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**Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

## 1. Assembly has its rights: Kerala CM

### Context:

- A Rajya Sabha member has filed a petition with the Chairman of the House seeking to initiate **breach of privileges and contempt proceedings** against the Chief Minister of Kerala after the Kerala Assembly passed a resolution against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.
- In response to this petition, Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan has said that the Assembly has its own rights and privileges and they could not be violated.

### What is Parliamentary Privilege?

- Parliamentary privilege refers to **rights, immunities and exemptions enjoyed by Parliament as an institution and MPs in their individual capacity**, without which they cannot discharge their functions as entrusted upon them by the Constitution.
- When any of these rights and immunities are infringed, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is **punishable under the law**.
- A notice is moved in the form of a motion by any member of either House against those being held guilty of breach of privilege.

### What are the Rules governing Privilege?

- The Constitution (**Article 105**) mentions two privileges i.e. **freedom of speech in Parliament** and **right of publication of its proceedings**.
- Rule No 222 in Chapter 20 of the Lok Sabha Rule Book and correspondingly Rule 187 in Chapter 16 of the Rajya Sabha rulebook govern privilege.
- A member may, with the consent of the Speaker or the Chairperson, raise a question involving a breach of privilege, either of a member or of the House.
- The rules mandate that any notice should be relating to an incident of recent occurrence and should need the intervention of the House.

### What is the Privileges Committee?

- In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker nominates a committee of privileges consisting of 15 members as per respective party strengths.
- A report is then presented to the House for its consideration.
- The Speaker may permit a half-hour debate while considering the report.
- The Speaker may then pass final orders or direct that the report be tabled before the House.
- A resolution may then be moved relating to the breach of privilege that has to be unanimously passed.
- In the Rajya Sabha, the deputy chairperson heads the committee of privileges that consists of 10 members.

### What is the Role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha Chair?

- The Speaker/RS chairperson is the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion.
- The Speaker/Chair can decide on the privilege motion himself or herself or refer it to the privileges committee of Parliament.
- If the Speaker/Chair gives consent under Rule 222, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.

## 2. No documents need to be produced for NPR: MHA

### Context:

The Union Home Ministry has clarified that no person needs to submit any documents during the house-to-house survey for updating the **National Population Register** and that information provided by individuals would be accepted and recorded.

### Key Details:

- The Ministry spokesperson's official Twitter handle has clarified the confusion surrounding NPR by stating that families need not dig out old documents for verification during the house-to-house survey that will be taken up by the enumerators for updating the National Population Register.
- The MHA has said that information provided by the individual would be just accepted and recorded accordingly.
- The MHA has issued this clarification following a report by 'The Hindu' which stated the contrary.
- In response to this clarification by the MHA, 'The Hindu' says that its earlier report was based on points given in the NPR manual of the Ministry itself.
- The **NPR manual** clearly mentions that the existing database would be updated by verifying the details of all respondents through house-to-house enumeration.
- The relevant points in the NPR Training Manual that indicate that the details collected by the enumerators will be verified are:
  - 1.6 The Government has decided to update the NPR database along with Houselisting and Housing Census phase of Census of India 2021 during April– September 2020.
  - 1.7 Updating the existing NPR database by verifying the details of all residents by conducting a house to house enumeration by the enumerator (designated Government official) and modifying/correcting the demographic data items.
  - 1.8 Collecting Aadhaar number from each resident voluntarily.
  - 1.9 Collecting mobile number, Election Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) or Voter ID Card number, Indian Passport number and Driving License number, if available with the residents.
  - 1.10 Inclusion of all new resident(s)/new household(s) found in the local area (HLB) during the fieldwork.

## Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 1. Modi calls up South Asian leaders

#### Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called up leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka and conveyed India's commitment to the principle of "**Neighbourhood First**".

#### Key Details:

- During the talks, Mr. Modi conveyed his greetings to the leaders and discussed the upcoming regional interactions.
- The talks hint at **India's pursuit of a regional arrangement without the participation of Pakistan**.
- The PM emphasised India's commitment to the '**neighbourhood first**' policy and the vision of shared peace, security, prosperity and progress for all of India's friends and partners in the region.
- India's '**neighbourhood first**' policy was adopted soon after Mr. Modi took charge in May 2014 which led to several **key regional agreements** including the **Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh**.
- During the latest telephonic interaction, Mr. Modi told his **Bangladeshi counterpart, Sheikh Hasina**, that **India's ties with Dhaka were a "priority"** for his government.

- In recent weeks, relations with the eastern neighbour were marred by negative references to the country by several leaders including Home Minister Amit Shah who justified the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 citing alleged persecution against minority religious communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Both leaders discussed the upcoming celebrations in Dhaka around the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in March 2020 where the Indian leader is expected to be a leading speaker.
- Modi also spoke to **Nepal PM K P Sharma Oli**. During 2019 both sides completed several bilateral projects including the operationalization of the **Motihari-Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline**. Both leaders agreed to inaugurate an **integrated check post of Biratnagar** through video conference.
- PM Modi discussed the visit of **Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk** to India in 2020. Mr. Modi visited Bhutan soon after being sworn in for the second stint.
- The phone calls were in keeping with India's recent attempts to create a regional grouping without Pakistan.

## 2. Protesters end siege of U.S. Embassy in Baghdad

### Context:

Thousands of Iraqi supporters of the largely **Iranian-trained Hashed al-Shaabi militants** had encircled and vandalised the US Embassy in Baghdad, following the recent **U.S. air strikes** that killed 25 Hashed al-Shaabi militants.

### Key Details:

- The Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force ordered the pro-Iraq protestors to withdraw a day after their dramatic incursion into the US Embassy compound in Baghdad.
- The protestors marched unimpeded through the checkpoints of the usually high-security **Green Zone** to the Embassy gates, where they broke through a reception area, chanting "Death to America" and spraying pro-Iran graffiti on the Embassy walls.
- Iraq's caretaker **Premier Adel Abdel Mahdi** called on the angry crowd to leave the Embassy but most spent the night in dozens of tents set up outside the perimeter wall. They burnt US flags and vandalised the area around the US Embassy.
- Later, the Hashed called on its supporters to leave the Embassy and regroup outside the Green Zone "out of respect for the state".
- **Kataeb Hezbollah**, the group targeted in the U.S. raids, was initially planning to stay at the Embassy until its demands were met. But later it decided to abide by the Hashed's order.
- Now they expect the Iraqi Parliament to revoke the legal cover provided for 5,200 U.S. troops who are deployed in Iraq.
- This incident was the latest episode in **spiralling tensions between the U.S. and Iran since Washington abandoned a landmark nuclear deal with Tehran in 2018**.
- **Many of those tensions have played out in Iraq, which has close ties with both governments.**
- **U.S. forces have faced a spate of rocket attacks** in recent months, **blaming them on pro-Iran Hashed factions**.
- One of those rocket attacks **killed a U.S. contractor, prompting the retaliatory U.S. air strikes that killed 25 fighters from Kataeb Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades)**.
- President Donald Trump and other US officials have blamed Iran for attacks on U.S. forces and the Embassy.

### U.S. deploys more troops to West Asia

- Charging that Iran was "fully responsible" for an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, President Donald Trump ordered about 750 U.S. soldiers to be deployed to West Asia as about 3,000 more prepared

- for possible deployment in the next several days.
- U.S. Marines were sent from Kuwait to reinforce the embassy compound.

### 3. Kim promises to unveil a 'new strategic weapon'

#### Context:

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has expressed deep frustration over stalled nuclear talks with the US, and has warned of unspecified “shocking” action and that his country will soon reveal a new “strategic weapon” to the world as it bolsters its nuclear deterrent in the face of U.S. pressure.

#### Key Details:

- Kim also said **North Korea was no longer obligated to maintain a self-imposed suspension on the testing of nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles**, which President Donald Trump has touted as a major diplomatic accomplishment.
- But Mr. Kim gave no clear indication that a resumption of such tests was impending and appeared to leave the door open for eventual negotiations.
- **Kim has used the diplomatic stalemate to expand North Korea’s military capabilities by intensifying tests of shorter-range weapons.**
- According to estimates, **North Korea has developed around 40-50 nuclear bombs and various delivery systems, including solid-fuel missiles designed to beat missile-defense systems and developmental ICBMs potentially capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.**
- North Korea has also strengthened its negotiating position, moving the diplomacy closer to an arms reduction negotiation between nuclear states rather than talks that would culminate in a unilateral surrender of the weapons which are seen as the strongest guarantee of survival by North Korea.
- **Strategic weapons usually refer to nuclear-capable delivery systems such as ICBMs**, but North Korea otherwise has been vague about what new arms it would display.
- It announced that it performed two “crucial” tests at its long-range rocket launch site that would further strengthen its nuclear deterrent.
- Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the U.S. was deeply disappointed by North Korea’s threat to resume nuclear missile tests but wants peace rather than confrontation with Pyongyang.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

#### 1. Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan-3 in mission mode, says ISRO

#### Context:

Four pilots from the Indian Air Force (IAF) will leave for Russia this month to receive training as astronauts of Gaganyaan, the first Indian crewed flight to space.

#### Background:

#### Gaganyaan:

- In 2018, **India’s first manned space mission** was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech.
- Gaganyaan will be the first Indian crewed orbital spacecraft intended to be the basis of Indian Human Space Flight Program.
- With Gaganyaan, India will become only the **4th country** after Russia, the USA and China to send

humans to space.

- The target is to launch it before the 75-year celebration of India's independence.
- Before the manned mission scheduled for **December 2021**, two unmanned tests will be carried out in December 2020 and July 2021.
- ISRO is planning to launch the manned mission in December 2021 and if there are any setbacks during development, the launch could be carried out in 2022.
- ISRO's indigenous mission will be assisted by a few other countries in selecting and training astronauts.
- According to ISRO, a budget of Rs 10,000 Cr has been set aside for setting up the required infrastructure.

### The Spacecraft:

- The spacecraft will carry **3 Indian astronauts** and it will circle the earth for around **7 days** from a distance of around **300-400 km**.
- It will be launched by India's biggest rocket **GSLV Mk 3 from Sriharikota**.
- The 7-ton spacecraft will orbit the earth at an altitude of around 400km for up to 7 days.
- ISRO has developed most of the critical technologies needed for the mission.
- Its service module will be powered by two liquid-propellant engines.
- It will have **life support and environmental control systems**.

### Crew Module:

- The crew module is a twin-walled sealed structure that recreates earth-like conditions.
- It will be equipped with **Emergency Mission Abort** and **Emergency Escape System**.
- The crew escape system is an emergency system to help the crew pull away from the launch vehicle if the mission has to be aborted. It can be done at the 1st and 2nd stage of the rocket.
- Crew escape system ensures that the crew module gets advance warning if anything goes wrong with the rocket.
- It pulls the crew module away to a safe distance and can be landed either on sea or on land with the help of parachutes.

### Development of the Project:

- Preliminary studies and technological development started in 2006 itself under the generic name 'orbital vehicle'.
- The plan was to design a simple capsule with an endurance of about a week in space, a capacity of 2-4 astronauts, and a splashdown landing after re-entry.
- ISRO is developing the Gaganyaan orbital vehicle based on its **Space Capsule Recovery Experiment (SRE)**, which was successfully launched and recovered in January 2007.
- India has already successfully developed and tested several building blocks, including **re-entry space capsule, pad abort test, safe crew ejection mechanism** in case of rocket failure, **flight suit** developed by **DRDO's Defence Bioengineering and Electromedical Laboratory** and the **powerful GSLV-Mk III launch vehicle**.
- Having met all required technological keystones, the Indian Human Spaceflight Programme was accepted and formally announced by the Prime Minister.
- A full-fledged training facility will be set up at Bengaluru for training the astronauts.

### Russian Support for Gaganyaan:

- Russia has offered Semi Cryogenic engine technology and critical components for the human space

- capsule.
- ISRO Chairman K Sivan revealed that the technology will be transferred under the 'Make in India' programme so that the engines can be made in India.
- The two countries have already signed a deal for the training program of astronauts.
- Based on an agreement between ISRO and Glavcosmos, a subsidiary of Russia's state-run space corporation Roscosmos, four selected pilots of the IAF will be trained at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonauts Centre.
- The Russian agency along with ISRO and IAF will select, test and qualify the trainees in collaboration with the state-run Institute of Medical and Biological Problems, Russia.
- India is also negotiating with Russia for the supply of space suits, crew seats and windows.
- Recently, India and Russia discussed matters related to Rocket Aerodynamic Test, Piloted Vehicle and Crew Rescue System for the Indian mission.

## On flight path

ISRO has planned 25 missions for the year 2020. Ground work for Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan-3 progressed smoothly in 2019. A status check:

<p><b>1</b> Gaganyaan, the country's maiden manned space mission, is progressing well. Four Indian Air Force personnel have been identified for the mission and their astronaut training will start from the third week of this month in Russia</p>	<p><b>2</b> Chandrayaan-3, the country's third lunar mission, has been approved. The mission, which will cost around ₹600 crore, will also try to land in the lunar south pole like Chandrayaan-2. The take-off may get postponed to next year</p>	<p><b>3</b> Communication satellite GSAT-30 is 2020's first scheduled launch</p> <p><b>4</b> In the first half of 2020, SSLV or small satellite launcher will make its debut</p> <p><b>ISRO has sought ₹14,000 crore as budget for 2020-21</b></p>
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**WHAT WENT WRONG WITH CHANDRAYAAN-2**

We are looking at all navigation guidance and control aspects. We learnt from telemetry data that the design could not take the large difference in velocity. We have learnt our lessons from the failure

**K. SIVAN**  
ISRO CHAIRMAN

### Key Details:

- ISRO Chairman K. Sivan has announced that **four IAF pilots have been shortlisted** after a series of fitness and endurance tests.
- The initial tests were conducted at the IAF's Institute of Aerospace Medicine, Bengaluru, and Russia.
- The four pilots will leave in the third week of January 2020 to be trained at the **Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Centre in Moscow**, as per an agreement signed between the respective space agencies of the two countries.
- The first of the two pre-Gaganyaan test flights with a humanoid will be launched by 2020-end along with some of the six shortlisted microgravity experiments.

For further information on Gaganyaan [watch our video](#)

### Chandrayaan - 3:

- ISRO has also quietly begun work on another soft landing mission to the moon with most of the same features of Chandrayaan-2 and almost on the back of the failure of the latter's lander on the

lunar surface.

- The launch of the nearly ₹600 crore Chandrayaan-3 is targeted for the end of 2020 or early 2021.
- It will be almost a repetition of the July 2019 Chandrayaan-2 mission in the configuration of spacecraft, the landing spot on the moon and the experiments to be conducted on the lunar surface.
- The third mission will be ISRO's bid to realise for itself the difficult technology of soft-landing on another planetary body.
- The agency is undertaking it as the landing module of the second mission crashed barely five minutes before it was to have landed on the lunar surface.
- The lander and rover are estimated to cost ₹250 crore and will go to the moon on a propulsion model. The GSLV Mark III vehicle costs around ₹350 crore.
- Another lunar mission is being discussed with **Japanese space agency JAXA** (Japan Aeronautics Exploration Agency) but its elements have not been finalised.
- Although scores of landers sent by Russia, the U.S. and the Chinese have explored the moon's surface, so far, no other agency has landed in the southern hemisphere. ISRO hopes to be still the first to do so.

### ISRO's Second Spaceport

- The Tamil Nadu government has started acquiring 2,300 acres of land in **Thoothukudi district for ISRO's second launch port**.
- Currently, satellites are launched from the Sriharikota launch centre in Andhra Pradesh.
- According to ISRO, Thoothukudi offers a **locational advantage to launch towards India's South**.
- When ready, the **new spaceport will handle mainly the small satellite launch vehicle (SSLV)** that is under development. SSLVs are meant to put a payload of up to 500 kg in space.

### Analysis of Vikram's Crash-landing:

- **Chandrayaan-2's moon lander Vikram** may have most likely crashed on the moon because the navigation control and guidance mechanism in the penultimate phase were not designed to handle the large spike in speed that developed in the last 35 minutes of its descent.
- This problem has been corrected in the new modules of Chandrayaan-3 which is due to be sent around the end of 2020.
- ISRO Chairman K. Sivan has stated that ISRO is looking at all navigation guidance and control aspects. It has learnt from telemetry data that the design could not take the large difference in velocity.
- ISRO's internal failure analysis committee has evaluated the failed landing attempt and it has denied that Chandrayaan-2 was launched without doing thorough tests.

## 2. Satcom technology deployed for learning

### Context:

The Rajasthan government has started using **satellite communication technology** in a big way to **enhance the learning outcome in educational institutions and generate awareness about social welfare schemes**, while giving priority to the **five aspirational districts** selected by **NITI Aayog** in the State.

### Key Details:

- The Science & Technology Department has taken an initiative to provide the facility of **receive only terminals (ROT) and satellite interactive terminals (SIT)** for getting the services of subject experts in the government schools and colleges and propagate various schemes in the remote areas with no internet connectivity.



- The technique would be used during the first phase in approximately 2,000 institutions coming under various departments, such as education, higher education, social welfare, minority welfare, woman and child development and tribal area development.
- The students studying English and science subjects in the government educational institutions will get services of subject experts through ROT and SIT.
- The state government is hoping that the level of English and science subjects would be increased among students of Class VI to XII in order to get better results in the board examinations of Class X and XII.
- The institutions with the shortage of teachers will especially benefit from the geostationary satellite uplinking facilities.
- Under the initiative, people going for Haj pilgrimage, who were earlier required to come to Jaipur for training, would be trained at the district level through ROT and SIT installed in the government colleges.
- The special focus of the initiative will be laid on the five aspirational districts selected by NITI Aayog – Karauli, Dholpur, Baran, Jaisalmer and Sirohi – where the satellite-related resources would be installed at old age homes and children’s homes.
- Along with this, the eight community radio stations run by the S&T Department would publicise education-related schemes in these districts.

## Category: DEFENCE

### 1. Peace on LAC can help solve border issue: Army chief

#### Context:

Gen. M.M. Naravane has taken over as the Army Chief and has spoken about the priority areas for the Indian Army.

#### Key Details:

- The new Army chief has stated that maintaining peace and tranquillity on the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** with China can set the stage for an eventual solution to the border issue.
- He acknowledged that the border question is yet to be settled. However, both sides have made a little progress in maintaining peace and tranquillity along the borders.
- India and China have different perceptions on the over **3,400 km-long border** and have held several rounds of **Special Representative talks** in an attempt to resolve it.

#### Priority Areas:

- According to the Army Chief, the Indian Army should be ever ready for any challenge and be operationally prepared at all times. This could happen only through modernisation.
- The Army should continue to build up its capabilities, especially in the north and north-eastern regions considering the **twin threat perception from Pakistan and China**.
- There should be greater emphasis on improving security awareness among the rank and file with special attention given to the issue of human rights.
- During his last few months as Vice-Chief of the Army, Gen. Naravane made a strong pitch for **indigenisation of defence equipment** and not waiting to build the best equipment.
- At an industry interaction, he called on the Indian industry to build products which would be inducted and subsequently improved based on their performance in the field.

## Category: ECONOMY

## 1. GST gross revenue crosses ₹1 lakh crore

### Context:

Goods and Services Tax gross revenue crossed the one lakh crore-mark for the second successive month, with a collection of ₹1.03 lakh crore in December 2019.

### Key Details:

- This increase in GST revenue is almost 9% higher than the December 2018 GST collection of ₹94,726 crore.
- While the December 2019 collection of ₹1,03,184 crore is slightly lower than the November 2019 collection of ₹1,03,492 crore, it does signal a trend of recovery after gross GST revenue dipped below the one lakh crore mark for the previous three months.
- The amount still falls short of the ambitious ₹1.1 lakh crore monthly target the Centre set for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- The improvement is unlikely to be enough to enable the government to reach its GST revenue targets for the year.
- The Centre had budgeted for ₹6.63 lakh crore in net GST revenue for the current financial year 2019-20, out of which it collected about 50% in the first eight months.
- For the first time, the Finance Ministry released a state-wise breakup of GST collection from domestic transactions, which shows a 16% growth from the same period a year ago.
- Apart from Jharkhand and Lakshadweep, all the States and Union Territories saw a growth in domestic GST collections in comparison to December 2018.
- Some of the north-eastern states have seen the highest rates of growth, with Arunachal posting a 124% increase, followed by Nagaland (88%), Manipur (64%) and Mizoram (60%). Jammu and Kashmir saw a 40% growth.
- This comes at a time when a number of State governments have been vocal in their complaints of declining GST revenue and demands for pending compensation payments from the Centre.
- Tax analysts say the improvement reflects higher consumption during the festive season in November, as well as the government's increased focus on corporate compliance. According to experts this increase in revenue collection could make it a little easier for the government to bridge the fiscal gap.

## Category:SECURITY

### 1. Situation not good enough to repeal AFSPA: Manipur CM

### Context:

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has said the law and order situation in the State has improved in recent years, but it is still not conducive to repeal the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act**.

### Key Details:

- Insurgency related violence in the State has decreased during the last three years and the Union Home Ministry has been apprised of the improved situation.
- However, the state government feels there is a need to wait for a better situation so that the AFSPA can be repealed.
- Official sources said a total of 233 insurgency-linked incidents were reported in 2016, which came down to 167 in 2017 and 127 in 2018.
- In November 2018, the Chief Minister had said that the time had come to review the AFSPA, but since the State shares border with foreign countries, the security aspect has to be considered.

### Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act

- The **AFSPA Act** allows **Army personnel to use force, “even to the causing of death”**, in order to **maintain public order**, and also **grants them executive powers to enter and search any premises and arrest without any warrant**.
- It was **imposed in Manipur in 1980** when the **State was a hotbed of insurgency**. It was **withdrawn from seven Assembly segments in Imphal** following intense agitation.
- Social activist **Irom Chanu Sharmila** was on fast for more than 13 years demanding its repeal after 10 civilians were killed by Assam Rifles on November 2, 2000.

For more information on AFSPA: [Click Here](#)

## Category:ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

### 1. 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** a species 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:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. In the **Kanjli Wetlands**, the **water hyacinth** which was introduced is now invasive. From time to time it is removed using mechanical means.
4. 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 KFRRI 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.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: **ECONOMY**

#### 1. Infrastructure push

##### Context:

- When the economy is going through a major slowdown, a big bang economic reform from the government can sometimes work to turn around that sentiment.
- Recently, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled one such policy to give a mega push to **infrastructure investment** by adding up to **₹102 lakh crore over the next five years.**
- This editorial evaluates the challenges in making this plan to boost investment in infrastructure work.

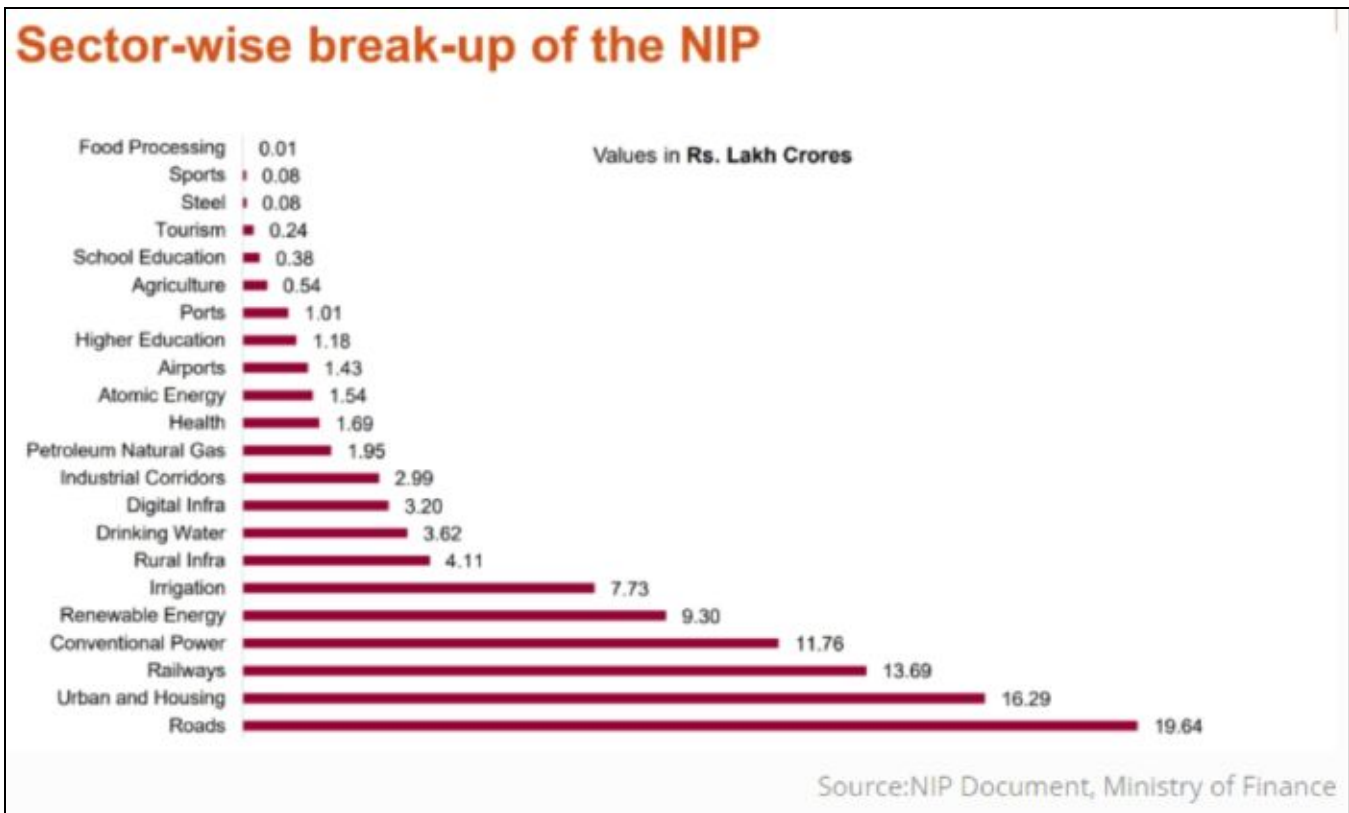
##### Background:

- In the 2019 Independence Day speech made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a key announcement was investment of Rs. 100 lakh crore in infrastructure over the next five years.
- This was also one of the promises made in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections held in April and May 2019.
- Following the announcement by the PM, a task force was constituted within the Finance Ministry to create a roadmap for this investment.
- Officials from the Departments of Economic Affairs and Expenditure in the Finance Ministry and NITI Aayog were part of this task force.
- The report of this body was presented in December 2019 by Ms. Sitharaman.
- This report, called the **National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)**, distills the sectoral investment plans and outlines a specific mission to achieve through this investment.

##### National Infrastructure Pipeline:

- Apart from the obvious step of outlining the details, the report also identifies facilitating design, development and maintenance of public infrastructure as per global standards a priority for national

- infrastructure.
- The report also calls out the need for enabling regulatory and administrative reforms to achieve the NIP ambition.
  - There are three significant parts to this report –
  - Firstly, the report identifies five specific reasons why Indian infrastructure needs an overhaul. These reasons include:
    1. Urbanization (42 per cent of population to live in urban areas in 2030 as opposed to 31 per cent now)
    2. Growing working-age population (1.03 billion workforce projected in 2030)
    3. Urban contribution to employment (41 per cent of the total by 2030)
    4. Shift to services-based economy (share of agriculture to go down to 8 per cent from current 15 per cent)
    5. Climate change and disaster resilience
  - Secondly, the NIP takes a broad view of what's included in infrastructure development. Social infrastructure areas including higher education, school education, health and family welfare, sports and tourism are specifically called out.
  - Thirdly, for each sector, a general vision of the year 2025 has been painted. This vision includes not just the end state of the NIP, but also a few pointers on how the governance and the administration of the sector looks like. These pointers can then form the basis for the regulatory reforms needed between now and 2025 to ensure that the full NIP benefits are realised.
  - Five areas of investment – roads, urban housing, railways, power and irrigation constitute more than 80 per cent of the investment plan.
  - The following chart shows the sector-wise break-up of the NIP.



**Editorial Analysis:**

- Projects in energy, roads, railways and urban infrastructure under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) have been identified by the task force.
- About 42% of such identified projects are already under implementation, 19% are under development and 31% are at the conceptual stage.
- The NIP task force appears to have gone project-by-project, assessing each for viability and relevance in consultation with the States.
- Considering that the NIP will be like a window to the future, a constant review becomes paramount if this is not to degenerate into a mere collation and listing of projects.
- A periodic review, as promised by the Finance Ministry, is necessary. The government's push on infrastructure development will not only enable ease of living – such as metro trains in cities and towns – but also create jobs and increase demand for primary commodities such as cement and steel. From this perspective, this push to invest in infrastructure is welcome.

### **Challenges:**

- Identifying the projects to be put on the pipeline is the easy part. Implementing and commissioning them will be the more difficult one.
- There are a few hurdles that the NIP task force needs to watch out for –
- First,
  - The financing plan assumes that the Centre and the States will fund 39% each while the private sector will chip in with 22% of the outlay.
  - Going by the present fiscal situation, it will be no small challenge for the Centre to raise ₹39 lakh crore, even if it is over the next five years.
  - The financial position of States is even more perilous.
- Second,
  - The ₹22 lakh crore expected from private investment also looks steep considering the lack of appetite for fresh investment by the private sector in the last few years.
  - In fact, this factor has been a major drag on economic growth. Given the scale of investment, debt will play an important role and it remains to be seen if banks have gotten over their apprehensions on infrastructure financing as a major part of their bad loans originated there.
- Finally,
  - Cooperation from States becomes very important in implementing infrastructure projects. The experience on this count has not been very happy till now.
- While these are genuine obstacles that the task force needs to manage, these should not detract from the need for a concerted effort to invest in infrastructure. The key will be following up and reviewing the pipeline at regular intervals.

### **Conclusion:**

- The NIP brings about an overarching vision to infrastructure development in India, which in itself is a huge achievement.
- But its success will depend on a plethora of factors including administrative reforms, financial success, judicial reforms and intervention and general governance reforms.
- The states will have to put all hands on the deck to support the central government in achieving the NIP targets.
- Given the acrimonious federal operating environment, this is not a given as of now.
- Vexatious issues like land acquisition and environmental clearances have imposed huge time and cost delays on several key projects nationally.
- The centre and the states have to work together to sort these two issues out, and quickly.
- Some of the investment assumptions themselves will come under greater scrutiny, especially in the

- power sector.
- This is one area where the reforms will have to predate any significant capacity addition.
  - The legislative process will be long and arduous and eventually most states will find it difficult to push through distribution reforms.
  - Without this sector showing significant movement, 24 per cent of the NIP will remain uncertain.
  - All in all, the NIP is still a commendable effort, simply for its breadth of coverage.
  - That the task force could link the need for hard and soft infrastructure to India's economic and social progress, including the sustainable development goals is creditable.
  - Key ministries will have to keep step with this ambition and demonstrate sweeping as well as incremental reforming mindset to make NIP successful.

## 2. The need for a single energy ministry

### Context:

- 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.

## Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

### 1. A persisting variance

#### Context:

- The **NITI Aayog’s Sustainable Development Goals Index for 2019** was recently released and it comprehensively documents the progress made by India’s States and Union Territories towards achieving the **2030 SDG targets of the UN.**
- The world is now in the fifth year of the SDG era. India’s National Development Agenda is mirrored in the SDGs.
- India’s progress in the global Goals is crucial for the world as the country is home to about one-sixth of the world’s population.

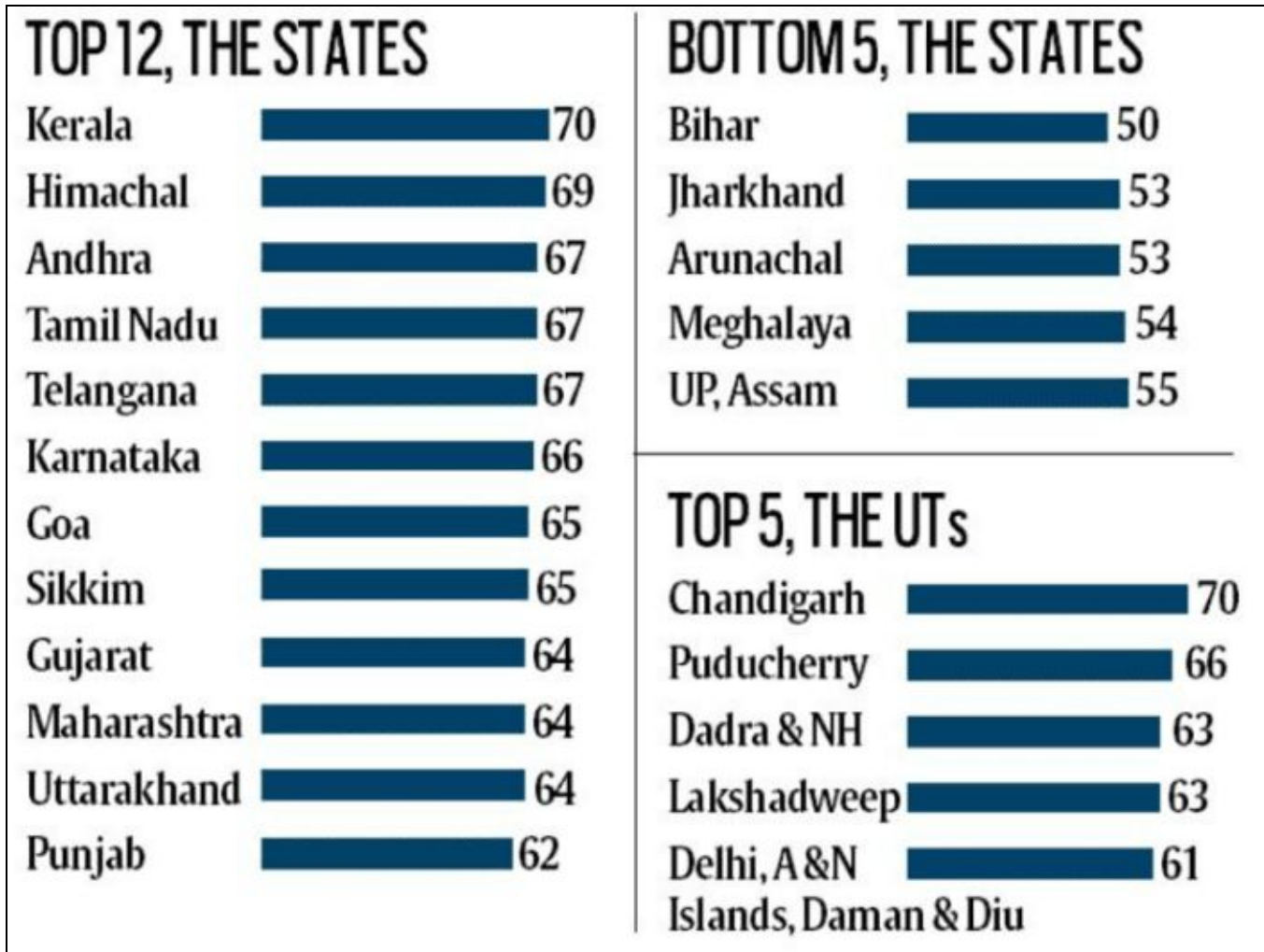
#### NITI Aayog and the SDG Index:

- The SDG India Index 2019 tracks progress of all States and UTs on **100 indicators** drawn from the **MoSPI’s National Indicator Framework (NIF).**
- The process of selection of these indicators included multiple consultations with Union ministries/departments and States/UTs.
- The **SDG India Index 2019 is more robust than the first edition on account of wider coverage of goals, targets, and indicators** with greater alignment with the NIF.
- The **Index spans 16 out of 17 SDGs with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17.** This **marks an improvement over the 2018 Index, which covered only 13 goals.**
- Additionally, this year, the SDG India Index report has a **new section on profiles of all 37 States and UTs**, which will be very useful to analyse their performance on all goals in a lucid manner.
- A **composite score was computed in the range of 0–100** for each State/UT based on its aggregate performance across 16 SDGs, indicating the average performance of every State/UT towards achieving 16 SDGs and their respective targets.
- If a State/UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies it has achieved the 2030 national targets. The higher the score of a State/UT, the closer it is towards achieving the targets.
- Classification criteria based on SDG India Index score is as follows:

1. Aspirant: 0 – 49
  2. Performer: 50 – 64
  3. Front Runner: 65 – 99
  4. Achiever: 100
- **NITI Aayog has the twin mandate** to oversee the **implementation of SDGs** in the country and **promote competitive and cooperative federalism** among States and UTs.
  - The SDG India Index acts as a bridge between these mandates, which embodies the **five Ps of the global SDG movement: people, planet, prosperity, partnership and peace**.
  - The SDG India Index 2019 is available on an **online dashboard**, which has cross-sectoral relevance across policy, civil society, business and academia.
  - The Index is designed to function as **a tool for focused policy dialogue, formulation and implementation, and moving towards development action pegged to globally recognizable metrics**.
  - The Index also **supplements NITI Aayog's continuous efforts to encourage evidence-based policymaking** by supporting States/UTs to **benchmark their progress, identifying priority areas and sharing best practices**.
  - The SDG India Index 2019 will also **help highlight crucial gaps related to monitoring SDGs** and the **need for improving statistical systems** at the National/State/UT levels.
  - Further, the Index **highlights the need for improvements in data collection, reporting and methodology**.
  - NITI Aayog is also exploring partnerships for disaggregating data and developing capacity for real-time monitoring and measuring incremental progress.

#### **Key Findings from the 2019 SDG Index of NITI Aayog:**

- India's composite score has improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019, thereby showing noticeable progress.
- The **maximum gains have been made in Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) and 7 (affordable and clean energy)**.
- South Indian States – Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka are joined by Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Goa as the best performers while the northern/north-central and north-eastern States have been laggardly in achieving the UN mandated goals by 2030.
- **Kerala achieved the first rank in the composite SDG Index with a score of 70**, followed by Himachal Pradesh at 69. Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu ranked at the third position with the score of 67.
- Poor performers such as Uttar Pradesh have shown discernible advances in the indices – measured between 2018-19 – especially in adopting cleaner energy and improving sanitation.
- The **biggest improvers since 2018 are UP (which has moved from the 29th position to the 23rd), Orissa (23rd to 15th), and Sikkim (15th to 7th)**.
- While Bihar improved its score from 48 in 2018 to 50 in 2019, it still has a long way to go in achieving the targets.



**The Stark Regional Divide:**

- But the regional divide is stark in basic livelihood goals such as “eradication of poverty”, and “good health and well-being” or even in measures such as “industry, innovation and infrastructure”.
- This points to **variances in both State governance and in administrative structures and implementation of welfare policies.**
- **The South, led by Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has done much more in orienting administrative institutions to deliver on basic welfare,** leading to actions on health care, education, poverty eradication and hunger, with a governance structure tuned to competitively monitoring actions on these fronts.
- **The converse is true of northern States – Bihar and Uttar Pradesh – where outcomes have remained relatively poor** despite there not being much of a difference in the governance structure.
- The obvious answer to the puzzle could be the **presence of historical socio-political movements** that have resulted in greater circulation of elites in power and which have addressed issues related to welfare more thoroughly in the South – Kerala and T.N in particular.
- Yet even these States need to go further in reaching the UN’s SDGs and achieving the living standards of both the first world and other developing nations.
- The **western States, especially Gujarat and Maharashtra,** are also better off in economic growth and industry, indicating a diversified economy, higher employment ratios, skilled labour and better

entrepreneurial culture.

### Concern about Gender Equality:

- A major fault-line in India is in achieving gender equality, where **barring middling performers such as Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, the rest of the country falls short.**
- **Low sex ratio (896 females per 1,000 males), poor labour force participation and presence in managerial positions** (only 17.5% and 30%, according to the report), **high level of informality of labour**, a **major gender pay gap** (females earn 78% of wages earned by males in regular salaried employment), **lack of adequate representation in governance** (14.4% in Parliament, but 44.4% in local government) besides **high crime rates against women** and girls are among the major national level indicators that have contributed to this.
- States need to climb a mountain to achieve gender equality, but immediate steps such as **enhancing women's participation in governance through parliamentary reservations would go a long way in addressing several of the issues faced by them.**

## 2. No country for procedural justice

The issue has been covered in the 7th December 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis, under the editorials segment. Click here to read: [CNA dated 7 Dec 2019](#)

## Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 1. 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 cosponsors, 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, even laughable, it must be remembered that it was the USCIRF that first recommended a visa ban against Mr. Modi, as Gujarat Chief Minister, in 2005.
- To date, he remains the only individual worldwide sanctioned thus under the **U.S.'s International Religious Freedom Act of 1998**.
- In the **U.S. Congress** too, lawmakers **can effectively block defence sales to India, or pursue sanctions on the S400 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**.
- In December 2019, a suit by a relatively remote player, **Gambia, ensured that Myanmar's top leadership was made to appear for a public hearing at the International Court of Justice at the Hague in connection with the Rohingya issue**.
- **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 **firefighting 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.

## F. Tidbits

### 1. Mandu Festival concludes in Madhya Pradesh

- In Madhya Pradesh, the first edition of the 5-day Mandu festival concluded in **Mandu, a world-famous picturesque tourist destination known for its forts and palaces**, located in the Dhar district of the state.
- 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.

### 2. Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra.
- Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary is **fast emerging as a prime tiger conservation and tiger tourism haven** despite the disadvantage of being much smaller in area.

## G. Prelims Facts

### 1. Battle of Koregaon

- It was fought on **1st January 1818** between the **British East India Company** and the **Peshwa faction of the Maratha Confederacy**, at **Bhima- Koregaon**.
- A 28,000-strong force led by **Peshwa Baji Rao II** whilst on their way to attack the company-held Pune, were unexpectedly met by an 800-strong Company force that was on its way to reinforce the British troops in Pune.
- The Peshwa dispatched around 2,000 soldiers to attack the force which sought entrenchment in Koregaon.
- Led by **Captain Francis Staunton**, the Company troops defended their position for nearly 12 hours, before the Peshwa's troops ultimately withdrew, fearing the imminent arrival of a larger British force.
- The battle was part of the **Third Anglo Maratha war**, a series of battles that culminated in the **defeat of the Maratha Empire (under the Peshwas)** and subsequent rule of the British East India Company in nearly all of Western, Central and Southern India.



- There is a “**victory pillar**” (‘Jaystambh’) in Koregaon commemorating the battle.

## 2. 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.**

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. 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

**Answer**

**Answer: d**

Explanation: The Bureau of Energy Efficiency is an agency of the Government of India, under the Ministry of Power. It was created in March 2002 under the provisions of the nation’s 2001 Energy Conservation Act.

Q2. 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

**Answer**

**Answer: a**

Explanation: After the second Anglo-Maratha war, Shinde and Holkar had lost many of their territories to the British. They encouraged the Pindaris to raid the British territories. The Pindaris, who were mostly cavalry, came to be known as the Shindeshahi and the Holkarshahi after the patronage they received from the respective defeated Maratha leaders. The total strength of the Pindaris in 1814 was estimated at 33,000. The Pindaris frequently raided villages in Central India. The result of the Pindari raids was that Central India was being rapidly reduced to the condition of a desert because the peasants were unable to support themselves on the land. They had no option but to join the robber bands or starve. In 1815, 25,000 Pindaris entered the Madras Presidency and destroyed over 300 villages on the Coromandel Coast. Another band swept the Nizam's kingdom while a third entered Malabar. Other Pindari raids on British territory followed in 1816 and 1817. Francis Rawdon-Hastings saw that there could not be peace or security in India until the predatory Pindaris were extinguished and launched an operation against them during the Third Anglo-Maratha War.

**Q3. 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

**Answer**

**Answer: c**

Explanation: Article 243K which provides for elections to the panchayats states that – the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.

**Q4. Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. The Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel 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

**Answer**

**Answer: c**

Explanation: Self-explanatory

**Q5. 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.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer**

**Answer: c**

Explanation: Self-explanatory

## I. UPSC 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. What kind of regional variances have been brought out by the 2019 index? (250 words; 15 marks)