmers' rights.

- As India was a signatory to TRIPS and UPOV (that gave priority to breeders' rights) as well as CBD and ITPGRFA (that emphasised farmers' rights), any Indian legislation had to be in line with all. It was this delicate balance that the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPVFR) Act of 2001 sought to achieve.

How PPVFR Act balances multiple legislations?

- The PPVFR Act retained the main spirit of TRIPS viz., IPRs as an incentive for technological innovation. However, the Act also had strong provisions to protect farmers' rights.

- It recognised three roles for the farmer: cultivator, breeder and conserver.

    * As cultivators, farmers were entitled to plant-back rights.

    * As breeders, farmers were held equivalent to plant breeders.

    * As conservers, farmers were entitled to rewards from a National Gene Fund.

How this bill helps?

- A shift from farm-saved seeds to certified seeds would raise seed replacement rates which is desirable.

- Certified seeds have higher and more stable yields than farm-saved seeds.

Cause of concern

However, such a shift should be achieved not through policing, but through an enabling atmosphere.

- Private seed companies prefer policing because their low-volume, high-value business model is crucially dependent on forcing farmers to buy their seeds every season.

- On the other hand, an enabling atmosphere is generated by the strong presence of Public Institutions in seed research and production. When public institutions, not motivated by profits, are ready to supply quality seeds at affordable prices, policing becomes redundant.

- But this has not been the case in India.

* From the late-1980s, Indian policy has consciously encouraged the growth of private seed companies, including companies with majority foreign equity.

* These firms have been demanding favourable changes in seed laws and deregulation of seed prices, free import and export of germplasm, freedom to self-certify seeds and restrictions on the use by farmers of saved seeds from previous seasons.

• Through the various versions between 2004 and 2019, private sector interests have guided the formulation of the Seeds Bill.

* As a result, even desirable objectives, such as raising the seed replacement rates, have been mixed up with an urge to encourage and protect the business interests of private companies.

* Not surprisingly, many of the Bill's provisions deviate from the spirit of the PPVFR Act, are against farmers' interests and in favor of private seed companies.

Problematic provisions in the bill

• First, the Seeds Bill insists on compulsory registration of seeds. However, the PPVFR Act was based on voluntary registration.

* As a result, many seeds may be registered under the Seeds Bill but may not under the PPVFR Act. Assume a seed variety developed by a breeder, but derived from a traditional variety.

* The breeder will get exclusive marketing rights.

* But no gain will accrue to farmers as benefit-sharing is dealt with in the PPVFR Act, under which the seed is not registered.

• Second, as per the PPVFR Act, all applications for registrations should contain the complete passport data of the parental lines from which the seed variety was derived, including contributions made by farmers. This allows for an easier identification of beneficiaries and simpler benefit-sharing processes.

* Seeds Bill, on the other hand, demands no such information while registering a new variety.

* As a result, an important method of recording the contributions of farmers is overlooked and private companies are left free to claim a derived variety as their own.

• Third, the PPVFR Act, which is based on an IPR like breeders' rights, does not allow re-registration of seeds after the validity period.

* However, as the Seeds Bill is not based on an IPR like breeder's rights, private seed companies can re-register their seeds an infinite number of times after the validity period.

* Given this "ever-greening" provision, many seed varieties may never enter the open domain for free use.

• Fourth, while a vague provision for regulation of seed prices appears in the latest draft of the Seeds Bill, it appears neither sufficient nor credible.

* In fact, strict control on seed prices has been an important demand raised by farmers' organisations. They have also demanded an official body to regulate seed prices and royalties.

* In its absence, they feel, seed companies may be able to fix seed prices as they deem fit, leading to sharp rises in costs of cultivation.

• Fifth, according to the PPVFR Act, if a registered variety fails in its promise of performance, farmers can claim compensation before a PPVFR Authority.

* This provision is diluted in the Seeds Bill, where disputes on compensation have to be decided as per the Consumer Protection Act.

* Consumer courts are hardly ideal and friendly institutions that farmers can approach.

• Sixth, according to the Seeds Bill, farmers become eligible for compensation if a plant variety fails to give expected results under "given conditions".

* "Given conditions" is almost impossible to define in agriculture. Seed companies would always claim that "given conditions" were not ensured, which will be difficult to be disputed with evidence in a consumer court.

The way ahead

• Given the inherent nature of seeds, farmer-friendly pieces of seed legislation are difficult to frame and execute.

• This is particularly so as the clout of the private sector grows and technological advances shift seed research towards hybrids rather than varieties. In hybrids, reuse of seeds is technically constrained.

* The private sector, thus, has a natural incentive to focus on hybrids. In such a world of hybrids, even progressive seed laws become a weak defence.

• On the other hand, strong public agricultural research systems ensure that the choices between hybrids, varieties and farm-saved seeds remain open, and are not based on private profit concerns.

* Even if hybrids are the appropriate technological choice, seed prices can be kept affordable.

* For the seed sector and its laws to be truly farmer-friendly, the public sector has to recapture its lost space

31. Stagflation

• It is a portmanteau of stagnant growth and rising inflation.

• Typically, inflation rises when the economy is growing fast. That's because people are earning more and more money and are capable of paying higher prices for the same quantity of goods.

* When the economy stalls, inflation tends to dip as well – again because there is less money now chasing the same quantity of goods.

- Stagflation is said to happen when an economy faces stagnant growth as well as persistently high inflation.

    * In other words, the worst of both worlds. That's because with stalled economic growth, unemployment tends to rise and existing incomes do not rise fast enough and yet, people have to contend with rising inflation.

    * So people find themselves pressurised from both sides as their purchasing power is reduced.

Why is everyone asking about Stagflation in India?

- Over the past six quarters, economic growth in India has decelerated with every quarter. In the second quarter (July to September), for which the latest data is available, the GDP grew by just 4.5%.

- In the coming quarter (October to December), too, GDP growth is likely to stay at roughly the same level. For the full financial year, the GDP growth rate is expected to average around 5% – a six-year low.

So, is India facing Stagflation?

Although it appears so at the first glance, India is not yet facing stagflation. There are three broad reasons for it.

- One, although it is true that we are not growing as fast as we have in the past or as fast as we could, India is still growing at 5% and is expected to grow faster in the coming years.

    * India's growth hasn't yet stalled and declined; in other words, year on year, our GDP has grown in absolute number, not declined.

- Two, it is true that retail inflation has been quite high in the past few months, yet the reason for this spike is temporary because it has been caused by a spurt in agricultural commodities after some unseasonal rains.

    * With better food management, food inflation is expected to come down.

    * The core inflation – that is inflation without taking into account food and fuel – is still benign.

- Lastly, retail inflation has been well within the RBI's target level of 4% for most of the year.

    * A sudden spike of a few months, which is likely to flatten out in the next few months, it is still early days before one claims that India has stagflation

32. Startup India Global Venture Capital Summit

Context

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), in partnership with Government of Goa, organized the 2nd edition of the Startup India Global Venture Capital Summit.

Objectives of the Summit

- The focus of the Summit is to mobilize global capital for innovation in India.

- The Summit aims to understand the best practices for venture capital industry, identify issues faced by them for investments in India, and evaluate ways to address them.

- The Summit will bring together a series of engagements involving representatives of leading Global Venture Capital Firms, Limited Partners, Family Offices, High-Network Individuals, Government of India officials, top Corporates, and select innovative Startups.

Significance

- Through this event Startup India is providing the Indian startups with an opportunity to meet Top Global Investors at the event to get business guidance and to discuss investment opportunities.

- It will showcase the India Advantage, diversity and scale of Indian market opportunity, and the cutting-edge innovations originating in India.

33. Sustainable Development Cell for Environmental Mitigation Measures

Context:

- The Ministry of Coal has decided to establish a 'Sustainable Development Cell' for promoting sustainable coal mining in the country and address environmental concerns at closure of mines.

Details

- The SDC envisages to address environment mitigation measures in a systemic manner and provide a better environment to people working and residing in the vicinity of mines

- The SDC will advise, mentor, plan and monitor mitigation measures taken by coal companies for maximising utilisation of available resources in a sustainable way, minimising adverse impact of mining and mitigating it for further ecosystem services, and will act as nodal point at Ministry of Coal level in this matter.

- The cell will also formulate the future policy framework for environmental mitigation measures, including the Mine closure Fund.

- The SDC will adopt a systemic approach, starting from collection of data, analysis of data, presentation of information, planning based on information by domain experts, adoption of best practices, consultations, innovative thinking, site-specific approaches, knowledge sharing and dissemination with an aim to ease the lives of people and communities in general

34. No extra charge on payments via RuPay, UPI from January 1

Context:

- Finance Minister's announcement on waiver of Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) on digital payments.

Background:

- One of the major proposals of the 2019 budget speech was that low-cost digital modes of payment like the BHIM UPI, UPI-QR Code, Aadhaar Pay, certain Debit cards, NEFT, RTGS, could be offered without the imposition of MDR in order to promote a "less-cash" economy.

- The Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) is the percentage of the digital transaction that a merchant pays to banks for providing the services of digital payment. This cost is often passed on to the customer which was only increasing the cost of digital transactions and was acting as a possible deterrent for digital transactions.

Details:

- The Finance Minister has announced that the digital transactions made using RuPay credit cards or UPI QR codes will not attract additional charges for merchants or customers from January 1st 2020.

- The government has already amended two laws — the Income Tax Act and the Payments and Settlement Systems Act — in order to implement the budget announcement.

- All shops, business establishments and companies with an annual turnover of ₹50 crores or more have been mandated to offer these modes of payment to customers.

- The Department of Revenue will soon notify RuPay and UPI as the prescribed mode of payment for digital transactions without any Merchant Discount Rate (MDR).

- RBI and banks will absorb these costs from the savings that will accrue to them on account of handling less cash as people move to these digital modes of payment.

Concerns:

- The Payments Council of India has always stated that an MDR waiver would hurt companies in the payments system. It argues that the cost should be borne by the government instead of banks, which would have no incentive to promote digital payments without MDR revenues.

Significance:

- The decision to choose RuPay and UPI as the platforms which will not attract this levy may promote these home-grown digital payment pathways over those promoted by foreign companies, including VISA and MasterCard.

- This move which will reduce the transaction costs of digital payment would provide a boost to the digital payments system in India and bring in the subsequent advantages of a digital economy to India.

35. The neglected foot soldiers of a liberalised economy

Context:

- In the backdrop of the merger of BSNL and MTNL, permanent employees of the two telecommunication companies are planning to opt for lucrative voluntary retirement schemes and a generous package also awaits the senior employees.

- Questions are being raised about thousands of contract labourers, contractual and temporary workers — who have served the two organisations for several years for far less wages and without any substantial social security benefits. After doing unpaid work for many months, many of the desperate employees are committing suicide.

Issues:

- There are thousands of employees in the informal sector, a majority of them engaged through contractors, working in precarious service conditions.

Skill deficiency:

- Rehabilitation of victims of an emerging market economy where most graduates are not employable due to skill deficiency and in a scenario where there is an acute shortage of job opportunities is the challenge

Non-compliance:

- The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 and the Inter State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 have been in place for long; but non-compliance is the order of the day.

- Similarly, manual scavengers, most of them employed as contract labourers, are still forced to do cleaning jobs under the most inhumane conditions, despite this barbaric practice having been outlawed through successive pieces of legislation.

- The Supreme Court, in judgment after judgment, has ruled that contract workers should be paid the same wages as permanent employees for similar jobs, but these orders seem to exist only to be taught in law classes, not for compliance by employers.

- Similarly, Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, has largely been a cosmetic exercise.

- The second National Commission on labour, in the year 2002, had strongly recommended abolition of the exploitative contract labour system in course of time and, in the meantime, suggested implementation of a comprehensive social security scheme. It had very rightly recommended that after two years of working for an organisation, a contract worker should be treated as a permanent worker.

* However, the apex court in SAIL vs. National Union of Water front Workers and others (2001) overruled some of its earlier judgments and decided that the law does not provide for automatic absorption of contract labourers upon its abolition and that the principal employer has no liability to regularise them.

Hire and fire norm:

- It is true that our labour laws are stringent and protective, but this statement applies only to the fortunate permanent employees, who constitute roughly 10% of the total workforce.

- Hire and fire is the rule for the contract labourers.

- Paradoxically, a rigid labour law system has also contributed to greater contractualisation of the workforce.

- Engaged in substantial numbers as contract labourers are people from vulnerable caste groups.

- The Contract Labour Act, 1970, is applicable only to organisations and contractors who are employing 20 or more workers. Hence, the number of such workers could be much more than what the numbers suggest.

- In the liberalised Indian economy of the 21st century, contract labourers are treated as sacrificial goats. Pay Commissions are always very gracious to upgrade the salary structure of permanent employees on a periodical basis, but the genuine needs of contract workers are repeatedly ignored by the state.

Way forward:

- Unless our policymakers ensure strong enforcement of policies linked to such workers, suicides, as in the BSNL-MTNL case, will continue. Parliament has already enacted the Code on Wages, 2019. Reforms are needed in our labour laws to enhance globalisation. But, at the same time, there is also need for a comprehensive umbrella of social security for these foot soldiers of growth and development.

36. CAG hints at massive diversion of LPG

Context:

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, in a report on the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), has highlighted the risk of diversion of domestic LPG cylinders for commercial use, as 1.98 lakh beneficiaries had an average annual consumption of more than 12 cylinders.

Details

- The CAG said this level of consumption seemed improbable in view of the BPL (below poverty line) status of such beneficiaries.

- It also exposed a mismatch in the names of 12.46 lakh beneficiaries between the PMUY database and SECC-2011 data.

- The audit also highlighted the delay of more than 365 days in the installation of 4.35 lakh connections against the stipulated time period of seven days.

Background:

- The scheme was launched to safeguard the health of women and children by providing them with clean cooking fuel. Its target was revised to eight crore LPG connections.

- As on 31 March 2019, the oil marketing companies had issued 7.19 crore connections, which is about 90% of the target to be achieved till March 2020.

Recommendation

- To rule out existing LPG connections in beneficiaries' household, de-duplication has to be carried out based on Aadhaar of all family members.

37. Audit for FDI norms must for e-com firms

Context:

- The government has issued new rules that make it compulsory for e-commerce companies with foreign investments to submit an audit report every year, showing that they have been in compliance with the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rules for the sector.

Details:

- According to a notification amending the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999 e-commerce companies have to obtain a statutory auditor report by the end of September each year for the preceding financial year.

Background:

- The Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) in 2018 issued a clarification to the existing rules pertaining to FDI in e-commerce companies.

- One of the main provisions clarified was that vendors that have any stake owned by an e-commerce company cannot sell their products on that e-commerce company's portal.

- Another provision said, any vendor who buys 25% or more of its inventory from an e-commerce group firm will be considered to be controlled by that firm and thereby barred from selling on its portal.

    * This provision was aimed at ensuring vendors in which marketplaces, such as Amazon, have a stake do not sell the bulk of their items to a third-party vendor who then goes on to sell those items on Amazon's marketplace.

- The rules were also designed to ensure that the e-commerce marketplaces themselves did not influence the prices of the products on sale by providing deep discounts.

38. Tech titans under watch

Context:

- Amazon, Google, Facebook, and Apple facing antitrust probes in the USA.

Background:

- After years of blistering growth driven by an ever-growing share of the online ad market and big data, the giants of Silicon Valley, including Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google, are now facing an unprecedented challenge with calls by lawmakers to curb their market monopoly power.

- There are two sources of tension relating to these four tech firms that have caused alarm across the United States, Europe and elsewhere:

- Firstly they may have engaged in anti-competitive behaviour over many years thus undercutting smaller potential rivals and holding onto an outsized market share.

- Secondly, as a result of this metastatic growth, they now have a vast influence on politics, policy and personal reputations across the spectrum, making the cost of data privacy breaches by these firms catastrophic.

- In July 2019 the United States Justice Department and the House Judiciary Committee separately announced major antitrust investigations into Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Apple promising "a top-to-bottom review of the market power held by giant tech platforms."

- They have announced a bipartisan investigation into competition and "abusive conduct" in the tech sector and specifically in the "market-leading online platforms".

- Attorneys-General across 50 U.S. states and territories announced a joint antitrust probe into Google and Facebook, and the House Antitrust Subcommittee made an enormous information demand to all four tech giants, requesting 10 years' worth of detailed records relating to competition, acquisitions, and other matters relevant to the investigation.

The scenario for the antitrust case:

- In the U.S. the cases against the four tech firms will likely be centered on possible violations of the Sherman and Clayton Antitrust Acts — two laws that have been foundational in the past century of federal antitrust prosecutions.

The Clayton Antitrust Act:

- The Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914, was a part of United States antitrust law with the Clayton Act seeking to prevent anti-competitive practices from the beginning.

- The Act defines unethical business practices, such as price-fixing and monopolies, and upholds various rights of labour.

- The Clayton Antitrust Act prohibits anti-competitive mergers, predatory and discriminatory pricing, and other forms of unethical corporate behaviour.

The Sherman Antitrust Act:

- The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 is a United States antitrust law that regulates competition among enterprises, which was passed by Congress under the presidency of Benjamin Harrison.

- The Sherman Act broadly prohibits (1) anti-competitive agreements and (2) unilateral conduct that monopolizes or attempts to monopolize the relevant market.

Concerns:

Amazon:

- The disruptive effect of its online sales platform on traditional retail markets and smaller sellers has resulted in lawmakers for years and in multiple countries contemplating regulations to clamp down on Amazon's alleged anti-competitive practices.

- Questions have often been raised on whether Amazon favors its self-branded products over those of third-party sellers, by requiring other sellers to use its advertising services or fulfillment network, by rankings of product search displays, or by using data on other sellers to tweak its own offerings to its advantage.

- Regulators are also said to be looking into the conglomerate's acquisition of Whole Foods, an upmarket U.S. grocery chain.

Apple:

- In September 2019, U.S. congressional investigators demanded documents from Apple to shed light on the company's App Store policies, specifically regarding how Apple ranks search results on that platform, questions surrounding how Apple determines the share of revenue it takes from in-app purchases, and the exclusion of certain competing apps from the Store.

- For example, Spotify and those behind certain parental-control apps have filed complaints to regulators in the U.S., Europe, and Russia about Apple's alleged restriction of their apps once the tech giant introduced self-made competing services.

Facebook:

- Regulators have focused their attention on Facebook's acquisitive streak in capital markets, for example, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) inquiry into whether Facebook defensively purchased certain companies to maintain its pre-eminent market position in the social networking ecosystem.

- Specifically, questions have centered on Facebook's relationship with Onavo, a data analysis firm that Facebook purchased in 2013, which then allegedly helped the social media giant see off potential competitors. Investigators have also started looking into allegations that Facebook may have cut off certain third-party apps from its data.

Google:

- Google handles more than 90% of online searches across the world, so regulators have been observing its delivery of search results under a microscope.

- In recent years concern has grown over the fact that Google has increasingly been sending users to its own sites to answer their queries, including products such as Google Flights and Google Maps.

- Thus, Google may find itself grilled by regulators over whether it is abusing its search dominance, to the detriment of rival content producers. The European Union has already fined Google $5.1 billion in 2018.

39. 'If India has to grow faster, States have to grow faster'

Context:

- Views expressed by the Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister regarding the economy.

Reasons for the slowdown:

- For four successive years, GDP growth was about 9%. During those four successive years, the exports GDP ratio was about 20%. Exports grew 15-20% plus in dollar terms.

- This points to the fact that at least 3 percentage points of the GDP growth were because of exports. Given the global economic slowdown and trade protectionism, the exports have fallen. If exports are not doing well then the GDP growth would be lesser as is being observed.

Solutions and associated concerns:

- To present the slowdown as a binary of structural versus cyclical or demand-side versus supply-side driven factors is completely unwarranted.

- The current slowdown needs to be dealt with.

Focus on states:

- Given the fact that with the exception of railways and defence, 90-95% of the national income is generated in the States, if India has to grow faster, the States have to grow faster.

- The data on the States' GSDP notes that half the States are growing at less than 6%.

- The growth multiplier of expenditure by State governments is almost twice that of expenditure by the Central government. This points to the need to prioritizing attention on the State governments' expenditures as well.

Structural reforms:

- Structural reforms in the domain of land, natural resources, labour, privatization, etc. have been pending since 1991.

- Structural reforms are important and necessary but there are obstacles in the way of structural reforms. The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the judiciary and environment clearances have resulted in tardy progress of the reforms in the past indicating that they are not that easy.

Fiscal stimulus:

- A fiscal stimulus from the Central government can boost the economy.

- Fiscal stimulus is generally implemented through either taxes or expenditure.

Government Expenditure:

- A large part of the growth has come from government expenditure.

- But there are limits to government expenditure due to the FRBM [Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003]. Though a temporary deviation from the FRBM is always possible in the current circumstances, there are limits to that too.

- A large part of government expenditure is committed – salaries, pensions, interest payments, centrally sponsored schemes, schemes that are legislation-mandated thus limiting the avenue for the more desirable capital expenditure with the potential to raise growth rates.

Taxation:

Direct Tax:

- The Finance Ministry has hinted that it is having a relook at the direct tax rates because the corporate tax rate has come down but the MSMEs don't pay the corporate tax rate, they pay the personal income tax rate.

- There is also a proposal for a reduction in personal income rate to 15% for some income brackets provided taxpayers agree to give up exemptions they enjoy currently.

- Direct taxes have to have an element of progressivity. So, it cannot be 15% for everyone and also have exemptions at the same time.

- Having reduced personal income tax rates and exemptions at the same time is not tenable. Increased number of exemptions will lead to a system that is discretionary and completely ad hoc making it difficult to formalize such a system.

Indirect Tax:

- There have been calls for raising the rates of GST given the lack of revenue being generated through it and the delay in compensation payments to the states.

- The GST has to be simplified. Previous analysis has shown that the average GST rate ought to be 16% to make it revenue neutral. Presently, the average GST rate is 11.6% because a large number of items are at 0%.

- To make the GST a simpler tax, the 28% [highest bracket GST rate] has to come to 18%, which finds popular support but there is no support to move some products out of the 0% bracket, which is being opposed. Also in the midst of a growth slowdown, it is a bad idea to increase the tax rates.

- The growth slowdown has been mainly attributed to a consumption slowdown. Raising the rates of GST, which, being an indirect tax, is non-progressive since it will only further curtail consumption due to reduced disposable income.

- What items can be brought under GST is a decision of the GST Council which will need consensus between the states and the centre.

- Decreasing the GST rates will limit government expenditure capabilities. If the objective is to address the issue of lack of disposable income in the hands of the poor, it is best not to do it through indirect tax policy but other means.

40. India needs a bottom-up growth model

Context:

- In the backdrop of the steady decline in the economic growth rates in India, the author of this article offers a critique of the growth model opted by India and suggests an alternative.

Details:

Comparison between India and China:

- China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, achieved independence at around the same time and both were at similar developmental stages when they started out as independent nations.

- More than 70 years later, China has progressed much faster. India, on the other hand, is yet to reach the development indicators that China attained back in the early 1990s.

- The approach taken by the two countries to ensure prosperity for their citizens has been markedly different. While China adopted a people-centric policy India has adopted the growth-centric approach.

People-centric policies:

Chinese model of growth:

- The Communist Party of China demands that local officials address the needs of citizens effectively. Singapore's government also follows a similar approach.

Indian model of growth:

- Within India itself there have been different models of development. The Constitution of India enables its States to adopt different models of development.

- Notable growth models in India include the 'Kerala model', the 'Gujarat model' and the 'common man's model' being implemented in Delhi.

Kerala Model of growth:

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

Delhi's common man's model:

- Delhi's government has adopted a people-centric model of government. One of the major interventions of the government was in the field of education.

  * The establishment of School Management Committees with parental involvement to monitor schools.

  * Teacher training budget has been raised five-fold.

  * The performance of Delhi's government schools has been impressive. The performance of government schools now exceeds the performance of private schools in Delhi.

- Public health expenditure has been increased steadily and now stands almost doubled compared to five years ago. 'Mohalla clinics' have been set up in poor colonies to provide accessible and affordable health care.

- The government has focused on providing basic facilities like piped water and electricity to poor and unauthorised colonies.

- An analysis of the outcome of the above schemes as computed by the government shows that its programmes for improving the 'ease of living' of citizens have increased savings per family by ₹4,000 per month. The increase in disposable incomes has resulted in additional consumer-buying power, estimated at ₹24,000 crores per annum.

Ineffectiveness of the 'Ease of Doing Business' approach:

- An analysis of the different growth models and their effects prove that growth must be bottom-up to be equitable and sustainable.

- India has climbed many rungs on the World Bank's 'Ease of Business' rankings. Yet, investments to increase production have not increased much because consumer demand has slumped, even for basic items.

- There has been growing anger amongst the citizens against the globalisation paradigm which suggests a growth-centric model of development. Citizens want their governments to generate more jobs domestically and to implement policies that increase incomes at the bottom of the pyramid rather than facilitating only further growth at the top.

- There is plenty of evidence to show that India has not benefitted from the opening of its economy and liberalisation post-1991. India's decision to not be part of the RCEP deal shows that India is now standing up to pressure from the Washington Consensus economists who continue to advocate that more free trade is the solution to India's economic problems.

The Indian context:

- India ranks very low in terms of human development in the domain of education and health. In spite of India being a larger economy it ranks lower than its poorer subcontinental neighbours in terms of the Human Development Index.

- India is the most water-stressed large economy in the world. Indian cities rank among the most polluted in the world.

- India's economic growth is not generating enough jobs for its burgeoning population of youth. The employment elasticity of India's growth (numbers of jobs created with growth) is amongst the worst in the world. Unemployment of persons with vocational education has gone up between 2011-12 and 2017-18, from 18.5% to 33%.

- India's complex, socio-economic environmental system is under great stress. India needs to improve on many fronts simultaneously balancing the mostly opposing objectives of social equity, economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Way forward:

- The policymakers and the government must focus on building an ecosystem which enables domestic competitive enterprises to grow and generate jobs for the youth and in the process increase citizens' incomes. Such a scenario will offer the following advantages:

  * Growth of incomes in India will lead to increased disposable income in the hands of the people. This will lead to increased demand. Given the huge market opportunity that India offers for the companies, India will become more attractive for investors.

  * A stronger domestic industrial system will give India more headroom in trade negotiations. One of the reasons for India opting out of the RCEP deal was because of the concern that the domestic industries would not be able to compete with products from more industrialised countries like China. India would be losing out on the benefits that would have accrued by being a part of RCEP. A stronger domestic industrial system would enable India to become part of the multilateral trade deals in the future.

- India's industrial and entrepreneurial ecosystem's growth must be accompanied by an improvement in the environment. Industrial growth without considering its harmful effects on the environment is not a sustainable approach to growth and development of a country. India needs to consider an integrated approach which considers both 'Ease of Doing Business' and 'ease of living' aspects. While 'Ease of Doing Business' gauges health from a business perspective, 'ease of living' should become the measure of the health of the whole system.

- India urgently requires an employment and income strategy to guide its industry and trade policies. The policies should focus on creating more employment opportunities and increasing income of the people.

41. India International Financial Services Centres (IFSC) Authority Bill, 2019

- The Bill provides for the establishment of an Authority to develop and regulate the financial services market in the International Financial Services Centres in India.

Who is covered?

- The Bill will be applicable to all International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) set up under the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005.

- The first IFSC in India has been set up at the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) in Gandhinagar.

What is the Authority that the Bill seeks to set up?

- The International Financial Services Centres Authority will consist of nine members, appointed by the central government.

- They will include, apart from the chairperson of the authority, a member each from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), and the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA); and two members from the Ministry of Finance. In addition, two other members will be appointed on the recommendation of a Search Committee.

- All members of the IFSC Authority will have a term of three years, subject to reappointment.

What will the Authority do?

- The Authority will regulate financial products such as securities, deposits or contracts of insurance, financial services, and financial institutions which have been previously approved by any appropriate regulator such as RBI or SEBI, in an IFSC.

- It will follow all processes which are applicable to such financial products, financial services, and financial institutions under their respective laws.

- The appropriate regulators have been listed in a Schedule to the Bill, and includes the RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, and PFRDA. The central government may amend this schedule through a notification.

- Among the other functions of the Authority, the PRS note says, are the regulation of any other financial products, financial services, or financial institutions in an IFSC, which may be notified by the central government; and to recommend to the central government any other financial products, financial services, or financial institutions, which may be permitted in an IFSC.

What is the need for such an Authority?

- Currently, the banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in IFSC are regulated by multiple regulators, i.e. RBI, SEBI and IRDAI.

- However, "The dynamic nature of business in the IFSCs necessitates a high degree of inter-regulatory coordination. It also requires regular clarifications and frequent amendments in the existing regulations governing financial activities in IFSCs. The development of financial services and products in IFSCs would require focussed and dedicated regulatory interventions.

- Hence, a need is felt for having a unified financial regulator for IFSCs in India to provide world class regulatory environment to financial market participants.

- Further, this would also be essential from an ease of doing business perspective. The unified authority would also provide the much needed impetus to further development of IFSC in India in sync with the global best practices

International Financial Services Centers

- An IFSC enables bringing back the financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centers by Indian corporate entities and overseas branches / subsidiaries of financial institutions (FIs)to India by offering business and regulatory environment that is comparable to other leading international financial centers in the world like London and Singapore.

- It would provide Indian corporates easier access to global financial markets. IFSC would also compliment and promote further development of financial markets in India.

- An IFSC caters to customers outside the jurisdiction of the domestic economy. Such centers deal with flows of finance, financial products and services across borders. London, New York and Singapore can be counted as global financial centres.

- An IFSC is thus a jurisdiction that provides world class financial services to non-residents and residents, to the extent permissible under the current regulations, in a currency other than the domestic currency (Indian rupee) of the location where the IFSC is located.

What are the services an IFSC can provide?

- Fund-raising services for individuals, corporations and governments

- Asset management and global portfolio diversification undertaken by pension funds, insurance companies and mutual funds

- Wealth management

- Global tax management and cross-border tax liability optimization, which provides a business opportunity for financial intermediaries, accountants and law firms.

- Global and regional corporate treasury management operations that involve fund-raising, liquidity investment and management and asset-liability matching

- Risk management operations such as insurance and reinsurance

- Merger and acquisition activities among trans-national corporations

Can an IFSC be set up in a special economic zone (SEZ)?

- The SEZ Act 2005 allows setting up an IFSC in an SEZ or as an SEZ after approval from the central government.

42. Tripura gets its first SEZ

Context

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has notified the setting up of the first ever Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Tripura

Details

- It will be a Sector Specific Economic Zone for Agro-Based Food Processing.

- The SEZ will have Duty free import/domestic procurement of goods for development, operation and maintenance of SEZ units, 100% Income Tax exemption on export income for SEZ units under Section 10AA of the Income Tax Act for first 5 years, 50% for next 5 years thereafter and 50% of the ploughed back export profit for next 5 years

- The developer of the SEZ will be Tripura Industrial Development Corporation (TIDC) Ltd.

- Rubber based industries, textile and Apparel Industries, bamboo and Agri-food Processing Industries will be set-up in the SEZ.

Significance

- The SEZ is estimated to generate 12,000 skilled jobs.

- Setting up of the SEZ in Sabroom will open up new avenues to attract private investment considering the proximity of the Chittagong Port and construction of the bridge across Feni River in South Tripura which is underway.

43. Economic revival key to banks' health

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India's report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2018-19.

Details:

Positives:

- The report states that the Indian banking sector's financial parameters such as bad loans and capital adequacy have shown an improvement in recent times.

- The report noted that during 2018-19, the asset quality of scheduled commercial banks turned around after a gap of seven years with the overhang of stressed assets declining and fresh slippages arrested.

- As a result of declining provisioning requirement, the banking sector returned to profitability in the first half of 2019-20. Besides, recapitalization had helped public sector banks in shoring up their capital ratios

Concerns:

Link with Economic growth:

- The report, however, also notes that the overall health of the banking sector will depend on revival in economic growth. The health of the banking sector hinges around a turnaround in macroeconomic conditions. The growth slowdown of the country intensified with GDP growth for the second quarter of the current financial year dipping to a six-year low of 4.5%.

Risk-averse Nature:

- Despite the improvement in some of the important parameters, the risk-averse nature among lenders was worrisome. The waning of banks' confidence in extending loans is worrisome, the Reserve Bank says in its report.

Credit slowdown:

- The slowdown of credit flow to the commercial sector in the first half of 2019-20 was evidence of the aversion to risk.

Impeding the recovery in financial sectors:

- This waning of confidence leading to credit slowdown is weighing on the overall economic activity. This is worrisome as it is taking hold at a time when the recent improvements in asset quality and profitability of the banking sector are at a nascent stage and capital ratios of public sector banks (PSBs) are shored up due to recapitalization by the government.

Way forward:

- The capital infusion by the government in public sector banks is 'just enough' to meet the regulatory minimum, including capital conservation buffer.

  * The banks' capacity to sustain credit growth in consonance with the financing requirements of the economy will, however, warrant that capital is maintained well above the regulatory minimum, providing these banks confidence to assume the risk and to lend.

  * This might require more recapitalization.

- Noting that recapitalisation would be a continuous process, the report states that going forward, the financial health of PSBs should increasingly be assessed by their ability to access capital markets rather than looking to the government as a recapitalizer of the first and last resort.

44. Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO)

- It is a fraud investigating agency

* This office was set up to investigate corporate frauds of very serious and complex nature.

* The mandate of SFIO is limited to investigating frauds relating to a company under the Companies Act and its investigation is considered separate from other normal investigation into the affairs of the company.

- SFIO is a multidisciplinary investigating agency, wherein experts from (i) banking; (ii) corporate affairs; (iii) taxation; (iv) forensic audit; (v) capital market; (vi) information technology; (vii) law; or (viii) such other fields as may be prescribed, work together to unravel a corporate fraud

- It is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs

- The SFIO is involved in major fraud probes and is the co-ordinating agency with the Income Tax Department and the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Why was it setup?

- SFIO was set up in the backdrop of stock market scams of 2000-02, failure of non-financial banking companies, phenomena of vanishing companies and plantation companies.

- Based on the recommendation of Naresh Chandra Committee on corporate governance (which was set up by the Government in 2002) and in the backdrop of stock market scams Vajpayee Government decided to setup SFIO in 2003

As per the resolution passed in 2003, SFIO is to take up only investigation of frauds characterized by:

- complexity, and having inter-departmental and multi-disciplinary ramifications:

- substantial involvement of public interest to be judged by size, either in terms of monetary misappropriation, or in terms of the persons affected, and

- The possibility of investigations leading to, or contributing towards, a clear improvement in systems, laws or procedures.

Process

- SFIO gets into the investigation only upon receiving an order from the central government in this regard.

- In other words, it cannot take up cases suo moto.

- Further, if any case has been assigned by the Central Government to the SFIO for investigation under Companies Act, 2013 no other investigating agency of the Central Government or any State Government can proceed with investigation in such cases and in case any such investigation has already been initiated, it cannot be proceeded further with, and the concerned agency have to transfer the relevant documents and records in respect of such offences to Serious Fraud Investigation Office.

Can they Arrest?

- SFIO now has powers to arrest people for violations of companies law

- The director as well as additional or assistant director level officials at the SFIO can arrest a person if they believe he or she is guilty of any offence with regard to the case being probed

- The SFIO director would be the competent authority for all decisions pertaining to arrest.

- The arrest of a person in connection with a government or a foreign company under investigation can be made by the SFIO only "with prior written approval of the central government".

- The SFIO would maintain an arrest register which would have entries about particulars of the arrestee, date and time of arrest as well as other relevant information pertaining to every arrest made by the agency's officers.

Context

- SFIO's Market Research Analysis Unit prepares 55 reports on fraud & misappropriation by Companies; SFIO assigned 12 for probe.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. **2+2 Dialogue (India-US)**

   Context

   - The Defence Minister and the External Affairs Minister were on a visit to the US for the second annual India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.

   Details

   - It is a dialogue between the defence and external affairs ministers of India and US

   - It provides for a review of the security, defence and strategic partnership between India and the United States.

   India and USA have concluded several agreements

   - Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI): United States has announced its commitment to being the founding member of the CDRI whose headquarters will be located in India.

     * CDRI is an initiative of Prime Minister Modi, launched in 2019.

     * U.S. participation in CDRI is a significant development for the organisation since the U.S. has considerable expertise in the area, which will be beneficial to the organisation and its members.

   - Finalisation of Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): This will harmonise the two side's processes for identification, development and execution of projects under the DTTI.

     * This will enable expedited decision making and set forth implementation guidelines for DTTI projects, enhancing process predictability of DTTI project proposals.

   - Space Situational Awareness: Both sides have agreed to cooperate for exchange of information in Space Situational Awareness, including space debris and space traffic management.

     * There are tens of thousands of objects in Earth orbit that pose a potential threat to satellites and launches. Space Situational Awareness (SSA) refers to keeping track of objects in orbit and predicting where they will be at any given time

   - Tiger Triumph Exercise: It has been decided to hold the India-U.S. joint tri-services and amphibious exercise 'Tiger Triumph' on an annual basis.

     * It was first held in November 2019 as a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise to develop synergies between the tri-services of both countries in conducting HADR operations.

   * U.S. has advanced capabilities in joint services operations for several decades; training together with the U.S. in these areas can help our forces as we strive for more jointness in our services.

   Other commitments

   - Both the countries have reaffirmed their obligation to work together in support of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

   - The two sides agreed to deepen cooperation to address regional and global threats, combat terrorism, coordinate on disaster relief, train peacekeepers, promote transparent and sustainable infrastructure, and advance maritime security.

   Industrial Security Annex (ISA) agreement

   - The ISA is a part of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) which will facilitate the exchange of classified military information between Indian and the US defense industries.

   - It will open the door for U.S. defence companies to partner with the Indian private sector and enable the release of more advanced technology and information to Indian industry that is working in partnership with US industry on a number of projects

   Significance

   - It will enable greater industry-to-industry collaboration for co-production and co-development in the defence sector, in line with the GOI's objective of promoting Make in India in the defence sector.

2. **Britain votes for Brexit**

   Context

   - The House of Commons of the United Kingdom which is the lower house of the Parliament went to polls in which Conservative Party headed by Boris Johnson has registered a landmark victory in general election

   Structure

   - The Commons is an elected body consisting of 650 members known as Members of Parliament (MPs).

   - Members are elected to represent constituencies by the first-past-the-post system and hold their seats until Parliament is dissolved.

   - Parliamentary terms are fixed at five years, except in the event of the House of Commons sustaining a vote of no confidence or passing an "early election" motion, the latter having to be passed by a two-thirds vote or, as in 2019, by some other mechanism

* A snap election refers to a swift and often unforeseen decision by the party in power to initiate a general election sooner than the fixed-term deadline.

- Elections to United Kingdom was conducted in 2017 so ideally the next general elections should have been in 2022

  * But Johnson's Conservative Party has lost its working majority in Parliament and he has been unable to pass his Brexit plan. In addition, Parliament passed a law preventing Britain from leaving the European Union

How many seats are needed to form a majority Government?

There are 650 seats in the House of Commons - which means a party needs at least 326 to form a Government.

- Conservatives: 365 seats
- Labour: 203 seats
- Scottish Nationalist Party: 48 seats
- Liberal Democrats: 11 seats

Inference

- The Poll results or People's mandate indicate a clear directive to take the U.K. out of the European Union without further delay.

Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement)

- Great Britain had ruled Ireland for hundreds of years, but it split off from British rule - leaving Northern Ireland as part of the UK, and the Republic of Ireland as a separate country.

When this happened, the population of Northern Ireland was divided in two:

- Unionists, who were happy to remain part of the UK - some of them were also called Loyalists (as they were loyal to the British crown)

- Nationalists, who wanted Northern Ireland to be independent from the UK and join the Republic of Ireland - some of them were also called Republicans (as they wanted Northern Ireland to join the Republic of Ireland)

Division on basis of religion

- Unionists were mostly Protestant, and Nationalists were mostly Catholic.

- When Northern Ireland became separated, its government was mainly Unionist. There were fewer Catholics than Protestants in Northern Ireland.

  * Catholics were finding it difficult to get homes and jobs, and they protested against this.

  * The Unionist community held their own protests in response.

- During the 1960s, the tension between the two sides turned violent, resulting in a period known as the Troubles.

- From the 1970s to the 1990s, there was a lot of fighting between armed groups on both sides and many people died in the violence.

- In order to deal with the conflict, British troops were sent to the area, but they came into conflict with Republican armed groups, the largest of which was the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

- In 1998 - after nearly two years of talks and 30 years of conflict - the Good Friday agreement was signed. This resulted in a new government being formed that would see power being shared between Unionists and Nationalists.

Impact

- It established a devolved power-sharing administration, and created new institutions for cross-border cooperation and structures for improved relations between the British and Irish governments.

- The agreement also said that British and Irish governments will develop "close cooperation between their countries as friendly neighbours and as partners in the European Union"

Concerns

- His Brexit agreement itself is controversial; once implemented, it could erect an effective customs border between Britain and the island of Ireland

  * The question is what impact Mr. Johnson's deal will have on the Good Friday agreement that brought peace to Northern Ireland and to the unity of the Kingdom in general.

- Second, a more difficult part of the Brexit process is negotiating an agreement on the U.K.'s future relationship with the EU.

  * Mr. Johnson is also facing the serious but less urgent threat of keeping Northern Ireland part of the U.K., in the wake of demands by nationalists for a united Ireland.

- Third the anti-Brexit Scottish National Party has won in 48 of the 59 seats in Scotland, and it could push for another referendum on Scottish independence.

  * This may leave Scotland and the rest of Britain on "divergent paths".

  * In fact Nicola Sturgeon says "'I accept that Boris Johnson after this election has a mandate to take England out of the European Union, but he does not have a mandate to take Scotland out of the European Union,"

- Both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted against Brexit in the shock 2016 referendum.

- Economic forecasters believe that Brexit will impede economic growth, perhaps even triggering a brief recession. That would make it more difficult for the Conservative government to deliver on its promise of greater public spending.

- India is the third-largest investor in the UK, Indians are the largest employers in the manufacturing sector, and there is a huge and vibrant diaspora presence, with over 1.5 million Indian heritage people living and working in the UK.

- Johnson's win also spells optimistic news for relations with India.

  * Johnson talked about standing shoulder to shoulder with India against cross-border terrorism (clearly a reference to Pakistan). Johnson has been forthright in his desire to see much deeper relations with India.

  * In contrast to the open hostility demonstrated by Jeremy Corbyn on issues from Kashmir to engagement with Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

- As Britain leaves Europe, India may need to boldly reimagine the bilateral relationship

- India has to seize the new opportunities for trade with Britain.

- Specific areas where meaningful progress could be made include defence and security (especially cyber security), data protection protocols, medical tourism, Ayurveda, cooperation in health care and education, and enhancing India's role in the Commonwealth.

3. Bougainville- Nation #194?

- Bougainville Island is the main island of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville of Papua New Guinea

- It got its name after French colonizer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, a scientist who undertook sea voyages, particularly to the Pacific in 1776, to colonise new territory for France. Interestingly, despite having the island named after him

What is the Bougainville referendum about?

- Between 1988-1998, political factions in Bougainville were involved in an armed conflict with the government of Papua New Guinea, in an attempt to force Papua New Guinea to divest control of the resource-rich island.

- This historic referendum is a result of one of the three provisions of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, signed in 2001 and enacted through an amendment of the Papua New Guinea Constitution, the other two provisions being weapons disposal and autonomy

- The peace agreement of 2001 brought an end to the violent conflict between the people of Bougainville and the government of Papua New Guinea.

- Voters in Bougainville had the option of choosing between 'greater autonomy'—a greater degree of autonomy than current arrangements within the framework of the Papua New Guinea Constitution—or independence for Bougainville from Papua New Guinea

- However, the referendum is not binding and would still have to be passed by the Government and the Parliament of Papua New Guinea, in consultation with the Autonomous Bougainville Government, before a final decision is made.

Why does Bougainville want complete independence from Papua New Guinea?

- There has subsequently been dissatisfaction among Bougainvilleans over implementation of the agreed arrangements for Bougainville autonomy, particularly in regard to the constitutionally guaranteed financial grants to which the Autonomy Bougainville Government (ABG) is legally entitled, but which the (Papua New Guinea) National Government has not provided in accordance with the ABG's calculations

- The conflict in Bougainville and the desire of Bougainvillean people for independence is rooted in the historic plunder of the resource-rich island that has large deposits of copper and the unequal distribution of wealth that followed.

How does a territory become a new country?

- There is no straightforward rule. Beyond a few set requirements, a region's quest for nationhood mainly depends on how many countries and international organisations it manages to convince to recognise it as a country.

- The biggest sanction of nationhood is the United Nations recognising a territory as a country.

Why UN recognition matters?

- UN recognition means a new country has access to the World Bank, the IMF, etc. Its currency is recognised, which allows it to trade.

- By and large, so far, a country swinging the UN's opinion in its favour has depended on how many of the big powers back it, and how much international clout its parent country wields at that time.

  * East Timor, then a Portuguese colony, was invaded by Indonesia in the 1960s. But the western powers then needed Indonesia as an ally against Russia, and East Timor's woes didn't get much attention.

  * By the 1990s, power alignments had changed, and East Timor managed to hold a referendum by 1999 and declare independence in 2002.

What criteria must a nation-hopeful meet?

Broadly, four, as decided in 1933's Montevideo Convention. A country-hopeful must have

- a defined territory,
- people,
- government, and
- The ability to form relationships with other countries.

A country's "people" are defined as a significantly large population sharing a belief in their nationality. Factors also kept in mind are if a majority has clearly expressed the desire to break away from the parent country, and if the minority communities' rights will be safeguarded.

Self-determination versus territorial integrity

- In June 1945, the right of "self-determination" was included in the UN charter. This means that a population has the right to decide how and by whom it wants to be governed.

- However, another of the oldest, widely accepted international rules is that of countries respecting each other's territorial integrity. This is conflicting.

  * While a population has the right to break off from the parent country, quick recognition of their claim would mean other nations are agreeing to the carving up of one country.

- The right to self-determination was introduced when a few colonial powers were dominating most countries, and questions of right were relatively easier to settle.

- Today, the issue becomes thorny and shapes up either as granting of greater autonomy to certain regions within a country, prolonged armed conflicts, or both.

  * Thus, though Taiwan says it is a country, other nations defer to China's feelings about it.

4. Hand-in-Hand

- It is a joint military exercise between India and China
- The first exercise was held in China at Kunming in Yunnan province in 2007.
- It is held annually, alternately, in India and China.

Aim

- The aim of the joint training is to share the expertise in drills and practices while tackling insurgency and terrorism, thereby promoting healthy military to military relations between the two armies and developing joint strategies for conducting operations in a counter terrorism environment.

Advantages

- Exercise Hand-in-Hand contributes immensely in developing mutual understanding and respect for each other's military.

- The conduct of Joint Military Exercises is also an important step to uphold the values of Peace, Prosperity and Stability in the region.

Context:

- The 8th India-China joint training exercise 'HAND-IN-HAND 2019' with the theme counter-terrorism under the United Nations mandate was conducted at Umroi, Meghalaya

5. Indra

Context

- Exercise INDRA 2019, a joint, tri-services exercise between India and Russia was conducted in India

Details

- The INDRA series of exercise began in 2003 and the First joint Tri-Services Exercise was conducted in 2017.

- The objective of the exercise is to imbibe the best practices from each other, jointly evolve drills to defeat the scourge of terror under the United Nations mandate.

6. India-Japan Steel Dialogue

Context

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between Government of India and Government of Japan to constitute the 'India-Japan Steel Dialogue' to strengthen cooperation in steel sector.

Benefits

- The 'India-Japan Steel Dialogue' envisages enhancement of mutual understanding to secure sustainable growth in the steel sector.

- The Dialogue aims to examine all aspects of cooperation in steel sector including promotion of investment in high grade steel making and finding new avenues of steel usage in India.

- The MoC will help in capacity building for high grade steel manufacturing in India

7. 'IORA nations should build a common vision for Indo-Pacific'

Context:

- External Affairs Minister's address at the Ministry of External Affairs 'Delhi Dialogue' on partnerships in the Indo-Pacific.

Details:

- The address dealt with the current scenario and way forward for the Indo-Pacific region.

- Significantly, although the 'Delhi Dialogue' conference had participants from India's Quadrilateral (Quad) partners, the U.S., Australia, and Japan, Mr. Jaishankar made no mention of the Quad in his address, in line with the government's objective of keeping the Indo-Pacific strategy separate from the Quad alignment.

Concerns:

- One of the problems in building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific maritime region was the lack of consensus on what such a concept meant or "even its geographic extent".

- While countries like the U.S. define the Indo-Pacific as reaching the Indian subcontinent, India and partners like Japan extend the idea to Africa.

- A comparison between the ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum and the lack of such architecture in the Indo-Pacific region west of India with the exception of Indian Ocean Region Association (IORA) brings to light the lack of an organization whose reach spans the entire region from end to end.

Way forward:

Vision for the Region:

- Indian Ocean Region (IORA) countries should build on a common vision for the region and its peoples.

- The vision for the region should be based on the guiding principle of ensuring that the region remained open and free for inclusive partnerships with all, within the parameters of sovereignty, equality, and a rules-based system.

Increasing connectivity:

- Connectivity is a major challenge for building better Indo-Pacific partnerships, and initiatives to enhance the delivery of development projects should be hastened.

Scientific initiatives:

- Initiatives like including a Grand Challenges scheme for the IORA; fellowship scheme for up to 100 post-doctoral scholars; place for partners on each other's oceanic research vessels; co-branded IORA research facilities should be considered.

- Regional powers like India should consider sharing of the existing technologies in India like low-cost, low-energy consuming desalination facilities, which may be useful especially for island nations.

Maritime Security:

- A major challenge in the region is maritime security.

- All the member countries need to work together to share maritime domain data to ensure that every link of the maritime security chain is equally strong.

- Challenges to human security in the wake of natural disasters also needs to be addressed

8. Iraq's autumn of discontent

Context

- Political crisis in Iraq.

Background:

- In the late 1970s, Iraq which was endowed with both oil and water, and a relatively modern citizenry, was doing well compared to other countries in the neighbourhood.

- Ironically, since then, Iraq has endured four decades of near-ceaseless depredations with three 'Mother of All Battles', economic sanctions, occupation, and existential duels with al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS).

- Recently, it has been crippled by agitations led by youth railing against the lack of employment, decaying state of civic amenities, and foreign domination.

- In December 2019 the Iraqi Parliament accepted the resignation of the Prime Minister throwing the country into a fresh bout of political instability.

Protests in Iraq:

- In 2018, Iraq's oil exports were $91 billion, or over $6 a day for each citizen. Yet, over 41% of the population lived below the poverty line of $3.2/day. This indicates misgovernance on the part of the administration.

- Two years after the defeat of the IS, millions of internally displaced Iraqis still await rehabilitation.

- Since the U.S. invasion in 2003, anarchic Iraq has been a hunting ground for various foreign powers — the U.S., Iran, Israel, Sunni Gulf powers, and Turkey — and their local proxies. With its geostrategic location, massive oil reserves and large Shia population, Iraq is a big prize. Iraqis resent foreign hegemony.

Concerns:

- Although the Prime Minister's resignation has broken a protracted stalemate, the prospects for an early positive resolution appear dim. Although the agitators reject the current political system, they lack a precise alternative.

- The protests have often been met with excessive force by authorities leading to over 400 deaths.

- The absence of any hierarchy or nationwide coordination renders them vulnerable to manipulation and divisions.

- The agitation could either coagulate into a more inclusive political force, or fragment along sectarian lines or morph into a militancy.

Way ahead for Iraq:

- To survive, Iraq's ruling politico-religious elite would need a package addressing agitators' basic demands and mitigating their distress.

- The new dispensation would need to be sectarian-light. Need to make a clean break from the current discredited Muhasasa system of sect-based allocation of government positions and replace it with direct elections and meritocracy. Iraq will need a new electoral law or even a new Constitution.

India's stakes in Iraq:

- Iraq is one of India's largest sources of crude oil. A protracted instability in Iraq would result in oil price rise.

- With direct bilateral trade of over $24 billion in 2018-19, Iraq is already a large market for India's exports with sizeable potential for growth.

- In the 1975-85 decade, Iraq was the biggest market for India's project exports. Iraq's post-conflict reconstruction requirement would be huge which could be harnessed by Indian companies.

- Before the Gulf war in 1991, there were more than 80,000 Indian nationals in Iraq. Most of them left Iraq before the war started. With the lifting of the Government of India advisory against travel of Indians to Iraq there has been an influx of Indian workers. The total number of Indians in Iraq is now estimated to be around 15,000-17,000, mostly in Kurdistan region, Basra, Najaf and Karbala.

Way forward for India-Iraq relations:

- India can help Iraq in MSMEs, skill development, healthcare, education, and improved governance. This developmental aid is much needed in Iraq and something which India has been successful in doing in other countries.

- In terms of capacity building, India has annually been providing assistance to Iraq under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to train officials of the Government of Iraq. This should be further strengthened

- India could help Iraq foster political reforms and create credible and effective socio-political institutions given India's own experience in creating such institutions suited for a multi-ethnic developing society. This makes India compatible to partner with Iraq.

- Cultural exchange needs to be enhanced to increase the width and depth of people to people contacts.

- There is scope for further deepening the people to people and institutional contacts between the two given that India has become the most preferred destination for Iraqis for seeking engineering and medical education and healthcare. The academic linkages in the medical and engineering fields between India and Iraq need to be enhanced.

- India's millennia-long civilizational ties with Mesopotamia give it a tradition of goodwill with all sections of Iraqi society. This legacy needs to be leveraged not only to help transform Iraq but also revitalize India's bilateral ties with this friendly country in the extended neighbourhood.

9. **Mitra Shakti**

- The exercise is aimed at enhancing interoperability and operational efficiency amongst the armies of both India and Sri Lanka when deployed as part of the United Nations peacekeeping forces.

- The objective of the exercise is to build and promote positive relations between armies of India and Sri Lanka through focus on sub unit-level training on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in urban and rural environment under the United Nations mandate.

- The joint training exercise also signifies the strength of India-Sri Lanka relations in the field of military cooperation and engagement, which is vital for refining the interoperability and operational preparedness.

- The joint exercise is designed for incorporating the current dynamics of the United Nations peacekeeping operations through practical and comprehensive discussions and tactical exercises.

- The primary focus of the joint training exercise will remain on field craft, battle drills and procedures as also the ability to operate jointly with seamless interoperability.

- India and Sri Lanka have collaborated on several counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations over the years. The two sides have a long history of military cooperation.

Context

- The seventh edition of Exercise MITRA SHAKTI- 2019 was held between India and Sri Lanka

10. **Red tourism**

- These are tourist destinations which showcase China's revolutionary past

- It was initiated from the year 2005 to promote the "national ethos" and socioeconomic development in those areas which are typically rural and poorer

- The Government began actively supporting red tourism in 2005

Significance

- It is helping the authorities in eliminating rural poverty, but also promoting the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

Long March

Background

- The Communist Party of China (CCP) was founded in 1921

- The CCP initially collaborated with the Chinese Nationalist Party or Kuomintang (KMT), founded by the revolutionary republican Sun Yat-sen.

- However, after the unexpected death of Sun in March 1925, a power struggle within the KMT led to the shift in the party's authority to Chiang Kai-shek

- Unlike other nationalist leaders, like Wang Jingwei, Chiang was opposed to the idea of continued collaboration with the Communist Party.

- Its alliance with the Kuomintang, or Nationalists, was disconnected in 1927

Long March

- In 1931, Communist leader Mao Zedong was elected chairman of the newly established Soviet Republic of China, based in Jiangxi province in the southeast.

- Between 1930 and 1934, the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek launched a series of Five Encirclement Campaigns against the Chinese Soviet Republic.

  * It includes larger armies of nationalists encircling the communist strongholds and then crushing them.

  * Early in 1934, the communist Red Army of China was on its heels, outnumbered and outgunned by the Nationalists

- Long March, (1934–35), the 10,000-km historic trek of the Chinese communists, which resulted in the relocation of the communist revolutionary base from southeastern to northwestern China and in the emergence of Mao Zedong as the undisputed party leader.

11. SITMEX– Singapore-India-Thailand Maritime Exercise

- The exercise is aimed at bolstering the maritime inter-relationships amongst Singapore, Thailand and India, and contribute significantly to enhancing the overall maritime security in the region,

- It would strengthen interoperability and development of a common understanding of procedures

Context

- The maiden trilateral naval exercise involving India, Singapore and Thailand was held at Port Blair

12. Special Representatives (SR) dialogue

Background

- Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee visited China in 2003 during which a Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation was signed.

- The two Prime Ministers appointed Special Representatives to explore from the political perspective of the overall bilateral relationship the framework of a boundary settlement.

- Both sides agreed to continue maintenance of peace and tranquility on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and to have high level dialogue and decided that foreign ministers of the two countries would meet annually

  * This Special Representatives dialogue has hence played an important role in promoting the settlement of the boundary question

- It also has mandate to discuss not only the solution to the boundary issue but also all other issues concerning the two countries.

Concerns

- As Beijing's comprehensive national power has grown, it has become more assertive on territorial disputes and its appetite for risk taking has increased.

- The second area of focus is on President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative.

  * If the Chinese leadership has invested much personal and political capital on the BRI, India's concerns have been so deep that Delhi took the unusual step of publicly criticising the BRI and staying away from it. China insists that the BRI is a win-win for both; Delhi fears it might just mean two wins for Beijing.

2019

- The Special Representatives resolved to intensify their efforts to achieve a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the India-China boundary question in accordance with the directives provided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping

- Both countries will resolve to respect each other's sensitivities for the sake of better ties

- India and China will intensify the quest for the settlement of the boundary question.

- The Special Representatives also exchanged views on regional and global issues of common interest and agreed to maintain close consultations on such issues.

13. Surya Kiran – XIV

Context

- The 14th edition of the bilateral annual military exercise SURYA KIRAN-XIV between Indian and Nepal Army commenced in Nepal.

About the exercise:

- The aim of this exercise is to conduct a battalion level combined training between Indian Army and Nepal Army with a scope to enhance interoperability at military level in jungle warfare, counter terrorist operations in mountainous terrain, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief operations, medical and environmental conservation including aviation aspects.

- As part of the exercise, important lectures, demonstrations and drills related to counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations in jungle and mountainous terrain will be conducted.

- Both the Armies will also share their valuable experiences in countering such situations and also refine drills and procedures for joint operations wherever the need arises.

14. Inauguration of development projects in the Maldives

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of Maldives jointly inaugurated several key development projects in the Maldives via video conference.

Details

- The projects included the gifting of Made in India Coast Guard Ship Kaamiyaab to Maldives, the launch of RuPay card, lighting up of Male using LED lights, High Impact Community Development Projects, the launch of fish processing plants.

- India's Neighborhood First Policy and Maldives' India first Policy has strengthened the bilateral cooperation in all sectors.

- The Fast Interceptor Craft Coast Guard Ship Kaamiyaab, would help in enhancing Maldives' maritime security, and promote the blue economy and tourism.

- Prime Minister also expressed happiness at partnering through High Impact Community Development Projects for supporting the livelihood of the island's community.

15. Cracks in the relic: on U.S.-Turkey relations

Context

- There are growing tensions in U.S.-Turkey relations which have the possibility to upset the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) unity.

- Turkish President Erdoğan has threatened to shut down two U.S. bases in retaliation for the proposed American sanctions on Ankara over purchasing Russian weapons

Background

- U.S.-Turkey ties began slumping in recent years after Washington's refusal to extradite Fethullah Gülen, a U.S.-based Turkish Islamic preacher who is accused by Ankara of orchestrating the failed 2016 coup against Mr. Erdoğan.

- Turkey's decision to purchase the Russian S-400 missile system despite U.S.-NATO opposition was the tipping point.

- The Trump administration has suspended Turkey from the F-35 programme, citing concerns over Russia spying on the fighter jet's capabilities using the S-400 system's radar.

But turkey seems determined to go ahead with the S-400 deal and even buy advanced Russian aircraft if the U.S. does not deliver the F-35s.

America's presence in Turkey

- The U.S. and Turkey are the largest and second-largest standing armies of NATO, respectively.

- There are U.S. nuclear warheads in the Incirlik airb ase, a critical facility for American operations in West Asia.

    * It is a Turkish airbase.

    * Constructed in 1955 with US assistance, the facility was NATO's most important "southeast wing" airbase during the Cold War.

    * Excluding Turkish forces, the US has the most troops deployed at the Incirlik airbase, with around 1,500 US military personnel on the ground, followed by the UK.

- Kürecik Radar Station is a military installation.

    * It was established in 2012 for use by NATO as an early-warning radar against ballistic missile attacks.

Now Turkey has threatened to shut down Incirlik and Kurecik bases.

Impact on US operations

    * It would change U.S. projections in the region as the base is of vital geopolitical significance for the Middle East.

Conclusion

- The question the Atlantic alliance faces in this hour of crisis is not just whether the U.S. and Turkey would manage to resolve their differences, but also whether NATO, a Cold War relic, could stay relevant in a post-Cold War era where bilateral ties are fast-changing.

16. China, Russia and Iran hold naval drills in Gulf of Oman

Context

- Iran, China and Russia began a joint naval exercise in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman, in what is being seen as a response to recent US manoeuvers in the region.

- The exercise has been launched from the port city of Chabahar in southeastern Iran

Why is the Iran-China-Russia naval exercise significant?

- The Gulf of Oman, where the exercise is being held, is a critical waterway as it connects the Arabian Sea to the Strait of Hormuz, a 33-km wide passage which opens into the Persian Gulf — located between energy producers Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman (the exclave of Musandam), and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

- A fifth of the world's oil passes through this waterway — around 30% of all sea-borne crude oil globally.

- Under President Trump, Washington in 2018 withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions on Tehran. The US has since pushed for Iranian energy sales to be cut off, crippling Iran's economy.

- The three-nation drill is expected to further provoke Washington

- The military exercises further aims to "deepen exchange and cooperation between the navies of the three countries.

17. U.S. House passes Bill seeking action over Uighur crackdown

Context

The U.S. House of Representatives have overwhelmingly approved a Bill that would require the Trump administration to toughen its response to China's crackdown on its Muslim minority, drawing swift condemnation from Beijing.

Details:

- The Uighur Act of 2019 is a stronger version of a Bill that angered Beijing when it passed the Senate in September 2019.

- It calls on President Donald Trump to impose sanctions for the first time on a member of China's powerful politburo (executive committee for communist parties).

- The Uighur Bill, requires the U.S. President to condemn abuses against Muslims and call for the closure of mass detention camps in the northwestern region of Xinjiang.

- It calls for sanctions against senior Chinese officials who, it says, are responsible.

- The revised Bill still has to be approved by the Republican-controlled Senate before being sent to Mr. Trump for approval.

China's response:

- China's Foreign Ministry called the Bill a malicious attack against China.

- "We urge the U.S. to immediately correct its mistake, to stop the above Bill on Xinjiang from becoming law, to stop using Xinjiang as a way to interfere in China's domestic affairs," said the statement, attributed to the Ministry's spokeswoman.

- Commenting on the repercussions the bill would have on the trade negotiations between the two countries, the spokeswoman hinted a strong counter reaction to the move.

Who are Uighurs?

- The Uighurs live in Xinjiang, the largest and most western of China's administrative regions, which is surrounded by Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

- They are Muslim, speak a language close to Turkish, and are culturally and ethnically closer to Central Asia than the rest of China.

- Till recently, they were the majority in Xinjiang, but massive registered and unregistered settlements of Han Chinese and heavy troop deployments have likely changed that situation.

- International concern has been growing about what China is doing to its Uighur population, a Muslim minority community concentrated in the country's northwestern Xinjiang province. Reports have emerged of China 'homogenising' the Uighurs, who claim closer ethnic ties to Turkey and other central Asian countries than to China, by brute — and brutal — force.

- Around a million Uighurs, Kazakhs and other Muslims have been bundled into internment camps, where they are allegedly being schooled into giving up their identity, and assimilate better in the communist country dominated by the Han Chinese.

18. An Asian engine driven by India and China

Context

- The emerging uncertainty in global affairs and the need for closer collaboration between India and China.

Fundamental transformation in global affairs:

- The world today is undergoing a fundamental transformation and there are several facets to the emerging uncertainty.

- Traditional and non-traditional security threats (economic and military competition, climate change, piracy, radical ideology, cyber threats, drug and human trafficking, and energy and food security) have grown in magnitude.

- Power, whether economic, political or military, is fractured. There have been increasing multi polarity and the associated power struggles. There is less multilateralism but greater multi-polarity. Hedging and multi-alignment are the order of the day.

- Trade and technology are at the heart of a new round of competition and contestation.

- Nationalism and regionalism are on the rise and this threatens to disrupt global cooperation.

Obstacles ahead:

Lack of effective international institutions:

- At the broadest level, the inadequacies of the post-World War II international institutions are showing up because of the complexities and uncertainties characterising global politics and the economy today. The old consensus is fraying and a new consensus is yet to emerge.

- The withdrawal of US from major international institutions like the UNESCO and the Paris climate deal has had a debilitating effect on these institutions and deals. This threatens to derail the progress made in these domains.

Rising risk of protectionism:

- The liberal trading order has encountered protectionism in the form of tariff and non-tariff barriers, which explains why India's service exports which touch $29.6 billion in the U.S. market, and pharma products, especially generic drugs, which account for 20% of global generic medicines, have barely been able to make a mark in the Chinese market.

- There is a looming danger for developing countries on account of 'zero-sum' mercantilism and rising protectionism in western economies. There is no doubt that the U.S.-China trade war has been disruptive.

Economic pressures:

- Geopolitical considerations are increasingly driving trade and investment decisions and the growing uncertainty has dampened the business sentiments.

- Worryingly, the global economy is likely to grow at its slowest pace in a decade, at 3% in 2019.

- Today, the momentum in manufacturing activity has weakened to levels unseen since the global financial crisis. Investor and business confidence even in emerging markets is at a low ebb. Low productivity growth and ageing demographics in advanced economies have further compounded the problem.

- Most countries appear to be financially vulnerable. Key anchors in the global economy, including China, are experiencing a slowdown.

Rise of China:

- The geo-economic forces unleashed by China's economic rise are redefining the geo-strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. There is a scope for power play in the region which threatens to derail peace and stability of the region.

Uncertainty in Europe:

- Europe is in the throes of a major readjustment in the context of Brexit. This might apart from affecting the economy of the world, lead to instability in this otherwise peaceful and developed part of the world.

Growing relevance of Asia:

- Even amidst the downturn in global economy and rising uncertainty, Asia is witnessing the simultaneous rise of several powers.

- Global engines of economic growth over the past three decades have shifted to Asia, first to the Asia-Pacific and now, more broadly, to the Indo-Pacific region that includes South Asia.

- The continent, home to over half the global population, has emerged as the new fulcrum for geo-economic and geo-strategic realignments. High economic growth rates across the region are accompanied by some of the highest military expenditures in the world.

Growing relevance of China and India Relations:

Shaping trade, economy of the world:

- Both India and China are expected to contribute to global economic growth in the future.

- India is also transforming into a knowledge-based, skill-supported and technology-driven society. A liberal FDI regime combined with a youthful demographic profile makes India an attractive destination.

Common concerns:

- Today, the global energy market is more favourable to consumers in the face of a supply side glut. OPEC and non-OPEC oil and gas producers have come together to prevent a fall in energy prices. This should be a common concern for China and India. As two of the world's biggest importers of oil and gas, the two nations should have a joint consultative mechanism to protect the interests of consumers.

Bilateral relations:

- India attaches great importance to its relations with China, a large trade partner in goods. Since 2015, there has been a spurt in Chinese FDI in India (at around $8 billion).

- There is great scope for China to participate in flagship initiatives such as the 'Smart Cities Mission' and 'Skill India' programmes.

- As the world's second-largest economy, China can and must play a constructive role globally and within Asia to help the world return to higher growth rates.

Concerns:

- Bilateral trade Between India and China today is approximately $95 billion. India faces a huge and rising trade imbalance. The decision at the Mamallapuram Summit, in October, to set up a new mechanism to discuss the trade imbalance, is aimed at addressing this issue.

- Cheaper imports from China, which practices "state capitalism", threaten domestic manufacturing in India. Movement of talent and the services sector, important for India, have not received satisfactory attention. Many of these concerns are central to India's position on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

- As China's presence in South Asia grows, greater transparency in its actions and closer consultations with India are also necessary to help allay concerns. China should also be mindful of its forays into the Exclusive Economic Zone of others.

Cooperation in multilateral forums:

- As members of several multilateral institutions, India and China are in a unique position to give shape to their economic destinies. There are suggestions that the era of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)-anchored, Most Favoured Nation (MFN)-based regime is drawing to a close and that the future lies in a web of free trade agreements. However, there is still scope for India and China to work together to strengthen the WTO.

- The RCEP should have a wider ambit, including trade in services. Many countries (especially Japan which still boasts of being the world's second-largest developed economy) have openly favoured a more accommodating position that addresses India's concerns and facilitates its joining the RCEP. China too should pro-actively work to ensure India's membership.

Joint projects:

- Beyond jointly training Afghan diplomats under the "India-China Plus One" framework, China and India could explore the potential to work together on Asian infrastructure and connectivity development on the basis of equality and an open and transparent model under the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Conclusion:

- There is enough room for all Asian countries to prosper together. An Asia of rivalry will hold back the region's development. It is the Asia of cooperation that will shape the coming century of the world.

- Asia's rise is linked to peace and stability and a vibrant bilateral relationship between India and China is a must for this to happen.

ART AND CULTURE

1. **Dada Saheb Phalke Award**

   - It is an annual award given by the Indian government for lifetime contribution to Indian cinema.

   - It was instituted in 1969, the birth centenary year of Dadasaheb Phalke, considered the father of Indian cinema. Phalke directed the first Indian film 'Raja Harischandra' (a silent film released in 1913).

   - The award is given along with the National Film Awards every year.

   - The first awardee was Devika Rani (1969).

   - The award comprises a Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus medallion), a shawl and a cash prize of Rs.10,00,000.

   Context:

   - President of India presents the Dada Saheb Phalke Award to Amitabh Bachchan.

2. **Hornbill Festival**

   - The Hornbill Festival is a celebration held every year from 1 to 10 December, in Nagaland

   - To encourage inter-tribal interaction and to promote cultural heritage of Nagaland, the Government of Nagaland organizes the Hornbill Festival every year. It is also called the 'Festival of Festivals".

   - The Festival is named after the hornbill, the globally respected bird and which is displayed in folklore in most of the state's tribes.

   - The week long festival unites one and all in Nagaland and people enjoy the colourful performances, crafts, sports, food fairs, games and ceremonies.

   - Traditional arts which include paintings, wood carvings, and sculptures are also on display.

   - One of the major highlights of this festival is the Hornbill International Rock Festival, which is held at Indira Gandhi Stadium; local and international rock bands perform

   - The Hornbill Festival has contributed significantly to enhancing the state's tourism brand.

3. **Purana Qila**

   - Purana Qila is one of the oldest forts belonging to the Mughal era.

   - The massive gateway and walls of the Qila were built by Mughal ruler Humayun and the foundation was laid for the new capital, Dinpanah.

   - The construction was taken forward by Sher Shah Suri, who displaced Humayun.

   - The walls of the Purana Quila are made of enormous red stones having minimal ornamentation and decoration.

   - The major attractions inside the fort are the Qila-i-Kuhna mosque (an example of Indo-Islamic architecture) of Sher Shah Suri, Sher Mandal (a tower, which is traditionally associated with the death of Humayun), a stepwell and the remains of the extensive rampart, which has three gates.

   - The unique features of Indo-Islamic architecture like horseshoe-shaped arches, bracketed openings, marble inlay, carving, etc. are very prominent in the structure.

   - Excavations have revealed that the Purana Quila stands at the site of Indraprastha, the capital of the Pandavas.

   - Excavations near one of the walls of the fort show that the site had been occupied since 1000 B.C.

   - The PGW (Painted Gray Ware Pottery) recovered from the site date back to around 1000 B.C.

   Context:

   - The Government/Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will set up a museum at Purana Quila to house objects excavated from across India which have been lying in the Central Antiquities Collection (CAC).

   Details:

   - The proposed museum will open in April 2020.

   - The museum will be housed in the arched cells of Purana Quila.

   - The objective to open a new museum is to display antiquities such as tools, potteries, terracotta, beads of semi-precious stones, sculptures, architectural fragments, etc. for the general public, students and research scholars.

- The objects to be displayed date from the pre-historic period to the medieval era such as Harappan seals, pre-historic animal and human figurines, coins and pottery from the Mughal period among several others.

- This is the third such museum at the Purana Qila.

4. Vivekananda Rock Memorial

- The Vivekananda Rock Memorial is situated offshore around 500 m east of the mainland of Vavathurai, Kanyakumari, in the southernmost tip of India.

- It comprises of two important structures, the 'Shripada Mandapam' and the 'Vivekananda Mandapam'.

- The construction of the memorial took six years and was completed in 1970 in honour of the great Indian monk and reformer Swami Vivekananda.

- It is believed that after meditating for three days and three nights at the rock, Swami Vivekananda attained enlightenment and transformed himself from a simple monk to an enlightened being.

Context:

- President addresses Golden Jubilee celebrations of Vivekananda Rock Memorial

5. Zonal Cultural Centers

Context:

- The Government of India has set up seven Zonal Cultural Centers to promote inter-state cultural development programmes.

Objective

- The Zonal Cultural Centers have been set up with the prime objective of creative development of Indian culture in the different regions and for building up a sense of cultural cohesiveness in the country.

- The mandate of the centers requires it to take culture, hitherto, the preserve of the elite and affluent, to the doorsteps of the common man.

- The obligation of the Ministry of Culture is to protect, preserve and promote various forms of folk art and culture throughout the country.

To meet this objective, the Government of India has set up seven Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCCs)

ZCC	HQ
Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre	Kolkata
North Central Zone Cultural Centre	Prayagraj
North East Zone Cultural Centre	Dimapur
North Zone Cultural Centre	Patiala
South Central Zone Cultural Centre	Nagpur
South Zone Cultural Centre	Thanjavur
West Zone Cultural Centre	Udaipur

- These ZCCs engage cultural troupes from different States to participate in the major festivals under the National Cultural Exchange Programme (NCEP). They also organize various cultural festivals and programmes on a regular basis in all the States/UTs of India.

Structure

- The Zonal Cultural Centers has been set up as registered autonomous bodies under the Societies Registration Act.

- They are governed by a governing body which is headed by the Governor of the state in which the Zonal Cultural Centre has it's headquarter.

Significance

- The ZCCs work for national unity through cultural integration.

- It will promote inter-State cultural development programme with a view to increase harmony among people of various States and communities.

- The ZCCs work towards promotion of art forms by improving opportunities for the artists for performance and also by documenting their art forms

- The Ministry of Culture organizes Festivals of India abroad to promote Indian Culture. These festivals are organized through Indian Missions abroad.

  * The cultural events during Festivals of India organized abroad are attended by large number of people in general, VIPs, Government officials, academicians, business community and members of Diplomatic Corps etc.

  * These events provide opportunity to the local people to watch live performances of different art forms thereby leaving long-lasting impact on them.

6. Earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India found in A.P

Context:

- In a significant find, the Epigraphy Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India has discovered the earliest epigraphic evidence so far for the Saptamatrika cult.

- It is also the earliest Sanskrit inscription to have been discovered in South India till date.

Details:

- Saptamatrikas are a group of seven female deities worshipped in Hinduism as personifying the energy of their respective consorts.

- The inscription is in Sanskrit and in Brahmi characters and was issued by the Satavahana King Vijaya in 207 A.D.

- The inscription was discovered in the Chebrolu village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh.

- The inscription was first copied and studied, and it transpired that it records the construction of a prasada (temple), a mandapa and consecration of images on the southern side of the temple by a person named Kartika for the merit of the king at the temple of Bhagavathi (Goddess) Saktimatruka (Saptamatrika) at Tambrape; Tambrape being the ancient name of Chebrolu.

- There are references of Saptamatrika worship in the early Kadamba copper plates and the early Chalukya and Eastern Chalukya copper plates. But the new discovery predates them by almost 200 years.

- The verification of all the available records proved that the Chebrolu inscription of Satavahana king Vijaya issued in his 5th regnal year – 207 A.D. — is also the earliest datable Sanskrit inscription from South India so far.

7. Tansen Samaroh

- It is the oldest and esteemed classical music festival celebrated every year in the month of December in Behat village of Gwalior district, Madhya Pradesh.

- The event is organized near the tomb of Tansen by the Academy of the department of culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh. Artists from all over India are invited to deliver vocal and instrumental performances.

- Tansen Samaroh is organized jointly by Ustad Alauddin Khan Kala Evam Sangeet Academy and Department Of Culture, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh.

Mian Tansen

- He was a prominent Indian classical music composer, musician and vocalist, known for a large number of compositions,

- He was among the Navaratnas (nine jewels) at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jalal ud-din Akbar. Akbar gave him the title Mian, an honorific, meaning learned man..

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation

Context:

- The space agencies of BRICS nations have been negotiating a Framework Agreement to formalize the cooperation on building a 'virtual constellation of remote sensing satellites', made up of satellites contributed by BRICS space agencies.

Details:

- The plan was first mooted by China to improve co-operation around natural disasters.

  * But it took shape later when BRICS space agencies agreed to build a "virtual constellation of remote sensing satellites".

- The Indian space Ministry has indicated major progress in terms of establishing a BRICS satellite for various applications including natural resources management and disaster management.

- The purpose of the proposed virtual constellation is to get access to satellite remote sensing data, which could be used by the individual BRICS nations for various applications including natural resources management and disaster management.

- Currently, only Brazil, Russia, India and China have remote-sensing satellites in the sun-synchronous orbit, and they will provide data to South Africa, which does not have a satellite of its own.

2. National Children's Science Congress

- The National Children's Science Congress is a flagship programme of the National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India.

- The theme of the 2019 Congress is "Science, Technology and Innovation for a Clean, Green and Healthy Nation".

- It is a platform for children to carry out small research activities at the micro-level.

- The seeds of this programme were planted in Madhya Pradesh by an NGO called Gwalior Science Centre. It was later adopted by the NCSTC, DST for extending it to the national level.

- The programme aims at spreading the concept of the method of science among children with their project activities adopting the process of learning through doing.

- The mandate of participation is that the children will carry out a project on a particular topic in relation to a focal theme and several sub-themes decided for a period of two consecutive years. The study is to be carried out in the neighbourhood of the children where they live or study. It is a group activity on a local specific problem using simple method of science.

- The Children's Science Congress was launched as a nationwide programme in 1993. The first Congress was in New Delhi with the theme "Know your Environment".

Objectives:

- The primary objective of the NCSC is to make a forum for the children of 10-17 years age group, both from formal school system as well as from out of school, to showcase their creativity and innovativeness and more particularly their ability to solve a societal problem experienced locally using the method of science under the supervision of a Guide Teacher.

- It emboldens the children to question many aspects of progress and development around and can also express their findings in their own choice of language.

Context:

- The Vice President (VP) addressed the National Children's Science Congress in Thiruvananthapuram.

3. RISAT-2BR1

- RISAT-2BR1 is a radar imaging earth observation satellite weighing about 628 kg.

- The satellite will provide services in the field of Agriculture, Forestry and Disaster Management.

- The mission life of RISAT-2BR1 is 5 years.

- It is part of India's RISAT series of SAR imaging spacecrafts

- The RISAT-2BR1 is follow on to RISAT-2B

RISAT

- RISAT (Radar Imaging Satellite) is a series of Indian radar imaging reconnaissance satellites built by ISRO. They provide all-weather surveillance using Synthetic Aperture Radars (SAR).

- The RISAT series are the first all-weather earth observation satellites from ISRO. Previous Indian observation satellites relied primarily on optical and spectral sensors which were hampered by cloud cover.

- The RISAT, which was first deployed in orbit in 2009 as the RISAT-2, uses Synthetic Aperture Radars (SAR) to provide Indian forces with all-weather surveillance and observation, which are crucial to notice any potential threat or malicious activity around the nation's borders.

- While RISAT-1 was expected to be released first, the incident of the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai meant that the deployment of the satellite needed to be accelerated.

- With the C-band SAR, being built by India, not being ready in time, India deployed the RISAT-2, which was based on the X-band SAR -- technology built by the Israel Aerospace Industries.

Significance

- The RISAT-2BR1 satellite uses the same SAR band, and will further improve India's imaging reconnaissance abilities

Context:

- India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, in its fiftieth flight (PSLV-C48), successfully launched RISAT-2BR1

4. CHEOPS (CHaracterising ExOPlanets Satellite)

- It is a European space telescope to determine the size of known extrasolar planets, which will allow the estimation of their mass, density, composition and their formation

- CHEOPS is said to study about 500 of the known exoplanets out of 4000 exoplanets during a 3 and a half-year period.

What are exoplanets?

- All of the planets that are in the solar system are known to orbit around the Sun. The planets that orbit around other stars are called exoplanets.

- Exoplanets can't be seen by using a telescope as they can be difficult to see since they are hidden by the bright glare of the stars in which they orbit.

- Because of this, astronomers use other ways to study and detect these distant planets. They look for exoplanets by looking at the effects that these planets have on the stars they orbit.

Significance

- It will seek to better understand what these planets are made of.

- It is an important step in the quest to unravel the conditions required for extraterrestrial life, but also to unlock the origins of our home planet.

- The mission would allow experts to measure the quantity of light reflected from the planets, which in turn could reveal new insights about their atmosphere or surface.

Context

- The Characterising ExOPlanets Satellite (CHEOPS) blasted off from Kourou, French Guiana

SECURITY AND DEFENCE

1. **Inner Line Permit (ILP)**

    -   The ILP is an official travel document required to visit four Northeastern states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland.

    -   The document is essential to allow entry for either travel or work. Both the duration of stay and the areas allowed to be accessed for any non-native are determined by the ILP.

    -   Different types of permits are issued based on the purpose of a visit.

    History

    -   The Inner Line Permit is an extension of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act 1873. The Britishers framed regulations restricting entry in certain designated areas.

    -   This was done to protect the Crown's interest in certain states by preventing "British subjects" (Indians) from trading within these regions. In 1950, the term 'British subjects' was replaced with 'Citizens of India'.

    -   Today, all nonnatives require the permit. This was done to protect the indigenous tribal communities of these states from exploitation.

    How is it obtained?

    -   An ILP is issued by the state government concerned.

    -   It can be obtained after applying either online or physically. It states the dates of travel and also specifies the particular areas in the state which the ILP holder can travel to.

    Protected Area Permit (PAP)

    -   The Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order 1958 states that a Protected Area Permit (PAP) is required for non-Indian citizens to visit certain areas in India.

    -   Certain requirements have to be fulfilled in order to get this permit.

        *   The permit is valid for group tourists consisting of two or more persons only.

        *   The permit is valid for the specific tourist circuit/ route and the specific entry / exit point. No area other than the ones indicated in the permit shall be visited.

        *   The permit holder must keep sufficient number of photocopies of the permit as he/she may be required to deposit a copy at each point of entry/ exit.

        *   The permit holder shall not stay in the restricted/ protected area after the expiry of the permit.

        *   Citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals of Pakistani origin, shall not be issued a special permit without the prior approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

    Protected Areas are located in the following States:-

    -   Whole of Arunachal Pradesh

    -   Parts of Himachal Pradesh

    -   Parts of Jammu & Kashmir

    -   Whole of Manipur

    -   Whole of Mizoram

    -   Whole of Nagaland

    -   Parts of Rajasthan

    -   Whole of Sikkim (partly in Protected Area and partly in Restricted Area)

    -   Parts of Uttarakhand

    Restricted Area Permit (RAP)

    -   The Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order 1963 states that a Restricted Area Permit (RAP) is required for non-Indians to visit certain areas in India.

    -   RAP is required for all visits to the

        *   Union Territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and

        *   Parts of the state of Sikkim.

    -   Unlike PAP, RAP is generally available for individual travelers and can be issued by overseas embassies.

    -   Indian citizens do not need special permission to visit Restricted Areas.

    Amended Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Bill (MRRSA) 2019

    -   The Amended Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Bill (MRRSA) 2019, similar to the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system, was passed by the Meghalaya Cabinet in the form of an ordinance in November 2019 and is still awaiting the Governor's assent.

    -   In the backdrop of protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Northeastern states of India, Meghalaya has demanded that some "protection" on the lines of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) be also implemented in the State.

    -   The government has stated that the proposed law does not bar outsiders from visiting the State. It is envisaged as an information collection mechanism and anyone who wants to visit Meghalaya has to register beforehand online or on arriving. This would ensure not only the security of the State and but also of the visiting person.

2. NAVARMS

- NAVARMS is the only international seminar and exhibition on Naval Weapon Systems conducted in the country to invite all the stakeholders in life cycle management of Naval Weapons and provide a common platform to share their views and concerns.

- It provided an opportunity for the exchange of ideas, create awareness and identify emerging prospects for Indian/International defence industry in the domain of naval weapon systems.

Context:

- The fourth edition of International Seminar cum Exhibition on Naval Weapon Systems 'NAVARMS-19' with the theme "Make in India - Fight Category: Opportunities and Imperatives" was recently held in Delhi.

The objective of the seminar is

- To identify means and ways for energizing Indian Navy's Fight category sector.

- To seek Industry support for capital and revenue requirements.

- To leverage the potential of start-ups and incubators for Defence R&D and Product realization

- To identify any impediments to a mutually beneficial partnership between the industry and the government

3. Navy Day

Context:

- The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has saluted the Indian Navy personnel on the occasion of Navy Day

About Navy Day

- The day is celebrated to commemorate the launch of Operation Trident by the Indian Navy against Pakistan on 4th December 1971.

  * During the 1971 India-Pakistan war, Indian Navy had played a significant role in the bombing of Karachi harbour, the stronghold of the Pakistani Navy.

  * In the attack, the Indian Navy sank four vessels and ravaged the Karachi harbour fuel fields.

  * In this operation, three missile boats of Indian Navy, INS Nirghat, INS Nipat and INS Veer had played a pivotal role in this mission.

- The day is observed to promote the marine border security of India and also to encourage good relations with other countries through joint exercises, relief missions and humanitarian missions.

4. National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)

Context:

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has formulated and is implementing NAPDDR for 2018-2025.

Details:

- The Plan aims at the reduction of adverse consequences of drug abuse through a multi-pronged strategy.

- The activities under the NAPDDR include, among others, awareness generation programmes in schools/colleges/Universities, workshops/seminars/with parents, community-based peer led interactions intervention programmes for vulnerable adolescent and youth in the community, provisioning of treatment facilities and capacity building of service providers.

- The Ministry also implements a "Central Sector Scheme of Assistance for Prevention of Alcoholism and Substance (Drug) Abuse" under which financial assistance is provided to eligible Non-Governmental Organizations based on the recommendations of State Governments/UT Administrations for running Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts to provide composite/integrated services for the rehabilitation of addicts including adolescents.

5. Pacific Air Chiefs Symposium

- This symposium was attended by Air Chiefs from across the Indo-Pacific region who provided perspectives on common challenges faced and on shared mutual interests while focusing on relevant topics like 'Regional Security', 'Domain Awareness', 'Multi-Domain Awareness', Interoperability' and 'HADR'.

- The symposium discussed on the combined effort required to maintain peace and security within the region.

- The conference is intended to further strengthen the existing cooperation between the Air Forces of the participating countries and also to pave the way for enhanced interaction in the future.

Context

- Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar, Chief of the Air Staff participated in the Pacific Air Chiefs' Symposium 2019 (PACS 2019) at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

Details

- The theme was 'A Collaborative Approach to Regional Security'.

- In addition to the host country USA, Air Chiefs from 20 countries are present at the Symposium.

6. Pinaka Missile System

Context:

- Pinaka Missile System developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) was successfully flight-tested from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the Odisha coast.

About the Pinaka Missile System:

- The Pinaka is an Artillery Missile System capable of striking into enemy territory up to a range of 75 kilometres with high precision.

- The Pinaka MK-II Rocket is modified as a missile by integrating with the Navigation, Control and Guidance System to improve the end accuracy and enhance the range.

- The Navigation system of the missile is also aided by the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS).

- The missile system has been jointly developed by various DRDO Laboratories.

7. Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM)

- It is a Short Range Surface to Air Missile system designed to protect moving armoured columns from aerial attacks.

  * This missile is an all-weather, all-terrain missile equipped with electronic counter measures against jamming by aircraft radars.

- The entire weapon system is configured on highly mobile platforms and is capable of providing air defence on the move.

- The missile can be mounted on a truck and is stored in a canister.

- It comprises of fully automated command and control, active array battery multi-function radar and launcher.

  * Both the radars are four-walled having 360-degree coverage with search on move and track on move capability.

- QRSAM uses solid-fuel propellant and has a range of 25-30 km.

Context

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation has successfully conducted twin tests of the QRSAM from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur off the Odisha coast.

8. Sea Vigil-19

- A pan India Coastal Defence Exercise, was conducted along the entire coastline and Exclusive Economic Zone of India.

- Significance: The exercise was conducted with the aim of simultaneously activating all agencies involved in the coastal security construct, and to identify gaps and mitigating measures.

9. StrandHogg- Android vulnerable to cyberattack: MHA

Context:

- The Union Home Ministry has sent an alert to all States warning them about the vulnerability of the Android operating system to a bug called 'StrandHogg' that allows real-time malware applications to pose as genuine applications and access user data of all kind.

Details

App icon of a legitimate app is clicked by the victim.

Instead of seeing the legitimate app, the malware is displayed and can now ask for any permission while pretending to be the legitimate app.

The victim is unknowingly giving permissions to the hacker. Victim is directed to the legitimate app.

- An app in which the user is already logged in asking him/her to login again is another anomaly pointing to the possibilities of a cyberattack. Once users approve such requests, the malware would instantly access the mobile phone or tablet for specific purposes.

Cause of concern

- These malware can then potentially listen to their conversations, access photo album, read/send messages, make calls, record conversations and get login credentials to various accounts.

- This apart, things that such malware can access include private images, files, contact details, call logs, and location information.

Steps taken

- An alert has been sent to all senior police officials to sensitise them to the threat.

- Steps will be taken to create awareness among the public on the vulnerability of Android to 'StrandHogg'

10. VC 11184

- It will be the first of its kind Ocean Surveillance Ship being built as part of the efforts under the NDA government to strengthen the country's strategic weapons programme.

- It is built with an objective to provide a robust shield to India's nuclear missile shield

  * One, track missiles using the two sensors on-board, the X-Band Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) primary radar and S-Band AESA secondary radar.

  * Two, gather electronic intelligence.

- It has the capacity to carry 300-strong crew with hi-tech gadgets and communication equipment, powered by two diesel engines, and a large deck capable of helicopter landing.

- The project which was launched in 2014 directly under the supervision of the National Technical Research Organisation, the Prime Minister's Office and the National Security Advisor

Significance

- There are only four other countries - the US, Russia, China and France - that have similar vessels in their arsenal

  * With this ship, India will join the likes of the Russia and China, as one of the few countries with advanced ocean capabilities

Context

- India's first missile tracking ship being built at Hindustan Shipyard Limited.

- Considered a "topmost secret project", a lot of confidentiality is being maintained in executing the project costing about ₹750 crore.

11. Limit deputation of IPS officers in paramilitary at 25%: RS panel

Context:

- A report of the 15-member committee with respect to functioning of the Border Guarding Forces, was submitted in the Rajya Sabha.

- The Rajya Sabha committee has objected to the overuse of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) for rigorous internal security and election-related duties to the extent that even the reserved battalions are deployed not giving them enough time for rest and recovery.

Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)

The Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) refer to the uniform nomenclature of security forces in India under the authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The seven security forces under CAPF are as follows:

- Assam Rifles

- Border Security Force (BSF)

- Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)

- Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)

- Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)

- National Security Guard (NSG)

- Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)

Recommendations:

- To boost the morale of the CAPFs, the committee insisted on limiting the deputation of officers from the IPS and the armed forces to CAPFs at 25% and the CAPFs cadres should be given the opportunity to become the Director-General of respective forces.

- The committee noted that the defence forces personnel are being paid Military Service Pay in view of the risk to life and social and family isolation and argued that the CAPF also deserves similar incentive in the form of Paramilitary Service Pay as they also face similar risks and isolation.

  * Noting the response of the MHA that the 7th Pay Commission and the Committee on Allowance did not agree to such special pay, the committee insisted on doing the needful.

- Referring to suicides in the CAPFs, the committee urged the Ministry to put in place an institutional mechanism with representatives of the MHA, the Bureau of Police Research and Development, heads of various forces and experts in public health, mental health, psychology and psychiatry to address the issue.

12. Navy plans 24 submarines to strengthen fleet

Context:

- The report submitted by the Navy to the parliamentary panel.

Details:

- In the report tabled in December 2019, the Navy has stated that there are presently 15 conventional submarines and two nuclear submarines in its fleet. The Navy has two nuclear submarines INS Arihant and INS Chakra, with the latter being leased from Russia.

- To strengthen its underwater fleet, the Navy plans to build 24 submarines, including six nuclear attack submarines and another 18 conventional submarines.

- Along with the Arihant Class SSBNs which are nuclear-powered submarines equipped with nuclear missiles, the Indian Navy has plans to build six nuclear attack submarines. They are also planned to be built indigenously in partnership with private sector industries.

- The Ship, Submersible, Ballistic, Nuclear (SSBN) is a nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine.

Concerns:

Rising Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region:

- The Indian Ocean Region, the area of operations of the Navy, has witnessed rising activities of the Chinese Navy. The Chinese have increased their presence in the form of increased patrolling by submarines and ships.

Aging Fleet:

- A majority of the conventional submarines in the Indian Navy are over 25 years old. Thirteen submarines are between 17 and 32 years, impairing the capability of the Indian submarines.

Delay in commissioning new submarines:

- The Indian Navy has been revamping its infrastructure, including procuring new ships to match the naval capabilities of the Chinese.

- Due to the delay in the new submarine construction projects like the six submarines under Project 75 being carried out at Mazagaon Docks, Mumbai, the Defence Ministry has approved Medium Refit cum Life Certification or MRLC of six older submarines.

The sanctions on Russia:

- The MRLC of submarine Sindhuraj was held up due to sanctions imposed by the U.S. on Russia. This has impeded the ability of Russia to submit bank guarantees and the integrity pact under the MRLC framework.

- The sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S. under its Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) have severely impaired the capabilities of Russia to service the submarines it has leased out to India.

13. Terror in London

Context:

- The recent knife attack in London.

Details:

- There have been a series of terror attacks in the U.K., especially in London. In 2017, there were three terrorist attacks in the U.K. with two in London.

- With the latest attack, which the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for, the attacker has succeeded in keeping the threat of terror to London alive.

- The recent knife attack in London is another reminder of the threat lone-wolf assaults pose to public security.

Concerns:

- Radicalisation through Social media remains the primary problem.

- While the British intelligence is often credited for foiling dozens of terrorist attacks since the 2005 London train bombings that killed 56, less sophisticated, less coordinated, often lone-wolf attacks are on the rise.

- The attacker was a convicted terrorist and was released in December 2018 with an electronic tag and conditions after serving half his jail term. But the police still could not prevent the knife attack. The attack points to security, intelligence and systemic failures.

Way forward:

- Need to address the systemic issues like making policing more efficient.

- A good counter-terror plan to tackle both extremism among youth and prevent lone-wolf attacks that often go undetected is the need of the hour.

- Realizing that there is no one-stop solution to terrorism, the state agencies need to work with civil society groups as well as community leaders and have deradicalisation programmes.

14. Special Protection Group (Amendment) Act, 2019

- It amended the Special Protections Group Act, 1988.

- According to the new act the armed force of the Union called the Special Protection Group will provide proximate security to

  * The Prime Minister and members of his immediate family residing with him at his official residence; and

  * Any former Prime Minister and such members of his immediate family as are residing with him at the residence allotted to him, for a period of five years from the date he ceases to hold the office of Prime Minister."

  * It further says when the proximate security is withdrawn from a former Prime Minister, such proximate security shall be withdrawn from members of immediate family of such former Prime Minister.".

What was the need for amendments?

- In the Act of 1988, there was no cut off period for providing SPG protection to former Prime Ministers or members of their immediate families.

- Thus, the number of individuals to be provided SPG cover can potentially become quite large.

- In such a scenario, there can be severe constraint on resources, training and related infrastructure of SPG. This can also impact the effectiveness of SPG in providing adequate cover to the principle protectee, the Prime Minister in office

- The law was amended to focus on core mandate, as the security of the Prime Minister…is of paramount importance for Government, governance and national security.

Background

- In the law of 1988, the provision concerned limits itself to protection for "immediate family members" and does not speak about where they should reside.

- It also guarantees protection for only one year after demitting office, and then continuation of the SPG cover beyond that period based on threat perception reports given by central intelligence agencies.

Context

- Parliament passed the Special Protection Group (Amendment) Bill, 2019 and it received the assent of the President

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Atal Bhoojal Yojana

Context:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Atal Bhujal Yojana to strengthen the institutional framework for participatory groundwater management and bringing about behavioural changes at the community level for sustainable groundwater resource management in seven States.

Details

- It is an initiative for water conservation.
- The scheme aims to improve ground water management in priority areas in the country through community participation.
  - * To The priority areas identified under the scheme fall in the states of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
  - * These States represent about 25% of the total number of over-exploited, critical and semi-critical blocks in terms of ground water in India.
- They also cover two major types of groundwater systems found in India - alluvial and hard rock aquifers- and have varying degrees of institutional readiness and experience in groundwater management.

Objective

- The scheme would seek to bring in innovative and successful practices to revive water bodies, improve ground water levels as well as conserve water
- The emphasis of the scheme will be on recharge (of ground water sources) and efficient use of water by involving people at the local level.
- Ensuring active community participation in groundwater management is among the major objectives of the scheme.
  - * The scheme envisages active participation of the communities in various activities such as formation of Water User Associations, monitoring and disseminating ground water data, water budgeting, preparation and implementation of Gram-Panchayat wise water security plans and IEC activities related to sustainable ground water management.
  - * Community participation is also expected to facilitate bottom-up groundwater planning process to improve the effectiveness of public financing and align implementation of various government programs on groundwater in the participating states.

Stats

- The scheme was conceived to arrest the rampant overuse of groundwater in India. According to a World Bank report, about 245 billion cubic metre of groundwater is abstracted each year in the country. This figure represents about 25% of the total global groundwater abstraction.
- In the past four to five decades, 80% of the rural and urban domestic water supplies in India have been dependent on groundwater, the report says.

Funding

- Of the total outlay of ₹6,000 crore to be provided from 2020-21 to 2024-25, 50% will be in the form of World Bank loan to be repaid by the Central government.
- The remaining part will be made available via Central assistance from regular budgetary support.
- The entire World Bank's loan component and the Central assistance will be passed on to the States as grants.

Significance

The implementation of the scheme is expected to have several positive outcomes like

- better understanding of the ground water regime,
- focused and integrated community based approach for addressing issues related to ground water depletion,
- sustainable ground water management through convergence of on-going and new schemes,
- Adoption of efficient water use practices to reduce ground water use for irrigation and augmentation of ground water resources in targeted areas.

2. Bar-Headed Goose

- The bar-headed goose (Anser indicus) is known to be one of the highest flying birds in the world.
- It can fly at altitudes of 25,000 feet, while migrating over the Himalayas, where oxygen and temperature levels are extremely low.
- The species has been reported as migrating south from Tibet, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Russia before crossing the Himalaya.
- This pale grey bird is distinct from other geese in its genus because of the black bars on its head.
- The summer habitat of the bar-headed goose is high-altitude lakes where it grazes on short grass, whereas the winter habitat is cultivated fields, where it feeds on barley, rice and wheat and could therefore cause crop damage.

- It is classified as "Least Concerned" as per the IUCN Red List.

3. Bandhavgarh National Park

- It is spread at vindhya hills in Madhya Pradesh

- It is known for the Royal Bengal Tigers. The density of the Tiger population at Bandhavgarh is one the highest known in India.

4. Climate Change Performance Index

- Published annually since 2005, the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) is an independent monitoring tool for tracking countries' climate protection performance.

- It aims to enhance transparency in international climate politics and enables comparison of climate protection efforts and progress made by individual countries.

- It is jointly presented by Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute and Climate Action Network (CAN).

- The Climate Change Performance Index report assesses the climate programmes of 57 countries and the European Union, which together account for more than 90 per cent of the global greenhouse gas emissions.

- The index is based on a number of criteria, like the country's energy use, its per capita emissions, its emission reduction targets for 2030, its national and international climate policy, renewable energy deployment and past trends of emissions.

- It assigns every country scores on each of these indicators to assess its overall ranking.

The national performances are assessed based on 14 indicators in the following four categories:

- GHG Emissions (weighting 40%)

- Renewable Energy (weighting 20%)

- Energy Use (weighting 20%)

- Climate Policy (weighting 20%)

India's ranking

- India, for the first time, ranks among the top 10 in 2019 Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)

- However, despite an overall high rating for its Climate Policy performance, experts point out that the Indian government has yet to develop a roadmap for the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies that would consequently reduce the country's high dependence on coal.

How other countries perform?

- Sweden tops the ranking

- EU countries such as Sweden (4th) and Denmark (5th), one of the best climbers, achieve overall high or very high ratings

- China, the largest global emitter slightly improves its ranking in the index to 30th place ("medium").

- Australia (56th out of 61), Saudi Arabia and above all the US perform particularly poor - the US is the worst performer for the first time.

5. CoP 25- Madrid

Context:

- The 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP25, is the 25th United Nations Climate Change Conference. It was held in Madrid, Spain, under the presidency of the Chilean government.

Agenda

- Reduce the Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs)

- To restrict global warming to under 1.5 C.

What was to be discussed at COP25?

- They were aiming to finalize the "rulebook" of the Paris Agreement, the operating manual needed when it takes effect in 2020

- Provisions under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, which would allow countries to meet, in part, domestic mitigation goals through market mechanisms such as Carbon Markets;

- Under the Paris Agreement, all parties committed to not only submitting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for cutting emissions, but also to "recommunicate" or "update" their pledges by the end of 2020.

  * Furthermore, successive NDCs must "represent a progression" and "reflect [each country's] highest possible ambition".

- Compensate poor countries for losses they suffer from rising sea levels and other consequences of climate change.

- Long Term Finance.

1. Kyoto Protocol

- The Kyoto Protocol was based on a notion of global equity and historical contributions to the emissions problem.

- The developed world, it was recognized under the Kyoto Protocol, had been emitting since the last quarter of the 18th century, when the industrial revolution started taking off.

- The emerging economies – Brazil, China, India, South Africa (BASIC countries) – started emitting in any serious quantities in the last quarter of the past century.

- In recognition of this historical fact, the Kyoto Protocol set in place a regime of 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities'.

- This essentially meant that the developed world would have to take on binding emissions-reduction targets, while the developing world would have non-binding targets that it would try to meet as best as it could.

- The idea was that developing countries – whatever their stage of development – would be given the 'emission space' they required to pursue development goals and take their people out of poverty traps.

The US did not sign the Kyoto Protocol because, in the words of former President George Bush after the first environmental conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 "The American way of life was not up for negotiation."

2. Paris Agreement

In December 2015, nearly every country, including all of the world's biggest polluters, came together in Paris and agreed to limit carbon emissions. The Paris accord was designed to keep the planet from warming by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.

It was specifically to get the US on board that the rest of the world decided to forsake the foundation principle of equity enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol. Under the Paris Agreement, which the US signed on to after many a presidential nudge from Barack Obama, thus, the whole idea of 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' was junked and all countries were expected to take on Nationally Determined (that is self-determined) emissions-reduction targets.

What did the US agree to?

- Each country submitted its own climate-action plan laying out how it would achieve these goals.

- Obama signed an executive order confirming the US's adoption of the agreement

But the US Government under Mr. Trump has begun the process of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, notifying the UN of its intention to leave. The US government says the deal puts an "unfair economic burden" on Americans.

3. Article 6- Carbon Markets

Article 6 of the Paris Agreement aims at promoting integrated, holistic and balanced approaches that will assist governments in implementing their NDCs through voluntary international cooperation.

- A carbon market allows countries, or industries, to earn carbon credits for the emission reductions they make in excess of what is required of them.

- These carbon credits can be traded to the highest bidder in exchange of money.

- The buyers of carbon credits can show the emission reductions as their own and use them to meet their own reduction targets.

Three subsections under Article 6

Article 6.2 enables bilateral arrangements for transfer of emissions reductions, while ensuring that they do not double-count the reductions.

Article 6.4 talks about a wider carbon market in which reductions can be bought and sold by anyone.

- The second mechanism would create a new international carbon market, governed by a UN body, for the trading of emissions reductions created anywhere in the world by the public or private sector.

- Carbon credits could, for example, be generated by a new renewable power plant, an emissions-saving factory upgrade or the restoration of an area of forest.

Article 6.8 provides for making 'non-market approaches' available to countries to achieve targets.

- It is not yet very clear what these approaches would constitute, but they could include any cooperative action, like collaboration on climate policy or common taxation, that are not market-based.

Carbon markets also existed under the Kyoto Protocol, which is being replaced by the Paris Agreement next year in 2020. The market mechanisms being proposed under the Paris Agreement are conceptually not very different, but are supposed to have more effective checks and balances, and monitoring and verification processes.

What is contentious?

- The main tussle is over two or three broad issues — what happens to carbon credits earned in the Kyoto regime but not yet sold, what constitutes double-counting, and transparency mechanisms to be put in place.

- Developing countries have several million unsold CERs (certified emission reductions), each referring to one tonne of carbon dioxide-equivalent emission reduced, from the Kyoto regime.

  * India has about 750 million unsold CERs and, along with other similarly placed countries, wants these credits to be valid in the new mechanism too.

- Developed countries are opposing it on the ground that the rules and verification procedures under the Kyoto Protocol were not very robust; they want the new mechanism to start with a clean slate.

4. Lip Service in CoP25

- Delegates from almost 200 nations endorsed a declaration to help poor countries that are suffering the effects of climate change, although they didn't allocate any new funds

- The final declaration called on the "urgent need" to cut planet-heating greenhouse gases in line with the goals of the landmark 2015 Paris climate change accord. That fell far short of promising to enhance countries' pledges to cut planet-heating greenhouse gases next year

* The EU, especially the countries of Western and Northern Europe, which have always been seen as the main drivers of climate negotiations and attempts to cut GHG emissions, have failed to meet their binding emissions-reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2020.

- The Madrid COP has failed to resolve the conundrum of the carbon credit system, which allows countries to reduce their emissions-reduction targets with the help of a complicated system of accumulating and trading in 'carbon credits'. The carbon-credits arrangement is basically a get-out clause for developed countries to buy their way out of reducing emissions.

Conclusion

- Negotiators in Madrid left some of the thorniest issues for the next climate summit in Glasgow in a year, including the liability for damages caused by rising temperatures that developing countries were insisting on.

India

Global climate action:

- India has argued that unless a stocktaking exercise of the fulfilment of various pre-2020 commitments by developed countries (such as those made at Copenhagen, Cancun and Kyoto) showed that they were making significant progress, India would not raise its climate ambition for its next round of Paris Agreement targets due in 2020.

- It is entirely appropriate for countries such as India to insist on not taking on an even more unfair share of the global mitigation burden unless developed countries deliver on the minimal parameter of fulfilling their existing promises.

- It is crucial that India continues to push developed countries in this fashion as the entire global climate action framework has been put in jeopardy by the inaction of big polluters.

Domestic Measures:

- India's own status as a low per capita carbon emitter offers little comfort as its overall emissions are bound to grow. With a low base compared to other major nations, it may well achieve its initial voluntary targets under the Paris Agreement, but a shift away from fossil fuels is inevitable in the longer term.

- As it prepares to face calls for higher ambition in 2020 and beyond, India has to involve its States in mitigation and adaptation efforts.

- Given the higher vulnerability of India to climate change, the death and destruction by frequent storms, floods and droughts should lead to urgent cohesive action.

6. Ganga council

River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016

- The Order lays down a new institutional structure for policy and implementation in fast track manner. It envisages five tier structure

    * National Ganga Council under chairmanship of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.

    * Empowered Task Force (ETF) on river Ganga under chairmanship of Hon'ble Union Minister of Jal Shakti (Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation).

    * National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).

    * State Ganga Committees

    * District Ganga Committees in every specified district bordering river Ganga and its tributaries in the states.

National Ganga Council

- National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) was replaced by National Ganga Council

- It is an Authority under the Chairperson of Hon'ble Prime Minister for overall responsibility for superintendence of pollution prevention and rejuvenation of river Ganga Basin.

    * It is supposed to meet at least once a year with the Prime Minister chairing the session.

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)

NMCG has a two tier management structure and comprises of Governing Council and Executive Committee.

- It empowers NMCG to discharge its functions in an independent and accountable manner.

- Similarly, there is adequate delegation of financial and administrative powers which will distinctly establish NMCG as both responsibility and accountability centre and effectively accelerate the process of project implementation for Ganga Rejuvenation.

- NMCG will comply with the decisions and directions of the National Ganga Council and implement the Ganga Basin Management Plan approved by it; co-ordinate and carry out all activities necessary for rejuvenation and protection of River Ganga and its tributaries.

Significance

- It is expected that the move will ensure effective abatement of pollution and rejuvenation of the River Ganga; maintain ecological flows in the River; impose restrictions on polluting industries; and carry out inspections to ensure compliance.

- In addition, it is proposed to maintain and disseminate data and carry out research on the condition of the river.

7. Green Deal

- It has been announced by the European Commission, with binding targets for member nations to cut emissions by at least 50% by 2030 and go net zero by 2050.

- It wants to come up with a new circular economy action plan. It will include a sustainable product policy in order to use less materials, and ensure products can be reused and recycled.

- Electric vehicles will be further encouraged

- 35% of the EU's research funding will be set aside for climate-friendly technologies

8. Green Good Deeds Initiative

- It is an initiative to promote environmental awareness and to mobilize people's participation for conservation of the environment.

- The Green Good Deeds was launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change.

- It has been launched to protect the environment and promote good living in the country.

- The initiative is about simple, practical steps that students/teachers/citizens can perform in their day-to-day life towards protection of the environment.

- The idea behind this initiative is to sensitise people and students, in particular about climate change and global warming.

Steps taken under this program

- Through the National Green Corps programme, which is one of the components of this scheme, about one lakh fifty thousand Ecoclubs have been established in schools/colleges across the country and nearly 35 lakh students are actively involved in the programmes related to environment protection and conservation.

- Taking forward the Green Good Deeds initiative, the Ecoclubs have been a centre stage for various environment protection and conservation activities like conducting cleanliness drives as part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, plantation drives, awareness on waste minimisation, waste segregation, recycling and reuse etc.

- Various environment awareness programmes are being undertaken by the students like minimizing the use of single-use plastic, celebrating Green Diwali, making of Eco-friendly idols of Ganesh and seed balls, adopting water bodies, beach cleaning, etc

National Green Corps (NGC) Programme

- It was introduced by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India

- It is aimed at spreading environmental awareness among school children by involving them in various environment - related activities.

- NGC School has Eco Clubs which promote environmental discipline and environmental responsibility

- These NGC Students participate in activities related to Biodiversity Conservation, Water Conservation, Energy Conservation, Waste Management and Land Use Planning and Resource Management. Locale specific issues are focused by the NGC Eco Clubs.

Significance

- By participating in environmental activities under the NGC programme, the children would very easily acquire the basic knowledge, skills, values and passion that promote environmental responsibility.

9. India State of Forest Report (ISFR 2019)

- ISFR 2019 is a biennial report published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI)

- The calculations are largely based on satellite data.

- It includes information on forest cover, tree cover, mangrove cover, growing stock inside and outside the forest areas, carbon stock in India's forests, forest types and biodiversity, forest fire monitoring and forest cover in different slopes and altitudes.

Definitions

- As per the report, "forest cover" includes all tree patches which have canopy density more than 10 percent and area of one hectare or more in size, irrespective of their legal status and species composition.

  * Currently, the forest cover in India stands at 7, 12,249 square kilometres.

  * The forest cover constitutes 21.67% of the nation's geographical area.

- The term "Recorded Forest Area" (RFA) is used for lands which have been notified as "forest" under any government Act or rules or recorded as "forest" in the government records.

  * The forest cover within the Recorded Forest Area showed a 330 sq. km decrease, but 'forest' outside such a recorded area increased by 4,306 sq. km.

- Dense Forest: All lands with a forest cover having a canopy density of 40 percent and above.

- Tree cover comprises of tree patches outside the recorded forest area exclusive of forest cover and less than the minimum mappable area (1 ha).

  * The total tree cover in India has grown by 1,212 square kilometres.

  * Tree and forest cover together constitute 25.56% of India's area. This marks an improvement from the last assessment where it stood at 24.39%.

  * The decline in tree cover inside forests is mainly due to the tribal populations getting land titles through the Forest Rights Act. The rise in trees outside the forest area is mainly due to increased tree plantation and afforestation activities.

- Trees Outside Forest (TOF) as "trees existing outside the recorded forest area in the form of block, linear & scattered size of patches".

  * Tree outside forest was found to comprise nearly 29.38 million hectares, which was 36.4% of the total tree and forest cover in the country.

  * Maharashtra possesses the largest share of tree outside forest.

Key stats

- As per the ISFR 2019, the top five states in terms of increase in forest cover are Karnataka (1,025 sq. km.), Andhra Pradesh (990 sq. km.), Kerala (823 sq. km.), Jammu & Kashmir (371 sq. km.) and Himachal Pradesh (334 sq km).

- In terms of area, Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.

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

- The ISFR 2019 also showed that the mangrove cover in the country has increased by 54 sq. km. as compared to the previous assessment.

  * The maximum increase was in Gujarat which recorded an increase of 37 sq. km followed by Maharashtra (16 sq. km.) and Odisha (8 sq. km.) but it marked a decrease of mangrove cover in Tamil Nadu (four sq. km.), West Bengal (two sq. km.) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands (one sq. km.).

The sharp decline in Northeastern states

- The sharpest decline in the forest cover among the states was recorded in the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram.

- The loss in the forest cover in the North East is attributed primarily due to the traditional farming practice of Shifting Cultivation.

- The decline in the forest cover in the northeastern states isn't an urgent concern given the fact that they have a much higher proportion of forest than most other States in India.

10. Invasive Alien Species- Fish in troubled waters

Context:

- Reports of increasing instances of invasive alien species.

Details:

- Climate change and unprecedented floods resulting from cloud bursts have facilitated the introduction of aquatic invasive alien species into new habitats in India.

- Human actions have also contributed towards the introduction of alien species.

Concerns:

Increasing Instances of Invasive alien species:

- A study from the University of Kerala revealed the role of the 2018 floods in introducing the most dangerous fish species into Kerala's wetlands. The authors said that exotic fishes such as arapaima and alligator gar were reported or caught by the residents after the floods. These are illegally imported fish that are reared by ornamental and commercial fish traders across India.

- Researchers say that during heavy floods, invasive alien fishes which are illegally farmed in fragile systems, including domestic aquarium tanks, ponds, lakes and abandoned quarries, effortlessly escape from captivity and enter nearby wetlands.

- Apart from being commercially important exotic species, ornamental fishes such as guppy, piranha, suckermouth, blue perch, goldfish and platy have been recorded in rivers, lakes, traditional village ponds and other inland freshwater bodies.

Effects of Invasive alien species:

- The invasive alien species slowly begin to wipe out local diversity and the economy by altering the functions of the ecosystem. This phenomenon threatens ecosystems, habitats and native species.

1. A study from Tamil Nadu:

- A team of researchers found that the exotic ornamental Amazon sailfin catfish poses a serious threat to the native fish species of Vandiyur Lake, Madurai.

- They reported that the biomass of the Amazon sailfin catfish is statistically significant compared to the indigenous varieties. This clearly shows the negative impact of this exotic aquarium fish on inland aquaculture in terms of diminished production/catch of edible fish.

- Further, sailfin catfish species do not hold any commercial value; therefore, people discard the species on the banks of the lake where it is not even scavenged by other animals and birds. Thus more than 15 exotic ornamental species have successfully established a reproductive population in Tamil Nadu's freshwater bodies

2. National scenario:

- India is endowed with 2,319 species of finfish. Studies from several parts of the country show that the diversity of freshwater fish is depleting at an alarming pace due to the invasion of commercially important and ornamental exotic fish species.

- Many native species of India, especially Indian major carps in various riverine systems, have been affected because of the invasion of exotic fish species such as Nile tilapia, African catfish, Thai pangus and common carp. This has accelerated the extinction of natural varieties from local water bodies.

Lack of regulation:

- Despite the increased instances of invasive alien species and the awareness of their detrimental impact, no State or Union Territory has any strong policy or law on the illegal rearing, breeding and trading of such invasive ornamental and commercially important fish species.

Non-recognition of the problem:

- During the monsoon, government officials release details about the amount of rainfall, the water level in reservoirs, and how the flood paralyzed essential services including transport, communication and electricity. But there is no information about biodiversity loss and the impact of the flood on freshwater diversity.

- Governments have focused on strengthening the state disaster response forces, identifying vulnerable sites, but have not focused on framing an aquatic biodiversity conservation policy.

- Tamil Nadu which faces the risk of invasive alien species has not yet framed any policy to control and manage the escape of invasive alien fish species during the monsoon season.

Way forward:

- India needs studies on the threat posed by invasive alien species to ecosystems and a policy to address the problem.

- The affected states should draft an aquatic biodiversity conservation policy in consultation with experts. A national policy on the same would be a useful guiding tool for the states.

- Given the limited information and literature regarding the issue of invasive alien species, the governments should also establish a unique research centre to address this issue.

11. Operation 'Clean Art'

Background

- The mongoose is listed under schedule 2, of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and their hunting, possession, transportation and trade is an offence and punishable.

    * Killing them or plucking their hair attract a jail term of three to seven years and a fine of Rs 10000/-

- They are also protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

- Despite these stringent laws, illegal trade in mongoose continues.

Different species of mongoose

- India has six different species of mongoose are found across the country, including the Indian grey, small Indian, ruddy, crab-eating, stripe-necked and brown mongoose.

- The mongoose is found in different habitats across the country and often hunted by traditional hunting communities like Narikuruvas in Tamil Nadu, Hakki Pakki in Karnataka

- The Indian Grey Mongoose is the most commonly found species and also the most hunted.

    * Its IUCN status is Least concern

Why are they killed?

- The creatures are hunted down in large numbers for their hair for manufacturing paint brushes, which is now a thriving multi-crore industry.

    * An adult mongoose will only have 40 grams of hair on average. About 50 mongooses will have to be killed for a kilo of hair

    * Most often their hair are plucked when they are still alive.

- The reason why painters prefer brushes made of mongoose hair is because they are superior and hold colour better.

Mongooses do a great service to the farmers by eating the mice, rats, frogs, snakes and other insects and keeping a check on their population. The massacre of the mongooses are a guaranteed way to disturb the fragile food chain. But the hunters and the illegal brush makers would have none of it.

Details

- It was the first pan India operation to crackdown on the smuggling of mongoose hair in the country.

- Operation Clean Art was conceived by Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) with the singular aim of ensuring that the mongoose hair brush trade should be closed down across the country.

    * WCCB is a statutory body under the ministry of environment, forests, and climate change (MoEFandCC)

Key Stats

Not a pretty picture

A look at the seizure of paint brushes made of mongoose hair in recent years

	Cases	No. of brushes seized	Arrests
2017	15	62,924	23
2018	16	79,021	19
2019	27	54,352	49

- For about 150 kg of mongoose hair, at least 6,000 animals would have been killed, according to an estimate

- Mongoose is listed in Schedule II Part 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act
- Any smuggling or possession of its body part is a non-bailable offence

Measures taken

- There have been instances in which mongoose hair has been transported using courier companies.

- Postal Department authorities are also trying to involve the Postal Department to spread awareness and identify illegal trade in wildlife.

- There is also a campaign on social media where concerned organisations are urging artists to take a pledge to refrain from using brushes made of mongoose hair.

- The WCCB is now trying to reduce the demand for these brushes and also provide alternative sources of livelihood for people from indigenous communities who are involved in this business.

12. Papikonda National Park (PNP)

- PNP in Andhra Pradesh is a moist deciduous forest

- Papikonda Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1978. It was upgraded to a national park in 2008.

- The 1,012.86 sq km national park is on both sides of river Godavari in the northern Eastern Ghats.

- Indian golden gecko, endemic to the Eastern Ghats was reported from this national park

Context:

- The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and experts from Kerala and northeastern States will begin the first survey of butterfly species in the Papikonda National Park (PNP).

Details

- The experts, led by Kerala-based environmental forum Warblers and Waders, will carry out the survey with an aim to record all butterfly species, and also conduct a study on migratory species in the national park in the Papikonda hill range in the Eastern Ghats.

- It is the maiden survey during which the entire national park will be explored, documenting the butterfly species.

- The diversity of butterfly species would be considered as a health indicator of the park.

13. Pollution fight: painting roads, lasers among options

Context:

- The Supreme Court has directed to form a High Level Committee (HLC) and look into the feasibility of technologies to control and monitor pollution.

Details:

- The HLC has members from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), NEERI, professors from IIT-Delhi, IIT-Kanpur and heads of environmental departments of Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

- Painting roads with photocatalytic coating to clean air, using anti-smog guns at construction sites to reduce dust pollution and setting up of a 20 metre-high 'smog tower' with air purifiers are among the pilot projects suggested by the High Level Committee (HLC) to the Supreme Court to control air pollution in Delhi and NCR.

Painting roads:

- There are companies that develop photocatalytic paints, which can remove pollutants from the air in the presence of sunlight and ultraviolet (UV) rays.

- It can be applied on a range of surfaces, such as roofing tiles or even on the surface of roads.

- Photocatalytic paints contain titanium dioxide [TiO_2] which acts as a catalyst when exposed to UV rays and removes atmospheric pollutants. The catalyst converts the pollutants into other species.

- But there is a risk that nanomaterials may result in the production of other undesirable species such as nitrous acid and formaldehyde, which will have adverse health impacts. However, such products have been used by the Dubai municipality in parks and also in Mexico.

Smog tower:

- The HLC has also suggested that a pilot project of "smog tower", as suggested by an expert panel of IIT-Delhi, IIT-Bombay and Department of Science and Technology, may be taken up.

- The proposal had stated that 65% reduction in pollution can be achieved on an average up to 700 metres from the tower.

Anti-smog gun:

- Anti-smog gun is a device that sprays nebulised water droplets into the air through high-pressure propellers, which helps particles to settle down.

- Anti-smog guns may be effective in controlling localized dust during the period of application and more suitable to high dust emission zones such as large construction sites.

Oxy furnace:

- Oxy furnace uses only oxygen as fuel instead of atmospheric air (which contains nitrogen), thus reducing the production of NOx by about 90% in industries.

Wireless Sensor Network (WSN):

- WSN technology to monitor air pollution is still in the developmental stage and IIT and NEERI are reviewing its performance.

- The committee has informed that WSN may be used as an indicative monitoring tool for a few activities like mining, large construction sites, to supplement air quality data and report to regulator for conducting further investigation.

LiDAR:

- LiDAR or Light Detection and Ranging is a high-end application of LASER-based technology for monitoring pollution.

- The HLC has recommended that this technology may be adopted for vertical monitoring at a few places to track transport of pollutants at higher altitude.

14. Tadoba National Park

- It is also known as the "Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve"

- It is Maharashtra's oldest and largest National Park

- It lies in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra state

- The word 'Tadoba' is derived from the name of God "Tadoba" or "Taru," which is praised by local tribal people of this region and "Andhari" is derived from the name of Andhari river that flows in this area

15. Not many lessons learnt from water planning failures

Background

- The Central government had launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA) which is a time-bound, mission-mode water conservation campaign.

- It is not a funding programme and did not create any new intervention on its own.

- Its only aim was to make water conservation a 'people's movement' through ongoing schemes like the MGNREGA and other government programmes.

- The JSA is partly modelled and driven by some sporadic success stories such as NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh's experiment in Alwar, Rajasthan and Anna Hazare-led efforts in Ralegan Siddhi, Maharashtra. These projects primarily involved building tanks and ponds to capture rainwater and building recharge wells to recharge groundwater.

Concerns around JSA

- Water planning should be based on hydrological units, namely river basins. And, political and administrative boundaries of districts rarely coincide with the hydrological boundaries or aquifer boundaries.

  * However, contrary to this principle of water management, JSA was planned based on the boundary of the districts, and to be carried out under the overall supervision of a bureaucrat.

  * This resulted in the division of basins/aquifers into multiple units that followed multiple policies.

- The JSA's portal displays impressive data, images and statistics.

  * For example, it claims that there are around 10 million ongoing and completed water conservation structures; 7.6 million recharge structures. The website also says that one billion saplings have been planted and that six million people participated in awareness campaigns.

- But, data and statistics can deceive or lie

  * For example, the data displayed on JSA portal do not speak anything about the pre-JSA water levels, the monthly water levels and impact of monsoon on the water levels across the 255 districts with critical and over-exploited blocks. They also don't convey anything about the quality of the structures, their maintenance and sustainability.

- TMoreover, it is difficult to say whether measures like JSA can provide long-term solutions. Most of the farm bunds are built with soil which can collapse within one monsoon season

- Further, there are issues like lack of proper engineering supervision of these structures, involvement of multiple departments with less or no coordination, and limited funding under MGNERGA and other schemes.

- Finally, there have hardly been many efforts undertaken to dissuade farmers from growing water-intensive crops such as paddy, sugarcane, and banana, when it is widely known that agriculture consumes 80% of freshwater.

Shallow Assumptions

True, the aim and intent of JSA are noble. But the assumptions are distorted.

- For example, it assumes that common people in rural areas are ignorant and prone to wasting water; on the contrary, they are the ones who first bear the brunt of any water crisis.
- The per capita water allocation to those living in rural areas is 55 litres, whereas the same for urban areas like Delhi and Bengaluru is 135-150 litres.
- Therefore, the JSA's move to reach out to poor people and farmers, asking them to 'save water', appears hypocritical, particularly when district administrations blatantly allow the sewage generated from towns and cities to pollute village water sources such as tanks, ponds and wells

Conclusion

- The steps taken by Central Government under this program is a good start but it will require addressing of above mentioned issues to find a solution to water crisis prevalent in India.

16. India tests Swedish technology to reduce stubble burning

Context:

- Pollution from stubble burning in winter is the key contributor to the sharp decline in air quality in Delhi. But stubble burning continues unabated.
- To find a solution to the stubble burning issue, India is testing a Swedish technology — torrefaction that can convert rice stubble into 'bio-coal'.

Details:

- The Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) to Government of India has funded a pilot project in Punjab to evaluate the feasibility of the technology.
- Bioendev, a Swedish company, has set up a pilot plant at the National Agri-Food Biotechnology Institute in Mohali.

How does torrefaction work?

- Torrefaction is a thermal process to convert biomass into a coal-like material, which has better fuel characteristics than the original biomass. Torrefied biomass is more brittle, making grinding easier and less energy intensive.

- The technology involves heating up straw, grass, saw mill residue and wood biomass to 250 degrees Celsius – 350 degrees Celsius.
- This changes the elements of the biomass into 'coal-like' pellets. These pellets can be used for combustion along with coal for industrial applications like steel and cement production.

17. Heavy metals contaminating India's rivers

Context:

- Samples taken from two-thirds of the water quality stations spanning India's major rivers showed contamination by one or more heavy metals, exceeding safe limits set by the Bureau of Indian Standards.
- The findings are part of a report, which is the third edition of an exercise conducted by the Central Water Commission (CWC) from May 2014 to April 2018.

Findings:

- Samples from only one-third of water quality stations were safe.
- The rest, or 287 (65%) of the 442 sampled, were polluted by heavy metals.
- Samples from 101 stations had contamination by two metals, six stations saw contamination by three metals.
- Iron emerged as the most common contaminant with 156 of the sampled sites registering levels of the metal above safe limits. None of the sites registered arsenic levels above the safe limit.
- The other major contaminants found in the samples were lead, nickel, chromium, cadmium and copper.
- The study spanned 67 rivers in 20 river basins.
- Lead, cadmium, nickel, chromium and copper contamination were more common in non-monsoon periods while iron, lead, chromium and copper exceeded 'tolerance limits' in monsoon periods most of the time.
- Arsenic and zinc are the two toxic metals whose concentration was always obtained within the limits throughout the study period.

Issue:

- Not all rivers were equally sampled. Several rivers have only been sampled at a single site whereas others such as the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Godavari were sampled at multiple sites. Marked variation was found in contamination levels depending on the season.

* Samples were collected in three different seasons: pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon.

- The presence of metals in drinking water is to some extent unavoidable and certain metals, in trace amounts, are required for good health. However, when present above safe limits, they are associated with a range of disorders.

- Long-term exposure to such heavy metals may result in slowly progressing physical, muscular, and neurological degenerative processes that mimic Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis.

- The main sources of heavy metal pollution are mining, milling, plating and surface finishing industries that discharge a variety of toxic metals into the environment.

18. Global Climate Risk Index 2020

- The Global Climate Risk Index 2020 analyses to what extent countries and regions have been affected by impacts of weather-related loss events (storms, floods, heat waves etc.).

- The index ranks the most vulnerable countries based on the number of casualties as well as economic losses caused by disasters.

- Germanwatch receives its data for annually calculating the Global Climate Risk Index from the NatCatSERVICE database of the reinsurance company Munich Re, as well as the socio-economic data of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Context

- According to the Global Climate Risk Index by Germanwatch, an international environmental think tank, India ranks fifth in the list of countries worst affected by climate disasters in 2018

  * The list is topped by Japan, Philippines and Germany.

Losses suffered by India

- India's economic losses in extreme weather events have been estimated to be over $37.8 billion.

- The incidents that caused these losses include the prolonged heat wave in northern and central parts of India, the cyclones on the eastern coast and floods in Kerala.

- India's high rank is due to severe rainfalls, followed by heavy flooding and landslides that killed over 1,000 people. The floods were described as the worst of the last 100 years. Furthermore, India was struck by two cyclones in October and November 2018 that also nearly killed 1,000 people. Last but not least, India also suffered from extreme heat.

19. Himalayan Gold (Caterpillar Fungus)

- Caterpillar fungus (Ophiocordyceps Sinensis) is a fungal parasite of larvae (caterpillars) that belongs to the ghost moth. It is endemic to the Tibetan Plateau, including the adjoining high Himalaya (3,200-4,500 metres above sea level).

- It is locally known as Kira Jari (in India), Yartsagunbu (in Tibet), Yarso Gumbub (Bhutan), Dong Chong Xia Cao (China) and Yarsagumba (in Nepal).

- In the Indian Himalayas, the species has been documented in the region from the alpine meadows of protected areas such as Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, Askot Wildlife Sanctuary, Kanchendzonga Biosphere Reserve and Dehan-Debang Biosphere Reserve.

Uses

- Caterpillar fungus has seemingly been used in traditional Tibetan and Chinese medicine as a tonic, as a therapeutic medicine for lung, liver and kidney problems.

- The species has been widely traded as an aphrodisiac and a powerful tonic, often called the 'Himalayan Viagra'.

- There are also reports that caterpillar fungus possesses a range of more specific therapeutic properties; including action against asthma and bronchial inflammation, cure of renal complaints, irregular menstruation and stimulation of the immune system.

20. Houbara bustard

- The houbara bustard, which lives in arid climates, comes in two distinct species as recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature,

  * one residing in North Africa (Chlamydotis undulata) and

  * The other in Asia (Chlamydotis macqueenii).

- The population of the Asian houbara bustards extends from northeast Asia, across central Asia, the Middle East, and the Arabian Peninsula to reach the Sinai desert.

- According to the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC), roughly 33,000 Asian houbara bustards and over 22,000 of the North African houbara bustards remain today.

Threats

- According to IFHC, the main reasons for the houbara's decline are poaching, unregulated hunting, along with degradation of its natural habitat.

Context

- The government of Pakistan has issued special permits to the Emir of Qatar and nine other members of the royal family to hunt the houbara bustard, an internationally protected bird species.

Details

- Pakistanis are not allowed to hunt the bird, the government invites Arab royals to hunt it every year.
- The hunting area is spread over the provinces of Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab.

HEALTH ISSUES

1. Anti-Microbial Resistance

What is Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR)?

- Since their discovery, antibiotics have served as the cornerstone of modern medicine.

- However, the persistent overuse and misuse of antibiotics in human and animal health have encouraged the emergence and spread of Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR), which occurs when microbes, such as bacteria, become resistant to the drugs used to treat them.

- AMR is rising to dangerously high levels in all parts of the world and is threatening our ability to combat common infectious diseases and support modern medical procedures.

Concerns

- Infections caused by drug-resistant organisms could lead to increased mortality and prolonged duration of hospitalization, causing a huge financial burden to the affected persons, health-care systems, and hinder the goals of sustainable development

- The pipeline for the discovery, development and dissemination of new antibiotics has virtually dried out.

- No new class of antibiotics has been discovered in the past three decades. The reason is simple. Availability of a new antibiotic takes 10-12 years and an investment of $1 billion. Once it comes into the market, its indiscriminate use swiftly results in resistance, rendering it useless.

In 2015, the World Health Organization launched a comprehensive global action plan on antimicrobial resistance

Antibiotic Awareness Week

- Every year, World Antibiotic Awareness Week (WAAW) is celebrated by governments, health facilities, schools and communities across the globe.

- The campaign highlights best practices among the general public, health workers and policy makers to help stop the further emergence and spread of antibiotic resistance.

- World Antibiotic Awareness Week (WAAW) takes place every November to promote global education on antibiotics, how they should be used, and the growing risks of antibiotic resistance.

National Action Plan (NAP) on anti-microbial resistance

- Antimicrobial resistance is a serious threat to global public health that requires action across all government sectors and society and is driven by many interconnected factors.

- Single, isolated interventions have limited impact and coordinated action is required to minimize the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance

- The objectives of the NAP include improving awareness, enhancing surveillance measures, strengthening infection prevention and control, research and development, promoting investments, and collaborative activities to control AMR.

Measures taken by Govt

- The Indian government banned the manufacture, sale and use of colistin in the poultry industry. Colistin is considered the last-resort medicine to treat a person with life-threatening infection.

To improve awareness and understanding of antimicrobial resistance;

To strengthen knowledge through surveillance and research;

To reduce the incidence of infection;

To optimize the use of antimicrobial agents;

And to develop the economic case for sustainable investment that takes account of the needs of all countries, and to increase investment in new medicines, diagnostic tools, vaccines and other interventions.

Way forward

- Implementation of India's NAP needs to be accelerated.

- The health of humans and animals falls in the domain of State authorities, and this adds complexity to the nationwide response. So we require better coordination

- The FAO has assisted India in forging the Indian Network for Fishery and Animals Antimicrobial Resistance for the generation of reliable data on the magnitude of the problem and monitoring trends in response to control activities. It is critical to expand and sustain such surveillance networks.

- There is an urgent need to augment capacity for regulatory mechanisms, infection control practices and diagnostics support, availability and use of guidelines for therapy, biosecurity in animal rearing practices and understanding the role of the environment and the engagement of communities. For this, the world must launch a global movement to contain AMR.

Antibiotic prescription rate high in private sector

Context:

- A new study by researchers at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) on Antibiotic prescription rates in India.

Details:

- The study is the first-ever estimate of outpatient antibiotic prescription rates and patterns in the private sector.

- The report states that India is one of the top users of antibiotics.

- The private sector clocked high levels of antibiotic prescription rates (412 per 1,000 persons per year), according to the report.

- The highest rate was seen among children aged 0–4 years (636 per 1,000 persons) and the lowest in the age group 10–19 years (280 per 1,000 persons).

- The authors used the 12-month period (May 2013-April 2014) medical audit data set and concluded that the prescription rates for certain classes are on a higher side in India as compared to the developed nations.

- The study said the percentage of prescriptions for wide-spectrum antibiotics like cephalosporins and quinolones (38.2% and 16.3%) was significantly higher than the U.S. (14.0% and 12.7%) and Greece (32.9% and 0.5%).

- Unusually high prescription rates of beta-lactams-penicillins and cephalosporins in uncomplicated upper respiratory infections in children are in stark contrast to the prescription rates and pattern reported in Europe.

- The study noted that the per-capita antibiotic consumption in the retail sector has increased by around 22% in five years from 2012 to 2016.

Concerns:

- Though clinical guidelines on judicious antibiotic use explicitly mention that they should not be prescribed for the common cold, non-specific Upper Respiratory tract Infection (URI), acute cough illness and acute bronchitis, the study shows a high rate of prescriptions for respiratory infections in primary care.

- The study highlighted that of the 519 million antibiotic prescriptions, the majority were dispensed for the diseases of the respiratory system (55%), followed by genitourinary system (10%) and symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical findings (9%); generally these infections are viral in origin and self–limiting in nature.

- Irrational prescription and use of antibiotics have its origins in production and selling tactics of pharma companies.

- The misuse of antibiotics and easy access fuels antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which is a growing concern worldwide and in India.

Way forward:

- There is a need to target antimicrobial stewardship programmes to specific constituencies and stakeholders to raise awareness on antibiotics and prevent its misuse.

2. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

- COPD is a progressive life-threatening lung disease that causes breathlessness

- COPD is not one single disease but an umbrella term used to describe chronic lung diseases that cause limitations in lung airflow.

  * The terms 'chronic bronchitis' and 'emphysema' are no longer used, but are now included within the COPD diagnosis.

- COPD is not curable, but treatment can relieve symptoms, improve quality of life and reduce the risk of death.

- The most common symptoms of COPD are breathlessness, or a 'need for air', excessive sputum production, and a chronic cough.

Risk factors

- indoor air pollution (such as solid fuel used for cooking and heating)

- outdoor air pollution

- occupational dusts and chemicals (such as vapours, irritants, and fumes)

- Frequent lower respiratory infections during childhood.

3. Eat Right Mela

- The 'Eat Right India' movement was launched by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to usher in a 'new food culture' by nudging businesses and consumers to adopt safe, healthy and sustainable food practices and habits.

- As part of the Eat Right India movement, the 'Eat Right Mela' was conceived to engage, excite and enable citizens to eat right through an infotainment model.

- Eat Right Melas have been envisioned for massive outreach to build awareness on safe food and healthy diets through an interactive and informative model.

- It is being held in Delhi.

- In addition to showcasing street foods from all over the country, it consists of entertaining yet informative activities such as food quizzes, talks by dieticians and nutritionists, live cooking demonstrations by chefs, discussions by leading food experts and exhibits on healthy eating along with a host of cultural performances such as street theatre, dances and so on.

- The Mela was first held in 2018 in Delhi.

Context:

- The Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare inaugurates the 2nd Edition of the "Eat Right Mela".

4. Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)

- It is a viral disease which can cause hemorrhagic fever

- The carrier or the vector of the disease are the Ticks

  * Tick-borne diseases affect humans and other animals, and the virus is transmitted by tick bites.

- KFD was first identified in 1957, when an illness occurred in monkeys in Kyasanur Forest area of Shimoga district in Karnataka

- The disease first manifested as an epizootic outbreak among monkeys killing several of them in the year 1957. Hence the disease is also locally known as monkey disease or monkey fever

Transmission

- The virus spreads through parasitic tick Haemaphysalis spinigera, a forest tick.

- There are a variety of animals thought to be reservoir hosts for the disease, including porcupines, rats, squirrels, mice and shrews

- Human infection has occurred through handling of dead monkeys that were infected.

Symptoms

- The symptoms of the disease include a high fever with frontal headaches, followed by haemorrhagic symptoms, such as bleeding from the nasal cavity, throat, and gums, as well as gastrointestinal bleeding

- Other symptoms include vomiting, muscle stiffness, tremors, absent reflexes, and mental disturbances

Prevention

- A vaccine does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India.

- Additional preventative measures include insect repellents and wearing protective clothing in areas where ticks are endemic.

5. Measles- 2.3 million Children in India unvaccinated

- Measles is a highly contagious, serious disease caused by a virus

- The virus infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body.

- Measles is a human disease and is not known to occur in animals.

Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) Virus Ecology

The hard tick *Haemaphysalis spinagera* is the reservoir and vector of Kyasanur Forest Disease Virus (KFDV). Once infected, ticks remain so for life and are able to pass KFDV to offspring via the egg.

Transmission of KFDV to humans may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal, most commonly a sick or recently dead monkey. No person-to-person transmission has been described.

Human cases occur more frequently in drier months (Nov-June) and in Southwest and South India.

Monkeys and small mammals are common hosts for KFDV. Infection with KFDV can cause epizootics with high fatality in primates.

Larva

Nymph

Eggs   Adult

Larger animals such as cattle, goats, or sheep may become infected with KFD but play a limited role in transmission of disease to humans.

Local residents visit the forest to collect firewood and can be infected through tick bites.

People with recreational of occupational exposure to rural and outdoor settings (e.g., hunters, farmers, people making charcoal) in Karnataka State and South India are potentially at risk for infection.

CDC

Stats

- In 2018, measles caused an estimated 10 million cases and 1,42,000 deaths globally

- At 2.3 million, India has the second highest number of children who are not vaccinated against measles

- With 2.4 million, Nigeria has the most number of unvaccinated children. The other four countries with the most number of unvaccinated children are Pakistan (1.4 million), Ethiopia (1.3 million), Indonesia (1.2 million) and the Philippines (0.7 million).

How dangerous is measles?

- Measles typically begins with a high fever, and several days later a characteristic rash appears on the face and then spreads over the body.

- It can cause fatal complications, including encephalitis, severe diarrhoea and dehydration, pneumonia, ear infections and permanent vision loss

Spread

- Measles can be spread through the air from respiratory droplets

- An infected person can release the virus into the air when they cough or sneeze.

- These respiratory particles can also settle on objects and surfaces. One can become infected if one comes into contact with a contaminated object, such as a door handle, and then touch your face, nose, or mouth.

Steps taken by the Govt

- India has initiated the world's largest Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccination campaign targeting vaccination of 410 million children and adolescents aged between 9 months and 15 years.

    * In India, the first dose of measles vaccine is given at nine-12 months of age

    * Measles immunization directly contributes to the reduction of under-five child mortality

- Measles Immunization Day is celebrated on 16th march every year to make people aware about this deadly disease and how they can deal with the same.

Prevention

- Measles can be prevented through two doses of vaccination.

Why issues of Measles persist?

Vaccine hesitancy has been highlighted for the staggering spread in cases globally. Vaccine hesitancy refers to delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccination services.

- In DR Congo, there is low institutional trust, misinformation, vaccine shortage and even attacks on healthcare centres and workers leading to the spread of measles.

- In many European countries and the U.S., vaccine hesitancy has been on religious grounds and primarily due to antivaccination campaigns spreading fake news about vaccine safety.

- Media platforms (including social media) have been enormously influential in the spread of vaccine hesitancy

    * Vaccine-hesitant parents are usually more active in searching for information online and are susceptible to unverified reports of adverse effects of vaccination and scare tactics promoted by anti-vaccination campaigners.

- Other arguments stem from misinformation regarding the immune system and vaccine response, claiming vaccines "overwhelm" the immune system, and that natural immunity is better than immunity induced by vaccines.

Steps to be taken

- To counter rising hesitancy, about a dozen European countries have already introduced laws making vaccination mandatory.

    * New York City too introduced such a law when the U.S. nearly lost its measles elimination status.

- Such laws may prove counterproductive in the long run, and the only way to increase vaccine uptake is by educating the public

    * In most cases, interventions should be dialogue based and directly targeted to a specific under-vaccinated population group.

    * By engaging collaboratively with health workers, caregivers/parents, and their families and communities, national authorities can generate the insights to develop better quality health services, systems, policies, and communication strategies that support and enable recommended vaccination behaviours

Conclusion

- Vaccine hesitancy is threatening the historical achievements made in reducing the burden of infectious diseases, which have plagued humanity for centuries.

- Only a collaborative effort between paediatricians, family doctors, parents, public health officials, governments, the technology sector, and civil society will allow myths and misinformation around vaccination to be dispelled.

- If we fail, the future health of unvaccinated children and their communities will suffer greatly.

6. NITI Aayog's proposed 15-year plan for the Indian healthcare system.

Context:

- The NITI Aayog has proposed a 15-year plan for Indian healthcare entitled "Health Systems for a New India: Building Blocks — Potential Pathways to Reform" to improve the state of the healthcare system in India.

The report has identified five focus areas of the future health system:

- To deliver on unfinished public health agenda and move towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

- Changing the health financing away from out of pocket expenditure into large insurers.

- Empowering citizens to become better buyers of health by educating them of the options available.

- Harnessing the power of digital health.

- Integrating service delivery vertically and horizontally.

Recommendation:

- With regard to the risk pooling mechanism, even though the report has not out rightly suggested that Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), the government's cashless health insurance scheme covering 10 crore poor families for Rs five lakh annually, should be extended to the whole of India, it discretely mentioned that PM-JAY should be considered with an eye on its potential to influence the overall healthcare transformation in India, beyond its current explicit mandate.

- The report is critical of the fragmented nature of the Indian Healthcare system. It emphasizes the fact that overcoming the challenges of fragmentation across healthcare financing and service delivery will help India optimize both quality and access in the domain of healthcare services. It proposes the consolidation of small practices into larger business-like organizations.

Concerns:

- The proposal of consolidation of small practices into larger business-like organizations seems a problematic proposition considering the following facts.

Emulating America's supermarket system:

- The proposal would lead to a system similar to the American model of health care delivery.

- The American model has been criticized for turning healthcare into a marketable commodity sold by healthcare providers in supermarket-like institutions, devoid of traits like empathy, regard and loyalty. Such arrangements would be devoid of the personal touch inpatient care.

Indian context:

- Nearly 98% of healthcare providers in India have less than 10 employees.

- The smaller clinics have enabled the availability of healthcare facilities in far-flung areas. They have increased the reach and affordability of healthcare facilities in the Indian context.

Patient care:

- Loyalty forms a vital pillar of the patient-physician relationship. This trust is built upon a foundation of mutual trust, warmth, and understanding that develops over time between patients and their personal physicians. This is more likely with respect to smaller institutions where individual patient care is possible.

- Apart from providing comprehensive care and coordinating referrals if necessary, a family physician's relationship with his/her patient helps in a better understanding of the patient's needs and expectations and in avoiding unnecessary clinical hassles. This will ensure better health outcomes and increased patient satisfaction.

Impairing the doctor-patient relationship:

- Widespread commercialization of the healthcare system has been observed in recent times. This has led to the impairing of the doctor-patient relationship, manifesting popularly through violence against healthcare providers.

- In a setting of overcrowded public hospitals, and profiteering healthcare enterprises, where the patient-physician interaction is largely transactional, mistrust in the healthcare provider and its gruesome implications like violence against doctors is a distinct possibility.

Advantage of small clinics:

- Studies have demonstrated that healthcare received in small clinics indeed scores higher in terms of patient satisfaction than that received in larger institutions.

- This increased satisfaction manifests as better compliance with the treatment regimen and regular follow-ups, culminating in improved clinical outcomes.

Counter arguments:

The major arguments favouring a consolidation of health care facilities are as follows:

- Lack of funds for the healthcare sector and the economics of scale offered by larger organizations.

- India faces an acute shortage in terms of manpower in the medical sector. An integrated framework would allow for a smaller number of medical personnel to take care of the needs of the large patient population in India.

- Considerations regarding emotive aspects of healthcare such as empathy and trust cannot be realistically factored into the framing of health policy and system design considerations.

Way forward:

- There is a need for installing an inbuilt family physician in the health services system who acts as the first port of call for every registered patient.

- Introducing Attitude, Ethics, and Communication (AETCOM) in the revised undergraduate medical curriculum is a welcome step and this needs to be progressively emphasized on in healthcare service delivery.

7. ROTAVAC5D®

Context:

- Vice President launched the new rotavirus vaccine – ROTAVAC5D®.

Details:

- ROTAVAC5D® was designed and developed by Bharat Biotech.

- The vaccine would be a great help in tackling the spread of Rotavirus that causes nearly 8,72,000 hospitalizations, over 32 lakh outpatient visits and an estimated 78 thousand deaths annually in India.

About Rotavirus:

- Rotavirus is a very contagious virus that causes diarrhea. It's the most common cause of diarrhea in infants and children worldwide

  * The virus causes inflammation in the stomach and intestines.

  * it can cause severe diarrhea, vomiting, fever, abdominal pain, and dehydration

- The virus can affect adults, but the most severe cases are among unvaccinated children aged from 3 to 35 months.

8. Snakebites

What is Snakebite envenoming?

- It is a potentially life-threatening disease that typically results from the injection of a mixture of different toxins ("venom") following the bite of a venomous snake.

- Envenoming can also be caused by having venom sprayed into the eyes by certain species of snakes that have the ability to spit venom as a defence measure.

Details:

- It is one of the world's most Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD)

- India has been consistently recognised as one of the countries with highest mortality rate from snakebites, largely because of poor access to healthcare.

Sufferers

- RRural cropping and livestock workers, hunter/gathers and their children are among the most affected.

* Children often suffer more severe effects than adults because of their smaller body mass.

- Lack of footwear contributes significantly to the risk of snakebite for both adults and children.

Key Stats

- Between 1.8 million and 2.7 million people are bitten worldwide every year according to World Health Organization (WHO)

  * According to the WHO, snakebites claim more than 100,000 lives globally.

  * India sees 45,000 snakebite deaths every year, finds the 2011 'Million Death Study'.

- South Asia has the highest incidence of venomous snakebites in the world.

  * Within the region, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka together constitute nearly 70% of global snakebite mortality.

Health Issues

Bites by venomous snakes can cause acute medical emergencies involving

- severe paralysis that may prevent breathing,

- cause bleeding disorders that can lead to fatal haemorrhage,

- cause irreversible kidney failure and

- severe local tissue destruction that can cause permanent disability and limb amputation

Concerns

- A large number of deaths occurs because the Primary Health Centres do not have anti-venom and doctors are not trained sufficiently to deal with bites

  * If a patient is treated with Anti-Snake Venom (ASV), without much delay the outcome would be better. But there is a problem of non-availability of anti-snake venom injections

- It is considered a poor man's disease. Hence there is lack of research, funding, data, and even the lack of prioritisation by governments are major challenges

WHO Strategy

- It focuses on a 50% reduction in mortality and disability caused by snakebite envenoming by 2030.

- Boost production of quality antivenoms

  * The aim is about building a sustainable, stable market for safe, effective anti-venoms at reasonable cost and assured access to treatment.

- The strategy also called for integrating snakebite treatment and response into national health plans in affected countries, including better training of health personnel and educating communities.

Steps taken in India

- Health Ministry has framed guidelines to be followed by all State health institutions to tackle and deal with the serious concern about deaths due to snakebites.

- Web application like SERPENTS providing real time help to victims, location of hospitals and related information.

9. World AIDS Day

- World AIDS Day is being observed every year on 1st December since 1988.

- The global theme of this year's World AIDS Day is 'Communities Make A Difference'.

- It is an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, to show support for people living with HIV, and to commemorate those who have died from an AIDS-related illness.

- Globally, there are an estimated 36.7 million people who have the virus.

- Despite the virus only being identified in 1984, more than 35 million people have died of HIV or AIDS, making it one of the most destructive pandemics in history.

- World AIDS Day is an opportunity to show solidarity with the millions of people living with HIV worldwide.

- Most people do this by wearing an HIV awareness red ribbon on the day.

Context:

- The Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare inaugurated the celebration of the World AIDS Day organised by the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO).

Details:

- Speaking at the event, the minister said that during 2018-19 in India, around 79% of people living with HIV knew their HIV status, 82% diagnosed with HIV infection are receiving free antiretroviral therapy and 79% are virally suppressed.

- The government has taken steps to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of ending the epidemic of AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

- The basic target remains that of 'Three Zeros':

  * Zero new infections

  * Zero AIDS-related deaths

  * Zero discrimination

- The event also saw the launch of the NACO Mobile Application, new IEC Material for TI NGOs, Calendar-2020, and Comprehensive Module for Private Practitioners on Management of HIV/AIDS.

About the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO):

- NACO is a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provides leadership to HIV/AIDS control programme in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies.

- In 1986, following the detection of the first AIDS case in the country, the National AIDS Committee was constituted in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

- As the epidemic spread, the need was felt for a nationwide programme and an organization to steer the programme. In 1992 India's first National AIDS Control Programme (1992-1999) was launched, and National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) was constituted to implement the programme.

- NACO envisions an India where every person living with HIV has access to quality care and is treated with dignity.

- Effective prevention, care and support for HIV/AIDS is possible in an environment where human rights are respected and where those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS live a life without stigma and discrimination.

- NACO is committed to contain the spread of HIV in India by building an all-encompassing response reaching out to diverse populations.

10. Packaged foods 'breach' salt, fat limits

Context:

- An analysis conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) says that several packaged snacks and fast foods breached safe limits for salt and fat content.

- The CSE found that per 100 g, one packet of packaged nuts, soup or noodles had salt and fat well over the limit.

Details

- The agency tested salt, fat, trans-fat and carbohydrates in 33 popular "junk foods": 14 samples of chips, salted snacks, instant noodles and instant soup, and 19 samples of burgers, fries, fried chicken, pizzas, sandwiches and wraps.

- The samples were collected from grocery and fast food outlets in Delhi.

- The CSE relied on the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) — the daily ceiling for salt, fat, carbohydrates and trans-fat. The RDA is based on scientific consensus and has been agreed upon by the World Health Organisation and the National Institute of Nutrition in India.

What are the limits as per the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA)?

- It says that ideally, no more than 5 g of salt, 60 g of fat, 300 g of carbohydrate and 2.2 g of trans-fat should be consumed by an adult every day.

- The RDA from breakfast, lunch and dinner should be no more than 25% each, and from snacks, no more than 10%.

Background

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) came up with a draft law, the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018

- The draft said salt must be declared as sodium chloride for instance, and that those ingredients which breached the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) should be marked in 'red'.

Why is industry opposed to the proposed laws?

- Food companies had reservations mainly because they felt 'red' signified danger, fearing that this would give consumers the impression that they were consuming toxic food.

    * Eventually with pressure from industrial groups changes were made to replace sodium chloride with salt, total fat with saturated fat and total sugar with added sugar

- Other than the red labels, the industry says the norms are unscientific and that packaged food is made to cater to the "taste" of people.

    * Moreover, the packaged industry argues, immense quantities of junk food — think samosas or fried food sold on unregulated pushcarts — are consumed in the country with no check on their nutritional status and there is an inherent unfairness in regulating one section alone.

- They claim the current regulations only contribute to fear-mongering.

Why has not the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) moved on the draft?

- To brand packaged food in different colors sends out the message that they are unsafe or "toxic"; this would be counterproductive to the larger aim of having a regulated but viable packaged food industry and people being educated about their food choices

- Regulation is "inevitable" and there would be more scrutiny of nutrient levels but in a way that would give packaged food companies time to adapt to stricter norms.

What is the practice internationally?

- The CSE says that the proposed labelling regulations publish too many numbers and an assortment of colour codes. This could potentially confuse people particularly because India has a vast non-English speaking population.

- Chile, for instance, has a system where a black hexagon in a white border appears on the front of a package.

    * In the hexagon is a phrase that says a product is "high in salt" or "high in trans-fat."

    * The more the hexagons the less desirable the product becomes for the consumer; surveys suggest that even children are becoming more conscious about the health impact of their favourite snacks and often influencing parents' buying choices.

- Surveys undertaken by the WHO show that a vast majority of European countries have some form of front-of-pack labelling

11. **South has higher prevalence of mental disorders: study**

Context:

- Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh account for a higher prevalence of mental disorders that manifest primarily during adulthood in depression and anxiety, according to the first comprehensive estimates of disease burden attributable to mental health from 1990 prepared by the India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative and published in the Lancet Psychiatry.

Details:

- The study finds that roughly one in seven Indians, or 197 million persons, suffered from mental disorders of varying severity in 2017.

- These include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, idiopathic developmental intellectual disability, conduct disorders, and autism.

- In its State-wise analysis, the study divides different States into three categories on the basis of their socio-demographic index (SDI), i.e low, medium and high SDI States.

- The SDI is a composite measure of per-capita income, mean education, and fertility rate in women younger than 25 years and is calculated on a scale of one.

- Prevalence of depressive disorders was highest in Tamil Nadu, Kerala (loss of 641 years), Goa and Telangana in the high SDI State group and Andhra Pradesh in the middle SDI State group.

- Similarly, anxiety disorders were found to be more common in Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, and Maharashtra in the high SDI State group and Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, and West Bengal in the middle SDI State group.

A heavy burden

Prevalence of depressive disorders was highest in
Tamil Nadu (loss of 836 years per 1 lakh population),
Kerala (loss of 641 years), Goa (loss of 626 years)
and Telangana (loss of 756 years)
in the high SDI group and
Andhra Pradesh (loss of 793 years)
in the middle SDI group

Prevalence per 1,00,000

- \>3,750
- 3,500–3,749
- 3,250–3,449
- 3,000–3,249
- 2,750–2,999
- <2,750

12.

BYJU'S IAS
The Learning App
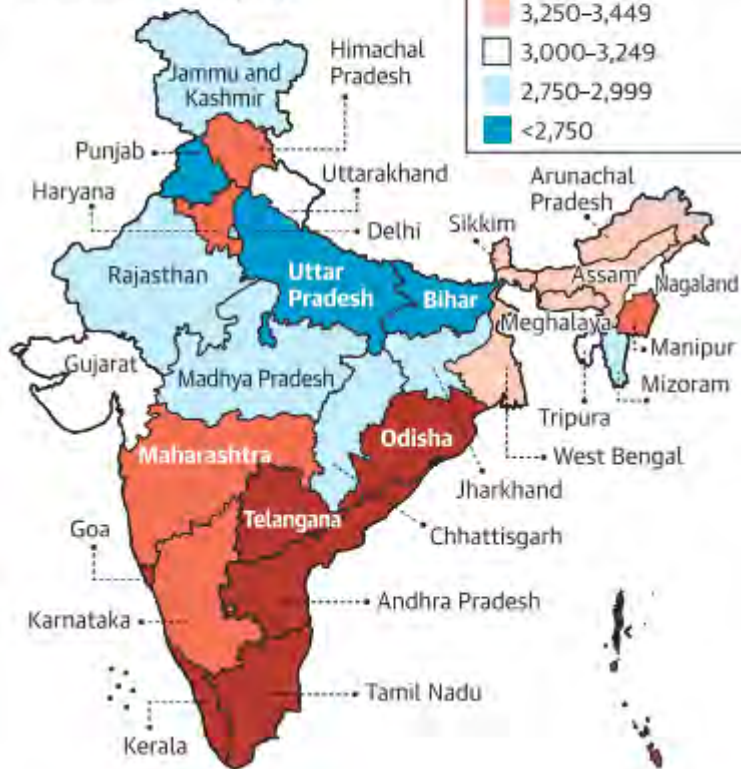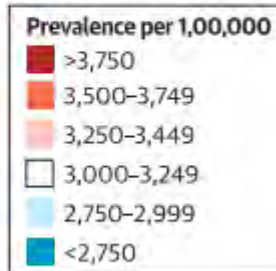
SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Accessible India campaign's deadline extended

Context

- The deadline for government's Accessible India campaign has been extended due to slow progress.

Background:

- Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment had launched Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) as a nation-wide campaign for achieving universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

- Accessible India Campaign or Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan initiative is in line with Article 9 of the (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) to which India is a signatory since 2007.

- The scheme also comes under Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 under section 44, 45, 46 for equal Opportunities and protection of rights which provides non-discrimination in Transport to Persons with Disabilities.

- According to the 2011 Census of India, 2.21 percent of the population or approximately 26.8 million Indians suffer from a disability.

- The scheme envisages incremental improvements with initial targets being conservative. It envisages further development with bigger targets in the following years. In this way, the overall environment becomes more inclusive and provides equal opportunities to the PwD.

- Accessibility is about giving equal access to everyone. Without being able to access the facilities and services found in the communities, persons with disabilities will never be fully included. Accessible India Campaign will seek the cooperation of all Central Government Departments/Ministries and State Governments to seek "accessible police stations", "accessible hospitals", "accessible tourism", and "accessible digital India" etc.

- Organizations, both public and private are encouraged to use their CSR funds for building accessible infrastructure. They may adopt projects of their interest e.g. making a hospital accessible or creating an accessible toilet in a school.

- Accessible India Campaign has the following three important components:

Part A: Built Environment Accessibility

Objective 1: Enhancing the proportion of accessible government buildings

- An accessible government building is one, where persons with disabilities have no barrier in entering it and using all the facilities therein. This covers the built environment – services, steps and ramps, corridors, entry gates, emergency exits, parking – as well as indoor and outdoor facilities including lighting, signage, alarm systems, and toilets.

- It involves specific targets for cities with respect to accessibility audits and conversion into fully accessible buildings.

Part B: Transportation System Accessibility

Objective 2: Enhancing the proportion of accessible airports

- An airport is accessible if a person with a disability has no barrier in entering it, using all the facilities, and boarding and disembarking from airplanes. This covers the built environment – surfaces, steps and ramps, corridors, entryways, emergency exits, parking – as well as indoor and outdoor facilities including lighting, signage, alarm systems and toilets.

- Specific targets involve conducting an accessibility audit of all the international airports and converting them into fully accessible international airports

Objective 3: Enhancing the proportion of accessible railway stations

- Targets involve ensuring that A1, A & B categories of railway stations in the country are converted into fully accessible railway stations

Objective 4: Enhancing the proportion of accessible Public Transport

- The target involves ensuring that 25% of Government-owned public transport carriers in the country are converted into fully accessible carriers (March 2018).

Part C: Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility

- Access to information creates opportunities for everyone in society. People use information in many forms to make decisions about their daily lives. This can range from actions such as being able to read price tags, to physically enter a hall, to participate in an event, to read a pamphlet with healthcare information, to understand a train timetable, or to view webpages. No longer should societal barriers of infrastructure, and inaccessible formats stand in the way of obtaining and utilizing information in daily life.

Objective 5: *Enhancing the proportion of accessible and usable public documents and websites that meet internationally recognized accessibility standards.*

- Public documents refer to all documents issued by the national government as well as all sub-national documents. They include all publications such as laws, regulations, reports, forms, and informational brochures.

- Targets involve conducting accessibility audit of 50% of all government (both Central and State Governments) websites and converting them into fully accessible websites (March 2017) and ensuring that at least 50% of all public documents issued by the Central Government and the State Governments meet accessibility standards (March 2018).

Objective 6: *Enhancing the pool of sign language interpreters*

- The target involves training and developing 200 additional sign language interpreters (March 2018).

Objective 7: *Enhancing the proportion of daily captioning and sign-language interpretation of public television news programs.*

- The target involves developing and adoption of national standards on captioning and sign-language interpretation in consultation with National media authorities (July 2016) and ensuring that 25% of all public television programs aired by government channels meet these standards (March 2018).

Concerns:

- The original deadlines under the Accessible India campaign were July 2016 for conducting an accessibility audit of 25-50 of the most important government buildings in 50 cities and making them completely accessible and March 2018.

- Under the Rights of PwD Act, 2016, all existing and new public buildings have to follow the accessibility standards notified on June 15, 2017. The existing buildings were given five years to comply. The deadlines have not been complied with.

- Due to slow progress, revised deadlines have been extended to March 2020.

2. Hunar Haat

- Hunar Haat is an exhibition of handicrafts and traditional products made by artisans from the Minority communities.

- It is organized by the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

- The scheme aims to establish Hunar Hubs in all the states where programs like Hunar Haats and other cultural events are to be organized.

- "Hunar Haat" exhibition is aimed at promoting and supporting artisans from Minority communities and providing them domestic as well as international markets for displaying and selling their products. This is providing an excellent platform to artisans belonging to Minority communities from across the nation to display their art and skills before the domestic and international visitors.

- One of the special features of this unique "Hunar Haat" is that besides providing free of cost stalls to artisans/craftsmen, the Minority Affairs Ministry has also made arrangements for their transport and are helping in their daily expenses. This has helped "poor but rich in art & skill" artisans to reach the venue easily and display their arts/skills at the international platform.

- It has proved effective in providing employment opportunities to more than 2 lakh 50 thousand artisans and craftsmen in the last three years.

- Hunar Haat is organized under USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme.

- The USTTAD scheme aims at preserving & promoting the rich heritage of the traditional arts & crafts of the Minority communities. These crafts have gradually lost their employability in the light of globalization & competitive market.

3. International Day of Persons with Disabilities

- 3rd December is observed as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities every year.

- This annual observance was initiated by the UN in 1992.

- It aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

Context:

PM sends message on the occasion.

- 2019 Theme: Promoting the participation of persons with disabilities and their leadership: taking action on the 2030 Development Agenda.

4. Kolam Tribe

- Kolam are a designated Scheduled Tribe in the states of Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

- They belong to the sub-category Particularly vulnerable tribal group

- They speak the Kolami language.

Jangubai Cave Temple and Kaplai Caves

- The cave is located on the Telangana-Maharashtra boundary in Asifabad district.

- The tribals believe that the Goddess will fulfill their wishes if they worship the deity with dedication and devotion.

5. Konda Reddi or Hill Reddis

- They are a designated Scheduled Tribe in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh

- They are found all along the Godavari River starting from Karimnagar to East Godavari and West Godavari districts.

- Konda Reddi tribes are classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group(s).

- The Konda Reddis are known for their eco-friendly practices such as use of household articles made of bamboo, bottle gourd, and seeds

6. Korku tribals

- The Korku are an Adivasi ethnic group predominantly found in the Khandwa, Burhanpur, Betul and Chhindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh and adjoining areas near the Melghat Tiger Reserve of Maharashtra.

- They speak the Korku language, which is a member of the Munda languages and is written using Devanagari.

- They are classified as a Scheduled Tribe

Bhilala

- The Bhilala are an aboriginal community in the Indian states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh

Barela

- The Barela are a part of the Bhil group.

- They are a scheduled tribe who live in the state of Madhya Pradesh in Khargone and other places of that state.

7. Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019

Context

- The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabh. The Bill amends the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.

Definitions

- In the Act, the term children refers to children and grandchildren, excluding minors. The Bill adds the following to the definition: step-children, adoptive children, children-in-laws, and the legal guardian of minor children.

  * Further, the Act defines a relative as the legal heir of a childless senior citizen, excluding minors, who possess or would inherit his property after death.

- The Bill amends this to include minors represented by their legal guardians. The Act defines parents to include biological, adoptive, and step parents. The Bill expands the definition of parents to include parent-in-laws, and grandparents.

Under the Act, Maintenance is defined as the provision of food, clothing, residence, medical attendance and treatment. Welfare is defined to include the provision of food, healthcare, and other amenities necessary for senior citizens.

- The Bill expands the definition of: (i) maintenance to include the provision of healthcare, safety, and security for parents and senior citizens to lead a life of dignity, (ii) welfare to include the provision of housing, clothing, safety, and other amenities necessary for the physical and mental well-being of a senior citizen or parent.

Appeals:

- The Act provides for senior citizens or parents to appeal the decisions of the maintenance Tribunal.

- The Bill allows children and relatives also to appeal decisions of the Tribunal.

Protection and welfare measures

- The Bill requires every police station to have at least one officer, not below the rank of Assistant Sub-Inspector, to deal with issues related to parents and senior citizens.

- State governments must constitute a special police unit for senior citizens in every district. The unit will be headed by a police officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

Offences and penalties:

- Under the Act, abandonment of a senior citizen or parent is punishable with imprisonment of up to three months, or a fine of up to Rs 5,000, or both.

- The Bill increases the penalty to imprisonment between three and six months, or fine of up to Rs 10,000, or both.

  * The Bill also provides that if the children or relatives fail to comply with the maintenance order, the Tribunal may issue a warrant to levy the due amount.

  * Failure to pay such fine may lead to imprisonment of up to one month, or until the payment is made, whichever is earlier.

8. National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE)

- The National Programme for the Health Care for the Elderly (NPHCE) is an articulation of the International and national commitments of the Government as envisaged under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Objective

- To provide easy access to promotional, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services to the elderly through community based primary health care approach

- To identify health problems in the elderly and provide appropriate health interventions in the community with strong referral backup support.

- To build the capacity of the medical and paramedical professionals as well as the care-takers within the family for providing health care to the elderly.

- To provide referral services to elderly patients through district hospitals, regional medical institutions

- Convergence with National Rural Health Mission, AYUSH and other line departments like Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Context

- The Vice President of India releases a book on Health and Wellbeing of the elderly and addressed the gathering. He stated that strengthening the family system is the need of the hour.

- The Vice President appreciated the government of India for implementing the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE).

9. Poshan Abhiyaan

Context

- Report on fund utilization in the POSHAN Abhiyaan program.

Background:

- The Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition or POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission), is the Government of India's flagship programme which is aimed at improving nutritional outcomes among pregnant women, lactating mothers and children. It would benefit an estimated 10 crore people.

- It aims at reducing the level of stunting, underweight, anaemia and low birth weight by 2022.

- POSHAN Abhiyaan is a multi-ministerial convergence mission with the vision to ensure the attainment of malnutrition-free India by 2022. It will create synergy, ensure better monitoring, issue alerts for timely action, and encourage States/UTs to perform, guide and supervise the line Ministries and States/UTs to achieve the targeted goals.

- For the implementation of POSHAN Abhiyaan, the four-point strategy/pillars of the mission are:

  * Inter-sectoral convergence for better service delivery

  * Use of technology (ICT) for real-time growth monitoring and tracking of women and children

  * Intensified health and nutrition services for the first 1000 days

  * Jan Andolan

Funding Pattern:

- The POSHAN Abhiyaan was launched with a total budget of ₹9,046.17 crores for three years.

- 50% of the sanctioned amount would be through budgetary support of the governments. The remaining 50% is from the World Bank or other multilateral development banks.

- The budgetary support amount is further divided into 60:40 between the Centre and the States, 90:10 for the north-eastern region and the Himalayan States, and 100% for the Union Territories without legislature.

Details:

- An analysis of the funds utilised under the scheme paints a grim picture.

- The State governments and the Union Territories have utilised only 30% of the funds released under the POSHAN Abhiyaan, since 2017.

- Except for Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Himachal Pradesh and Bihar, none of the governments has used even 50% of the sum granted.

- During the financial year of 2019-20, funds under the scheme were released for 19 States even though 12 of these states had used less than a third of the funds released in the previous two years.

Reasons:

- The POSHAN Abhiyaan programme has been conceptualised to be implemented in phases. The fund utilisation is generally slow in the initial phase of such incremental schemes.

- A number of activities which have been planned under the scheme like the Integrated Child Development Services-Common Application Software meant to monitor anganwadis have had a slow start.

- Lack of political will and action to tackle the issue of malnutrition is the major reason why the governments have failed to utilise the available funds under the scheme.

Concerns:

- The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS), released by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 2019, showed that 35% of the children under the age of 5 are stunted, 17% are wasted (low weight for height) and 33% underweight (low weight for age).

- In spite of the alarming level of malnutrition in India and the subsequent problems associated with it, there has been underutilization of the sanctioned amounts by almost all states.

10. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana

PMMVY is a Centrally Sponsored Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme under which cash benefits are provided to pregnant women in their bank account directly

- to meet enhanced nutritional needs

* An undernourished mother almost inevitably gives birth to a low birth weight baby. When poor nutrition starts in - utero, it extends throughout the life cycle since the changes are largely irreversible.

• Partially compensate for wage loss.

* Providing partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentive so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child.

• Ministry of Women and Child Development is the implementing agency

Under the 'Scheme', Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM) receive a cash benefit of Rs. 5,000 in three installments on fulfilling the respective conditionality, viz.

• first instalment of Rs 1000/-

* On early registration of pregnancy at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) / approved Health facility as may be identified by the respective administering State / UT

• second instalment of Rs 2000/ - after six months of pregnancy

* On receiving at least one Ante-Natal Check-Up (ANC)

• third instalment of Rs 2000/-

* After child birth is registered and the child has received the first cycle of vaccination like the BCG, OPV, DPT and Hepatitis - B, or its equivalent/ substitute.

* Registration of the birth of the child and completion of first cycle of vaccination for the first living child of the family.

• The eligible beneficiaries also receive cash incentive under Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY). Thus, on an average, a woman gets Rs. 6,000.

Target beneficiaries

• All Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM), excluding PW&LM who are in regular employment with the Central Government or the State Governments or PSUs or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.

HOW PMMVY EXCLUDES

1 Only for the first born

2 Provided after meeting several conditionalities -registration of pregnancy, at least one ante-natal check-up, registration of child birth and vaccinations

3 Proof of address of marital home

4 Husband's Aadhaar card

5 Minimum age of 19 years

6 Father and mother need to give separate undertaking that the child is the first living child for both of them

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

• Total 6 application forms to be filled, with total 30 of 32 pages to be filled by the beneficiary

• As many as 9 IDs to be produced: copy of Aadhaar card (or enrolment slip), copy of Identity proof, copy of Voter ID card (as age proof) for both husband and wife, copy of ration card (as proof of address of marital home), copy of passbook, Mother and Child Protection Card

• All eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers who have their pregnancy on or after 01.01.2017 for first child in family

Concerns

• Activists say that registration for the scheme requires an applicant to provide her husband's Aadhaar details along with her own, affecting single women which include unwed mothers, deserted wives and widows.

* If it is a woman's right under the National Food Security Act, 2013, why then insist on the husband's identity proof

• Moreover, a mother seeking benefits needs to provide proof of address of her marital home, which proves challenging for a newlywed expecting a child and often residing in her natal home during pregnancy. She is then forced to go from pillar to post to claim benefits.

• The legal age of marriage is 18 years

Conclusion

• Activists urge for a need for reviewing the scheme and making it universal by removing restrictions on the number of children as well as including all women, whether they are in the formal or informal sector, engaged in paid or unpaid work.

• The sum promised should also be at least on par with minimum wages for women in self-employment, unpaid work, or working for less than minimum wages.

11. Women Help Desks in Police Stations

Context:

- Home Ministry sanctions Women Help Desks in Police Stations across the country.

Details:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has sanctioned a sum of Rs. 100 crores from the Nirbhaya Fund for setting up/strengthening of Women Help Desks in Police Stations.

- This scheme would be implemented by the States and Union Territories.

- Women Help Desks would focus on making the Police Stations more women-friendly and approachable, as they would be the first and single point of contact for any woman walking into a police station.

- Essentially, lady police officers would be deployed at these help desks.

- The officials of the Women Help Desk would be trained to be sensitive towards women.

- These help desks would have enlisted panel of experts like lawyers, psychologists and NGOs to facilitate legal aid, counselling, shelter, rehabilitation and training, etc.

12. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019

Context:

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

Background:

- In 2016, the Government introduced its a Bill in the Lok Sabha and it was referred to a Standing Committee, which made a number of recommendations including defining the term persons with intersex variations, granting reservations for these socially and educationally backward classes, and recognition of civil rights including marriage, partnership, divorce, and adoption. However, with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19), that Bill lapsed.

- The reintroduced bill was passed in the Lok Sabha in August 2019, a month after its introduction in the House, and the Rajya Sabha cleared it in November 2019. Post receiving presidential assent the Social Justice Ministry has also notified the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

- The Bill was meant to be a consequence of the directions of the Supreme Court of India in the National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India case judgment, mandating the Central and State governments to ensure legal recognition of all transgender persons and proactive measures instituted for their welfare. It called for affirmative action for transgenders in education, primary health care and social welfare schemes.

- The apex court deemed that individuals had the right to the self-identification of their sexual orientation. It recognised that transgender persons have fundamental rights, and paved the way for enshrining the rights of transgenders in law.

Significance:

Upholding rights:

- It provides for the protection of rights of transgender people.

- It provides for Prohibition against discrimination. No person or establishment shall discriminate against a transgender in the domain of education, employment, healthcare, property rights etc.

- It provides for Right to the residence of transgenders with their family.

Self-perceived gender identity:

- There is a provision for recognition of the identity of transgender persons. The transgenders will have the right to self-perceived gender identity. They can apply to the district magistrate and get a certificate of identity as a transgender person. The certificate issued shall confer rights and be a proof of recognition of the identity of a transgender.

Welfare Measures:

- There are provisions which require the government to initiate welfare measures for the transgenders. The appropriate government will take the necessary steps to secure full and effective participation of transgender persons and their inclusion in society.

- Welfare schemes and programmes will focus on rescue, protection and rehabilitation of the transgenders.

- The major focus areas will be education, social security and health of transgender persons. It would involve providing inclusive education and opportunities for vocational training and self-employment of the community.

Specific health needs:

- The special and specific health needs of the community like sex reassignment surgery, hormonal therapy, and mental health will need adequate interventions from the government.

National council for transgender persons:

- It provides for the setting up of the National Council for transgender persons. It will mainly play an advisory function on policies, programmes. It will also review and co-ordinate programmes meant for the community and redress grievances from the transgenders.

Offences and penalties**:**

- There are provisions that stipulate strict punishment and even imprisonment if there is forced or bonded labour of transgenders and also against acts which deny access and discriminates against the community.

- 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. It will lead to greater inclusiveness and make the transgenders productive members of society.

Objections to the Bill:

- Activists referring to the Supreme Court of India judgment in the National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India case have been chastising the Union government for failing to live up to the opportunity to ensure that fundamental rights are guaranteed to all people regardless of their sex characteristics or gender identity.

- The community had organized protests across the country, urging changes to the Bill, claiming that in the form in which the Central government had conceived it, it showed a poor understanding of gender and sexual identity.

Name of the Bill:

- As per the bill, Transgender person means a person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-woman or trans- man, person with intersex variations, genderqueer and person having such socio-cultural identities as kinner, hijra, aravani and jogta.

- Activists have problems with the name of the bill. They feel the term 'Transgender' is restrictive. They claim that it showed a lack of understanding of the complexities in people who do not conform to the gender binary, male/female.

- Rejecting 'Transgender' as the nomenclature, the activists have suggested instead that the title should be a comprehensive "Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (Protection of Rights) Bill", and in definition, have sought to introduce the distinction between transgender and intersex person. Members of the community perceive transgender as different from intersex and were insistent that the distinction is made in the Bill.

- Transgenders have a different gender identity than what was assigned to them at birth. Intersex variations are defined to mean a person who at birth shows a variation in his or her primary sexual characteristics, external genitalia, chromosomes, or hormones from the normative standard of a male or female body. There are also multiple variations in intersex itself.

- The transgender community seeks a Bill that would have separate provisions for transgender, transsexual and intersex persons.

Identity issue:

- While the Act is progressive in that it allows self-perception of identity, it mandates a certificate from a district magistrate declaring the holder to be transgender. This goes against the principle of self-determination itself, activists argue, also pointing out that there is no room for redress in case an appeal for such a certificate is rejected.

National Council for Transgender Persons:

- While the Act envisages the setting up of a National Council for Transgender Persons to provide the institutional framework for its implementation, suggestions on the composition of such a council, or the demand to set up a working group for a Council for Intersex Persons were also ignored.

Sex Reassignment surgery:

- One long-pending demand has been to declare forced, unnecessary and non-consensual sex reassignment surgery illegal, and to enforce punitive action for violations. There is no mention of this in the bill.

- In early 2019, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court declared a ban on sex normalization surgeries on intersex children and infants, relying on a petition to the National Human Rights Commission on the subject from Gopi Shankar, an intersex person, and activist. The Tamil Nadu government followed this up with issuing a Government Order banning such surgeries.

Implementation challenges:

- While the community is miffed that the Bill has become an Act without any effort to make valid or relevant changes to its original composition, it worries about how implementation will address the pressing needs of the community.

- The legislation has been criticised by the transgender community for replacing district screening committees with bureaucratic impediments.

- They have also highlighted that the provisions against discrimination have no enforceability.

Gender certificate:

- Many in the transgender community have raised concerns about the requirement of a certificate from the district magistrate.

- There is a lack of knowledge about the transgender identity certificate under the Act. Given the lack of awareness and sensitization among the government officials, some of the transgender are finding it difficult to get the certification.

- However one needs to understand that certification is needed to prevent misuse of welfare measures meant exclusively for the transgender. Given the fact that Transgender people are deeply deprived, any leakage of benefits meant for them would render the scheme ineffective for the community.

Lack of consultation:

- There are concerns that there was very little consultation with the Transgender community in whose interest the bill has been prepared. The concern is that the rules so framed without consultation with the stakeholders may not make any difference to their lives.

Way forward:

- The definition in the bill should highlight the distinction between transgender persons and intersex persons enabling them to exercise the rights which they are entitled to.

- To address discrimination against intersex persons, the Bill should have included a provision directing medical professionals to ensure that intersex traits are not characterized as "disorders of sex development". Intersex traits should not be considered as genetic defects/ disorders, and terms like 'gender dysphoria' should be used to characterize them.

- The National Council for Transgender Persons must allow for a more favourable implementation of the law, and thus provide more elbow room for genuine representations of the community and the appeals and the concerns of the community.

- There is a need for greater sensitization among the common people and the government officials regarding the transgender community.

- The past experience as in the State of Tamil Nadu, which had set up a welfare board for transgender persons, and made recommendations right from allowing a 'third gender' in official forms to setting up of special toilets, and customising health interventions needs serious consideration.

13. Hyderabad Rape-Murder Case

Context

- After the rape and murder of a veterinary doctor in Hyderabad and the burning of a rape survivor in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh, there has been an outcry for justice.

- Within and outside Parliament there has been a clamor to make the criminal justice system tougher on an offender committing sexual crimes against women and children.

Background

- 'Rape' as a clearly defined offence was first introduced in the Indian Penal Code in 1860. Prior to this, there were often diverse and conflicting laws prevailing across India.

- The codification of Indian laws began with the enactment of the Charter Act, 1833 by the British Parliament which led to the establishment of the first Law Commission under the chairmanship of Lord Macaulay.

* The Law Commissioners decided to put the criminal law of the land in two separate codes.

Sections of IPC

- Section 375 of the IPC made punishable the act of sex by a man with a woman if it was done against her will or without her consent.

    * The definition of rape also included sex when her consent has been obtained by putting her or any person in whom she is interested, in fear of death or of hurt.

    * With her consent, when, at the time of giving such consent, by reason of unsoundness of mind or intoxication or the administration by him personally or through another of any stupefying or unwholesome substance, she is unable to understand the nature and consequences of that to which she gives consent.

    * Also, sex with or without her consent, when she is under 18 years is considered rape.

- Section 376 provided for seven years of jail term to life imprisonment to whoever commits the offence of rape.

- In the IPC, Section 228A was added which makes it punishable to disclose the identity of the victim of certain offences including rape.

- A man is given immunity from the crime of rape if he is the husband of the victim.

Are rape laws stricter now?

- The nationwide public outcry, in 2012, following the December 16 gang rape and murder in Delhi, led to the passing of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act in 2013 which widened the definition of rape and made punishment more stringent.

- Parliament made the amendments on the recommendation of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee, which was constituted to re-look the criminal laws in the country and recommend changes.

- The 2013 Act, increased jail terms in most sexual assault cases and also provided for the death penalty in rape cases that cause death of the victim or leaves her in a vegetative state.

- It also created new offences, such as use of criminal force on a woman with intent to disrobe, voyeurism and stalking.

- The punishment for gang rape was increased to 20 years to life imprisonment from the earlier 10 years to life imprisonment.

- Earlier, there was no specific provision in law for offences such as use of unwelcome physical contact, words or gestures, demand or request for sexual favours, showing pornography against the will of a woman or making sexual remarks. But, the 2013 Act clearly defined these offences and allocated punishment. Similarly, stalking was made punishable with up to three years in jail. The offence of acid attack was increased to 10 years of imprisonment.

What about offences against minors?

- In 2018, an eight-year-old girl in Rasana village near Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir was abducted, raped and murdered by a group of men. The news of the shocking act led to nationwide protests and calls for harsher punishment.

- This led to the passing of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 which for the first time put death penalty as a possible punishment for rape of a girl under 12 years; the minimum punishment is 20 years in jail.

- Another new section was also inserted in the IPC to specifically deal with rape on a girl below 16 years.

  * The provision made the offence punishable with minimum imprisonment of 20 years which may extend to imprisonment for life.

Concerns

- There has been a long list of such cases where women across India have been killed and maimed in the most brutal fashion even while we have had a stringent, amended rape law in place and also fast-tracked judicial processes.

- Even if a criminal is convicted, the appeals that follow lead to a further delay of more than five years. This has meant that citizens lose faith in the law and they hero-worship officers who "encounter" these criminals.

  * They cite examples of the Delhi 2012 accused still in Tihar and Ajmal Kasab, who was hanged six years after the gruesome killing of innocent citizens in Mumbai.

- From protesters on the ground to the commentary on social media, to MPs in Parliament, the demand for the instant killing of the accused from all corners created the public opinion for the abandonment of the rule of law that appears to have led to the incident.

The Brutal Rape led to encounter of these criminals and the Police were worshipped as Heroes, in spite of them violating due process. But this worshipping is due to failure of criminal justice system to deliver Justice to victims of crime on time.

- There is no law in force in India that authorises the police to kill. The plea of self-defence cannot be used to rationalise a targeted, premeditated killing of suspects in custody. There is nothing to suggest that the four suspects posed a threat to the lives of the police personnel since they were admittedly in custody and, therefore, presumably unarmed.

- There is a procedure prescribed by the law for criminal investigation. This is a procedure embedded in constitutional principles and honed over decades of thinking on keeping constitutionalism alive and throbbing through the most testing times. Article 21 of the Constitution of India — "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law" — is fundamental and non-derogable. The police, as officers of government, are bound by the Constitution — there are no exceptions.

- A core constitutional precept was set out in the Salwa Judum case in 2011: "Modern constitutionalism posits that no wielder of power should be allowed to claim the right to perpetrate state's violence against anyone, much less its own citizens, unchecked by law, and notions of innate human dignity of every individual." This is the touchstone of the constitutionally prescribed rule of law, which police officers are schooled in as part of their foundational training.

- Retributive justice may not be the way to go in a democratic country that prides itself on its unprecedented historical legacy of resisting violence in fundamentally non-retributive ways.

Way forward

- On the institutional Side

  * Police investigation and presentation by the prosecutors need to improve, it is the judiciary that must rise to the occasion.

  * Session courts need to finish cases at one go, within a week or fortnight, and not hear them in the piecemeal manner they are doing currently. They need to clamp down heavily on adjournments.

  * Expenses for more judicial officers and their staff should be met by the Centre and state governments jointly.

  * For police, medical officers, forensic experts, prosecutors and judicial officers to work together as a team, it is essential that formal interactive sessions between them are organised.

- On the moral side

  * Sexual assault is pervasive and the response must be systemic, not episodic.

  * The cycle of rapes, outrage, and amnesia must end.

  * Boys and girls should be raised right in an atmosphere of freedom and a culture of mutual respect. There is a need for inclusion of gender sensitization in every curriculum, right from school and wider societal changes to end sex crimes

Conclusion

- Justice lies in supporting the affected families in their moment of grief and pain and insisting on a due process that brings the suspects and accused to trial through a robust, stringent and competent criminal investigation. This is the challenge before governments and the criminal justice administration

- Therefore we need to invest in all four wings of the crumbling criminal justice system — police, prosecution, judiciary and prisons.

- The pathways of justice are not linear nor without obstacles, but constitutional morality must be followed which is non-negotiable

- India, after more than 70 years of Independence, needs to be the lighthouse for the rule of law.

GEOGRAPHY

1. Annular Solar Eclipse

What is an Eclipse?

- An eclipse happens when the moon while orbiting the Earth, comes in between the sun and the Earth, due to which the moon blocks the sun's light from reaching the Earth, causing an eclipse of the sun or a solar eclipse.
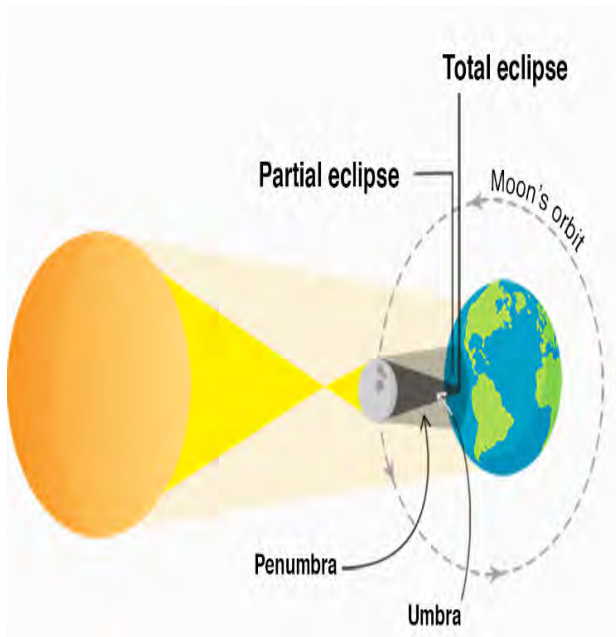
Three types of eclipses

- Total Solar Eclipse-Moon completely covers the Sun
    * It is visible only from a small area on Earth.
    * A total solar eclipse happens when the sun, moon and Earth are in a direct line.
- The second type of a solar eclipse is a partial solar, in which the shadow of the moon appears on a small part of the sun.
- The third kind is an Annular Solar Eclipse, which happens when the moon is farthest from the Earth, which is why it seems smaller.
    * The moon covers the center of the Sun, giving the appearance of a bright ring.
    * The key difference between Annular and Total is that the Moon is further away from the Earth during an Annular as compared to a Total Eclipse.
    * There are no annular lunar eclipses because Earth is much bigger than the Moon, and its shadow will never be small enough to leave a ring.

Shadows

During a solar eclipse the moon casts two shadows on the Earth

- The first one is called the umbra, which gets smaller as it reaches the Earth.
- The second one is called the penumbra, which gets larger as it reaches the Earth.

Is it safe to view solar eclipses?

- NASA maintains that the sun can be viewed safely using the naked eye only during a total eclipse, while during partial and annular solar eclipses, the sun should not be viewed without proper equipment and techniques.
- Not using proper methods and equipment for viewing can cause permanent eye damage or severe visual loss, it says.
- Safety equipment includes eclipse glasses and using appropriate solar filters for covering binoculars, telescopes and cameras.

Context

- Different stages of the annular solar eclipse as seen from Dindigul in Tamil Nadu

Different stages of the annular solar eclipse as seen from Dindigul in Tamil Nadu

2. Kelo River

- This river originates in the Raigarh district in Chattisgarh.

- Flowing from north to south it reaches a place named Mahadev Pali in the state of Orissa and joins the Mahanadi river.

3. White Island volcano

- Whakaari/White Island is New Zealand's most active cone volcano which has been built up by continuous volcanic activity over the past 150,000 years.

- White Island lies along the "ring of fire" that surrounds the Pacific Ocean plate, with stratovolcanoes at the edges of the Americas, the Asia-Pacific region and as far south as New Zealand.

4. India, Sweden to sign MoU for polar science cooperation

Context

- Proposed visit to India of the Swedish royal couple and senior Ministers.

Details:

- India and Sweden are likely to sign their first maritime cooperation agreement, Cooperation in Polar Science.

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is being prepared, encompassing cooperation in both Arctic and Antarctic regions. India and Sweden have arrived at a tentative agreement.

Significance:

- In the past few years, India has signed a series of maritime information exchanges as well as military logistics support agreements, extending the reach of its armed forces.

- The pact with Russia, in advanced stages of discussion, will give India access to Russian bases in the Arctic for logistics and operational turnaround. However, the agreement with Sweden is scientific in nature.

Polar Science:

- The world's Polar Regions and their contiguous oceans are attracting more interest than ever before. Once regarded as barren, inhospitable places, the north and south Polar Regions have been transformed into high profile sites of scientific research.

- Polar science has the potential to benefit humanity, help sustainable use of resources, and protect the planet and generate economic and social impact. Research in the Polar Regions is important and relevant to present-day needs. The Polar Regions may be at the ends of the Earth but what happens there affects us all. Understanding how the Earth works, and in particular how it is responding to ever-increasing human pressure, is one of the greatest challenges of science.

- Be it in understanding the role of the polar realm in modulating the global climate or for studying the ecosystem adaptability and survival under extreme conditions, there has been an increasing interest in the science of the polar realm, over the past two decades.

- Major research areas in polar science include Geology, atmospheric sciences, Meteorology, Snow study, Geomagnetism, Environmental Sciences, Wildlife biology, Oceanography, Ozone depletion, Climate change, etc.

India's effort in Polar Science:

- Realizing the importance of polar science as a pedestal for scientific research and to cater to the requirements of the Indian scientists in both the Polar Regions, two stations "Maitri" and "Himadri" have been established to serve as living-cum-research bases in the Antarctic and the Arctic respectively. Another permanent Indian research base "Bharati" in Antarctica was commissioned.

- India commenced Arctic research by establishing its Arctic research station in 2008.

- India's Arctic programme aims to contribute to the development, consolidation and dissemination of the current understanding of climate change, its impacts and adaptations in the Norwegian Arctic, Svalbard.

- The focus areas of scientific studies in the Arctic and the Antarctic have been largely confined to earth, atmospheric and biological sciences.

- Considering the significance of the polar ice cap and the sea ice in the Polar Regions in modulating, if not driving the global climate, it is proposed to initiate a major national mission of cryospheric studies of both the Polar Regions.

National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR):

- NCPOR formerly known as the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) is an Indian research and development institution, situated in Vasco, Goa.

- It is India's premier R&D institution responsible for the country's research activities in the polar and Southern Ocean realms.

- It is an autonomous Institution of the Department of Ocean Development (DOD), Government of India which is responsible for administering the Indian Antarctic Programme and maintains the Indian government's Antarctic research station, Maitri.

- At present, NCPOR is an agency working under the Ministry of Earth Sciences

EDUCATION

1. Ekal School Abhiyan

- 'Ekal School Abhiyan' which aims to promote the education among rural and tribal children.

- The main activity undertaken in this movement is to run one-teacher schools (known as Ekal Vidyalayas) all over India, in the remotest rural & tribal villages to take the education to every child.

Context

- Prime Minister congratulated Ekal Vidyalaya Sangathan for spearheading the 'Ekal School Abhiyan'

- PM also appreciated the use of e-education and digitization by Ekal Sansthan

Details

- The Sangathan has remarkably promoted out of box thinking through the 'Panchatantra Model of Education' such as

  * Promotion of nutrition through Poshan Vatikas,

  * training for bio-fertilizers use in farming,

  * imparting skills for using medicinal qualities of herbs,

  * Training for employment and

  * Generation of Social Awareness.

- The Sangathan has been awarded with Gandhi Peace Prize due to its commitment towards social service

2. Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching

- It is the culmination of the Government of India efforts in launching a comprehensive umbrella scheme aimed at improving the quality of education at all levels by infusing quality and excellence in our teachers and teaching

- It is envisaged to address comprehensively all issues related to teachers, teaching, teacher preparation and professional development.

- The Mission would address, on the one hand, current and urgent issues such as supply of qualified teachers, attracting talent into teaching profession and raising the quality of teaching in schools and colleges.

- On the other, it is also envisaged that the Teacher Mission would pursue long term goal of building a strong professional cadre of teachers by setting performance standards and creating top class institutional facilities for innovative teaching and professional development of teachers.

- It is under the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

3. The many structural flaws in India's higher education system

Context

- The furore surrounding fee hikes at the Jawaharlal Nehru University has spurred deeper questions about the quality of university education.

Issues in higher education system in India:

- India's higher education system is structurally flawed and underfunded. This crisis will affect innovation and human capital, the two pillars of labour productivity and GDP growth, while cheating India's largest demography of its potential.

- The mammoth system deserves better than the superficial data that is being bandied about.

  * For example, a surge in women's enrolment has been much-talked about but this does not necessarily imply better outcomes. The latest 'India Skills Report' suggests that only 47% of Indian graduates are employable — a problem exacerbated by startlingly low faculty figures.

- Faculty vacancies at government institutions are at 50% on average. The problem lies in increased demand, and stagnant supply.

- The number of institutions has surged in India since the 2000s, while the number of students doing PhD has remained constant. Meanwhile, there are over a 1,00,000 India-born PhDs in universities around the world, kept away by paltry salaries and poor funding.

  * China solved this problem by attracting Chinese-origin PhDs back home with dollar salaries and monetary incentives for published research.

  * The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, at rank 155, was our highest in the Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR) for research while six Chinese institutes figured in the top 50.

  * Indian universities persist in separating research and teaching activities, depriving students of exposure to cutting-edge ideas.

  * It is not surprising that Indian universities rank low in both research and teaching. Monetary incentives for academia are practically non-existent, and Indian R&D expenditure at 0.62% of GDP is one of the lowest in emerging economies.

Macroeconomic impact:

- Such flaws could affect macroeconomic indicators such as labour productivity, which is determined by innovation and human capital, among other things.

- The workers of tomorrow need to transition to the formal, non-agricultural sector, armed with higher education credentials.

- In addition, an increase in research could lead to more innovation in the economy, which might in turn drive up labour productivity.

Initiatives taken by the government:

Higher education has a potential twofold effect on productivity.

- The government released a Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) in 2019, which proposed ambitious reforms.

  * The DNEP aims to double education spending to 6% of GDP, and close the research-teaching divide in higher education.

- 'Institutions of Eminence' programme started in 2018 gave increased funding to some research universities.

Way forward:

- The government needs to recognise the systemic anger at play, and ensure that higher education's role in innovation and human capital is not ignored.

- Given the scale of India's higher education sector, an effective policy would require that the ongoing debates and experiences of various models of higher education functioning are critically examined.

- The DNEP is a great first-step, but the reforms must be pushed through and must lead to legislation that will fund research-based universities. Only this can bring a culture of discovery and accountability to India's higher education institutions.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Delhi fire Tragedy

Context

- A massive fire broke out in Delhi's Anaj Mandi area in which many people died and many were succumbed to injuries.

Details

- It was a four-storey building. The fire broke out on the second floor allegedly due to a short circuit
- The building had a rented a portion to a jacket manufacturer
  - * The building was packed with combustible materials like cardboard, rexine, plastic and other packaging stuff that aggravated the fire and resulted in dense smoke

Building Woes

- The building was notified as residential but commercial activities was being undertaken
- Fire incidents due to electrical short circuits are common in the area because most of the manufacturing units consume more than the sanction electricity load.
- The building did not have a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Fire Department, and no fire safety equipment was found to have been installed.
- There was no ventilation in the building. There was only one window. There were two exits, but one of the exit routes was blocked and used to store the factory's raw material.
  - * The victims on the first two floors of the building managed to escape while those on the third and fourth floors were trapped as the fire broke out on the second floor blocking their only exit route.

Concerns

- The episode brings to light the condition of workers toiling under crushing and dangerous conditions.
  - * The poorly paid labourers live and work in several residential buildings turned into unregistered factories.
- Neither the Delhi government which is responsible for civic services and labour issues nor the Centre, which has control of law and order in the national capital is ready to accept the responsibility and have been blaming each other.
- Fire outbreak is the third biggest risk to business continuity and operations, according to India Risk Survey (IRS) 2018.

- * The survey blames non-compliance of safety norms and under-equipped fire services for the sudden increase in risk posed by fire outbreaks

Way forward

- Chart a new course:
  - * Public safety cannot be allowed to fall victim to the blame game and irresponsible wrangling between the centre and the state.
  - * Political parties, civil society and the government must chart a new course, with a plan to make the older, built-up areas safe.
- Addressing the root problem:
  - * At the root of chaotic urban development is the deplorable compact arrived at between governments and violators that allows rezoning to accommodate illegal commercial establishments in residential zones, weak enforcement of regulations and post facto regularisation of illegalities. There is a need to come up with clear cut guidelines to avoid future misuse of this provision.
  - * The culpability of building owners has to be dealt with sternly as held by the Supreme Court of India in the Uphaar Cinema case.
  - * Rules under the new occupational safety code must be strong enough to protect workers.
- In 2013, the Supreme Court asked the fire department to conduct annual fire safety audits of the city's structures.
  - * It is an effective tool to assess fire safety standards of an organisation or an occupancy.
- Organizing firefighting workshop once in six months in localities/mohallas/schools with the involvement of local councillor/elected representatives

2. Locust invasion

- Locusts are a group of short-horned grasshoppers that multiply in numbers as they migrate long distances in destructive swarms.
- Only four species of locusts are found in India: Desert locust (Schistocerca gregaria), Migratory locust (Locusta migratoria), Bombay Locust (Nomadacris succincta) and Tree locust (Anacridium sp.).
- India is most at risk of a swarm invasion just before the onset of the monsoon. The swarms usually originate in the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa.

* Locusts need moist, sandy soil in which to lay eggs and fresh vegetation for hoppers to grow into adults. A good monsoon is therefore always cause for concern to locust authorities and farmers

* Under suitable conditions, they start to breed abundantly, and become nomadic (loosely described as migratory) when their populations become dense enough.

Economic Impact

• The swarms devour leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, bark and growing points, and also destroy plants by their sheer weight as they descend on them in massive numbers.

• The adults are powerful fliers; they can travel great distances, consuming most of the green vegetation wherever the swarm settles.

• . Adult locusts can eat their own weight every day and a swarm can consume vast quantities of food. They thus pose a threat to human food security.

Measures taken by India

• India has a locust control and research scheme that is being implemented through the Locust Warning Organisation (LWO), established in 1939 and amalgamated in 1946 with the Directorate of Plant Protection Quarantine and Storage (PPQS) of the Ministry of Agriculture, according to the PPQS.

• The LWO's responsibility is monitoring and control of the locust situation in Scheduled Desert Areas, mainly in Rajasthan and Gujarat, and partly in Punjab and Haryana.

• The Gujarat government has formed 27 locust control teams that has been engaged in spraying insecticides in the affected regions

Context:

• Crops in Gujarat are under attack from locusts that have flown in from Pakistan.

GOVERNANCE

1. Good Governance Index (GGI)

Context:

- The Union Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions launched the 'Good Governance Index' on the occasion of 'Good Governance Day'.

- Good Governance Day is observed on the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee (25th December). It was observed for the first time in 2014.

About the Good Governance Index (GGI):

- The Good Governance Index is a uniform tool across States to assess the status of governance and the impact of various interventions taken up by the State Government and UTs.

- The objectives of GGI are:

  * To provide quantifiable data to compare the state of governance in all states and UTs.

  * To enable states and UTs to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving governance.

  * To shift to result-oriented approaches and administration.

How is the GGI calculated?

- Various principles have been kept in mind while selecting the indicators, i.e. it should be easy to understand & calculate, citizen-centric & result-driven, leading to improved results and applicable to all states and UTs, among others.

- The GGI takes into consideration ten sectors, namely,

  * Agriculture and Allied Sectors

  * Commerce & Industries

  * Human Resource Development

  * Public Health

  * Public Infrastructure & Utilities

  * Economic Governance

  * Social Welfare & Development

  * Judicial & Public Security

  * Environment

  * Citizen-Centric Governance

- These ten Governance Sectors are measured on total 50 indicators.

- Difference indicators are given different weightage under one Governance Sector to calculate the value.

* g. Under Agriculture & Allied Sector, there are 6 indicators with different weightage, namely: Growth rate of agriculture and allied sector (0.4), growth rate of food grains production (0.1), growth rate of horticulture produce (0.1), growth rate of milk production (0.1), growth rate of meat production (0.1) and crop insurance (0.2).

- The states and UTs are divided into three groups:

  * Big States

  * North-East & Hill States

  * UTs

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

Findings of the GGI Report:

- Among the big states:

  * Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat are the top six rankers.

  * The bottom six states are Odisha, Bihar, Goa, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.

- Among the North-East & Hill States:

  * Top 3 states are Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Tripura.

  * The bottom 3 states are Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

- Pondicherry leads among the UTs followed closely by Chandigarh with Delhi bagging the third spot. Lakshadweep is at the bottom among the UTs.

- The report also gives sector-wise ranking.

- In the environment sector:

  * The top three states are West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

  * The bottom 3 states are Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Goa.

- West Bengal, however, is at the bottom two in the judicial and public security ranking. Tamil Nadu tops the chart here.

- Karnataka is at the top under the economic governance category while Kerala is at the top in the public health sector.

Considerable progress by the "BIMARU' states:

- The dubiously-labelled "BIMARU" states seem to be catching up with the other states in development.

- Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have performed well in terms of ranking in the nine sectors considered for the GGI. In spite of their lower developmental states, they have featured in the top 10 rankings of a few sectors.

- In the agriculture and allied sectors, almost all the "BIMARU" states are within the top 10 categories.

- In the composite ranking, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh are ranked fourth and ninth, respectively.

Concerns:

- Any index is bound to have some shortcomings, at least in the first round. The GGI also has certain shortcomings with respect to the indicators considered.

- Important indicators like farmers' income, the prevalence of micro-irrigation or water conservation systems and inflow of industrial investment have been left out.

- The "ease of doing business" indicator, has been given disproportionate weight in the sector of commerce and industries, to the virtual exclusion of growth rate of major and micro, small and medium enterprises.

- The question of whether process-based or outcome-based indicator should get more importance in the design of such a study has not been satisfactorily addressed.

Significance:

- Notwithstanding the shortcomings in GGI, the Centre's attempt to address the problem of the absence of a credible and uniform index for an objective evaluation of the States and Union Territories is a welcome move, keeping in mind India's size and complexity.

- The move of the central government to institute the GGI will incentivise States to competitively deliver on public services to the citizens.

- The significant observation regarding the "BIMARU" states' impressive performance in the index brings forth the key message that these northern States can catch up with others in due course of time if the political leadership shows the will to stay focused on development.

Way forward:

- The GGI requires fine-tuning and improvement in its subsequent editions.

- The GGI must serve as a guiding tool for the states for better policymaking and implementation.

2. GeM Samvaad

Context

- Government e-commerce portal GeM has launched a national outreach programme, GeM Samvaad, to bring on-board more local sellers.

Details

- The outreach programme will take place with stakeholders across the country and with local sellers in order to facilitate on-boarding of local sellers on the marketplace while catering to specific requirements and procurement needs of buyers.

- GeM Samvaad is essentially a dialogue between buyers and sellers. Sellers and buyers can look for new opportunities also in this outreach programme.

GeM

- It is the national public procurement portal offering end to end solutions for all procurement needs of Central and State Government Departments, PSUs, autonomous institutions and local bodies.

- Since its launch in 2016, it has transformed public procurement in the country by leveraging technology and making procurement contactless, paperless, and cashless.

- GeM has more than 15 lakh products and around 20,000 services, more than 3 lakh registered sellers and service providers and more than 40,000 government buyer organizations.

- State Departments and organisations, and public sector enterprises (PSEs) have been using GeM for their buying needs. Sellers from the States are also benefiting through access to the national public procurement market using the portal.

- GeM's vision is "to affect an evolution in public procurement promoting a transparent, efficient and inclusive marketplace."

3. Hill Area Development Programme (HADP)

Context:

- The HADP was launched for a period of two years (2018-19 and 2019-20).

About the HADP:

- It is a pilot project launched for the hill district of Tamenglong (later on divided into two districts of Tamenglong and Noney) in Manipur with an outlay of Rs.90 crore for a period of two years (2018-19 and 2019-20).

- As per NER District Infrastructure Index, prepared by the Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region (DoNER) in 2009, districts of Tamenglong, Chandel & Churachandpur in Manipur are ranked among the lowest in NER (North-Eastern Region).

- The pilot programme is aimed at bringing them on par with the rest of the districts in the region.

About the District Infrastructure Index (DII):

- The Ministry of DoNER has prepared the DII in order to reduce intra-regional disparity and have better targeting of schemes and projects in the North Eastern States.

- The DII is based on seven broad indicators — transport facilities in terms of road density and road quality, energy, water supply, education, health facilities, communication infrastructure and banking facilities.

- The Ministry has used the composite NER DII to give ranking from 1 to 80 to all the 80 districts. (In all there are 86 districts in eight NE States. However, six new districts, four in Assam and two in Arunachal Pradesh have been clubbed with the old districts from which those were carved out, for the purpose of DII).

4. **'Nagpur Resolution: A holistic approach for empowering citizens'**

   Context:

   - The 'Nagpur Resolution – A holistic approach for empowering citizens' was adopted during the valedictory session of the two-day Regional Conference on 'Improving Public Service Delivery – Role of Governments', in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

   Details:

   - The conference was organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, in collaboration with the Government of Maharashtra and the Maharashtra State Commission for Right to Public Services.

   - On earlier occasions, the Shillong Declaration and the Jammu Resolution have been adopted for good governance.

   The Resolution adopted states that the GOI, the Government of Maharashtra and other participating States shall collaborate to:

   - To empower the citizens by policy interventions for better service delivery through timely updation of citizens charters, implementation of enactments and benchmarking standards for continuous improvement;

   - To empower citizens by adopting a bottom-up approach to bring massive improvements in quality of grievance redressal and reduction in timelines of grievance redressal;

   - To adopt a holistic approach of systemic public grievance reforms through improved mapping, formulation of monitoring matrix, data collection and evaluation in quality of grievance redressal;

   - To provide an enabling environment for States and Ministries/Departments of the Government of India for creating web portals and to adopt a holistic approach for improved service delivery through digital platforms;

- To focus on dynamic policy-making and strategic decisions, monitoring of implementation, appointment of key personnel, coordination and evaluation;

- To achieve a sense of common identity by exchange of technical expertise in the areas of Improved Service Delivery between the paired States under the Ek Bharat – Shreshth Bharat Program;

- To work towards long-term engagements in the areas of Improved Service Delivery for Empowering Citizens through greater cooperation between the DARPG and the participating States and,

- To ensure timely publication of Good Governance Index to identify the quality of governance in 10 sectors especially those pertaining to welfare and infrastructure at the Union, State and District levels.

5. **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019**

   Context:

   - The Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019, was introduced in Lok Sabha and is now referred to a joint select committee.

   Why was the law important?

   - Collection of information about Individuals and their online habits has become an important source of profits, but also a potential avenue for invasion of privacy because it can reveal extremely personal aspects.

   - Companies, governments, and political parties find it valuable because they can use it to find the most convincing ways to advertise them online.

   - To prevent breach of privacy and unwarranted advertising this bill was a necessity.

   Terms

   Data

   - Data is any collection of information that is stored in a way so computers can easily read them

   - Data usually refers to information about your messages, social media posts, online transactions, and browser searches.

   Data Processing

   - The analysis of data to collect patterns, turning raw data into useful information

   Data Principal

   - The individual whose data is being collected and processed

   Data Fiduciary

   - The entity that collects and/or processes a data principal's data

   Data Processor

   - The entity that a fiduciary might give the data to for processing, a third-party entity

- The physical attributes of data — where data is stored, where it is sent, where it is turned into something useful — are called data flows.

Personal data

- It is data which pertains to characteristics, traits or attributes of identity, which can be used to identify an individual.

Sensitive Personal Data

- Data related to finances, health, official identifiers, sex life, sexual orientation, biometric, genetics, transgender status, intersex status, caste or tribe, religious or political belief or affiliation. This data can only be sent abroad with Authority approval.

Right to data portability

- The right to receive the data from the fiduciary in a machine-readable format

The right to be forgotten

- The right to restrict continuing disclosure of personal data

Data Protection Authority (DPA)

- A government authority tasked with protecting individuals' data and executing this Act through codes of practice, inquiries, audits and more

- Each company will have a Data Protection Officer (DPO) who will liaison with the DPA for auditing, grievance redressal, recording maintenance and more.

Adjudicating officers:

- Officers in the DPA with the power to call people forward for inquiry into fiduciaries, assess compliance, and determine penalties on the fiduciary or compensation to the principal.

- Adjudication decisions can be appealed in the appellate tribunal.

- Appeals from the Tribunal will go to the Supreme Court

Features

- The Bill seeks to provide for protection of personal data of individuals

- The Bill governs the processing of personal data by:

  * Government

  * Companies incorporated in India

  * Foreign companies dealing with personal data of individuals in India.

- Obligations of data fiduciary: Personal data can be processed only for specific, clear and lawful purpose. Additionally, all data fiduciaries must undertake certain transparency and accountability measures such as:

  * Implementing security safeguards (such as data encryption and preventing misuse of data), and

  * Instituting Grievance Redressal Mechanisms to address complaints of individuals. They must also institute mechanisms for age verification and parental consent when processing sensitive personal data of children.

- Rights of the individual

  * seek correction of inaccurate, incomplete, or out-of-date personal data

  * have personal data transferred to any other data fiduciary in certain circumstances

  * Restrict continuing disclosure of their personal data by a fiduciary, if it is no longer necessary or consent is withdrawn.

- Grounds for processing personal data: The Bill allows processing of data by fiduciaries only if consent is provided by the individual. However, in certain circumstances, personal data can be processed without consent. These include:

  * if required by the State for providing benefits to the individual,

  * legal proceedings,

  * To respond to a medical emergency.

Exemptions

The central government can exempt any of its agencies from the provisions of the Act:

- in interest of security of state, public order, sovereignty and integrity of India and friendly relations with foreign states, and

- for preventing incitement to commission of any cognisable offence (i.e. arrest without warrant)

Offences:

- processing or transferring personal data in violation of the Bill, punishable with a fine of Rs 15 crore or 4% of the annual turnover of the fiduciary, whichever is higher, and

- Failure to conduct a data audit, punishable with a fine of five crore rupees or 2% of the annual turnover of the fiduciary, whichever is higher.

The impact on organizations

- Private organizations will have a lot to do, from making technical changes in engineering architecture to modifying business processes. At the core, they need to place limits on data collection, processing and storage, but there's a lot more.

- Technical security safeguards, including de-identification—preventing an individual's identity to be inadvertently revealed—and encryption needs to be built in. Any instance of data breach needs to be reported to the regulator.

- Larger organizations—depending on the volume of data, annual turnover and other factors—and social media companies with users above a defined threshold will have additional responsibilities. This includes conducting data protection impact assessments for specific tasks defined by the regulator, periodic security audits and appointing a data protection officer. Additionally, social media platforms would be required to enable users to voluntarily verify their accounts, similar to the "blue tick" on Twitter.

How is it different from the draft?

In the Bill there are three significant changes from the version drafted by a committee headed by the Justice B N Srikrishna Committee.

- Data Protection Authority's composition is dominated by the government, as contrasted with the diverse and independent composition as suggested in the committee's draft.
  - * In the current bill, the authority's chairperson and six whole-time members will be appointed on the recommendation of a committee comprising cabinet secretary, IT secretary and law secretary.
- The draft had said all fiduciaries must store a copy of all personal data in India — a provision that was criticized by foreign technology companies that store most of Indians' data abroad and even some domestic startups that were worried about a foreign backlash.
  - * The Bill removes this stipulation, only requiring individual consent for data transfer abroad.
- Similar to the draft, however, the Bill still requires sensitive personal data to be stored only in India.
  - * It can be processed abroad only under certain conditions including approval of a Data Protection Agency (DPA). The final category of critical personal data must be stored and processed in India.
- The Bill mandates fiduciaries to give the government any non-personal data when demanded. Non-personal data refers to anonymised data, such as traffic patterns or demographic data.
  - * The previous draft did not apply to this type of data, which many companies use to fund their business model.

Merits

- All personal data (characteristic, trait, attribute or other feature of the person) online or offline, shall require the explicit and informed consent of the individual to whom it belongs before such data can be collected or subjected to any form of analysis.

- Section 6 of the Bill provides that any data collected should only be to the extent necessary for the processing of such personal data. Section 7 mandates that a notice be given to the person whose data is being collected of the nature and categories of personal data, and the purposes for which the data is to be processed, among other things.
  - * This should put a huge spoke in the wheels of organisations that thrive on processing and monetising data collected from individuals.
- Data localisation will help law-enforcement access data for investigations and enforcement.
  - * As of now, much of cross-border data transfer is governed by individual bilateral "mutual legal assistance treaties" — a process that almost all stakeholders agree is cumbersome.
  - * In addition, proponents highlight security against foreign attacks and surveillance, harkening notions of data sovereignty.
- Many domestic-born technology companies, which store most of their data exclusively in India, support localisation.
  - * PayTM has consistently supported localisation
  - * Reliance Jio has strongly argued that data regulation for privacy and security will have little teeth without localisation, calling upon models in China and Russia.
- Many economy stakeholders say localisation will also increase the ability of the Indian government to tax Internet giants.

Concerns

- The appointment of members to the DPA will not be made through an independent body but by a handful of people, mostly bureaucrats, selected by the government.
- Civil society groups have criticized the open-ended exceptions given to the government in the Bill, allowing for surveillance.
  - * There is a blanket power of exemption from all provisions of the law (including access to personal data without consent, citing national security, investigation and prosecution of any offence, public order) in favour of a government agency.
- A new watchdog without teeth, with no functional autonomy, would mean governments are legally immune from charges of data-mining.
  - * Justice (Rtd) BN Srikrishna, who headed the committee that formulated the original draft of the Bill, has reportedly called it "a piece of legislation that could turn India into an Orwellian state".
- Technology giants like Facebook and Google and their industry bodies, especially those with significant ties to the US, have slung heavy backlash.

* Many are concerned with a fractured Internet where the domino effect of protectionist policy will lead to other countries following suit.

* Much of this sentiment harkens to the values of a globalised, competitive internet marketplace, where costs and speeds determine information flows rather than nationalistic borders.

• Allowing the government to force companies to transfer non-personal data raises serious intellectual property concerns, and can still threaten users even if they're not individually identified.

Comparison of Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Where they are alike?

• The exceptions given to the Indian Bill and the EU Regulation look similar. Both allow data processing for prevention, investigation, detection, or prosecution of criminal offences. Both also discuss "public security", "defence", and "judicial" proceedings.

* The GDPR states: "This Regulation does not apply to issues of protection of fundamental rights and freedoms or the free flow of personal data related to activities which fall outside the scope of Union law, such as activities concerning national security. This Regulation does not apply to the processing of personal data by the Member States when carrying out activities in relation to the common foreign and security policy of the Union."

• Consent: The PDP Bill and the GDPR are founded upon the concept of consent. In other words, data processing should be allowed when the individual allows it. Consent carries similar meanings, with words like "free", "specific", and "informed".

• Individual's rights: Both have similar rights given to the individual, including the right to correction, the right to data portability (transferring your data to another entity), and the right to be forgotten (the right to erase the disclosure of your data).

* But the right to object to profiling is in the GDPR and not the PDP Bill.

• Other similarities: Both place responsibility on the fiduciaries, such as building products that include privacy by their design and transparency about their data-related matters.

* The European Data Protection Board in the GDPR and the Data Protection Authority in the PDP Bill have some similar duties, such as dispute resolution and codes of conduct.

Where they differ?

• Data Transfer Abroad: One significant difference between the GDPR and the PDP Bill is the framework built around deciding whether or not data can leave the country. Both give a government authority the power to decide if data transfers can occur, but the GDPR more clearly lays out the parameters of this decision.

* Their "Adequacy Decision" is made based on the country's rule of law, authorities, and other international commitments. The transfer can be made without this decision if there are legally binding rules or other codes of conduct that allow for it.

* The PDP simply states that the Authority has to have approval of the transfer of any sensitive personal data abroad, without specifying as many details about the other country's "adequacy" in receiving the data.

• Automated Decisions: The GDPR much more directly addresses personal harm from automated decision-making.

* The PDP Bill requires an assessment in cases of large-scale profiling, but does not give the citizen the right to object to profiling, except in the cases of children.

Conclusion

• The sweeping powers the Bill gives to the Government renders meaningless the gains from the landmark K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of India case, which culminated in the recognition that privacy is intrinsic to life and liberty, and therefore a basic right.

• The idea of privacy is certainly not reflected in the Bill in its current form and hopefully the parliamentary committee looks into it and due changes are initiated.

6. RTI 'abuse' led to 'fear' among officials: CJI

Context:

• The Supreme Court was hearing an application about the lack of transparency in the appointment of information commissioners.

Details:

• The Supreme Court has directed the Centre and the state governments to appoint within three months information commissioners in the Central Information Commission and the State Information Commissions.

• It has also said that there was a need to evolve guidelines to stop misuse of the Right to Information Act.

Rising requests

The number of RTI requests and the backlog of unprocessed queries have been rising in the recent years. However, the share of queries answered has remained stable while rejection rates have come down

— Requests rejected as a % of total queries (right axis)
— RTI requests answered as a % of total queries (right axis)
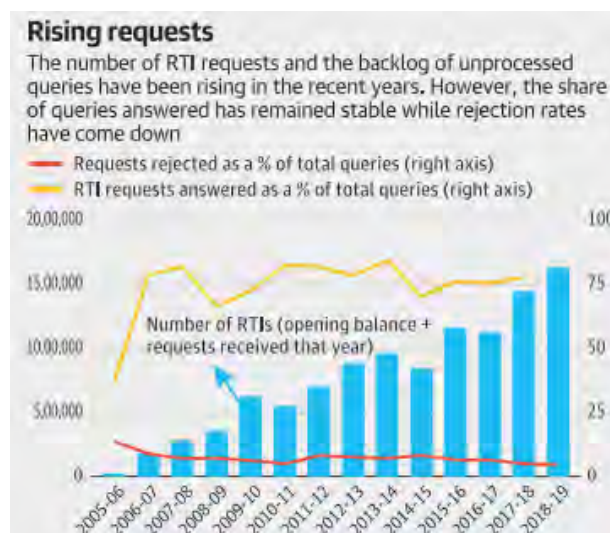
Issue:

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad Arvind Bobde has said that the unbridled use of the Right to Information (RTI) Act had created a sense of "paralysis and fear" in the government and norms were needed to "filter" the requests.

- There is the serious problem of people filing RTI requests with malafide intentions, people set up by rivals.

- The CJI highlighted that the RTI Act had become a source of criminal intimidation by people.

Way forward:

Besides highlighting that the court was not against the exercise of the right to information, the Chief Justice has said that guidelines need to be laid down to check the locus of the RTI applicant and put a filter on the kind of requests made under the 2005 Act.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. EChO Network

What's in News?

- EChO Network has been launched to catalyze cross-disciplinary leadership in India.

What is EChO Network?

- EChO Network is a national program to provide a template for cross-disciplinary leadership in India with the specific focus of increasing research, knowledge, and awareness of Indian ecology and the environment.

- It will train educators and students in interdisciplinary manner.

Context

- India faces unprecedented threats to its human environmental and ecosystems, solving which requires a confluence of India's strong technological expertise and knowledge of the natural world itself. EChO Network would develop a national network to catalyse a new generation of Indians who can synthesize interdisciplinary concepts and tackle real-world problems in medicine, agriculture, ecology, and technology.

- With no precedent for such a network anywhere in the world, EChO Network establishes a new platform to change how science is embedded in our modern society.

- Through interactive sessions with citizens, industry, academia, and the government, the Network will identify gaps in knowledge regarding selected topics in human and environmental ecosystems.

  * The program will then train postdoctoral leaders in research and outreach on these topics, while also incorporating current public and private efforts into a national network.

  * It would then go on to establishing nation-wide awareness in these issues through public discourse and education for citizens, industry, and government with information exchange at all educational levels.

- Over time EChO Network intends to create an international distributed institute comprising individuals housed within industry, government, private, and academic sectors, combining their expertise and resources collectively to tackle large scale problems.

2. Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize

Context

- Portugal announces Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize to perpetuate Mahatma Gandhi's ideals.

Details

- This would be an award given annually and the first edition will be dedicated to animal welfare.

  * Regarding animal welfare, Mahatma Gandhi had said, "The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

- The awards would be based on Gandhi's quotes and thoughts.

3. Human Rights Day

Context:

- Human Rights Day is celebrated on the 10th of December every year to commemorate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948.

Details:

- The Declaration recognizes that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of mankind are the foundation of justice, freedom and peace in the world.

- The United Nations' theme for this year's Human Rights Day is: "Youth Standing up for Human Rights."

- The youth will be celebrated as agents of change and encouraged to amplify their voices against racism, hate speech, bullying, discrimination, and fight for climate justice, among other issues, and engage a broad range of global audiences in the promotion and protection of rights.

4. National Florence Nightingale Awards

- The Government of India instituted these awards in 1973.

- They are named after Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, and the very icon of selfless care.

- The award carries Rs 50000 cash, a certificate, a citation certificate and a medal.

Context:

- The President of India Ramnath Kovind presented the National Florence Nightingale Awards.

Details:

- The World Health Organisation has announced 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Mid-wife.

- 2020 will also mark the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale.

- Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, was born on May 12, 1820 and hence this day is celebrated as International Nurses Day all over the world.

5. North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP)

- It is a livelihood project funded by the Government of India.

- It has facilitated the establishment of community-based micro-credit organisations and non-farm enterprises in its project areas.

- It provides employment to Self Help Groups (SHGs).

6. Shehri Samridhi Utsav (SSU)

- It is an initiative of Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) which aims to extend the outreach of Deendayal Antyodaya Mission – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), to the most vulnerable, showcase its initiatives and facilitate access of Self-Help Group (SHG) members to the other government schemes.

Significance of SSU:

- The SSU would provide access to a wider customer base to locally made products of SHGs, through a collaboration with e-Commerce portals for onboarding of high-quality products made by Self Help Groups (SHGs).

- The initiative would also be useful in capacity building of the women entrepreneurs in the skills of branding, digital marketing and financial management.

- Shehri Samridhi Utsav would be utilized as a platform to make a more significant, out of the ordinary impact in the lives of beneficiaries under DAY-NULM.

7. Zero FIR

- A 'Zero FIR' is a document that can be registered by any police station when a complainant approaches them for a cognizable offence, whether the case is in their jurisdiction or not.

- Normally, an FIR is registered by a serial number in the police station having territorial jurisdiction to investigate the Crime.

- Zero FIR can only be registered but not numbered. Such unnumbered FIR is then forwarded to the concerned police station where it gets numbered and then proceeded for investigation.

- Justice Verma Committee Report recommended the provision of Zero FIR, after the December 2012 gang rape in Delhi (Nirbhaya Case).

8. Afghanistan first country to recognize Indian Pharmacopoeia

What's in News?

- The Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP) has been recognised formally by the National Department of Regulation of Medicines and Health Products of the Ministry of Public Health of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

- With this, a new beginning has been made and Afghanistan has become the first country to recognize IP pursuant to the efforts of Department of Commerce and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

What is Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP)?

- IP is an officially recognized book of standards as per the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules 1945 thereunder.

- The IP specifies the standards of drugs manufactured and marketed in India in terms of their identity, purity and strength.

- In order to ensure the quality of medicinal products, the legal and scientific standards are provided by Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP).

- As per, the Second Schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, IP is designated as the official book of standards for drugs imported and/or manufactured for sale, stock or exhibition for sale or distribution in India.

Details:

- The IP Commission's mission is to promote public and animal health in India by bringing out authoritative and officially accepted standards for quality of drugs including active pharmaceutical ingredients, excipients and dosage forms, used by health professionals, patients and consumers.

- This is achieved by developing the standards for medicines and supporting their implementation.

- In addition, IPC also develops IP Reference Substances (IPRS) that act as fingerprint for identification of an article under test and its purity as prescribed in the IP monographs.

- Standards prescribed in the IP are authoritative in nature and are enforced by the regulatory authorities for quality control of medicines in India.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. **Consider the following statements with respect to Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960:**

   1. It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

   2. As per the provisions of the law the government of India formed the Animal Welfare Board of India.

   3. The act Provides for a provision that nothing contained in the Act shall render it an offence to kill any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community.

   Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

   A. 1 and 2

   B. 2 and 3

   C. 1, 2 and 3

   D. 1 and 3

2. **Which of the following statement regarding Chile is wrong?**

   A. Chile lies between the Andes to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east.

   B. Chile borders Peru to the north, Bolivia to the northeast.

   C. The arid Atacama Desert in northern Chile contains great mineral wealth, principally copper and lithium.

   D. Chile is located along a highly seismic and volcanic zone, part of the Pacific Ring of Fire.

3. **Consider the following statements regarding SPARSH (Social Innovation programme for Products: Affordable & Relevant to Societal Health):**

   1. The programme is initiated by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) under the aegis of Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India.

   2. The scheme intends to create a pool of social innovators in the biotech arena who will identify the specific needs and gaps in healthcare.

   3. The social innovators will be provided financial and technical support for developing market-based solutions that have potential to bring cost effective health care breakthroughs to vulnerable populations in particular.

   Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

   A. 1 and 2

   B. 2 and 3

   C. 1, 2 and 3

   D. 1 and 3

4. **Which of the following statement/s are wrong?**

   1. An avalanche is an event that occurs when a cohesive slab of snow lying upon a weaker layer of snow fractures and slides down a steep slope.

   2. Presently there are no methods to mitigate or prevent avalanches.

   Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

5. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

   1. Kyasanur forest disease (KFD) is a tick-borne viral haemorrhagic fever.

   2. It is endemic to South 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

6. **Which of the following statements are wrong?**

   A. In India, the power to grant pardon is entrusted to the President and the Governors under Article 72 and Article 161 of the Constitution.

   B. There is a six-month time limit for Mercy Plea.

   C. Supreme Court in Kehar Singh v Union of India, 1988 has held that the grant of pardon by the President is an act of grace and, therefore, cannot be claimed as a matter of right.

   D. President can pardon the death sentence but the Governor has no power to pardon the death sentence.

7. **Consider the following statements:**

   1. The European Economic Area (EEA) agreement enables the extension of the European Union single market to non-EU member parties.

   2. European Economic Area (EEA), consists of the Member States of the European Union (EU) and three countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) namely Iceland, Switzerland and Norway.

   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. **Arrange the following national parks starting with the most eastwardly located moving westward.**

1. Gulf of Mannar

2. Anshi

3. Balphakram

4. Betla

Options:

A. 1, 4, 2, 3

B. 3, 4, 1, 2

C. 3, 1, 4, 2

D. 2, 1, 4, 3

9. **Consider the following statements with respect to National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):**

1. National Human Rights Commission of India is a statutory body.

2. NHRC has the powers of a civil court.

3. The chairperson and members of the NHRC are appointed by the President of India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

10. **Consider the following statements:**

1. Rabies is a viral disease that causes inflammation of the brain.

2. Funds are provided under the National Rabies Control Programme (NRCP) for the procurement of Anti- Rabies vaccine (ARV).

3. In India, dogs are responsible for most of the cases of human rabies.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. 3 only

11. **Consider the following statements:**

1. Hand-in-hand is a joint training exercise between India and China.

2. It is an annual exercise that has been carried out every year since its inception in 2007.

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

12. **Consider the following statements with respect to River Amur:**

1. The Amur River forms a border between Russia and China.

2. The river originates in Russia.

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

13. **Consider the following statements:**

1. Regolith is present on the Earth, the Moon, Mars, some asteroids, and other terrestrial planets and moons.

2. The composition of the Regolith can strongly influence water composition through the presence of salts and acid-generating materials.

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

14. **Which of the following is the most suitable explanation of "Torrefaction"?**

A. It is a thermal process to convert biomass into a coal-like material, which has better fuel characteristics than the original biomass.

B. It is the use of living micro-organisms to degrade the environmental contaminants into less toxic forms.

C. It is the concentration of a toxin, in the tissues of tolerant organisms at successively higher levels in a food chain.

D. It is the process used to separate the components or substances from a liquid mixture by using selective boiling and condensation.

15. **Which of the following is INCORRECT with respect to the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act?**

1. A Fugitive Economic Offender is a person who has an arrest warrant issued in respect of a scheduled offence and who has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution.

2. A person can be named an offender under this for involvement in economic offences involving Rs. 1000 crore or more.

3. The person who is declared as a Fugitive Economic Offender cannot challenge the proclamation in the court of law.

Options:

A. 1 and 3 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 only

D. 3 only

16. **Consider the following statements with respect to Light Combat Aircraft Tejas:**

1. The LCA Tejas is a lightweight, multi-role supersonic aircraft developed as a joint venture between Russia and India.

2. It can carry air-to-air, air-to- surface, precision guided and standoff weaponry.

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

17. **Consider the following statements with respect to System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR):**

1. SAFAR is an initiative of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) to measure the air quality of a metropolitan city.

2. SAFAR is operationalized by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD).

3. In addition to regular air quality it will measure Black carbon, Mercury, sun's UV-Index (UVI).

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

18. **Consider the following statements with respect to Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA):**

1. PM-AASHA aims at ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers

2. The expenditure and losses due to procurement under PM-AASHA will be borne by the respective state governments.

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

19. **Consider the following statements with respect to Cyber Swachhta Kendra:**

1. Cyber Swachhta Kendra is a part of the Government of India's Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan.

2. It was set up to create a secure cyber space by detecting botnet infections in India and to notify, enable cleaning and securing systems of end users.

3. It is being operated by the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In).

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

20. **Consider the following statements:**

1. Money laundering is the process of concealing the origins of money obtained illegally by passing it through a complex sequence of commercial transactions.

2. Three stages involved in Money laundering are placement, refining and integration.

3. Establishment of shell companies is a form of money laundering.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 3 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

21. **Consider the following statements with respect to National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF):**

1. National Investment and Infrastructure Fund is an Indian-government backed entity established to provide short-term capital to India's infrastructure sector.

2. It was set up as an alternative investment fund (AIF).

3. The government of India's contribution to the AIFs under the NIIF scheme is 49% of the total commitment.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

22. **Consider the following statements with respect to "Nirbhaya Fund":**

1. It is a non-lapsable corpus fund for the safety and security of women.

2. It is administered by the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

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

23. **Consider the following statements with respect to Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme:**

1. Under the scheme, eligible landholding farmer families will be provided direct income support of three equal installments of Rs. 6,000 per year.

2. The income support will be transferred directly into the bank accounts of beneficiary farmers.

3. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. None of the above

24. **Which of the following is/are NOT the books authored by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:**

1. The Annihilation of Caste

2. The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and its Solution

3. State and Minorities

4. Pakistan or Partition Of India

Choose the correct option:

A. 2 only

B. 2 and 4 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. None of the above

25. **Consider the following statements with respect to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India:**

1. It is a statutory public body constituted under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.

2. It cannot take suo motu cognisance of any case and can look into only those cases recommended by suitable authorities.

3. The chairperson is always a person, who has been the Chief Justice of India or a Judge of the Supreme Court.

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

26. **Consider the following statements with regard to Election spending in India:**

1. The law prescribes that the total election expenditure shall not exceed the maximum limit prescribed under Rule 90 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961.

2. A uniform limit of Rs. 70 lakhs has been set for Lok sabha elections throughout India.

3. Expenditure beyond the cap would amount to a corrupt practice under the Representation of Peoples Act, 1951.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

27. **Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?**

1. The Polar bears rely heavily on the sea ice environment for travelling, hunting, and reproductive cycles.

2. The diminishing sea ice cover owing to Global warming is an existential crisis for the Polar bears.

3. The Polar bears are listed as critically endangered under the IUCN red list.

Choose the correct option:

A. 1, 2 and 3

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 2 only

D. 3 only

28. Which of the following cities lies on a latitude closest to the Tropic of Cancer?

A. Ranchi

B. Varanasi

C. Kolkata

D. Gwalior

29. Which of the following pairs is wrongly matched?

A. Rumtek Monastery: Gangtok, Sikkim

B. Namdroling Monastery: Pinjoor, Himachal pradesh

C. Ghum Monastery: Darjeeling, West Bengal

D. Namgyal: Dharmashala, Himachal Pradesh

30. Consider the following statements with respect to The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act:

1.   The Act provides for the establishment of Special Courts for trial of offences under the Act

2. The POCSO Act is only applicable to child survivors and adult offenders. In case two children have sexual relations with each other, or in case a child perpetrates a sexual offence on an adult, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, will apply.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 2 both

D. Neither 1 nor 2

31. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The pygmy hog is classified as critically endangered in the IUCN red list.

2. Wild populations of the Pygmy hog have been limited to only the Manas national park in Assam.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 2 both

D. Neither 1 nor 2

32. which of the following statements are wrong with respect to the monetary policy committee?

1. The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934was amended by Finance Act (India), 2016 to constitute MPC.

2. The committee comprises seven members – three officials of the Reserve Bank of India and three external members nominated by the Government of India and The Governor of Reserve Bank of India as the chairperson ex officio of the committee.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

33. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the Lokpal?

1. Lokpal is established under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013.

2. The serving Prime Minister does not come under the ambit of Lokpal.

3. It is only involved in investigating and inquiry into complaints and not with the subsequent prosecution process.

4. Indian public servants working abroad shall not come under the ambit of Lokpal.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 1, 2 and 3

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

34. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1.   Elephant corridors are narrow strips of land that connect two large habitats.

2. Elephant herds are in the habit of migrating across large areas annually.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

35. Which of the following pairs is wrongly matched?

A. Rudrasagar Lake: Tripura

B. Keoladeo National Park : Rajasthan

C. Hokera wetland: Himachal Pradesh

D. Deepor Beel: Assam

36. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral infection.

2. There is no specific treatment for dengue.

3. The female Aedes aegypti mosquito is the main vector that transmits the viruses that cause dengue.

Options:

A. 1 and 2

B. 1, 2 and 3

C. 1 only

D. 2 and 3

37. Consider the following statements:

1. Citizenship signifies the relationship between an individual and the government.

2. The provisions relating to citizenship are dealt with in Articles 5 to 11 of the Constitution of India.

3. The Constitution of India provides for a single citizenship for the entire country.

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

38. Which of the following is/are active volcano/es?

1. White Island in New Zealand.

2. Island of Santa Maria along the Atlantic coast.

3. Barren Island of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Choose the correct option:

A. 1 and 3 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1, 2 and 3

D. 3 only

39. The factors considered in the formulation of the Human Development Index involves:

1. Life expectancy

2. Education

3. Per capita income (PCI)

4. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Choose the correct option:

A. 1, 2 and 4 only

B. 1, 2 and 3 only

C. 1, 3 and 4 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

40. Consider the following statements with respect to Jal Jeevan Mission:

1. The mission aims to create local infrastructure for rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse in agriculture.

2. One of the chief objectives of the Mission is the cleaning of river Ganga and its tributaries.

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

41. Consider the following statements:

1. The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 contains a provision allowing for Children in Conflict with Law (CCL) to be tried as adults under certain circumstances.

2. The Juvenile Justice Act defines a child as someone who is under the age of 14.

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

42. Consider the following statements:

1. Western disturbance is an extra tropical storm originating in the Mediterranean region.

2. Western disturbance brings winter rain to the north-eastern parts of the Indian subcontinent.

3. The western disturbances are highly beneficial for the standing rabi crops.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 2 only.

D. 2 and 3 only

43. Consider the following statements:

1. The Ease of Doing Business Report measures the performance of countries across 10 different parameters.

2. Ease of Doing Business Report is published by the World Bank.

3. In India, the Ease of Doing Business Index is calculated based on the data from all the Metro cities.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1, 2 and 3

D. 1 and 3 only

44. Consider the following statements with respect to Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI):

1.   CCPI is an instrument designed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

2. As per CCPI 2020, the U.S.A is classified as the worst-performing country.

3. India ranks among the top 10 in CCPI 2020.

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

45. Consider the following statements with respect to Leopard (Panthera pardus):

1.   It is listed at par with Tigers under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972.

2. It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

3. It is a nocturnal animal.

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

46. Consider the following statements with respect to ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV):

1.   PSLV can launch satellites into the low earth orbits only.

2. Chandrayaan-1, Mars Orbiter Mission and the space recovery mission were launched on PSLV.

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

47. Consider the following statements with respect to International Court of Justice (ICJ):

1. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is an independent judicial body and is not associated with the United Nations.

2. It is composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office.

3. It is situated at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

   A. 1 and 2 only

   B. 2 only

   C. 1, 2 and 3

   D. 2 and 3 only

48. Consider the following statements:

1.   Odisha is home to 50% of the world's total population of Olive Ridleys and about 90% of the Indian population of sea turtles.

2. Rushikulya rookery is a major nesting site for the Olive Ridleys along the Indian coast.

3. Olive Ridleys are mostly carnivorous but occasionally consume algae and seaweed.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

   A. 1 and 2 only

   B. 1, 2 and 3

   C. 2 and 3 only

   D. 3 only

49. Consider the following statements:

1.   GST Council is a joint forum for the Centre and the States.

2. Prime Minister is the Chairman of the GST Council.

3. The GST Council will make recommendations to the Union and the States on the important issues related to GST.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. 1 and 3 only

   D. 2 and 3 only

50. Which of the following ancient dance forms finds place in 'Machupalli Kaifiat'?

   A. Bharatanatyam

   B. Kathakali

   C. Kuchipudi

   D. Odissi

51. Consider the following statements with respect to Inner Line Permit (ILP):

1.   ILP is issued by the central government.

2. ILP is obligatory for all those who reside outside the protected states.

3. ILP can solely be issued for travel purposes.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 2 and 3 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

52. An economy is said to be experiencing 'stagflation' when:

1.   Economic growth stagnates or slows down.

2. General prices in the economy rise.

3. General prices in the economy fall.

Choose the correct option:

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 2 only

53. Which of the following statements are correct?

1.   Indian states of Assam and Mizoram are the only two states with which Tripura shares a border.

2. Tripura was a part of an independent princely state under the protectorate of the British Empire which joined the independent India in 1949.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. Neither 1 nor 2

54. Which of the following statements are wrong?

1. Article 371 appears in Part XXI of the Constitution, titled 'Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions'.

2. Article 371 was part of the Constitution at the time of its commencement on January 26 1950.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. Neither 1 nor 2

55. which of the following statements are correct?

1. Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) are regulated only by the RBI.

2. Deposits in UCBs are not covered by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation of India.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

56. Which of the following statements are correct?

1.   The accessible India Campaign was launched by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

2. Accessible India Campaign envisages improvements in built Environment Accessibility, Transportation System Accessibility and Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

57. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The National Ganga Council was constituted in 2016 to oversee the cleaning of the Ganga.

2. One of the Chief Ministers of the States through which the Ganga flows becomes the Chairman of the national Ganga council on a rotational basis.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

58. Which of the following statements are correct?:

1. Train 18, is an Indigenous semi-high speed

2. It is an engine-less train consisting of electric self-propelling multiple units.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

59. Which of the following statements are wrong?

1. Mahanadi basin stretches over the states of Chhattisgarh and Odisha only

2. The Hirakud dam is built across the Mahanadi.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

60. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Inner line Permit system is applicable only to the three states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Mizoram.

2. The Protected area permit is required for the Non-Indians to visit Sikkim and Andaman and Nicobar islands.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

61. Which of the following pairs of martial arts and associated states is wrongly matched?

A. Mukna: Bihar

B. Huyen Langlon: Manipur

C. Silambam: Tamil Nadu

D. Paika Akhada: Odisha

62. Which of the statements is/are correct?

1. Citizenship is listed under the union list of the 7th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

2. Article 256 of the Constitution states that the executive power of every State shall be so exercised as to ensure compliance with the laws made by Parliament.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

63. Which of the following is wrongly matched?

A. Araku Valley Arabica coffee: Andhra Pradesh

B. Kani shawl: Jammu and Kashmir

C. Muga silk: Assam

D. Toda embroidery: Madhya Pradesh

64. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act is applicable only for the biological mothers and not those who are adopting a child.

2. The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act makes crèche facility mandatory for every establishment employing 10 or more employees.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

65. Consider the following statements with respect to the Citizenship Amendment Act:

1. The Act gives eligibility for Indian citizenship to illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Myanmar and Pakistan.

2. The Act does not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.

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

66. Consider the following statements with respect to Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR):

1. LiDAR is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure variable distances

2. Topographic LiDAR typically uses a near-infrared laser to map the land, while bathymetric LiDAR uses water-penetrating green light to measure seafloor and riverbed elevation.

3. LiDAR can be used for monitoring pollution.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1, 2 and 3

D. 1 and 3 only

67. Consider the following statements with respect to NIRVIK:

1. The aim of the scheme is to ease the lending process and enhance loan availability for exporters.

2. The scheme was introduced by the Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (ECGC).

3. The insurance cover guaranteed under the scheme will cover up to 90 percent of the principal and interest.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1, 2 and 3

C. 2 and 3 only

D. None of the above

68. "SURYA KIRAN" is a joint military training exercise between:

A. India – China

B. India – Nepal

C. India – Sri Lanka

D. India – Bangladesh

69. Consider the following statements:

1. Solar Eclipse can only occur on a Full Moon day.

2. In case of a Solar Eclipse, the Moon passes between Earth and Sun and the Moon's shadow happens to fall upon Earth's surface.

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. "Red Octagon" recently seen in news is:

A. A warning symbol employed in packaged foods.

B. A major area in the basin of the Pacific Ocean where many earthquakes and volcanic eruptions occur.

C. An autonomous territory in northwest China that is home to Turkic Uyghur people.

D. None of the above.

71. Consider the following statements with respect to Maternal Mortality:

1. Maternal mortality refers to deaths due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth.

2. Maternal mortality ratio is calculated per 10,000 live births.

3. India has seen a declining trend of Maternal Mortality Rate since the year 2007.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

A. 3 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. 2 and 3 only

72. Consider the following statements with respect to Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR):

1. It is a multilateral export control regime.

2. It seeks to encourage the proliferation of missiles and missile technology.

3. India is a member of MTCR.

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

73. Consider the following statements:

1. There is no time limit for the President to respond to a mercy petition.

2. The mercy petition is not subject to Judicial Review.

3. In India, the authority to decide on mercy petitions rests with the President and the Governor.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

74. Consider the following statements:

1. Bangladesh shares 57 trans-boundary rivers with India.

2. Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by India.

3. The country has a gigantic delta formed by the alluvial deposits of the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 2 only

D. 1 and 3 only

75. Consider the following:

1. Remission: Reduction of punishment without changing the nature of the punishment.

2. Pardon: Completely absolving the person of the crime and letting him/her go free.

3. Commute: Reduction of the type of punishment into a less harsh one.

Which of the above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

76. Consider the following statements with respect to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT):

1. It hears appeals against the orders of the National Company Law Tribunal(s) (NCLT).

2. It is the Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India.

3. It is the Appellate Tribunal to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

A. 1 only

B. 3 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. None of the above

77. **Consider the following statements with respect to National Population Register (NPR):**

1. NPR is a register of permanent residents of the country.

2. Under the provisions of NPR, a resident identity card (RIC) will be issued to individuals only over the age of 18.

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

78. **"Operation Twist" refers to:**

A. The name given to the monetary policy operation that involves the purchase and sale of bonds.

B. The operation by the Military of India that led to the capture of Goa, Daman and Diu and Anjediva Islands.

C. The operation of the Indian Armed Forces to capture the Siachen Glacier in the Kashmir region.

D. None of the above.

79. **Consider the following statements with respect to Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA):**

1. It provides a legal framework for the transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India.

2. It is one of the four foundational agreements that a country needs to sign to become a major defence partner of the United States.

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

80. **Consider the following statements with respect to INDRA 2019:**

1. INDRA 2019 is a joint tri-services exercise between India and Russia.

2. INDRA exercise began as a single service exercise

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. **Which of the following statements are correct?**

1. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is a Central Armed Police Force in India.

2. CISF is directly under the Union Ministry of Defence.

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

82. **Which of the following statements are correct?**

1. The INS Arihant and INS Varsha are the two nuclear-powered submarines currently in service with the Navy.

2. Sagarika is a nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missile.

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

83. **Which of the following statements are correct?**

1. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 provides legal immunity to juvelines under 18 years of age in all cases.

2. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 does not deal with adoption and associated issues.

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor2

84. **Which of the following constitute the Foreign Reserves of India?**

1.   Foreign Currency Assets

2. Gold held with Bank of International settlements

3. Reserve Tranche Position with World Bank

4. Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) with International Monetary Fund

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

   A. 1, 2 only

   B. 1. 2, and 3 only

   C. 1, 2 and 4 only

   D. 1, 2, 3, 4

85. **Which of the following are not correctly matched?**

   A. Paithani: Uttar Pradesh

   B. Ilkal saree: Karnataka

   C. Balaramapuram saree: Kerala

   D. Pochampalli Ikat: Telangana

86. **Which of the following statements are correct?**

1.   Chiru is a medium-sized bovid native to the Tibetan plateau.

2. They are hunted for their underfur, known as shahtoosh.

3. It is classified as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red list.

Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 1 and 2

   C. 1, 2 and 3

   D. 1 and 3

87. **Which of these statements are wrong?**

1.   The International Criminal Court has jurisdiction to prosecute nations for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression.

2. India has signed the Rome statute of the ICC.

Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

88. **Which of the following statements are correct?**

1. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has been established under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

2. The judgment from the NCLAT cannot be challenged in the Supreme Court of India.

Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

89. **Which of the following statements are correct?**

1.   The Monetary policy committee (MPC) comprises of six members – three officials of the Reserve Bank of India and three external members nominated by the Government of India.

2. The external members will hold office for a period of five years from the date of appointment.

3. The MPC considers the core inflation as the basis for inflation targeting.

Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 1 and 2

   C. 1, 2 and 3

   D. 1 and 3

90. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an initiative of the G20.

2. India and Pakistan are members of the FATF.

Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

91. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1.   Hunar Haat is a programme organized by the Ministry of Art and Culture.

2. Hunar Haat is organized under USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme.

Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 or 2

92. which of the following constitute the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve?

1. Bandipur National Park

2. Nagarhole National Park

3. Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

3. Silent Valley National Park

4. Periyar National Park

5. Mathikettan Shola National Park

Options:

A. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6

B. 1, 2, 3 and 4

C. 1, 2, 5 and 6

D. 4, 5 and 6

93. Consider the following statements:

1. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is an economic union of countries located in Central and Northern Asia and Eastern Europe.

2. Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Syria are the member states of EAEU.

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

94. Consider the following statements:

1. Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) is a Constitutional category.

2. A sub-category of Primitive tribal group was created on the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission.

3. 75 tribal groups have been categorized by Ministry of Home Affairs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG)s.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 only

D. 1 and 3 only

95. Consider the following statements with respect to Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile:

1. It is a single-staged missile that uses solid-fuel propellant.

2. It has a range of 250 – 300 km.

3. It is equipped with electronic counter measures against jamming by aircraft radars.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

96. Consider the following statements with respect to National Investigation Agency (NIA):

1. NIA acts as the Central Counter-Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency.

2. It investigates and prosecutes on offences on atomic and nuclear facilities in the country.

3. The officers of the NIA have the same powers as other police officers in relation to the investigation of such offences, across India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 1 and 2 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

97. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Defence Acquisition Council is headed by the Chief of Defence Staff.

2. The Defence Acquisition Council includes the National security adviser.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

98. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Atal Bhujal Yojana?

1. It is a centrally sponsored scheme.

2. It is a pan India scheme.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

99. **Which of the following is wrongly matched?**

   A. Hojagiri: Tripura

   B. Yakshagana: Karnataka

   C. Rauf: Jammu and Kashmir

   D. Cheraw: Manipur

100. **Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution?**

   1. It prescribes regular elections every five years and election within 9 months of the dissolution of any PRI.

   2. To ensure free, fair, and timely elections there is a provision for the setting up of state election commission.

   Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

101. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

   1. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a non-UN, inter-governmental body.

   2. In 2004, the FAO adopted the Right to Food Guidelines, offering guidance to states on how to implement their obligations on the right to food.

   3. The FAO is headquartered in Rome, Italy.

   Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. 1 and 2 only

   D. 2 and 3 only

102. **The World Investment Report is published by –**

   A. IMF

   B. World Bank

   C. UNCTAD

   D. World Economic Forum

103. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

   1. The Satavahana dynasty was based in the Deccan region.

   2. They formed a cultural bridge and played a vital role in trade and the transfer of ideas and culture to and from the Indo-Gangetic Plain to the southern tip of India.

   Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

104. **Which of the following statements are correct?**

   1. The Atal Bhujal Yojana is focussed on promoting panchayat-led groundwater management and behavioural change at the community level.

   2. It is funded entirely by the World Bank.

   Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

105. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

   1. Burkina Faso is a West African country that faces the Atlantic Ocean.

   2. Formerly, Burkina Faso was a colony of France.

   Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

106. **Which of the following is/are correctly matched?**

   1. Global Competitiveness Index- World Economic Forum

   2. Human Capital Index- World Bank

   3. World Economic Outlook- IMF

   4. Global Hunger Index- WHO

   5. Gender Inequality Index- UNDP

   Options:

   A. 1, 4 and 5 only

   B. 2, 3 and 4 only

   C. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

   D. 1, 2, 3 and 5 only

107. **Incirlik Air Base is in which country?**

   A. Djibouti

   B. Saudi Arabia

   C. Turkey

   D. Indonesia

108.   India is not a party to which of the following Pacts?

1. Rome Statute

2. Refugee Convention 1951

3. Australia Group

4. Wassenaar Arrangement

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1, 2 and 3 only

C. 3 and 4 only

D. 2, 3 and 4 only

109.   Which of the following is/are the protected areas within Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve?

1. Bandipur-Nagarhole Tiger Reserve

2. Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary

3. Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

110.   Which of the following statements are correct?

1.   The Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 (IRWD Act) is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted under Article 263 of the Constitution of India.

2. River water use is included in the Union list of the 7th schedule of the Indian constitution.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

111.   Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017 mandates that compensation payable to a State shall be provisionally calculated and released at the end of every two months during the transition period of 10 years.

2. The projected nominal growth rate of revenue assumed for a state during the transition period shall be the average for the state over the previous five years.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

112.   Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) would act as the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC).

2. The CDS will be a part of the Defence Acquisition Council and Defence Planning Committee.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

113.   Which of the following are incorrectly matched?

A. Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary: Madhya Pradesh

B. Kuno National park: Uttar Pradesh

C. Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary: Maharashtra

D. Mitilaya Wildlife Sanctuary: Gujarath

114.   Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The National Nutrition Mission is under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

2. The Mission aims to achieve improvement in nutritional status of children in the age group of 0-6 years only.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

115.   Which one of the following best describes the term "Merchant Discount Rate"?

A. The incentive given by a bank to a merchant for accepting payments through debit cards pertaining to that bank.

B. The incentive given by the Government to customers when they use debit cards for financial transactions when purchasing goods or services.

C. The charge to a merchant by a bank for accepting payments from his customers through the bank's debit cards.

D. The incentive given by the Government to merchants for promoting digital payments by their customers through Point of Sale (PoS) machines and debit cards.

116. **Which of the following best describes the term "eBkray"?**

A. It is an e-auction platform to enable online auction of attached assets by banks.

B. It is a platform for providing online loans for businesses in the textile sector.

C. It is a platform for the government to receive quotations from the MSMEs for its mandatory procurement policy.

D. It is an interactive platform for guiding startups in the food processing sector.

117. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. The Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) is a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India.

2. Presently, the DICGC offers an insurance coverage of upto ₹2 lakh on the deposits.

3. The deposit insurance facility is not available to depositors of NBFCs.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

118. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. The Qutub Minar was built in honour of the first emperor of the slave dynasty, Qutubuddin Aibak.

2. The Alai Darwaza was built by Alauddin Khilji.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

119. **Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. The Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act, 1876 prohibits the sale of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis in Santhal Pargana region.

2. Birsa Munda's struggle against the exploitation and discrimination against tribals led to the passing of the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act, 1876.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

120. **Which of the following best describes Project 75?**

A. Production of indigenous submarines

B. Increasing the average speed of freight trains in India by 75 % by 2022

C. Increasing the immunization cover to 75% by 2020

D. Production of indigenous air-to-air missile system

121. **Bandhavgarh National Park is located in?**

A. Uttar Pradesh

B. Chhattisgarh

C. Madhya Pradesh

D. Jharkhand

122. **Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the state of forest report 2019?**

1. The country's forest cover has increased.

2. The forest cover within the Recorded Forest Area has decreased.

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

123. **Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the state of forest report 2019?**

1. The sharpest decline in the forest cover was recorded in the northeaster states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram.

2. Among the states, Mizoram has the highest proportion of land under forest cover.

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

124.   Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1.   The SDG index is released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

2. The SDG index considers all the indicators mentioned by the UN under the SDG goals.

Options:

  A. 1 only

  B. 2 only

  C. Both 1 and 2

  D. Neither 1 nor 2

125.   Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1.   According to the Disturbed Areas Act, 1976, once declared 'disturbed', the area has to maintain status quo for a minimum of 6 months.

2. An area can be declared disturbed area only by the Ministry of Home affairs.

Options:

  A. 1 only

  B. 2 only

  C. Both 1 and 2

  D. Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWER KEYS

1	B		21	C
2	A		22	C
3	C		23	B
4	B		24	D
5	C		25	C
6	B		26	C
7	A		27	B
8	B		28	A
9	D		29	B
10	B		30	C
11	A		31	C
12	A		32	B
13	C		33	A
14	A		34	C
15	B		35	C
16	B		36	B
17	D		37	C
18	B		38	A
19	B		39	B
20	A		40	B

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41	A		61	A
42	B		62	C
43	A		63	D
44	C		64	D
45	D		65	B
46	A		66	C
47	D		67	D
48	B		68	B
49	B		69	B
50	C		70	A
51	A		71	B
52	B		72	C
53	C		73	B
54	D		74	B
55	D		75	D
56	C		76	D
57	A		77	B
58	C		78	A
59	A		79	C
60	D		80	C

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81	A		101	D
82	B		102	C
83	D		103	C
84	C		104	A
85	A		105	B
86	B		106	D
87	C		107	C
88	D		108	A
89	A		109	D
90	D		110	D
91	B		111	D
92	B		112	C
93	A		113	B
94	C		114	D
95	C		115	C
96	D		116	A
97	D		117	B
98	D		118	B
99	D		119	A
100	B		120	A

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121	C
122	C
123	C
124	D
125	D

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MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. In the backdrop of the recent political crisis in Maharashtra discuss the recommendations from the Sarkaria commission and the important Supreme Court Judgments which can act as a guide to the Governor in case of a hung assembly. (10 marks, 150 words)

2. The recent move of The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to make FASTag mandatory for all vehicles on the national highways is a welcome move. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

3. The proposed disinvestment of Air India is a welcome move. Comment. Discuss the major reasons for the government's failure to disinvest in its previous attempts and state a suitable way forward. (15 marks, 250 words)

4. Europe is having to cope with the political challenges of the U.S. pursuing 'America first'; a resentful Russia on its border; and a China determined to emerge as the new global power. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

5. In the backdrop of tense Indo-Pak relations, cross border trade provides a ray of hope for establishing peace. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

6. In the light of the recent London terrorist attack, the threat that lone-wolf assaults pose to public security needs urgent attention. Comment. Suggest suitable steps to tackle it. (15 marks, 250 words)

7. The U.S. administration's recent Israel policy and Israel's actions have made the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine issue redundant. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

8. In spite of the national outrage in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya incident, the cycle of rapes, outrage, and amnesia continue in India. Comment. In the light of the recent rape and murder in Hyderabad, discuss the measures needed to tackle the issue of sex crimes. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

9. In order to surpass the stringent labour regulations, the industry sector in India is largely resorting to contract labourers. Despite legislation to safeguard contract labourer, non-compliance has become the order of the day. Comment and discuss the way forward. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

10. What are the structural flaws in the higher education system in India? Also discuss the reforms needed. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

11. The seeds bill violates the rights of the farmers as opposed to what was guaranteed under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPVFR) Act of 2001. Analyse and suggest measures. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

12. Critically evaluate if the Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act, 2018 has been able to address the key concerns of economic offences. (10 Marks, 150 Words).

13. Though climate change is a global challenge, India is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts. Comment. Also, suggest suitable way forward for India. (250 words, 15 marks).

14. Enumerate the major oil producing regions of the world. List out the major oil fields and refineries in India and explain the fact that Petroleum refineries are not necessarily located nearer to crude oil producing areas. (150 words, 10 Marks)

15. Enumerate the laws dealing with sexual crimes in India. Comment on the adequacy of these laws in addressing the problem of sexual violence. Suggest necessary changes required to ensure a tougher criminal justice system on sexual offenders. (15 marks, 250 words)

16. The Supreme Court's Indra Sawhney judgment is a landmark in the domain of reservations in India. Comment. Does the Supreme Court's stand in the 2018 Jarnail Singh case follow the same principles as laid out in the Indra Sawhney case? (10 marks, 150 words)

17. Discuss the concerns associated with the recent episode of the brutal rape and murder in Hyderabad and the subsequent death of the four accused in an encounter. (10 marks, 150 words)

18. An Asia of rivalry will hold back the region's development. It is the Asia of cooperation that will shape the coming century of the world. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

19. Outlining the events which led to the partition of India in 1947, illustrate the fact that partition can be attributed to not just one individual or reason but to an array of personalities and motives, often at variance with one another. (15 marks, 250 words)

20. In the backdrop of the current political crisis in Iraq, comment on India's stake in Iraq and what should be India's role in revitalizing its bilateral ties with Iraq. (10 marks, 150 words)

21. Overcoming 'vaccine hesitancy' is a major step in checking the global spread of measles infection. Discuss and suggest measures. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

22. A tussle between Executive and Judiciary over judicial appointments hinders access to justice. Examine the issues in appointment procedure. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

23. A program, scheme or policy initiative without the backing of sufficient, periodic and scientific data is a recipe for failure in public policy. Explain the statement with respect to Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA). (10 Marks, 150 Words).

24. The biggest sanction of nationhood is the United Nations recognising a territory as a country. Evaluate its importance and illustrate with examples, the Independence Movements around the world. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

25. Should the creamy layer norm be extended to SC/STs? Critically examine. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

26. In the light of an impending water crisis in India, a community-driven decentralized approach provides a viable way forward. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

27. Discuss the importance of Co-operative banks in the financial sphere of India and the concerns associated with their functioning. (10 marks, 150 words)

28. In the backdrop of reducing agricultural productivity and Farmer distress in India, reverting back to some principles of the traditional agricultural methods, supplemented by high impact scientific interventions seems to provide a viable way forward. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

29. Indian Ocean Region Association (IORA) can play the important role of filling the vacuum of the lack of an organization whose reach spans the entire region of the Indo Pacific. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

30. India is facing the prospect of an acute water crisis. Discuss the reasons for it and suggest a suitable way forward. (10 marks, 150 words)

31. The excessive stress on the need for proper documentation to limit leakages can lead to large scale exclusion of beneficiaries of government schemes. Comment in the backdrop of the findings in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY). (10 marks, 150 words)

32. Despite the availability of scientific reports pointing to the dangers of climate change and the inadequacy of the current global efforts, the 25th CoP of UNFCCC failed to increase ambition on mitigation, adaptation, and finance to tackle the climate crisis. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)

33. There are concerns that the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 falls short of privacy requirements as envisaged by the Justice B.N. Srikrishna committee report. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

34. The proposed labour reforms in India should strike a balance between the need to increase the ease of doing business in India and the need to uphold the rights of the workers. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

35. In the backdrop of increasing instances of Invasive alien species in India discuss the major reasons contributing to this phenomenon and the concerns associated with it. Suggest suitable actions to tackle this issue. (15 marks, 250 words)

36. Discuss the technological challenges involved in the merger of Banks. (10 Marks, 150 Words).

37 "A reasonable man is deterred not by the gravity of the sentence but by the detectability of the crime". In light of this statement, critically examine if Capital Punishment can be used as a tool for deterrence of criminality. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

38. Compare the procedures followed for the impeachment of the President of India and the President of the United States of America. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

39. Describe how the policies of Colonial rule sowed the seeds of communalism in India. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

40. In the backdrop of increasing instances of internet blockades in India, discuss the associated concerns and the governments reasoning for such blockades. Discuss suitable suggestions in this regard. (250 words, 15 marks)

41. What are the monetary policy tools used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to manage liquidity or money supply in the Indian economy? (150 words, 10 marks).

42. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) was envisaged as part of a comprehensive revamp of the adjudication of corporate law disputes. The recent instances of its rulings being overturned by the Supreme Court is a cause of concern. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

43. India is among those nations which have neither signed nor acceded to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Discuss the major concerns of India with respect to the statute and functioning of ICC. (10 marks, 150 words)

44. The constitution of the Monetary Policy Committee will bring more transparency and accountability in fixing India's Monetary Policy. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

45 Although the fall of the WTO Appellate Body represents a turbulent period in the history of trade disputes adjudication, it by no means spells the end of the WTO. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

46. Constitutional Morality requires a co-existence of freedom and self- imposed restraint. Analyse. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

47. Are National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) detrimental for the secular nature of India? Critically comment. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

48. Despite the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments according constitutional status to local administration bodies in India, very little progress has been achieved in truly strengthening the local administrations in India. Comment. Discuss the significance of local bodies in the Indian context. (15 Marks, 250 words)

49 Karnataka government's notification allowing women to work night shifts in all factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948 is a welcome move though there are still some concerns which need to be addressed first for truly empowering the women factory workers. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

50. The latest Global Gender Gap Index paints a dismal picture of India on the gender equality front. Critically evaluate. (250 words; 15 marks)

51. Examine the relevance of Gandhian secularism in present-day Indian society. (250 words; 15 marks)

52. Does the Data protection bill strike a balance between Personal privacy and National Security? Critically Analyze.

53. The concentration of power in the hands of Civilian bureaucracy in defence should give way to power distribution with higher echelons of the military. Discuss.

54. What are the constitutional provisions related to interstate river water disputes? Discuss the

Significance of the recent amendments to the inter-state river water disputes act of 1956.

(10 marks, 150 words)

55. The creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has been a long-pending demand

and it calls for a total transformation of the traditional military mindset. Comment. (10

marks, 150 words)

56. Discuss the significance of the Gaganyaan mission to India. What are the major challenges in the manned mission to space?

57. India's current economic slowdown seems to be driven by both cyclical and structural factors and the problems in the finance sector has only exacerbated the slowdown. Comment. Discuss the measures taken by the government to revitalise the financial sector in India.

58. Notwithstanding the shortcomings in its inaugural edition, the Good Governance Index addresses the problem of the absence of a credible index for an objective evaluation of the States and Union Territories. Comment. What is the significance of such an index? (10 marks, 150 words)

59. India is endowed with a complex socio-economic environmental system which requires it to simultaneously balance the mostly opposing objectives of social equity, economic growth and environmental sustainability. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

60. The NITI Aayog's proposed 15-year plan for in India healthcare entitled "Health Systems for a New India: Building Blocks — Potential Pathways to Reform" is a welcome step in many regards. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

61. Considering the fact that the Internet has become an integral part of people's lives, it is time to recognize the right to access Internet as a fundamental right. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Name: Abhishek Surana

AIR: 10 (CSE 2017)

Chairperson: Air Marshal Ajit Bhonsle

Duration: 25 – 30 minutes

Hometown: Bhilwara, Rajasthan

Abhishek Surana

Optional Subject: Physics

Work Experience:

- IPS Probationer.

- Co-founder Zestbuds (Mobile-based app start-up in Chile).

- Worked in the corporate sector.

Education: B Tech from IIT Delhi.

Hobbies: Astrophysics, Cooking, Travel Photography, Reading Memoirs.

Air Marshal Ajit Bhonsle

Service: Air Marshal, Indian Air Force

- Prior to joining UPSC, as a member, he held the Office of Chief of Headquarters, 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 a keen interest in performing arts, culture and culinary. An animal lover, he is fond of golf, swimming and equestrian sports.

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 the University of Madras, Masters in Business Management from IGNOU and Osmania University and M.Phil from Tokyo.

Interview

Background

- Why have you filled IPS again?

- Why do you want to change cadre?

- What did you do to get the 'Ambassador of Change' award?

- Do you think you were successful? Why so?

- What is needed to bring the change?

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- Three changes that you would like to bring in the district?

- What was Zestbuds? (Startup)

Astrophysics

- How did you get interested in Astrophysics?

- Who gave the Theory of Evolution and what was the name of the book?

- Who said that we should leave the Earth in 100 years? What could be the rationale? Do you subscribe to it?

- Some wise man said that Venus was like Earth before? Why did he say so?

Hobby

- What do you like to cook?

- How do you cook Daal Baati?

- What is the last memoir you've read? What is your favourite memoir and what do you like about it?

Policing

- Don't you think there are certain cons of home cadre? What are the pro and cons of home cadre?

- Why do you want to opt for IAS? what will you do if you get West Bengal again in IAS?

- Will you leave police service for IFS?

- Is police service or force?

- West Bengal has WB police and WB police service? What's the difference?

- What is the perception of people about the police? Why is it so?

- What are the issues being faced by the police? What will you do to address these? What are the three challenges faced in India?

- Have you watched Dabang? What's the image of police it portrays? Is it correct?

Women Empowerment

- What should India do for women empowerment, to bring them to the level they are in Singapore?

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