

Access to the Internet is a Fundamental Right

Striking a balance between liberty and security



AIR INDIA DISINVESTMENT



Air India Disinvestment

Government to sell
100 percent stake in
national carrier



Qassem Soleimani Assassination

Increasing tensions
in the volatile
Middle East region.



Australia Bushfires

Devastation caused by
the fires, destruction
of life and property.



Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Securing women's
choices and
interests.

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
Udit Singh

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. POLITY 01

- Anticipatory Bail
- Article 19
- Article 131
- All India Judicial Service no panacea, says study
- Democracy Index
- Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO);
- Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA)
- National Voter's Day (NVD)
- Muslim personal law a cultural issue: AIMPLB
- Review and Curative Petition
- Speakers and disqualification powers
- Tele-Law
- The Indian Constitution's unitary tilt
- Needless impatience: On Centre's plea on death row convicts
- The long wait for empowered mayors
- Death sentence for rape-murder in 2019 highest in 4 years: NLU report
- The four phases of constitutional interpretation
- A case for including Tulu in the Eighth Schedule
- The right to protest in a free society
- State can regulate minority institutions, says Supreme Court
- The warp and weft of religious liberty
- Access to the internet is a fundamental right

2. ECONOMY 23

- Air India disinvestment
- ARTIS (Application for Remedies in Trade for Indian industry and other Stakeholders)
- Baba Kalyani led committee- SEZ Policy Report
- Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI)
- Coal Mining
- ELECRAMA
- Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC)
- Gold hallmarking being made mandatory
- India's no-fly list
- 'Make in India'

- MGNREGA: On rural jobs scheme fund crunch
- Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI) App
- National Highways Excellence Awards
- National Startup Advisory Council
- National Stock Exchange (NSE) Knowledge Hub
- National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI)
- Paperless Licensing for Petroleum Service Stations
- PF benefits should be extended to contractual employees, rules Supreme Court
- State Energy Efficiency Index 2019
- UJALA and SLNP
- Web Portal 'GATI'
- Wings India 2020
- A multilateral alternative, by Asia
- RBI reopens scheme for FPI investments in debt
- Budgeting for jobs, skilling and economic revival
- IMF lowers India's growth forecast to 4.8%
- Redesigning India's ailing data system
- Govt to provide Rs. 5,559 crore funding to northeast gas grid
- Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD)
- The need for a single energy ministry

3. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS 42

- Bolsonaro- Republic day Guest
- Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)
- Donald Trump's peace plan for Israel and Palestine
- International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in the Rohingya case
- Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs)
- India- Australia Relations (A road map for robust trade ties)
- Jogbani-Biratnagar check post
- Kalapani border issue
- Libya summit
- Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement
- Myanmar's growing dependence on China
- Raisina Dialogue
- Sagarmatha Sambaad

- Sampriti
- Shanghai Council meet
- Soft power of India still untapped
- In the ruins of unilateralism
- The new worry of depleting diplomatic capital
- New and Emerging Strategic Technologies (NEST)
- India-Pak. trade freeze hits thousands: report
- Qassem Soleimani Assassination

4. ART AND CULTURE

68

- Bharat Parv
- Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM)
- Bibi Ka Maqbara
- Bihu
- Classical Languages of India
- Indian Heritage in Digital Space
- Kabir Yatra
- Madhavpur Mela
- Nagoba Jatara
- National Council of Science Museums (NCSM)
- Patola Saree
- Tata Vadya or Stringed Instruments (Chordophones)
- Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards (Akademi Puraskar)
- Inscriptions confirm presence of two medieval monasteries at Moghalmari
- Lai Haraoba
- Mandu Festival
- Seke Language
- Sangita Kalanidhi award

5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

74

- Challakere to be ISRO's astronaut training hub
- Global Drosophila Conference
- GSAT-30
- Indian cobra genome mapped
- Indian Science Congress (ISC)
- Vyom Mitra
- Young Scientists Labs

6. SECURITY AND DEFENCE

78

- AK-203 Assault Rifles

- Bru refugees to be settled in Tripura
- CDS and the path to jointmanship
- De-Radicalization (DR)
- Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)
- K-4
- Ministry of Defence (MoD) No Objection Certificate (NOC) web portal
- NIA takeover of Bhima Koregaon case
- Saras Mk2
- Steel mesh to replace fences on the borders

7. ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

85

- African cheetahs to prowl Indian forests
- Australia wildfires
- Biotechnology adoption
- HydroChloroFluoroCarbon (HCFC)-141 b
- Irrawaddy dolphins sighted in Chilika
- Maradu buildings destroyed
- Re-grassing is mandatory after mining, rules SC
- Waterbird census in A.P.
- World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS)
- 10 more wetlands in India declared as Ramsar sites
- India records less than 100 tiger deaths for the first time in three years
- Green nod for oil, gas exploration waived
- Eastern Ghats: land-use policies, climate change hit endemic plant habitats
- Kerala for steps to curb alien plants' growth in NBR
- Chinese paddlefish

8. HEALTH ISSUES

99

- Coronavirus
- Dengue
- National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2019
- National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) Bill, 2019.
- Myeloma
- EVALI
- 171 hospitals de-listed from PM's health scheme after fraud
- Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSD)

9. SOCIAL ISSUES	106	15. MISCELLANEOUS	121
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 • A weak test: On Swachh ranking of cities • Preventing Mob Lynching • Women politicians trolled more: Amnesty India 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Krishi Karman Awards • Mannequins to handle traffic surveillance • National Youth Festival (NYF) • Pariksha Pe Charcha • Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar • World Braille Day • Youth Co: Lab National Innovation Challenge • WHO has designated 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife • Use of chemicals to ripen fruits amounts to poisoning consumers 	
10. GEOGRAPHY	109	15. PRACTICE QUESTIONS	124
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angel Falls (Salto Ángel) • Mandovi River/ Mahadayi/Mhadei River • Papagni River • Thirty Metre Telescope • Yellow Rust • New method better estimates melting of debris-covered Himalayan glaciers • Heatwave effect • Taal Volcano 		16. ANSWER KEYS	138
11. EDUCATION	112	17. MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS	141
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) • Deeksharambh Scheme • Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO (INCCU) • National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) • NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement) • Paramarsh Scheme 		18. INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	144
12. DISASTER MANAGEMENT	115		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operation Vanilla • Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2020 			
13 HISTORY	116		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savitribai Phule Jayanti 			
14. GOVERNANCE	117		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption Perception Index • Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS) • National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP) • One government proposes, the next disposes 			

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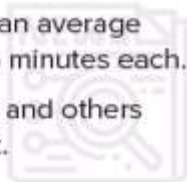
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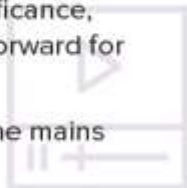
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POLITY

1. Anticipatory Bail

Bail

- 'Bail' refers to the process of releasing an accused charged with certain crime by ensuring his future attendance in the court for trial and compelling him to remain within the jurisdiction of the court.
- Bail has been defined by Black's Law Dictionary as "the security required by a Court for the release of a prisoner who must appear at a future time".

In the 1973 case *Supt. and Remembrancer of Legal Affairs v. Amiya Kumar Roy Choudhry*, the Calcutta High Court explained the principle behind giving bail: "The law of bails... has to dovetail two conflicting demands, namely,

- On one hand, the requirements of the society for being shielded from the hazards of being exposed to the misadventures of a person alleged to have committed a crime; and
- On the other, the fundamental canon of criminal jurisprudence viz. the presumption of innocence of an accused till he is found guilty."

Bail is of two kinds:-

1. Regular bail

- Regular Bail is a bail that is granted by the Court to a person after he has been arrested.

2. Anticipatory bail.

- It is a bail that is granted to a person, even before an arrest, in anticipation that he might be getting arrested in some days for a certain criminal offense.
- There is no need of a First Information Report (FIR) that is filed against a person to make an application for the anticipatory bail.

S. 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973

It lays down the law on anticipatory bail. Sub-section (1) of the provision reads: "When any person has reason to believe that he may be arrested on an accusation of having committed a non-bailable offence, he may apply to the High Court or the Court of Session for a direction under this section; and that Court may, if it thinks fit, direct that in the event of such arrest, he shall be released on bail."

Rationale behind anticipatory bail

- This bail is essential nowadays where influential persons involve their opponents, in false and frivolous criminal issues to either damage their image or to get them arrested for some time, to enable them to get their work done.

- Apart from false cases, where there are reasonable grounds for holding that a person accused of an offence is not likely to abscond, or otherwise misuse his liberty while on bail, there seems no justification to require him first to submit to custody, remain in prison for some days and then apply for bail

Conditions while granting anticipatory bail

438(2) reads: "When the High Court or the Court of Session makes a direction under sub-section (1), it may include such conditions in such directions in the light of the facts of the particular case, as it may think fit, including —

- a condition that the person shall make himself available for interrogation by a police officer as and when required;
- a condition that the person shall not, directly or indirectly, make any inducement, threat or promise to any person acquainted with the facts of the case so as to dissuade him from disclosing such facts to the Court or to any police officer;
- a condition that the person shall not leave India without the previous permission of the Court;

Context

- The Supreme Court has ruled that anticipatory bail granted to a person "should not invariably" be limited to a fixed period and could continue till the end of trial.
- It said however that it is open for the court to limit its tenure in case of "special or peculiar features".
- Further denial of bail amounts to deprivation of the fundamental right to personal liberty in a free and democratic country.

Divergent views in the past

- 1980 *Sibbia* case: Anticipatory bail can't be construed as being limited by time
 - * Court can impose appropriate conditions
- 1995 *Salauddin* case: Anticipatory bail limited within a time frame
- 2010 *Mhetre* case: Life of anticipatory bail order can't be curtailed

The questions referred to the Constitution Bench were twofold:

- Whether protection of anticipatory bail granted to a person should be limited to a fixed period so as to enable him or her to surrender before the trial court and seek regular bail, and
- Whether the life of anticipatory bail should end at the time and stage when accused is summoned by the court.

SC Ruling

- Anticipatory bail does not end when the accused is summoned by the court.
 - * The court held that protection against arrest should adjust in favour of the accused. Restricting the protection would prove unfavourable for the accused.
- Nothing in CrPC to suggest operation of order granting anticipatory bail must be limited by time
- However, it is open for a court to impose appropriate conditions for grant of anticipatory bail if the specific facts or the features of the offence involved demand it.
 - * Courts have to consider the nature of the offence, the role of the person, the likelihood of his influencing the course of investigation or tampering of evidence, including intimidating witnesses and fleeing justice.
 - * But restrictions/conditions can be imposed only on a case-to-case basis.
 - * Special or other restrictive conditions may be imposed if the case or cases warrant, but should not be imposed in a routine manner in all cases, the Bench pointed out.

2. Article 19**Brandenburg v. Ohio (1969)**

- In this case, the 'clear and present danger' test was expanded, and the 'imminent lawless action' test was laid down by the U.S. Supreme Court, which the court has followed since.
- This test states, "The constitutional guarantees of free speech and free press do not permit the state to forbid or proscribe advocacy of the use of force or of law violation, except where such advocacy is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action".

Initially, Indian courts explicitly rejected the "clear and present danger" test, arguing that the doctrine cannot be imported into the Indian Constitution because of "reasonable restrictions", but subsequently we see the courts adopting tests similar to the US ones, and even affirming the Brandenburg test, as in the case of Arup Bhuyan [Arup Bhuyan vs State of Assam, (2011)].

- The Supreme Court said, citing the Brandenburg test, "We respectfully agree and are of the opinion that they apply to India too, as our fundamental rights are similar to the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution".

Shreya Singhal vs Union of India, (2013)

How do we differentiate between advocacy and incitement? The Shreya Singhal judgment offers a very clear exposition of the difference between advocacy and incitement.

- The court held that three concepts are fundamental to understanding the scope of free speech. For them "The first is discussion, the second is advocacy, and the third is incitement.

- Mere discussion or even advocacy of a particular cause howsoever unpopular is at the heart of Article 19(1)(a).
- It is only when such discussion or advocacy reaches the level of incitement that Article 19(2) kicks in".

They cited Brandenburg's case: "The wide difference between advocacy and incitement, between preparation and attempt, between assembling and conspiracy, must be borne in mind. In order to support a finding of clear and present danger it must be shown either that immediate serious violence was to be expected or was advocated, or that the past conduct furnished reason to believe that such advocacy was then contemplated."

3. Article 131**Context**

- Kerala became the first state to challenge the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) before the Supreme Court.
 - * The Kerala government has moved the apex court under Article 131 of the Constitution, the provision under which the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction to deal with any dispute between the Centre and a state; the Centre and a state on the one side and another state on the other side; and two or more states.
- The Chhattisgarh government filed a suit in the Supreme Court under Article 131, challenging the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act on the ground that it encroaches upon the state's powers to maintain law and order.

Kerala Govt's Challenge

- The State of Kerala has filed a suit to challenge the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, stating that it is violative of Articles 14 (equality before the law), 21 (protection of life and personal liberty) and 25 (freedom of religion) of the Indian constitution as well as against the secular fabric of the nation.
- It also challenges the Passport (Entry to India) Amendment Rules 2015, and Foreigners (Amendment) Order 2015, which had regularised the stay of non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, who had entered India before December 31, 2014, on the condition that they had fled religious persecution from their home countries.

What is Jurisdiction?

- Jurisdiction of a court is its power or authority to hear and determine a matter
 - * Pecuniary (power of court based on the amount of money involved in the matter),
 - * Territorial (power of court based on the geographical limit where the cause of action arises or offence is committed),
 - * Subject-wise (power of court based on a particular subject matter),
 - * Appellate (the Supreme Court hears appeals from lower courts)

- * Advisory jurisdiction (the President has the power to seek an opinion from the apex court under Article 143 of the Constitution)
- * Original (power of court to hear a case from its beginning)

What is Article 131?

- In its extraordinary original jurisdiction, the Supreme Court has exclusive power to adjudicate upon disputes involving elections of the President and the Vice President, those that involve states and the Centre, and cases involving the violation of fundamental rights.
- For a dispute to qualify as a dispute under Article 131, it has to necessarily be between states and the Centre, and must involve a question of law or fact on which the existence of a legal right of the state or the Centre depends.
- In a 1978 judgment, *State of Karnataka v Union of India*, Justice P N Bhagwati had said that for the Supreme Court to accept a suit under Article 131, the state need not show that its legal right is violated, but only that the dispute involves a legal question.
- Article 131 cannot be used to settle political differences between state and central governments headed by different parties.

Is there any bar on the original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court?

Yes, the original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court does not extend to:

- A dispute arising out of any treaty, agreement, covenant, engagement or other similar instrument executed before the commencement of the constitution and continues to be in operation or which provides that the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court shall not extend to such a dispute;
- The parliament may exclude the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in disputes relating to the use, distribution, or control of the water of any inter-state river;
- Suits brought by private individuals against the government of India.

Can the Centre too sue a state under Article 131?

- The Centre has other powers to ensure that its laws are implemented. The Centre can issue directions to a state to implement the laws made by Parliament. If states do not comply with the directions, the Centre can move the court seeking a permanent injunction against the states to force them to comply with the law.
- Non-compliance of court orders can result in contempt of court, and the court usually hauls up the chief secretaries of the States responsible for implementing laws.

Is it unusual for states to challenge laws made by Parliament?

- Under the Constitution, laws made by Parliament are presumed to be constitutional until a court holds otherwise. However, in India's quasi-federal constitutional structure, inter-governmental disputes are not uncommon.
- The framers of the Constitution expected such differences, and added the exclusive original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court for their resolution.

4. All India Judicial Service no panacea, says study

Context

- Report on The All India Judicial Service by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.

Background:

- The lower judiciary is plagued by a number of issues like the large pendency in the cases and the poor quality of its judgment which is more often than not appealed in the higher courts. This is mainly due to a large number of vacancies in judicial positions, the long delays in the appointment process and lack of transparency in the appointment process.
- Currently, the appointments of District Judges and Subordinate Judiciary are done by the respective State governments.
- Given the challenges being faced in the lower judiciary, there has been a growing call for the creation of a unified pan-India judicial service.
- The idea for All India Judicial Service (AIJS) was first proposed by the 14th Report of the Law Commission of India in 1958, aimed at creating a centralised cadre of District Judges.
- The Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy in its recent report titled, 'A primer on the All India Judicial Service – A solution in search of a problem?' has brought forth many arguments against an AIJS.

Arguments for AIJS:

- * A All India Judicial Service (AIJS) would help in centralizing the recruitment process. This would help attract the best talent from all over the country.
- * AIJS can help in a faster and timely recruitment process which would help address the high level of vacancy in the judiciary. It will address the problem of a high level of pendency in cases by helping increase the judges: cases ratio in India
- The AIJS can be implemented with provisions which will help address the issue of lack of representation for the marginalised in the judicial services.

Arguments against AIJS:

The report by the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy points out several issues in pitching AIJS as a solution to judicial vacancies.

- The major arguments in favour of the AIJS were that it would help fill the approximately 5,000 vacancies across the District and Subordinate Judiciary in India. However, a closer analysis would reveal the fact that, it is only certain High Courts which account for a majority of the approximately 5,000 vacancies.
- Instead of proposing an AIJS as a solution for judicial vacancies, it may be more effective to investigate the reasons and causes for a large number of vacancies in the poorly performing States and address the issues at the local levels.

Reservation:

- AIJS has been pitched as a solution to lack of representation for the marginalized in the judiciary. Interestingly many States are already reserving posts for marginalized communities and women in the appointment process of the lower judiciary.
- The creation of AIJS and the subsequent reservation would face some backlash given that many of the communities who currently benefit from the State quotas, may oppose the creation of an AIJS. This is because the communities recognised as Other Backward Classes (OBC) by State governments may or may not be classified as OBCs by the Central government. This might lead to the disempowerment of a few communities in the state.

Local language and customs:

- Judges recruited through a centralized process may not know the local languages of the States in which they are posted. This becomes an important impediment considering the fact that the proceedings of civil and criminal courts are to be conducted in a language prescribed by the respective State governments which in most of the cases is the state language.
- The lack of understanding of the local language and customs are issues that deserve serious consideration since it will not only lead to longer case disposal times and also may affect the quality of judgments.

5. Democracy Index

- Democracy Index is an index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a UK-based company. It intends to measure the state of democracy.
- The index is based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories, measuring pluralism, civil liberties and political culture.

The In addition to a numeric score and a ranking, the index categorizes each country in one of four regime types: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.

- Full democracies: are nations where civil liberties and fundamental political freedoms are not only respected but also reinforced by a political culture conducive to the thriving of democratic principles.

- * These nations have a valid system of governmental checks and balances, an independent judiciary whose decisions are enforced, governments that function adequately, and diverse and independent media.

- Flawed democracies: are nations where elections are fair and free and basic civil liberties are honoured but may have issues (e.g. media freedom infringement).

- * These nations have significant faults in other democratic aspects, including underdeveloped political culture, low levels of participation in politics, and issues in the functioning of governance.

- Hybrid regimes: are nations with regular electoral frauds, preventing them from being fair and free democracies.

- * These nations commonly have governments that apply pressure on political opponents, non-independent judiciaries, widespread corruption, harassment and pressure placed on the media, anaemic rule of law, and more pronounced faults than flawed democracies in the realms of underdeveloped political culture, low levels of participation in politics, and issues in the functioning of governance.

- Authoritarian regimes: are nations where political pluralism has vanished or is extremely limited.

- * These nations are often absolute monarchies or dictatorships, may have some conventional institutions of democracy but with meagre significance, infringements and abuses of civil liberties are commonplace, elections (if they take place) are not fair and free, the media is often state-owned or controlled by groups associated with the ruling regime, the judiciary is not independent, and there are omnipresent censorship and suppression of governmental criticism.

Context:

- India – the world's biggest democracy has slipped 10 places in the 2019 Democracy Index to 51st place.
- The report, "A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest", was done by the Economist Intelligence Unit — the research and analysis division of the Economist Group, which is the sister company to 'The Economist' newspaper.
- The report records how global democracy fared, analyzing 165 independent states and two territories.

What does the report say?

India:

- India's overall score fell from 7.23 to 6.9, on a scale of 0-10, within a year (2018-2019) — the country's lowest since 2006.

- India ranks eighth in the Asia and Australasia region, behind Taiwan and Timor-Leste.
- The survey attributes the primary cause of the democratic regression to an erosion of civil liberties in the country.
 - * The report talks about the repeal of both Article 370 and Article 35A and the events that followed.
 - * It notes that the government restricted Internet access in the state.
 - * It pointed out that the NRC exercise in Assam excluded 1.9 million people from the final list, and that the vast majority of people excluded from the NRC are Muslims.
 - * On the CAA, the report says that it has enraged the large Muslim population, stoked communal tensions and generated large protests in major cities.

World:

- The average global score also recorded its worst value ever, down from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.44.
- The fall is driven by a sharp regression in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, a lesser one in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and by stagnation in the remaining regions that were covered.

6. Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO):

- The Foreigners Registration Office is the primary agency to regulate the registration, movement, stay, departure of foreigners, and also for recommending the extension of stay in India.
- The FRRO is an office exclusively for the services of foreign tourists in the country.
- The FRRO comes under the administrative control of the Union Home Ministry.

'e-FRRO' (e-Foreigners Regional Registration Office) scheme

- e-FRRO scheme is aimed at building a centralized, transparent online platform for foreigners to avail visa related services, and to provide Faceless, Cashless and Paperless services to the foreigners with a user-friendly experience.

How does it work?

- e-FRRO includes online FRRO Service delivery mechanism without the requirement of visiting FRRO/FRO Office barring exceptional cases.
- Using this application, foreigners are required to create their own User ID by registering themselves.

- Afterwards, they can apply online through the registered User-ID for various Visa and Immigration related services in India viz. Registration, Visa Extension, Visa Conversion, Exit Permit, etc.

Advantages of e-FRRO

- It includes the facilitation of legitimate foreigners through "Digital India" vision of the Government.
- Foreigners need not visit FRRO/FRO office – "Services from the comfort of home".
- Convenient and time-saving.
- An exclusive dashboard for User-friendly experience and Uniform & Standardized Services across the country.

7. Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA)

- FEMBoSA is a regional establishment to increase mutual cooperation in respect to the common interests of the SAARC's Election Management Bodies (EMBs).
- In 2010, for the first time, the Bangladesh Election Commission organized a regional meeting titled 'Meeting on Cooperation of Election Commissions in the South Asia Region', which was later called FEMBoSA as an institutionalized form.
- The forum's charter was approved in 2012 when FEMBoSA was established.
- FEMBoSA was established at the 3rd Conference of Heads of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of the SAARC countries held at New Delhi in 2012.
- The annual FEMBoSA meeting is held by rotation among the members.
- The FEMBoSA represents a very large part of the democratic world and is an active regional association of the election management bodies of South Asia.

The objectives of the Forum are:

- To promote contact among the EMBs of the SAARC countries.
- To share experiences with a view to learning from each other.
- To cooperate with one another in enhancing the capabilities of the EMBs towards conducting free and fair elections.

Context:

- The Election Commission of India is going to host the 10th annual meeting of the Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) at New Delhi.

8. National Voter's Day (NVD)

- NVD has been celebrated on January 25 every year since 2011, all across the country at over ten lakh locations across the nation, to mark the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on 25th January 1950.
- It is being celebrated in order to encourage more young voters to take part in the political process.
- Dedicated to the voters of the country, the Day is utilized to spread awareness among voters for promoting informed participation in the electoral process.

Context

- 10th National Voters' Day was celebrated on 25th January 2020.

Details

- Theme for NVD 2020 is 'Electoral Literacy for Stronger Democracy'.
- This year marks an important milestone in the history of Indian democracy as Election Commission of India (ECI) completes 70 years of its journey.

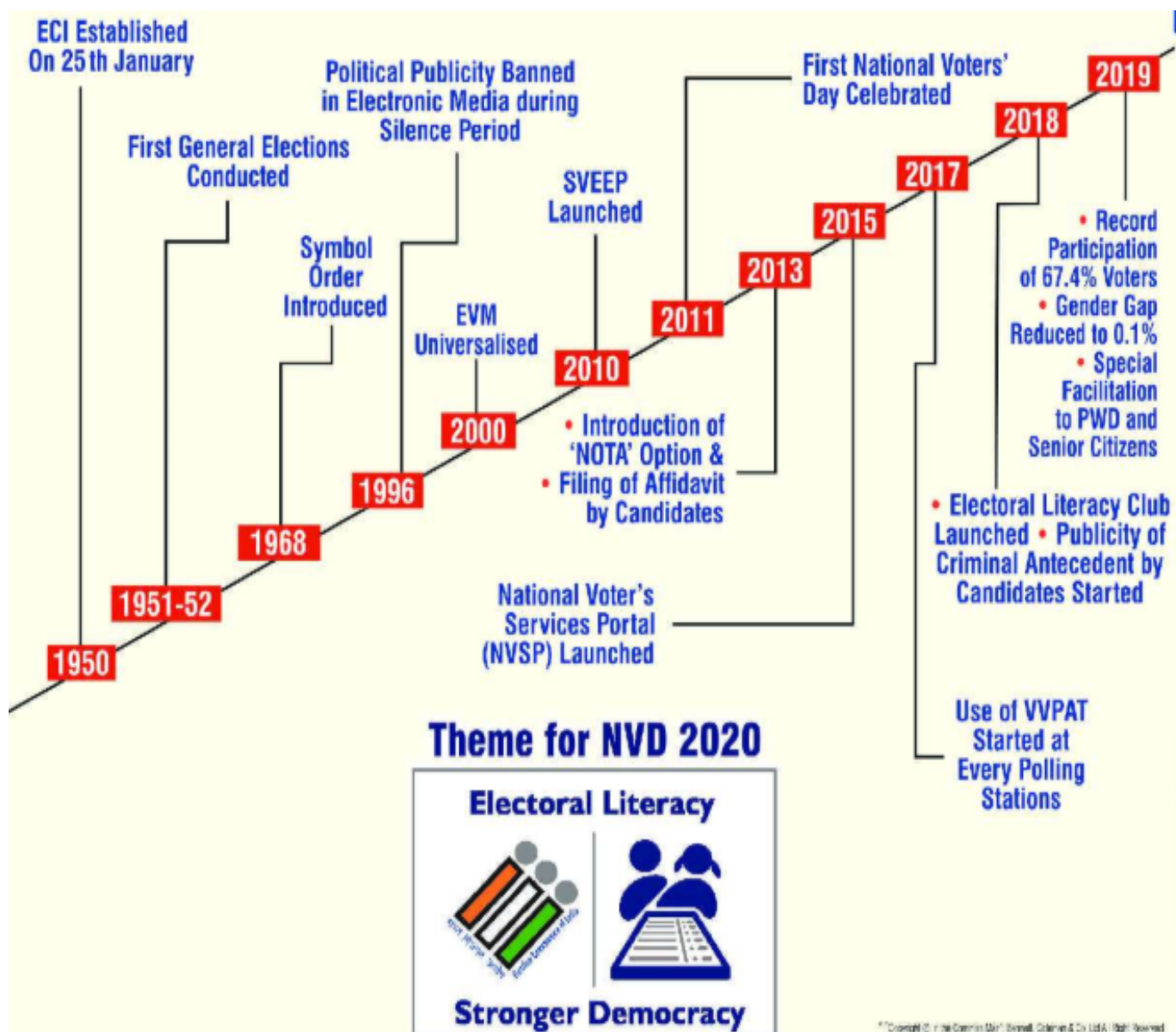
9. Muslim personal law a cultural issue: AIMPLB

Context

- A writ petition was filed in the Supreme Court challenging the Constitutional validity of the Muslim practice of Nikah Halala and Polygamy.
- It said practices violates the Muslim women's right to live with dignity and their privacy, and hence asked the Apex Court to declare such practices as unconstitutional and illegal.
- The All Indian Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has replied to the petition filed in the Supreme Court.

Meaning

- Polygamy allows Muslim man to have more than one wife
- Nikah Halala is the procedure which a Muslim woman needs to follow if she wants to remarry her divorced husband



Petitioner's arguments:

Violative of Constitution:

- The petition wants the apex court to declare Section 2 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution and hence deem it to be unconstitutional.

Rights of women:

- The petition claims that the ban on polygamy and nikah halala would help secure basic rights for the women and also ensure the interest of public order, morality, and health.

AIMPLB's arguments

Cultural issue:

- The AIMPLB has argued that the Muslim personal law, which allows practices like polygamy and nikah halala, is a cultural issue and inextricably interwoven with the religion of Islam.

Not bound by fundamental rights provisions:

- The Board argues that since personal laws do not derive their validity from the legislature or any other competent authority but from the scriptural texts of the respective religions, the personal law does not fall within the definition of 'laws' under Article 13 of the Constitution.
- Due to this, the validity of personal law cannot be challenged on the basis of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

Constitutional provisions:

- The Constitution allows the continuance of the different practices of various religions until the state succeeds in securing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

Uniform Civil Code:

- The Board has stated that the petition is a push for a judicial pronouncement to bring the UCC. The board argues that even Article 44 of the Constitution only says the state should try for bringing UCC and is not mandatory.
- Article 44 has implicitly recognised the plurality of faiths and permits their continuance in India.

Judicial precedents:

- The SC in its 1997 judgment in the Ahmedabad Women Action Group case, had already refused to examine whether polygamy in Muslim personal law is illegal and an act of cruelty.
- The court had stated that the issue should be dealt with by the legislature and not the courts.

Women rights:

- The Board claims that the rights of Muslim women are already secure under the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act of 1986.

10. Review and Curative Petition

Article 137 of the Indian Constitution provides for a review petition. Review literally and even judicially means reexamination or reconsideration. Basic philosophy inherent in it is the universal acceptance of human fallibility. Rectification of an order thus stems from the fundamental principle that justice is above all, it is exercised to remove the error and for disturbing finality.

- In accordance to the rules set under the Supreme Court Rules, 1966 the petition must be filed within thirty days from the date of the order and must be presented in front of the same bench of judges who had initially delivered the order.
- In *Eastern Book Company vs DB Modak* SC declared that review petition is liable to be dismissed on the grounds of delay itself.

Process

- Ordinarily, review petitions are tied up to the bench which had decided the main case. And if any judge of that bench has retired, a new judge takes his place.
- The case files are circulated to the judges in their respective chambers and there is no need for the all the judges on the bench to sit together. Nor is there a requirement of lawyers to make oral arguments.
- Only those, who were parties to the main case, are allowed to file review petitions unless the court specifically gives permission to any other party.

What the case papers need to demonstrate to the judges is that

- there was a grave error in deciding the case,
- either in law or on account of understanding of the facts, and
- That this error warrants a correction to meet the ends of justice.

Open court hearing of review petitions

- The applications for open court hearing accompany the substantial review petition. It is completely the discretion of the judges to decide whether the case deserves an open court hearing.
- If the bench is of the view that an open court hearing furthers the interest of justice and it would assist the judges in their decision-making in a given case, the plea for an open court hearing can be accepted.

Curative Petition

A curative petition may be entertained only after a review petition has been disposed. A curative petition is usually decided by judges in chamber, unless a specific request for an open-court hearing is allowed.

- The concept of Curative petition was evolved by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of *Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra* (2002) where the question was whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after dismissal of a review petition

- * The court ruled that a curative petition can be entertained if the petitioner establishes there was a violation of the principles of natural justice, and that he was not heard by the court before passing an order.
- * It will also be admitted where a judge failed to disclose facts that raise the apprehension of bias.
- * Abuse of the process of court.

For opening the channel of review the court has imposed several conditions

The SC has held that curative petitions must be rare rather than regular, and be entertained with circumspection.

- The grounds stated in curative petition must be taken earlier in the review petition
- A curative petition must be accompanied by certification by a senior advocate, pointing out substantial grounds for entertaining it.
- It must be first circulated to a bench of the three senior most judges, and the judges who passed the concerned judgment, if available. Only when a majority of the judges conclude that the matter needs hearing should it be listed — as far as possible, before the same Bench.
- If at any state of consideration the curative petition the bench holds that petition is without merit exemplary costs may be imposed on the petitioner

Context

- SC rejects curative plea in Nirbhaya case

11. Speakers and disqualification powers

Context

- The Supreme Court in its latest verdict has asked Parliament to make changes in the Constitution to strip Legislative Assembly Speakers of their exclusive power to decide whether legislators should be disqualified or not under the anti-defection law.
 - * The Tenth Schedule provides the circumstances under which a Member of Parliament or a State Legislative Assembly can be disqualified for defecting to another party.
 - * Disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule are decided by the Speaker of the concerned House.

The court made two important declarations

- First, the three-judge bench said that the Speakers of both the State Assemblies and the Parliament have to decide on disqualification petitions for members within three months except for the existence of an extraordinary circumstance.
 - * It also held that courts have the powers to intervene if the proceedings are delayed.

- Second, the court recommended to Parliament that it strongly considers removing the Speakers' disqualification powers and forming an independent tribunal to take up these petitions.

- * Given the fact that a Speaker belongs to a particular political party, the Court has mooted that these disqualification petitions be decided by an independent permanent tribunal.

Background

- The judges were ruling on the disqualification of a Congress legislator in Manipur who joined the Bharatiya Janata Party right after the 2017 Assembly elections.
- The Congress had asked the Manipur Speaker to disqualify him. The Speaker failed to act and kept the petition pending.
- After the Speaker failed to take any action on these petitions, a writ petition was filed before the High Court of Manipur at Imphal.
 - * In 2017, the High Court stated that as the issue of whether a High Court can direct a Speaker to decide a disqualification petition within a certain timeframe is pending before a Bench of five judges of the Supreme Court, it could not pass any order in the matter.
 - * Since the High Court refused to grant any relief, the appellant approached the Supreme Court in appeal.
- The question for the judiciary was to look at Speaker's powers to disqualify members and the extent to which courts can interfere with it.

Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu & others

- The present Bench referred to the five-judge Bench judgment in Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu & others, which held, among other things, that a Speaker does not enjoy immunity from judicial scrutiny while deciding disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule.
- It was also held in this case that a Speaker or a Chairman, acting under the Tenth Schedule, is a Tribunal.
- So it made the Speaker's order subject to judicial review on limited grounds.
- It made it clear that the court's jurisdiction would not come into play unless the Speaker passes an order, leaving no room for intervention prior to adjudication.

Rajendra Singh Rana vs Swamy Prasad Maurya

- The court, elaborating on a 1992 decision in Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachillhu and others, held that the Constitution prohibits judicial intervention
 - * This means that the court cannot issue an interim order protecting the MLA or the MP from disqualification proceedings.

- What the law does not prohibit is the court enforcing disqualification proceedings, which are quasi-judicial in character, when they are unnecessarily delayed.
- Thus according to Justice Nariman, when a Speaker refrains from deciding a petition within a reasonable time, there was clearly an error “which attracted the jurisdiction of the High Court in exercise of the power of judicial review”.

What did the court say?

- Having cleared the confusion over contrasting past judgments, the three-judge bench, in its verdict, set a time limit of three months for the Speakers to decide on disqualification petitions.
- It also recommended that Parliament should seriously consider taking away disqualification powers from the Speakers. These powers could be given to an independent tribunal headed by a former Supreme Court judge or a former chief justice of a High Court or form “some other outside independent mechanism to ensure that such disputes are decided both swiftly and impartially”.

Course correction for the Speaker's office

Article 93 of the Indian Constitution speaks about the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House of the People

- The House of the People (Lok Sabha) shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the House to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker thereof and, so often as the office of Speaker or Deputy Speaker becomes vacant, the House shall choose another member to be Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be

In the Lok Sabha, the lower House of the Indian Parliament, both Presiding Officers—the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker- are elected from among its members by a simple majority of members present and voting in the House. As such, no specific qualifications are prescribed for being elected the Speaker.

Functions performed by the Speaker

The speaker is guided by the provisions of the Constitution and the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.

- The speaker is benefitted from the Directions issued by the predecessors which are compiled periodically.
- The speaker is assisted by the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha and senior officers of the Secretariat on parliamentary activities and on matters of practice and procedure.

The office of the Speaker occupies a pivotal position in our parliamentary democracy. It has been said of the office of the Speaker that while the members of Parliament represent the individual constituencies, the Speaker represents the full authority of the House itself.

- The Speaker is the head of the Lok Sabha
- The Speaker is the guardian of the rights and privileges of the House, its Committees and members

- * The Speaker decides the duration of debates, can discipline members and even override decisions by committees.

- While facilitating the business of the House and to maintain decorum in the House, the Speaker has ‘extensive functions to perform in matters regulatory, administrative and judicial, falling under their domain. The speaker enjoys vast authority under the Constitution and the Rules, as well as inherently’.
- The Speaker is the ‘ultimate interpreter and arbiter of those provisions which relate to the functioning of the House. The decisions taken by the Speaker is final and binding and ordinarily cannot be easily challenged.

Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the chief architects of India's freedom and a moving force behind its Constitution, describes the position as: “The Speaker represents the House. She represents the dignity of the House, the freedom of the House and because the House represents the nation, in a particular way, the Speaker becomes a symbol of the nation's freedom and liberty. Therefore, that should be an honored position, a free position and should be occupied always by persons of outstanding ability and impartiality”.

The nature of duties of the Speaker, technically as an “arbiter” or a “quasi-judicial body” should not be limited exclusively to matters under the Tenth Schedule; rather, it extends to a range of its functions.

Speaker's role has been questioned on the allegation of bias

- The Supreme Court has observed in Jagjit Singh versus State of Haryana as “...Without meaning any disrespect for any particular Speaker in the country, but only going by some events of the recent past, certain questions have been raised about the confidence in the matter of impartiality on some issues having political overtones which are decided by the Speaker in his capacity as a Tribunal.”
- As a minority view, Justice J.S. Verma in Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachillhu and Others observed: “The Speaker being an authority within the House and his tenure being dependent on the will of the majority therein, likelihood of suspicion of bias could not be ruled out.”

Speakers as impartial and apolitical

- The role and impartiality of the speaker currently resonates with his personal image and character.
- Even if the speaker wants to stay neutral, be apolitical and non-partisan, the structural issues in the system the manner of appointment of the Speaker and tenure in office, will not allow the speaker to completely dissociate from the party considerations as the electoral system and conventions in India have ‘not developed to ensure protection to the office’
- A member is appointed to the office of the Speaker if a motion nominating an individual is carried in the House.

- * Elections are not always by consensus and there have been cases when different parties have fielded their own candidates.
- * All political parties campaign in the constituency of the Speaker. Even if the Speaker is re-elected to the House, the office of the Speaker in India is still open for elections.
- Therefore, what is required is not merely incidental changes in the powers of the Speaker; rather a major revamp in the structure of the office itself is necessary.
- It is suggested that a scheme should be brought wherein Speakers should renounce all political affiliations, membership and activity once they have been elected, both within the Assembly and in the country as a whole.

UK Model

- In the UK Model the speaker resigns from the party and remains politically neutral. He abstains from expressing any political views and he never voices an opinion on party issues.
- As a result they have developed a convention in which the speaker is elected unopposed.
 - * Political Parties do not field their candidates against the speaker in the general poll.
 - * The major political parties usually at the time of general elections as a matter of convention support the Speaker as an independent candidate.
- Thus he is re-elected as the Speaker of the house on account of strict impartiality and nonalignment to party politics.

But in India, usually, the Speaker is elected from the majority party. The speaker's continuation or re-election in Parliament depends on the existence of the Government. Hence the speaker owes his allegiance to the political party from which he was elected.

Conclusion

- Impartiality, fairness and autonomy in decision-making are the hallmarks of a robust institution.
- It is the freedom from interference and pressures which provide the necessary atmosphere where one can work with absolute commitment to the cause of neutrality as a constitutional value.
- At a time when India's fall in ranks in the latest Democracy Index has evoked concern, it is expected that Parliament will pay heed to the reasoning of the Supreme Court and take steps to strengthen the institution of the Speaker.

12. Tele-Law

- It is an initiative to provide pre-litigation advice to needy people.
- The initiative was launched in 2017 with an aim to provide legal advice in the villages through Common Service Centres (CSCs).

- It is aimed at facilitating the delivery of legal advice through an expert panel of lawyers.
- The Department has partnered with NASLA and CSC eGovernance Service Ltd for offering this service to poor and marginalised people.
- The project connects lawyers with clients through video-conferencing/telephone/chat facilities by the Para-Legal Volunteers stationed at CSCs.
- A dedicated website on Tele-Law is maintained by the Department of Justice which has been designed with support from CSC eGovernance and has been translated into 22 languages.
- A Tele-Law mobile application is available for the PLVs to pre-register Tele-Law cases.
- A Tele-Law Dashboard is also developed with decentralized features for login and registration of cases, and for viewing the status of cases added for panel lawyers, PLVs, etc.

Context

- The Department of Justice, Government of India celebrated 1,50,000 registrations for advice on Tele-Law.

13. The Indian Constitution's unitary tilt

Context

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) has revealed some of the most significant gaps of Indian federalism.

- State governments occupied by Opposition parties have declared that they would not implement the law
- Legislative Assembly of Kerala went to the extent of passing a resolution, stating that the law "contradicts the basic values and principles of the Constitution"
- In this backdrop let us have a look at the Federal relationship between the Center and the States.

Constitutional Perspective

- Article 256
 - * The executive power of every State shall be so exercised as to ensure compliance with the laws made by Parliament and any existing laws which apply in that State, and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of such directions to a State as may appear to the Government of India to be necessary for that purpose
 - * It compels the State government to ensure implementation of the laws made by Parliament.
 - * If the State government fails to do so, the Government of India is empowered to give "such directions to a State as may appear... to be necessary".

- Article 365
 - * Effect of failure to comply with, or to give effect to, directions given by the Union Where any State has failed to comply with or to give effect to any directions given in the exercise of the executive power of the Union under any directions given in the exercise of the executive power of the Union under any of the provisions of this Constitution, it shall be lawful for the President to hold that a situation has arisen in which the government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution
 - * The refusal to enforce the law even after the Centre issues directions would empower the President to impose President's Rule in those States under Articles 356 and 365.

The Supreme Court of India has also confirmed this reading of the law in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* — arguably the most significant case on Indian federalism.

Anti-CAA ads in West Bengal

- Another controversy arose in West Bengal, where the State government put anti-CAA advertisements on its websites.
- In an interim order, the Calcutta High Court directed the State government to remove those advertisements.
- The question — whether State governments are empowered to use public funds to campaign against a law made by Parliament — is open for final determination.
- In its final judgment, the High Court could bar the State government from campaigning against a parliamentary law.

Therefore, neither the refusal to implement nor the official protests registered by State governments carry much legal force.

Concerns raised about single party dominance for electoral politics

- Parliament, the “temple of democracy”, has been reduced to a site for procedural formalities. The Lok Sabha appears to be an extension of the executive, rather than a mechanism for its accountability.
- The Opposition's right to question the government and keep them accountable is seen as meddling in Governance
 - * This is based on the assumption that losers should step aside, respect the democratic mandate, and let the government do its job
- The brute dominance has dwarfed any semblance of Opposition politics at the Centre.
 - * This is manifested through the absence of the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha for six years in a row (a consequence of an archaic and arguably unlawful practice requiring a party to secure at least 10% of total seats to occupy the position of Leader of Opposition)

- * It has also led to denial of an Opposition vote in the appointments to various anti-corruption bodies

Time and again, our experiences with single-party dominance have shown that in the face of comfortable majorities, our constitutional structure reveals its tendencies to concentrate power.

What was the need of strong Center?

- In the backdrop of a bloody partition and threats of “fissiparous tendencies”, it was probably justified for the founders of the Indian republic to be hesitant in instituting a stronger federalism.
- If we wanted to be together, the argument went, we should only have so much federalism.

Electoral federalism

Over the last seven decades, there have been changes in ground realities.

- We have seen repeated examples of huge vote swings between national and State elections, separated by only a few months, in the same constituencies.
- People have identified the Central and State issues, and are now nuanced in their voting choices, leading to the “losers” of national politics still winning State elections and form legitimately elected governments.
- The State governments are thus filling the Opposition deficit at the Centre. With this shift of Opposition politics from New Delhi to State capitals, the politics of Opposition is likely to become the politics over federalism.

Conclusion

- The conflict that the CAA has triggered might become a template for future contestations over the federal question. While the politics seems to be ripe for advancing federalism, the law is likely to constrain such a development.

14. Needless impatience: On Centre's plea on death row convicts

Context

- The Supreme Court (SC) of India has upheld its decision of imposing death penalty to the four convicts in the heinous 'Nirbhaya Gang rape case'
 - * But change in the date of the execution and the delay, is seen as justice delayed
- So the Ministry of Home Affairs essentially seeks the incorporation of measures aimed at reducing the scope for death row convicts to adopt dilatory tactics.

Guidelines given by the SC in Shatrughan Chauhan case

- Article 21 of the Constitution postulates that every human being has inherent right to life and mandates that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.

- In line with this the Supreme Court, in the Shatrughan Chauhan case, had stipulated that a convict must be given 14 days between being informed that his mercy plea has been rejected and his execution.
- These guidelines were undoubtedly aimed at protecting the constitutional rights of prisoners in the context of a sound body of jurisprudence that maintains that such rights extend right up to the moment of their execution
- Further, the 14-day time lag between the closure of the clemency route and their hanging is aimed at preventing secret executions.
 - * The court was concerned about the right of the convicts' family members to be informed
 - * The court had stated that this period of 14 days would give a convict time to make "peace with God", accept his fate and prepare themselves mentally.

Government View

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has informed the SC that convicts of heinous offences who are given a death sentence take refuge under this precedent and Article 21, and thereby take the "judicial process for a ride".
- The government wants to make the guidelines victim-centric, rather than convict-centric as they are now.
- The ministry has requested the court to alter these guidelines in a way that the convicts be bound to file a curative petition within a specific time period after the review petition is rejected.

Cases with multiple convicts

- The government has stated that if there are multiple convicts of a crime in which the death sentence has been awarded, the court should mandate the issuance of death warrant within seven days of the rejection of the mercy plea, and the execution should take place within seven days after the warrant is passed.
- This process, the government has urged, should be irrespective of any other legal proceedings opted for by the co-convicts.
- It has argued that when there are multiple convicts of the same crime awarded death penalty, the delay tactic is visible when one convict files for review, others are advised not to opt for the same legal remedy, and wait until the first one exhausts his legal options.
 - * The review petitions of the four convicts were filed in 2018 and 2019. Three of the petitions were rejected in 2018; the fourth in 2019.
 - * Thereafter, only two convicts filed curative petitions, while the other two still haven't.

The following are the modifications sought:

- Declare that death row convicts can file curative petition after the dismissal of review petition only within the time stipulated by the Court.

- Clarify that mercy petition has to be filed within 7 days of the issuance of death warrant by the court.
- Direct that death warrant against a convict has to be executed within 7 days of rejection of mercy petition, regardless of the pendency of legal proceedings at the instance of co-convicts.

Conclusion

- Death penalty is about snatching the life of a person as per the procedure established by law. Death penalty is limited to the "rarest of rare" cases. Therefore those facing the execution should be allowed to exhaust all possible remedies.

15. The long wait for empowered mayors

Context

- Many Global cities like New York, Paris, London have empowered mayors who lead their country on Urban Issues, but in India the metros have been deprived of empowered Mayors who can raise efficiency, productivity and livability

A look at key Stat

- The Economic Survey of 2017-18 notes that a third of the population now lives in urban areas which produce three-fifths of the GDP.

Advantages of having empowered mayors

- The system will allow mayor to select a team of experts to handle various responsibilities such as health, sanitation and transport and would ensure in a systematic functioning of the city.
 - * The Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, assumed the leadership of the climate movement in iconic ways, with a move to prescribe green roofs in the vast French capital capturing the public imagination worldwide.
- An empowered Mayor could ensure better transparency, since municipal committees under state authorities have a tendency to be ridden by corruption.
 - * Government departments will feel accountable for urban services and infrastructure only under the watch of an empowered leader, who enjoys the mandate of the city's residents.

Challenges

- The first challenge is the status quo itself and the vested interests it has entrenched. State governments do not wish to delegate more authority to city-level institutions.
 - * Chief Ministers see a potential threat from a charismatic and empowered Mayor with progressive policies.
 - * Mayors could steal the limelight through spectacular successes, leaving Chief Ministers and legislators with little direct connect with urban voters.

* Some of them have used the excuse of poor performance of urban local bodies as a justification to replace direct election of Mayors with an indirect system.

- The second challenge is the post of municipal commissioner. Even if some powers are delegated to the municipality, the state governments have in place municipal commissioners to perform the executive functions, again cutting the mayor to size, the nature of mayoral election notwithstanding.
- It has to be ensured that the Mayor has autonomous authority and is not a mere puppet with a glorified title. It means that the Mayor should have access to the city's budget, which implies that the state administration should step aside and not interfere in city's interior functioning.

Conclusion

- In the coming decade, progress on Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN Habitat New Urban Agenda will come under close international scrutiny.
- India's cities need a new deal, one that is focused on development. Only elected, empowered and accountable Mayors can deliver on that.

16. Death sentence for rape-murder in 2019 highest in 4 years: NLU report

Context

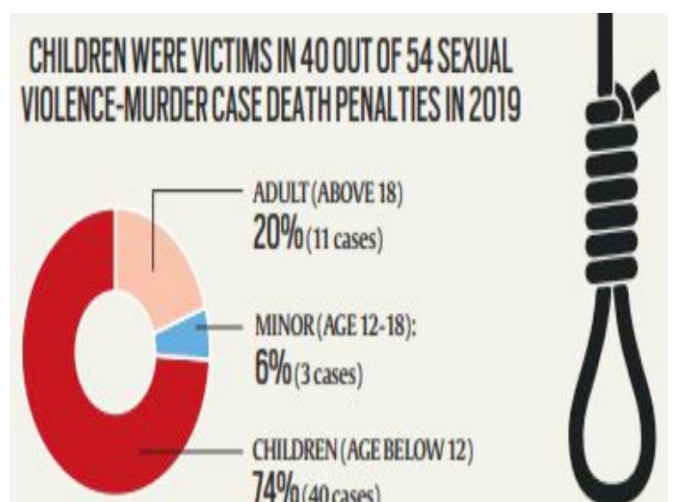
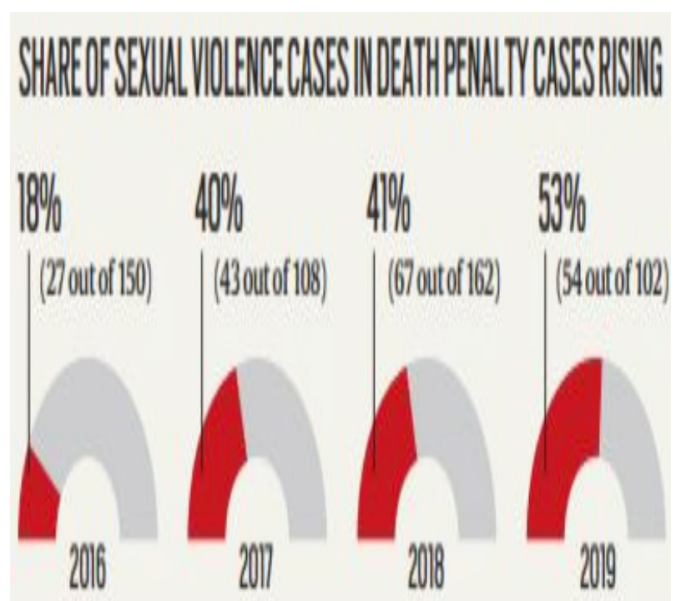
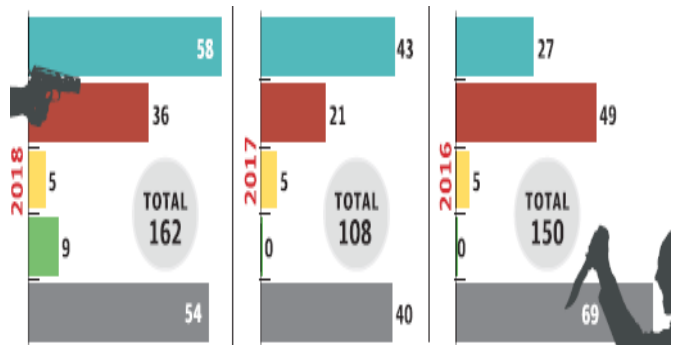
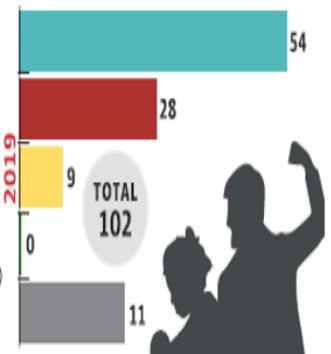
- The National Law University (NLU), Delhi, published a report called 'The Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics' under Project 39A
- Project 39A is a research and litigation initiative focussed on the criminal justice system, and especially issues of legal aid, torture, death penalty, and mental health in prisons.

Details

- According to this report higher number of death sentences awarded in India in recent years relate to cases of sexual offences

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Number of death penalties awarded



MOST DEATH SENTENCES IN RAJASTHAN IN 2019				
State by state, year by year*				
	2019	2018	2017	2016
Rajasthan	13	13	8	6
Uttar Pradesh	12	15	18	32
Madhya Pradesh	11	22	6	13
Karnataka	10	15	2	3
West Bengal	8	5	7	35
Jharkhand	8	9	3	3
Maharashtra	7	16	22	13
Bihar	7	5	11	22
Odisha	5	9	0	0
Assam	4	6	0	0
Kerala	4	5	2	5
Tamil Nadu	3	12	13	3
Uttarakhand	2	7	1	1
Punjab	2	4	6	0
Gujarat	2	3	0	3
Chhattisgarh	1	3	1	1
Total**	102	162	108	150

* No death sentences have been passed in Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim since 2016

**Top states only; total does not include all states

* It commuted a total of 17 cases of death penalty.

POCSO Act amendment

- The report also observed that the amendment to The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, introducing stringent mandatory minimum punishments and death penalty for penetrative sexual assault on children was a major development in this direction

17. The four phases of constitutional interpretation

Introduction

- The Constitution of India came into force 70 years ago, on January 26, 1950. The enactment of the Constitution was an ambitious political experiment — with universal adult franchise, federalism in a region consisting of over 550 princely States, and social revolution in a deeply unequal society. However,

it was equally a unique achievement in terms of constitutional design.

- Republic Day therefore provides us an opportunity to take a step back from political contestations about the Constitution and consider how the text has been interpreted by the courts over the last seven decades.

Phase One-Textualist Approach

- In its early years, the Supreme Court focused on the plain meaning of the words used in the Constitution.
- A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras (1950) was one of the early decisions in which the Court was called upon to interpret the fundamental rights under Part III.
 - * The leader of the Communist Party of India claimed that preventive detention legislation under which he was detained was inconsistent with Articles 19 (the right to freedom), 21 (the right to life) and 22 (the protection against arbitrary arrest and detention).
 - * The Supreme Court decided that each of those articles covered entirely different subject matter, and were to be read as separate codes rather than being read together.
- Amongst the most controversial questions in Indian constitutional law has been whether there are any limitations on Parliament's power to amend the Constitution, especially fundamental rights. In its early years, the Court read the Constitution literally, concluding that there were no such limitations.

Phase Two- The Structure

In the second phase, the Supreme Court began exploring other methods of interpretation.

- Appeals to the text of the Constitution were gradually overtaken by appeals to the Constitution's overall structure and coherence.
- In the leading case of Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973), the Court concluded that Parliament's power to amend the Constitution did not extend to altering its "basic structure" — an open-ended catalogue of features that lies within the exclusive control of the Court.
 - * When Parliament attempted to overturn this decision by amending the Constitution yet again, the Court, relying on structuralist justifications, decisively rejected that attempt.
- In this phase, the Court also categorically rejected the Gopalan approach in favour of a structuralist one in Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978). Through this decision, the Court conceived of the fundamental rights as a cohesive bill of rights rather than a miscellaneous grouping of constitutional guarantees.
 - * The right to life was incrementally interpreted to include a wide range of rights such as clean air, speedy trial, and free legal aid.

- * This paved the way for the Supreme Court to play an unprecedented role in the governance of the nation.
- Impact
 - * What was common between the first two phases of the interpretive story was that significant decisions involving the interpretation of the Constitution were entrusted to Constitution Benches (comprising five or more judges of court) and were carefully (even if incorrectly) reasoned.
 - * There was limited scope for precedential confusion, since matters which had been decided by Constitution Benches and which demanded reconsideration were referred to larger Constitution Benches.

Phase Three- Eclecticism

In the third phase, the Supreme Court's interpretive philosophy turned far more result-oriented than it had ever been. The Court often surrendered its responsibility of engaging in a thorough rights reasoning of the issues before it. Two factors underpinned this institutional failure.

- First, the changing structure of the Court, which at its inception began with eight judges, grew to a sanctioned strength of 31; it is currently 34.
 - * It began to sit in panels of two or three judges, effectively transforming it into a "polyvocal" group of about a dozen sub-Supreme Courts.
- Second, the Court began deciding cases based on a certain conception of its own role — whether as sentinel of democracy or protector of the market economy.
 - * This unique decision-making process sidelined reason-giving in preference to arriving at outcomes that match the Court's perception.

The failure to give reasons contributed not only to methodological incoherence but also to serious doctrinal incoherence and inconsistency across the law.

- This can be best described as panchayati eclecticism, with different Benches adopting inconsistent interpretive approaches based on their conception of the Court's role, and arriving at conclusions that were often in tension with one another.
 - * The imagery that panchayati eclecticism is meant to invoke is that of a group of wise men and women (applying the analogy, sub-Supreme Courts), taking decisions based on notions of fairness that are detached from precedent, doctrine and established interpretive methods.

Phase Four- Purpose

In the fourth phase, the Court has acknowledged as critical to its interpretive exercise the purpose for which the Constitution has been enacted. Many Constitutions attempt the task of entrenching a political compromise between the incumbents and challengers of the day. India's Constitution, at its very inception, was different.

- In enacting the Constitution, the founders of our Republic expressed a sense of unease with the status quo and raised expectations of root-and-branch social revolution and transformation.
 - * The Court is now beginning to interpret the Constitution in accordance with its revolutionary and transformative potential.
- With about a dozen significant Constitution Bench decisions from the Supreme Court since 2018, there has been a renaissance in decision-making by Constitution Benches. This includes the Court's decisions striking down Section 377 and the criminal offence of adultery, and including the office of the Chief Justice of India within the scope of the Right to Information Act.

Conclusion

However, facets of phase 3 continue to linger on in the courts.

- Cases that involve substantial questions of interpretation of the Constitution — such as the cases concerning the National Register of Citizens and the electoral bonds scheme — are still being adjudicated upon by benches of two or three judges.
- There remains a latent risk, therefore, that the gains made in the early days of phase four could be lost, and we could slide back to panchayati adjudication once again.

18. A case for including Tulu in the Eighth Schedule

Context

- The Tulu speaking population of the country has been urging the government to expedite the steps to list it under schedule eight.

Stats about Languages in India

- According to the 2001 Census, India has 30 languages that are spoken by more than a million people each. Additionally, it has 122 languages that are spoken by at least 10,000 people each.
- It also has 1,599 languages, most of which are dialects.
- These are restricted to specific regions and many of them are on the verge of extinction. India must accommodate this plethora of languages in its cultural discourse and administrative apparatus.

Constitutional Angle

- Article 29 of the Constitution provides that a section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same. Whose burden is it to conserve the distinct language, script or culture of such a section of citizens? Does it fall on the state or the citizens concerned?
- Actually, both the state and the citizens have an equal responsibility to conserve the distinct language, script and culture of a people.

A look at Eighth Schedule Languages

- There are 22 Languages in 8th schedule of the Indian Constitution. They are protected in Schedule VIII of the Constitution.
- Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu.

About Tulu Language

- Tulu is a Dravidian language
- The present-day Tulu linguistic majority area is confined to the region of Tulu Nadu, which comprises the districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi in Karnataka and the northern part of Kasaragod district of Kerala up to the river Payaswani, or Chandragiri.
- The cities of Mangaluru, Udupi and Kasaragod are the epicentres of Tulu culture.

Why Tulu should be included in eighth Schedule?

- Sanskrit, an Eighth Schedule language, has only 24,821 speakers (2011 Census).
 - * Manipuri, another scheduled language, has only 17,61,079 speakers.
- The Census reports 18,46,427 native speakers of Tulu in India. The Tulu-speaking people are larger in number than speakers of Manipuri and Sanskrit, which have the Eighth Schedule status.
- Many unscheduled languages too have a sizeable number of speakers: Bhili/Bhilodi has 1,04,13,637 speakers; Gondi has 29,84,453 speakers; Garo has 11,45,323; Ho has 14,21,418; Khandeshi, 18,60,236; Khasi, 14,31,344; and Oraon, 19,88,350.

Advantages

- At present, Tulu is not an official language in India or any other country. Efforts are being made to include Tulu in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- If included in the Eighth Schedule, Tulu would get recognition from the Sahitya Akademi.
- Tulu books would be translated into other recognised Indian languages.
- Members of Parliament and MLAs could speak in Tulu in Parliament and State Assemblies, respectively.
- Candidates could write all-India competitive examinations like the Civil Services exam in Tulu.

Yuelu Proclamation

The Yuelu Proclamation, made by the UNESCO at Changsha, The People's Republic of China, in 2018, says: "The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity helps to improve social inclusion and partnerships, helps to reduce the gender and social inequality between different native speakers, guarantee the rights for native speakers of endangered, minority, indigenous languages, as well as non-official languages and dialects to receive education, enhance the social inclusion level and social decision-making ability by encouraging them to participate in a

series of actions to promote cultural diversity, endangered language protection, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage..."

Other languages demanding for inclusion under eighth schedule

- As many as 37 languages including Angika, Banjar, Bazika, Bhojpuri, Bhoti, Bhotia, Bunclekhundi, Chhattisgarhi, Dhatki, Garhwali (Pahari), Gondi, Gujail, Ho, Kachachhi, Kamtapuri, Karbi, Khasi, Kodava (Coorg), Kok Barak, Kumaoni, Kurak, Kurmail, Lepcha, Limbu, Mizo, Magahi, Mundari, Nagpuri, Nicobarese, Himachali, Pali, Rajasthani, Sambalpuri, Shourseni, Siraiki, Tenyidi, and Tulu, want the government to include them under schedule eight.

Way forward

- India has a lot to learn from the Yuelu Proclamation. Placing of all the deserving languages on equal footing will promote social inclusion and national solidarity.
- It will reduce the inequalities within the country to a great extent.
- So, Tulu, along with other deserving languages, should be included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in order to substantially materialise the promise of equality of status and opportunity mentioned in the Preamble.

19. The right to protest in a free society

Context:

- The article argues for the right to protest for the citizens.

Background:

- Recently, there have been public protests in India against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and the proposed National Register of Citizens.
- The government's handling of the protests has invited criticism from certain sections. The administrations have been blamed of arbitrary imposition of section 144.
 - * Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1973 authorises the Executive Magistrate of any state or territory to issue an order to prohibit the assembly of four or more people in an area.
 - * Section 144 of CrPC generally prohibits public gathering.
 - * Section 144 has been used in the past to impose restrictions as a means to prevent protests that can lead to unrest or riots.
- The administration has defended its actions, as being preventive in nature and to avoid violence and damage to public property.

India as a functioning democracy:

- The Preamble of the Constitution states that India is a democratic republic.
- Democracies are founded on two core political rights.
 - * The right of every citizen to freely elect their government and when dissatisfied with its performance, to vote it out of power in a legitimately held election (Article 326).
 - * The people have the right to question and challenge the government's proposals or decisions. This allows the citizens to politically participate not only during but between elections. This involves a broader conception of democracy that embodies active and not passive citizenship.
- Democracy requires that the voice of the people be heard by those in power and decisions be reached after proper discussion and consultation.
- Public protests for legitimate causes and concerns are the hallmark of a free, democratic society. They constitute our political freedoms.
- The right to protest is a fundamental political right basic to a democratic society.

Holding the government accountable:

- The protests perform an important function of holding the government in power accountable to its actions and decisions.
- The cluster of inter-related political rights of expression, association, assembly, petition and protest is meant to ensure that the government works in the interests of the citizenry.
- The citizens can act as watchdogs and constantly monitor the government's acts.
 - * They play an important role of helping to recognize and rectify mistakes.
 - * An elected government may stray from the constitutional course, go against the interests of the people, become unresponsive and refuse to listen. In such conditions, pressure against the government can be built through public protests.
- This is similar to the multiparty system provided for in the Constitution, where Opposition parties are viewed as valuable adversaries and not enemies.

Fundamental rights:

- The right to protest peacefully is enshrined in the Indian Constitution via Article 19(1)(a) which guarantees the freedom of speech and expression and Article 19(1)(b) which assures citizens the right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
 - * The right to free speech and expression can be also interpreted as the right to freely express an opinion on the conduct of the government.

- * The right to association can also be the right to associate for political purposes, which might involve challenging government decisions.
- * The right to peaceably assemble allows political parties and citizenship bodies to question and object to acts of the government by demonstrations, agitations and public meetings.
- The Supreme Court has reiterated that the right to protest is a fundamental right through its verdicts in many cases.
 - * In the case of Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union of India & Ors., the Supreme Court has held that citizens have a fundamental right to assembly and peaceful protest which cannot be taken away by an arbitrary executive or legislative action.
 - * In the Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India case, the SC held similar views on right to protest.

Inclusive approach:

- Street protests and demonstration movements are particularly important for those outside the mainstream, or those not educated formally.
- They provide an opportunity for even the most illiterate and powerless person to show dissent. Street protests help involve many people in the movement.
- Abraham Lincoln had once noted that "the right of the people to peaceably assemble is a constitutional substitute for revolution".

Historical experience:**Independence struggle:**

- The background of the Indian Constitution is formed by its anti-colonial struggle.
- The Indian freedom struggle involved public expression of views against colonial policies and laws, demonstrations expressing dissent and shaping of public opinion against them.
- The methods involved staging dharnas, holding large public meetings and demonstrations and even civil disobedience.

Post-Independence:

- Potti Sreeramulu undertook a satyagraha demanding for the creation of a new Telugu-speaking state of Andhra.
- The Chipko Movement led by Gaura Devi, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, was a people's movement to save the trees in Uttarakhand. It was meant to prevent the then U.P. government from awarding contracts to commercial loggers.

Context**Restraints on Right to protest:**

- The right to protest, to publicly question and force the government to answer, is a fundamental political right of the people that flows directly from a democratic

reading of Article 19. For this, the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are necessary.

- The arbitrary restraint on the exercise of such rights by the imposition of Section 144 is a concern.
- Section 144 is to be imposed in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger of events that has the potential to cause trouble or damage to human life or property thus limiting it to only emergency situations.

Intolerance towards dissent:

- The arbitrary imposition of Sec 144 highlights the inability of the government to tolerate dissent.
- It also reflects the incapacity of the government to discuss, deliberate or listen.

Way forward:

- The people opposing the CAA have the right to protest and express their opinions. The government needs to acknowledge the right to dissent and protest for all Indians.
- Notably, Article 19(1)(3) states that the rights are subject to "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of public order. There is the need to ensure there is no violence or damage to public property in the protests.

20. State can regulate minority institutions, says Supreme Court

Context

- The Supreme Court has held that the state is well within its rights to introduce a regulatory regime in the "national interest" to provide minority educational institutions with well-qualified teachers in order for them to "achieve excellence in education."
- The managements of minority institutions cannot ignore such a legal regime by saying that it is their fundamental right under Article 30 of the Constitution to establish and administer their educational institutions according to their choice.

Background:

- The judgment came on a challenge to the validity of the West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act of 2008.
- The State Act mandated that the process of appointment of teachers in aided madrasahs, recognised as minority institutions, would be done by a Commission, whose decision would be binding.
- The apex court upheld the validity of the 2008 Act, saying the Commission was composed of persons with profound knowledge in Islamic Culture and Islamic Theology.

TMA Pai Foundation case:

- Referring to the 11-judge Bench decision in the TMA Pai Foundation case, SC said Article 30(1) (right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice) was neither absolute nor above the law.

- "When it comes to the right to appoint teachers, in terms of law laid down in the TMA Pai Foundation case, a regulation framed in the national interest must necessarily apply to all institutions regardless whether they are run by majority or minority as the essence of Article 30(1) is to ensure equal treatment between the majority and minority institutions."
- "An objection can certainly be raised if an unfavorable treatment is meted out to an educational institution established and administered by minority. But if ensuring of excellence in educational institutions is the underlying principle behind a regulatory regime and the mechanism of selection of teachers is so designed to achieve excellence in institutions, the matter may stand on a completely different footing,"

Details:

- In the judgment, SC said the regulatory law should, however, balance the dual objectives of ensuring a standard of excellence as well as preserving the right of the minorities to establish and administer their educational institutions.
- The court explains how to strike a "balance" between the two objectives of excellence in education and the preservation of the minorities' right to run their educational institutions.
- For this, the court broadly divides education into two categories – secular education and education "directly aimed at or dealing with preservation and protection of the heritage, culture, script and special characteristics of a religious or a linguistic minority."
- When it comes to the latter, the court advocated "maximum latitude" to be given to the management to appoint teachers.
- The court reasons that only "teachers who believe in the religious ideology or in the special characteristics of the concerned minority would alone be able to imbibe in the students admitted in such educational institutions, what the minorities would like to preserve, profess and propagate."
- However, minority institutions where the curriculum was "purely secular", the intent must be to impart education availing the best possible teachers.

21. The warp and weft of religious liberty

Context

- A nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court will begin hearing arguments on questions concerning the relationship between the right to freedom of religion and the rights of individuals to dignity and equality.

Background:

- The establishment of the nine-judge bench originated out of an order of reference made on review petitions filed against the Sabarimala judgment. The new bench will have to interpret the scope and extent of the Constitution's religious liberty clauses.

- There have been many such cases in recent history which involved the often contradictory relationship between the right to freedom of religion and the rights of individuals to dignity and equality.

1. Madesnana ritual:

- It is a 500-year-old ritual performed at the Kukke Subramanya Temple in Karnataka.
- The practice involves people mostly belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, rolling over plantain leaves left behind with food half-eaten by Brahmins. The belief is that this act would cleanse their skin of impurities.
- In 2012, following a petition by progressive-minded citizens, a division bench of the Karnataka High Court had put a halt to the ritual, but allowed it to continue in a modified form where Devotees could now voluntarily choose to roll over leaves containing food that was not tasted or partially eaten by the members of any community.
- The order was lifted two years later by another division bench of the High Court, which allowed madesnana in its original form. The court noted that the practise did not violate any law and the banning of it would hurt the sentiments of devotees and effect their constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of religion.
- Following a challenge, the Supreme Court of India in 2014 placed a temporary ban on madesnana.

2. Female genital mutilation:

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is practised in India by the Dawoodi Bohras, a sect of Shia Islam with one million members in India. The procedure is generally performed when a girl is seven years old and involves the total or partial removal of the clitoral hood.
- In 2017 a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) case was raised in India's Supreme Court, seeking a ban on FGM in India.
- The petition claimed the practice violated children's rights under Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 21 (Right to Life) of the Constitution of India. FGM can lead to complications in later life including difficult deliveries and urinary infections.
- The defendants argue that khafz is an essential part of the community's religion, and their right to practise the religion is protected under Articles 25 and 26. The community believes that male and female circumcision is required as "acts of religious purity".

3. Parsi women and entry to sun temple:

- A fire temple in Zoroastrianism is the place of worship for Zoroastrians.
- There is a religious custom in India of not allowing Zoroastrian women to enter the Fire Temple and the Tower of Silence if they marry a non-Zoroastrian person.
- Overturning a previous a Gujarat High Court order which upheld the practice the Supreme Court has

ruled that a Parsi who married outside her community must be allowed to enter fire temples and participate in other religious rituals.

- Also, entry of menstruating women and non-Parsis is not allowed inside Fire Temple.
- There have been petitions which claim that the laws governing the personal lives of Parsis in India are inherently discriminatory and there is a need for state intervention to correct it.

The Court will be faced with a difficult task of balancing the right to freedom of religion and the rights of individuals to dignity and equality.

1. Freedom of Religion:

- India is a pluralist and diverse nation. The groups and communities with their diverse religious or cultural practices need to be protected, given that they have played an important role in society.
- The Constitution of India in an effort to protect the diverse practices recognizes both the freedom of religion as an individual right (Article 25), as well as the right of religious denominations to manage their own affairs in matters of religion (Article 26).

2. Reasonable restrictions:

- Communities which can be a source of solidarity among the people can also be a source of oppression and exclusion at times. Some members of religious and cultural communities may be subjected to authoritarian and oppressive social practices.
- In India, religion and social life are inextricably linked. Religious and social status often reinforce each other.
- The practise of "untouchability", which the Constitution explicitly prohibits and the practice of "ex-communication" reflect the effect that certain religious practices can have on the social status of the vulnerable sections.
- The constitution recognizing the need to protect such vulnerable sections, states that Articles 25 and 26 are subject to public order, morality, and health. Article 25 is also subject to other fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and to the state's power to bring in social reform laws.

Finding the middle ground:

- There is a need to balance the autonomy of cultural and religious communities and also ensure that individual rights are not entirely compromised due to community compulsions.

The doctrine of essential practices:

- Over the years, the Supreme Court has attempted to reconcile the two impulses of respecting religious autonomy and enforcing individual rights by using the jurisprudence of "essential practices of a religion". The court has in its previous judgments held that only those practices that are "essential" to a religion, enjoy constitutional protection. All other rituals are considered open to the state's interference.

- The Courts have struck down a number of rituals across religions on the grounds that those practices were embodiments of superstition as opposed to faith. The followers have opposed this questioning the competency of the “secular” courts to make such distinctions in religious practices.

Way forward:

The anti-exclusion principle:

- One way to strike a balance between the two rights would be to check whether the effect of the disputed religious practice causes harm to individual rights or not. If it does not the religious practice can be allowed, if not it should be banned.
- In this approach the enquiry is not whether the practice is truly religious, but whether its effect is to subordinate, exclude a section of the society.
- A similar approach was used by the Bombay High Court in dealing with a petition challenging the exclusion of women from the inner sanctum of the Haji Ali Dargah. The court found that this practice constituted a violation of equality for women and struck it down.
- Even in the Sabarimala case, both the concurring opinion of Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and the dissenting opinion of Justice Indu Malhotra agreed that the anti-exclusion principle ought to be the test of the permissibility of certain religious and cultural practices.

Conclusion:

- The rights of women who have long been at the receiving end of discriminatory practices and other vulnerable groups are on stake. The constitution envisions a life of dignity and equality to all, both in the public sphere and in the sphere of community.
- The court’s constitutional interpretation, in this case, will go a long way in guaranteeing the basic norms of fairness, equality, and freedom to members of a community.

22. Access to the internet is a fundamental right

Background

- 5th of August 2019 the president of India issued an order which changed the position of statehood accorded to J&K to the status of Union Territory
- Anticipating breach of peace and tranquility the District Magistrates imposed restrictions on movement and public gatherings by virtue of powers vested under Section 144, CrPC.
- The Central Government and J&K Administration also imposed Internet shutdown as they felt that the restrictions were necessary in the interest of national security. It was submitted that internet ban is necessary to cut-off the co-ordination amongst militants.

Petitioners

- Aggrieved by the same, the Petitioners (Ms. Anuradha Bhasin and Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad) approached Supreme Court under Article 32 of the Constitution seeking issuance of an appropriate writ for setting aside or quashing any and all order(s), notification(s), direction(s) and/or circular(s) issued by the Govt.

Context

- In a significant ruling, the Supreme Court said that access to the Internet is a fundamental right under Article 19 of the Constitution, and asked the Jammu and Kashmir administration to review within a week all orders imposing curbs in the Union Territory.
- A five-judge bench headed by Justice NV Ramana also asked the Jammu and Kashmir administration to restore Internet services in institutions providing essential services like hospitals and educational places.

The SC was looking at the issues of Liberty and security

- It wanted to strike a balance between liberty and security concerns so that the right to life is secured and enjoyed in the best possible manner.

What is Internet Shutdown?

- Any disruption in access to Internet services is shutdown of Internet
- Section 144 Criminal Procedure Code was used to shut the Internet
 - * It empowers the state government to take measures, including the imposition of certain restrictions, to maintain public tranquility.
- Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017
 - * Rule 2(1) provides the procedure and powers for the ‘competent authority’ to issue a direction for the suspension of Internet.
 - * The ‘competent authority’ refers to the Home Secretary of Union government or the State government.
 - * If in case obtaining of prior direction from the competent authority is not feasible, such order may be issued by an officer, not below the rank of a Joint Secretary to the Government of India.
- Under these rules, the government can temporarily suspend the internet in any part of the country.

SC Judgment - Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India and Ors

- Indian constitution makes the right to freedom of speech and expression a fundamental right for all citizens. It has been listed in Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution
- The Supreme Court has on many occasions expanded the scope of the right to freedom of speech and expression.

* Internet is the primary source of information to millions of Indian citizens.

- A non-citizen can avail the same benefits but cannot claim it as his/her fundamental right.
- The court declared that the freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to practice any profession or carry on any trade, business or occupation over the medium of internet enjoys constitutional protection under Article 19(1) (a) and Article 19(1) (g). The restriction upon such fundamental rights should be in consonance with the mandate under Article 19 (2) and (6) of the Constitution, inclusive of the test of proportionality."
- Suspension of internet for indefinite period not permissible. It can only be for a reasonable duration and periodic review should be done.

* The court also said the orders suspending the Internet would have to necessarily state how the action was justified and proportionate to the imminent threat to law and order.

- Going forward any net ban will be subject to the scrutiny.

* The observations made by the court essentially laid out guidelines that Internet shutdowns cannot be arbitrary and can be challenged in courts

Chilling Effect Doctrine

- It is chiefly adopted for challenging an action of the State, which may be constitutional, but which imposes a great burden on the free speech.
- The chilling effect is used to describe overt censorship such as a government banning publication of a book, as well as more subtle controls such as ambiguous legislation and high legal costs that provoke uncertainty and fear among writers and journalists.

SC On Section 144 CrPC

- Prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC cannot be imposed to suppress legitimate expression of opinion or grievance or exercise of any democratic rights.
- Section 144 CrPC orders can be imposed when there is apprehension of danger. But the danger must be in the nature of an "emergency".
- While passing orders under Section 144 CrPC, Magistrate has to balance interests of individual rights and concerns of state.
- The orders under Section 144 CrPC should state material facts to enable judicial review. The power should be exercised in a reasonable and bona fide manner.
- Repetitive orders under Section 144, Cr.P.C. would be an abuse of power

Chilli On the obligation of the State to disclose information

Ram Jethmalani v. Union of India, (2011)

- In order that the right guaranteed by Article 32 be meaningful, and particularly because such petitions seek the protection of fundamental rights, it is imperative that in such proceedings the petitioners are not denied the information necessary for them to properly articulate the case and be heard, especially where such information is in the possession of the State."

Freedom of Press

- The apex court also considered the issue whether the freedom of the press of Anuradha Bhasin, Kashmir Times Editor, was violated due to restrictions.
- While upholding the right to access to the Internet, the court upheld the freedom of the press and observed that "there is no doubt that the importance of the press is well established under Indian Law. The freedom of the press is a requirement in any democratic society for its effective functioning".

Reference to UDHR

- The right to access to the internet is also a salient feature of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- Article 19 of the UDHR states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

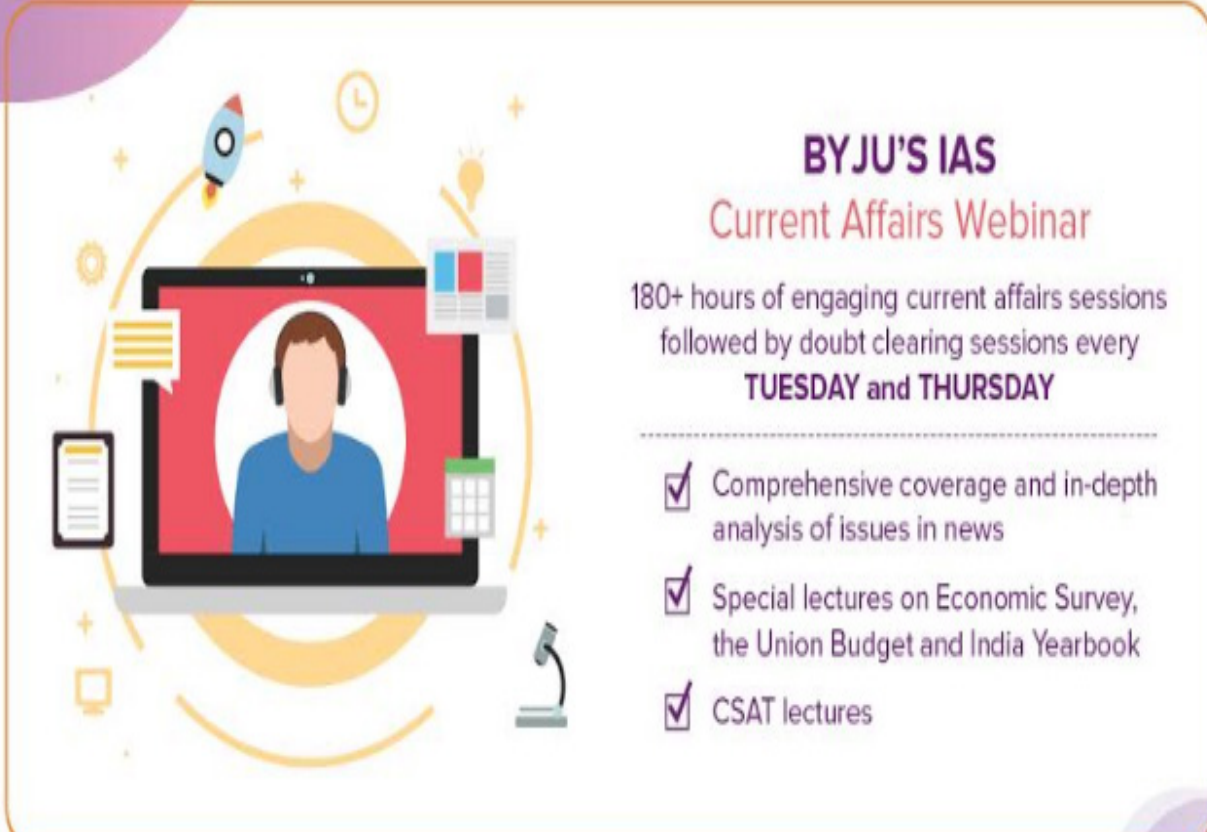
High Court Judgments in the past

- 2015-The Gujarat High Court upheld the state government's decision to put a ban on mobile internet during the Patel quota agitation
 - * According to order of the Gujarat High Court: Yes; Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 ("CrPC") empowers the State government machinery to impose a temporary ban.
- 2018- The State of Rajasthan banned internet services more than 10 times in the state when the administration conducted exams including RAS prelims and police constable recruitment.
 - * The Govt shut internet to prevent cheating in entrance examinations. It caused inconvenience to general public
 - * Rajasthan high court said Internet services cannot be banned for conducting exams.

Conclusion

- The verdict may have larger, lasting consequences for fundamental rights in our digital age, since other rules created and used by the Union government, particularly under the Information Technology Act, have allowed the blocking of countless websites via secret orders that are not published.

- It has hurt democracy and gone against the principles of judicial oversight and the necessity to have thorough checks and balances.
- This judgment should be seen as a work in progress. It leaves many issues of actual state measures impacting citizens today, and matters of law, open. It should also be seen as a call for further action.
- The government going forward has to formulate clear guidelines on internet shutdowns that are in consonance with the Court's ruling, and these should be put out for public discussion.



The graphic features a central illustration of a person wearing a headset, representing a webinar session. This central figure is surrounded by various educational and technological icons: a rocket, a clock, a lightbulb, a document, a calendar, a magnifying glass, and a smartphone. The entire illustration is enclosed in a rounded rectangular frame with a decorative orange border. To the right of the illustration, the text 'BYJU'S IAS' is written in a bold, purple font, followed by 'Current Affairs Webinar' in a red font. Below this, a line of text states '180+ hours of engaging current affairs sessions followed by doubt clearing sessions every TUESDAY and THURSDAY'. A dashed line separates this text from a list of three bullet points, each preceded by a checkmark icon. The background of the graphic includes a large, abstract purple and pink shape on the left and bottom right corners.

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ECONOMY

1. Air India disinvestment

Context

- The NDA government has kicked off the disinvestment process for Air India for the second time — its previous attempt in 2018 had failed to receive a single bid.
- The Union government has now invited bids for 100% stake sale of Air India (AI) and transfer of management control along with its complete share in two subsidiaries-low-cost international carrier Air India Express and ground-handling arm AISATS.

The government has sweetened the deal on several counts.

- First, unlike last time when it offered to offload only 76 per cent of its stake in the airline, the government will offload its entire stake. This is likely to encourage prospective bidders as it implies having full operational freedom to run the carrier.
- Second, the government has taken steps to address the airline's massive debt, which has been a major stumbling block for prospective buyers. This time around, the government has transferred part of the debt to a special purpose vehicle. As a result, the buyer will now have to take over only Rs 23,286 crore of debt.
- Third, the government has lowered the net worth criteria for potential bidders from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 3,500 crore.
- Fourth, eligibility norms have been tweaked and consortiums have been given greater flexibility for bidding, making it a better structured deal. However, prospective buyers will still have to contend with the airline's huge workforce. Some have argued that investors may find it difficult to buy the entire airline.

Eligibility

- Any private or public limited company, a corporate body and a fund with a net value of ₹3,500 crores will be eligible to bid.

What will the new investor get?

- The most attractive proposition in acquiring Air India is the slots and landing rights that it holds at airports such as Delhi, Mumbai, London, New York, Chicago, Paris, etc.
- These could be helpful both to airlines looking to expand into long-haul international operations, and to entities looking to set up global operations from scratch.
- The new investor also gets hold of the ground-handling firm AI-SATS, which offers end-to-end ground handling services such as passenger and baggage handling, ramp handling, aircraft interior cleaning, load control and flight operations, and cargo handling services for general, perishable,

trans-shipment, express courier and special cargo at Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mangaluru and Thiruvananthapuram airports. This would provide the investor with an ancillary services firm with captive use.

- Air India currently operates to 56 Indian cities and 42 international destinations. Several of Air India's international and domestic routes are profit-generating, while a number of them are loss-making or witness low load factors. This is a legacy problem that the airline comes with for the new promoter.

How Air India Sale helps?

- The present offer marks a bold reform and a very determined effort to exit the airline to allow the taxpayers' funds to be utilized for the government's social agenda.
- The present offer involves a clean exit by the government and complete transfer to the private player. This would ensure the private players enough freedom to run the state of affairs in the company without many regulations.

How will consumers and employees be impacted?

- CONSUMERS: If and when Air India is taken over by a private entity or consortium, experts believe the first move could be pruning of operations to ensure the airline inches closer to profitability. This could cause Air India to cease operations on certain loss-making domestic and international routes — leading to a rise in fares.
 - * It is believed that Air India's continuous loss-making operations have skewed the market, wherein private companies have to play ball even when fares are artificially low.
 - * Cutting certain routes could also impact consumers in terms of the unique offerings by Air India, such as higher baggage allowance, etc.
- EMPLOYEES: Air India's bloated staff strength was flagged by potential investors in the last disinvestment attempt. According to the preliminary information memorandum, 36% of the permanent staff will retire in the next five years.
 - * The government has not addressed a prime hurdle to the stake sale — the fates of 17,984 employees of Air India and Air India Express, 9,617 of whom are permanent
 - * Apart from the huge employee base, the successful bidder will also have to deal with pension liability for the airline's retired employees and their perks such as free/rebated tickets.

- * There is no escaping the fact that whoever buys the airline will have to shed surplus labour. A turnaround will not be possible without pruning employee costs.

Conclusion

- For bidders, having full operational freedom without government interference is a huge positive.
- However if there are no bidders this time, in such a scenario, the government can seriously consider selling Air India in parts, given that there will be greater demand for some of its businesses such as international routes.
- Thus, a more prudent approach would be to split its various businesses such as international and domestic operations, its ground services arm, and the airport services company, and sell them separately.

AISATS

- It is a 50:50 joint venture between Air India Limited, and SATS Limited, a leading gateway services and food solutions provider in Asia.
- As part of the Indian Government's initiative to upgrade its airports to world-class facilities and attract more airlines to fly into India, AISATS was formed with the vision to provide world-class airport services in ground and cargo handling

2. ARTIS (Application for Remedies in Trade for Indian industry and other Stakeholders)

- The commerce ministry's arm Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) has launched an online system - ARTIS - for filing of anti-dumping applications by domestic industry with an aim to facilitate speedy resolution of dumping issues.
- It is developed for filing of applications, responses and other related submissions with respect to various trade remedial measures.

Significance

- Its aim is to enhance transparency, efficiency and provide expedited relief to the domestic producers for different trade remedies like anti-dumping duty, safeguard duty and countervailing duty.
- Applicants can also monitor the current status of their applications through this portal.

3. Baba Kalyani led committee- SEZ Policy Report

- The Baba Kalyani led committee was constituted by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry to study the existing SEZ policy of India

Objectives

- The objectives of the committee were to evaluate the SEZ policy and make it WTO compatible,

- Suggest measures for maximizing utilisation of vacant land in SEZs,
- Suggest changes in the SEZ policy based on international experience and
- Merge the SEZ policy with other Government schemes like coastal economic zones, Delhi-Mumbai industrial corridor, national industrial manufacturing zones and food and textiles parks.

Context

- Commerce and Industry & Railways Minister chaired a meeting to review Baba Kalyani report on Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy of India..

4. Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI)

Context

- The National Statistical Office released data that showed annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation for December 2019 at 7.35%, which was the highest since the 7.39% of July 2014, and also more than the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) upper target limit of 6%.
- But the real shocker was retail food inflation, which soared to a more than six-year high of 14.12%.

Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI)

- It is a measure of change in retail prices of food products consumed by a defined population group in a given area with reference to a base year.
 - * The base year presently used is 2012.
- Like Consumer Price Index (CPI), the CFPI is also calculated on a monthly basis and methodology remains the same as CPI.
- The Central Statistics Office (CSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) releases CFPI for three categories -rural, urban and combined, separately on an all India basis
 - * Price data are collected from selected towns by the Field Operations Division of NSSO and from selected villages by the Department of Posts.
 - * Price data are received through web portals being maintained by the National Informatics Centre.

How serious is the spike in food inflation? Is it more than what was expected?

- The sudden and sharp increase in the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) inflation has caught everyone by surprise. For an extended period from September 2016 to August 2019, the year-on-year CFPI inflation consistently remained below the overall CPI inflation.
- But CFPI inflation went up from 2.99% in August to 5.11% in September to 7.88% in October, then to 10.01% in November and 14.12% in December. This last figure was the highest since the 17.89% for November 2013.

So what accounts for this sudden spike?

- The main reason seems to be the uneven rains. The southwest monsoon season (June-September) in 2019 brought little rain almost until the last week of July. The late onset of the monsoon resulted in lower and delayed sowing of the kharif crop.
- However, September, October, and even the first half of November saw heavy rain, which caused damage to the standing crop that was in the late maturity stage, or due for harvesting.
- The production disruptions during kharif, ironically from more and not less rain, are the main reason for prices rising, especially from September onward.

Is this then temporary and once-for-all?

- The same heavy and unseasonal rain that wreaked havoc on the kharif (monsoon) crop has helped recharge groundwater aquifers, and filled the major irrigation reservoirs to near full capacity. This is proving beneficial to the rabi (winter-spring) crop.
- Government data show farmers have sown 8% more area during the current rabi season. That, together with vastly improved soil moisture conditions and a normal winter, should hopefully translate into a bumper harvest, offsetting any kharif losses.

Concerns

- What could cause unease to the policy makers is that the spike comes alongside a global upswing in food prices. The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation's Food Price Index (base year: 2002-04 = 100) averaged 181.7 points in December 2019, the highest since the 185.8 level of December 2014.
- The simultaneous hardening of international prices poses a challenge to the government and the Reserve Bank of India in containing domestic food inflation at a time when the economy is already going through a deep slowdown.
- Rising global prices can potentially undermine the assumption of food prices cooling off after March, which also complicates RBI's efforts at monetary easing to address the ongoing slowdown.
- The disturbing December print has set off fears over whether India is entering a period of slow growth accompanied by high inflation, in other words, stagflation.

What can the government do?

- Food inflation is not bad news for farmers who have suffered from low crop prices and the end of the global commodity boom after 2014. A price recovery would give a boost to rural incomes, which is beneficial for consumption and overall economic growth in the current circumstances.
- But neither the government nor the RBI can afford to ignore food inflation that will hurt consumers and make further cuts in interest rate impossible.

- There is pressure now to open up or allow more imports of commodities such as pulses, milk powder, and edible oils. The government will ultimately have to take a considered decision that balances the interests of both producers and consumers

5. Coal Mining**Context**

- The Cabinet has cleared the Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020, which will open up the coal mining sector completely, enabling anyone with finances and expertise to bid for blocks and sell the coal freely to any buyer of their choice

Present Scenario

- Until now there were restrictions on who could bid for coal mines — only those in power, iron and steel and coal washery business could bid for mines — and the bidders needed prior experience of mining in India.
- This effectively limited the potential bidders to a select circle of players and thus limited the value that the government could extract from the bidding.

Now all end-use restrictions have been removed, easing the entry of companies not engaged in any coal-use industry in coal mining.

- Moreover, existing private owners will now be able to sell their surplus coal in the market.

Why this is a very important step?

- The ordinance essentially democratises the coal industry and makes it attractive for merchant mining companies, including multinationals such as BHP and Rio Tinto, to look at India.
- India is one of the largest coal producers in the world with an output of 729 million tonnes in 2018-19. However, despite sluggish economic growth, import shipments have surged from 190 million tonne in 2016-17 to 235 million tonne in 2018-19 — in value terms, imports touched \$26.18 billion in 2018-19, up from \$15.76 billion in 2016-17.
 - * This surge in coal imports, along with oil and electronics imports, has exerted pressure on the country's current account in recent years.
 - * The relaxation in regulations, along with previous initiatives such as allowing 100 per cent foreign direct investment through the automatic route in commercial coal production, can aid in boosting coal production in the country and help reduce imports.

Advantages

- Large investment in mining will create jobs and set off demand in critical sectors such as mining equipment and heavy commercial vehicles.

- The move to amend the law will help India gain access to high-end technology for underground mining used by global miners.
- The steel industry would get cheaper inputs, leading to an increase in 'competitiveness'.
- The move will help create an efficient energy market, usher in competition and reduce coal imports, while also ending the monopoly of state-owned Coal India Ltd.

What should the Government do?

- Government needs to reduce the time for approval of mining leases and also ease the procedures for clearances.
- The opening up of coal mining effectively ends Coal India's (CIL) monopoly status.
 - * CIL is a Maharatna PSU and tremendous public resources have been invested in the company over the years. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that CIL is not compromised the way BSNL has been by opening up to private players.
 - * The company employs about three lakh people, is listed and is a national asset. It has to be nurtured even as private players are welcomed.

Conclusion

- How quickly these investments fructify depends on the kinds of coal blocks offered, the infrastructure available, the government's ability to ease the regulatory hurdles such as the process of obtaining clearances, and clearing of mining plans, that have complicated the process so far.

6. ELECRAMA

- It is the flagship showcase of the Indian electrical industry and a platform to connect the world with Indian industry in respect of technology, new trends and innovation for future energy transition.
- ELECRAMA over the years emerged as a platform for knowledge-sharing with a strong focus on electric vehicles, Internet of Things (IoT), storage solutions and renewable energy.
- ELECRAMA 2020 will serve as a catalyst to boost the Indian growth story for the Indian industry, MSME and start-ups to understand and experience global trends and adopting new technologies.

Context

- Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises Minister Inaugurated ELECRAMA 2020

7. Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC)

- EEPC India is the premier trade and investment promotion organisation in India. It is sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry

- As an advisory body it actively contributes to the policies of the Government of India and acts as an interface between the engineering industry and the government.

What are Engineering Goods?

It includes

- Iron and Steel and Products made of Iron and Steel
- Non-Ferrous Metals and Products made of Non-Ferrous Metals
- Industrial Machinery
 - * Boilers, parts, etc. IC Engines and Parts Pumps of all types Air condition and Refrigerators Industrial Machinery for dairy, food processing, textiles etc.
 - * Machine Tools
 - * Machinery for Injection molding, valves and ATMs
- Automobiles
 - * Motor Vehicle/cars; Two and Three Wheelers; Auto Components/Part; Aircrafts and Spacecraft parts and products; Ships Boats and Floating products and parts
- Other engineering products
 - * Medical and Scientific instruments; Railway Transport; Hand Tools & Cutting Tools; Electrodes Accumulators

Functions

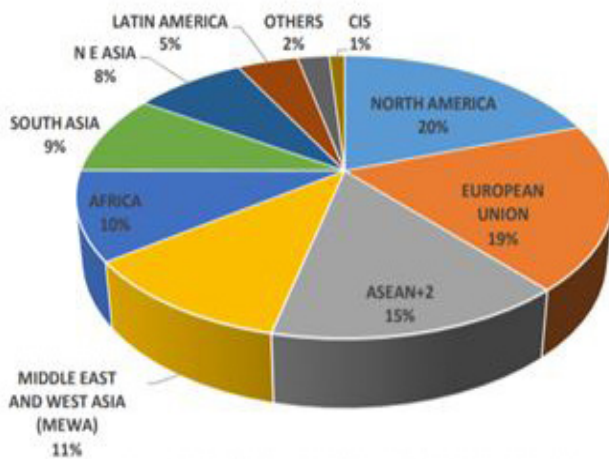
- Keep in constant communication with Chambers of Commerce and other mercantile and public bodies throughout the world with a view to taking appropriate and necessary measures for maintaining or increasing the exports of engineering goods;
- Support upgradation of technology to boost India's engineering exports and establish synergy between industry and academia;
- EEPC India facilitates sourcing from India and encourages MSMEs to raise their standard at par with international best practices.

Context

- Engineering exports for (2019-2020) are expected to be almost the same as that of last year (2018-2019), according to chairman of EEPC India.

Region wise engineering export

- The U.S. and the EU are major destinations for engineering exports and China's supplies have come down drastically due to several reasons such as pollution issues, high labour cost, anti-dumping duties
- European clients had approached Indian companies in the beginning of this financial year as Chinese supplies reduced. But, India did not have adequate capacity.



Source: Data from DGCI&S and EEPC India analysis

8. Gold hallmarking being made mandatory

Context

- Gold Hallmarking was made mandatory across the nation from 15th January, 2020 but a period of one year will be given for implementation

Details

Gold hallmarking is a purity certification of Gold

- The BIS (Bureau of Indian standards) Act 2016 has enabling provisions under Section 14 & Section 16 for making hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts mandatory by the Central Government. This will make it compulsory for all the jewellers selling gold jewellery and artefacts to register with BIS and sell only hallmarked Gold jewellery and artefacts.

Significance

- It is designed to strengthen consumer confidence, create a level-playing field for jewellers and make trade more organized
- It will help the customers as this will ensure purity of the precious metal, one will be assured of the authenticity of the jewellery.
- The hallmarked gold will now fetch customers the right market price for gold when they have plans of selling the same in the future.

Way forward

- The need of the hour is to create awareness among the consumers across the country so that they demand hallmarked gold jewellery.
- The government should ensure that the hallmarking centers follow best practices while assaying the jewellery to ensure uniformity
- Barcodes on hallmarked gold jewellery should also be made compulsory to avoid infiltration of jewellery with fake hallmarking certification into the supply chain.

9. India's no-fly list

Why is there a no-fly list?

- The Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued an advisory to the airlines on dealing with unruly passengers.
- According to the DGCA, the adoption of unlawful/disruptive behavior in any situation on board the aircraft or during embarkation/disembarkation may interfere with the performance of the duties of the crew member.
- Such an act may also lessen the ability of the crew member to perform those duties or jeopardize the safety of the aircraft/persons/property on board/good order and discipline on board, aggravate discomfort to other passengers & crew members and may invite penal action in accordance with applicable regulations.
- The government kick-started the process of developing these rules after an incident involving then Shiv Sena MP Ravindra Gaikwad assaulting an Air India staffer on a flight back in 2017.
 - * Subsequently a number of airlines banned Gaikwad from travelling on their flights. The government then came out with the no-fly list in 2017

Guidelines for no-fly list

In 2017, the government issued rules for preventing disruptive behaviour by air travellers and laid down guidelines.

- As per the rules, a complaint of unruly behavior needs to be filed by the pilot-in-command, and this is to be probed by an internal committee to be set up by the airline.
- During the period of pendency of the inquiry, the rules empower the concerned airline to impose a ban on the passenger. The committee is to decide the matter within 30 days, and also specify the ban duration.

The rules define three categories of unruly behavior:

- Level 1 refers to behaviour that is verbally unruly, and calls for debarment up to three months;
- Level 2 indicates physical unruliness and can lead to the passenger being debarred from flying for up to six months;
- Level 3 indicates life-threatening behaviour for which the debarment would be for a minimum of two years.

How does someone end up on the list?

- A no-fly list essentially begins with a passenger causing verbal, physical or life-threatening unruliness. The DGCA has given an indicative list of actions that may be construed as unruly.
- These include: consuming alcohol or drugs resulting in unruly behaviour; smoking in an aircraft; using threatening or abusive language towards a member of the crew or other passengers; intentionally interfering with the performance of the duties of a crew member etc.

- Once the pilot-in-command submits his complaint, the airline is bound to refer the complaint to its internal committee.
- During the course of the enquiry, the airline can ban the passenger from flying for a maximum period of up to 30 days.
- In addition, the Ministry of Home Affairs provides a list of individuals identified as national security threats to DGCA and to the airlines, for inclusion in the no-fly list.

What is the structure of the internal committee?

- The internal committee is to consist of a retired district and session's judge as Chairman, along with a representative from a different scheduled airline and a representative from a passengers association or consumer association as members.
- The internal committee shall give the final decision in 30 days by giving the reasons in writing, the rules state, and the decision of the committee shall be binding on the airline concerned.
- In case the committee fails to take a decision in 30 days, the passenger will be free to fly.

Is there redress for someone declared guilty by the internal committee?

- Any aggrieved person, upon receipt of communication of a ban from the airline, may appeal within 60 days from the date of issue of the order, to an Appellate Committee constituted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, consisting of a retired judge of a High Court as Chairman; a representative from a passengers' association or a consumer association; and an airlines representative not below the rank of vice-president or equivalent.
- The rules, however, do not specify the functional details of either the internal committee or the appellate committee, and whether they would invite the accused to make their case.
- The Civil Aviation Requirements state that the decision of the appellate committee shall be final and that any further appeal shall lie in a High Court.

Context

- Four airlines in India — IndiGo, SpiceJet, Air India and GoAir — have banned stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra from taking their flights after he allegedly heckled television news anchor Arnab Goswami on an IndiGo flight.

10. 'Make in India'

- It is an initiative to encourage multinational, as well as domestic, companies to manufacture their products in India.
- Promoting India as best investment destination and establish India as a hub of global manufacturing
- Make in India is based on 4 pillars namely - New Processes, New Sectors, New Mindset and New Infrastructure.

What was the objective?

- The initiative hopes to attract capital and technological investment in India
- The major objective behind the initiative is to focus on job creation and skill enhancement
- The initiative is set to boost entrepreneurship, not only in manufacturing but in relevant infrastructure and service sectors as well.

As the policy changes were intended to usher growth in three key variables of the manufacturing sector — investments, output, and employment growth — an examination of these will help us gauge the success of the policy.

1. Investment

- The last five years witnessed slow growth of investment in the economy. This is more so when we consider capital investments in the manufacturing sector.
- Gross fixed capital formation of the private sector, a measure of aggregate investment, declined to 28.6% of GDP in 2017-18 from 31.3% in 2013-14 (Economic Survey 2018-19).
- Interestingly, though the public sector's share remained more or less the same during this period, the private sector's share declined from 24.2% to 21.5%. Part of this problem can be attributed to the decline in the savings rate in the economy.
- Household savings have declined, while the private corporate sector's savings have increased. Thus we find a scenario where the private sector's savings have increased, but investments have decreased, despite policy measures to provide a good investment climate.

2. Output Growth

- With regard to output growth, we find that the monthly index of industrial production pertaining to manufacturing has registered double-digit growth rates only on two occasions during the period April 2012 to November 2019.
- In fact, data show that for a majority of the months, it was 3% or below and even negative for some months. Needless to say, negative growth implies contraction of the sector.

3. Employment Growth

- Regarding employment growth, we have witnessed questions being raised over the government's delay in releasing data as well as its attempts to revise existing data collection mechanisms.

Why it appears to have been unsuccessful?

- First, the bulk of these schemes relied too much on foreign capital for investments and global markets for produce.
- Second is about Policy Casualness.

* The spate of policy announcements without having the preparedness to implement them is 'policy casualness'.

- Third, the initiative brought in too many sectors into its fold. This led to a loss of policy focus.
- Fourth, given the uncertainties of the global economy and ever-rising trade protectionism, the initiative was spectacularly ill-timed.
- Lastly, it set out too ambitious growth rates for the manufacturing sector to achieve. An annual growth rate of 12-14% is well beyond the capacity of the industrial sector. Historically India has not achieved it and to expect to build capabilities for such a quantum jump is perhaps an enormous overestimation of the implementation capacity of the government.

Way forward

- The focus now should tilt towards proper implementation of schemes to increase the competitiveness of ease of doing business.
- Increasing the investor confidence by bridging the gaps in infrastructure
- Adequate measures have to be taken address Red Tapism by complete overhauling of government management system ex-Ease of exiting from the business as mentioned under chakravyuha challenge in Economic Survey.

11. MGNREGA: On rural jobs scheme fund crunch

Context

- Lack of funds for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.

Background:

- 2019's budget allocation was ₹60,000 crore for the MGNREGA scheme.
- The allocated amount for MGNREGA for the present fiscal (2019-20) was lesser than the amount spent under MGNREGA in the previous fiscal (2018-19).

Details:

- More than 96% of the allocated money for MGNREGA has already been spent or is needed to pay pending dues, with less than ₹2,500 crores left to sustain the scheme for the next two months.
- January, February, and March are months with little agricultural activity when rural workers desperately need employment.

Concerns:

- The Centre is on the verge of running out of funds for the crucial MGNREGA scheme.
- With the Centre yet to release pending dues to the states, fifteen States are already facing negative net balances as per the scheme's financial statements. Worryingly, these states will enter next year with pending liabilities.

- States are unable to pay the workers on time. For example, in Rajasthan, workers' wages have not been paid since October-end 2019. This is contrary to the spirit of the Act and violates the principle of rights-based implementation of the MGNREGA scheme.
- There is a high demand for work, as the rural economy is in distress and informal employment has also collapsed. The lack of funds is a cause of concern.

How MGNREGS has transformed the rural sector?

- Several studies have shown that MGNREGS has helped the rural poor by providing employment in the agricultural off-season, offering alternative jobs during years of lean agricultural growth and as a safety net during crop failures.
- Researchers have also found that a large proportion of those availing the scheme are from the 18-30 age group, which suggests that this has addressed the problem of youth unemployment
- MGNREGS has improved agricultural productivity where it has been implemented properly.

Way forward

- MGNREGS should involve rural workers in skilled work and pay them more wages for asset creation beyond just roads, wells and check-dams.
- A change in mindset is therefore important as this not only creates new opportunities for the unemployed but it also provides an opportunity to address the slowdown.
 - * Economists have pointed to a slowing of rural consumption, which has also dragged down the economy.
 - * By paying wages adequately, and on time, to rural workers, the government could allow for more spending and consumption and stimulate the economy.
- A more meaningful allocation for the scheme in the budget is therefore a much needed imperative.

12. Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI) App

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) launched a mobile app for visually impaired people to identify the denomination of currency notes called the Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI)

Details

- It seeks to help such people who faced various problems in accessing the new and old currency notes of the Mahatma Gandhi Series.
- Using the app, a visually challenged person can scan and identify the denominations by checking the front or reverse side of a currency note, including folded notes.

- The app also works offline to scan and identify the denominations of currency notes once it is installed.
- The app is available both on Android and iOS operating systems
- The MANI app does not authenticate a currency note as genuine or counterfeit while scanning them.

How does it work?

- For people with hearing and visual impairments, the app has pre-defined vibrations for different denominations; one vibration for Rs 5, two vibrations for Rs 10, three for Rs 20, four for Rs 50, five for Rs 100, six for Rs 200, seven for Rs 500 and eight for Rs 2,000.
- In case the app is unable to identify the denomination, it uses a long vibration and asks for the note to be scanned again.

13. National Highways Excellence Awards

- National Highway Excellence Awards aim to recognize the well-performing companies in the field of construction, operations, maintenance, toll collection and road safety on National Highways.
- The awards were instituted in the year 2018.
- The motive behind starting an annual awards program is to create a spirit of healthy competitiveness amongst all stakeholders involved in the development of highway infrastructure in the country and to contribute to the larger goal of expanding the road network in the country.

Context

- Ministry of Road Transport & Highways announced the second cycle of National Highway- Excellence Awards 2019

14. National Startup Advisory Council

- The Council will advise the government on measures needed to build a strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and startups in the country to drive sustainable economic growth and generate large scale employment opportunities.

Functions

- Suggest measures to foster a culture of innovation amongst citizens and students in particular.
- Support creative and innovative ideas through incubation and research and development to transform them into valuable products, processes or solutions to improve productivity and efficiency.
- Create an environment of absorption of innovation in industry.
- Promote creation, protection and commercialization of intellectual property rights.
- Make it easier to start, operate, grow and exit businesses by reducing regulatory compliances and costs.

- Promote ease of access to capital for startups, incentivize domestic capital for investments into startups, and mobilize global capital for investments in Indian startups.

Composition

- The Council will be chaired by the Minister for Commerce & Industry.
- The Joint Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade will be the Convener of the Council.
- The Council will consist of non-official members, to be nominated by the Central Government, from various categories like founders of successful startups, veterans who have grown and scaled companies in India, persons capable of representing interests of investors into startups, persons capable of representing interests of incubators and accelerators and representatives of associations of stakeholders of startups and representatives of industry associations. The term of the non-official members of the Council will be for a period of two years.
- The nominees of the concerned Ministries/ Departments/Organisations, not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India, will be ex-officio members of the Council.

15. National Stock Exchange (NSE) Knowledge Hub

- It is an Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered learning ecosystem that will assist the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector.
- It is created by the National Stock Exchange (NSE)
- The Hub has been developed by NSE Academy, a wholly-owned subsidiary of NSE.
- The NSE Knowledge Hub will enhance skills and help academic institutions in preparing future-ready talent for the financial service industry.
- It is also available on mobile and attempts to bring together world-class content and learners through this state-of-the-art and future-ready platform.

Context

- The Union Commerce and Industry Minister inaugurated NSE Knowledge Hub in New Delhi.

16. National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI)

Context

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has outlined an ambitious strategy for financial inclusion till 2024

Background

- Financial inclusion is recognized as a key driver of economic growth and poverty alleviation world over.
- Access to formal finance can boost job creation, reduce vulnerability to economic shocks and increase investments in human capital.

- Seven of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of 2030 view financial inclusion as a key enabler for achieving sustainable development worldwide.
- To achieve the above objectives in a coordinated and time-bound manner National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI) is essential.

NSFI

- It sets forth the vision and key objectives of the Financial Inclusion policies in India to expand the reach and sustain the efforts by a convergence approach involving all the stakeholders in the financial sector.
- It aims to strengthen the ecosystem for various modes of digital financial services in all Tier-II to Tier VI centers to create the necessary infrastructure to move towards a less-cash society by March 2022.
 - * The goal was also to see that every adult had access to a financial service provider through a mobile device by March 2024.
- One of the objectives is to increase outreach of banking outlets so as to provide banking access to every village within a 5-km radius or a hamlet of 500 households in hilly areas by March 2020.

Steps taken by the Govt

The government has been trying to take steps to provide access to credit at an affordable cost and financial instruments to the low-income group and the weaker sections of the society.

- PM Jan Dhan Yojana seeks to provide universal banking services for every unbanked household
- Pension scheme such as Atal Pension Yojana
- Insurances schemes such as PM Suraksha Bima Yojana are some of the schemes launched by the government

Way forward

- India has largely benefited from the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar- Mobile (JAM) trinity over the last few years, steps are needed to strengthen the digital financial services' ecosystem including increased awareness on usage of digital modes of transactions, increased acceptance infrastructure and a safe environment incorporating the principles of consent and privacy

17. Paperless Licensing for Petroleum Service Stations

Context

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched paperless licensing process through the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO) for petroleum service stations (retail outlets storing and dispensing petrol/diesel for motor conveyances) under the Petroleum Rules, 2002.

Details:

- The process will include filing the applications online, online payment of fees which will go directly to the concerned officer's ID without any manual interface.
- Applicants, at each stage of processing of the application, will be intimated via SMS and email, in case of discrepancy or grant of license or approval.
- These details will also be reflected in the applicant's profile.
- The entire process will not require any printing and physical dispatch of license. The license will be dispatched electronically.

Significance

- This initiative for petroleum pump licensing is expected to benefit more than 70,000 petroleum pump owners and oil marketing companies.
- An added advantage of this move is that the authenticity of the license may be verified on PESO's official website. This automation is expected to benefit the petroleum and gas industry.
- This move is in line with the government's Digital India and Ease of Doing Business

18. PF benefits should be extended to contractual employees, rules Supreme Court

Background

- There was a petition filed by M/s Pawan Hans Limited
 - * It is a helicopter service company
 - * It is a Mini Ratna-I category PSU.
 - * It provides helicopter support services to the oil sector for its offshore exploration operations, services in remote and hilly areas, and charter services for the promotion of tourism.
- The company had filed the petition against its employees' union, the Aviation Karmachari Sanghatana, which sought uniformity in service conditions among employees.
- Of a total workforce of 840 employees, the company had engaged 570 employees on regular basis, while 270 employees were engaged on "contractual" basis.
- The company implemented the PF Trust Regulations only with respect to the regular employees, even though the term "employee" had been defined to include "any person" employed "directly or indirectly" under the PF Trust Regulations.
- The contractual employees have been seeking parity with the regular employees, who are covered under the Pawan Hans Employees Provident Fund Trust Regulations.

Context

- The Supreme Court has observed that contractual employees engaged by a Company, who draw their wages/salary directly or indirectly from the Company, are entitled to the benefit of provident fund under the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.

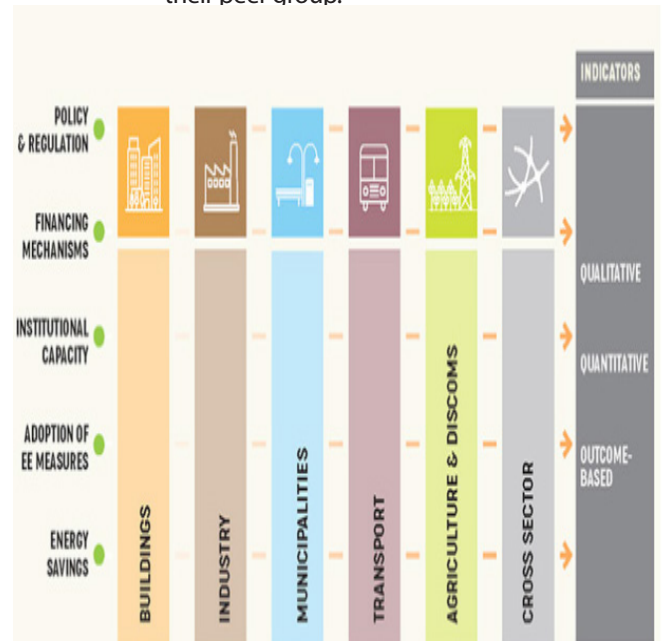
Details

- The SC says that employees who draw wages or salaries directly or indirectly from a company are entitled to provident fund benefits under the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) Act.
- The employer cannot differentiate between contractual and permanent employees, as the casual workers are also entitled to social security benefits

* New indicators include adoption of Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) 2017, energy efficiency in MSME clusters, etc.

- For rational comparison, States/UTs are grouped into four groups based on aggregated Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES) required to meet the state's actual energy demand (electricity, coal, oil, gas, etc.) across sectors.

* TPES grouping shall help states compare performance and share best practices within their peer group.



19. State Energy Efficiency Index 2019

- The index tracks the progress of Energy Efficiency (EE) initiatives in states and union territories based on 97 significant indicators
- It is developed by Bureau of Energy Efficiency in association with Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy.
- It will help states to contribute towards national goals on energy security and climate action by helping drive Energy Efficiency policies and programme implementation at the state and local level.
- The first such Index was launched in 2018.
- The State Energy Efficiency Index categorises states as 'Front Runner', 'Achiever', 'Contender' and 'Aspirant' based on their efforts and achievements towards energy efficiency implementation.

Significance

- It will help states contribute towards national goals on energy security and climate action by helping drive EE policies and programme implementation at the state and local level, tracking progress in managing the states' and India's energy footprint and institutionalising the data capture and monitoring of EE activities by states

Context

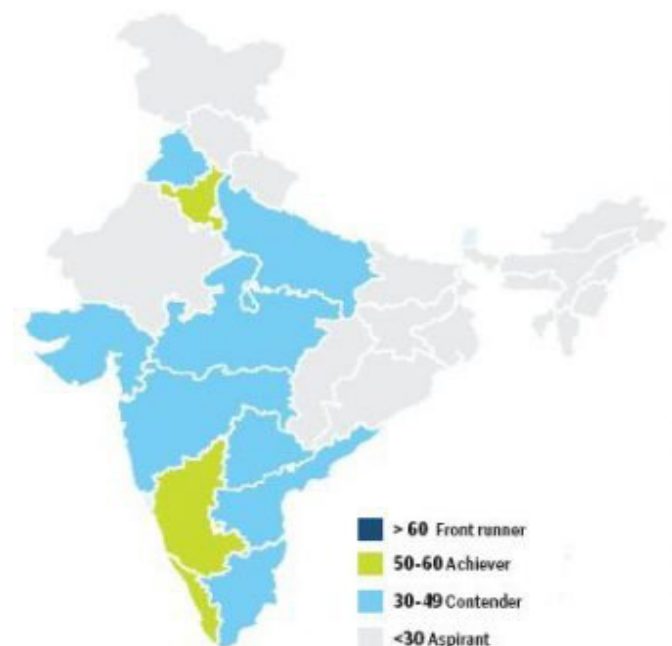
- Union Government released the State Energy Efficiency Index 2019
- The index this year incorporates qualitative, quantitative and outcome-based indicators to assess energy efficiency initiatives, programs and outcomes in five distinct sectors.

Details

- The State Energy Efficiency Index 2019 incorporates qualitative, quantitative and outcome-based indicators to assess energy efficiency initiatives, programs and outcomes in five distinct sectors – buildings, industry, municipalities, transport, agriculture, and DISCOMs.

Performance

- Haryana, Karnataka and Kerala have topped the State Energy Efficiency Index 2019.
- Manipur, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and Rajasthan perform worst in their groups



For State EE Index 2019, unified Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh have been considered

20. UJALA and SLNP

Context

- The Government of India's UJALA & Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP) complete five successful years.

About UJALA:

- Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All (UJALA) is a zero-subsidy scheme launched by the Government in 2015. It is touted as the world's largest domestic lighting project. For more on the UJALA Scheme, click on the linked article.

About the SLNP:

- The SLNP is a government scheme to promote energy-efficiency in India.
- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a joint venture of PSUs under the Power Ministry, is the implementing agency for SLNP.
- EESL, launched in 2015, has already replaced 50 lakh street lights with LED bulbs in more than 500 cities of India.
- To bring in mass-scale transformation, EESL has adopted a unique strategy by joining hands with states, municipal bodies and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
 - * Under the programme, EESL replaces the conventional street lights with LEDs at its own costs, with no upfront investment by the municipalities, thereby making their adoption even more attractive.
 - * Over a period, EESL is repaid through the consequent reduction in energy and maintenance cost of the municipality.
- This scheme is expected to enable peak demand reduction of 500 MW, annual energy savings of 190 crore kWh, and reduction in 15 lakh tons of CO₂.
- **Objectives of SLNP:**
 - * Mitigate climate change by implementing energy-efficient LED-based street lighting.
 - * Reduce energy consumption in lighting which helps DISCOMs to manage peak demand.
 - * Provide a sustainable service model that obviates the need for upfront capital investment as well as additional revenue expenditure to pay for the procurement of LED lights.
 - * Enhance municipal services at no upfront capital cost of municipalities.

21. Web Portal 'GATI'

Context:

- Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways launched web portal 'GATI'.

Details

- The portal has been created by NHAI taking inspiration from the PRAGATI Portal used by PMO.
- It can be accessed from the NHAI Website and contractors/concessionaires can raise any project related issues on the Portal.
- The issue will immediately come to the notice of every official of NHAI including top management, and immediate action will be taken by the concerned officer, duly updating on the Portal.
- The issues raised in the GATI will be daily monitored by a team of officers in NHAI and will be constantly reviewed by the senior officers of NHAI and the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways.
- This will bring transparency and speed up the decision making giving real GATI (pace) to highway construction.

22. Wings India 2020

- It is an international exhibition and conference on civil aviation sector
- It is Organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) jointly with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airports Authority of India (AAI)
- The international platform focuses on new business acquisition, investments, policy formation and regional connectivity in civil aviation industry.

Context

- Asia's largest Civil Aviation platform- 'Wings India 2020' will be held at Hyderabad in March 2020.

23. A multilateral alternative, by Asia

Context

- This article discusses the transformation of Asian economies in the last few years and how this has led to them being larger than the rest.

Asian Century

- This Phrase is said to have arisen in the 1988 meeting between Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, re-establishing relations after the India-China border conflict in 1962.
- It responds to the re-emergence of the two countries, leveraging size and technological competence to shape a new order that reflects their civilizational values which are distinct from those of the West.

A look at key facts

- Asia is home to more than half the world's population.
- Of the world's 30 largest cities, 21 are in Asia, according to UN data.
- By the end of 2020 it is said, Asia will also become home to half of the world's middle class, defined as those living in households with daily per capita incomes of between \$10 and \$100 at 2005 purchasing power parity (PPP).

- Since 2007, Asians have been buying more cars and trucks than people in any other region — by about 2030 they will be buying as many vehicles as the rest of the world combined, according to LMC Automotive.

The decisive shift responds both to the Asian growth engine and to Asian technology.

India and China's Global outreach

- In 2015, emerging India established the International Solar Alliance, laying out a distinct global sustainable development framework, and seeking a triumvirate.
- China, in 2013, after attaining 15% of the global wealth, announced the multilateral Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and in 2014, launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, challenging the global governance paradigm.
- The United States has recognized the 'Asian Century' bypassing multilateralism; its direct dealings with China and India and the Indo-Pacific construct are examples.

USA continues to hold power

- USA has defined human rights solely on the basis of political and procedural terms.
- It has withdrawn from climate change after shifting the burden onto developing countries.
- It has forced inclusion of intellectual property rights into the trade regime.
- U.S.-determined national security standards on the world has led to a handful of countries agreeing to ban Huawei 5G technology.
- It has imposed sanctions on companies building a gas pipeline from Russia.
- Sanctions on Iran have affected India's interests, impacting long-term relations.

This is not just questioned by Asian countries but also by its alliance partners.

How China has capitalized?

- The BRI provides a strategic framework for new global institution building as its scope is as wide as multilateral treaties.
 - * For example, state-owned enterprises in infrastructure sectors in the BRI, with backing from national banks, are contributing to internationalisation of the Renminbi, enhancing China's role in global economic governance.
- As the world leader in digital transactions, China is developing block chain-based financial infrastructure in BRI countries and exploring an international block-chain currency for digital settlements without relying on the dollar, thus reducing U.S. leverage.
- With the U.S. military 'pivot to Asia', China is keen to resolve the border dispute with India to avoid constraints.

- * The recent India-China Summit on boundary issues resolved to work out a framework on a roadmap to a final solution on border issues.
- * India has rejected American opposition to Huawei taking part in 5G trials. The Indian government has allowed all applicants, including Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd, to participate.

Therefore, the contours of the new order should not be seen through a western prism.

Conclusion

- In Asia, differences will centre on overlapping priorities —
 - * Security (the U.S.'s efforts to maintain hegemony),
 - * Economic (China's emphasis on connectivity, markets and growth) and
 - * Equitable sustainable development (India-led framework of digital infrastructure designed as a public good).
- By 2030, there is every possibility of a triumvirate.
 - * Both the U.S. and China have regular high-level discussions on strategic issues with India, recognising its demographic, technological and resource potential to be part of a future global triumvirate.
- Asia and Africa, former colonies with conditions closer to India than to China, are waiting for late-comer India, a civilisational state like China, to lay out its vision of a digital, cooperative, sustainable multilateral strategic framework to complement the frameworks of the other two powers.
- Early concrete moves for their simultaneous rise are in the global interest.

24. RBI reopens scheme for FPI investments in debt

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India raised the investment limit for FPIs in government and corporate bonds

Current norms

- Short-term investments by a foreign portfolio investor (FPI) should not exceed 20 per cent of the total investment of that FPI in either central government securities (including treasury bills) or state development loans.
- The same norms are applicable on investments in corporate bonds.

Changes introduced

- The short-term investment limit has now been increased from 20 per cent to 30 per cent in both the cases
- The RBI has also made relaxation in the voluntary retention route (VRR) for FPI investments in debt.

- * The investment limit under VRR has been increased to Rs. 1,50,000 crore from the Rs. 75,000 crore of the earlier scheme, with a minimum retention period of three years.

Voluntary Retention Route:

- In March 2019, the RBI introduced a separate channel, the 'Voluntary Retention Route', to enable FPIs to undertake long-term investments in the debt markets in India.
- Investments through VRR are free of the macro-prudential and other regulatory prescriptions applicable to FPI investments in debt markets, provided FPIs voluntarily commit to retaining a required minimum percentage of their investments in India for a particular period.

25. Budgeting for jobs, skilling and economic revival

Context

- This article speaks about changes that needs to be introduced in the upcoming Budget to provide direction to India's tottering economy and a boost to aggregate demand and investment

A look at key stats

- The unemployment rate at 6.1% (Financial Year 2017-2018) is the highest in 45 years.
 - * The rate for urban youth in the 15-29 years category is alarmingly high at 22.5%.
- The Labour Force Participation Rate has come down to 46.5% for the '15 years and above' age category.
 - * It is down to 37.7% for the urban youth.
- Even among those employed, a large fraction get low wages and are stuck with 'employment poverty'.

Structural factors

The prolonged, and ongoing, slowdown, is the main reason behind the depressing employment scenario, though several structural factors have also contributed to the situation.

- The GDP growth for the second quarter of Financial Year 2019-2020 is 4.5%, the lowest in the last six years, for which a decline in private consumption and investment are the factors primarily responsible.
 - * The aggregate investment stands at less than 30% of the GDP, a rate much lower than the 15-year average of 35%.
 - * Private consumption, which contributes nearly 55-60 per cent, to India's GDP has been slowing down.
 - * Savings by household sector – which are used to extend loans for investment – have gone down from 35% (FY12) to 17.2% (FY18).

Budget should focus on reviving demand to promote growth and employment.

- Schemes like PM-KISAN and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are good instruments to boost rural demand.
- Farmers and landless laborers spend most of their income. This means that income transfers to such groups will immediately increase demand.
- Further, rural India consumes a wide range of goods and services; so, if allocation and disbursement is raised significantly, most sectors of the economy will benefit. And, the payoff will be immediate.
- Rural unemployment can be reduced by raising budgetary allocation for irrigation projects and rural infrastructure like roads, cold storage and logistical chains.
 - * These facilities, along with a comprehensive crop insurance scheme, can drastically increase agricultural productivity and farmers' income.
- Moreover, by integrating farms with mandis, such investments will reduce wastage of fruits and vegetables, thereby leading to a decrease in the frequency of inflationary shocks and their impact.
- Boosting urban employment: In urban areas, construction and related activities are a source of employment for more than five crore people; across the country, the sector's employment figures are second only to those of the agriculture sector.
 - * These projects, along with infrastructure, support 200-odd sectors, including core sectors like cement and steel.

Issues with the Real Estate Sector

Due the crisis in the real-estate and infrastructure sectors, construction activities have come to a grinding halt.

- At present, many real-estate projects are caught up in legal disputes — between home-buyers and developers; between lenders and developers; and between developers and law enforcement agencies like the Enforcement Directorate.
- The sector has an unsold inventory of homes, worth several lakh crores.
- Even worse, multiple authorities — the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA); the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT); and the many consumer courts — have jurisdiction over disputes.

Consequently, restructuring and liquidation of bad projects is very difficult, and in turn, is a main source of the problem of Non-Performing Assets faced by the Non-Banking Financial Companies.

How to revive the demand for housing sector?

- The Budget can raise the limit for availing tax exemption on home loans.

- * The ₹25,000-crore fund set up by the center to bailout 1,600 housing projects should be put to use immediately.
- * The funds should be used to salvage all projects that are 80% complete and not under liquidation process under the NCLT.
- Several additional measures can also help. For example, there should be a single adjudication authority.
- The multiplier effects of spending on infrastructure and housing in terms of higher growth and employment are large and extensive. Therefore, the ₹102-lakh-crore National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) programme is a welcome step.

Action Plan for the Future

More than 60% of the planned investment is expected from the private sector and the States.

- Private Sector: Many infrastructure projects are languishing due to regulatory hurdles and contractual disputes between construction companies and government departments. As a result, infrastructure investment has come to be perceived as very risky.
 - * This is the major reason behind non-availability of private capital for infrastructure.
 - * The government should standardize the regulatory uncertainty
- The State finances are shaky due to low GST collection, the onus is on the Centre to ensure that the programme does not come a cropper.
 - * The budgetary support to infrastructure will have to be much more than the NIP projection at 1.11% of the GDP.
- Bidding and contracting for new roads, highways, railway tracks and urban development projects is a lengthy process.
 - * This is also the reason why several infrastructure-linked Ministries like those for civil aviation and roads have not been able to spend money allocated to them in the current fiscal year.
 - * Therefore, rather than earmarking budgetary support for new projects, the focus should be on projects that are currently under implementation so as to complete them as soon as possible.
 - * In addition to creating employment, a timely completion of infrastructure projects will help increase competitiveness of the economy.
- The distress among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is another area of concern.
 - * For many products produced by these enterprises, the GST rates are higher for inputs than the final goods. Due to this anomaly, around ₹20,000 crore gets stuck with the government annually in the form of input tax credits.

- * This has increased cost of doing business for SMEs, which employ over 11 crore people.
- Next, according to some estimates, there are more than 22 lakh vacancies in various government departments.
 - * Such negligence is baffling when the unemployment among youth is very high.
 - * The government should fill these vacancies
- Job openings that arise in the private sector put a premium on practical skills and work experience.
 - * So the government should provide affordable and good quality vocational training programmes.
 - * The Budget should give tax incentives to companies and industrial units to encourage them to provide internships and on-site vocational training opportunities.

Conclusion

- It is high time these reforms are introduced in the upcoming budget to give boost to multiple sectors in the economy.

National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)

- It is estimated that India would need to spend \$4.5 trillion on infrastructure by 2030 to sustain its growth rate.
- The endeavour of the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), is to make this happen in an efficient manner.
- NIP will enable a forward outlook on infrastructure projects which will create jobs, improve ease of living, and provide equitable access to infrastructure for all, thereby making growth more inclusive.

Benefits

- For Government: Well-developed infrastructure enhances level of economic activity, creates additional fiscal space by improving revenue base of the government, and ensures quality of expenditure focused in productive areas.
- For Developers: Provides better view of project supply, provides time to be better prepared for project bidding, and ensures enhanced access to sources of finance as result of increased investor confidence.
- For Banks/financial institutions (FIs)/investors: Builds investor confidence as identified projects are likely to be better prepared, exposures less likely to suffer stress given active project monitoring, thereby less likelihood of NPAs.

26. IMF lowers India's growth forecast to 4.8%

Context:

- Update of the World Economic Outlook (WEO) report of the International Monetary fund (IMF).

Projections for India:

- The IMF has lowered India's economic growth estimate for the current fiscal to 4.8%. This marks a lowering of its own estimate of 6.1% made in October 2019.
- The growth markdown largely reflects a downward revision to India's projection.

The WEO lists the following reasons for the slowdown in growth estimates for India:

- Weak rural income growth leading to the decline in rural demand growth
- The sharp decline in consumer demand
- Stress in the non-bank financial sector
- Sluggish credit growth

India:

- India's growth is projected to improve to 5.8 per cent in 2020 and 6.5 per cent in 2021 (1.2 and 0.9 percentage point lower than the October 2019 WEO projections).
- The WEO notes that the growth momentum should improve in the coming fiscal due to:
 - * The positive impact of corporate tax rate reduction.
 - * The positive impact of monetary stimulus by the RBI and fiscal stimulus by the government.
 - * Subdued oil prices

Projections for global growth:

- The IMF's new projections estimate that global growth would be 2.9% in 2019, and would increase to 3.3% in 2020 and 3.4% in 2021.
- However, compared to the October 2019 WEO forecast, the estimate for 2019 and the projection for 2020 represent 0.1 percentage point reduction for each year while that for 2021 is 0.2 percentage point lower.

Reasons:

- The downward revision in growth forecast is mainly due to weaker growth across emerging economies, including India, Mexico and South Africa.
- The subdued growth forecast for India accounts for the largest share of the downward revisions in global growth estimates.

Risks:

- The IMF has categorized rising geo-political tensions, especially between the United States and Iran, as a notable downside risk for the global economy.
- Deterioration in economic relations between the US and its trade partners due to higher trade tariffs could further undermine the growth prospects.

Positives:

- The IMF notes that market sentiment has improved due to the following reasons:
 - * The broad-based shift toward accommodative monetary policy in most economies.

- * Favourable news on US-China trade negotiations in the form of the first phase of the trade deal.
- * Diminished fears of a no-deal Brexit.

Way forward:

The WEO suggests the following measures for strengthening economic activity and forestalling downside risks to growth:

- Stronger multilateral cooperation.
- Balanced policy mix at the national level, considering available monetary and fiscal space.

27. Redesigning India's ailing data system

Context

- The article offers a critique of the current official data and suggestions to improve it.

Background:

- A new series of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures with 2011-12 as the base, was released in 2015.
- The administration has delayed the release of employment-unemployment data and consumer expenditure data.
- The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the National Statistical Commission have been brought under the fold of National Statistics Office, altering the long-standing arrangement.

Significance of data:

- Data is the new oil in the modern networked economy. It has an important role to play in the socio-economic development of a country.
- Official statistics are a public good and give vital information regarding the state of the economy and the success of governance.
- The economic data influence markets, signalling investment sentiments, the flow of funds and balance of payments.

Concerns:

1. Flaws in approach:

Problems with price adjustment:

- The data on GDP is initially estimated at the current price and then deflated for the constant price for comparability of data over time.
- The present series encountered serious problems with respect to price adjustment, specifically for the services sector contributing about 60% of GDP, in the absence of appropriate price indices for most service sectors.
- Price indices going into a low and negative zone in 2014-17 distorted the real growth.

Enterprise approach:

- The shift from the establishment to enterprise approach, replacing Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs MCA21 data, posed serious data and methodological issues.

- The use of MCA21 data without weeding out defunct enterprises, and the insufficient mapping of comparable ASI data, was a major lacuna.

2. Deficiencies:

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

3. Unchanged approach:

The approach for the collection of data remains largely unchanged for long even when more effective methodologies are available.

Agriculture:

- Agricultural development is a major developmental issue in India and productivity is a major concern for agriculture.
- The yield rate for rice is still being estimated based on crop cutting experiments.
- Instead of collecting data on factors such as soil conditions, moisture, temperature, water and fertilizer use can help in a more accurate determination of yield rates.
- Israel a pioneer in agriculture technology, collects data on the above factors for analysis to support productivity.

Reliance on field surveys:

- There is still high reliance on field surveys for collection of data on employment-unemployment, consumer expenditure, industrial output, assets and liabilities.
- Though field surveys help validate projections and form an integral part of the official statistical discourse, the failure to integrate new methodologies is a concern.
- The initiatives under e-governance which have enabled the capturing of huge amounts of data need to be collated for use in the production of official statistics.
- The process of collection of data needs modernisation, using technology.

Way forward:

Newer aspects:

- The major focus of official statistics has been on estimating GDP.
- The official statistics should also focus on data to assess competitiveness, inclusive growth, environmental protection, sustainable development and social welfare.
- The GDP data needs to be linked with a host of other data for deeper insight.

Need for granular data

- India is vast and heterogeneous, and there would be differences in approach while setting goals for

development and reducing regional imbalance.

- Data should help the state pursue the right policy right from the level of a district to the country at large. It should also help evaluate performance for efficiency.
- There is a need to re-engineer the existing system, creating an integrated system populated with granular data.

Committees:

- Previously any data inconsistencies in official statistics were addressed by setting up committees to address the concerns.
- However thoughtful and well-meaning key recommendations of the Rangarajan Commission and subsequent recommendations, 2006 onwards by successive National Statistical Commissions have faced stumbling blocks in implementation.
- The committees should have the support of a dedicated team for audit, and the ability to implement decisions by cutting red tape.

Data logistics:

- There is the need for systems which have the capability to analyze large volumes of data, with high levels of reliability, validity, consistency and coherence.
- There is a need to adopt big-data technology.

Newer framework:

- There is a need for a new framework for the analysis of complex and evolutionary economic system. This should involve the aspects of automation, robotization and other labour-replacing technologies.
- There is the need to know in greater detail, the role of technology and advanced research, changing demand on human skills, and enterprise, which are all complex.

Move towards Micro-economic framework:

- The generally used macroeconomic framework of analysis assumes symmetric income distribution and does not get into the depth of structural issues. These can have a profound impact on the usefulness of the data.
- The new approach should consider the micro-behaviour of individuals, and the structure of their mutual interactions. Given the availability of microdata, we need to build a system to integrate the micro with the macro, maintaining distributional characteristics.

Transparency:

- There is a need for a renewed commitment to produce the official statistics transparently, following internationally accepted standards.

Conclusion

- As the statistics reflect on the performance of the government, it is necessary that its independence is maintained.

28. Govt to provide Rs. 5,559 crore funding to northeast gas grid

Context

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a Rs. 5,559 crore viability gap funding for the proposed northeast gas grid.

Details:

- A viability gap funding of 60% of the project cost has been approved. The quantum of viability gap funding (VGF) would be capped at 60 per cent of estimated project cost and would not be linked with upward capital cost variation.
- This is only the second instance of the government directly funding a gas pipeline.
- The funding support to the gas grid is a part of a broader goal of the government to raise the share of natural gas in the country's energy mix to 15% by 2030 from the current 6.2%.

North-East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid:

- The 1,656-km North-East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid will connect Guwahati in Assam to major cities in the region such as Itanagar, Dimapur, Kohima, Imphal, Aizwal, Agartala, Shillong, Silchar, Gangtok, and Numaligarh.
- The gas pipeline grid will be developed in the eight states of the North-Eastern region — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.
- The North-East pipeline grid is to be implemented by Indradhanush Gas Grid, a joint venture of state-owned GAIL India, Indian Oil Corp (IOC), Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), Oil India Ltd (OIL) and Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL).
- The vision envisages the development of the region by leveraging its hydrocarbon potential, enhancing access to clean fuel and accelerating the growth.

Benefits:

- The pipeline will enable the supply of piped cooking gas to households and CNG to automobiles, besides fuel to industry.
- The pipeline grid would ensure reliability and uninterrupted natural gas supplies to the consumers which otherwise gets severely affected due to various reasons in this part of the country.
- The uninterrupted supply of LPG and other value-added products in the region will bring energy security to the people in the area.
- Availability of natural gas across the region is expected to boost industrial growth without impacting the environment and would offer better quality of life to the people in general due to use of cleaner and green fuel.
- It would boost exploration and production of gas in the region and help in early monetisation of natural resources.

- Possibility of installing bottling plants for LPG is in the exploration stage, for reducing transportation cost.

29. Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD)

Context

- The government has launched a central accident database management system that will help in analysing causes of road crashes and in devising safety interventions to reduce such accidents in the country.

Issue:

- India sees the largest number of road fatalities in the world.
- More than 1.5 lakh people lost their lives in road crashes in the country in 2018, according to government data. Of the total people killed in road crashes in 2018, 48% were between 18 years and 35 years old, and more than 60% of such fatalities were due to overspeeding.

Details:

- The IT tool, known as the Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD), has been developed by the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M).
- It will be implemented by the National Informatics Centre.
- The project costs Rs.258 crore and is being supported by the World Bank.
- The system will be first piloted in the six States with highest fatalities from road crashes — Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.
- The IRAD will be improved on the basis of the learnings from the trial, following which it will be rolled out across the country.

How does it work?

- The IRAD mobile application will enable police personnel to enter details about a road accident, along with photos and videos, following which a unique ID will be created for the incident.
- Subsequently, an engineer from the Public Works Department or the local body will receive an alert on his mobile device.
- He or she will then visit the accident site, examine it, and feed the required details, such as the road design.
- Data thus collected will be analysed by a team at IIT-M, which will then suggest if corrective measures in road design need to be taken.
- Road users will also be able to upload data on road accidents on a separate mobile application.

30. The need for a single energy ministry

Introduction:

- India's energy sector is currently governed by a multitude of regulators including five different ministries.

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

So the column proposes a single energy ministry which could act as the sole point of reference for a crucial sector which is necessary to ensure energy security, sustainability and accessibility.

Multiple regulators and issues with data collection:

- No single agency collects energy data in a wholesome and integrated manner. Data pertaining to consumption are barely available while supply side data collected by agencies of respective ministries are riddled with gaps.
- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation collates data available from various ministries and conducts surveys at sporadic intervals.
- On the energy efficiency front, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency is the sole statutory authority with the mandate to regulate energy efficiency on the consumption side.
- There is no agency or body for the same purpose on the supply side. This stands in stark contrast to most other nations with their varied energy governance models.

The global regulatory model:

- Developed and efficient countries such as the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom have their energy sectors administered by a single ministry or department.
- There are also instances where the energy ministry is in conjunction with other portfolios such as environment, climate change, mines and industry.
- For example, the U.K. has the "Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy", France has the "Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Marine Affairs", Brazil has the "Ministry of Mines and Energy" and Australia has the 'Ministry of Environment and Energy'.
- The predominance of unified energy ministries is evident.

Recommendations for a single energy ministry:

- The Kelkar Committee in its report "Roadmap for Reduction in Import Dependency in the Hydrocarbon

Sector by 2030" (2013) stated that "Multiple ministries and agencies are currently involved in managing energy related issues, presenting challenges of coordination and optimal resource utilization, hence undermining efforts to increase energy security".

- In the Draft National Energy Policy (NEP), the NITI Aayog has advocated that a Unified Ministry of Energy be created by merging the Ministries of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG), Coal (MoC), New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and Power (MoP).
- The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) has been left out since it has implications beyond the scope of energy and involves national security issues.

Proposed regulatory structure:

- The proposed ministry would have six agencies under it to handle various aspects of the energy sector — Energy Regulatory Agency, Energy Data Agency, Energy Efficiency Agency, Energy Planning and Technical Agency, Energy Schemes Implementation Agency and Energy R&D Agency.

How a unified regulator can optimize efforts and resources?

- A single unified ministry of energy would help India to have an integrated outlook on energy that would enable us optimise our limited resources to meet the goals of energy security, sustainability and accessibility.
- In the fast-changing energy landscape of our country, having a single energy ministry would be beneficial as it would allow for a quicker policy response.
- Formulating an integrated and wholesome energy policy in the current governance structure is a complex and challenging task not only due to lack of coordination among ministries but also due to the absence of good quality consumption data and an inadvertent promotion of their own fuels over other choices, which may not always be the best option.

Steps being taken:

- The present government has already taken some steps towards unifying the governance structure of the energy sector such as appointing a single minister for both MNRE and MoP.
- This move has been lauded across sections of society as both those sectors are heavily interlinked.
- Having the same person heading both of these ministries will help resolve longstanding issues faced by both conventional and renewable power generators such as power balancing and transmission infrastructure planning.
- The hotly debated issue of non-payment of dues by DISCOMS to the generators might also be resolved with such synergy in administration.
- In the past too, this government has had the same minister for MNRE, MoP and MoC with great results in village electrification, LED bulb distribution (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All, or UJALA), power sector reforms (Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana, or

UDAY), coal block auctions and alleviation of coal shortages.

- This demonstrates the intention of the political leadership to reform the energy governance structure.

The 'Jal Shakti' model:

- The government has already shown a disposition towards unifying critical ministries.
- A pertinent example is the newly created Ministry of Jal Shakti which was formed by merging the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- The objective of this action is to unify water management functions, treat the issues of water management holistically and ensure better coordination of efforts.
- This was a crucial decision at a time when nearly 600 million Indians faced "high to extreme water stress", while 75% households did not have drinking water on their premises.

Conclusion:

- Though the actions by this government are a step in the right direction, there is a long road ahead.
- Accepting and implementing the recommendations of the NEP on reforming energy governance, which is to be placed for the approval of the Cabinet soon, would need to be carefully traversed given their hard-hitting implications on the existing bureaucratic structure.
- But nothing is more important than ensuring energy security, sustainability and accessibility. In this age of energy transition, this can only happen with quick and holistic decision-making as well as providing a level playing field for various fuels, all of which can happen if a single ministry handles the entire sector.
- Such a Unified Ministry of Energy will not only enable India to keep up with the global energy transition but also to continue to be a leader in adopting cleaner energy sources.



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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Bolsonaro- Republic day Guest

Context

- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was the Chief Guest at India's 71st Republic Day celebrations.

Bolsonaro and his policies

- He studied at Brazil's prestigious military academies and served as captain in the Army before moving to Rio and making his political career
- The defining aspects of his administration have been a strong inclination towards the U.S. and damaging policies affecting the Amazon rainforest.
 - * In foreign policy, his affiliation with the U.S. is driven by admiration for President Donald Trump. Brazil has been designated a 'major non-NATO ally', a status held by close U.S. allies like Japan, Israel and South Korea.
 - * On the Amazon delta, his policy has been to withdraw regulation and enforcement, facilitating the utilisation of the indigenous people's land for the purposes of agri-business, mining and cattle-ranching.

Imbalance within BRICS

- BRICS was set up as a move towards greater multi-polarity; hence it has spread across three continents (Asia, Africa and South America) and both hemispheres (North and South).
- The BRICS combination accounts for about one-third of global output, but a glance at the GDP table and growth rates will show the infirmities of the group:
 - * In terms of GDP, China occupies the second position; India the fifth; Brazil the ninth; Russia the 11th; and South Africa the 35th.
 - * In terms of growth rates, China grew at 6%; India at 4.5%, Russia 1.7%, Brazil 1.2% and South Africa 0.1%.
 - * Both politically and economically, Brazil and South Africa have been the laggards in recent years.
- Global rating agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) has said that Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) as economic grouping has lost relevance due to diverging long-term economic trajectory
 - * The better economic performance of China and India over the past two decades contrasts with disappointing results in Brazil, Russia, and South Africa

- Each country has different economic and political leverage, and its own burden of domestic and external issues.
 - * Their political regimes range from different types of democracy in Brazil, India and South Africa to Vladimir Putin's oligarch system and Chinese Communist Party rule under a leader for life.
- Mr. Bolsonaro in the past was critical about China, but he had to share the stage with China's head in the BRICS summit

Achievements of the grouping

- The main achievement of BRICS is the New Development Bank, with each country contributing equally to its equity. The bank has so far financed over 40 projects at a cost of \$12 billion.
- The BRICS countries are also developing a joint payments mechanism to reduce foreign trade settlements in U.S. dollars.
- They share the benefits of autonomous decision making and the group's informal structure is an advantage for coordination among the most influential non-Western countries.
- An offshoot of the group, dealing with climate change, is BASIC (BRICS without Russia), which met at the Spain conference and reiterated its support to the Paris Agreement.

Brazil - India Relationship

- Brazil's has agreed to waive visa requirements for Indian citizens
- In recent years, Brazil and India have demonstrated an interest in having a more decisive role in international institutions, one that is proportional to their geographic size and share in world population. Both have campaigned for a UN Security Council permanent seat.
- Owing to their geographical significance and relative advantages, Brazil in South America and India in South Asia are also considered as "regional" powers that wield influence in their respective neighborhoods.
- Their foreign policy activism offers alternative narratives to those of the West in the BRICS and IBSA, that provide a reference to their "soft balancing" strategy that resents the dominant views of the West.
- Brazil like India was little receptive to China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and there is discussion in Brazil regarding China's growing economic influence in South America
- India's trade with Brazil in 2018-19 stood at more than \$8 billion.

- * Top export items from India include organic chemicals, chemical-based products, and pharmaceuticals.

Conclusion

- The BRICS group can survive only if its members maximize their congruence to the extent possible, despite the growing intensity of Sino-Russian ties; the pro-American leanings in Brazil; the socio-economic difficulties of South Africa; and India's many difficulties with China, including its abstention from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
- India and Brazil have shown the desire to increase cooperation in diverse areas such as defense and agriculture. But the total two-way trade is at a paltry \$8 billion. Therefore both the countries need to work on the economic front to bring a new optimism in their relationship.

India, Brazil sign 15 pacts, agree on joint action plan

India and Brazil agreed on an action plan to strengthen bilateral partnership and signed fifteen pacts in sectors ranging from agriculture to energy.

- The plan provides for following up in a coordinated manner the outcomes and activities of the existing institutional mechanisms and the implementation of cooperation initiatives in all areas of bilateral relations
- Other important areas covered by the agreements signed include health, bio-energy cooperation, cultural exchange, geology and mineral resources, animal husbandry and science & technology.
- As per the action plan, all the new goals identified by the two sides to strengthen ties as well as the existing mechanisms would be grouped in six major thematic areas: political and strategic coordination; trade & commerce, investments, agriculture, civil aviation and energy mechanisms; science, technology and innovation, space cooperation, environment and technical cooperation, health mechanisms; defence and security mechanisms; culture and education mechanism; consular issues, social security and legal cooperation mechanism.
- The India-Brazil Joint Commission for Political, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation shall be the main forum for monitoring the implementation of the action plan of the strategic partnership.

Conclusion

- While the presidential visit opened large avenues of cooperation, the challenge will rest on keeping the momentum and following it up, so that this strategic partnership can translate into wide and concrete collaboration.
- Implementing the Action Plan as well as the bilateral agreements will require continued efforts of mobilization of public and private actors to produce the medium-term results.

Guaranteeing healthcare, the Brazilian way

Context

- Potential of India-Brazil co-operation in the health sector.

Background:

- Brazil is currently the only country in the world where more than 100 million inhabitants have a universal health system. Considering the fact that Brazil is often classified as a developing country makes it even more laudable that Brazil has achieved universal health coverage.
- India's Ayushman Bharat is currently the world's largest and most ambitious government health programme.
- Ayushman Bharat Yojana or Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) or National Health Protection Scheme is a national scheme that is aimed at making necessary interventions in primary, secondary and tertiary health-care systems. It was launched in 2018, under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in India.

Brazilian experience:

The Unified Health System (SUS):

- Brazil's efforts to achieve universal coverage have been through the establishment of a government-funded system.
- The Unified Health System (SUS), which guaranteed free health coverage that included pharmaceutical services, was written into the new Constitution in 1988.

The Family Health Programme:

- The Family Health Programme (Programa Saúde da Família) of Brazil, relies on a community-based healthcare network.
- It helped in the rapid expansion of health coverage in Brazil.
- From 4% of coverage in 2000 to up to 64% of the overall population in 2015, it was able to reach even the rural areas and the poorest states of the country.
- The strategy is based on an extensive work of community health agents who pay monthly visits to every family enrolled in the programme.
- The health agents carry out multiple tasks. They conduct health promotion and prevention activities, oversee compliance in treatment regime and manage the relationship between citizens and the healthcare system.
- Research shows that the programme has drastically reduced Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and increased adult labour supply.

Impressive progress:

- In the last 30 years, Brazilians have experienced a drastic increase in health coverage as well as health outcomes. Life expectancy has increased, while the Infant Mortality Rate has declined. Polio vaccination has reached an impressive 98% of the population.
- A 2015 report notes that 95% of those that seek care in the SUS are able to receive treatment.

High-cost efficiency:

- Unlike the universal health systems in other countries which consume around 8% of the GDP, Brazil spends only 3.8% of its GDP on the SUS, serving a large population.
- The impressive progress in healthcare has been made possible even amidst a scenario of tightening budget allocation in Brazil.

Given Brazil's impressive performance, India and Brazil can explore cooperation and strategic partnership in healthcare.

Way forward:

- Achieving universal coverage in India, a country with a population of 1.3 billion, will be a big and complex challenge. India may consider the following to ensure Universal health coverage.

Steady improvement:

- India should focus on steady growth and improvement. India must record details of improvement in terms of access, production and population health on a year-by-year basis.
- Any deficiencies should be addressed through appropriate corrective actions.

Increased funding:

- Public health expenditure is still very low in India, at around 1.3% of GDP in the 2017-2018 fiscal year. There is a need for increasing this in line with the national health policy.

Primary health care:

- Wellness centres form a major pillar of the primary health care system in India.
- The Brazilian experience in the implementation of its successful Family Health Programme can inform the design of the establishment of 1,50,000 wellness centre by 2022.

Differentiated approach:

- India is composed of many States with their own set of challenges and strengths. A one-size-fits-all approach for such heterogeneous conditions would be ineffective.
- The challenge must be met by an intricate combination of standardized programmes and autonomy to adopt policies according to their needs.

- The diversity can act as a powerful source of policy innovation and creativity and should be encouraged.
- Regional disparities in terms of resources and institutional capabilities must be addressed.

2. Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)

- Initiated in 2007, it is the European Union and India's proposed Free Trade Agreement
- India and the EU expect to promote bilateral trade by removing barriers to trade in goods and services and investment across all sectors of the economy

Both sides have major differences on key issues like intellectual property rights, duty cut in automobile and spirits, and liberal visa regime.

What does EU Want?

- EU wants India to liberalize accountancy and legal services.
 - * This has met with controversy as Indians do not want foreign lawyers and accountants to practice in India.
- European banks have been eyeing India's relatively under-tapped banking space
 - * But they are suspicious of the restrictive rules on priority sector lending and obligation on financial inclusion.
- EU is requesting India to reduce import duties on wines and spirits (France wants lower import tariffs on wines)
 - * But tax reduction on wines and spirits is not acceptable as these are regarded as 'sin goods' and the states which derive huge revenue from liquor sales, would be reluctant to cut taxes.
- Reduce taxes on automobiles.
 - * India maintains high duties on luxury cars where Germany is seeking better market access.
- Import duties on Dairy products has to be reduced substantially,
- The major contentious issues that remain are the differences on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), investment protection and trade in agriculture and food items.
 - * India fears that any commitment over and above the WTO's intellectual property rights (TRIPS, or Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) will undermine its capacity to produce generic formulations.
- The EU seeks liberalisation of FDI in multi-brand retail and insurance

What does India want?

Indian demand for more liberalisation in services and greater flexibility on data privacy

- India is asking for 'Data Secure Nation' status to be granted by the EU.

- * The country is among the nations not considered data secure by the EU. The matter is crucial as it will have a bearing on Indian IT companies wanting market access.
- India seeks improved market access Mode 1 (ITeS/BPO/KPO) and Mode 4 (movement of software professionals).
 - * There are many barriers to movement of professionals including cumbersome rules on work permits, wage parity conditions, visa formalities and non-recognition of professional qualifications.
 - * These rules also vary across different European countries that India would want harmonised and relaxed access to.
- India demands that the EU help the country in the development of textile and chemical industry, including leather goods and apparels, as gaining better access to the EU may help in the expansion of these sectors and their operations, thereby contributing to the overall growth of the Indian economy
- Miffed by MNCs frequently serving arbitration notices on India for hefty compensation, New Delhi's model act on investment protection has introduced several changes that are not to the liking of the European Commission, such as the removal of MFN clause and narrower scope of national treatment or exclusion of tax disputes from the purview of investment protection.
 - * Besides, it will allow investors to initiate international arbitration only after domestic legal remedies are exhausted.
- Other sticking points are the presence of non-tariff barriers that the EU imposes on Indian agricultural products in the form of sanitary and Phyto-sanitary measures which are too stringent and enable the EU to bar many Indian agricultural products from entering its markets
 - * India wants the EU to cut its agricultural subsidies while the EU has interests in India reducing its duties on dairy products, poultry, farm and fisheries.

Why they should be signing it?

- A common liberalized market would reach up to 1.7 billion consumers in both markets. The BTIA is seen as a great way to reduce the existing trade barriers on both sides.
- Both India and the EU are major exporters of IT and associated services. Growing services trade and possible BTIA may facilitate further labour mobility.

Concerns

- European NGOs like Oxfam, Health Action International have raised concerns that the proposed EU-India BTIA may reduce access to affordable generic medicines produced by India to a large number of developing country patients.

Conclusion

- A trade pact is about give and take. Failing to conclude the EU-India BTIA will be a lost opportunity for both the partners, especially when the US is erecting new barriers to trade.
- Both India and the EU have enough trade complementarities and can gain a lot by opening up their respective markets.
- Therefore they need to create a platform of trust and transparency to build a strategy and to find an agreement beneficial to both parties.

Context

- Latvian Foreign Minister's Statement on the India-EU Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).

3. Donald Trump's peace plan for Israel and Palestine

Context

- President Donald Trump has come up with a 'Middle East plan, Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People'
- It proposes to create Palestinian state with capital in eastern Jerusalem, dependent on Palestinians taking steps to become self-governing, to end decades of conflict in the region.
- Israel would control a unified Jerusalem as its capital and not require it to uproot any of the settlements in the West Bank

Plan for Israel

- Israel gets unified Jerusalem as its capital, and it does not have to dismantle any of its illegal settlements in the West Bank.
- The plan says the Jordan Valley, "which is critical for Israel's national security, will be under Israeli sovereignty".
- In exchange, Israel would agree to accept a four-year freeze on new settlement activity while Palestinian statehood is negotiated.

For Palestinians

- Trump promised to provide \$50 billion in international investment to build the new Palestinian entity and open an embassy in its new state.
 - * Includes constructing essential infrastructure including "high-speed transportation links" between the West Bank and Gaza, promoting private sector growth, upgrading education, and improving the healthcare sector and the overall quality of Palestinian life.
- To the Palestinians, the deal offers the possibility of a US-recognised quasi sovereign state that will not, however, have a standing army; they will also have to give up violent resistance to Israel, and ensure the disbandment of Hamas, which governs Gaza.

- The Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, immediately denounced the plan as a “conspiracy deal” unworthy of serious consideration

Status of Jerusalem

- Both Israel and the Palestinians make non-negotiable claims over Jerusalem. The plan says Jerusalem will not be divided, and it will remain “the sovereign capital of the State of Israel”.
- The capital of Palestine can occupy far-flung eastern neighborhoods lying beyond “the existing security barrier”, which can be renamed Al Quds, the Arabic name for Jerusalem.



It is not a fair deal say the observers

- The deal was drawn up without any meaningful Palestinian participation and is loaded in Israel's favor.

- * For any peace process to be successful, the first step is to take all conflicting parties into confidence.
- * By that standard, U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan for Israel and Palestine is a failure from the start

- The Palestinians believe that Mr. Trump, whose administration recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, is not an impartial negotiator between the two sides.
- Mr. Trump has thrown his weight behind the two-state solution. But to achieve the solution, the plan overly favors the Israeli positions and demands excessive concessions from the Palestinians.
- According to the plan, Israel can annex the Jordan Valley as well as the Jewish settlements on the West Bank.
 - * It also recognizes Jerusalem as the “undivided capital” of Israel, while the Palestinian capital could come up in the eastern outskirts of the city.
 - * It proposes to enlarge Gaza and swap the Arab-populated towns in southeast Israel with Palestine for parts of the West Bank.
 - * In effect, the Palestinians would lose roughly 30% of the West Bank, their claim to Jerusalem and the right to return of refugees.
 - * In return, they will get an independent state in a shrunken West Bank and an enlarged Gaza connected through a tunnel that would practically be encircled by Israel
- Even to achieve statehood under the proposed conditions, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is required to crack down on Hamas and Islamic Jihad (which is practically impossible as both operate from Gaza and the PA runs only West Bank territories), stop supporting families of those jailed or killed by Israel and stop challenging Israeli actions on international fora.

Conclusion

- Under the present plan it is virtually impossible for any Palestinian leader to sell these proposals to a people who have been resisting Israel's occupation for decades.
- Any plans going forward that seeks constructive and lasting peace should include Palestine's participation from the beginning, rather than a unilateral imposition by USA.

Oslo Accords

- They are a set of agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
- The first Oslo Accord was signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993 and the second Oslo Accord was signed in Egypt, in 1995.

- The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement was signed in Washington in 1995, subsequent to the Oslo Accords. The Oslo Accords marked the start of the Oslo process, a peace process aimed at achieving a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine.
- The Oslo Accords created a Palestinian Authority tasked with limited self-governance of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The agreement set out the scope of Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza. It even acknowledged the PLO as Israel's partner in permanent-status negotiations and other questions.
- The most important questions are related to the borders of Israel and Palestine, Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, Israel's military presence in and control over remaining territories after Israel's recognition of Palestinian autonomy, and the Palestinian right of return. The Oslo Accords, however, did not create a Palestinian state.
- The Oslo Accords are based on the 1978 Camp David Accords.

4. International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in the Rohingya case

Context

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has asked the government of Myanmar to immediately take "all measures within its power" to prevent atrocities against members of the minority Rohingya Muslim community.

Who took Myanmar to the ICJ?

- It was the Republic of the Gambia.
- Gambia had filed a suit in ICJ on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
- The suit alleged that the brutalities by the defence services amounted to crimes of genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention.
- The Gambia urged the ICJ to direct Myanmar to stop the genocide, ensure that persons committing genocide are punished, and allow the "safe and dignified return of forcibly displaced Rohingya".
- During the proceedings, Gambia relied on the report published by the Independent Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar established by the UN Human Rights Council to support its case.

Who are the Rohingyas?

- The Rohingyas are a largely Muslim ethnic group belonging to the Rakhine region, who were rendered stateless under a controversial 1982 citizenship law and have been the subject of persecution since.
- In recent years, the attempts of the Rohingya to flee Myanmar by sea or land have captured international media attention.

What did the ICJ say?

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in a unanimous ruling, has pinned legal responsibility on Myanmar's government for the military's large-scale excesses of 2017.
- Myanmar has also been asked to furnish periodic reports until the conclusion of the case, which relates to genocide accusations.

The court indicated the following provisional measures:

- That Myanmar shall, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, "take all measures within its power to prevent the killing of the Rohingya or the causing of serious bodily or mental harm to the members of the group"; deliberately inflicting on the Rohingya "conditions of life calculated to bring about (their) physical destruction in whole or in part"; and imposing "measures intended to prevent births within the group".
- That Myanmar shall ensure that its military or any irregular armed units within its control, do not commit any of the acts described above, or conspire to commit, direct, attempt to commit, or be complicit in genocide.
- That Myanmar shall take "effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to allegations of acts" of genocide.
- That Myanmar shall submit a report to the ICJ on all measures taken to give effect to the order within four months, and thereafter every six months, until a final decision is passed.

It is important to note that these directions are "provisional measures" until the ICJ can finally decide if Myanmar has been committing an ongoing genocide against the Rohingya. The final verdict could take several years.

Myanmar's defence:

- Myanmar has expectedly, rejected the ICJ's ruling and has accused rights groups of presenting the Court with a wrong picture of the situation in Myanmar.
- Myanmar has defended the army's action as a legitimate response to violations of the law by the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army.

What happens if Myanmar does not comply with the provisional measures?

- For its part, Myanmar has denied that its military or paramilitary has participated in a genocide of Rohingya and it is unlikely to alter its position.
- Provisional measures are essentially a restraining order against a state when a case is pending and can be seen as, at most, a censure. Provisional orders cannot be challenged and are binding upon the state. However, limitations in enforcing decisions of the ICJ are widely acknowledged by law experts.

What are these limitations?

- When a state fails to comply, the Security Council has the power to impose sanctions against it and ensure compliance when international security and peace are at stake. So far, the Security Council has never taken a coercive measure against any country to get an ICJ ruling implemented.
- Even with the stepping in of the Security Council, there are several hurdles in enforcement of ICJ decisions. Any one of the five permanent members of the Security Council with veto powers can block the enforcement of an ICJ decision against itself or its ally.
 - * For example, in *Nicaragua v United States* (1989) where the ICJ ruled against the US holding it responsible for illegal military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua, the US refused to abide by the ruling.

Significance

- Although it could take years before the ICJ pronounces the final verdict in the genocide case, the ICJ's injunction in the case holds hope for Rohingya refugees languishing in the Bangladesh refugee camps.
- The ruling empowers the UN Security Council to prevail upon Myanmar to take appropriate measures for the rehabilitation and repatriation of displaced communities.
- India has its own interests in an amicable resolution of Myanmar's internal dispute. This would reduce the pressure on India to accept the incoming refugees.

Conclusion

- The ICJ order to Myanmar to take concrete steps to prevent the genocide of the Rohingya is a landmark step to stop further atrocities against one of the world's most persecuted people.
- The world court's orders are legally binding but it relies on the United Nations to add political pressure, if necessary, to enforce them.
- Concerned governments and U.N. bodies should now weigh in to ensure that the order is enforced as the genocide case moves forward.

5. Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs)

- A hypersonic delivery system is essentially a ballistic or cruise missile that can fly for long distances and at speeds higher than 5 Mach at lower altitudes.
- This allows it to evade interception from current Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD).
- It can also execute a high degree of manoeuvres.

Context

- In December 2019, Russia announced that its new Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (HGV), Avangard, launched atop an intercontinental ballistic missile, had been made operational.

- With this induction, it appears that Russia has beaten the U.S. and China in deploying the HGV.
 - * But China and the U.S. are also close on the heels: the U.S. has moved from the research to the development stage, and China demonstrated the DF-17, a medium-range missile with the HGV, at the military parade

Avangard

- The Avangard is a strategic Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) system which has a range of over 6,000 km, weighs approximately 2,000 kg, and can carry a nuclear or conventional payload equipped with a hypersonic glide vehicle.
- It's designed to sit atop an ICBM and, once launched, it uses aerodynamic forces to sail on top of the atmosphere.

Significance of Hypersonic Technologies

This technology is considered to be a game changer as far as military strategy is concerned.

- Any country having this technology has an added advantage, as it creates uncertainty for its adversaries.
- The weapons' manoeuvrability allows them to travel on unpredictable trajectories, making it difficult to track and destroy them before they successfully penetrate advanced air and ballistic missile defences.

How would the induction of hypersonics complicate security concerns?

1. First, these missiles are being added to the military capabilities of countries that possess nuclear weapons which could escalate tensions between the countries.

- For the adversaries the concern is, an attack on nuclear assets would degrade retaliation capabilities.
- The incoming warhead and destination ambiguities could create misperception and miscalculation in moments of crisis.

2. Second, the induction of hypersonics would lead to an offence-defence spiral.

- According to reports, the U.S. has begun finding ways of either strengthening its BMD or looking for countermeasures to defeat hypersonics, besides having an arsenal of its own of the same kind.
- The stage appears set for an arms race instability given that the three major players in this game have the financial wherewithal and technological capability to play along.
- This looks particularly imminent in the absence of any strategic dialogue or arms control.

3. A third implication would be to take offence-defence developments into outer space.

- Counter-measures to hypersonics have been envisaged through placement of sensors and interceptors in outer space.

- While none of this is going to be easy or quick, weaponisation of outer space would, nevertheless, be a distinct possibility once hypersonic inductions become the norm.

Conclusion

- Thus induction of this technology would likely prove to be a transitory advantage eventually leading nations into a strategic trap.
- India needs to make a cool-headed assessment of its own deterrence requirements and choose its pathways wisely.

6. India- Australia Relations (A road map for robust trade ties)

Introduction

- India and Australia share a strong bilateral relationship based on historic ties, cultural links and extensive people-to-people connections.
- As large democracies, the two countries play a central role in strengthening geopolitical cooperation and maintaining peace and security.

Historically, India-Australia relations suffered from deep structural impediments.

- The first was the logic of the Cold War, during which Australia decided to be among Britain and the United States' closest allies, while India initially opted for non-alignment.
 - * This led to a number of disagreements and misunderstandings.
 - * As India achieved Independence, for example, Australian leaders advocated to their British counterparts that the strategically important Andaman and Nicobar Islands be retained by the empire.
- The second complicating factor was India's nuclear status outside the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
 - * This resulted in Australia taking a particularly strong stance against India's 1998 nuclear tests, which came soon after French nuclear tests in the South Pacific.
 - * However, the 2008 waiver granted to India by the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the subsequent lifting by Australia of its uranium ban against NPT non-signatories, and a bilateral civil nuclear agreement in 2014-2015 largely addressed the matter.
- Third, the relationship historically suffered from a lack of economic content. This has changed.
 - * India is one of the largest export destination for Australia, and Australia is a top 20 trade partner for India.
 - * Yet, merchandise trade remains below potential

- Fourth, the relationship was previously held back by an absence of people-to-people content.
 - * In recent years, however, Indian immigrants have been among the largest contributors to Australia's population growth.
 - * In addition to the massive influx of Indian students, Indian tourists are also visiting Australia in larger numbers.

Strategic Side

- India-Australia relations have experienced a major upswing. This is evident in a growing number of military exercises involving all three services, as well as staff talks and military training initiatives.
- In 2019, the countries took part in large-scale anti-submarine warfare exercises in the Bay of Bengal.
- The establishment of a bilateral 2+2 dialogue (involving senior foreign and defence ministry officials) represent more heft and purpose in strategic coordination.

Trade relationship

- The trade between the two countries has been at a modest \$31 billion, largely composed of resources like coal and other minerals.

Issue Area

- Negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement, which began in 2011, have not moved forward significantly.
- It is important for India to concentrate on various underdeveloped and undervalued sectors such as agriculture, education, tourism and services.
- Adani Group's coal project in Australia has been hampered by regulatory delays and difficulty in securing financing amid a passionate environmental protest movement.

India Economic Strategy 2035 Report

- It was prepared by former Foreign Secretary of Australia Peter Varghese for the government of Australia which lays down a comprehensive road map for strengthening Australia's trade engagement with India.
- This report recommends that Australia strive by 2035 to lift India into our top three export markets, to make India the third largest destination in Asia for Australian outward investment, and to bring India into the inner circle of Australia's strategic partnerships, and with people to people ties as close as any in Asia.

Entrepreneurship and Digital Technology

India-Australia trade has been steadily evolving into a new architecture underpinned by developments in digital technology, the rise of a younger generation of entrepreneurs, and a noticeable shift in the trade basket from resources to services.

- Technology and young entrepreneurship make a formidable combination and should set the agenda for the future of bilateral trade relations.
 - * About 80% of the Australian small and medium-sized enterprises are managed by young professionals.
- Young Australians, like young Indians, carry the compelling vision of 21st century globalization, multiculturalism and quality education.
 - * What adds strengths to this process is a great deal of social engineering, people-to people contacts, and knowledge partnerships.
 - * The young can see issues like immigration and outsourcing with far more equanimity than the older generation.
 - * Young Australians are thus emerging as great champions of India-Australia trade relations.
- There is also recognition that Australia is a laboratory of ideas, innovation, technology-led growth and university-industry partnerships. India is a large and demographically young market with a love for innovation and an appetite for new products and services. These synergies should add momentum to a growing engagement in trade relations.

The weakest link in India's exports to Australia is in merchandise.

- First, despite globalization, markets are country-specific and culturally sensitive.
 - * Indian companies will need to invest a little more in market research on Australian consumer expectations and lifestyles before their products can successfully penetrate the Australian market.
- Second, Australia is a brand-conscious market while India has not created a single consumer brand of international acceptance.
 - * Only when India's textiles, leather products, cars and two-wheelers, kitchen equipment and other products are visible across the world's shopping malls and supermarkets displaying their own brands that India will be recognised as a major player in the global markets.

Conclusion

- Thus innovation is key for the success of the Global trade.
- The future must be woven around the three pillars, which are economic relationship, geostrategic congruence and people to people ties. The glue that can bind this is a sustained momentum.

7. Jogbani-Biratnagar check post

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Nepal K P Sharma Oli jointly Inaugurate Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Jogbani-Biratnagar.

Details

- An ICP is intended to be a one-stop solution that houses all regulatory agencies, such as immigration, customs and border security.
 - * The ICPs are aimed at facilitating cross-border trade and movement of people.
 - * It helps in efficient management of border crossings
- The second Integrated Check Post at Jogbani-Biratnagar was built with Indian assistance to facilitate trade and people's movement across India-Nepal border.
- The first was built at the Raxaul-Birgunj border in 2018.

Efficient border checkpoints

- They are crucial for promoting regional trade
- Inadequate infrastructure at border checkpoints is one of the biggest obstacles to the growth of trade, as it hinders the movement of both goods and people in and out of neighboring countries.
- Thus, conditions at the border checkpoints must be improved to improve India's ties with neighbouring countries, and in particular, trade and people-to-people relations.

Land Port Authority of India (LPAI)

- It is a statutory body established under the LPAI Act, 2010—is responsible for the efficient management of the ICPs.
- It falls under the purview of the Border Management Department of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and is tasked with developing, sanitising and managing the facilities for cross-border movement, at the designated points along the international border of India.

Conclusion

- The establishment of the ICPs reflects India's willingness to provide world-class facilities at the border checkpoint to promote trade and connectivity with its neighbour.

8. Kalapani border issue

Background

- In November 2019, India released fresh maps of the newly created Union Territories (UTs) of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, along with a map of India depicting these UTs.
- In the maps, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was part of Jammu and Kashmir, while Gilgit-Baltistan was included in Ladakh.
- The map also included the Kalapani area.
- The Nepal government then lodged a protest against the inclusion of the Kalapani area, claiming it as Nepalese territory.

Context

- The Ministry of External Affairs has now said Nepal and India will resolve the Kalapani border issue through dialogue.

Geographical Location

- Kalapani is a 35 square kilometre area, which is claimed by both India and Nepal. River Mahakali, earlier known as river Kali, flows through Kalapani, which is situated on the eastern bank of the river.
- Both India and Nepal claim Kalapani as an integral part of their territories — India as part of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district and Nepal as part of the Darchula district.
- Kalapani is also a tri-junction point, where the Indian, Nepalese and Tibetan (Chinese) borders meet. The region has been manned by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police since 1962.

What is the dispute?

- The source of river Mahakali is at the heart of the dispute between the countries.
- The 1816 Treaty of Segauli, signed between British India and Nepal, defined river Mahakali as the western border of Nepal. River Mahakali has several tributaries, all of which merge at Kalapani.
- India claims that the river begins in Kalapani as this is where all its tributaries merge. But Nepal claims that it begins from Lipu Lekh Pass, the origin of most of its tributaries.
- Nepal has laid claim to all areas east of the Lipu Gad — the rivulet that joins the river Kali on its border, a tri-junction with India and China.

Politics of Kalapani

- The origin of the dispute goes back to the early 19th century; politically it emerged as a contentious issue between India and Nepal after the two countries signed the Treaty of Mahakali in 1996.
- The two countries had formed the Joint Technical Boundary Committee in 1981 to resolve the dispute.

Though the committee managed to resolve a large part of the dispute, they failed to reach a final settlement.

- Eventually, the issue was referred to the foreign secretaries of the two countries and they have been trying to find a resolution to the dispute.

9. Libya summit**Context**

- World powers held a high-stakes summit in Berlin to discuss the way forward to end the conflict in Libya.

Background:

- The Libyan Crisis refers to the ongoing conflicts in Libya, beginning with the Arab Spring protests of 2011, which led to a civil war, foreign military intervention, and the ousting and death of Muammar Gaddafi.
- The civil war's aftermath and proliferation of armed groups led to violence and instability across the country, which erupted into renewed civil war in 2014.
- The ongoing crisis in Libya has so far resulted in tens of thousands of casualties since the onset of violence in early 2011 and also affected the output of Libya's economically crucial oil industry.
- Presently the major conflict is between Mr Fayeaz al-Sarraj Tripoli-based, UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and Khalifa Haftar, the Commander of the Libyan National Army. The Libyan National Army, under Haftar's leadership, has replaced nine elected municipal councils by military administrators.
 - * Mr Sarraj's GNA is backed by Turkey and Qatar while
 - * Mr Haftar has the support of Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Aim of the summit

- The summit was aimed to help restart dialogue between the warring factions.
- The summit's main goal was to convince foreign powers wielding influence in the region to stop interfering in the war in the form of supplying weapons, troops or financing.
- This was making the situation on ground more complex given that Libya had become a stage for the struggle of regional and world powers. Libya was facing the devastating impact of foreign influence on the conflict.

Details:

- The Presidents of Russia, Turkey and France joined other global chiefs at the talks hosted by German Chancellor and held under the auspices of the UN.
- World leaders present at the summit made a fresh push for peace in Libya, in a desperate bid to stop the conflict-affected nation from turning into a breeding ground for extremist forces.

- UN hopes that all parties will sign up to a plan to refrain from interference, and commit to a truce.
- Notably, leaders of both warring factions, Khalifa Haftar and Faye al-Sarraj were also present in the summit. This was the first such gathering since 2018.

10. Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement

Context

- Cabinet approves ratification of Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement between India and France.

This Agreement aims to establish and develop co-operation between India and France in the following areas:

- The circulation of persons
- The facilitation of mobility of students, academics, and researchers, migration for professional and economic reasons, abiding by equal treatment of nationals of both Parties in similar situation.
 - * The provisions of this Agreement will be without prejudice to the application of national laws on the stay of foreigners on all the points that are not dealt with in this Agreement.
- The prevention of and the fight against irregular migration and the exploitation and trafficking in human beings in accordance with their laws and respective obligations.
- The provisions of this Agreement shall not substitute deeper engagement of the Parties in respect of the temporary movement of natural persons for the purpose of providing services as a result of a free trade agreement binding the Parties.

Significance

- The Agreement represents a major milestone in enhancing people-to-people contacts, fostering mobility of students, academics, researchers and skilled professionals and strengthening cooperation on issues related to irregular migration and human trafficking between the two sides.
- The Agreement is a testimony to India's rapidly expanding multi-faceted relationship with France and symbolizes the increasing trust and confidence between the two sides.

11. Myanmar's growing dependence on China

Context

- Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded a two-day visit to Myanmar

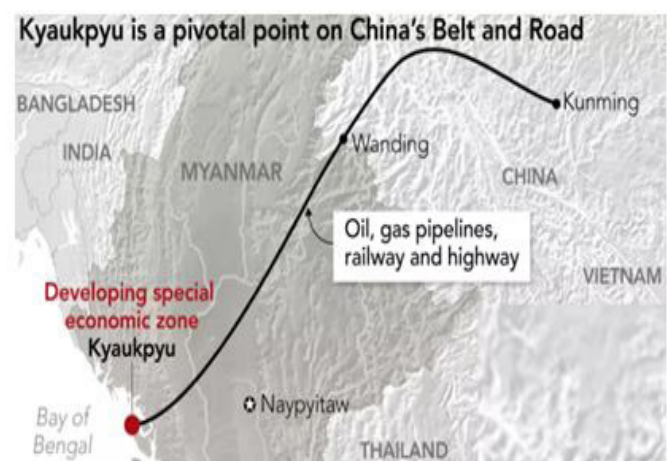
Background

- The last visit by a Chinese President took place in 2001.
- The 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations was judged to be the ideal occasion to launch a major renewal and strengthen the process of the bilateral relationship.

- With the Myanmar visit, Xi has effectively completed his key neighborhood trips, having traveled through the Maldives and Sri Lanka in 2014, Pakistan in 2015, Bangladesh in 2016, and Nepal in 2019.

Key Agreements signed during the visit

- During Xi's visit, China and Myanmar have signed a total of 33 agreements, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), protocols, and exchanges of letters on areas including major infrastructure projects, railways, industrial and power projects, trade and investment.
- The two countries agreed on MoUs to undertake a feasibility study on the Myanmar-China Power Interconnection Project in addition to conducting feasibility studies for the Yangon River Estuary West Bank Protection, Mandalay-Bagan Railway Line, and Watalone Tunnel projects.
- Giving a big boost to China's efforts at seeking greater presence in the Indian Ocean, the two countries signed a concession agreement and shareholders' agreement for the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) deep seaport project.
 - * The Kyaukpyu deep seaport is particularly critical for China as it would provide it with an alternative to Straits of Malacca, which is currently their lifeline for energy transportation as well as a trade corridor.
 - * Making progress on the Kyaukpyu port is important also because it is linked to the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and therefore the China-Myanmar agreement on the port is touted as a big success for the BRI.



Why Myanmar needs China?

Analysts are skeptical about these projects as there are no significant benefits for Myanmar.

- But the prime reason why they are supporting China is because the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is all set to deliver its judgment on the issue of violence against the Rohingya minority. Myanmar seeks support from China on this issue.
 - * The joint statement issued during the visit stated that “The Chinese side supports the efforts of Myanmar to address the humanitarian situation and to promote peace, stability and development for all communities in Rakhine State.”
 - * For Beijing’s support on the Rohingya issue, Naypyidaw has reconsidered some of the earlier tough positions it had taken on stalled projects.
- Because of the internal situation in Myanmar, most western countries are reluctant to fund projects in the country. Xi’s visit enhances investments in the country.
 - * In the first 11 months of 2019 investment from China reached \$20.9 billion, accounting for 25.21% of all foreign direct investment, second only to Singapore
- Beijing is also supporting Myanmar via tourism: Chinese tourist arrivals increased 150% in 2019 when compared with 2018

India’s Concern

- A Chinese-developed deep sea port in the Bay of Bengal will complete the encirclement of India — with Sri Lanka already having given its Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to China, which has also developed the Gwadar port on Pakistan’s coast on the Arabian Sea.
- China has already been given a mediator’s status by Dhaka and Naypyitaw in their Rohingya crisis dispute — adding to New Delhi’s isolation in South Asia
- Considering that even Nepal, which will have a high-speed rail link built by China and Sri Lanka, which has a known pro-China Sri Lankan government, headed by brothers Gotabaya Rajapaksa as president and Mahinda Rajapaksa as PM, are heavily leaning on Beijing.
- From New Delhi’s perspective, these are problematic. India has taken a strong position against Belt and Road and it worries about the strategic implications of any Chinese bases in the Bay of Bengal under guise of infrastructural projects.

Conclusion

- China keeps reiterating that it conducts its diplomacy with mutual respect and reciprocity as the guiding principle, smaller countries in Asia have found China’s projects have significant downsides.
- India, lacking China’s economic muscle or infrastructure-building capacity, can only hope that Myanmar’s caution will limit China’s influence.

12. Raisina Dialogue

- It is India’s premier foreign policy conference which is committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community.

- Organized along the lines of the Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore
- Every year, global leaders in policy, business, media and civil society are hosted in New Delhi to discuss cooperation on a wide range of pertinent international policy matters.
- The conference is hosted by the Observer Research Foundation, an independent think tank, in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs of India.
- The Dialogue, since its inception, has attracted academics, scholars, researchers, students, journalists and even politicians who are either interested—or are working—in the field of international relations, geopolitics, security, nuclear issues and Indian foreign policy.
- The name “Raisina Dialogue” comes from Raisina Hill, an elevation in New Delhi, seat of the Government of India, as well as the Presidential Palace of India, Rashtrapati Bhavan

Themes and strategies

- The first edition of the Dialogue took place in March 2016.
- Over the past few years, discussions on the themes of regional and global connectivity, terrorism, maritime security threats and challenges, political cooperation, and global governance have been a staple at Raisina.
- The title of the Raisina Dialogue 2020 is “Navigating the Alpha Century”.

Why does the Dialogue matter?

- Raisina Dialogue has elevated the global profile of India by uniting the best strategic thinkers of the world.
- Raisina Dialogue is an opportunity for the world to see India’s growing aspirations to play a more proactive role in international relations.
- Raisina Dialogue is conceived as a platform for ideas, allowing India to enhance its importance
 - * India is open to varying opinions, willing to debate and negotiate, and understanding the scale and stakes of global interdependencies.
- The Dialogue also provides a golden chance for young scholars and researchers to interact with a galaxy of stars from the international relations universe.

Conclusion

- The Raisina Dialogue helps confirm global public perception that India’s time is fast approaching. India is messaging to the world very clearly that it desires to be recognized as an emerging and formidable power, a true world power.

13. Sagarmatha Sambaad

- The Sambaad (dialogue) is named after the world's tallest mountain, Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest), which is also a symbol of friendship
- It is scheduled to be held biennially in Nepal.
- The Sambaad hopes to draw global leaders, including heads of state/government, parliamentarians, policy makers, leaders from the inter-governmental organisations, the private sector, the civil society, think tanks, women and the media to discuss on the ways of cooperation, exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences on prominent global issues.

Context

- Nepal has invited the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan along with several other heads of government and heads of state for the Sagarmatha Sambaad

Details

- The theme for the first edition of the Sagarmatha Sambaad, scheduled from April 2-4, is 'Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity'
- The main objectives of the first edition of the Sambaad are to forge a common consensus among countries on the impending climate crisis and encourage political leaders to mobilise political will to tackle the menace.
- It also hopes to create awareness among participants and the world about the direct relation that exists between the climate change and mountain ecology.
- The Kathmandu event aims to draw all the SAARC leaders and provide an opportunity to break the ice.

Significance

- Sagarmatha Sambaad will highlight Nepal's ability to assert its point of view before the global audience

14. Sampriti

- It is a military exercise by Bangladesh and India.
- It is hosted alternately by both countries. The exercise was first held in Assam in 2011.
- The exercise is aimed to strengthen and broaden the aspects of interoperability and cooperation between the Indian and Bangladesh Armies.
- The exercise will involve tactical level operations in a counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment under the UN mandate.
- In addition to understanding each other in tactical level operations, emphasis will also be laid for greater cultural understanding to strengthen military trust and cooperation between the two nations.

15. Shanghai Council meet

Context

- The 19th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) will be hosted by India
- As per protocol all heads of government would be invited for the event.
- Therefore Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan will also be invited to participate in the Heads of Government Council meeting

What kind of a grouping is the SCO?

- After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the then security and economic architecture in the Eurasian region dissolved and new structures had to come up.
- The original Shanghai Five were China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.
- The SCO was formed in 2001, with Uzbekistan included. It expanded in 2017 to include India and Pakistan.
- The SCO, which has its headquarters in Beijing, holds summits of heads of states as well as heads of government meetings annually in member countries.
- The event will bring together leaders from eight SCO member-states—India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Under what circumstances did India enter the SCO?

- While Central Asian countries and China were not in favour of expansion initially, the main supporter — of India's entry in particular — was Russia.
- A widely held view is that Russia's growing unease about an increasingly powerful China prompted it to push for its expansion. From 2009 onwards, Russia officially supported India's ambition to join the SCO.
- China then asked for its all-weather friend Pakistan's entry.

How does membership of the SCO help India?

For India, two important objectives are counter-terrorism and connectivity.

- India wants access to intelligence and information from SCO's counter-terrorism body, Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS).
- Connectivity is important for India's Connect Central Asia policy. Energy cooperation dominates its interest

16. Soft power of India still untapped

Definitions

According to Joseph Nye, hard power the term is "the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will."

- Here, "carrots" are inducements such as the reduction of trade barriers, the offer of an alliance or the promise of military protection.

- On the other hand, “sticks” are threats including the use of coercive diplomacy, the threat of military intervention, or the implementation of economic sanctions.
- Ex: Surgical Strike in Pakistan, 2015 Indian counter-insurgency operation in Myanmar

According to Joseph Nye, soft power is the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without resorting to force or coercion. Soft power, he said, lies in a country's attractiveness and comes from three resources:

- its culture
- its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad),
- Its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).

Key Facts about India's film industry

- India is the world's largest in terms of the number of films produced and second largest after Hollywood in terms of its global reach.
- Indian cinema is also the most diverse, contrary to the general tendency in the West and elsewhere to club all films under the generic “Bollywood”. Made in several regional languages, they have their own film-making styles, star systems and tell stories rooted in specific cultural matrix.
 - * Tamil movies have an audience base in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and Fiji;
 - * Bengali movies are hugely popular in neighboring Bangladesh; and
 - * Punjabi films too have a huge audience across the border in Pakistan.
- The films are shown in some 100 overseas markets, catalyzing the growth of trans-national creative networks, collaborations.
- Big studios Columbia, Disney and 20th Century Fox are now striking co-production deals with Indian companies.
- Bollywood, considered a living example of success of cultural openness, has all the traits to emerge as India's ‘soft power’ of the future, says a Deutsche Bank chief economist.

Movies as Soft Power

- In the past, the US has used Hollywood to not only fund wars, increase recruitment in the armed forces and even convinced the entire world that it was only America that could safeguard freedom, liberty and equality for all.
 - * The spread of American content helped create desirability for the American dream and way of life and cemented the hegemony of the U.S.

- Aamir Khan's Dangal setting new box office and critical records of sorts in China. The themes, which include women empowerment and a statement against female infanticide, have made the local Chinese audiences as well as critics ask why their government is not promoting films on social themes.
- This development can be the foundation of a fresh new chapter in the book of Indian Cinema being a soft power.

A PWC report states that the media and entertainment industry outperformed expectations in FY19 and was amongst the fastest-growing sectors with a growth rate of 13%.

Concerns

1. Context

Despite all these advantages it is still far from being recognised as an important sector for the government.

- Initially, under the Goods and Services Tax regime, the film industry was slotted under the ‘luxury’ category. A tax rate of 28% was imposed on it. After an outcry, this was revised to 18%.
- However, GST poses a challenge: if a particular movie appeals to a State government, that government can grant ‘tax free’ status to that film.
- With the GST in place, States can waive off the SGST (9%) alone. Therefore, a movie deemed ‘tax free’ is still be liable to pay CGST.

Deeming the entertainment sector as a ‘luxury’ sector undermines its soft power.

2. Need for improvements in Infrastructure

India lacks the infrastructure to take films to interior areas.

- For a population of 1.37 billion people, India has less than 10,000 screens, of which 6,700 are single screens. The procedure to convert a single screen theatre to a multiplex is tedious and costly.
 - * New permission and licenses are required, and existing licenses often hold little value.
- In stark contrast, China has about 60,000 screens for a population of 1.4 billion. These were created over the last decade with government support in the form of public-private partnership models, which makes the country a viable market for foreign film industries as well.
 - * This has created revenue for the Chinese government as foreign films have to share a sizeable amount of their profit with the state.

3. Lack of guidelines for courses related to film industry

- The Hindi film industry was accorded industry status only in 1998, even though the first Indian film was made in 1913.
- The industry employs a vast number of technicians and creative professionals. But there are no formal rules for courses related to the film industry.

- The government created the Film and Television Institute of India, but its curriculum is not binding on other private film schools. There are barely any government academies catering to the industry.
- In contrast, film education in the U.S. is accorded the same importance given to journalism or biotechnology.

4. Not enough incentives

- Much like the U.S., India allows its States to decide incentives for film shoots that take place within their territories.
- American states provide incentives such as tax shelters, cash rebates and grants to productions taking place in their territories.
 - * During a film shoot, the location gains tourist attention. Films also generate seasonal employment by hiring local staff and parts of the crew. It is a lucrative venture to have a film shoot at site.
- It is because of this that countries like the U.K. and Malta provide incentives such as easy clearances and rebates upto 30-40% of the total cost of the projects filmed there.
- In India the incentives are much lower, and in most States the cash rebates are capped at nominal amounts which are not lucrative for big-budget productions.
- Moreover, though there is now a single-window clearance for shoots in many States, shooting at various spots such as archaeological sites requires multiple permissions and is a time-consuming and arduous process.

Conclusion

- The film industry deserves more support for its growth and protection. With high export potential, the content created helps disseminate the uniqueness of India's culture.
- Yet, there are hardly any support tools from the government. The risk may be high, but the returns are good. Various countries are realising this and working to either strengthen their content-creating industries or become viable destinations for hosting shoots.
- Tapping into the potential of this multi seasonal industry opens a plethora of opportunities: from better international awareness about the country to creating employment opportunities within.
- India's culture, heritage and its pluralism are its strengths. India must use its culture to leverage and accelerate its growth.

17. In the ruins of unilateralism

Introduction

The year 2019 had many issues that defined global politics.

- There were protests by students against the establishment in several parts of the world — from Santiago, Hong Kong, Beirut to New Delhi.

- The rise of assertive China both in trade and foreign policy and the relative decline in America's power.
- Iran's dangerously aggressive, yet calculated behaviour and the rise of Turkey as a new power in West Asia.

USA's domination in World Politics after the fall of the Soviet Union

- The U.S. is the world's mightiest military power and arguably the centre of the post-Soviet world order.
- In the 1990s, the U.S.'s dominance was at its peak with international and multilateral organisations getting overshadowed by its pre-eminence.
- In 2001, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, it got international support for its war in Afghanistan.
- In 2003, the U.S. went ahead with the plan to bomb Iraq despite the UN opposition, reminding the world of imperial invasions.

Three developments in 2019 suggested that the U.S.'s ability to shape global politics is clearly declining.

1. The Afghan experience

- The U.S. went to Afghanistan in October 2001, with a vow to destroy Al-Qaeda and topple the Taliban regime. After years the US is now desperate to get out of a stalemated conflict and has started direct negotiations with the Taliban.
- The whole Afghan experience shows how the U.S. botched up the war.
 - * The U.S. has a superior hand in conventional warfare.
 - * But winning a war abroad is not just about toppling a hostile regime, but also about stabilizing the country after the regime is toppled.
- The U.S., history shows, is good at the former but fares poorly in the latter. It is now left with no other option but to reach an agreement with the Taliban for a face-saving exit.
- That would leave Kabul's fragile, faction-ridden government exposed to the Taliban insurgency, just like how the Mohammed Najibullah government was left to the Afghan Mujahideen in 1989 after the Soviet withdrawal.

2. The Iran stand-off

- The U.S.-Iran tensions were triggered by President Trump's unilateral decision to pull the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal.
- Trump's plan was to put "maximum pressure" on Iran through sanctions and force Tehran to renegotiate the nuclear deal. But Iran countered it through "maximum resistance", instead of giving in.
- The year 2019 saw Iran repeatedly provoking the U.S. and its allies.

- * It shot down an American drone over the Gulf, captured a British tanker and is believed to have either carried out or orchestrated multiple attacks on oil tankers that pass through the Strait of Hormuz.
- * Two Saudi oil facilities came under attack, which temporarily cut the kingdom's oil output by half. Iran was blamed for the attacks.

- The only counter-measure the U.S. took in response to Iran's growing provocations was imposing more sanctions.
- The U.S.'s inability to shape outcomes of the wars it launches is acting as a deterrent against its own war machines.

3. Cracks in the NATO

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Cold War alliance that was formed as a counterweight to the Soviet Union, continued to act as a vehicle of Western military dominance under the leadership of the U.S. in the post-Soviet order.
- The alliance has come under pressure in recent years with the rise of nationalist-populist leaders, like Mr. Trump, who have a favourable view of Russian President Vladimir Putin and are critical of NATO.
- These contradictions sharpened in 2019, suggesting that there are growing cracks in the alliance.
- Turkey invaded northeastern Syria's Kurdish held-territories, which had housed U.S. troops during the war against the Islamic State
 - * Ankara practically forced the Trump administration to pull back troops from the areas before it started airstrikes.
 - * The U.S. was relegated to the role of a spectator when a determined Turkey first captured some towns on the border and then struck a deal with Russia to create a buffer between Turkey and the Kurdish-held territories of Syria, which will be manned by Russian and Turkish troops.

Conclusion

- These incidents do not mean that the U.S.'s dominance over global politics is over. But they do show that America's long wars and its inability to shape post-war outcomes are impacting its stature in an international system that centres around it.
- The relative decline in America's power coupled with the rise of new and old powers point to a structural churning in the post-Cold War order
 - * New economic powers (China) are on the rise and an old military power (Russia) is making a comeback.

18. The new worry of depleting diplomatic capital

Context:

- In the initial year of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first tenure (2014–19), his foreign policy moves were given priority.
- During the first term, the Modi government made significant diplomatic gains and reaffirmed India's ties with key global powers and as well as with neighbours.
- But over the last one year, contentious domestic policies of the Modi government have started to have an impact on India's diplomatic ties and its standing as a vibrant, secular democracy.
- The Modi government has responded to this criticism by vigorously trying to convince the global community that these are internal matters of India and they do not have a bearing on India's external policies and on countries that are friendly to India.
- This column evaluates the consequences of this strategy on India's hard-won diplomatic capital over the years.

Diplomatic gains during the first term:

- Putting the past with the United States behind him — it had cancelled his visa for nearly a decade and criticised his actions in Gujarat — Mr. Modi's government forged an extra close bond with the Barack Obama administration, opening a new chapter in Indo-Pacific policy.
- With China, he also cast domestic sentiments aside to welcome its President, Xi Jinping to India, following it up with a visit to China.
- Finally, with India's neighbours, he signalled a new start from his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party's traditionally hard-line policies on Pakistan, Bangladesh, even Sri Lanka, putting bilateral ties over domestic concerns.

Diplomatic impact of controversial domestic policies:

- The contrast between that period and the first year in his second tenure (2019–2020) could not be more pronounced; rather than dealing with bilateral ties, the Ministry of External Affairs and its missions abroad are now fully devoted to dealing with India's domestic concerns and their fallout.
- Among them, the decision to amend Article 370 of the Constitution on Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, or the CAA, 2019, and the proposal for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have been called into question by several countries and international organisations.

State of India's ties with U.S and Europe:

- The impact of these policies has been most keenly felt in ties with the U.S., where bipartisan support for India has been the norm for at least two decades.

- The whittling away of Democrat support was evident early on during the “Howdy Modi” event in September 2019, where only three out of the two dozen lawmakers at the event were from the Democratic Party; the party, especially under Mr. Obama, had been very supportive of the Modi government.
- While the ostensible reason was that they did not wish to share a stage with U.S. President Donald Trump, it was significant that even among the five Indian–American lawmakers, only one was present. Nor has the discomfort in Washington been limited to the Opposition party alone.
- In the weeks that followed “Howdy Modi”, the State Department and several bipartisan committees have issued statements of concern over continued detentions in Kashmir and the CAA, held hearings in the U.S. Congress, and even inserted language on Kashmir into the annual Foreign Appropriations Act for 2020.
- A resolution urging India to lift restrictions in Kashmir, sponsored by Indian–American lawmaker Pramila Jayapal, now has 29 co-sponsors, including two Republicans, and a lawmaker who had earlier attended “Howdy Modi”.
- The same issues found voice in the U.K. Parliament. In the European Parliament, there were also discussions on Kashmir.
- It also led to heated battles within their polities, as Kashmir became a campaign talking point between Labour and Conservative candidates in the U.K. elections.
- The Modi government’s invitation to far–right Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to visit Kashmir (October 2019) has riled European diplomats from various countries — they have been denied similar access.

Impact on neighbourhood ties:

- In the neighbourhood, the government has upset both friend and foe with its wording of the CAA. Pakistan is predictably angry, while Afghanistan is more muted. But the real damage has been done to ties with Bangladesh.
- In the past decade, and especially after completing the Land Boundary Agreement, Dhaka and New Delhi had worked hard on building connectivity, opening energy routes, trade and developing travel links.
- The relationship was seen as a “win–win” in contrast to the preceding years when terror safe–havens and border killings dominated the India–Bangladesh narrative.
- By clubbing Bangladesh with Pakistan and Afghanistan on treatment of minorities, India has introduced a note of bitterness that is hard to mistake in the bilateral engagement.

- Some in Sheikh Hasina’s government have pointed out that the Modi government’s desire to naturalise only one group of immigrants from Bangladesh but castigate the others as “illegal immigrants” and “termites” cannot but be seen in a communal light.
- If India’s motivation was compassion for the religiously persecuted, they ask, then why was the Modi government so impervious to Ms. Hasina’s repeated requests for help in the Rohingya refugee issue?

Damage Control:

- Regardless of the reasoning, India’s diplomats, including new Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla, who had earlier served in Dhaka, will have their work cut out in repairing the damage.
- If close friend Bangladesh that defends India at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) feels that India’s actions are religiously discriminatory, it is only a matter of time before others in the Islamic world, most notably the Arab countries, who have been muted so far, will become more vocal.
- The OIC’s plans for a special meet on Kashmir and the CAA in April 2020, possibly in Islamabad, is one such indicator.
- It would be easy to dismiss all of the above with the simple line that they constitute interference in India’s internal affairs.
- Even if countries issue statements and world bodies pass resolutions on the detentions and the Internet ban in Kashmir, the crackdown in Uttar Pradesh and protests across the country, does New Delhi really need to worry?
- There are, in fact, a number of reasons why the government must weigh its diplomatic posture on these issues carefully, as all of them are likely to dominate its time in 2020.

Will it affect India’s national interests?

- The stand taken by some of these countries could lead to worrisome measures against India.
- The U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has already recommended sanctions be considered for Home Minister Amit Shah and other officials.
 - * While this may be considered an extreme step, it must be remembered that it was the USCIRF that first recommended a visa ban against Mr. Modi, as Gujarat Chief Minister, in 2005.
- In the U.S. Congress too, lawmakers can effectively block defence sales to India, or pursue sanctions on the S–400 missile system purchase from Russia, for example, regardless of support in the Trump administration for India.
- On the international stage, the United Nations and its affiliated bodies, which often seem toothless, could provide a platform for India to be targeted.

- New Delhi's break in ties with Turkey and Malaysia for their comments at the UN on Kashmir could also lead to them vetoing India's legitimate position at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), where it hopes to blacklist Pakistan for terror financing this year.
- At the very least, the unrest that has emerged from the policies will lead to a lower number of foreign visitors, and visit cancellations/postponements by leaders, recent examples being Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, or Bangladesh's Foreign and Home Ministers.

Is it worth losing India's diplomatic capital?

- The government must also evaluate the toll on its diplomatic resources that have been diverted for much of the year in fire fighting negative international opinion.
- The skills of the Minister of External Affairs, himself a trained diplomat, for example, could be better used than they have been; he has had to give a barrage of interviews to the European and U.S. media and the "think-tank blitz" in Washington and New York to deal with questions about Kashmir and the NRC.
- Missions everywhere, including in friendly countries, have been overworked, disseminating FAQs and lobbying with lawmakers on Article 370, the Ayodhya verdict and the CAA.
- Many are occupied martialling their strengths to prevent resolutions with objectionable wording from being drafted, and UN Security Council meetings from being held.
- Finally, the government must consider the impact of its domestic actions on India's diplomatic capital.

Conclusion:

- This capital is a complex combination of the goodwill the country has banked on over decades as a democratic, secular, stable power, bilateral transactions it can conduct in the present, and the potential it holds for future ties, particularly in terms of its economic and geopolitical strengths.
- At a time when the western world is in flux, the economy under stress and the rules-based order in recess, India's diplomatic capital is being depleted at a rate unseen in the last few decades.

19. New and Emerging Strategic Technologies (NEST)

Context

- The Ministry of External Affairs has announced the setting up of a new division on New and Emerging Strategic Technologies (NEST), to deal with emerging security implications arising due to emergence of new technologies like 5G and artificial intelligence

Details

- The NEST division will act as the nodal point in India's foreign ministry for all matters connected to new and emerging technologies including exchange of views with foreign governments and coordination with domestic ministries and departments.

- It will help assess foreign policy and international legal implications of emerging technology and technology-based resources
- The desk will also be involved in negotiations to safeguard Indian interests at multilateral fora like the United Nations or the G20 where rules governing the use and access to such technologies could be decided.
- NEST will negotiate technology governance rules, standards and architecture, suited to India's conditions, in multilateral and plurilateral frameworks.
- It will also undertake creation of HR capacity within the ministry for technology diplomacy work by utilising the existing talent-pool and facilitating functional specialisation of Foreign Service officers in various technology domains.

20. India-Pak. trade freeze hits thousands: report

Context

- A report highlighting the effect of India-Pakistan ties on the lives of the people in the bordering regions.

Background:

- Following the Pulwama attack, India imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan which curbed the bilateral trade between the two neighbouring countries.
- There has been the shutdown of trade between India and Pakistan across the Wagah-Attari border and the Line of Control (LoC) Salamabad-Chakhan da Bagh routes.
- The cancellation of the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Pakistan and the trade routes' closure, was followed by Pakistan's counter-measures, including an airspace ban and suspension of trade relations.

Details:

- According to the report titled "Unilateral decisions, bilateral losses" authored by researchers at the Bureau of Research on Industry and Economic Fundamentals (BRIEF), the measures and countermeasures have led to a decline in the relatively meagre bilateral trade of \$2.56 billion in 2018-19 dropping to \$547.22 million (April-August 2019).
- It has resulted in losses in billions of dollars and hundreds of job days affecting the livelihood opportunities of the locals.
- Many families and roughly 50,000 people, in Punjab and nearly 900 families in Kashmir have been directly affected by the shutdown of trade between India and Pakistan.
- The affected groups comprise of traders, custom house agents, truck drivers and helpers, those working at tyre and mechanic stores, local dhabas and motels, who are more vulnerable to economic hardships and poverty.

Government's arguments:

- Government officials justify the decisions on trade as being meant to be a tough message for Pakistan and to show India's frustration over Pakistan's continued support to terrorism.
- The economic sanctions would affect Pakistan's economy even more than India's.
- The Union Home Ministry has argued that trade needs to be stopped until a stricter regulatory regime is in place to block the misuse of the route for smuggling weapons, narcotics and fake currency. The ministry has stated in the suspension order that trade would be resumed at a later date considering any change in prevailing circumstances.

Way forward:

- The governments at the Centre and in Punjab and Jammu Kashmir should consider compensating the affected people for the losses as a short term measure.
- In the longer run, there is the need to find alternative trading markets internally so that those affected are not put out of business permanently.

21. Qassem Soleimani Assassination**Context**

- Major General Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander, was killed in a US strike at Baghdad International airport

What exactly happened in Baghdad?

- Gen Soleimani was killed in an airstrike, for which the US later claimed responsibility. The strike was carried out by a drone on a road near Baghdad's international airport.
- Soleimani had reportedly just landed from a plane.
- The blast also killed others including Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq known as Popular Mobilisation Forces.

Who was Gen Soleimani?

- Soleimani was in charge of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which the US designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2019.
- The Quds Force undertakes Iranian missions in other countries, including covert ones.
- Soleimani, who had headed the Quds since 1998, not only looked after intelligence gathering and covert military operations, but also drew immense influence from his closeness to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He was seen as a potential future leader of Iran
- In recent years, Soleimani was believed to be the chief strategist behind Iran's military ventures and influence in Syria, Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

What did the Quds Force do?

- Khomeini had created the prototype in 1979, with the goal of protecting Iran and exporting the Islamic Revolution.
- In 1982, Revolutionary Guard officers were sent to Lebanon to help organise Shia militias in the civil war, which eventually led to the creation of Hezbollah.
- According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, the IRGC including the Quds Force has contributed roughly 125,000 men to Iran's forces and has the capability of undertaking asymmetric warfare and covert operations.
- Quds Force plots have been uncovered in countries including Germany, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kenya, Bahrain, and Turkey.
- The Quds Force plotted a terrorist attack against the Saudi Ambassador to the US on American soil.
- 2018: A US federal court found Iran and the IRGC liable for the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing which killed 19 Americans.
- # Support to terror organisations: According to the State Department, Iran funds, equips, and fuels terrorism, violence, and unrest across the Middle East and around the world. "The IRGC continues to provide financial and other material support, training, technology transfer, advanced conventional weapons, guidance, or direction to a broad range of terrorist organizations, including Hizballah (Hezbollah), Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Kata'ib Hizballah (Hezbollah) in Iraq, al-Ashtar Brigades in Bahrain, and other terrorist groups in Syria and around the Gulf."

How has the US justified his killing?

- The Department of Defense issued a statement underlining Soleimani's leadership role in conflict with the US: "General Soleimani and his Quds Force were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of American and coalition service members and the wounding of thousands more. He had orchestrated attacks on coalition bases in Iraq resulting in the death and wounding of additional American and Iraqi personnel."
- The Pentagon in a statement said that the Iranian general was "actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region".

Self-defence:

- The U.S. had no authorization from the UNSC.
- Notably, the targeting of Soleimani in Baghdad had no prior consent from Iraq as well. This constitutes a violation of the territorial integrity of Iraq.
- The U.S. can justify its use of force as being lawful only if it is able to show that it was an exercise of its right to self-defence.

* Article 51 of the UN Charter recognises the right of every state to use force in self-defence, only "if an armed attack occurs".

- However, unlike an "armed attack", which is an objective standard, an "anticipated" armed attack is subjective and remains controversial and contested.
- There are both legal and policy arguments against recognising a right to anticipatory self-defence. Given the subjectivity of the provision of "anticipated" armed attack, it is vulnerable to abuse by states.

Need for anticipatory self-defence

- Given the rise of terrorism and the advancement in weapons technology, there might be the need for a right to anticipatory self-defence.

Way forward

- The objective of the general prohibition on the use of force as propounded in the U.N. charter is to minimise the chances of unilateral use of force. To ensure this objective a stricter and restricted notion of the right to self-defence is perhaps more appropriate.
- The threat of an armed attack must be so imminent that the need to act in self-defence should be "instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment of deliberation".
- To hold the countries responsible for their acts, the legality of any act of self-defence will depend on the subsequent disclosure of facts to prove the imminence of a planned attack. The country will have to justify that its action was proportional to the planned attack.

Conclusion

- In the current case, the U.S. administration will have to justify its use of force in Iraqi territory and prove that Iraq was either unable or unwilling to prevent the imminent attack.
- The U.S. will also have to provide an explanation for its use of drones during peacetime, which resulted in collateral casualties.

The threat to cultural sites

Context

- Following the assassination of Soleimani, President Donald Trump tweeted that if "Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets" in retaliation, the US would target 52 sites in Iran, "some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture".

Important sites in Iran

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest civilisations dating back to 10,000 BC. Its rich heritage and culture is an amalgam of Arab, Persian, Turkish and South Asian cultures.

- Twenty-four Iranian sites are on UNESCO's World Heritage List, two of which are natural sites and the rest cultural sites. Among the main World Heritage Sites in Iran are the Meidan Emam and Masjed-e-Jame in Isfahan; the Golestan Palace in the historic heart of Tehran; Pasargadae and Persepolis, capitals of the Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus II and Darius I in the 6th century BC; and the archaeological site of Takht-e Soleyman, which has the remains of an ancient Zoroastrian sanctuary.

What is the problem with targeting cultural heritage?

Following the unparalleled destruction of cultural heritage in World War II, the nations of the world adopted at The Hague in 1954, The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the first international treaty focussed exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage during war and armed conflict.

- The Convention defined cultural property as "movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites..."; etc.
- The signatories, referred to in the Convention as "the High Contracting Parties", committed themselves to protecting, safeguarding, and having respect for cultural property.
- There are currently 133 signatories to Convention, including countries that have acceded to and ratified the treaty. Both the United States and Iran (as well as India) signed the Convention in 1954, and it entered into force in 1956.

The Rome Statute of 1998, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, describes as a "war crime" any intentional attack against a historical monument, or a building dedicated to religion, education, art, or science.

- Article 8 of the Rome Statute deals with war crimes.
 - * Article 8(2)(b)(ii) says war crimes include "intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives"; and
 - * 8(2)(b)(ix) mentions "intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives".
- 122 countries are States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The United States is a signatory that has not ratified the Statute.
- India has neither signed nor ratified the Statute.

The U.S. president's threat to target cultural sites in Iran was in breach of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property during armed conflict.

Iran's counterattack

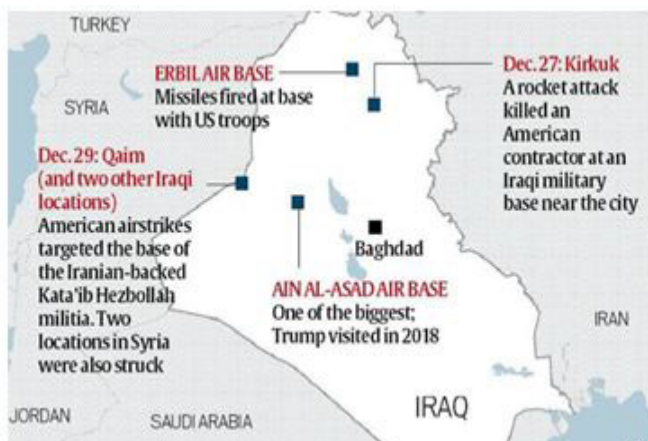
Context

- Iran launched ballistic missile attacks at American troops in two military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani.
- Article 51 of the UN Charter was invoked by Iran, which allows member-states to take military actions in self defence if they come under attack.
- The attacks were both an act of retaliation and a show of its capability.

What was the scale of Iran's attack?

- Number of Missiles: The US Department of Defence said in a statement that Iran had launched "more than a dozen ballistic missiles" that "targeted at least two Iraqi military bases hosting US military and coalition personnel".

Two bases that were hit



- AIN AL-ASAD: This vast air base is located in Iraq's western al-Anbar governorate, about 160 km west of Baghdad, and nearly 220 km from the border with Syria. The base, for long a major hub for US military operations in western Iraq, has also hosted Danish and British troops.
- ERBIL: The other base that came under attack, is located in Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq.
 - * The base is adjacent to the city's airport, which American transport aircraft, gunships, and reconnaissance aircraft have used for operations in northern Iraq and eastern Syria.
 - * The base has been a Special Operations hub to hundreds of American and other allied troops, logistics personnel and intelligence specialists throughout the fight against the IS

America's Response

- The Pentagon's assessments suggested there were no American casualties and only minimal damage in the attacks.
- Mr. Trump has signalled that he was backing away from further conflicts with Iran.

Further escalation and implications

- If the U.S. had responded with air strikes or missile attacks inside Iran, it could have triggered further attacks from Iran, setting off a cycle of violence and aggression.
- A direct shooting match between the U.S. and Iran would have been disastrous for the whole of West Asia.
- Iran may be a weaker power compared to America's conventional military might, but it is a formidable rival. It not only has ballistic missiles and a wide range of rockets but also a host of militias under its command across the region. It could have made an invasion and air strikes on its territories extremely costly for the U.S. and its allies.
- It could also have disrupted global oil supply by attacking the Gulf waterways. By any assessment, a direct war would have been catastrophic

Way forward

Mr. Trump did well to step back and not push the Gulf region into a disastrous cycle of violence and destruction.

- The international community should now push for a diplomatic settlement of the crisis and find ways to revive the nuclear deal which could bring long-term peace to the Gulf.
- And Iran should seize this opportunity for de-escalation.

Impact

Volatile region

- The killing of Gen. Soleimani, considered the architect of Tehran's spreading military influence in West Asia, marks a dramatic escalation in the regional shadow war between Iran and the U.S. and its allies, principally Israel and Saudi Arabia. At the outset, it appears as a reckless and unilateral act of provocation by the U.S. that could trigger another full-scale war in West Asia.
- The region is already struggling to cope with multiple conflicts and external interventions.
- Iran has in the past used its foreign proxies, and it might resort to the same in the present scenario. The latest escalation could trigger multiple attacks across the West Asia region, destabilising it further and causing heavy casualties. This could help the jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and the IS regroup and re-emerge.

Worsen the situation in Iraq

- Gen. Soleimani's assassination in Baghdad is likely to worsen the already bad situation in Iraq. Iraq has been witnessing nearly three months of youth protests and is undergoing political chaos under a caretaker government. The undue foreign interference by both Iran and the U.S. would only complicate the matters more.

- The event is likely to re-polarise Iraqi society along sectarian lines and intensify the Iran-U.S. competition for influence in Iraq. The situation could turn more volatile providing a fertile ground for the growth of terrorist organizations.
- The popular Iraqi clamour for political reforms and transparency may be eclipsed by the demand for eviction of the U.S. presence itself.

Efforts towards De-escalation

- Iran despite having a range of options at its disposal, stopped at retaliatory strikes on US bases in Iraq.
- The U.S. has decided against further attacks claiming that the Iran missile attacks had not caused any American casualties.
- With both Iran and U.S. not seeking an escalation, the chances of war have diminished. This is a good development not only for the countries concerned but also the west Asian region and the world at large.

Nuclear weapon

- For the U.S. the development of Nuclear weapon by Iran is a major concern.
- Iran when it publicly declared its intention to walk away from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in the aftermath of Soleimani's killing, it was careful to reassure the international community of its continued commitment to the NPT and IAEA inspections.

Potential fallout in India:

India has already had considerable difficulties in adapting to the U.S.-Iran cold war. Now that the conflict has escalated, its adverse impact on India could only magnify.

1. Oil imports

- The U.S. withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and has been steadily increasing the sanctions on Iran. This has involved asking other countries to limit economic transaction with Iran to isolate it economically.
- Iran has traditionally been one of the major sources of oil for India. The price and the payment options that Iran offers India has been the best deal for India in terms of oil purchasing. India has been pressurized into stopping oil imports from Iran post the American sanctions.
- Given India's huge dependence on imported oil, the reduced basket of oil exporters to India and the possibility of the disrupted supply chain will definitely lead to a rise in India's import bill and difficulty in procuring oil.

2. Geostrategic reasons:

- India's ties with Iran, apart from being "civilizational", have their own geostrategic significance.
- The much touted Chabahar port in Iran is very important for India geostrategically, given the growing strength of the Chinese in the region. The Chabahar port of which India is a major player would suffer from the delays as a result of any escalations.

- Iran has the capacity to influence the U.S.-Taliban peace process in Afghanistan, a neighbouring country. The derailment of the peace process in Afghanistan would have adverse effects on India.

3. Indian Diaspora:

- Though Iran hosts very few Indians, given the fact that the Iran-US escalation will not be limited to the two nations and would spread out to the entire West Asian region, the safety of an estimated eight million Indian expatriates in the Gulf may be affected.
- India is a large recipient of remittances and a large share of this is accounted by West Asia. Any turbulence in West Asia will adversely affect remittance flow and the Indian foreign reserves.

4. Domestic factors:

- After Iran, India has perhaps the largest number of the world's Shia population. The killing of Soleimani has resulted in widespread anger among the Shia community and the possibility of some of them being radicalized by this event cannot be ruled out. This will pose an additional challenge to the anti-terror apparatus in India.

Given India's goodwill in the region and the large stakes in the extended neighbourhood, it is in India's interest to activate its regional diplomacy in order to de-escalate the tensions and encourage dialogue.

Peremptory Norm/ Jus Cogens /ius Cogens

- **JUS COGENS** or **ius cogens**, meaning "compelling law" in Latin, are rules in international law that are peremptory or authoritative, and from which states cannot deviate.
 - * These norms cannot be offset by a separate treaty between parties intending to do so, since they hold fundamental values.
- Today, most states and international organisations accept the principle of jus cogens, which dates back to Roman times.
- The jus cogens rules have been sanctioned by the Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties of 1969 and 1986. According to both Conventions, a treaty is void if it breaches jus cogens rules.

Important Articles

- Article 53 of the 1969 Convention ("Treaties conflicting with a peremptory norm of general international law ("jus cogens")") says: "A treaty is void if, at the time of its conclusion, it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law. For the purposes of the present Convention, a peremptory norm of general international law is a norm accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character."

- Article 64 of the 1986 Convention, "Emergence of a new peremptory norm of general international law (jus cogens)", says: "If a new peremptory norm of general international law emerges, any existing treaty which is in conflict with that norm becomes void and terminates."
- Besides treaties, unilateral declarations also have to abide by these norms.

Examples

- So far, an exhaustive list of jus cogens rules does not exist. However, the prohibition of slavery, genocide, racial discrimination, torture, and the right to self-determination are recognised norms.
- The prohibition against apartheid is also recognised as a jus cogens rule, from which no derogation is allowed, since apartheid is against the basic principles of the United Nations.

Context

- Responding to President Donald Trump's threat to attack sites that were "important to Iran and Iranian culture", Iran's Foreign Minister posted on Twitter: "Having committed grave breaches of int'l law in Friday's cowardly assassinations, @realdonaldtrump threatens to commit again new breaches of JUS COGENS; — Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME"

Protecting Power

- During armed conflicts a protecting power is a neutral State or one which is not party to the conflict, and is designated by a party to the conflict and accepted by the adverse party.
- A protecting power is a country that represents another sovereign state in a country where it lacks its own diplomatic representation.

Context

- Following the killing of Iranian military and intelligence commander Major General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in a drone attack carried out by the United States, the Iranian government registered its protest with the Swiss Embassy in Tehran.

Example

- Switzerland represents the interests of the US in Iran. This is because the US itself does not have an embassy there.
- Iran's interests in the United States, on the other hand, are represented by the Pakistan Embassy in Washington.
- In an arrangement such as this, Switzerland is the "Protecting Power" of the United States' interests in Iran.

Why Switzerland?

- It has historically represented a number of countries in territories where they have no diplomatic mission.

Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations

- The instrument of Protecting Powers is provided for under the 1961 and 1963 Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations. "If diplomatic relations are broken off between two States, or if a mission is permanently or temporarily recalled... the sending State may entrust the protection of its interests and those of its nationals to a third State acceptable to the receiving State," the 1961 Vienna Convention states.
- And the 1963 Convention reiterates: "A sending State may with the prior consent of a receiving State, and at the request of a third State not represented in the receiving State, undertake the temporary protection of the interests of the third State and of its nationals."

How is the Iran air crash being probed?

Context

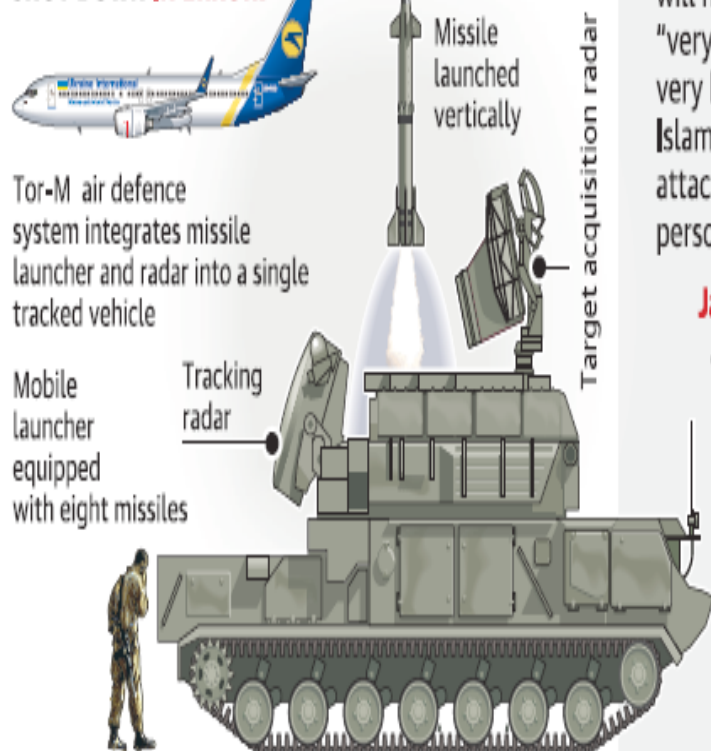
- Assuming the passenger jet had been misidentified as a cruise missile flying over its Airspace, a missile was launched at Ukraine International Airlines Boeing 737-800 a flight from Tehran, Iran to Kiev, Ukraine, killing all 176 people on board.
- Iran has admitted that it accidentally shot down Ukrainian passenger jet

Details

- The Aircraft Accident Investigation Board (AAIB), Civil Aviation Organisation, Islamic Republic of Iran has possession of Black Boxes



SHOT DOWN IN ERROR?



JAN. 3: A U.S. drone strike near Baghdad's international airport kills Soleimani, head of the Qods Force

▪ Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei promises "severe revenge"

Jan. 4: Donald Trump warns that the U.S. is targeting 52 sites in Iran and will hit them "very fast and very hard" if the Islamic republic attacks American personnel

Jan. 5: Iran announces its fifth step back from the 2015 nuclear deal, saying it will forgo a

"limit on the number of centrifuges"

Jan. 7: Iran's Parliament passes a Bill designating all U.S. forces "terrorists"

Jan. 8: Iran launches a volley of missiles at Iraqi bases housing U.S. and other coalition troops

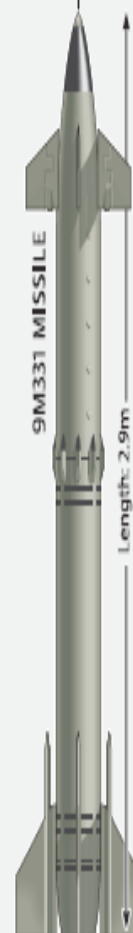
▪ Hours later, a Ukrainian passenger jet crashes down into a field shortly after taking off from Tehran, killing all 176 people on board

▪ In a televised address, Trump pulls back from the brink of war, saying Tehran appears to be "standing down"

Jan. 10: Trump says he thinks

Soleimani was planning attacks against four U.S. Embassies before he was killed

Jan. 11: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says a military probe into the Ukrainian passenger jet tragedy found "missiles fired due to human error" brought down the Boeing 737



What are black boxes?

- They are not actually black, but high-visibility orange.
- A Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) for pilot voices or cockpit sounds
 - * It keeps track of conversations that occur in the cockpit
 - * A recorder might pick up a stall warning sound or may reveal that the engine wasn't operating correctly.
 - * A recorder can also help investigators determine whether flight crew was aware that something was wrong before the plane went down.
 - * Data from the black box can help investigators determine what led to the plane crash, it can also be used as evidence to prove negligence on the part of the airline
- A Flight Data Recorder (FDR): It stores information about
 - * How fast the plane was traveling
 - * The direction the plane was flying in
 - * Fuel data
 - * How high the plane was traveling (altitude)
- They're typically kept in the tail of an aircraft, which is less likely to be damaged in a crash.

Importance of Blackbox

- The data helps experts piece together the cause of an accident or serious incident.
- Investigation is not to proportion liability of anyone but to find out the cause that led to the crash and prevent it from happening in the future.

-International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

- The Convention on International Civil Aviation, also known as the Chicago Convention, established the ICAO which is charged with coordinating international air travel
 - * It is the specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) for civil aviation
- The Convention establishes rules of airspace, aircraft registration and security in relation to air travel.
 - * It also sets international standards and regulations necessary for safe, regular, efficient and economical air transport

Annex 13

- When an accident happens involving an international civil aviation flight, Annex 13 of the International Civil Aviation Convention sets out the rules on the notification, investigation and reporting of the accident.
- It sets out the rights on who should conduct the investigation, which are the parties who can be involved, what rights does each party have, how should the investigation be conducted, and how the final results should be reported.

Annex 13 states that investigation can take place when:

- A person is seriously injured
- the aircraft sustains damage or structural failure
- the aircraft is missing or completely inaccessible

Who will investigate?

- Under Annex 13, the State where the accident occurs will lead the accident investigation.
- Under international law, four states participate in an investigation:
 - * State where the crash has occurred (Iran in this case);
 - * State of the operator (Ukraine in this case);
 - * State of registration;
 - * State of the manufacturer (U.S. in this case).
- The investigatory procedures include putting out relevant news and information, initiating forensic identification, protecting crash site evidence and sending an initial notifications

Does ICAO have any authority over a country's investigation board?

- ICAO is not directly involved in any aircraft accident investigation.
- It simply lays down the recommended practices, which states are expected to adhere to. Also, ICAO conducts annual audits of states and publishes its report.
- Thus, if a state has not adhered to ICAO's recommended practices it gets bad publicity.
- States (where the accident has occurred) have a right to disallow any state from taking part in an ongoing investigation. Thus, the state (where the accident has occurred) can conduct the investigation (including decoding of the black box) independently and this would not render the investigation invalid, provided ICAO's recommendations are followed.
- It must be noted that only a few countries, mainly the U.S., the United Kingdom and France possess the proper technology to decode black boxes.
- If it lacks the technological infrastructure required, it should take the assistance of states that are equipped to deal with it.

How is the recreation of the sequence of the crash done? Where does the engine manufacturer fit in?

- The recreation of events that led to the crash is done by the investigators and no law requires the recreation to be done at any particular phase of the investigation
- It can be done at any time, whenever the investigators deem fit.
- On the involvement of the engine manufacturer/s, they have the right to be "apprised" of the outcome of the investigation.

- But their involvement is at the sole discretion of the state (where the accident has occurred).

Can a civilian aircraft be brought down by a state?

- The “law” over this point is not very clear. An amendment in the Chicago convention (many countries including India have not ratified this amendment), provides that states should refrain from exercising the use of weapons against civilian aircraft.
- But while suggesting that states should refrain from such acts, it does not make the act illegal, provided the state had reasonable reasons to believe that the aircraft was on a destructive path.
- Legal scholars converge on the point that a state can shoot down an airliner if:
 - * it has reason to believe that the aircraft is being used for terror
 - * the aircraft is not responding to any other means of interception
 - * it is headed towards a strategically important or a populated place.

In most cases, if it emerges that the airliner was wrongly judged, the state that took it down makes an ex-gratia compensation to families.

- For example in the 2001 Siberia Airlines case, after investigations showed Ukraine’s involvement, Ukraine and Israel signed an agreement where the family members of the Israeli citizens were awarded \$200,000 each.
- In 1988, when the U.S. Navy shot down an Iran Air flight (Flight 655), the U.S. was insistent that there was no improper use of force, and thus, it did not have a duty to compensate. It did so later on humanitarian grounds.
- Thus, in cases where it is found that the airliner was shot down by a state even when it knew that there was no reasonable apprehension of any terror act, the culprit state can be taken to the International Court of Justice.

India

- In India, the air accident investigation is governed by the Aircraft (Investigation of Accidents and Incidents) Rules, 2012.
- The Central government is under an obligation (and has the power) to investigate any accident that happens within the territory of India, and in cases of aircraft registered in India even if the accident occurs outside India.
- The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) is a division of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, which investigates aircraft accidents and incidents in India.

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ART AND CULTURE

1. Bharat Parv

- It is a festival organised by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
- The objective of Bharat Parv is to encourage people to visit different tourism places of the country and to inculcate

Context

- Bharat Parv 2020 was celebrated from 26th to 31st January
- The Central theme of 2020 is 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' and 'Celebrating 150 Years of Mahatma Gandhi'.

2. Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM)

- It is the international theatre festival of India organized by National School of Drama (NSD)
 - * The National School of Drama (NSD) is an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture
- It was established two decades ago to stimulate the growth and development of theatre across India.
- Originally a national festival showcasing the work of the most creative theatre workers in India, BRM has evolved to international scope, hosting theatre groups from around the world, and is now the largest theatre festival of Asia.

Context

- 20th Bharat Rang Mahotsav inaugurated in New Delhi

3. Bibi Ka Maqbara

- The tomb is located in Aurangabad, Maharashtra.
- It is known as the 'Taj of the Deccan' because of its striking resemblance to the Taj Mahal.
- It was commissioned by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1660 in memory of his wife Dilras Banu Begum (posthumously known as Rabia-ud-Daurani).

4. Bihu

It is mainly a harvest festival, wherein the farmers thank the lord for the successful harvest and welcome the spring season.

- It has been derived from the Sanskrit word bishu, which means "to ask for prosperity from the Gods during the harvesting season".
- One of the most important festivals of Assam, Bihu is celebrated three times a year. The three sets of festivals include

- * Bhogali or Magh Bihu celebrated in January,
- * Rongali or Bohag Bihu, which is also the Assamese New Year in April and Kongali or
- * Kati Bihu, reflecting a season of short supplies in the month of October.

5. Classical Languages of India

- There are six languages that have been declared 'classical languages' in India.
- They are:
 - * Tamil – declared in 2004
 - * Sanskrit – declared in 2005
 - * Kannada – declared in 2008
 - * Telugu – declared in 2008
 - * Malayalam – declared in 2013
 - * Odia – declared in 2014
- Four of the six classical languages are Dravidian (Sanskrit and Odia are Indo-Aryan). And, five of the six are regional languages (all except Sanskrit, which is not specific to any region).
- The Ministry of Culture confers the classical language status. The following are the guidelines that the government follows while conferring this status:
 - * High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years.
 - * A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
 - * The literary tradition has to be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
 - * The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.
- Upon receiving the proposal for considering a language for the status, the Ministry of Culture refers it to the Committee on Linguistic Experts through the Sahitya Akademi for recommendations. The Ministry then forwards the proposal along with the recommendations to the Prime Minister's Office for further action.

Benefits of being conferred the classical language status:

- Two major international awards for scholars who have made significant contributions to Classical Indian Languages are awarded annually.

- A Center of Excellence for the Study of Classical Languages has been set up by the government.
- Central Universities have also been requested to provide grants for Professional Chairs for Classical Languages.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) also awards research projects for promoting these languages.
- The Central Institute of Indian Languages located in Mysore, Karnataka works for the promotion of Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and Odia.

How many people speak classical languages?

- Sanskrit is spoken as a first language only by 24,821 people in the country. The percentages of population that speak the other languages are given in the following table:

Language	Percentage of Population
Telugu	6.7
Tamil	5.7
Kannada	3.61
Odia	3.1
Malayalam	2.88

Context:

- Vice President stresses the need to preserve and promote classical languages.

6. Indian Heritage in Digital Space

Context:

- The Union Minister of State for Culture and Tourism (IC) launched a special exhibition titled Indian Heritage in Digital Space and first international heritage symposium in New Delhi.
- The exhibition was organized in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

Details

- This special exhibition showcase adaptation and infusion of technologies being developed under the Indian Digital Heritage (IDH) initiative of the Department of Science and Technology (DST)
- The exhibition demonstrates the outcome of two flagship projects
 - * A digital mini-spectacle to showcase the glory of Hampi and
 - * Augmented reality based interactions with physical models of monuments; that are completed under the DST mentored initiative Indian Heritage in Digital Space (IHDS).
- The goals of these projects are to create digital installations using 3D laser scan data, AR, holographic projections and 3D fabrication to provide interactive and immersive experiences showcasing the glory of five Indian monuments namely

- * Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Varanasi
- * Taj Mahal, Agra
- * Sun Temple, Konark
- * Ramachandra Temple, Hampi
- * Rani Ki Vav, Patan

7. Kabir Yatra

- It is organized by Lokayan in partnership with Rajasthan Tourism and Rajasthan Police
- The Rajasthan Kabir Yatra is a musical gala aimed at celebrating the philosophies and teachings of the Bhakti and Sufi saint poets such as Kabir, Mira, Bulleh Shah etc.
- The festival aims to create an inclusive space where artists, scholars and students from different genres can come together to celebrate Bhaktism and Sufism.
- The festival wants to promote love and harmony and dissolve all barriers of caste, class, religion and identity.

8. Madhavpur Mela

- It is an annual fair held at Madhavpur Ghed in Porbandar district in Gujarat
- Madhavpur Ghed, a small but culturally significant village, is the place where, according to folklore, Lord Krishna married Rukmini, the daughter of King Bhishmaka.
- The Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat shares its connect to the Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.
 - * The Mishmi Tribe traces its ancestry to the legendary King Bhishmak and through him to his daughter Rukmini and Lord Krishna.
- The festival celebrates the immortal journey which Rukmini undertook from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat with Lord Krishna.

Context:

- The art, culture, cuisines, handicrafts and handlooms of the Northeastern region will be showcased at the "Madhavpur Mela" to be held in Gujarat in April

9. Nagoba Jatara

- Nagoba Jatara is a tribal festival held in Keslapur village in Telangana.
- It is the second biggest tribal carnival and celebrated by the Mesram clan of Gond tribes for 10 days.
- Tribal people from Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh belonging to the Mesram clan offer prayers at the festival.

- The event also includes a ceremony called 'bheting', which incorporates new brides into the clan. The Raj Gond Adivasis of Adilabad follow an elaborate ritual called Bheting, one of their many regalistic ceremonies, through which new daughters-in-law are formally introduced to the clan. All those who are married into the clan during the last year need to 'meet' clan deities through Bheting so that they become eligible to enter the deity's temple.
- The women clad in white saris are the Bheti Koriad or daughters-in-law to be introduced to goddess Jangubai and belong to the eight clans which have Jangubai as the clan deity.
- Adivasis celebrate with music and more than 15 types of dances.
- The Gusadi Dance performance by dancers from the Gond tribe is a major special attraction of the event.

10. National Council of Science Museums (NCSM)

- It is an autonomous society under the Ministry of Culture
- NCSM has its Headquarters in Kolkata
- In addition to development of Science centres/museums, NCSM strives to communicate Science and educate masses by its Mobile Science Exhibitions, Lectures and Demonstrations, Training and Workshops, Publications etc.

Context:

- National Council of Science Museums, of the Culture Ministry, collaborated with Google Arts & Culture for the largest interactive online exhibition on inventions and discoveries

Details

- NCSM had collaborated with Google Arts & Culture for 'Once upon a Try': Epic journeys of invention and discovery.
- It's the largest online exhibition about inventions and discoveries ever curated, as an attempt to explore humanity's greatest inventions and discoveries in an interactive online exhibition.
- The online exhibition contains collections, stories and knowledge from over 110 renowned institutions, across 23 countries, highlighting millennia of major breakthroughs and the great minds behind them.

11. Patola Saree

Context:

- In a historic initiative taken by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), a silk processing plant has been set up in Gujarat.

Patola Silk Saree:

- Patola, the trademark Saree of Gujarat, is considered to be very costly and worn only by the Royals or the Aristocrats. It was conferred with a GI tag in 2014.
- Based on their origin, there are essentially two varieties of Patola sarees – the Rajkot Patola and the Patan Patola. Rajkot Patolas are single ikat weaves while Patan Patolas are double ikat weaves.
- A double ikat weave, Patola sarees originated in the town of Patan in Gujarat and is a characteristic weave of the silk weavers of the Salvi caste of Karnataka and Maharashtra, who migrated to Gujarat.
- After the decline of the Solanki Empire, it was a sign of social status amongst Gujarati women.
- Traditionally, every region in India has had its own unique weave for the Silk Saree. Patola Silk Saree is amongst the top five silk weaves.
- Patola sarees are considered sacred in a number of communities.
- Its immense value is not just because of its intricacy but also because of the tremendous amount of skill and perseverance that goes into making it.

Significance:

- It would help cut down the cost of production of silk yarn drastically and increase the sale and availability of raw material for Gujarati Patola Sarees locally.
- It is an effort to generate livelihood and boost sales of Patola Sarees by making silk more readily available at a low cost, for the Patola Saree manufacturers in the nearby areas.

12. Tata Vadya or Stringed Instruments (Chordophones)

- The tata vadya is a category of instruments in which sound is produced by the vibration of a string or chord. These vibrations are caused by plucking or by bowing on the string which has been pulled taut
- The length of the vibrating string or wire, the degree to which it has been tightened, determines the pitch of the note and also to some extent the duration of the sound
- The Chordophones can again be classified into two groups:
 - * Plucked
 - * Bowed.
- Further subdivided into the fretted and non-fretted variety.

Plucking

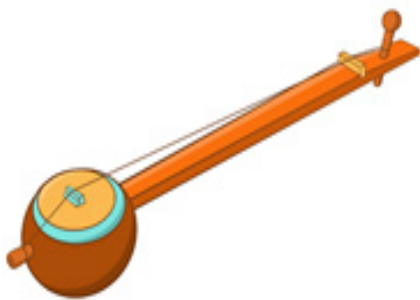
- It is used as the sole method of playing on instruments such as the banjo, guitar, harp, lute, mandolin, oud, sitar, and either by a finger or thumb, or by some type of plectrum.

Bowing

- It is a method used in some string instruments, including the violin, viola
- The bow consists of a stick with many hairs stretched between its ends.

Ektara

- It is a one-stringed musical instrument
- In origin the ektara was a regular string instrument of wandering bards and minstrels from India and is plucked with one finger.
- The ektara is a common instrument in Baul music from Bengal

**13. Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards (Akademi Puraskar)**

- The Sangeet Natak Akademi is India's national academy for music, dance and drama.
- It is the highest Indian recognition given to practising artists.
- The awards are given in the categories of music, dance, theatre, other traditional arts and puppetry, and for contribution/scholarship in performing arts.
- Akademi Puraskar carries Rs 1,00,000/- (rupees one lakh) along with a Tamrapatra and Angavastram.

Significance:

- The Akademi is an autonomous body of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India and is fully funded by the Government for implementation of its schemes and programmes.
- The Akademi establishes and looks after institutions and projects of national importance in the field of the performing arts.

Context

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, presented the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards for the year 2017 at a function held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

14. Inscriptions confirm presence of two medieval monasteries at Moghalmari**Context**

- A study of inscriptions on clay tablets recovered from recent excavations at Moghalmari, a Buddhist monastic site of the early medieval period in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district, have confirmed the presence of two monasteries — Mugalayikaviharika and Yajñapindikamahavihara.

Details:

- The presence of two monasteries dating to the same period within a single compound is unique in eastern India. Earlier excavations had indicated the presence of two monasteries on the basis of the structural plan.
- The monasteries at Moghalmari date from 6th century CE and were functional till the 12th century CE.
- Six tiny fragments of inscribed seals were found during excavations. Each of them contained a set of letters accompanied by the deer-dharmachakra symbols.
- The inscriptions are in Sanskrit and the script is a transitional phase between later north Indian Brahmi and early Siddhamatrika.
- The first name Yajñapindikamahavihara, implying etymologically 'a place of sacrificial offering' is of special significance.
- The second name on the seals, Mugalayikaviharika, bears a phonetic resemblance to the modern name of the site, Moghalmari

In Xuanzang's travels:

- Archaeologists and historians point out that famous Chinese traveller Xuanzang (more widely identified as Huen Tsang), who visited India in the 7th century CE, referred to the existence of 'ten monasteries' within the limits of Tamralipta (modern day Tamluk in adjoining Purba Medinipur district). However, he did not refer to any specific name or location.
- With the discovery of the site and the deciphering of the inscriptions, at least two of these monasteries are now identified.
- It is known from Buddhist texts that Buddhist monasteries have a definite hierarchy — Mahavihara, Vihara and Viharika — which is reflected in the inscriptions found.

- The study provides the only contextual epigraphical proof for the existence of a viharika (Mugalayikaviharika in this case) as early as the 6th century in this part of the subcontinent.
- The study of the inscribed seals suggests that the monastery was called Mugalayikaviharika.
- It is believed that the name Mugalayika suggests a fair connection to the modern place-name Moghalmari.

15. Lai Haraoba

- It is a ritualistic festival observed by Manipuri meitei communities since ancient times
- It is jointly organized by Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Government of Tripura, Puthiba Lai Haraoba Committee and Puthiba Welfare & Cultural Society, Agartala.
- The festival aims to uphold tradition and cultural values of Meitei community.
- Lai Haraoba is one of the main festivals still performed in Manipur which has its roots in the pre-Vaishnavite period.
 - * Lai Haraoba is the earliest form of dance which forms the basis of all stylised dances in Manipur.
 - * Literally meaning - the merrymaking of the gods, it is performed as a ceremonial offering of song and dance.
 - * Lai Haraoba is celebrated through oral literature, music, dance and rituals.

16. Mandu Festival

- In Madhya Pradesh, the first edition of the Mandu festival concluded in Mandu, a world-famous picturesque tourist destination known for its forts and palaces, located in the Dhar district.
- It was organized by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board and witnessed a celebration of the historic heritage blended with the modern vibrancy of the city culture.
- Based on the idea of 'Khojne Me Kho Jao', the Mandu festival offered an eclectic mix of performing arts, workshops, art installations, nature trails, walks, food, architecture and music to the visitors during the festival.

17. Seke Language

Context

- The New York Times reported that the "near-extinct" Nepalese language Seke has just 700 speakers around the world.

Details

- The New York Times reported that the "near-extinct" Nepalese language Seke has just 700 speakers around the world.

Details

- According to the Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), Seke is one of the over 100 indigenous languages of Nepal and is mainly spoken in the five villages of Chuksang, Chaile, Gyakar, Tangbe and Tetang in the Upper Mustang district.
- According to ELA, difficult conditions at home and job prospects elsewhere have brought speakers of Seke to places such as Pokhara, Kathmandu and even New York.
- Therefore, the vulnerability of the language is linked to the migration of people to places where Seke is not spoken, which has reduced the intergenerational transmission of the language.
- Furthermore, the younger generation does not find much use in learning the language, giving preference to Nepali and English.

Languages in danger?

UNESCO has six degrees of endangerment. These are:

- Safe, which are the languages spoken by all generations and their intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted;
- Vulnerable languages, which are spoken by most children but may be restricted to certain domains;
- Definitely endangered languages, which are no longer being learnt by children as their mother tongue.
- Severely endangered are languages spoken by grandparents and older generations, and while the parent generation may understand it, they may not speak it with the children or among themselves.
- Critically endangered languages are those of which the youngest speakers are the grandparents or older family members who may speak the language partially or infrequently and
- Lastly, extinct languages, of which no speakers are left.

Considering these definitions, Seke may be considered to be a definitely endangered language.

- As per UNESCO, roughly 57 per cent of the world's estimated 6,000 languages are safe, about 10 per cent are vulnerable, 10.7 per cent are definitely endangered, about 9 per cent are severely endangered, 9.6 per cent are critically endangered and about 3.8 per cent of all languages are extinct since 1950.

Stats

- As per the Endangered Languages Project (ELP), there are roughly 201 endangered languages in India and about 70 in Nepal.

18. Sangita Kalanidhi award

- It is the title awarded yearly to a Carnatic Musician by the Madras Music Academy.
- sangeetha = music, kala = art, nidhi = treasure
- This honour is considered one of the highest awards in Carnatic music.

Context

- Well-known Carnatic vocalist S Sowmya was awarded 'Sangita Kalanidhi' award

IAS टेबलेट कार्यक्रम

सर्वोत्तम व्याख्यान की
कहीं भी और कभी भी उपलब्धता



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



हमारे मार्गदर्शकों द्वारा प्रत्येक छात्र हेतु मार्गदर्शन और व्यक्तिगत प्रतिपुष्टि



मानक पुस्तकों सहित समग्र और अद्यतन अध्ययन सामग्री



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



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

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Challakere to be ISRO's astronaut training hub

Context:

- According to an update from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), a world-class facility for the training of astronauts will come up in Challakere in Chitradurga district of Karnataka.
 - Challakere, about 200 km from Bengaluru, is also where premier scientific establishments have set up adjoining and interactive campuses.
 - Called the Science City, it houses facilities of the ISRO, the Defence Research & Development Organisation's Advanced Aeronautical Test Range, the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and the Indian Institute of Science.

Details

- ISRO has proposed a ₹ 2,700-crore master plan to create top infrastructure that will house its young Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC).
- Currently, HSP [Human Spaceflight Programme] work is split across various centres such as the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram and the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru. The Institute of Aerospace Medicine of the Air Force has been roped in for the astronauts' selection, basic and final training in Bengaluru.

Significance

India pays a substantial sum to use such facilities abroad.

- The first set of four astronaut candidates for the first Gaganyaan mission of 2022 are to train at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre for 15 months as candidates for Gaganyaan, in Russia.
 - In Moscow, they will learn the skills of life and survival in a narrow capsule, before, during and after travelling away from earth's gravity while managing the travel around earth.
- With the establishment of such facilities in India, future training could be done in India.
- The centre is tasked with pursuing future human space missions, complete mission planning, developing engineering systems for survival and safe return of the crew from space, as also selecting and training the astronauts.

2. Global Drosophila Conference

Context:

- The Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) is organizing the fifth edition of the Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conference (APDRC5).
- It is being organized in the country for the first time.

About the conference:

- This biennial conference aims to promote the interaction of Drosophila researchers in the Asia-Pacific region with their peers in the rest of the world.
- It will bring together scientists from all over the world who use the fruit fly, Drosophila, as a model organism to address basic and applied questions.

Drosophila

- Drosophila is one of the most widely used and preferred model organisms in biological research. They are ideal for the study of genetics and development.
- The relationship between fruit fly and human genes is so close that often the sequences of newly discovered human genes, including disease genes, can be matched with equivalent genes in the fly.

3. GSAT-30

Context:

- India's telecommunication satellite GSAT-30 was successfully launched into a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) from Kourou launch base, French Guiana by Ariane-5 VA-251.

Details

- The satellite will replace the Defunct INSAT-4A
- The satellite has a mission life of 15 years.
- It has two band Transponders:
 - Ku band: It will provide services to Indian mainland and islands
 - C band: It will provide extended coverage over Gulf countries, a large number of Asian countries and Australia.

Applications

- GSAT-30 will provide DTH Television Services, connectivity to VSATs (that support working of banks') ATMs, Stock-exchange, Television uplinking and Teleport Services, Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) and e-governance applications.
- The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.

4. Indian cobra genome mapped

Context:

- A consortium of scientists, including some from India, have mapped the genome of the Indian Cobra, among the most poisonous snakes in the country.
- The Indian cobra genome sequencing is reportedly the most detailed blueprint of a snake's genes.

Stats

- Every year, approximately five million people worldwide are bitten by venomous snakes resulting in about 400,000 amputations and more than 100,000 deaths.
- Each year, about 46,000 people die and 140,000 people are disabled in India from snakebites by the 'Big 4' — the Indian cobra, the common krait, Russell's viper, and the saw-scaled viper.

How is antivenom made?

- Antivenom is made by extracting venom from the snake and injecting small amounts into rabbits or horses.
- In the case of the polyvalent antivenom available in India, it is made by injecting it into horses.
- The donor animal is hyperimmunized with non-lethal doses of one or more venoms to produce a neutralizing antibody response.
- The antibodies that form are then collected from the domestic animal's blood, purified and isolated.
- The process is considered laborious, expensive and time consuming.
- It can be irrelevant

Monovalent vs. polyvalent

- If the hyperimmunizing venom is obtained from a single species, then it is considered a monovalent antivenom.
- If the antivenom contains neutralizing antibodies raised against two or more species of snakes, then the composition is considered polyvalent.

What does sequencing a cobra genome mean?

- They used the genome and gene expression data from 14 different cobra tissues.
- They analysed the genomic organisation of gene families encoding toxin proteins
- Targeting these 19 specific toxins using synthetic human antibodies should lead to a safe and effective anti-venom for treating Indian cobra bites
 - * These are the constituents of venom that cause paralysis, internal bleeding and death associated with snakebite
- If genomes of more snakes are sequenced, there is a bigger possibility of genes commonly associated with venom production (across snake species) are identified and more broad-spectrum antivenoms are made.

Significance

- Knowing the sequence of genes could aid in understanding the chemical constituents of the venom and contribute to development of new anti-venom therapies, which have remained practically unchanged for over a century.
- It can be used for the development of synthetic anti-venom of defined composition

Concerns

- The antivenom now available is effective only against the 'Big 4'. The study titled "Beyond the 'big four': Venom profiling of the medically important yet neglected Indian snakes reveals disturbing antivenom deficiencies"
- For instance, the monocled cobra (*Naja kaouthia*), found in east and north-east India, is not among the 'Big 4', but its venom, tested in mice, is more potent than that of the Indian cobra. But the commercial antivenom is not effective against the monocled cobra.

5. Indian Science Congress (ISC)**Context**

- Prime Minister inaugurated the 107th edition of the Indian Science Congress in Bengaluru.

Details

- The objective of the ISC is to build a scientifically literate country and mould younger generations empowered with critical thinking and scientific temper.
 - * Article 51 A (h) mandates that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
- The theme of ISC 2020 is "Science and Technology: Rural Development".
- The event brings together science fraternity across the world to discuss scientific innovation and research.

Indian Science Technology and Engineering facilities Map (I-STEM) Portal

- The web portal 'I-STEM' has been developed by scientists from the Indian Institute of Science – Bengaluru.
- I-STEM will allow researchers to identify the specific facility they need located closest to them for their R&D work in India.
- Termed as 'One Nation One Research Web Portal' for the scientific community, the portal will link researchers and resources, hold a database of all the R&D facilities established in institutions around the country, and enable their sharing in a transparent manner.
- A secure payment gateway and SMS-based booking confirmation would enable them to compare the usage charges, make payments and schedule the time-slots.
- In the near future, there are also plans to include private laboratories and universities in the database, which could also benefit start-ups.

Need for the Project

- At present, there is no mechanism for young scientists to gain access to facilities needed for experiments, which are not available in their labs. As a result, they have to individually approach institutes to seek permissions to use their facilities, a process that is tedious.
- By the time a researcher gets a time slot to make use of the facility, their samples get degraded. The aim, therefore, is to make the entire process hassle-free.

Compromising Scientific curiosity for marketability**Introduction**

- At the recently concluded 107th Science Congress, the Prime Minister has conveyed that young researchers should “innovate, patent, produce, prosper”.
- In 2015 the directors of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) labs under the ‘Dehradun declaration’ decided to market patents as a means to self-finance research.

* It was a market-driven revenue model which encourages students, researchers and universities to innovate, come up with a new product and market this product to gain monetary benefits.

- It is this model that has been encouraged by the Union Government. It has been directing laboratories and other research centers to earn their own revenue from external sources by marketing their expertise and investing the surplus to develop technologies for national missions.
- Consequently, there has been a steady decline in government expenditure in higher education and research, reflecting this changed stand on making the government labs financially autonomous and leaving their fortunes to be determined by the market forces.

Investments in R&D

- Investments are key inputs in economic growth. The impact of this is proven on productivity, exports, employment and capital formation. India's investment in R&D has shown a consistent increasing trend over the years.
- However, it is a fraction of India's GDP, it has remained constant at around 0.6% to 0.7% of India's GDP.
- This is below the expenditure of countries like the US (2.8), China (2.1), Israel (4.3) and Korea (4.2).

Concerns

- There is a genuine concern among the researchers and academics that this transformation will have serious repercussions for India's competence in research.
- Science is essentially an end-product of human curiosity and a desire to understand the world. Thus, an increasing emphasis on immediate applicability of science should not be allowed to steal the space of curiosity-driven basic science which can be sustained only by direct government funding.

- Besides the 40 CSIR laboratories and a few premier research institutions like the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Institutes of Technology, there are over 600 universities, meeting the educational requirements of about 29 million students.

* But hardly any international-level research is done in the universities. Our impact on global science continues to be minimal, except for a few isolated bright spots.

- The situation is so dire in India that even the country's premier technology colleges, the Indian Institutes of Technology, are reaching out to their alumni for funds.
- As for developing self-financing models for government labs, the government should tread its path slowly and selectively looking at the strengths and weaknesses of each of the institutes. It will be counterproductive to implement a one-size-fits-all solution in a hasty manner.

Way forward

- Government expenditure, almost entirely the Central Government, is the driving force of R&D in India which is in contrast to the advanced countries where private sector is the dominant and driving force of R&D spend. There is a need for greater participation of State Governments and private sector in overall R&D spending in India especially in application oriented research and technology development.
- India needs to re-double its efforts to improve its ranking in the science and research ecosystem by increasing the national expenditure on R&D.
- The immediate priority in this regard should be to increase the government funding in higher education and R&D. The forthcoming Union Budget will provide an excellent opportunity to make this long-standing demand a reality.

6. Vyom Mitra

Vyom Mitra is a half-humanoid, set to take the first unmanned flight to space under Gaganyaan.

- She can switch panel operations, ECLSS [environment control and life support systems] functions, be a companion, converse with the astronauts, recognise them and also respond to their queries.
- Two trial flights without crew will take place with a humanoid.
- The humanoid will simulate the human functions required for space before real astronauts take off before August 2022.

7. Young Scientists Labs**Context:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Young Scientists' Laboratories to enable focused research in advanced technologies.

Details

Investment in the future technology is the need of the hour and innovation is necessary to protect our citizens, borders and interests.

- The lab lays down the foundation for research and development of futuristic technologies.
- Each lab will work on key advanced technology of importance to the development of futuristic defence systems, such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, cognitive technologies, asymmetric technologies and smart materials.

Significance

- In the field of defence manufacturing, DRDO will come up with new innovations to make India self-reliant.
- In promoting a Vibrant Defence Sector, DRDO's innovations have a huge role in strengthening Make in India.

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SECURITY AND DEFENCE

1. AK-203 Assault Rifles

Context

- The Army is likely to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the procurement of over 7.5 lakh AK-203 assault rifles, which are to be manufactured locally by an India-Russia Joint Venture (JV).

Details

- The rifles will be manufactured by the Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL) at Korwa, in the Amethi district of Uttar Pradesh.
- The facility is being set up by the Ordnance Factories Board (OFB) from the Indian side, and Rosoboron Exports and Kalashnikov from the Russian side.
 - * 5 percent of its stakes will belong to the Indian Ordnance Factory Board, and the remainder to Russian entities: Rosoboron Exports (7.5 percent) and Kalashnikov Concern (42 percent; the concern, in turn, belongs to the Russian defense giant Rostec).
- The JV was formed following an inter-governmental agreement between India and Russia in 2019.

Significance

- Its introduction will allow New Delhi to phase out its own rifle, the INSAS (Indian National Small Arms System) rifles.
- INSAS was found to be an unreliable firearm, and in 2017 it was decided that it needs to be withdrawn.

SIG716

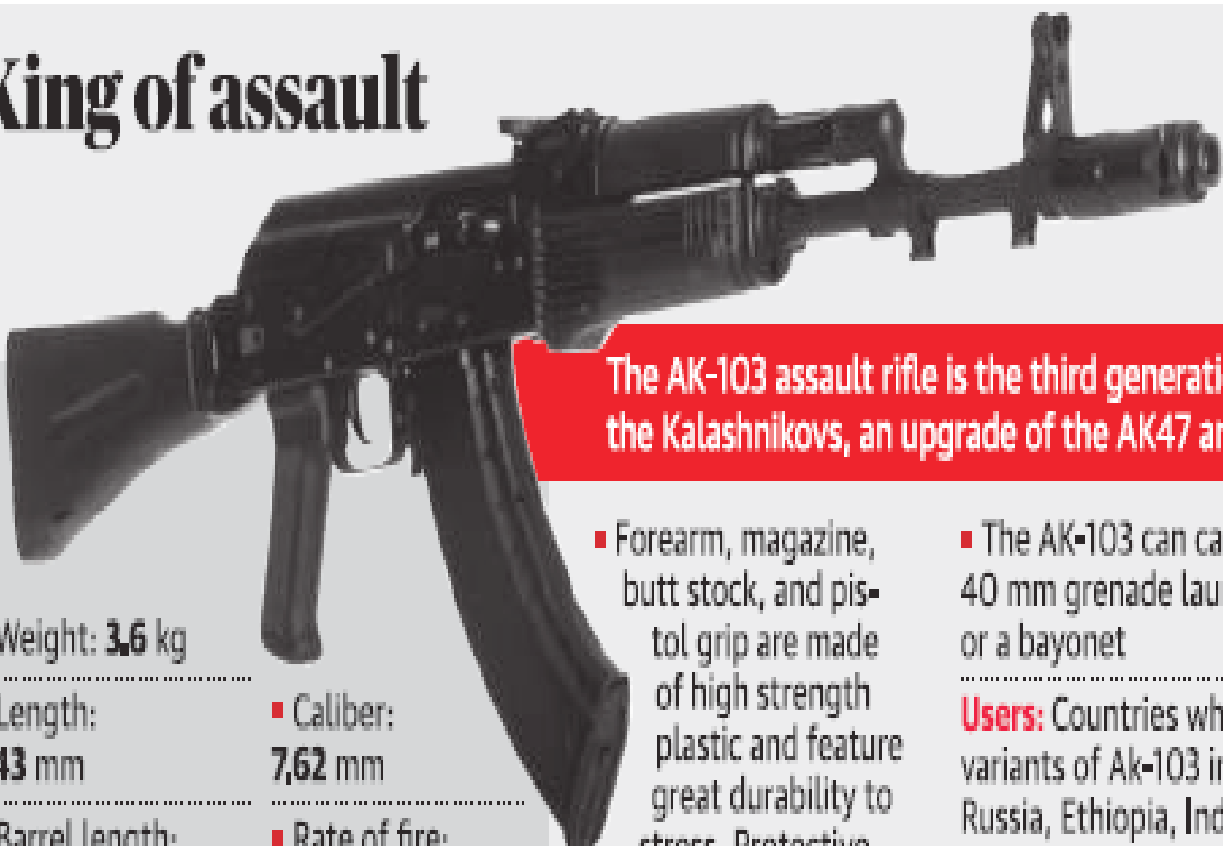
- The assault rifle will be supplied by US arms maker Sig Sauer.
- The SIG716 uses the powerful 7.62×51 mm cartridge.
- The Sig Sauer rifles will be used by soldiers deployed along the border with China.

2. Bru refugees to be settled in Tripura

Background

- In the year 2018 a tripartite pact was signed by the Centre, Mizoram government and Bru representatives which envisaged repatriation of displaced Bru refugees to Mizoram, barely 328 families returned.
- The rest, living in Tripura for over two decades, were reluctant to move out.

King of assault



The AK-103 assault rifle is the third generation of the Kalashnikovs, an upgrade of the AK47 and AKM

■ Weight: **3.6 kg**

■ Length:
943 mm

■ Barrel length:
415 mm

■ Cartridge:
7,62×39mm

■ Caliber:
7,62 mm

■ Rate of fire:
600 rounds/min

■ Effective firing
range: **500 m**

■ Forearm, magazine, butt stock, and pistol grip are made of high strength plastic and feature great durability to stress. Protective coatings ensure excellent corrosion resistance of metal parts

■ The AK-103 can carry a 40 mm grenade launcher or a bayonet

Users: Countries which use variants of Ak-103 include Russia, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Libya, Namibia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Venezuela

- The Centre then started fresh negotiations to find a solution to the Bru people's demand that they be allowed to settle down in Tripura.

Context

- Union Home Minister presided over the signing of a Quadripartite Pact of MHA with the State governments of Tripura, Mizoram and leaders of Bru community to permanently settle around 34,000 internally displaced people in Tripura.

Details

- The Centre has sanctioned around ₹600 crore as a settlement package
- The community members would also get a
 - * One-time assistance of ₹4 lakh as fixed deposit.
 - * A 40/30 feet plot of land,
 - * an aid of ₹5,000/month for the next two years,
 - * Free ration and ₹1.5 lakh to build houses will be given to them.
 - * The Tripura government has identified land to settle them

Significance

- The Bru community who were living a life of apathy will now live with dignity
- The Brus would get voting rights in Tripura and would get "tribal status."

Concerns

- It could lead to conflicts with the locals of Tripura.
 - * Conflicts between the Brus and the local Bengali non-tribal people have started taking place in Tripura.
- Rights activists fear it could "legitimise" the ejection of minority communities by ethnocentric states.
- The protector of rights of the people the government has withdrawn from the executing its duty of protection
- Repatriated Brus in Mizoram Demand Equal Share in Rehabilitation Package
 - * The repatriated Brus received ₹80,000 on their return to Mizoram and were entitled to free rations for a year.
 - * The quadripartite agreement signed by the Centre, the governments of Tripura and Mizoram and various Bru refugee organisations entail a housing plot in Tripura for each displaced family in addition to ₹4 lakh as a fixed deposit, ₹5,000 per month for two years, free rations for two years and ₹1.5 lakh to build houses.

3. CDS and the path to jointmanship

Context

- Gen. Bipin Rawat was appointed as the first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), which is one of the key policy decisions made by the Narendra Modi government.

- It was a long-pending reform for the establishment of a CDS, which was recommended by the Kargil Review Committee in 2001.

Role of CDS

- The CDS will be "first among equals" in that he will consult and solicit the views of the services, but the final judgment will be taken by CDS alone
- His views will be confined to the acquisition matters exclusive to each service and won't extend to the procurement of big-ticket items such as warships or fighter aircraft, which will remain under firm control of the Department of Defence (DoD).
 - * CDS will enjoy the rank of Secretary within the DoD and his powers will be confined to only the revenue budget.
- The CDS will be the single-point military adviser to the Defence Minister on matters involving all three services and the service chiefs will be obliged to confine their counsel to issues pertaining to their respective services.
- The CDS is also vested with the authority to provide directives to the three chiefs.
 - * Additionally, the CDS will lead the Department of Military Affairs (DoMA) dealing with the three services.
 - * While the CDS does not enjoy any command authority, in his capacity as DoMA, he will wield control over issues governing promotions, travel, appointment to key posts, and overseas assignments. Consequently, the CDS will enjoy a substantial amount of influence.
 - * Above all, his core function will be to foster greater operational synergy between the three service branches of the Indian military and keep inter-service frictions to a minimum.
- Fundamentally, the CDS will perform two roles,
 - * One, as the single point military advisor to the Defence Minister
 - * Two, as head of the DoMA.

Advisory role in the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA).

- Since the CDS will also administer the Strategic Forces Command, this measure will go a long way in enhancing the credibility of our nuclear deterrent.
- Given the differing interpretations of India's nuclear doctrine voiced by Government of India (GoI) functionaries from time to time, the CDS would do well to initiate an early review of the doctrine.

Significance of this move

- With creation of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) headed by CDS, the military will, for the first time, be admitted into the central edifice of the GoI and become a participant in policy-making.

- Designation of the CDS as Principal Military Adviser (PMA) to Raksha Mantri (RM) will enable unhindered access to MoD, accelerating the process of decision-making and accord of approvals.

Challenges

- There are concerns over matters relating to service parochialism.
 - * If the CDS privileges support for parent service, it is likely to have opposition from the other two services.
 - * Any parochialism could potentially derail the primary objective of creating the CDS — promoting synergy and shaping acquisition priorities both within and between the services.
- CDS's role is not simply about tri-service cooperation, it is equally about fostering better cooperation between the MoD bureaucracy and the services and ensuring that projected and planned acquisitions of the services do not exceed capital allocations.
- Indian Army consumes the lion's share of the defence budget. As it is a manpower-intensive fighting force, pruning the number of personnel in the Army will remain perhaps the most vexed challenge
- The final challenge facing the CDS will be the extent to which he can encourage the services to support indigenisation.
 - * Cost saving is not simply about reducing manpower in the Army, it is equally about getting all the services, particularly the capital-intensive services, to rally behind a committed enterprise to support the native Research and Development for production and eventual deployment of weapons systems, which when procured from abroad drive a massive hole in the budget.

Steps that can be undertaken

- There are no instant remedies, but one pointer is towards greater investment in Artificial Intelligence (AI) over the long term, a process that has already begun, but will require a dedicated push from the CDS over the course of his tenure.
 - * The application of AI technology is likely to lend itself to tanks and artillery systems, as is visibly evident from the vigorous pursuit of AI by China's People's Liberation Army.
- To ensure adequate availability of expertise, civilians will need to be inducted into DMA and military personnel into DoD. This will require the CDS to vigorously pursue enabling amendments to GoI Business Rules and the Central Staffing Scheme.

4. De-Radicalization (DR)

Context:

- Three attacks in 2019, one in the U.K. and two in the U.S.'s military facilities, were characterized by sections of the media and by analysts as 'lone wolf' attacks.

Details:

- The stabbing at London Bridge in the U.K., and the shootings at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam and Pensacola Naval Air Station in the U.S., were all quickly characterised as 'lone wolf' attacks.
- There has been an increasing trend of labelling acts of violence, as acts of terror.
- The basis for categorisation of violent acts as terrorist acts includes the type of weapons used in the killings, the beliefs of the accused, the number of people killed, etc.
- Categorising violence is important, as it provides a framework for future remedial actions.
- Though the mentioned acts of violence have been termed as lone-wolf attacks, the reality is more complex. Though all three cases are still under investigation, going by the news reports, except the attack in Pensacola Naval Air Station, the other two attacks do not qualify as acts of terror.

Concerns:

Discounting structural factors:

- The focus of counterterrorism programmes have been on individuals and do not take into consideration overarching structural factors in play.
- No society can benefit by oversimplifying the factors that push an individual towards violence. Oversimplification will mean that we will be left with poor policies.
- The influence of an extremist organisation's concerted efforts at recruiting individuals to its cause is often discounted and individuals getting radicalized because of propaganda on the Internet is simply called "self-radicalised".

Understanding the process of radicalization:

- There is a concern regarding how the process of radicalisation is perceived by analysts and academics. Most consider radicalisation as a linear process where the individual goes through a number of stages. However, recent studies point to an aggregation of factors, structural and causal, that may push an individual to an act of terror.
- The final cognitive step of actually committing violence cannot be prejudged accurately every time.

Radicalization

- It is a product of protracted psychological conditioning of minds.
- It is carried out by political propaganda, print and social media.

Steps to be taken

- First we need to get to the nerve of who is radicalizing people.
- Second, venues of radicalization need to be sanitised vigorously.
- Third, start isolating these people gradually and then start a counter-radicalization programme by identifying people who have been radicalized, to what degree.
 - * One has to segregate them in degrees and then look at those who are completely radicalized
- Fourth, techniques should be adopted which varies from soft to hybrid to hard approaches
 - * Soft approach requires committed and charismatic leadership for initiating a change of approach to violent extremism.
 - * Hybrid Approach: The State alone does not have all the tools necessary to counter violent extremism.
 - * Hard Approach: Violent extremists in prison require "a professional, comprehensive and financially sustainable" DR programme.

Way forward

- Given the nature of the problem, any policy or programme with respect to radicalisation must be based upon objectively researched conclusions based on empirical evidence and not merely the subjective experience of an officer.
- Most important, a credible strategy of WHAM (winning hearts and minds) needs to be systematically promoted
- Improvements in governance are necessary, whereby political leaders at all levels and the administration remain committed to the aspirations of the people.
- Contemporary educational infrastructure with dedicated security cover should be created and the religious preachers should not be allowed to spew venom and spread ideology of hatred.
- Since poverty creates exploitable conditions for radicalisation and idle minds are the root of all evil, job opportunities should be created expeditiously by giving a boost to tourism, developing infrastructure

Operation Sadbhavana

- Under Op Sadbhavna Army took up a large number of welfare and development projects.

- It was launched by the army in 1998 in rural areas of Jammu & Kashmir
- Under this programme, the Army has tried to improve the quality of life of people in five focus areas: education, infrastructure development, health and sanitation, women and youth empowerment and community development.

5. Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)

- The I4C is a multipronged system, which includes
 - * National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit,
 - * National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal,
 - * National Cyber Crime Training Centre,
 - * Cyber Crime Ecosystem Management Unit,
 - * National Cyber Crime Research and Innovation Centre,
 - * National Cyber Crime Forensic Laboratory Ecosystem and
 - * Platform for Joint Cyber Crime Investigation Team.
- The portal enables citizens to report online content with specific focus on crimes against women, children, particularly child pornography, child sex abuse material, online content pertaining to rapes/gang rapes.

Significance

- The portal can boost the capacity of the law enforcement agencies to investigate cases and will improve the success rate of prosecutions
- The portal will improve coordination amongst the law enforcement agencies of different states, districts and police stations for dealing with cybercrimes in a coordinated and effective manner

Context

- Union Home Minister inaugurated the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)

6. K-4**Context**

- India successfully test-fired the 3,500-km range submarine-launched ballistic missile, K-4.
- The test was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) from a submerged pontoon off the Visakhapatnam coast. A pontoon simulates the situation of a launch from a submarine.

Significance:**Technological breakthrough:**

- The missile ejecting from a submerged platform to the surface [sea] possess several technical challenges. There are very few countries which have managed to achieve this.
- This technological breakthrough marks an important step towards achieving indigenization of defence technology.

Edge over other missiles of the same class:

- The Circular Error Probability (CEP) of the K-4 is much more sophisticated than most countries which possess similar missiles. The CEP determines the accuracy of a missile. The lower the CEP, the more accurate the missile would be in targeting.

Increased range:

- INS Arihant, the first and only operational SSBN, is armed with K-15 Sagarika missiles with a range of 750 km. The K-4 has an enhanced range.
- The K-4 missiles will be the mainstay of the Arihant class of indigenous ballistic missile nuclear submarines and will give India the stand-off capability to launch nuclear weapons submerged in Indian waters.
- Standoff weapons are missiles or bombs which may be launched at a distance sufficient to allow attacking personnel to evade defensive fire from the target area. Typically, they are used against land- and sea-based targets in an offensive operation.

Second strike capability:

- The nuclear triad is a three-pronged military force structure that consists of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles.
- India completed its nuclear triad with the commissioning of INS Arihant in 2016, which was India's first submarine built indigenously.
- The K-4 being nuclear-capable, it will also enhance the second strike capability of India.
- In nuclear strategy, a second-strike capability is a country's assured ability to respond to a nuclear attack with powerful nuclear retaliation against the attacker.

Additional Information:

- SSBN is the US Navy hull classification symbol for a nuclear-powered, ballistic missile-carrying submarine.
- The SS denotes "submarine" or "submersible", the B denotes "ballistic missile," and the N denotes "nuclear powered."

7. Ministry of Defence (MoD) No Objection Certificate (NOC) web portal**Context**

- Defence Minister launched Ministry of Defence (MoD) "No Objection Certificate" (NOC) web portal www.modnoc.ncog.gov.in for undertaking aerial survey with the final permission of Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

Details

- The portal will be used by various vendors engaged by state governments, public sector undertakings and autonomous bodies in seeking NOC from MoD
- The initiative will help speed up development projects undertaken by various agencies, besides ensuring expeditious disposal of applications for carrying out aerial surveys while bringing in more transparency and accuracy.
- The portal is hosted on the National Informatics Centre platform.

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)

- The DGCA is the governmental regulatory body for civil aviation under the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
- Its vision is to promote safe and efficient air transportation through regulation and proactive safety oversight system.
- The body governs the safety aspects of civil aviation in the country.
- It is headed by the Director-General of Civil Aviation.
- Among other things, the DGCA is engaged in the registration of civil aircraft; licensing of pilots, aircraft maintenance engineers, air traffic controllers, etc.; certification of aerodromes; checking the proficiency of flight crew; granting air operator's certificates to Indian carriers; approving institutes engaged in flying training including simulator training, and any other related training; advising the government on matters pertaining to air transport.

8. NIA takeover of Bhima Koregaon case**Context**

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) took over the Bhima Koregaon case in which several activists were booked for making provocative speeches at the Elgaar Parishad event organised at Shaniwar Wada in Pune in 2017, which then allegedly escalated tensions leading to riots in Pune and Mumbai.
- The activists were arrested and booked under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).
- The transfer of the case to the NIA is now being looked at as a "misuse" of the powers conferred upon the agency.

Procedures for NIA to investigate a case

- According to the rules, for the NIA to take over a case from a state, a formal communication is usually sent to the MHA by the state requesting for a transfer of the case to the agency, following which a notification is issued and the investigation is formally transferred.
- The state police then formally hands over all the files related to the case to the agency.
- But in this case, Section 6(5) of the NIA Act was invoked that permits the central government to direct the agency (NIA), suo motu, to investigate any offence if it feels that a crime is a scheduled offence fit to be probed by the NIA.

Background

- The Pune police have filed a charge sheet against activists on the charge of being part of a Maoist plot against the government, basing their claim on purported material seized from computers during raids.
- It was believed that a sinister plot was devised to overthrow the government, allegedly at the behest of the Communist Party of India (Maoist).
- Despite its inter-State ramifications, the State government opposed a petition in the Supreme Court for a court-monitored independent probe.
- At that time, the Centre, expressed no inclination to hand over the probe to the NIA, even though sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) were invoked.

The Union government cannot now turn around and claim that it is a fit case for an NIA probe.

Issue Area

- It is an unwarranted interference in the police powers of the State as policing and law and order are state subjects.
 - * The Pune police reports to the state government, the NIA is answerable only to the Union Home Ministry.
- It threatens to undermine the spirit of federalism.
- The Elgar Parishad case has gone through the investigation process and reached the courts — bail pleas in the case have been heard by the Supreme Court.
 - * For the Union Home Ministry to intervene at this juncture and change the investigating agency is tantamount to undermining this process.
 - * Even if the state government orders a review of the case, it will have to pass the test of the courts.
- The credibility of the NIA as an independent investigative agency itself is being questioned.

- * An impression has formed that the agency, set up in 2008 following the Mumbai attacks to probe acts of terrorism, is just another arm of the Centre, another “caged parrot” meant to serve its political masters.

Conclusion

- Whatever the merits of the claims and counter-claims, the probe has been completed and the case is waiting to be heard by the court.
- Any attempt to unilaterally change the course now will be seen as motivated and driven by bad faith and will hurt the Centre and the investigative agency

9. Saras Mk2

- It is the first indigenous light transport aircraft designed by the National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL).
- The 19-seater aircraft, developed with a target cost of ₹50 crores, is at least 20-25% lower in cost than other aircraft in a similar category.

Significance

- It is slated to be one of the biggest achievements under the Make in India mission.
- The CSIR-NAL, without prior experience, designed and developed the first prototype of Saras. Consequently, the first successful maiden flight took off in 2004, thus enabling India to join the elite club of nations to manufacture the light passenger transport aircraft.

10. Steel mesh to replace fences on the borders**Context**

- India shares 4,096.7 km border with Bangladesh and 3,323 km border with Pakistan. The border currently has barbed wires which will be replaced with meshed fence made of steel and coated with anti-rust paint
- This will be a complete overhaul of the security system.

Details

- The Border Security Force (BSF) that is deployed along the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders has been tasked to ensure that the fence is installed in a time-bound manner.
- The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) is implementing the project
- Measures also include strengthening Indian defences along Pakistan, mapping of infiltration prone areas along the two borders
- BSF is pushing the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to get the latest technology to disable drones.
 - * Surveillance drone flights are very frequent. But load-carrying drones are a grave threat. In fact, that's the future of warfare.

- * The assassination of Iranian Major General Qasim Suleimani in Iraq by a US drone strike is an instance
- * They have requested for a drone disabling technology that can cut radio frequency and disable GPS — the two key technologies guiding most drones

Significance

- It will plug vulnerable and infiltration-prone patches along its sensitive border with Pakistan and Bangladesh

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ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. African cheetahs to prowl Indian forests

Context:

- The Supreme Court has lifted its stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs into the Indian habitat.

Background:

- There have been previous proposals to introduce African cheetahs in India, as part of a plan to revive the Indian cheetah population. The proposal was to introduce African cheetahs into the Palpur Kuno Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh on an experimental basis.
- However, the Supreme Court had stalled the plan in 2012.
- The SC had expressed concerns that the proposed introduction of cheetahs in the given sanctuary, may come into conflict with a parallel project to reintroduce lions into the sanctuary and delay its implementation.
- The court had also expressed doubts over the choice of the sanctuary for the re-introduction proposal, over doubts on the abundance of prey. It had opined that the Kuno Sanctuary was not a natural habitat for the African cheetah.
- The court also took into consideration many scientific studies which claimed that the introduction of an alien species involves considerable risk of destabilizing the ecological balance and should be considered only if no suitable native species are available for re-introduction.

Details:

- Following a favourable view from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the Supreme Court has lifted its seven-year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis.
- The hearing came on an application filed by the NTCA.
- The court has asked for the right precautions to be taken during the process and ensure every effort is taken to ensure that the re-introduction is a success.
- The court has called for a proper survey to be done to identify the best possible habitat for the cheetahs.
- The SC has set up a three-member committee, to guide the NTCA in the implementation of the re-introduction programme. The Committee will have to file a progress report every four months on the progress made. The committee would help, advice and monitor the NTCA in the programme.

Significance:

The possible gains from introducing the cheetah in India include:

- The move would boost wildlife tourism in the region. This would provide impetus to the development of the surrounding regions.
- The introduction of cheetahs could lead to the improvement of grasslands. They could help control the population of the herbivores in the region.
- The success of the initiative would help bring global recognition for India for having been able to successfully revive the Cheetah in India.
- The lessons learned in the implementation of the programme could help guide similar efforts in the re-introduction of other species.

Key fact

- According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List, cheetah's population is 'vulnerable' witnessing a decreasing trend with only less than 7,000 of them left in the wild globally.

Concerns

- Few Conservationists fear that India will end up housing the animals in semi-captive conditions, secured open air zoos rather than allowing them to live free.
- Man-animal conflicts is an area of worry
- The current prey base sustains the tiger and leopards. Introduction of new predator may add pressure in the existing eco system
- Cheetahs are genetically fragile and lose cubs prematurely, affecting the establishment of a viable population.
- Given the fact that cheetahs do not breed well in captivity and require vast stretches of grassland and access to adequate prey to thrive, officials at the NTCA feel that the actual process of translocation and its success might be a long-drawn effort.

Conclusion

- India will need to maintain strict protocols to reduce the risk of human injury, livestock predation and stress, and improve identification of prey and non-prey species
- The plan to bring the cheetah to India should have a minimum requirement of setting up a Grassland Policy
- India should also focus on the species it has and restore the ecology.

2. Australia wildfires

Introduction

- Fire is no stranger to Australia but the fires of 2020 have been described as unprecedented with over 10 million hectares of land damaged, killing at least 25 people and tens of millions of animals, besides forcing the evacuation of communities.
- Bushfires are actually a part of Australia's ecosystem. Many plants depend on them to cycle nutrients and clear vegetation. In fact, eucalyptus trees in Australia depend on fire to release their seeds. But all this usually happens during a few weeks in late January-February, when the country is at its driest. The prolonged blaze of 2020 has coincided with Australia's harshest summer.
- Much of Australia is facing a drought that is a result of three consecutive summers with very little precipitation. This, according to climate scientists, is unprecedented.
- Australian Bureau of Meteorology's 2018 State of the Climate report notes, "Australia's climate has warmed by just over 1 degree Celsius since 1910, leading to an increase in the frequency of extreme heat events." This has led to more rainfall in northern Australia, but created drought-like conditions in the more densely populated southeast.

Political decisions of the Government criticized

The Government has sought to downplay the impact of changing climate

- It ignored calls from fire experts to prepare in advance to reduce the damages due to fire
- Australia is a major producer of fossil fuels, and among the world's top exporters of coal and liquefied natural gas.
 - * The prime minister has further pledged to maintain Australia's position as a world-leading coal exporter.
 - * It continues to support aggressive development without giving importance to environment and sustainable development
- The Govt has prioritized the needs of business over action to cut carbon emissions.

Concerns

- Australia's encounters with devastating fires could become more frequent, perhaps even once in eight years, making large parts of the continent uninhabitable.
- Australia is home to nearly 250 animal species, some of them like the koalas and kangaroos are not found elsewhere. But the region also has the highest rate of native animals going extinct over the past 200 years. The fires will aggravate this situation.

- The fires have also caused a drop in the bird, rodent and insect populations. These creatures are the building blocks of the ecosystem and the fall in their population is bound to have long-term impacts.

Conclusion

- The situation is bound to worsen without policy change, as temperatures are predicted to soar to 50°C.
- Over the past half century, the number of hot days and very hot days each year have steadily increased. It would be tragic if this scientific insight is ignored.
- Long-term prosperity for Australians and a future for its charismatic animals can be secured only through policies that foster environmental protection.

IOD and its link to Bushfires

- The 2019 June-September monsoon in India started its withdrawal on October 9, against the normal date of September 1, making it the most delayed in recorded history.
- It was also the strongest in recent years with a surplus of 10% in 2019 — both attributed in part due to the positive phase of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD).

Why did Australia suffer from drought?

- The Indian Ocean saw eight cyclones in 2019 which is more than the normal
- The Arabian Sea saw five major intense high-frequency cyclones, over the normal one per year.
 - * This caused the revival of the south west monsoon and also the month-late withdrawal of monsoon from the country.
- Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) in 2019 was two degrees above normal, leading to the unusually dry weather in Australia that triggered the recent devastating forest fires
 - * The IOD measures differences in sea surface temperatures between the western and eastern parts of the Indian Ocean.
 - * A positive IOD occurs when waters near the Horn of Africa are warmer than average leading to enhanced rainfall there, while cooler waters develop off Indonesia resulting in less rainfall and high temperatures in Australia.
 - * Negative IOD: In this case the eastern equatorial Indian Ocean off Sumatra in Indonesia becomes abnormally warm while the western tropical part of the ocean near the African coast becomes relatively colder.
 - * As in 1982 there were forest fires in Australia due to a combination of the high IOD levels and the El-Nino in the Pacific Ocean.

Inference

- Typically, a "positive IOD brings below-average winter-spring rainfall to southern and central Australia, with warmer days for the southern two-thirds of the country.
- Positive IOD events are often associated with a more severe fire season for South-east Australia.

3. Biotechnology adoption**Context:**

- The article deals with arguments for and against the use of Biotechnology, especially with respect to Bt. Cotton, in India.

A look at key stats:

- India's cotton production in 2019 is projected as the highest ever.
- India's cotton production has doubled over the past decade.
- India is expected to be the world's largest cotton producer, surpassing China in output in 2020.

Arguments against Bt. cotton:

There have been many concerns with Genetically Modified (GM) pest-resistant Bt. cotton hybrids.

Favoring seed companies over farmers:

- Seeds have captured the Indian market since their introduction in 2002. These now cover over 95% of the area under cotton, with the seeds produced entirely by the private sector.
- The current annual value of the cotton seed used for planting is about Rs. 2,500 crore, and that of lint cotton produced is Rs.68,000 crore.
- This makes it appear that the country's hybrid seed model for cotton, favours seed companies over farmers.

Impacting livelihoods of farmers:

- The hybrid seeds involve high input costs. The volatile nature of the markets and the increasing variability in rainfall patterns has made cotton cultivation riskier for the low resource farmers in rain-fed areas.
- Agricultural distress is extremely high among cotton farmers and the combination of high input and high risk has likely been a contributing factor.

Low productivity in India:

- Though India leads in the production of cotton, India's productivity (yield per unit area), is much lower than other major cotton-producing countries. This implies that a much larger area is used for cotton production in India.

- India's productivity has been only a third of these countries for over four decades. This questions the impact of Bt. Cotton cultivation in India.

India's reliance on hybrids:

- India is the only country that grows cotton as hybrids and was the first to develop hybrid cotton back in 1970.
- Hybrids are made by crossing two parent strains having different genetic characters.
- Though hybrids offer the advantage that these plants have more biomass than both parents, and also a capacity for greater yields, there are some concerns with respect to hybrids.
- Hybrid cotton seed production is expensive since it requires manual crossing. The availability of low-cost manual labour in India makes hybrid's economically viable in the Indian context.
 - * Hybrids, farmers must purchase seed for each planting.
 - * Using hybrids gives pricing control to the seed company and also ensures a continuous market.
 - * Hybrids require more inputs, including fertilizer and water.

Neglect of other approaches:

- India has continued to neglect the use of other alternate technologies or methods in the domain of cotton cultivation.

Variety:

- In the case of Varieties, seeds are produced by self-fertilization.
- Varieties can be propagated over successive generations by collecting seeds from one planting and using them for the next planting. This reduces the costs incurred by the farmers.

High-Density Planting (HDP):

- In cotton cultivation, the strategy of using High-Density Planting (HDP) of compact varieties has been found to outperform hybrids at the field level.
- For over three decades, most countries have been growing cotton varieties that are compact and short duration.
- The compact nature of the plants allows these varieties to be planted at high density whereas hybrids in India are bushy, long duration and planted at ten-fold lower density as compared to high-density planting. This compensates for even the lower boll production by compact varieties.

- Cotton being a dryland crop and with 65% of the area under cotton in India being rain-fed, farmers with insufficient access to groundwater in these areas are entirely dependent on rain. The shorter duration variety has a major advantage as it reduces dependence on irrigation and the risk of crop failure.
- The advantages of compact varieties over hybrids are considerable. They offer higher productivity, use lesser fertilizer and water, and are considered less vulnerable to damage from insect pests due to a shorter field duration.
- Yet, India has persisted with long-duration hybrids, many years after benefits of compact varieties became clear from global experience.

Lack of choice for farmers:

- Commercial Bt hybrids have completely taken over the Indian market, accompanied by the withdrawal of public sector cotton seed production.
- The Indian cotton farmer today is left with little choice but to use Bt hybrid seeds produced by private seed companies.

Lack of consultation in policy-making:

- India is a signatory to international treaties on GMO regulation (the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety), which specifically provides for the inclusion of socio-economic considerations in GMO risk assessment.
- However, socioeconomic and need-based considerations have not been a part of the GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) regulatory process in India. This leads to the lack of a comprehensive evaluation of costs and benefits.

Context of the technology:

- The outcome of using a technology such as Biotechnology is determined by the context in which it is deployed, and not just by the technology itself.
- It is important to recognize that apart from the technology itself, its relevance to the particular context is also important. If the context is suboptimal and does not prioritize the needs of the farmers, it can have significant negative fallouts, especially in India with a high proportion of farmers being marginal and subsistence farmers.

Effects on ecology:

- Given the lack of long term authoritative scientific studies on the risks posed by genetically modified varieties, there is a lack of knowledge in this domain.
- Unverified reliance on GM varieties could have unintended effects on the ecological balance.

Arguments for Bt cotton:

Choice of the farmer:

- The fact that Indian farmers have chosen seeds with biotechnologies by planting hybrid cotton biotech seeds on over 90% of the country's cotton acreage proves the efficacy of the Bt. Cotton.
- Farmers have not shown any preference for planting non-Bt cotton seeds including the quantity supplied along with the Bt cotton seed, by the seed companies as per regulatory guidelines.

Higher production:

- Biotechnology in cotton, post its introduction in 2002, has led to transformational changes in India's cotton cultivation.
- It has helped increase cotton yields by over 1.8 times between 2002-2003 and 2018-2019.
- GM cotton countries, contribute to more than 90% of global cotton production.

Reduced pesticide usage:

- Hybrid cotton has delivered not only higher yields but also provided resistance to some pests and diseases.
- The technology offered a solution to some of the farmer's biggest on-field pest challenges. This marked a considerable improvement over the low tech approach of insecticide and pesticide usage.
- The introduction of Bt cotton which is resistant against certain pests has greatly reduced pesticide use. This saves costs for the farmers and also is beneficial to the ecology.

High economic returns:

- A study shows that the significant increase in farmer incomes from higher yields and reduced pesticide use has generated additional farm income of over Rs.42,300 crores.
- Additional incomes are also generated from cotton seeds oil and cotton seed oil meal.
- The Bt cotton seed market is about Rs.3,000 crore, making it hardly 2.5% of the total value generated.

Potential for improvement:

- Biotechnology offers other avenues for improvement. There is the possibility of introducing weedicide resistance in the Bt cotton. In such a scenario Bt cotton farms would require lesser labour for weed management. Labour accounts for over 58% of a farmer's cost of cultivation per acre. Given the decreasing availability of low-cost manual labour and the challenges in securing labour to conduct field operations, the shift to Bt cotton will help decrease the costs incurred in cotton cultivation.

Ripple-effect benefits:

- Several key studies by economists and sociologists have established that 85% of hybrid Bt cotton seed farmers and farm labourers have observed improved quality of life.
 - * Higher investment in education for children.
 - * Higher intake of nutritious food.
 - * Better health of their family members.

Other factors:

- While considering the fact that productivity in India is low, it is important to note that it is not just the technology that increases yields. India's farmers face numerous uncertainties and crop management challenges, affecting farm yield.

Unviability of other alternatives:

- Alternate techniques like High-Density Planting (HDP) have limited relevance for India given that the planting rates are determined by several agronomic and environmental conditions.
- As against the claim that hybrid farmers need to buy seeds repeatedly, the fact is that not just biotech cotton, but all hybrid seeds lose their benefits if replanted, creating reduced and erratic yields. New seeds help farmers sustain high yields year on year.

Ecological benefits:

- Given the fact that Bt cotton offers higher production from the same area, the expansion of agricultural land into forest areas has been slowed. This has helped conserve biodiversity.

Way forward:

- New technology introduction has stopped in India since 2005, affecting the growth of yields
 - * Other countries have been using more advanced GM traits than what is being used in India. There is a need to consider the usage of the new technologies in India too.
- In a fast-evolving global market, India's farmers need the best technologies to remain competitive.
- The knowledge of cultivation and correct agronomic practices can make a significant impact on agricultural yields. Extension efforts need to be emphasized.
- A one-sided depiction regarding GM seeds not only harms agriculture and the industry. There is a need for scientific and detailed studies to ensure proper evaluation of the technology.

4. HydroChloroFluoroCarbon (HCFC)-141 bContext

- India has successfully achieved the complete phase out of Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b

Details

- HCFC-141b is not produced in the country and all the domestic requirements are met through imports.
 - * The issuance of import license for HCFC-141b is prohibited from 1st January 2020 under the Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2019 issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- Nearly, 50 % of the consumption of ozone depleting chemicals in the country was attributable to HCFC-141 b in the foam sector.
 - * It is one of the most potent ozone depleting chemical after Chloro Fluoro Carbons (CFCs)
- India has consciously chosen a path for environment-friendly and energy-efficient technologies while phasing out Ozone Depleting Substances (ODSs).
- Importantly, India is one among the few countries globally and a pioneer in some cases in the use of technologies, which are non-Ozone Depleting and have a low Global Warming Potential (GWP).

What was it used for?

- It is a chemical used by foam manufacturing enterprises
- (HCFC)-141 b is used mainly as a blowing agent in the production of rigid Poly Urethane (PU) foams.
 - * The Polyurethane Foam Sector has links with important economic sectors related to buildings, cold storages and cold chain infrastructure, automobiles, commercial refrigeration, domestic appliances such as refrigerators, water geysers, thermo-ware, office and domestic furniture applications, specific high-value niche applications, etc.

Measures taken to reduce the impact on Industries

In India, the foam manufacturing sector is a mix of large, medium and small enterprises having varying capacities, with a preponderance of MSMEs. Many of the MSMEs operate largely in the informal sector.

- To ensure minimal dislocation in the sector and for enhancing the capacities of MSMEs in converting to low-GWP non-ODS technologies, training and awareness programmes on non-ODS and low-GWP alternatives to HCFCs including the adoption of such alternatives have been organized in close collaboration with the industry.
- MSMEs will also be facilitated for adequate tie-ups with system houses, laboratories for getting their material tested, etc. in addition to organizing study tours, field visits, etc.

Significance of phase out

The phase out of HCFC-141b from the country has twin environmental benefits viz.

- assisting the healing of the stratospheric ozone layer
- Towards the climate change mitigation due to transitioning of foam manufacturing enterprises at this scale under HCFC Phase out Management Plan (HPMP) to low global warming potential alternative technologies.

5. Irrawaddy dolphins sighted in Chilika

- The Irrawaddy dolphin is a euryhaline (able to tolerate a wide range of salinity) species of oceanic dolphin found in discontinuous subpopulations near sea coasts and in estuaries and rivers in parts of the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia. It is an aquatic mammal.
- Although sometimes referred to as the Irrawaddy river dolphin, it is not a true river dolphin, but an oceanic dolphin that lives in brackish water near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries.

Range:

- It has established subpopulations in freshwater rivers, including the Mahakam River, the Mekong, the Ganges and the Irrawaddy River from which it takes its name.
- Its range extends from the Bay of Bengal to New Guinea and the Philippines although they do not appear to venture offshore.
- In India, it is mostly present in the brackish-water Chilika Lake. Their Presence has also been recorded from Sunderbans National Park.

Threat:

- Irrawaddy dolphins are more susceptible to human conflict than most other dolphins who live farther out in the ocean.
- The Irrawaddy dolphin's proximity to developing communities makes the effort for conservation difficult. Entanglement in fishnets and degradation of habitats are the main threats to Irrawaddy dolphins.
- Some Irrawaddy dolphin sub-populations are classified by the IUCN as critically endangered. Irrawaddy dolphins in general, however, are listed as an endangered species in the IUCN list, which applies throughout their whole range.

Conservation efforts:

- Conservation efforts are being made at international and national levels to alleviate the threats faced by the Irrawaddy Dolphins.

- Protection from international trade is provided by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). In 2004, CITES transferred the Irrawaddy dolphin from Appendix II to Appendix I, which forbids all commercial trade in species that are threatened with extinction.
- The Irrawaddy dolphin is listed on both Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Context:

- The dolphin census was taken up in Chilika and off Odisha coast.
- Odisha Forest Department officials, wildlife experts and researchers have sighted 146 Irrawaddy dolphins in Chilika Lake.

Details:

- Chilika Lake has the highest single lagoon population of the Irrawaddy dolphin in the world.
- The counting of dolphins was done using hydrophones. A hydrophone is a microphone designed to be used underwater for recording or listening to underwater sound. Most hydrophones are based on a piezoelectric transducer that generates an electric potential when subjected to a pressure change, such as a sound wave.

Significance:

- The good numbers recorded signify the importance of freeing the lake from encroachments by prawn farming gherries.
- Post the eviction of encroachments, Dolphins were colonizing new areas.

6. Maradu buildings destroyed

Background

- The Maradu Panchayat had granted permission for the construction for five waterfront apartments overlooking the scenic canals of Kochi backwaters.
- The 343 flats in the five buildings cover an area of 68,028.71 sq mts.
- But after granting permission, the panchayat issued a notice to the builders following a directive by the Kerala Coastal Zone Management Authority (KCZMA).

Why did KCZMA object the construction?

- The government body said the site fell under the CRZ-III vulnerable category where no construction is allowed within 200 metres from the coast.
- Any such act will be identified and acted upon as a violation of the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) rules.

What is CRZ?

- The CRZ norms are framed under Section 3 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986 to promote sustainable development based on scientific principles.

- No construction is allowed within 200 metres from the coast in areas falling under CRZ-III zone

How did the Supreme Court come into the picture?

- The builders managed to get an interim stay order from the Kerala High Court in 2007 and finished the construction before starting selling the flats.
- The KCZMA approached the Supreme Court in 2016 and argued the panchayat issued construction permit without their concurrence.
- The apex court formed a technical committee to study the issue - whose findings were in favour of the KCZMA.
- In May 2019, the Supreme Court declared the construction permission granted by the Panchayat "illegal" and ordered the demolition of the complexes.

Finally on January 11 and 12 following a Supreme Court order the buildings were destroyed

Supreme Court order

- The apex court stated that these apartments had been built on the shores of Vembanad wetland, renowned for its rich biodiversity.
- The wetland is a part of the strictly restricted zone for construction under the provisions of the CRZ notifications, which aim to protect the ecology of the coast.
- Hence, the violations cannot be lightly condoned. The illegal constructions in Maradu might have hindered the natural water flow of Vembanad and resulted in severe natural calamities such as floods, which Kerala witnessed in 2018.

Flaws in the system

- The crime branch found that the builders had constructed the apartments after conspiring with panchayat officials in 2006. This indicates the gravity of institutional and policy failures.
- When there is weak enforcement of environmental laws, corruption, and undue political influences, violations become common

Cost of violations

The overall cost of violation is immeasurable.

- The house owners who lost their flats not only suffered financial losses but were also under mental pressure.
- There were major administrative challenges in demolishing the apartments. Expert consultations had to take place, the public needed to be made aware of what was happening and a safe demolition strategy had to be drawn up.
- Families in the neighbourhood were anxious about their life and property.

- The safety of public assets such as roads and bridges was also a concern.
- Besides, there were environmental costs of the demolition including air and noise pollution, contamination of the lake, and safe disposal of the debris.

If an industry discharges effluents, the enforcement agency can fine or tax them (polluter pays principle) and/or insist that they install pollution control measures or follow safe waste disposal strategies. But if someone violates the law and constructs apartments in an ecologically sensitive zone, the removal of these buildings is the only solution; no heavy fine will fulfil the purpose of complying with the law.

Conclusion

- What will happen to other illegal constructions in India in the future is unclear. But there is no doubt that the Maradu incident will help builders guard against future violations.

Significance:

- The Miyawaki method of afforestation has revolutionized the concept of urban afforestation by turning backyards into mini-forests. This concept has helped increase green cover in urban areas.
- It will help increase the green cover in India and also help meet India's pledge in the Paris Climate Deal, which involved increasing carbon sequestration in India.

Context:

- Kerala Government's move to implement the concept of Miyawaki forests in more areas.

Details:

- Following the success by individual initiatives, the Kerala government has decided to employ the Miyawaki method of afforestation to add a green cover on government office premises, residential complexes, school premises, and puramboke land in Kerala.
- The Forest Department would be the nodal agency in the State.
- To take the initiative forward, each department has been asked to nominate nodal officers at the State and district levels and issue formal orders on the initiative.

7. Re-grassing is mandatory after mining, rules SC

- Re-grassing is a technique to reclaim land by growing grass on land affected by mining activity

Context

- A Bench led by the Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde ordered the government to include re-grassing of mined areas as a mandatory condition in every mining lease, environmental clearance and mining plan across the country.

- The Supreme Court has ordered that mining lease holders should be held responsible for re-grassing mined areas, so that biodiversity gets a second chance in these scarred landscapes.

Environmental issues

- It includes erosion, formation of sinkholes, loss of biodiversity, and contamination of soil, groundwater and surface water by chemicals from mining processes, and the effects persist for years.
- When mining happens, there is large-scale de-grassing, due to which the habitat is destroyed resulting in denial of fodder to herbivores

Recommendations

- The court asserted that the area which has been mined should be restored so that grass and other vegetation, including trees, can grow in the mining area for the benefit of animals.
- The court opined that it can be achieved by directing the Union of India to impose a condition in the mining lease and a similar condition in the environmental clearance and the mining plan to the effect that the mining lease holders shall, after ceasing mining operations, undertake re-grassing the mining area and any other area which may have been disturbed due to their mining activities and restore the land to a condition which is fit for growth of fodder, flora, fauna, etc.
- The Bench also directed the government to devise methods to ensure compliance by mining lease holders.
- The cost of re-grassing the mined area and wherever damage was caused, would be entirely borne by the licence holder.

The mandatory re-grassing would be in addition to the other conditions imposed on the licence holder in the mine closure plan, to restore biodiversity.

8. Waterbird census in A.P.

Context

- The Annual Bird Census will commence in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) and surrounding wetlands in the Godavari mangrove cover on the east coast
 - * Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary is Located in Andhra Pradesh
 - * It is part of the Godavari estuary

Details:

- It will be a two-day census of the avian species which will access the threats and challenges being faced by the water birds.
- The census aims at documentation of migratory and resident birds to be able to prepare a better management plan of the complex ecosystem that supports the waterbird species.

- It will give a picture of its present state and results of the conservation being done in the wildlife sanctuary and outside

Indian Skimmer

- It is a waterbird
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable
- It has started visiting the Godavari mangroves. It can also be sighted at Chambal River in Central India



9. World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS)

- WSDS is the annual flagship event of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).
- Started in 2001, the Summit has become a focal point for leaders and stakeholders across the world to bridge thought and action for sustainable development.
- The Summit series has emerged as the premier international event on sustainability which focusses on the global future, but with an eye on the actions in the developing world which could bend our common future.
- The WSDS has continued the legacy of the erstwhile Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS) which was initiated in 2001 with the aim of making 'sustainable development' a globally shared goal.

The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)

- TERI is a leading think tank dedicated to conducting research for the sustainable development of India and the Global South.
- TERI was established in 1974 as an information centre on energy issues. However, over the following decades, it made a mark as a research institute, whose policy and technology solutions transformed people's lives and the environment.

- The Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas & Steel delivered the keynote address at the TERI's World Sustainable Development Summit 2020 on 'Energy Future Road Map'.

10. Ten more wetlands in India declared as Ramsar sites

Context

- Union Environment Minister's announcement on the addition of new wetlands from India to the Ramsar Convention.

Details:

- India has added 10 more wetlands to sites protected by the Ramsar Convention.
- Among the 10 new Ramsar sites is Nandur Madhameshwar, the first Ramsar site in Maharashtra.
- Punjab, which has three Ramsar sites, added three more including the Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal.
- UP, which had one Ramsar site previously, has added six more including Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar.
- The other Ramsar sites are in the states of Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Tripura.
- With the new additions, a total of 37 sites in the country have been recognized under the international treaty.
- The new additions are expected to bring renewed focus and commitment to the conservation of wetlands in India.

Additional Information:

- The countries with most sites are the United Kingdom and Mexico. And, the country with the greatest area of listed wetlands is Bolivia.

Background:

Wetland:

- Wetland constitutes a land area covered by water, either temporarily/seasonally or permanently. It has the characteristics of a distinct ecosystem.

Ramsar Convention:

- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. The Convention, signed in 1971, is one of the oldest inter-governmental accords for preserving the ecological character of wetlands.
- It aims to develop a global network of wetlands for the conservation of biological diversity and for sustaining human life.

- The Convention is also known as the Convention on Wetlands. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed.
- Wetlands declared as Ramsar sites are protected under strict guidelines. Certain activities are prohibited within wetlands.

Significance of wetlands:

- Wetlands provide a wide range of important resources and ecosystem services such as food, water, fibre, groundwater recharge, water purification, flood moderation, erosion control, and climate regulation.
- The wetlands also support a large number of migratory birds.
- The wetlands are, in fact, a major source of water. The main supply of freshwater comes from an array of wetlands that help soak rainfall and recharge groundwater.

Government efforts:

- Recognizing the importance of wetlands and the increasing risk faced by them due to anthropogenic activities, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has prepared a four-pronged strategy for the restoration of wetlands.
- The strategy includes preparing baseline data, wetland health cards, enlisting wetland Mitras and preparing targeted Integrated Management Plans.

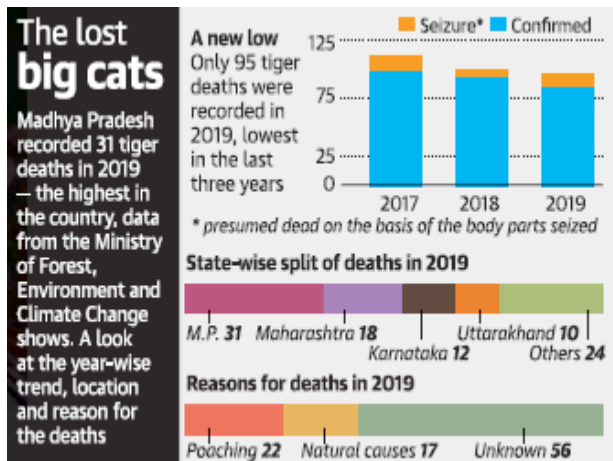
11. India records less than 100 tiger deaths for the first time in three years

Context

- According to data from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), for the first time in the past three years, the number of tiger deaths in a year in the country has been less than 100.

A look at stats

- In 2019, there were 84 cases of tiger deaths in the country and 11 cases of seizures (in which a tiger is presumed dead on the basis of body parts seized by authorities). Both put together, the number of tiger deaths was 95.
 - * The data on tiger mortality also confirms 22 cases of poaching in the country and one case of tiger poisoning in 2019.
- In 2018, the number of tiger deaths recorded was 100 (93 mortalities and seven seizures).
- In 2017, the number of tiger deaths was 115 (98 mortalities and 17 seizures).
- In 2016, it was 122 (101 mortalities and 21 seizures).



Figures from the States

- Madhya Pradesh, which has the highest number of tigers in the country (526, as per the last census), has recorded the most number of cases of tiger deaths, with 31 tiger deaths reported from the central Indian State in 2019.
- It is followed by Maharashtra, which reported 18 deaths.
- Karnataka, another State with high tiger population, recorded 12 deaths, and Uttarakhand recorded ten deaths.
- Tamil Nadu recorded seven cases of tiger deaths.

How was this achieved?

- The reduced numbers of tiger mortalities are because of surveillance, good management of Tiger Reserves and a lot of awareness and education programmes on tiger conservation.
- M-STriPES (Monitoring System for Tigers-Intensive Protection & Ecological Status) patrolling app was deployed and used in every Tiger Reserve.

Recommendations

- Tigers are coming out of Reserves and covering long distances, so there is a need for more Tiger Reserves.

12. Green nod for oil, gas exploration waived

Context:

- The Environment Ministry's notification granting exemption to oil and gas firms involved in exploratory drilling, from seeking environmental clearance.

Background:

- Previously, even exploratory surveys required the highest level of environmental scrutiny and were classified under category 'A' projects.
 - * Category 'A' projects required project proponents to prepare an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) plan.
 - * The EIA would be scrutinized by a centrally constituted committee of experts.
 - * The project would also be subject to a public hearing involving the locals of the proposed project site. Public hearings, for category 'A' projects, are generally exempted if they are offshore projects.

Details:

- The new exemption of environmental clearance is valid only for drilling explorations of both on-shore and offshore projects.
- Developing an offshore or onshore drilling site as a hydrocarbon block will still continue to merit a "category A" classification.
- The new amendments demote exploratory projects to the category of 'B2' projects, which implies that the project appraisal would be conducted by the States concerned and will not require an EIA.
- The move is part of a larger process of decentralization by the Centre, which is seeking the devolution of more regulatory actions to State and local units.

Concerns:

- Since the exploratory drilling process is an ecologically-intensive exercise that involves digging multiple wells and conducting seismic surveys offshore, environmentalists fear that the exemption could lead to lax oversight over such projects.
- Environmentalists note with concern that this move is part of a continuing trend of the larger lack of oversight by the Environment Ministry and making the projects more business-friendly by focusing on ease of doing business.

Tamil Nadu and Puducherry experience:

- In 2019, ONGC and the Vedanta group were granted permission to conduct exploratory oil surveys in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.
- Amid fears that the exploratory drilling would lead to the destruction of agricultural fields in the Cauvery delta, there were protests in the region.

- There are also arguments by environmentalists that offshore drilling operations can lead to a build-up of heavy water contaminants and possibly affect fish and other sea life that rely on sonar for navigation.
- There are fears that the exploratory drilling in offshore areas can increase the risk of oil spills and severely impact the coastal ecology.

13. Eastern Ghats: land-use policies, climate change hit endemic plant habitats

Context:

- A study on the effect of anthropogenic activities and climate change on the endemic species of the Eastern Ghats in India.

Background:

- The Eastern Ghats, consisting of a chain of broken hill-ranges is spread across Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- The Eastern Ghats is home to unique ecosystems and consists of over 450 endemic plant species. The region remains one of the most exploited and degraded ecosystems of India.

Details:

Increasing anthropogenic pressure:

- The study notes that with intensifying anthropogenic activities like agricultural practices, urbanization and pressures from mining and deforestation, the Eastern Ghats ecology is under severe strain.
- The highly threatening human activities in the Eastern Ghats area are mining, urbanisation/settlements, dam construction, firewood collection and agricultural expansion. Unsupervised tourism has also been a major source of concern.
- The study estimates that by 2050 the total human population in the Eastern Ghats region would reach 2.6 million, raising pressure from anthropogenic activities.

Habitat Destruction:

- The increased demand for land for food, road and other activities will lead to encroachments and threaten the habitats of endemic and rare, endangered and threatened (RET) species of Eastern Ghats.
- The endemic species of Eastern Ghats were found to be distributed in the core areas of the forests of Kalahandi, Mahendragiri, Nallamalai-Seshachalam, Kolli and Kalrayan hill forests, while the RET species were distributed not only in the core areas but also in the periphery of the forests, thus being at a greater risk from anthropogenic disturbances.
- There are fears that this habitat destruction could have led to species loss also.
- The study notes that unsupervised tourism has also affected the distribution of endemic and RET species.

Climate change effect:

- Observations based on simulations have shown that that the temperature in the region is likely to increase by 1.8 degree Celsius by 2050 to 1.98 degree Celsius by 2070. The rainfall is also projected to increase by 113 millimetres by 2050 and 160 millimetre by 2070.
- Given that the mean temperature and rainfall are crucial for the plant species, the endemic species are at risk.
- The regional or local climate change (warming) has led to frequent prolonged non-rainy days, increased number of days with maximum and minimum temperatures resulting in loss of soil moisture and soil degradation.
- The increased temperatures and reduced moisture have also contributed to the occurrence of frequent forest fires, eliminating regeneration of the less-frequent endemic species in the forest.

Significance of the study:

- The study confirms other similar studies from across the globe which have shown that the tropics are losing more plant biodiversity than other regions. These observations stress the need for urgent conservation strategies.

Way forward:

- The biodiversity conservation initiatives of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Government of India and State forest departments should focus on the Eastern Ghats to protect declining habitats of endemic and RET species.
- More scientific studies including the setting up of larger species inventories to identify and record species can help on conservation efforts.
- The administrations should consider redefining the boundaries of national parks and sanctuaries based on the richness of endemic and RET species. This would aid the conservation efforts of these species.
- Ecotourism with regulatory guidelines being a positive way to educate and promote conservation should be encouraged and supported by the state.

14. Kerala for steps to curb alien plants' growth in NBR

Context

- The Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department is gearing up to adopt comprehensive steps to arrest the rampant growth of invasive alien plants, especially tree species like 'Senna Spectabilis', in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), including the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

What are Alien Invasive Species?

- An invasive species is one that is not native to a specific location (an introduced species), and that has a tendency to spread to a degree believed to cause damage to the environment, human economy or human health.

- According to experts, alien species become 'invasive' when they are introduced deliberately or accidentally outside their natural areas, where they out-compete the native species and upset the ecological balance.
- The most common characteristics of invasive species are rapid reproduction and growth, high dispersal ability, ability to survive on various food types and in a wide range of environmental conditions and the ability to adapt physiologically to new conditions, called phenotypic plasticity.

How Invasive Alien Species (IAS) are introduced?

- The movement of people and goods around the world increases the opportunity for the introduction of IAS.
- The most effective way to stop the negative impacts of IAS is through prevention of spread by regulating the trade or movement of a species.
- Once an IAS has arrived, early detection, monitoring and eradication can stop the species from spreading.

Negative Consequences of Invasive Species:

- Invasive species can have a number of negative impacts on the areas that they invade. Perhaps the most significant of these is the widespread loss of habitat.
- Some invaders can physically alter the habitat in addition to destruction.
- Other invasive species may not destroy habitat but can have an impact by killing large numbers of endemic species.
- Invasive species can also impact human health. Invasive zebra mussels accumulate toxins in their tissues like PCBs and PAHs. When other organisms prey on these mussels, the toxins are passed up the food chain and can also enter animals consumed by humans.
- Ballast water from ships also sometimes contains harmful bacteria like cholera. Invasive animals can also be vectors for diseases.
- In addition to these impacts, invasive species can also have enormous economic costs.

Some commonly found alien species:

- African apple snail (*Achatina Fulica*): The most invasive among all alien fauna in India, this mollusc was first reported in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is now found across the country and is threatening the habitat of several native species.
- Papaya Mealy Bug (*Paracoccus marginatus*): Native of Mexico and Central America, it is believed to have destroyed huge crops of papaya in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.
- Cotton Mealy Bug (*Phenacoccus solenopsis*): Native to North America, it has severely affected cotton crops in Deccan.
- Amazon sailfin catfish (*Pterygoplichthys pardalis*): This species is responsible for destroying the fish population in the wetlands of Kolkata.

Other prominent cases in India in recent times:

- Chilika Lake became degraded mainly through siltation and the choking of the seawater inlet channel, this resulted in the proliferation of invasive freshwater species, a decrease in fish productivity and an overall loss in biodiversity.
- Invasive growth of the grass *Paspalum distichum* has changed the ecological character of large areas of the Keoladeo National Park, reducing its suitability for certain waterbird species including the Siberian Crane.
- In the Kanjli Wetlands, the water hyacinth which was introduced is now invasive. From time to time it is removed using mechanical means.
- At the Ropar Wetlands, invasive weeds are also a concern and management plans are under development.

Key Details:

- The spread of invasive plants, especially *Senna Spectabilis*, is posing a major threat to the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, owing to its quick growth and coppicing character.
- The tree species had been found in nearly 10 km sq. area of 344.44 sq. km of the sanctuary around five years ago. But now it has invaded more than 50 sq. km of the sanctuary in a short span of time.
- This showed its high invasive nature. A recent study of the Ferns Nature Conservation Society with the support of the Forest Department recorded the presence of the plant on 78.91 sq. km area of the sanctuary.

Impact on Tiger Reserves located in NBR:

- The plant started to invade adjacent tiger reserves, including Bandipur and Nagarhole in Karnataka and the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu.
- Earlier, it was planted as avenue trees along roadsides in Wayanad. Due to massive flowering and drying of bamboo species in the Wayanad, lots of open spaces were created which were occupied by *Senna Spectabilis*.
- An adult tree grows up to 15 to 20 metres in a short period of time and every year distributes thousands of seeds after the gregarious flowering.
- The thick foliage arrests the growth of other indigenous species of trees and grass, and causes food shortage for the wildlife population, especially herbivores, during summer.
- Moreover, wildlife would not feed on the leaves of the tree as it was not palatable for them.

Chemical measures:

- "The 'vayal' ecosystem' (marshy land) of the forest area now houses this plant in large numbers. The allelochemicals produced by this plant adversely affect the germination and growth of the native species.

- The KFRI has developed some physical and chemical measures to tackle the threat of the plant. Though the physical method has been followed for the past five years to tackle the issue, it was yet to have any desired effect.
- Hence plans have been made to adopt an integrated method by combining the physical as well as chemical measures to address the issue.
- Inter-State co-ordination needed: As the same threat is being faced by the adjacent tiger reserves, managers of the reserves agreed to follow similar steps to tackle the threat. The issue would be further discussed with them in the Inter-State meetings to be held soon.

15. Chinese paddlefish

Context

- Owing to human activities, the Chinese paddlefish, one of the world's largest fish that have been around for 200 million years has now been declared Extinct.

Details

- Its ancestral home was the Yangtze River.

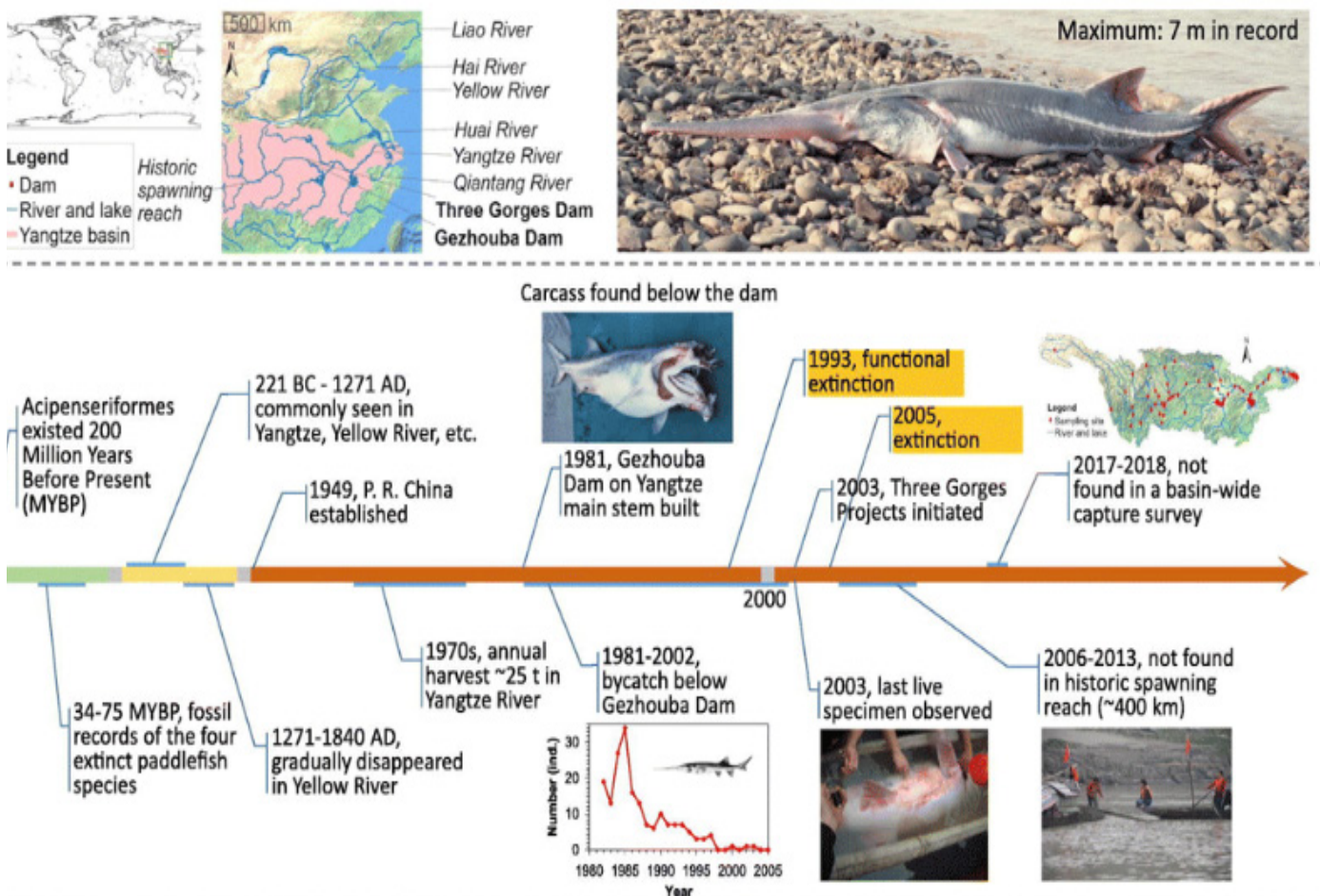
How did the study determine that it has gone extinct?

Chinese researchers made this conclusion based on the Red List criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Red List has several categories for extinction, or for how endangered a species is.

- For example, "extinct in the wild" means a species survives only in a captive environment while "locally extinct" means a species has ceased to exist in a particular area but may exist in other areas.
- Then there is "functionally extinct", which means the species continues to exist but it has too few members to enable to reproduce meaningfully enough to ensure survival.
- To be "globally extinct", it means a species has no surviving member anywhere. Such a conclusion is reached when there is no reasonable doubt left that its last member has died.

Declaring species extinct is an elaborate process.

- It involves a series of exhaustive surveys, which need to be taken at appropriate times, throughout the species' historic range and over a time-frame that is appropriate to the species' life cycle and form.
- When these surveys fail to record the existence of any individuals belonging to that species, a species may be presumed to be extinct.








- Once declared extinct, a species is not eligible for protective measures and conservation funding; therefore, the declaration has significant consequences.

In the case of the Chinese paddlefish, the researchers made the conclusion over long-term surveys.

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HEALTH ISSUES

1. Coronavirus

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses with some causing less severe common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).
 - * It causes respiratory and intestinal diseases.
- A coronavirus has many "regularly arranged" protrusions on its surface, because of which the entire virus particle looks like an emperor's crown, hence the name "coronavirus".
- Apart from human beings, coronaviruses can affect mammals including pigs, cattle, cats, dogs, martens, camels, hedgehogs and some birds.
- Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans.

What do we know about the virus?

- Much remains to be understood about the new coronavirus. Not enough is known about 2019-nCoV to draw definitive conclusions about how it is transmitted, clinical features of disease, or the extent to which it has spread.
- The source also remains unknown.

Initial Symptoms

- Coronaviruses are transmitted between animals and people, according to the WHO.
- The agency said common signs of the new coronavirus infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.
- In more severe cases, the infection can cause pneumonia, SARS, kidney failure and even death.

Steps to be taken

- Individuals with symptoms of Coronavirus should be first isolated and public awareness has to be raised
 - * This is essential so that they report to a hospital when symptoms show up later or in case of contact with a person who has travelled to China recently.
- There is evidence that those who appear to be healthy despite being infected can spread it even during the incubation period. Also, cases have been reported wherein people have not exhibited symptoms in spite of being infected.
- In both instances, thermal screening at airports, which is largely helpful, would fail to detect infected people

- Hence, time-tested measures which include handwashing and hand hygiene, wearing protective gear while attending to sick people and covering one's mouth and nose properly when coughing or sneezing will drastically reduce the infection risk.

Why coronavirus virus could hit Indian pharma industry?

Context

- India has reported its first confirmed case of coronavirus in Thrissur district of Kerala.
- The patient is a student studying in Wuhan University, China and had recently returned to India.
- The central and state governments will be expected to try to ensure that its response system is strong, quick, and proactive in order to prevent the infection from spreading any further.

Impact on the pharma industry

- The density of population in India, low levels of public awareness, and vulnerabilities in the healthcare network present strong challenges to controlling outbreaks of communicable disease.
- India is vulnerable also because it is heavily dependent on China for components used to make products across industries, including essential medicines.
- The lockdown in China to control the outbreak has the potential to disrupt global supply chains of various essential products and consumer goods. If the situation does not improve soon, several industries in India and, ultimately, its citizens, could be impacted.
- According to government data, bulk drugs used to manufacture medicines were among the top 10 imports from China between 2015 and 2019. While an impact is expected across the board if the situation does not improve, experts feel pharmaceuticals may be among the sectors to be hit the hardest.
- China supplies nearly 70% of the total bulk drugs and intermediates (raw materials) imported to make medicines in India. Some 354 drugs and drug ingredients were imported from China in 2017.
- Experts said that supplies of fermentation-based ingredients used to make most antibiotics and vitamins would be the most impacted in case a shutdown of operations in China continues, or if the infection spreads to major manufacturing hubs.

Impact on patients

- Industry executives fear that if the situation does not improve soon, the cost of materials used to make medicines in India will rise regardless of therapeutic category.

- In the case of products that are under price control, the prices that customers pay should not be impacted.
- In the past increasing prices of key therapeutic ingredients used to make drugs have led to shortages of the medicines in the country.

WHO's unexplained hesitancy

Global economic and financial market impact

- A paper by Jong-Wha Lee and Warwick McKibbin estimates the global economic loss due at SARS at \$40 billion in 2003.
- A 2016 study by the Commission on a Global Health Risk Framework for the Future estimated that pandemic disease events would cost the global economy over \$6 trillion in the 21st century — over \$60 billion per year.
- A 2017 paper by economists Victoria Fan, Dean Jamison and Lawrence Summers estimated that the expected annual losses from pandemic risk to be about \$500 billion — or 0.6% of global income — per year, accounting for both lost income and the intrinsic cost of elevated mortality.

Market winners and losers

- Winners
 - * Despite the disruption to the wider economy, virus outbreaks have tended to benefit pharmaceutical stocks
 - * Facemask manufacturers also outperformed.
- Losers
 - * Tourism and travel-related stocks — hotels, airlines and luxury and consumer goods — tend to get punished.
 - * People didn't take public transport, stayed away from work, stayed away from shops, restaurants, cinemas, conferences etc.

The impact from the disease is massive on the economy, but almost all of it indirect, due to the precautionary behaviour of the population

How is the information disseminated to public?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has taken to twitter to keep the public updated. With Twitter not available in China, WHO has been regularly posting updates on Weibo, a Chinese microblogging site.
- The update on WHO website about the virus is slow. Even on Twitter, there seems to be some unexplained hesitancy on WHO's part to retweet important information about the virus

Way forward

- Twitter is an excellent medium to quickly disseminate information, particularly for the WHO which has 5.1 million people followers. Therefore, it is crucial for the WHO to retweet the important updates

- It is also important for the WHO to keep its coronavirus 'disease outbreak news' page on its website regularly updated.

What makes WHO declare a disease outbreak a public health emergency?

Context

- World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the novel coronavirus outbreak in China as a 'Public Health Emergency Of International Concern (PHEIC)'

What criteria does the WHO follow to declare PHEIC?

- PHEIC is declared in the event of some "serious public health events" that may endanger international public health.
- Under the International Health Regulations (IHR), a public health emergency is defined as "an extraordinary event which is determined, as provided in these Regulations: to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease; and to potentially require a coordinated international response".
- The responsibility of declaring an event as an emergency lies with the Director-General of the WHO and requires the convening of a committee of members.

What are the implications of a PHEIC being declared?

- In the past decade, WHO has declared public health emergencies for outbreaks including swine flu, polio and Ebola.
- There are some implications of declaring a PHEIC for the host country, which in the case of the coronavirus is China. Declaring a PHEIC may lead to restrictions on travel and trade.
- However, several countries have already issued advisories to their citizens to avoid traveling to China, while others are airlifting their citizens from it.

Convalescent plasma therapy tested on critically ill COVID-19 patients

Context

- As part of controlling the spread of novel coronavirus and to develop vaccines for the patients China's pharmaceutical company has turned to plasma taken from people who have recovered from the infection to treat critically ill patients.
- They have called people who had recovered from the new coronavirus to donate blood plasma, because it might contain valuable proteins that could be used to treat sick patients

What are Antibodies?

- Antibodies are proteins that the immune system makes to fight invaders such as viruses, bacteria or other foreign substances. Antibodies are specific to each invader. However, it takes time for the body to ramp up its production of antibodies to a completely new invader.

- If that same virus or bacteria tries to invade again in the future, the body will remember and quickly produce an army of antibodies.
- People who have recently recovered from COVID-19 still have antibodies to the coronavirus circulating in their blood.
- Injecting those antibodies into sick patients could theoretically help patients' better fight the infection.
- This treatment will transfer the immunity of a recovered patient to a sick patient, an approach that has been used previously in flu pandemics

Examples from the past

- This is not the first time that plasma from recovered patients has been used to treat people infected with certain viruses for which drugs are not available.
- When Ebola struck Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in 2014, the World Health Organization prioritised the evaluation of treatment with convalescent plasma derived from patients who had recovered from the disease.

Issue Area

- Antibodies in the plasma bind to the virus and prevent them from entering the cells. But by the time it is given, many cells would have been infected. Hence, convalescent plasma therapy is not very effective
- The New England Journal of Medicine had published an article which said convalescent plasma in a trial carried out in Ebola patients was not beneficial.

Treatment Options

- Plasma infusions are just one of many ways experts are considering to treat COVID-19.
- Others include repurposing antivirals or looking for brand-new molecules that can block the binding of the virus into cells

2. Dengue

Context:

- The advent of a new vaccine against the dengue virus.

Background:

- Dengue is essentially a tropical disease that occurs in the countries around the Equator.
- Hot weather and high humidity aided by intermittent rainfalls favour the sustenance of *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* (a minor contributor) the vectors transmitting the dengue virus.
- Dengue is mostly an asymptomatic infection, and only a very few develop severe disease. Those very young or very old and those who have chronic ailment are at a greater risk of developing severe disease. The worldwide Dengue case fatality rate is as low as 0.3%.

Details:

- The advent of a new tetravalent vaccine against the dengue virus has thrown new light into the evidence-based management of dengue.
- The studies and trials have indicated that this vaccine confers about 80% protection to children vaccinated between 4 and 16 years of age without any major side effects.

Concerns:

Challenges associated with Dengue:

- Urbanisation, poor town planning, and improper sanitation are the major risk factors for the multiplication of the vector mosquitoes. The rapid and unplanned urbanization in India has only amplified the challenges for the public health system
- *Aedes* eggs can remain dormant for more than a year and will hatch once they come in contact with water.

Shortage of skilled manpower:

- Source reduction activities like preventing water stagnation and using chemical larvicides and adulticides are often recommended. These chemicals need to be applied in periodic cycles to kill the larvae that remain even after the first spray.
 - * An adulticide is a type of insecticide used to kill adult mosquitoes
- However given the scale of operations required and the shortage of skilled workers available for such measures, the above options are rarely used.
- Many posts in government departments remain vacant despite there being a dire public health need. The National Vector Borne Disease Control Program notes that the deficiency of manpower has led to a lack of active surveillance in India which has severely impeded India's actions against Dengue.

Under-Reporting:

- Dengue cases are often under-reported due to political reasons, fearing political backlash by the voters in subsequent elections.
- The state also considers under-reporting of cases to avoid spreading panic among the common people.

Lack of Co-ordination:

- There is a lack of coordination between the local bodies and health departments in the delivery of public health measures. This has resulted in piecemeal efforts from the stakeholders thus depriving the community the benefit that would arise from synergy.
- The lack of proportionate targets and resources to the different levels of public health system has resulted in overburdening of the grass root levels.

Alternative medicine drugs:

- Despite the guidelines for the management of dengue cases by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Indian government, the usage of complementary medicines like Nilavembu kudineer (a Siddha medicine) and papaya leaf extract are rampant among the people.
- For any medicine, safety is more important than efficacy. Every modern medicine drug has come out after rigorous safety and efficacy studies for around 10 years, with an informed declaration of the side effects. There has been a lack of such studies with respect to the above alternative drugs.
- The studies on which alternative drugs are being promoted are based on very primitive forms of research like case reports, in-vitro studies, and animal studies.
- A meta-analysis of various studies has shown that there is no credible evidence for the use of papaya extract in dengue fever. However, some pharmaceutical companies are still marketing papaya extract pills. There are case reports which point out to many side effects due to the usage of these medicines.

Way forward:More comprehensive approach:

- A comprehensive mechanism is required in the efforts against Dengue. Apart from promoting the use of the vaccine, gaining control over dengue will require a more holistic approach. An integrated approach against Dengue should also include within its ambit vector control and proper case management.

Vector control:

- Aedes mosquitoes have a limited range as it cannot fly beyond a hundred meters. Keeping the surroundings clean and hygienic can help prevent the breeding of the vector mosquitoes.
- Considering that the vector mosquitoes bite during the daytime, keeping the windows shut in the day hours is a simple yet effective measure to reduce dengue incidence.

Epidemiological Measures:

- Epidemiological measures are essential in the management of communicable diseases like Dengue.
- Epidemiology is the study and analysis of the distribution, patterns and determinants of health and disease conditions in defined populations. It is a cornerstone of public health and shapes policy decisions and evidence-based practice by identifying risk factors for disease and targets for preventive healthcare.
- Singapore uses one successful model of mapping and analysing data on dengue, using Geographical Information System (GIS). This involves mapping the streets with dengue cases for vector densities. It helps the state to focus attention on such areas for more effective interventions.

Proper Case Management:

- Fluid management is the cornerstone in the management of severe diseases like dengue hemorrhagic fever and dengue shock syndrome. There is a need to adhere to the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO), given that, it is based on elaborate studies and trials.

Need for studies on alternative medicines:

- Alternative medicines need to undergo rigorous testing before its wide-scale usage.

3. National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2019Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the amendments in the National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2019 for amending the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973.

Details:

- The amendments intend to ensure necessary regulatory reforms in the field of Homoeopathy education.
- The bill seeks the establishment of the National Commission for Homoeopathy (NCH), which will replace the current regulatory body for homoeopathy, the Homoeopathy Central Council.
- The Bill seeks to repeal the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973 and provide for a medical education system which ensures:
 - * availability of adequate and high quality homoeopathic medical professionals
 - * adoption of the latest medical research by homoeopathic medical professionals
 - * periodic assessment of medical institutions,
 - * An effective grievance redressal mechanism.

Functions of the NCH include:

- framing policies for regulating medical institutions and homoeopathic medical professionals,
- assessing the requirements of healthcare related human resources and infrastructure,
- ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils of Homoeopathy of the regulations made under the Bill
- Ensuring coordination among the autonomous boards set up under the Bill.

Entrance examinations:

- There will be a uniform National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for admission to under-graduate homoeopathy education in all medical institutions regulated by the Bill.
- The NCH will specify the manner of conducting common counselling for admission in all such medical institutions.

Significance

- They will also enable transparency and accountability for protecting the interests of the general public.
- The Commission will promote the availability of affordable healthcare services in all parts of the country.

Background:

- The Homoeopathy Central Council (HCC) Act, 1973 was enacted for:
 - * The constitution of a Central Council of Homoeopathy for the regulation of education and practice of Homoeopathy.
 - * The maintenance of a Central Register of Homoeopathy and for matters connected therewith.
- The broad functions, constitution and regulation-making powers of the Council are identical to those of the Medical Council of India.
- While the Act provides a solid foundation for the growth of medical education and practice in Homoeopathy, various bottlenecks in the functioning of the Council have been experienced, which has resulted in serious detrimental effects on medical education as well as delivery of quality Homoeopathy healthcare services.

4. National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) Bill, 2019.

Context

- The National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2019 seeks to repeal the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970

Details

- The NCIM bill is aimed at bringing reforms in the medical education of Indian medicine sector in lines with the National Medical Commission proposed for setting up for Allopathy system of medicine
- It seeks to replace the existing regulator, the Central Council for Indian Medicine (CCIM), with a new body to ensure transparency and accountability
- The Bill provides for the establishment of the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM).
 - * The NCISM will consist of 29 members, appointed by the central government.
 - * A Search Committee will recommend names to the central government for the post of Chairperson, part time members, and presidents of the four autonomous boards set up under the NCISM.
 - * These posts will have a maximum term of four years.

- * The Search Committee will consist of five members including the Cabinet Secretary and three experts nominated by the central government (of which two should have experience in any of the fields of Indian System of Medicine).

Functions of the NCISM include:

- framing policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals of Indian System of Medicine,
- assessing the requirements of healthcare related human resources and infrastructure,
- ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils of Indian System of Medicine of the regulations made under the Bill, and
- ensuring coordination among the autonomous boards set up under the Bill.

Significance

- The proposed regulatory structure will enable transparency and accountability for protecting the interests of the general public
- The NCIM will promote availability of affordable healthcare services in all parts of the country

5. Myeloma

- Myeloma, also known as multiple myeloma, is a cancer of plasma cells.
 - * Plasma cells are a type of white blood cell made in the bone marrow.
 - * Bone marrow is the 'spongy' material found in the centre of the larger bones in the body and is where all blood cells are made.
- Often, no symptoms are noticed initially. As it progresses, bone pain, bleeding, frequent infections, and anemia may occur

How does myeloma develop?

- Myeloma develops when DNA is damaged during the development of a plasma cell.
- This abnormal cell then starts to multiply and spread within the bone marrow and they start to multiply the wrong way.
- The abnormal plasma cells release a large amount of a single type of antibody – known as paraprotein – which has no useful function.

6. EVALI

- E-cigarette or Vaping Product Use-Associated Lung Injury (EVALI)
- It is the name given by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the dangerous, newly identified lung disease linked to vaping.

- E-cigarettes, also called 'vapes' or 'electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS)', are battery-run devices that were originally marketed as a safer alternative to smoking traditional cigarettes.

Context

- In recent years, there has been a deadly rise in nicotine addiction in the US, allegedly due to aggressive marketing by manufacturers.

Details

- The disease 'EVALI' is unknown to doctors, and a link between vaping and the lung illness is yet to be concretely established.
- Symptoms, according to the CDC, are those in common with other respiratory illnesses, including coughing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, extreme fever or fatigue.

7. 171 hospitals de-listed from PM's health scheme after fraud

National Health Authority (NHA)

- It is the apex body responsible for implementing India's flagship public health insurance/assurance scheme 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana'.
 - It is an attached office of the Ministry of health and Family Welfare with full functional autonomy
 - NHA is governed by a Governing Board chaired by the Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare.
 - Chief Executive Officer (CEO), an officer in the rank of Secretary to the Government of India manages its affairs.
- * The CEO is the Ex-Office Member Secretary to the Governing Board.

Functions of NHA

- Formulation of various operational guidelines related to PM-JAY
 - Develop, and enforce compliance with, standards for treatment protocols, quality protocols, minimum documentation protocols, data sharing protocols, data privacy and security protocols
 - It also works on fraud prevention and control including penal provisions etc.
- * Regular Anti-Fraud Advisory Notes are issued to all States advising them on measures to be adopted to prevent, detect and deter fraud.

National Anti-Fraud Unit (NAFU)

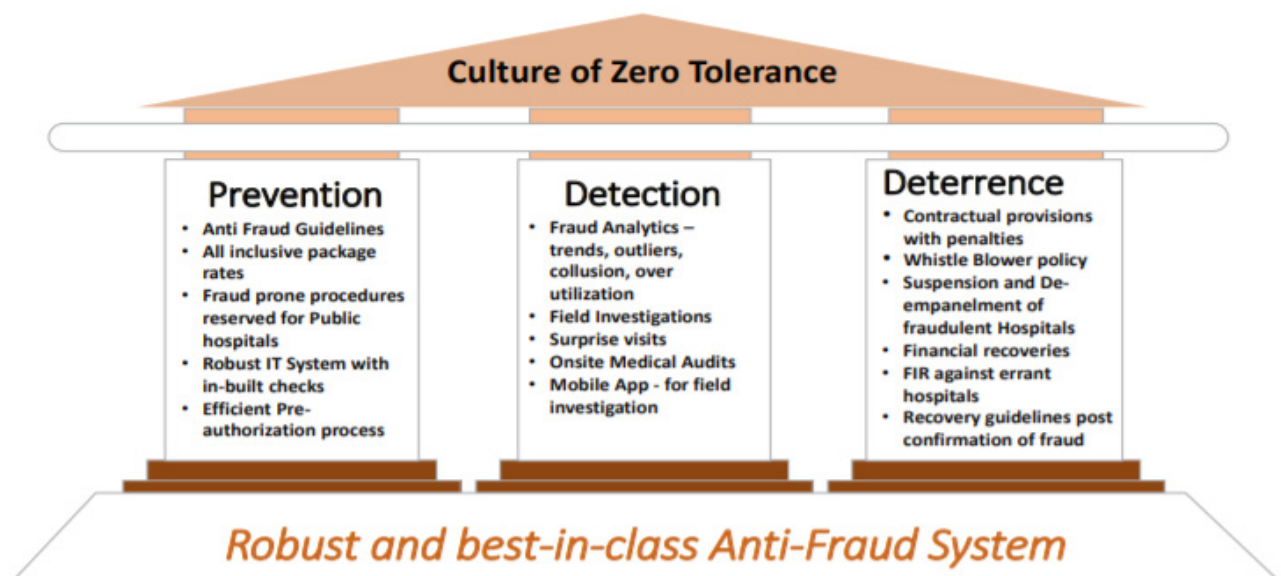
- NAFU at National Health Authority that is responsible for implementing Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna (AB-Pmjay), is conducting regular medical audits to check any violations under the scheme
- NAFU is supported by State Anti-Fraud Units (SAFU) at State level.

Context

- To curb frauds in the Ayushman Bharat scheme, the National Health Authority (NHA) has taken action against more than 390 hospitals.

Steps taken by NHA

- These hospitals have been served show cause notice, suspended and de-empanelled in different states.
- The amount of penalties levied is more than Rs 4.6 crores in 9 states
- A close watch is also maintained on wrongful enrolment of beneficiary



8. Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSD)

Context

- The Madras High Court has directed the Centre to consider providing medical care to economically poor patients suffering from the rare Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSD), a group of more than 50 genetically inherited and potentially fatal disorders, as an issue no less than a “national emergency” and come up with a concrete plan, within a month, on sharing the financial burden with the State governments.

Details:

- Lysosomal storage diseases are a group of about 50 rare inherited metabolic disorders that result from defects in lysosomal function. They are inherited metabolic diseases.
- Lysosomes are sacs of enzymes within cells that digest large molecules and pass the fragments on to other parts of the cell for recycling.
- This process requires several critical enzymes. If one of these enzymes is defective, because of a mutation, the large molecules accumulate within the cell, eventually killing it.
- Lysosomal storage disorders are caused by lysosomal dysfunction usually as a consequence of deficiency of a single enzyme required for the metabolism of lipids, glycoproteins (sugar-containing proteins), or so-called mucopolysaccharides.

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.

What was the need of new bill on abortion?

- Section 3 of Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, capped the abortion limit at 20 weeks.
- Under Section 5, a woman could undergo abortion beyond 20 weeks only if her life was endangered by pregnancy.
 - But there remained no provision for fetuses that were diagnosed with severe life threatening defects.
 - Most birth defects are diagnosed between 16 to 18 weeks of pregnancy. But some anomalies of the brain and spine can be detected only after 20 weeks.
- The MTP Act, 1971 was replete with unclear language, which resulted in doctors refusing to perform abortions even within the stipulated 20 week gestation limit fearing criminal charges.
 - Women had to seek the approval of the judiciary, which, by most accounts, did not always come in time.
 - "As a result", notes a 2015 study in the India Journal of Medical Ethics, "10 to 13 per cent of maternal deaths in India are due to unsafe abortions".
 - Given the delays in the judicial system, the 20-week mark often passed, leaving many, including rape survivors, with unwanted pregnancies.

Features of the bill

- The bill proposes to permit the termination of pregnancy up to 24 weeks from the existing 20 weeks.
 - It aims to expand access of women to safe and legal abortion services on therapeutic, eugenic, humanitarian or social grounds.
- The amendments proposed in the bill are the requirements for opinion of one doctor for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation, and introducing the requirement of opinion of two doctors for termination of pregnancy of 20-24 weeks of gestation.

- The bill also proposed enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women, which will be defined in the amendments to the MTP Rules and would include vulnerable women including survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women (like differently-abled women, minors) etc.
- Upper gestation limit will not apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by Medical Board.
 - The composition functions and other details of Medical Board is to be prescribed subsequently in Rules under the Act.
- Name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorized in any law for the time being in force

Significance

- The extension of limit would ease the process women, allowing the mainstream system itself to take care of them, delivering quality medical attention.
- It has a provision to protect the privacy of the person seeking abortion.
- The proposed increase in gestational age will ensure dignity, autonomy, confidentiality and justice for women who need to terminate a pregnancy.
- The extension will help victims of rape, girls with disabilities as well as minors, who may not realize they are pregnant until later

Issue Area

- First, it doesn't allow abortion on request at any point after the pregnancy.
- Second, it doesn't take a step towards removing the prejudice against unmarried women by amending the relevant provision.
- Third, it enhances the gestational limit for legal abortion from 20 to 24 weeks only for specific categories of women such as survivors of rape, victims of incest, and minors.
 - This means that a woman who does not fall into these categories would not be able to seek an abortion beyond 20 weeks, even if she suffers from grave physical or mental injury due to the pregnancy.
- Finally, MTP will be extended till 24 weeks only for certain category of women, there is also a provision that says that pregnancies with foetal abnormalities can be terminated only after being approved from medical boards

- * Medical boards often delay medical interventions required and often do not have the right kind of specialists.

Way forward

- The Government needs to ensure that all norms and standardized protocols in clinical practice to facilitate abortions are followed in health care institutions across the country.
- The government should also learn from the experiences of the 1971 Act: The new piece of legislation should be worded in a manner that removes frequent appeals to the judiciary.

2. A weak test: On Swachh ranking of cities

Introduction

- Sanitation and public health are responsibilities of State governments and the States have failed at managing growing volumes of municipal and hazardous waste.
 - * The problem has been compounded by the absence of plans that take a holistic view of housing, sanitation, water supply, waste management and transport.
- To address these issues and unleash the competitive spirit among States, the Union Government had launched Swachh Survekshan.

Ahead of the launch of Swachh Survekshan 2020, the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is once again trying to stir up competition among cities, by pre-ranking them for their performance.

Issues

- The idea of competition seems good but in reality, the problems confronting urban India require large-scale infrastructure creation, full adherence to legal requirements on waste management, and transparent technical audits.
- Many cities remain clueless about handling their waste, one shocking example being the rising mountain of garbage at the Ghazipur landfill in Delhi.
 - * Ironically, Bhopal, which figures among the top five cleanest cities, continues to live with the effects of the gas disaster of 1984.
- Ranks and prizes clearly cannot solve the national waste management crisis.

Steps to be taken

- The Urban Affairs Ministry has identified ambitious targets: "100% processing and safe disposal of waste and wastewater treatment and reuse."
 - * The Ministry has also sanctioned funds under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) to help States set up facilities necessary to manage waste.

- States should ask for extended funding under such schemes to create the infrastructure for a future-focused clean-up and, simultaneously, institute measures to reduce waste.
- The emphasis should be on creating a circular economy centred at the principle of material recovery from all kinds of waste, reuse, recycling and reduced pressure on natural resources.

Conclusion

- A sound ranking of cities and towns is important but this will also require changes in the policy formulation and a switch to alternative sources to eliminate single-use plastic.

3. Preventing Mob Lynching

Context

- The Supreme Court described lynching as a "horrendous act of mobocracy". Looking at this horrified rule of mobs the SC had requested Central and state Govt's to draft laws to bring perpetrators of crime under the watchful eyes of law and impose punishment
- Manipur, Rajasthan and West Bengal introduced bills to fight the menace of Mob Lynching
- What this article speaks about is what aspects should be included while the center drafts the law?

What the Centre can do?

- While adopting the guidelines, the Centre would do well to incorporate sections in the law for penal action against doctors who stand accused of dereliction of duty, for delay in attending to victims of lynching, or submitting false reports without carrying out a proper and thorough medical examination of the victims, either under coercion by the police or due to their own prejudice against the community or religion of the victims.
- Under the compensation scheme for the victims, the amount to be paid to the victims should be recovered from the perpetrators of the crime or collective fines be imposed on the villagers where the lynching takes place.
- While framing the laws, the Centre could even provide for punitive action against political leaders found guilty of inciting mobs. Until a zero-tolerance attitude is adopted in dealing with mob lynching, this crime will continue to show a rising trend.
- Punitive action to be taken against police officers accused of dereliction of duty, as incorporated in the law enacted by Manipur government, could be replicated in the Central law too as it would deter police officials acting in a partisan manner in favour of the lynch mob

4. Women politicians trolled more: Amnesty India

What's in News?

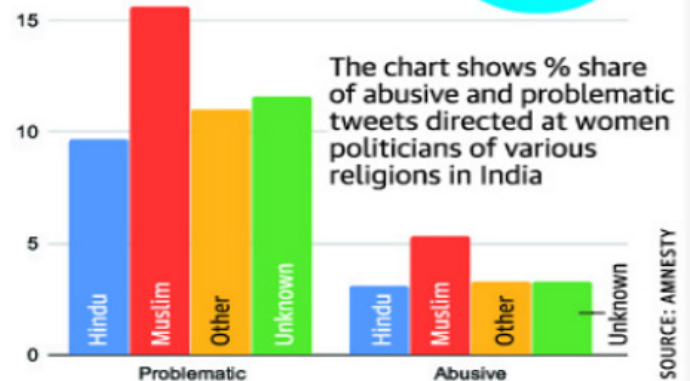
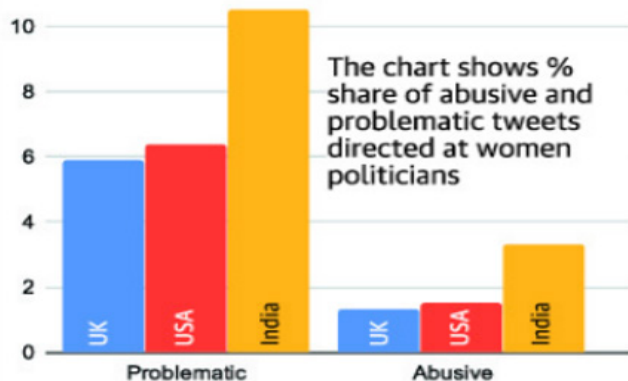
Amnesty India had carried out a study of 95 politicians during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India.

Findings:

- Twitter is a toxic space for Indian women politicians, who face substantially higher abuse on the social media platform than their counterparts in the U.S. and the U.K., according to a study. One out of every seven tweets mentioning them is problematic or abusive, with many women targeted by a relentless flow of threats and sexist, religious, racist and casteist slurs.
- While all women are targeted, Muslim women politicians faced 55% more abuse than others.
- The report quotes one of the women leaders, which say: "Women do not enter politics because the price of constant online harassment and trolling was too high."

Softer targets

Women politicians from India faced significantly more abusive and problematic tweets compared with their counterparts in the U.S. and the U.K. Muslim women politicians, in particular, faced more such tweets than others



SOURCE: AMNESTY

GEOGRAPHY

1. Angel Falls (Salto Ángel)

- It is a waterfall in Venezuela.
- It is the world's highest uninterrupted waterfall.



2. Mandovi River/ Mahadayi/Mhadei River

- It is the west-flowing inter-state river which rises in the Western Ghats from Karnataka's Belagavi district.
- The river travels 35 km in Karnataka; 82 km in Goa before joining the Arabian Sea.

Context

- Migratory seagulls are seen arriving along the Mandovi river at Betim in Goa

3. Papagni River

- The Papagni originates in the Nandi Hills of Chikkaballapur district in Karnataka.
- It is a non-perennial river that is rainfed which flows through the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

- It is a right-bank tributary of the Pennar River.

Environmental issues

- Human activities in this region have led to deterioration in the quality of groundwater as there is excessive sand mining in the riverbed.

4. Thirty Metre Telescope

Context:

- India, a partner in the construction of one of the largest telescopes in the world, has said it wants the project to be moved out of the proposed site at Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano in Hawaii.

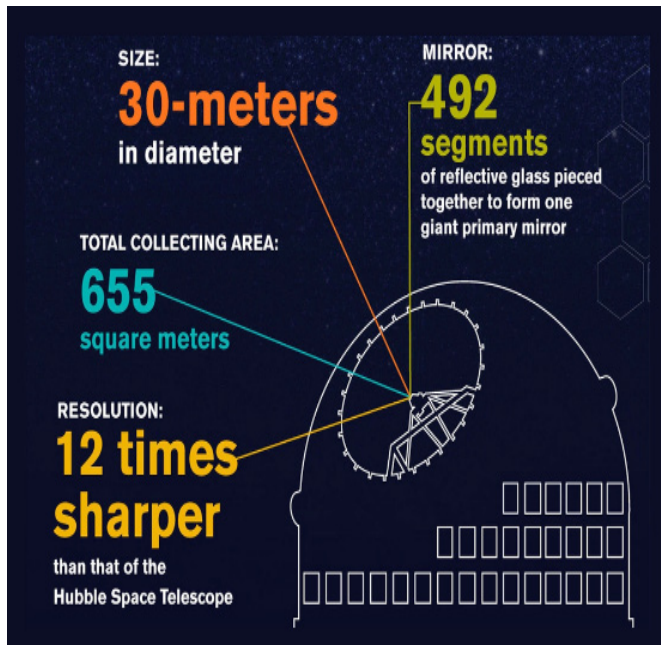
Details:

- The TMT or Thirty Metre Telescope, as it is called, is a joint venture (JV) involving five countries, but the \$2 billion project has been marred by protests for over a decade.
- The TMT will enable scientists to study fainter objects far away in the universe, which would give information about early stages of evolution of the universe.
- Also, it will give out finer details of not-so-far-away objects like undiscovered planets and other objects in the Solar System and planets around other stars.
- Canada, the United States, China and Japan are the other — and more significant — partners in terms of the monetary and infrastructural aspects of the TMT. The level of contribution determines the amount of viewing time, or slots, that the member-countries' scientists get on the machine. Thus India, in a given year, stands to get 10% of the available slots; any downtime could potentially eat into those.
- The proposed site is considered sacred to indigenous Hawaiians, and also has too many observatories for one more such massive establishment to come up, say groups that have contested the site.

Issues:

- The TMT has been a litigious site since 2014. In 2018, the Supreme Court of Hawaii gave permission for construction to proceed but the project's proponents have not made progress because they were obstructed twice, in 2015 and 2019, respectively, from construction.
- Protests at the site in 2019 saw scientists unable to access other telescope facilities in Mauna Kea.
- The project has been delayed by nearly five years and should have begun operations by 2025.
- India has committed \$200 million, which is about a tenth of the proposed cost.
- The telescope needs 492 precisely polished mirrors and India is to contribute 83 of them.

- The project delay has meant that these manufacturing contracts have also been delayed.
- India too has its problems with hosting ambitious science projects. The Indian Neutrino Observatory, proposed to come up in Theni, Tamil Nadu, has also been stalled due to protests against the project in the State.



Mauna Kea:

- The Mauna Kea Observatories (MKO) are a number of independent astronomical research facilities and large telescope observatories that are located at the summit of Mauna Kea on the Big Island of Hawaii, United States.
- The location was considered near ideal because of its dark skies from lack of light pollution, good astronomical seeing, low humidity, high elevation, position above most of the water vapour in the atmosphere, clean air, good weather and low latitude location.

Next Best Site:

- The next best site to locate the telescope is the Observatorio del Roque de los Muchachos (ORM) on La Palma in the Canary Islands, Spain (Northern Hemisphere).
- Hanle, in Ladakh, was also in the running to host the TMT, but lost out to Mauna Kea, which is considered a superior site due to the imaging possibilities it offers, its stable weather, and also because it has the necessary infrastructure to manage telescopes, already being host to several telescopes.

5. Yellow Rust

- Wheat yellow rust, also known as wheat stripe rust, is one of the three major wheat rust diseases, along with stem rust of wheat and leaf rust.
- Yellow rust is a fungal disease that turns the crop's leaves into a yellowish colour and stops photosynthetic activity, which eventually could result in a drop of wheat crop productivity
- The disease usually occurs early in the growth season, when temperature ranges between 2°C and 15°C. High humidity and rainfall are favourable conditions for increasing the infection on both leaf blade and leaf sheath, and even on spikes when in epidemic form.

Symptoms

- It includes stunted and weakened plants, shrivelled grains, fewer spikes, loss in number of grains per spike and grain weight.

Concerns

- The disease can spread rapidly under congenial conditions and affects crop development, and eventually the yield.

Context

- Wheat crop in Haryana has come under attack of 'yellow rust' due to cold and humid conditions prevailing in the region

6. New method better estimates melting of debris-covered Himalayan glaciers

Context

- A group of researchers studied the impact of debris on Glacier melting in the Himalayan Region

Effect of debris

- About 20% of Himalayan glaciers are debris-laden, and their dynamics are very different from the ones without debris cover.
- In glaciers without a debris cover, the rate of melting increases as the elevation decreases.
 - * However, in glaciers covered with debris, the thick cover partially insulates the glacier from the warm exterior and thereby slows down the melting.

Satopanth glacier

- Satopanth glacier is located in Garhwal in Central Himalaya, in Uttarakhand.
- It is the origin of the river Alaknanda, one of the two main tributaries of the Ganga.
- The other tributary is Bhagirathi, which originates from the Gangotri glacier.
- These two rivers join at Devprayag, around 70 km upstream of Rishikesh. Downstream of Devprayag, the river is called Ganga

- The term 'Satopanth' is perhaps derived from two words – 'Sat-o' meaning of truth, and 'Panth' meaning path or way. So its literal meaning is the path of truth.

7. Heatwave effect

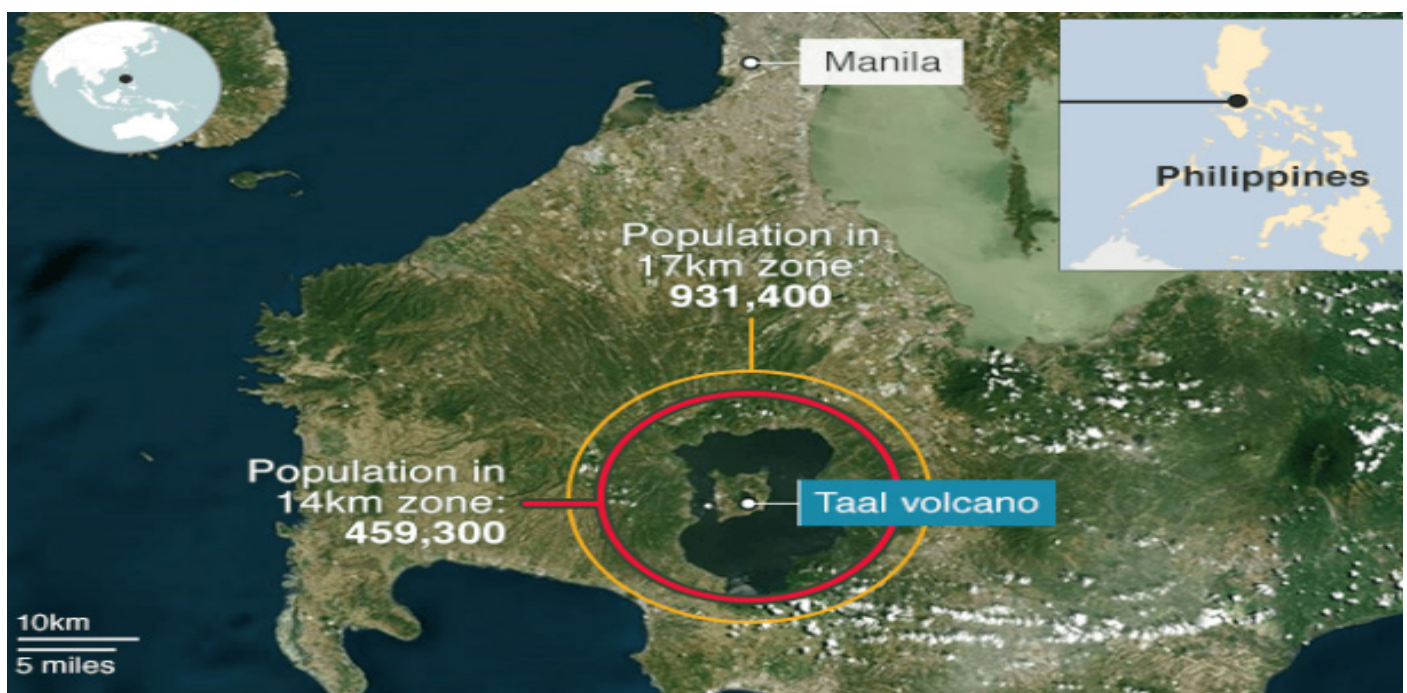
- Heatwaves can also occur in the ocean and these are known as marine heatwaves or MHWs. Under MHWs the ocean temperatures are extremely warm for an extended period of time.
- Marine heatwaves can occur in summer or winter – they are defined based on differences with expected temperatures for the location and time of year.
- Marine heatwaves affect ecosystem structure, by supporting certain species and suppressing others. Biodiversity can be drastically affected by marine heatwaves. Marine heatwaves can cause economic losses through impacts on fisheries and aquaculture.
- The unprecedented death of nearly one million birds between 2015 and 2016, whose remains washed ashore in Alaska, US, was brought on by a severe and long-lasting marine heatwave in the northeast Pacific dubbed "The Blob".
- The heatwave lasted more than 700 days from 2014 to 2016, increasing water temperature and interrupting patterns in the food web from the smallest creatures to top predators. It squeezed out the bird's fish food supply in the Pacific Ocean.

8. Taal Volcano

- Taal is one of the world's smallest active volcanoes.
- It is the second most active volcano in the Philippines.
- The lake partially fills Taal Caldera, which was formed by prehistoric eruptions.
- All volcanoes of the Philippines are part of the Pacific Ring of Fire.
- It sits in the middle of a lake about 70 km south of the centre of the capital, Manila.

A complex volcano

- Taal is classified as a "complex" volcano by the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS).
- A complex volcano, also called a compound volcano, is defined as one that consists of a complex of two or more vents, or a volcano that has an associated volcanic dome, either in its crater or on its flanks. Examples include Vesuvius, besides Taal.
- The Taal volcano does not rise from the ground as a distinct, singular dome but consists of multiple stratovolcanoes (volcanoes susceptible to explosive eruptions), conical hills and craters of all shapes and sizes, as per NASA's Earth Observatory.
- Taal has 47 craters and four maars (a broad shallow crater).



EDUCATION

1. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

Context

- NGO Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in the past has spoken about deficiencies in India's Education system and how children fall short on basic learning skills
- In the latest edition of ASER, it directs attention to children between four and eight years of age, and suggests that India's learning crisis could be linked to the weakness of the country's pre-primary system

Key stats

- The Right to Education and national policy mandates that children enter grade one at age six.
- More than 20 per cent of students in Standard I are less than six, ASER 2019 reveals — they should ideally be in pre-school.
- At the same time, 36 per cent students in Standard 1 are older than the RTE-mandated age of six.
- A comparison of Govt and private school shows 26.1% children in grade one of government schools are four or five years old compared to 15.7% in private schools. At the other end of the spectrum, 30.4% children in grade one of government schools are seven-eight years old compared to 45.4% in private schools.

According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019, 21% children in grade one of government schools could read words compared to 46.7% in private schools — an advantage of 122%. How is this possible?

- It is well known that children who go to private schools come from relatively affluent backgrounds. They also tend to have more educated parents. This affords them certain advantages which are not available to children who are from less advantaged families and are more likely to attend government schools.
- Early childhood education is supposed to prepare children for school. Children are supposed to be exposed to activities that build their cognitive abilities and early literacy and numeracy skills.

* For instance, the National Early Childhood Care and Education curriculum framework talks about developing skills related to sequential thinking, predicting patterns, observing, reasoning and problem solving in the pre-school stage. These cognitive and early language skills are highly correlated with the child's ability to acquire further language skills.

* Therefore, children who enter grade one better prepared with these skills are likely to perform better.

* For instance, among the cognitive tasks administered in ASER 2019 (seriation ["the ability to arrange objects in order by size"], pattern recognition and puzzle) only 23.8% children of grade one in government schools could do all three tasks compared to 43.1% in private schools.

Recommendation

- According to the report within Standard I, children's performance on cognitive, early language, early numeracy, and social and emotional learning tasks is strongly related to their age. Older children do better on all tasks
- Therefore ASER suggests children between four and eight should be taught cognitive skills through play-based activities. It emphasizes on developing problem-solving faculties and building memory of children, and not content knowledge

Leveraging the existing network of anganwadi centres to implement school readiness.

- India has a huge investment in its early childhood programme, administered through 1.2 million anganwadis under the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme.

* Pre-school education is part of their mandate. But at the best of times, these centres do no more than implement the government's child nutrition schemes.

- A number of health crises — including Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) outbreak in Bihar — have bared the inadequacies of the system. A growing body of scholarly work has also shown that the anganwadi worker is poorly-paid, demoralised and lacks the autonomy to be an effective nurturer.
- The findings of ASER 2019 make a clear case for strengthening these early childhood education centres so that they implement appropriate "school-readiness" activities.

* There is a need to expand and upgrade anganwadis to ensure that children get adequate and correct educational inputs

Conclusion

- Therefore a reworking of curriculum and activities is urgently needed for the entire age band from four to eight, cutting across all types of preschools and early grades regardless of whether the provision is by government institutions or by private agencies.

2. Deeksharambh Scheme

- It is a guide to Student Induction Programme which is prepared by the University Grants Commission (UGC).
- It will help new students adjust and feel comfortable in the new environment, inculcate in them the ethos and culture of the institution, help them build bonds with other students and faculty members, and expose them to a sense of larger purpose and self-exploration.
- The Programme engages with the new students as soon as they come into the institution, before regular classes start.

3. Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO (INCCU)

- The INCCU is a governmental body formed by the Government of India which functions under the Department of Secondary and Higher Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- The objective of the Commission is to advise the Government in matters relating to the UNESCO.

Context

- Union HRD Minister chairs a meeting of the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO in New Delhi.

Background

- India has been a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a specialized agency of the United Nations since its inception in 1946.
- The Constitution of the UNESCO mandates each member to form a national commission to function as agencies of liaison between the national government and UNESCO.
- Accordingly, an interim Indian National Commission for Co-operation with UNESCO was set up in 1949 by the Government of India, Ministry of Education.
- A permanent Commission was established in 1951.

Functions of the INCCU

- To promote understanding of the objects and purposes of UNESCO among the people of the Republic of India;
- To serve as a liaison agency between the Government of India and the institutions concerned with the working for the advancement of education, science and culture;
- To cooperate with the Government departments and with services, organizations and institutions concerned with questions within UNESCO's competence;
- To encourage participation of national, governmental and non-governmental institutions and various individuals in the formulations and execution of UNESCO's programmes so as to secure for UNESCO all the intellectual, scientific, artistic or administrative assistance that it may require;

- To collaborate with the National Commissions of Asia and the Pacific and with UNESCO's Regional Offices and centres in fostering regional, sub-regional and bilateral cooperation in education, the sciences, culture and information, particularly through the joint formulation and execution of programmes;
- To disseminate information on the objectives, programme and activities of UNESCO and endeavour to arouse public interest in them;

4. National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT)

- It is an initiative of Ministry of Human Resource Development for using technology for better learning outcomes in Higher Education.
- The objective is to use Artificial Intelligence to make learning more personalised and customised as per the requirements of the learner. This requires development of technologies in Adaptive Learning to address the diversity of learners.
- AICTE would be the implementing agency for NEAT programme. The scheme shall be administered under the guidance of an Apex Committee constituted by MHRD.
- It will function through a PPP model between the Ministry of HRD and EdTech companies.

Significance

- It offers adaptive and personalized learning through Artificial Intelligence (AI) to students, particularly from economically and socially weaker sections.

5. NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement)

- It is an initiative to build capacities of teachers and school principals at the elementary stage.
- The initiative is an Integrated Teacher Training Programme of the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of HRD as part of its National Mission to improve learning outcomes at the Elementary level under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Samagra Shiksha during 2019-20.
- The programme aims to build the capacities of around 42 lakh participants covering all teachers and Heads of Schools at the elementary level in all Government schools, faculty members of State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) as well as Block Resource Coordinators and Cluster Resource Coordinators in all States and UTs.
- The aim of this training is to motivate and equip teachers to encourage and foster critical thinking in students, handle diverse situations and act as first level counsellors.

6. Paramarsh Scheme

- 'Paramarsh' is a University Grants Commission (UGC) scheme for Mentoring National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) Accreditation Aspirant Institutions to promote Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- The scheme will be a paradigm shift in the concept of mentoring of institution by another well performing institution to upgrade their academic performance and enable them to get accredited by focusing in the area of curricular aspects, teaching-learning & evaluation, research, innovation, institutional values & practices etc.
- The Scheme will be operationalized through a "Hub & Spoke" model wherein the Mentor Institution, called the "Hub" is centralized and will have the responsibility of guiding the Mentee institution through the secondary branches the "Spoke" through the services provided to the mentee for self-improvement.
- This allows a centralized control over operational efficiency, resource utilization to attain overall development of the mentee institution.

Significance

- The scheme will lead to enhancement of overall quality of the Mentee Institutions and enhance its profile as a result of improved quality of research, teaching and learning methodologies.
- Mentee Institution will also have increased exposure and speedier adaptation to best practices.
- "Paramarsh" scheme will also facilitate sharing of knowledge, information and opportunities for research collaboration and faculty development in Mentee Institutions.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Operation Vanilla

Context

- Indian Navy had launched 'Operation Vanilla' to Provide Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief at Madagascar

Details

- It was launched to provide assistance to the affected population of Madagascar post devastation caused by Cyclone Diane
 - * It had caused heavy flooding and landslides leading to massive loss of life and property.
- INS Airavat reached port city Antsiranana, Madagascar and immediately began to provide medical aid
 - * It rendered all necessary assistance to the local population in Madagascar.
- India's assistance to Madagascar is in consonance with Indian Navy's Foreign Cooperation initiatives in line with India's vision of 'Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR)'.

- * Mr. K M Singh who has been selected for the award is a founder member of the National Disaster Management Authority. He is known for his work during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
- * Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre in Uttarakhand has also been chosen for the award.
- * In 2019, the 8th Battalion of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) located in Ghaziabad was selected for its commendable work in disaster management.

2. Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2020

- In order to recognise the excellent work done by individuals and institutions in India in the field of disaster management, the Government of India has instituted an annual award known as Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar.
- The award is announced every year on 23rd January, the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.
- Up to three awards are given under this. Both institutions and individuals are eligible for these awards.
- If the awardee is an institution, it shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 51 lakhs. The Institution shall utilize this cash prize for Disaster Management related activities only.
- If the awardee is an individual, the winner shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 5.00 lakhs.
- Only Indian nationals and Indian institutions can apply for the award.
- For institutional awards, voluntary organizations, corporate entities, academic/research institutions, response/uniformed forces or any other institution may apply for the award.

Context:

- Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2020 announced.

HISTORY

1. Savitribai Phule Jayanti

Context

- PM pays tribute to Savitribai Phule on her jayanti.

Background:

- Savitribai Phule was an Indian social reformer, educationalist, and poet.
- She played an important role in improving women's rights in India. She is regarded as the mother of Indian feminism.

Her efforts

- She worked to abolish the discrimination and unfair treatment of people based on caste and gender.
- She campaigned against child marriage.
- Savitribai started the Mahila Seva Mandal to raise awareness about women's rights. She supported widow remarriage too.
- She and her husband, Jyotirao Phule, opened a school for women in Pune during 1848; at a time when public education was limited.
- She initiated the first Satyashodhak marriage-a marriage solemnised in austerity.

She is regarded as an important figure of the social reform movement in Maharashtra. All her efforts, though diverse, had a unanimous effect of posing a brave and pioneering challenge to the caste system and patriarchy.

GOVERNANCE

1. Corruption Perception Index

Context:

- Transparency International has announced that India's ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI-2019) has slipped from 78 to 80, compared to 2018.

Corruption Perceptions Index:

- Transparency International (TI) has published the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) since 1995, annually ranking countries "by their perceived levels of corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys"
- The CPI generally defines corruption as "the misuse of public power for private benefit"
- The assessments are either business people opinion surveys or performance assessments from a group of analysts
- The score runs from zero, which is highly corrupt, to 100, which is very clean.

Legend:

Scores	Perceived as less corrupt					Perceived as more corrupt				
	100-090	089-080	079-070	069-060	059-050	049-040	039-030	029-020	019-010	009-000

India's ranking

- With a score of 41, India is at the 80th spot. The rank is also shared by China, Benin, Ghana and Morocco.
- China has improved its position from 87 to 80 with a score of 41 out of 100.
- Pakistan is ranked at the 120th place.

Global Ranking

- Denmark and New Zealand have cornered the top spot, followed by Finland, Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland in the top ten.
- Other countries in the top level are Norway (7th rank), the Netherlands (8th), Germany and Luxembourg (9th).
- The global average for 2019 is 43.

Analysis:

- In the last eight years, only 22 countries significantly improved their CPI scores, including Greece, Guyana and Estonia. In the same period, among the 21 countries that saw a significant fall in their scores are Canada, Australia and Nicaragua. In the remaining 137 countries, the levels of corruption show little to no change.

- The report observed that, in democracies like India and Australia, unfair and opaque political financing, undue influence in decision-making and lobbying by powerful corporate interest groups, have resulted in stagnation or decline in the control of corruption.
- The CPI report has revealed that a majority of countries are showing little to no improvement in tackling corruption.
- Transparency International pointed out that their analysis also showed that corruption was more pervasive in countries where big money could flow freely into electoral campaigns and where governments listened only to the voices of wealthy or well-connected individuals.

Conclusion:

- The CPI has been widely credited with putting the issue of corruption on the International Policy Agenda. It sends a powerful message and the governments are forced to acknowledge their scores and act on it.
- The governments must urgently address the corrupting role of big money in political party financing and the undue influence it exerts on the political systems.

2. Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS)

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the organizational restructuring of the railways through the unification of the existing eight Group A services into one central service — the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).
- The move was required as there was huge "departmentalism" that delayed many projects.

What is the present system like?

- The Indian Railways is governed by a pool of officers, among whom engineers are recruited through the Indian Engineering Services Examination and civil servants through the Civil Services Examination.
- The engineers are in five technical service cadres — Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE), Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME), Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE), Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSSE) and the Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS).
- The Civil Servants are in the Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) and Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS).

Why was the reform needed?

The government wants to end inter-departmental rivalries, which it says have been hindering growth for decades.

- Several committees including the Bibek Debroy Committee in 2015 have noted that “departmentalism” is a major problem in the system.
 - * Most committees have said the merger of the services in some form would be a solution.
- The Debroy panel had recommended the merging of the eight services into two — the Indian Railway Technical Service (IRTechS) comprising five engineering services (IRSE, IRSSE, IRSEE, IRSME and IRSS), and the Indian Railway Logistics Service (IRLogS), comprising non-technical services (IRAS, IRPS and IRTS). The government has now collapsed all services into one.
- The government has followed the Prakash Tandon Committee’s recommendations of 1994 as it was apprehensive that even if there are two services, there would be infighting.

What will change with the restructure?

- The Chairman along with four members responsible for
 - * Infrastructure,
 - * Operations and Business development,
 - * Rolling stock and
 - * Finance respectively will form the Railway Board.
- The Chairman shall be the cadre controlling officer responsible for Human Resources (HR) with assistance from a DG (HR).
- Three apex level posts shall be surrendered from Railway Board and all its remaining posts shall be open to all officers regardless of the service to which they belonged.
- The Board will also have some independent non-executive members, who will be highly distinguished professionals with deep knowledge and 30 years of experience including at the top levels in industry, finance, economics and management fields.

Concerns

- People with a specific skill set might be pushed to perform other work about which there is no clarity.
- The merger is unscientific and against established norms, because it proposes to merge two fundamentally dissimilar entities, with multiple disparities.
- There is growing uncertainty over promotions and career progression of the officers who are currently employed in Railways.
- There could be misunderstanding between civil servants and engineers in Railways.

- * The civil servants come from all walks of life after clearing the Civil Services Examination.
- * The engineers usually sit for the Engineering Services Examination right after getting an engineering degree. Various studies have noted that engineers join the Railways around the age of 22-23, while the civil servants join when they are around 26, barring exceptions.
- * The civil servants are saying that if all present cadres are merged and even higher departmental posts become open to all, engineers, being in larger numbers and of a certain age profile, may end up occupying most posts, if not all.

Future Course

- The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) will be conducting an exclusive examination for recruitment of officers to handle specialised services in the newly created Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).
- Candidates aspiring to get into railways will have to appear for the prelims after which they will indicate their preference for IRMS under five specialities — four of them engineering specialities for ‘technical’ operations comprising of civil, mechanical, telecom and electrical, and one ‘non-technical’ speciality which will recruit officers for accounts, personnel and traffic.
 - * This means the Engineering Services Examination, which selects officers for five out of eight railway services, will become redundant.
 - * Indian Railways will now provide the UPSC with its exact requirement of engineers, e.g. for electrical and mechanical. The UPSC, will, in turn, choose them from candidates having those as optional subjects.
- The first batch will be recruited in 2021, while the new five-member board with merged officers will be in place by mid-2021.
- The government, it’s learnt, may also make it mandatory to select non-engineers — e.g. for accounting, traffic and personnel — from a few disciplines such as economics and commerce, restricting the entry of recruits with optional subjects such as history, political science, sociology, among others. However, this will have to wait until the GoM takes a final call.

3. National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP)**Context:**

- NITI Aayog released its vision for the National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP)
- The development of NDAP will take place over a period of one year. The first version of the platform is expected to be launched in 2021.

Details

- The platform aims to democratize access to publicly available government data.
 - It will host the latest datasets from various government websites, present them coherently, and provide tools for analytics and visualization.
 - NDAP will follow a user-centric approach and will enable data access in a simple and intuitive portal tailored to the needs of a variety of stakeholders.
 - NDAP will spearhead the standardization of formats in which data is presented across sectors and will cater to a wide audience of policymakers, researchers, innovators, data scientists, journalists and citizens.
 - An inter-ministerial committee will oversee the progress of the development of platform and a group of leading experts have been inducted into an advisory group to provide technical guidance for the development of the platform.
- * The success of the endeavor is dependent on the cooperation and support of various stakeholders.

4. One government proposes, the next disposes**Context:**

- The trend of incumbent governments cancelling the projects and proposals of precedent governments.

Background:

Andhra Pradesh:

- After coming to power, the new government in Andhra Pradesh has cancelled or put on hold a number of high-profile State contracts and projects, many involving foreign partners. Most notably in the case of planning for the proposed city of Amaravati.
- In addition, the incumbent government has made other reversals, including challenging the contracts awarded towards the massive Polavaram dam project, sacking a large number of State bureaucrats, and restricting liquor licences and sales.
- There have been attempts to renegotiate existing power purchase agreements and other high-value tenders.

Maharashtra:

- The new State government of Maharashtra is considering cancelling public work commitments made by their predecessors like the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project and the Mumbai-Pune hyperloop project.

Similar instances have been noted in states which have witnessed changes in the government.

Incumbent Government's arguments:

- Reviewing commitments made by the previous government will help increase accountability and possibly decrease corruption in the State.

- The review exercise may help verify if any project has been awarded at allegedly uncompetitive pricing to favour any particular person or group.
- The review might help ascertain the viability of the project or contract in changed circumstances. For example, the attempts to renegotiate existing power purchase agreements make sense in the light of falling power prices and consumption.

Concerns:

- Favoritism: There are concerns that the major intention behind reviews is to refashion deals to benefit new government officials and their supporters.
- Genuine investors face a lot of difficulties in the wake of reviews. The subsequent delays lead to huge losses for them.
 - * Cancellations expose the State and also the genuine investors to potentially costly and damaging legal challenges.

Attracting Investors:

- The constant reviews risk alienating potential investors. The relative lack of information about how the reviews are being made, and whether stakeholders have a real voice in the outcome, will be a major concern to the investors.
- It will become extremely hard for the States to attract foreign investors in the future.
- In the case of Andhra Pradesh, potentially at risk is the reputation of what has been considered one of the most business-friendly states in India. It might come across as a less transparent, less predictable and less open economy.
- Given the increasing competitive federalism, there have been increased numbers of potential Indian business destinations which means that investors can look elsewhere if things in any State get tough.

Affecting Development:

- Without investments, it will be harder for the State to raise the revenue it needs for social programmes and economic development.
- Cancelling multiple high-profile public projects may imperil the state's ability to create new jobs and opportunities and subsequent development.
- If more and more States follow this trend, the dependability of India as a foreign direct investment destination may be negatively affected.

Impact on Indian economy:

- Recent events in two of India's largest state economies of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have chilled investor enthusiasm. In the backdrop of the slowing Indian economy, this is worrisome given that it will lead to a further slowdown of the economy.

Way forward:

- The States should create a set of governing rules and guidelines for future reviews of projects and programmes.
- Establishing procurement regimes that allow for open tendering, stakeholder engagement, and outside audits would reassure domestic and foreign investors that governments are fair and open to all for business.

Newly-elected governments certainly have the right to review potentially unjust or unwarranted deals. However, a State must be careful to provide clear evidence when making its case to trigger such reviews. The review should have the right intentions.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. Krishi Karman Awards

- The Krishi Karman Awards are given to the best performing states in food grain production.
- There are a total number of 7 rewards including 3 for the States with highest food grain production in three identified categories –large, medium and small producers; and 4 rewards one each for the highest production under rice, wheat, pulses and coarse cereals crops.
- The states are divided into the following 3 groups based on the highest production levels of food grains achieved by the States in the previous five years.

Group	Highest Production (in '000 tons)	States
Group 1	> 10000	UP, Punjab, AP, WB, Haryana, MP, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Bihar
Group 2	1000 - 10000	Odisha, TN, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, HP, J&K
Group 3	<1000	Rest of the states

* However, for rice and wheat, no grouping of states is carried out.

- The reward amount for the highest food grain producing State will be Rs 2 crores and for the individual crop categories, it is Rs 1 crore.
- The first Krishi Karman Awards were first given in 2011.

Context

- The Prime Minister distributed Krishi Karman Awards and Commendation Awards to states at a public meeting in Karnataka.

2. Mannequins to handle traffic surveillance

Context

- As an innovative measure, the Karimnagar Commissioner of Police has decided to install mannequins for traffic surveillance in various parts of the district.

Details

- The mannequins wearing traffic police gear, including uniform, reflector jacket, cap, boots, mask and sunglasses, would be installed at strategic locations to regulate traffic and prevent accidents.

- The mannequin traffic police would also keep surveillance with a secret camera and take photos of traffic violators.

Significance

- It will create fear among commuters about traffic policemen watching them and hence reduce traffic violations.
- The mannequins would be of immense help as there is a shortage of traffic policemen at unmanned junctions.

3. National Youth Festival (NYF)

What's in News?

- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and State Government of Uttar Pradesh are jointly organizing 23rd National Youth Festival (NYF) 2020.

Details

- The Government has been organizing NYF since 1995.
- The objective of NYF is to provide a platform to bring the youth of the country together in an attempt to provide them the opportunity to showcase their talents in various activities.
- It also provides an arena, by creating a mini-India, where youth interact in formal and informal settings and exchange their social and cultural uniqueness.
- The theme of the 23rd National Youth Festival 2020 is 'FIT YOUTH FIT INDIA' in pursuance of the goal of Prime Minister for New India to be a fit India.
- NYF 2020 would leverage on the knowledge and ideas that Youth of today bring to the table where they are hugely connected and integrated through online and offline communication channels than ever before.
- The NYF 2020 intends to focus on bringing the attention of the Youth towards dialogue and discussions on selected thematic interfaces so that the outcome feeds into a National Level.

4. Pariksha Pe Charcha

- This is an interaction programme of the Prime Minister with a cross-section of students and teachers from India and abroad.
- The idea behind the programme is to beat exam stress.
- The first such event was held in 2018. 2020 is the third such interaction programme.

5. Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar

- This award scheme gives awards in two categories every year:

- * Bal Shakti Puraskar (to individuals)
- * Bal Kalyan Puraskar (for institutions/individuals working for children)
- Bal Shakti Puraskar
 - * This award is given to children in the fields of innovation, social service, scholastic, sports, art and culture and bravery.
 - * It carries a medal, a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh, a certificate and a citation.
 - * It was formerly known as "National Child Award for Exceptional Achievement".
 - * It was instituted in 1996 and renamed to "Bal Shakti Puraskar" in 2018.
- Bal Kalyan Puraskar
 - * This award was instituted in 1979 as "National Child Welfare Awards".
 - * It was renamed in 2018 to "Bal Kalyan Puraskar".
 - * This is given to individuals and/or organisations working in the field of child development, child protection and child welfare.
 - * This award is given in two categories – Individual and Institution. Three awards are given in each of these two categories along with cash prizes.

How does it work?

- Any child with exceptional achievement in the fields of innovation, scholastic achievements, social service, arts & culture, sports and bravery can apply for the award.
- Also, any person who knows about a meritorious achievement by a child can recommend this child for the award.
- A high-level committee selects the winners after careful consideration of each application.
- The scheme is under the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Context:

- The President of India presented the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2020 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

6. World Braille Day

- January 4th is celebrated as World Braille Day in order to mark the birth anniversary of Louis Braille. The declaration to celebrate the day was given by the UN in 2018.
- Louis Braille is credited with inventing the Braille language. Braille is a tactile writing system used by people who are visually impaired.
- The World Braille Day spreads awareness about Braille script and other accessible forms of communication, as most of the public places such as hospitals fail to provide their material in Braille.

- Despite 2.2 billion people with visual impairment in the world, most of the schools do not offer classes in Braille and a lot of countries do not even recognize this as a part of their educational curriculum.
- The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities considers Braille essential for education.
- Hence, the celebration of the World Braille Day is intended to spread awareness amongst people regarding the necessity and importance of including the language at a more global level.

7. Youth Co: Lab National Innovation Challenge

Context

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) NITI Aayog and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) hosted Youth Co: Lab -national innovation challenge in Delhi

Details

- Youth Co: Lab launched in collaboration by AIM and UNDP earlier, aims at fostering technology, promoting youth leadership and social entrepreneurship in India.
- Co-created in 2017 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Citi Foundation, Youth Co: Lab aims to establish a common agenda for Asia-Pacific countries to invest in and empower youth to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Significance

- It will enable young students from all over the country and all over the world to participate in generating new ideas and coming up with innovative solutions to many of the problems faced by the world aligned with the SDGs.

8. WHO has designated 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife

- Nurses and midwives play a vital role in providing health services.
- These are the people who devote their lives to caring for mothers and children; giving life-saving immunizations and health advice; looking after older people and generally meeting everyday essential health needs.
- They are often, the first and only point of care in their communities.
- The world needs 9 million more nurses and midwives if it is to achieve universal health coverage by 2030.
- So to promote the profession and this cause, the World Health Assembly of the WHO has designated 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.

9. Use of chemicals to ripen fruits amounts to poisoning consumers

What's in News?

The Delhi High Court has observed that the use of pesticides and chemicals to ripen fruits amounts to poisoning the consumer while noting that invoking penal provisions against the culprits would have a deterrent effect.

- The Bench was hearing a petition initiated by the court to monitor use of pesticides on fruits and vegetables.
- Chemicals, such as calcium carbide, are used to ripen fruits, like mangoes. It is hard to detect the presence of the chemical as its presence can only be tested in laboratories with the help of proper equipment and additional chemicals.

Concern:

A report by amicus curiae had stated that due to excessive usage of pesticides in fruits and vegetables, various countries have banned the import of Indian vegetables and fruits and many more are under scrutiny.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency is an agency of the Government of India, under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
2. It was created under the provisions of the National Renewable Energy Act.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

2. During the Third Anglo-Maratha War, the British East India Company fought against a band of Muslim mercenaries known as –

- A. Pindaris
- B. Mappilas
- C. Santhals
- D. Bhills

3. Who appoints the State Election Commissioner, for overseeing elections to the local bodies?

- A. President
- B. Ministry of Home Affairs
- C. Governor
- D. Chief Minister

4. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to The global code of practice on the International recruitment of health personnel?

1. It was adopted by the WHO's 63rd World Health Assembly in 2010.
2. It is the main international policy framework for addressing shortages and maldistribution of healthcare professionals.

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. A cryogenic rocket engine uses a cryogenic fuel and/or oxidizer which is liquefied and stored at extremely low temperatures.

2. The upper stage of GSLV MK-III launch vehicle is powered by Cryogenic Engine (CE)-20.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

6. Consider the following statements about Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB):

1. CPCB is a statutory organization under the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
2. It was established under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both
- D. None

7. Under what circumstances does an elected member be disqualified under the Anti-Defection law?

1. If an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
2. If the elected member votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party.
3. If a nominated member joins a political party after 6 months of nomination.

Options:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

8. Which of the following is/are correctly matched?

1. Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve- West Bengal
2. Satkosia Tiger Reserve – Odisha
3. Rajaji National Park- Uttarakhand
4. Buxa Tiger Reserve- Maharashtra

Options:

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1 and 4 only

9. Arrange the following from west to east:

1. Kanchenjunga
2. Annapurna
3. Dhaulagiri
4. Mt Everest

Options:

- A. 4-1-2-3
- B. 4-1-3-2
- C. 3-2-4-1
- D. 4-3-2-1

10. Which of the following states have been accorded special provisions under Article 371 of the Indian Constitution:

1. Sikkim
2. Karnataka
3. Tripura
4. Maharashtra
5. Mizoram
6. Nagaland

Options:

- A. 1, 3, 5 and 6
- B. 1, 5 and 6
- C. 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6
- D. 1, 2, 4 and 6

11. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha nominates the members of the privileges committee of Rajya Sabha.
2. The Privileges Committee of Rajya Sabha consists of ten members.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

12. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The six zonal councils in India have been created under the States Re-Organization Act, 1956.
2. The councils function under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs' Inter-State Council Secretariat.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

13. Arrange the following ports from north to south:

1. Krishnapatnam port
2. Vishakapatnam port
3. New Mangalore port
4. Mormugao port
5. Ennore port

Options:

- A. 2, 4, 1, 5, 3
- B. 2, 1, 4, 3, 5
- C. 2, 4, 1, 3, 5
- D. 1, 2, 4, 3, 5

14. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Eat Right India Movement is an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
2. It involves providing fortified food to infants and lactating mothers at Anganwadi Centres.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

15. The term Miyawaki is associated with which of the following?

- A. Traditional dance of Tibet
- B. Afforestation method
- C. A musical instrument from Arunachal Pradesh
- D. Traditional silk weaving technique

16. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana provides an insurance cover of Rs.5 lakh per individual.
2. The PMJAY beneficiaries get an e-card that can be used to avail services at any hospital, public or private, anywhere in the country.
3. The eligibility for the PMJAY is based on the SECC 2011 data.

Options:

- A. 1, 2 and 3
- B. 1 and 3
- C. 2 and 3
- D. 3 only

17. Arrange the following cities from North to South:

1. Sydney
2. Perth
3. Brisbane
4. Melbourne
5. Canberra

Options:

- A. 3, 2, 1, 5, 4
- B. 3, 1, 2, 5, 4
- C. 2, 3, 1, 4, 5
- D. 2, 3, 4, 1, 5

18. India is a member of which of the following??

1. Belt and Road Initiative
2. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
3. The Indo-Pacific Business Forum
4. The Blue Dot Network
5. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

Options:

- A. 3, 4 and 5
- B. 2, 3 and 5
- C. 4 only
- D. None of the above

19. "The Blue Dot Network" is associated with:

- A. The international protocol for internet connectivity
- B. The network of countries involved in the blue flag certification of their beaches
- C. Infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific region
- D. A group of countries working towards enhancing port infrastructure

20. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Bibi Ka Maqbara was commissioned by Mughal Emperor Jahangir.
2. It is located in Aurangabad, Maharashtra.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

21. The term *Drosophila* is associated with which of the following?

- A. Bacteria
- B. Fungi
- C. Flies
- D. Fish

22. Consider the following statements with respect to River Beas:

1. It is one of the major tributaries of River Indus.
2. The river originates near the Rohtang Pass, on the southern end of the Pir Panjal Range.
3. The river lies entirely within the Indian Territory.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

23. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Council of Agricultural Research:

1. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education.
2. The Council is the apex body for coordinating, guiding and managing research and education in agriculture including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences in India.
3. The Union Minister of Agriculture is the President of ICAR.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 2 and 3 only

24. Consider the following statements:

1. Lysosomal Storage Diseases (LSD) are a group of rare inherited metabolic disorders.
2. LSD occurs due to mutations in genes.
3. Gaucher's Disease is a type of LSD.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 3 only

25. Consider the following statements with respect to Prompt Corrective Action (PCA):

1. PCA is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the World Bank.
2. The PCA framework deems banks as risky if they slip below certain norms on three parameters namely capital ratios, asset quality and profitability.

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

26. Consider the following statements with respect to the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA):

1. PFRDA is a statutory body having executive, legislative and judicial powers.
2. PFRDA is responsible for regulating and administering both the National Pension System (NPS) and the Atal Pension Yojana (APY).
3. The President of India is the guardian of PFRDA.

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

27. Consider the following statements with respect to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC):

1. The MCC is a set of guidelines issued by the Government of India to regulate political parties and candidates prior to elections to ensure free and fair elections.
2. The MCC is operational from the date that the election schedule is announced until the date that results are announced.
3. The MCC is not enforceable by law.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 2 and 3 only

28. Which among the following is the most toxic Indian Snake?

- A. Sind Krait
- B. Spectacled cobra

- C. Russell's viper
- D. Saw-scaled viper

29. "The final value of the goods and services produced within the geographic boundaries of a country during a specified period of time" is termed as:

- A. Net National Product
- B. Gross Domestic Product
- C. Gross National Product
- D. Purchasing Power Parity

30. Consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court has the ability to review any judgment declared by it.
2. Review Petition, Curative Petition and Presidential Pardon are the resources available to those seeking relief from an Order of the Supreme Court.
3. Curative Petition is the last judicial resort available for redressal of grievances in court.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

31. Consider the following statements with respect to the European Council (EUCO):

1. EUCO is a collective body that defines the European Union's overall political direction and priorities.
2. It comprises the heads of state or government of the EU member states, along with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.
3. The European Council has legislative powers.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

32. Consider the following statements with respect to the National Green Tribunal (NGT):

1. It is a Constitutional Body that draws inspiration from India's constitutional provision of Article 21.
2. It has Original Jurisdiction on matters of substantial question relating to environment and damage to the environment due to specific activity.

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

33. Consider the following statements:

1. National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) is under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. NCRB publishes the 'Crime in India' report.
3. NCRB is entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring, coordinating and implementing the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 3 only

34. Which among the following is/are not Stringed instruments?

1. Ghatam
2. Khol
3. Kamaicha

Options:

- A. 1, 2 and 3
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 3 only

35. "Brickfielder" in Geography refers to:

- A. Showers that help crops grow during spring.
- B. Grasslands in Mid Africa.
- C. Hot, dry and dusty winds in Southern Australia.
- D. A rift valley lake.

36. Which of the following are offences against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes?

1. Compelling a member of the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe to dispose or carry human or animal carcasses, or to dig graves.
2. Garlanding with footwear or parading naked or semi-naked, a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe.
3. Corrupting the water of any spring, reservoir or any other source ordinarily used by members of the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes.

4. Destroying, damaging or defiling any object generally known to be held sacred or in high esteem by members of the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes.

Options:

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 1, 2 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2, 3 and 4
- D. 2, 3 and 4 only

37. With reference to Vembanad Lake, consider the following statements:

1. It is the largest lake in Tamil Nadu.
2. The Vembanad Wetland system is included in the list of wetlands of international importance, as defined by the Ramsar Convention.

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

38. The red line campaign is associated with:

- A. Creating awareness on HIV-AIDS among the masses.
- B. Part of government's Anti-Microbial resistance awareness campaign
- C. Creating awareness about the critically endangered species in India
- D. Campaign against sexual harassment at workplace.

39. The term Candida auris is associated with:

- A. Disease causing fungi
- B. Disease causing virus
- C. Bacteria used in production of biofuels
- D. Bacteria used extensively for production of antibiotics

40. The Anamalai tiger reserve is situated in which of the following states:

- A. Kerala
- B. Tamil Nadu
- C. Karnataka
- D. Telangana

41. Which of the following is wrongly matched?

- A. Bihu: Assam
- B. Lavani: Maharashtra
- C. Dollu Kunitha: Karnataka
- D. Pulikali: Tamil Nadu

42. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. Petroleum And Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) comes under the Ministry of petroleum and natural gas.
2. The Headquarters of PESO is in New Delhi.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

43. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Kisan Credit Card scheme was prepared by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.
2. Participating institutions under this scheme include only the commercial banks.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

44. Arrange the following cities from east to west:

1. Muscat
2. Tehran
3. Sanaa
4. Kuwait city
5. Tripoli

Options:

- A. 1, 2, 4, 3, 5
- B. 4, 2, 1, 5, 3
- C. 2, 1, 4, 3, 5
- D. 2, 4, 1, 3, 5

45. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Vembanad Lake is included in the list of wetlands of international importance, as defined by the Ramsar Convention.
2. The government of India has identified the Vembanad wetland under the National Wetlands Conservation Programme.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

46. Consider the following statements with respect to Volcano Taal:

1. It is one of the world's smallest active volcanoes.
2. It lies along the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

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 Input Tax Credit (ITC):

1. ITC is the tax that a business pays on a purchase that can be used to reduce the tax liability when it makes a sale.
2. ITC is not available for goods or services exclusively used for personal use.
3. Only a business under composition scheme can avail ITC.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

48. Consider the following statements with respect to Raisina Dialogue:

1. The Raisina Dialogue is a multilateral conference held bi-annually in India.
2. The conference is hosted by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF).

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

49. Consumer Price Index (CPI) is released by:

- A. Reserve Bank of India
- B. Central Statistics Office, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation
- C. Office of the Economic Advisor, Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- D. Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), Department of Agriculture and Co-operation

50. The Supreme Court has original jurisdiction in:

1. Disputes between the Centre and State(s).
2. Matters regarding the enforcement of Fundamental Rights.
3. Any dispute between the Indian Government and one or more States on one side and one or more States on the other side.
4. Disputes between States.

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

51. Which of the following is/are Critically Vulnerable Coastal Areas as per the CRZ Regulations?

1. Gulf of Khambat
2. Karwar
3. Bhaitarkanika

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

52. Consider the following statements with respect to Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):

1. MPC is a committee constituted by the Government of India for fixing the benchmark policy interest rate to restrain inflation within the particular target level.
2. The MPC consists of six members.
3. The MPC is required to meet at least four times in a year.

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

53. Which of the following is the last judicial resort available for redressal of grievances in the court?

- A. Curative petition
- B. Review Petition
- C. Presidential Pardon
- D. None of the above

54. Consider the following statements with respect to Multiple myeloma:

1. It is a cancer that forms in a type of white blood cell called a plasma cell.
2. It causes cancer cells to accumulate in the bone marrow.

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

55. Consider the following statements with respect to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

1. SCO is a Eurasian Economic, Political and Security organization.
2. It has eight member nations.
3. India, Pakistan and Iran are among the permanent members of SCO.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1 and 2 only

56. Consider the following statements:

1. Bru tribals inhabit parts of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
2. They are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)..

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

57. Consider the following statements with respect to Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS):

1. RATS was established at the Astana Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
2. RATS is a permanent organ of the SCO.
3. It is engaged in furthering cooperation between member countries on concerns of terrorism, security, drug trafficking and cyber warfare.

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

58. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) has been established in pursuance of Article 323A of the Indian Constitution.
2. The members of the defence forces, officers, staff of the Supreme Court and the secretarial staff of the Parliament are not covered under the jurisdiction of CAT.
3. The appeal against the orders of CAT could be made only in Supreme Court.

Options:

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 2 and 3
- C. 1 and 3
- D. 1, 2 and 3

59. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Constitutional Amendments with respect to federal provisions will need the ratification by at least 50 per cent of the state assemblies.
2. The states are required to ratify the bill within 6 months of passage by the parliament, failing which the bill lapses.

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 GSAT-30 is a communication satellite of India which was placed in the geostationary orbit by the Ariane launch vehicle.
2. The GSLV-MkIII launch vehicle has a capacity of placing 4 tonne class satellites of the GSAT series into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbits.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

61. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. The "Blue Dot Network" (BDN) encourages private investment in infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region by offering public loans to viable infrastructural projects.
2. Currently, the U.S., Japan, Australia and India are its members.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

62. The Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement of India is associated with which of the following?

- A. The European Union
- B. South Korea
- C. United States of America
- D. Japan

63. Which of the following statements are correct?

1. Share of natural gas in India's energy basket is higher compared to the global average.
2. India is more dependent on LNG imports as compared to crude oil imports.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

64. The term "The Blob" is associated with which of the following

- A. Cold current off the coast of Peru
- B. Marine Heat waves in northeast Pacific
- C. Heat wave in North America
- D. Depression off the coast of South America

65. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to the Sun temple at Konark?

1. It is attributed to King Narasimhadeva I of the Eastern Ganga dynasty.
2. It is a classic illustration of the Kalinga Architecture.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only

- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

66. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013?

1. The constitution of an Internal Complaints Committee is a statutory requirement under the act for all establishments.
2. The Internal Complaints Committee is always headed by a female member.
3. The Internal Complaints Committee consists of only internally selected members.

Option:

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 2 and 3
- C. 2 only
- D. 1 only

67. The term euryhaline implies

- A. Can tolerate only low salinity environments
- B. Needs high salinity environments
- C. Can tolerate a wide range of salinity
- D. Salinity observed at high depths of the oceans

68. The successfully tested K-4 is

- A. Submarine-launched ballistic missile
- B. Supersonic cruise missile
- C. Air to air beyond visual range missile
- D. Anti-tank missile

69. The recently released MANI app has been developed by

- A. Ministry of Social justice and Empowerment
- B. Ministry of Finance
- C. National Payments council of India
- D. Reserve Bank of India

70. Consider the following statements with respect to the UDAN Scheme:

1. It is a part of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP).
2. The Scheme is funded jointly by the Centre and the State governments.
3. The primary objective of the Scheme is to facilitate regional air connectivity.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

71. World Economic Outlook report is published by:

- A. International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- B. World Trade Organisation (WTO)
- C. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- D. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

72. Consider the following statements with respect to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

1. It was founded on the initiative of G 20.
2. It is responsible for setting global standards on anti-money laundering (AML) and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT).
3. India is a full-time member of FATF.

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

73. Consider the following statements with respect to BrahMos:

1. It is a long-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile.
2. It can be launched from submarine, ships, aircraft, or land.
3. It is the fastest supersonic cruise missile in the world..

Which among the above statements is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 3 only

74. Consider the following statements with respect to Coronaviruses:

1. Coronavirus has regularly arranged protrusions on its surface.
2. SARS Coronavirus and MERS Coronavirus, both cause severe respiratory diseases.
3. All Coronaviruses are zoonotic.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only

- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

75. Consider the following statements:

1. Citizenship is listed in the Union List and is under the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament.
2. "Deprivation" is the compulsory termination of the Citizenship of India obtained by Registration or Naturalisation.
3. A person registered as Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cannot acquire the citizenship of India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

76. India and Nepal have territorial disputes over which of the following region/s?

1. Kalapani
2. Susta
3. Aksai Chin

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. None of the above

77. Consider the following statements:

1. Anti-defection law was inserted via the 42nd Amendment Act and is contained in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution.
2. The decision on disqualification on grounds of defection is referred to the Chairman or the Speaker of the House of the Parliament, and his/her decision is final.
3. Anti-defection law is not applicable to an independent member who joins a political party within 6 months of his/her election.

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

78. Consider the following statements:

1. The Chief Election Commissioner and the other Election Commissioners have equal powers to take all decisions relating to the elections.
2. The Chief Election Commissioner is appointed by the President; however, he cannot be removed from office by the President.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

79. "Tallinn Manual" relates to:

- A. Artificial Intelligence
- B. Zoonotic Diseases
- C. Outer space treaty
- D. Cyber conflicts and cyber-warfare

80. Consider the following statements with respect to the World Health Organization (WHO):

1. WHO is a member of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG).
2. The annual publication of the WHO – World Health Report (WHR) began with the inception of the organisation in 1948.
3. World Health Assembly is the forum through which the WHO is governed by its member states.

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

81. Consider the following statements with respect to Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI):

1. CBI comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. It is a statutory body.
3. The CBI acts as the "National Central Bureau" of Interpol in India.

Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 3 only

82. Which of the following is/are the publication/s of Transparency International?

1. Corruption Perceptions Index
2. Democracy Index
3. Global Corruption Barometer

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1 and 3 only

83. Consider the following statements with respect to International Court of Justice (ICJ):

1. It has the jurisdiction to deal with applications only from states, non-governmental organizations, corporations or any other private entity but not individuals.
2. It can Suo Motto take up disputes between states.
3. Judgments delivered by the Court are binding upon the parties concerned.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 2 only
- D. 3 only

84. "Ophichthus kailashchandrai" is:

- A. A new snake eel species discovered in Odisha
- B. A new species of ginger found in the Western Ghats
- C. A new species of snake discovered in the Western Ghats
- D. None of the above

85. Which of the following countries have been declared Measles free by the World Health Organisation (WHO)?

1. Maldives
2. Sri Lanka
3. Brazil
4. Greece

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

86. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the National Security Act?

1. It is applicable to the citizens of India only.
2. The maximum period for which any person may be detained shall be six months from the date of detention.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

87. Which of the following is not covered under the Integrated Child Development Scheme?

- A. Immunization
- B. Formal pre-school education
- C. Supplementary nutrition
- D. Health check-up

88. Which of the following countries is the largest sugar producer in the world?

- A. Brazil
- B. India
- C. United States of America
- D. China

89. Arrange the following in increasing order of their contribution to the tax revenues of the government.

1. Corporation tax
2. Income tax
3. Goods and Services Tax
4. Custom duties.

Options:

- A. 4,2,3,1
- B. 4,3,2,1
- C. 3,4,1,2
- D. 4,2,1,3

90. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Dhanush is a self-propelled artillery gun with the Indian Army.
2. The Dhanush howitzer has been designed and developed by DRDO.

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. Rani ki Vav is situated in the state of Rajasthan.
2. It is listed as one of UNESCO's World Heritage sites.
3. Rani Ki Vav was constructed during the rule of the Chalukya dynasty.

Options:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

92. Which of the following is wrongly matched?

- A. Taal Volcano: Philippines
- B. Mount Merapi: Indonesia
- C. Kilauea: Malaysia
- D. Mount Erbus: Antarctica

93. Which of the following statements is/are wrong?

1. Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
2. CARA monitors and regulates both in-country and inter-country adoptions.

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. The Lily Thomas v. Union of India case of 2013 is associated with:

- A. The Supreme Court (SC) directing the political parties to publicize pending criminal cases faced by their candidates.
- B. SC asking the Centre to appoint special courts to exclusively try cases against politicians.
- C. The removal of the statutory protection offered to convicted legislators from immediate disqualification.
- D. SC directing the completion of trials involving elected representatives within a year.

95. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. India is the largest cotton producer in the world.
2. India is the largest cotton exporter in the world.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

96. India is not a signatory of which of the following conventions?

- A. World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.
- B. The International Criminal Court's Rome statute.
- C. Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention of the International Labour Organization
- D. Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO.

97. Gatka, a form of martial art is associated with which of the following state?

- A. Haryana
- B. Punjab
- C. Himachal Pradesh
- D. Uttar Pradesh

98. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Kuno National Park?

1. It is in Madhya Pradesh.
2. It is part of the Kathiawar-Gir dry deciduous forests ecoregion.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

99. Which of the following pairs of wetland and state is wrongly matched?

- A. Harike Wetlands: Punjab
- B. Pong Dam lake: Himachal Pradesh
- C. Nandur Madhameshwar: Maharashtra
- D. Sarsai Nawar: Madhya Pradesh

100. Arrange the following cities from north to south:

1. Beirut
2. Tel Aviv
3. Damascus
4. Jerusalem

Options:

- A. 1, 3, 2, 4
- B. 1, 2, 3, 4
- C. 3, 1, 2, 4
- D. 3, 1, 4, 2

101. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Plastic Waste Management Rules?

1. It stipulates a minimum thickness of 50 microns for plastic sheets.
2. The Rules lay down the phasing out of all Multilayered Plastics.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

102. "Yellow Rust Disease" is:

- A. A fungal disease that stops photosynthetic activity.
- B. A viral disease that develops due to the lack of photosynthetic activity.
- C. A bacterial disease particularly affecting the root.
- D. None of the above

103. Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

1. It is a tribal carnival held in the state of Chattisgarh.
2. Gusadi Dance performance by the Gond tribe is a major attraction of the event.
3. The event includes a ceremony called 'bheting', which incorporates new brides into the clan.

Options:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

104. Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

1. The MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee for two hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of rural households at a statutory minimum wage.
2. The Central Government bears the 100 percent wage cost of unskilled manual labour, under the scheme.
3. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

Options:

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

105. Consider the following statements with respect to the Gaza Strip:

1. It is a territory on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.
2. It borders Egypt on the South-West and Israel on the East and North.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

106. Which of the following statement/s about calcium carbide is/are correct?

1. It is used as a deoxidizer during the manufacture of steel.
2. It is used as a ripening agent.
3. It is used in the removal of sulfur from iron.

Options:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

107. Madhav National Park recently seen in news is in which state?

- A. Madhya Pradesh
- B. Rajasthan
- C. Uttarakhand
- D. Maharashtra

108. Which of the given pair/s is/are correctly matched?

1. Vishnuprayag Hydro-electric project: River Alaknanda
2. Maneri Bhali Hydro-electric project: River Yamuna
3. Pashulok Hydro-electric project: River Bhagirathi

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 2 and 3

109. The World Health Organization (WHO) has in the past, declared Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) for the outbreak/s of which of the following diseases?

- 1. Polio
- 2. Ebola
- 3. H1N1 Swine Flu

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

ANSWER KEYS

1	D
2	A
3	C
4	C
5	C
6	B
7	D
8	B
9	C
10	C
11	C
12	B
13	A
14	D
15	B
16	D
17	A
18	D
19	C
20	B

21	C
22	D
23	C
24	A
25	A
26	B
27	A
28	A
29	B
30	D
31	B
32	B
33	C
34	C
35	C
36	C
37	A
38	B
39	A
40	B

41	D
42	D
43	A
44	A
45	C
46	D
47	A
48	B
49	B
50	D
51	D
52	B
53	A
54	C
55	B
56	C
57	C
58	A
59	A
60	C

61	D
62	A
63	D
64	B
65	C
66	C
67	C
68	A
69	D
70	D
71	A
72	C
73	C
74	C
75	A
76	B
77	C
78	C
79	D
80	B

81	C
82	D
83	A
84	A
85	B
86	D
87	B
88	B
89	A
90	D
91	B
92	C
93	A
94	C
95	A
96	B
97	B
98	C
99	D
100	A

101	A
102	A
103	B
104	B
105	D
106	D
107	A
108	A
109	C

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. The National Infrastructure Pipeline will help boost investment in the infrastructure sector as well as help revive the flagging economy. Critically examine the statement. (250 words; 15 marks)
2. Discuss the salient features of the SDG Index that has been developed by NITI Aayog. Comment on the observations made by the 2019 SDG index with respect to regional variances. (250 words; 15 marks)
3. In global politics, the hegemony of a single power is temporary. Explain the statement with reference to the USA? (250 words, 15 marks)
4. If India is to have a real chance to minimise the housing development divide, it requires an integrated housing development strategy. Discuss. (150 words, 10 marks)
5. The recent U.S. assassination of Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, in an airstrike has serious consequences not just for the West Asian region but also for India. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
6. The recent move of the Kerala Assembly to pass a resolution calling upon the Centre to repeal the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 has found both supporters and detractors. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
7. India, facing the double burden of malnutrition, has taken several steps to address the same. Despite the progress made, there are still considerable challenges facing India in the fight against malnutrition. Comment. Also suggest suitable steps that need to be incorporated in India's efforts. (15 marks, 250 words)
8. In the backdrop of the recent U.S. moves making the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body dysfunctional, discuss the significance of the WTO's Appellate body and the concerns associated with its current state of affairs. (10 marks, 150 words)
9. There has been a deterioration of the relationship between the U.S. and China in recent times which spells serious concerns for the world. Comment. Discuss what the specific concerns to India are and suggest suitable steps to be taken by India to counter these concerns. (15 marks, 250 words)
10. The Citizenship Amendment Act could have landed India in an unenviable diplomatic spot and have long-term implications for India's foreign policy. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
11. With respect to the Yuelu Proclamation, discuss the significance of protecting linguistic diversity. Discuss the constitutional provisions available in the Indian Constitution to conserve the linguistic diversity of India. (15 marks, 250 words)
12. Despite the rapid and impressive growth in the higher education system in India, its performance has been below par. Comment. What is the importance of a vibrant higher education system for India? (10 marks, 150 words)
13. The creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has been a long-pending demand and forms part of higher-level military reforms. However, there are concerns regarding the current provisions and powers of the CDS. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)
14. India and Australia have many converging interests and presently there is an opportunity to translate these converging interests and coalescing of values into a formidable partnership. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
15. What is Green Politics? Discuss whether the world is witnessing the dearth of Green Politics due to increasing industrialisation and urbanisation? (15 Marks, 250 Words).
16. Discuss the significance of the Centre's decision to liberalise norms for entry into coal mining and the relaxation of regulations on mining. (10 Marks, 150 Words).
17. Financial inclusion without financial literacy has no meaning. With reference to this statement, explain the role of Technology in Financial Inclusion. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
18. Discuss how the Right to Internet access as a fundamental right strikes a balance between liberty and security. (10 Marks, 150 Words).

19. Define Indian Ocean Dipole and explain how it is one of the causes of the raging bushfires in Australia. Comment on the arguments being made by Scientists and researchers that the unfolding fire disaster in Australia can be attributed to climate change. (10 marks, 150 words)
20. In the backdrop of a recent study pointing to the better carbon capture by species rich forests discuss the other benefits of a species rich forest. Comment on how the recent observations necessitate the need to transform the reforestation/afforestation policies in India. (15 marks, 250 words)
21. The often conflicting relationship between the right to freedom of religion and the rights of individuals to dignity and equality has been a constant source of litigation of late. Comment. Discuss the Supreme Court's stand on such issues. (15 marks, 250 words)
22. In the backdrop of the recent demolition of apartments in Kochi, discuss the concerns regarding violations of environmental laws and the significance of the Supreme Court directions in the case. (10 marks, 150 words)
23. In the backdrop of the killing of General Soleimani in a drone strike by the U.S., discuss the concerns being raised that the U.S. actions and its subsequent justification of self-defence are exploiting the loopholes in the UN charter. Suggest suitable safeguards in this regard. (10 marks, 150 words)
24. Given the risks posed by deterioration of ties between Iran and the U.S. to the region and the world at large, suggest necessary steps to de-escalate the tensions. Discuss India's role in this regard. (10 marks, 150 words)
25. Early childhood education has the potential to be the "greatest and most powerful equaliser". In the backdrop of the recently released Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report, analyse the statement and suggest measures to improve India's pre-primary education system. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
26. Is an empowered office of a directly elected mayor desirable for Indian cities? What are the associated challenges? Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
27. Recent laws passed with respect to mob lynching in some states provide a good start yet fall short in adhering to the criteria laid down by the Supreme Court. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
28. Discuss the challenges associated with addressing the issue of Bru refugees to be settled in Tripura. What are the features of the tripartite agreement signed in this regard? (10 Marks, 150 Words).
29. The phase one trade deal between the U.S. and China though is only a temporary truce that leaves the key issues of the trade dispute still unresolved, is still a significant step forward. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
30. In the backdrop of large number of infant deaths being reported from Kota and other places in Rajasthan discuss the major underlying causes and also the associated concerns. Suggest suitable measures to address the challenge. (15 marks, 150 words)
31. Stagflation challenges the conventional economic view that inflation helps an economy operate at full capacity. Comment. Discuss the concerns associated with Stagflation in an economy. (10 marks, 150 words)
32. In a notable shift from the British-era focus on high-value timber, the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department's move to focus on threatened indigenous tree species, holds immense significance in the present context. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
33. Despite the 'Make in India' initiative being a well-intended policy, it suffers from major shortcomings. Comment. Evaluate the effectiveness of the 'Make in India' initiative. (15 marks, 250 words)
34. In the backdrop of the signing of the quadripartite agreement in New Delhi to solve the Issue of the Brus, discuss both the significance and also the associated concerns with the agreement. (10 marks, 150 words)
35. Given the significance of data in the modern networked economy and concerns regarding the current official approach to data collection and processing, there is the need for a complete overhaul of the system. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)
36. Given Brazil's impressive performance in increasing health coverage, India and Brazil can explore cooperation and strategic partnership in healthcare. Comment. Discuss the steps to be taken in India to ensure Universal health coverage. (15 marks, 250 words)

37. Given the potential benefits of a trilateral Co-operation between India, China and Pakistan not just for the members of the grouping but also for the region and the world at large, there is a need to explore such an arrangement. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
38. The right to protest is a fundamental political right basic to a democratic society like India. Comment. Discuss the provisions regarding the right to protest peacefully enshrined in the Indian Constitution. (10 marks, 150 words)
39. Indian cinema is one of the strongest global cultural ambassadors of a New India. How can the Indian government explore movies as an instrument of soft power? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
40. Is the Supreme Court justified in asking the Parliament to cut down powers of the Speakers? How will this impact the functioning of India's legislatures? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
41. With inconsistencies on the Economic and Political front, do you think BRICS is still a relevant bloc? Justify your Opinion. (150 words, 10 marks)
42. The persistent slowdown in the economy will require big-ticket reforms from the Government especially on the demand side. Suggest measures to spur economic growth. (250 words, 15 marks)
43. Given the current inflation trends, the monetary policy has its own limitations in helping boost India's slowing growth. The need of the hour is more structural reforms and fiscal measures. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
44. The NITI Aayog's draft policy to revamp the government's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in the urban areas is a welcome relief, considering the distinctive characteristics of urban areas and the corresponding health needs. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
45. The philosophy and teachings of Basaveswara, a seminal figure of the Bhakti movement, not only held relevance during the 12th century but are also relevant even today. Analyze. (10 marks, 150 words)
46. The development of the anti-satellite (A-SAT) missile capability holds immense significance for India. Comment. Also discuss the associated concerns with the Mission Shakti. (10 marks, 150 words)
47. Discuss the advantages offered by the use of Genetically Modified (GM) pest-resistant Bt. cotton hybrids in India and also the concerns associated with it. (15 marks, 250 words)
48. Discuss the underlying reasons for the increased criminalization of Indian politics and the associated concerns. Comment on the landmark Supreme Court judgments in addressing the issue of criminalization of politics and their effectiveness. (15 marks, 250 words)
49. In the backdrop of the renewed efforts by the government to disinvest its share in Air India, discuss the significance of disinvestment as a policy measure and the associated concerns. (10 marks, 150 words)
50. The Supreme Court decision to allow the introduction of cheetahs into Indian forests is a significant step forward. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
51. India needs to redouble its efforts to improve science and research and development in the country. Discuss. Also suggest suitable measures. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
52. Discuss how Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has transformed the rural economy and the employment scenario. Evaluate the successes and failures of the scheme. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
53. The higher judiciary must be the guardian of citizens' constitutional rights when there is an onslaught on liberty and freedom of speech. Illustrate with relevant case laws the difference between advocacy and incitement. (15 marks, 250 words)
54. Explain in detail how the coronavirus impacts the Indian Pharma Industry and the economy. What steps should be taken by the Government to reduce human losses? (10 marks, 150 words)
55. Discuss the transformation of the Asian economies in the past decade and comment how this has helped them in becoming larger than the rest. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
56. Critically analyse the significant gaps in Indian federalism. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Candidate Details:

- Name: Saumya Sharma
- Rank: 9 (CSE 2017)
- Hometown: Delhi
- Education: Graduated in B.A. LL.B. (Hons.), from National Law University, Delhi in June 2017.
- Work Experience: No previous experience as a permanent employee. Cleared the exam in the first attempt. Internships under Hon'ble Justice Bhat of the Delhi High Court, PRS Legislative Research and Human Rights Law Network.
- Hobbies: Travelling, Reading, Photography, Map reading.
- Optional subject: Law

Interview Panel Chairperson Details:

- Interview panel chairperson: Shri. Arvind Saxena.
- Arvind Saxena is an Indian civil servant and is the current chairman of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).
- Arvind Saxena earned his bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Delhi College of Engineering, Delhi, before pursuing a master's degree in systems management from the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi.
- A 1978-batch officer, he served in the Indian Postal Service for 10 years.
- In 1988, Saxena left the Postal Service to join the Research and Analysis Wing, where he specialized in the study of strategic developments in the neighbouring countries including Nepal, China, and Pakistan.
- Arvind Saxena has had the opportunity to travel extensively in India and abroad and has had the opportunity to interact and establish productive relations with the senior-most echelons of leadership in various countries covering areas of local politics, intelligence, military, international relations, terrorism, finance, and commerce.
- He took over as Special Secretary in-charge of the Aviation Research Centre (ARC) in 2014, where he strengthened working ties with similar agencies of other countries and interacted closely in India with the Chiefs of the three Defence Services and Heads of Central Armed Police Forces.
- In May 2015, he joined the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) as its member and was appointed its acting chairman in June 2018. In November 2018, he was appointed the full-time chairman.

Interview Questions:

- Interview duration: 35 minutes
- Questions were mainly asked from the Detailed Application Form (DAF) and Current Affairs.

Graduation and optional based questions:

- Questions based on the Criminal Law of India.
- Have the Environmental laws of India been effective in ensuring environmental conservation?
- Can you elaborate on the Constitutional and legislative framework regarding water in India?

Current affairs based questions:

- How will India-U.S. relations be affected by the election of Mr. Donald Trump as the U.S. President?
- Has Demonetization served its intended purpose?

- What do you mean by Net neutrality? Why is it important?
- What do you mean by Equalization levy? Why is it necessary?
- What do you mean by wilful defaulters and how should the state deal with them?

Hobby based question:

- The question was based on the hobby of map reading as mentioned in the DAF.
- If one travels from Delhi to Sudan via road, what all countries will one cross?

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Hyderabad

Srishti Tower, Hitech City Rd, VIP Hills, Silicon Valley, Madhapur, Hyderabad, Telangana 500081

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