



VAJIRAM & RAVI

(Institute for Civil Services Examination)

JULY 2019

the RECITALS

Explore Current Affairs Through Q&A



Featured
Articles



Mains
Q & A



Prelims
Q & A

Bridging
Gaps

Drought Management

US Plans For Afghan
And Its Impact

Electoral Reforms

VAJIRAM & RAVI
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From the Desk of the Director

Dear Students

The preparation of current affairs magazine is an evolutionary process as its nature and content keeps changing according to the demands of Civil Service Exam. As you are aware about the importance of current affairs for the prelims as well as mains exam, our aim is to follow an **integrated approach** covering all stages of examination from prelims to interview. Keeping these things in mind, we, at Vajiram and Ravi Institute, are always in the process of evolving our self so as to help aspirants counter the challenges put forward by UPSC.

In fulfillment of our objective and commitment towards the students, we have introduced some changes in our current affairs magazine. The CA Magazines, now with the name of “**The Recitals**”, will have four sections. These are:

1. **Feature Article:** As you are aware of the fact that civil service mains exam has become quite exhaustive and analytical, especially since 2013 after the change in syllabus, we have decided to focus on 2-3 topics every month that will provide an insight into the issue so as to help students understand the core of the issue. This will help in Essay writing as well as Mains Exam.
2. **Mains Q&A:** New students quite often struggle to find out that in what way the given topic is useful for them and in what form questions can be framed from the article. To help those students, we at Vajiram and Ravi have designed an innovative way to teach current affairs. Now, we will cover the current issues through questions and answers so as to make it more targeted towards exam. This will not just provide the information and analysis on current issues but will also help in learning the art of answer writing. Further the related information on the topics on which questions have been framed but that is outside the purview of answer will be given in the Box as ‘**Extra Mile**’.
3. **Prelims Q&A:** This section will contain prelims based MCQs that will test your diligence while reading the current issues. These MCQs will be of UPSC standard and will contain detailed explanation. Students are advised to attempt these MCQs honestly and read the Explanation carefully. The idea is to also provide students with a question bank of around 600 current affairs MCQs (50 Qs × 12 months = 600 Qs) just before their prelims examination, which will act as revision on issues spanning over the entire year.
4. **Bridging Gaps:** This section will contain miscellaneous topics which has not been covered through Q&A. That is why it is called Bridging Gaps, meaning the left-over topics.

So, the new magazine is a complete overhaul of what we have been doing for so long. We hope that the new beginning will be to the liking of students.

Thanks

Best Wishes

Drought Management

Drought is a natural hazard that differs from other hazards since it has a *slow onset, evolves over months or even years, affects a large spatial extent, and cause little structural damage*. Its **onset and severity are often difficult to determine**. Like other hazards, the impacts of drought span economic, environmental and social sectors and can be reduced through mitigation and preparedness.

Few Incidents of Drought in India

- In 2002, India experienced its worst drought in 20 years.
- After two consecutive years of weak monsoons, a quarter of India's population, spread across 10 states, had been reeling from severe water shortage in 2016.
- Drought conditions in Maharashtra were so severe that the government decided to run **water trains to provide water** to drought-hit regions, **especially Marathwada**.
- **Jaldoot**, commissioned by the Railway Ministry in collaboration with the Maharashtra government, transported half a million litres of water on each of its trips from **Miraj in Sangli district**.

Present Scenario

- As per the **South Asia Drought Monitor**, in the year 2019, more than **44% area of the country** is facing drought-like conditions, of which over **17% is facing 'severe dry'** conditions.
- Several of these areas are facing successive droughts and may not recover even after a 'normal' monsoon this year.
- Against the normal onset date of June 1, the southwest monsoon arrived over Kerala on June 8 this year. Thereafter, the progress of monsoon has been slow. It hit Mumbai only on June 25, the most delayed it has been in the last 45 years.

Classification Of Drought

Drought in India occurs in areas with high as well as with meagre rainfall. Drought is **no longer mere scarcity or the absence of rainfall, but related to inefficient water resource management**.

The **National Commission on Agriculture** in India classified three types of drought: *meteorological, agricultural and hydrological*.

1. **Meteorological Drought** is defined as a situation when there is significant decrease from normal precipitation over an area (i.e. more than 10 %). Meteorological drought is classified into three groups:
 - **Normal** – If rainfall deficiency with respect to long term average is 25% or less.

- **Moderate** - If rainfall deficiency with respect to long term average is 26 to 30%.
 - **Severe** - If rainfall deficiency with respect to long term average is more than 50%
2. **Hydrological Drought** results from prolonged meteorological drought resulting in depletion of surface and sub-surface water resources.
 3. **Agricultural Drought** is a situation when soil moisture and rainfall are inadequate to support healthy crop growth.

Table 1. Drought classification systems

| Drought class | Conditions of drought and effects |
|--|---|
| Classification by British Rainfall Organization (BRO, 1936) | |
| Absolute drought | When there are at least 15 consecutive days with less than 0.01 inch of rainfall per day. |
| Partial drought | When there are at least 29 days having mean rainfall of 0.01 inch or less. |
| Dry spell | When 15 consecutive days receive less than 0.04 inch of rain per day. |
| Thornthwaite (1947) classification^{1,14} | |
| Permanent | Characteristics of the desert climate, possibility of vegetation and agriculture only by irrigation. |
| Seasonal | Planting dates and crop duration should be synchronized with rainy season and residual moisture storage. |
| Contingent | Irregular occurrence and there is no regular season of occurrence. |
| Invisible | Occurs even when there is frequent rainfall and occurs in humid region. |
| Classification based on physical aspects^{10,38-40} | |
| Agricultural | When soil moisture is inadequate to support healthy growth of crops, resulting in very low yield. |
| Hydrological | Associated with shortfalls in surface or subsurface water supply (stream flow, reservoir and lake levels, and groundwater) on a watershed or river basin-scale. |
| Meteorological | Related to the deficiency of rainfall compared to the average mean annual rainfall of an area. |
| Indian National Commission on Agriculture (1978) | |
| Meteorological | Normal precipitation below 25%. |
| Hydrological | Prolonged meteorological drought and drying of reservoirs, lakes, streams and rivers, cessation of spring flows and fall in groundwater levels. |
| Agricultural | Depletion of soil moisture during the growing season. A dry situation with 20% probability and rainfall deficiency of more than 25% in drought-prone states of India. |

Drought is also classified on the basis of time of onset as early season, mid-season and late season.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) recognizes

- **A drought week**- when rainfall in a *week is less than half of its normal amount*,
- **An agricultural drought**- when *four drought weeks* occur consecutively during mid-June to September.
- **A seasonal drought**- when seasonal rainfall is deficient by more than the standard deviations from the normal.
- **A drought year**- when annual rainfall is deficient by 20 % of normal or more.
- **Severe drought year**- when annual rainfall is deficient by 25-40% of normal or more.

When Is Drought Declared

The four indicators viz., **rainfall deficiency, extent of area sown, normalized difference vegetation index and moisture adequacy index** are usually applied in combination for drought declaration. The

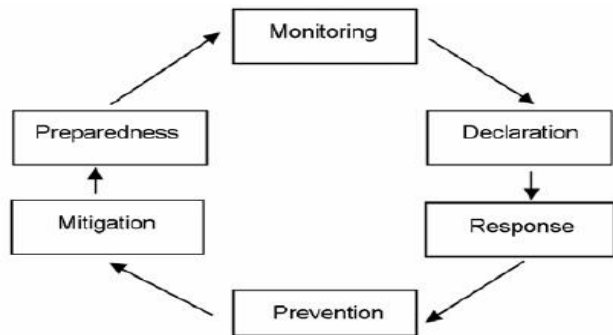
information on these indicators is available at the level of Taluka / Tehsil / Block. Drought may be declared by the State Government at these levels.

According to the **Drought Management Manual** brought out in 2009, a drought is assessed on five parameters:

1. Availability of drinking water
2. Availability of irrigation water
3. Availability of fodder
4. Availability of food grains
5. Energy sector requirement

Drought Management In India

- Disaster management emphasizes **preparedness, mitigation and improved Early Warning System** over emergency response and relief assistance. A drought management strategy consists of the components as shown in following figure -



- The **Union Ministry of Agriculture** is the *nodal ministry* in respect of monitoring and managing drought conditions.
- In the last few years, India has shifted its focus from relief centric to the **present drought management strategy**, which involves institutional mechanisms, extending relief through employment generation and social welfare practices, community participation and operation of Early Warning System (EWS) -

I. Institutional Mechanism:

- There is a **Crop Weather Watch Group** representing concerned Central Ministries/Departments under Department of Agriculture & Cooperation, which meets on regular basis to take stock of rainfall, weather forecast, progress of sowing, etc.
- Based on the situation, the State Governments are also advised suitably and their efforts are supplemented from the Central resources.
- The **Crisis Management Group** on drought headed by the Central Drought Relief Commissioner reviews situation with the representatives of all the Line Departments, as and when warranted.

- A **Crisis Management Plan** is released annually to guide and formulate the Contingency Plan for all the sectors linked with the impact of drought to mitigate the impact of drought situation.
 - In case of severe drought situation in the country, the **National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) under the Chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary** also reviews the situation and takes necessary decisions to mitigate the drought situation.
 - **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force** are constituted to **provide immediate drought relief** to the affected people.
 - The **Drought Management Group** is constituted to deal with the situation. The **National Disaster Management Cell monitors** the drought situation in different states and **National Calamity Contingency Fund** from the government deals with calamities of severe nature.
 - **Research Institutes** like ICRIASAT, Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Indian council of Forestry Research and Training are involved in draught management.
- II. **Different programmes to combat drought like situation:** To increase the preparedness as well as to mitigate the impact, Government has launched various schemes. These are:
- **National Agricultural Insurance Scheme** in 1999 and Weather Based Crop Insurance scheme in 2007 was launched to protect the income of farmers in drought like situation.
 - **Drought Prone Area Development Programme** and **Desert Development programme**
 - Watershed development programme; National Food Security Mission; National Horticulture mission; Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana; National mission on micro-irrigation
 - **National Mission for Green India** to improve quality of forests
 - **National Water Policy** addresses the issues like the water scarcity, inequities in its distribution and lack of planning, management and use of water resources. Recently, Government has launched **Jal Shakti Abhiyan** for Water Conservation.
- III. **Extending Relief:** Drought Management Manual sets out four important measures that a State government should take at the time of a drought, with the Union government's help.
1. It should use the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to provide immediate employment to drought-affected people.
 2. The public distribution mechanism should be strengthened to provide food and fodder as a measure to sustain the rural economy.
 3. The government should initiate actions to recharge the groundwater table by building check dams and providing pipeline water and other irrigation facilities.

4. The government should either waive off or defer farmer loans and arrange for crop loss compensation.
- IV. **Drought Early Warning Systems:** Drought forecasting and drought monitoring are two components of Drought Early Warning System. Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) along with National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting offer support for early warning and drought preparedness.
- V. **Community Participation:** To increase the effectiveness of government efforts, Gram Sabha and local bodies are included in recommending, sanctioning and monitoring of relief works.

Challenges in Drought Management

- **Unsustainable land and water management practices** are the main culprits of drought intensification. No emphasis is given on rain water harvesting during building construction.
- All **contemporary knowledge, experience** and information are not taken on board.
- **Multiplicity of agencies** further creates confusion and reduces effectiveness.
- The evolution and practice of **standard procedures for declaration** of drought including the **time of declaration is not homogeneous**.
- Global and National best practices are yet to be integrated into the drought management policy.

Conclusion

- Drought is a complex and least understood natural disaster, the impacts of which often depend upon the nature of socio environmental background in the region, and affects more people than any other disaster.
- Implications of global climate-change impacts coupled with local environmental modifications (land use, geomorphological changes, natural resource degradation) need to be assessed with the application of strategic environmental assessments.
- Suitable models of anticipatory environmental impact assessment can be developed further for long-term drought risk management.
- It is also important to recognize the issues of 'urban drought' and 'water drinking industries' while developing the drought management framework.

US Plans For Afghan And Its Impact

President Donald Trump's announced that the US will be pulling out nearly half of its more than **14,000 troops** in Afghanistan. It has taken the Indian security establishment by surprise. Moreover, the US President also has started peace talks with Taliban.

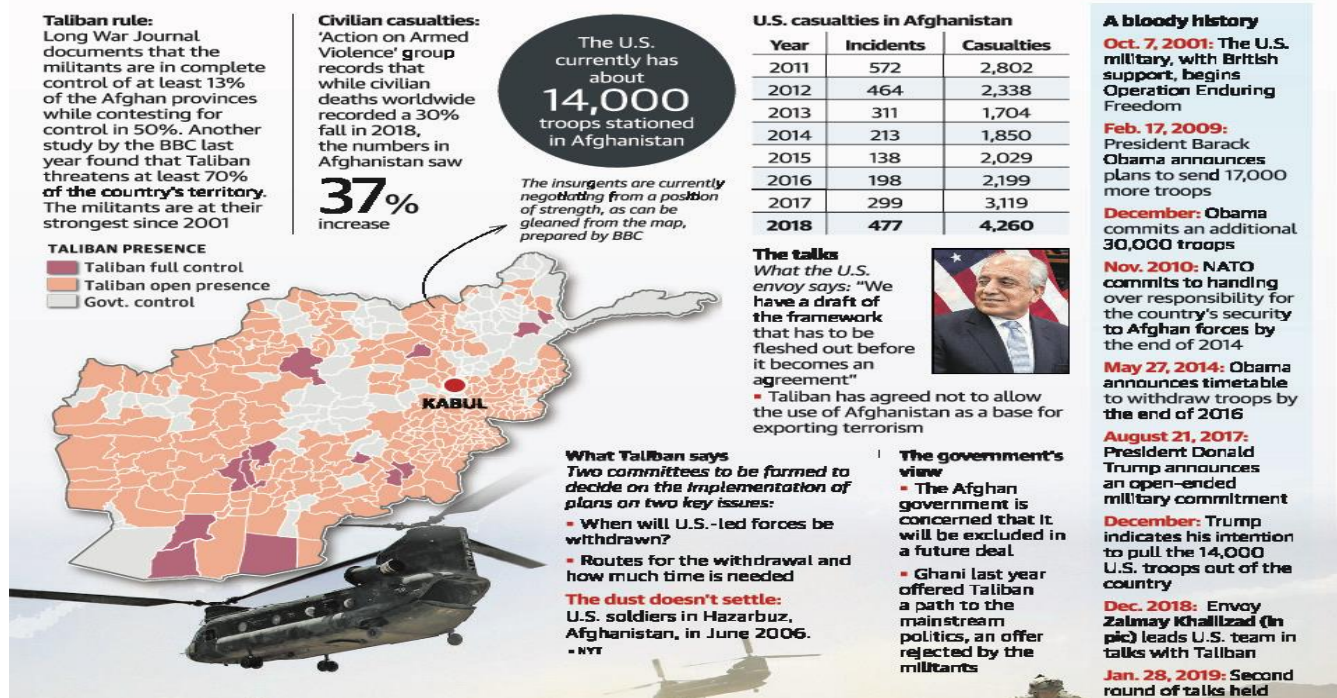
America is thinking of quitting Afghanistan because its soldiers are too expensive to send abroad. It stands to save **\$43 billion annually** if it leaves. US also believes that America bears too much of the burden of securing the world. Trump now insists that America's friends and partners must begin to pick up a fair share of the burden.

Impact Of US Withdrawal

- ***Benefit for Pakistan and Taliban:*** If Washington has run out of patience and is preparing for a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan, this would surely hand the advantage to Taliban and its Pakistani sponsors. The latter retain influence over Taliban, exemplified by the fact that Sirajuddin Haqqani of the Haqqani Network, which is close to Pakistan's ISI, is the current deputy head of Taliban.
- ***Pakistan gains central stage:*** Trump has frequently criticized Pakistan for turning a blind eye to the Taliban's insurgency. But he now appears reconciled to Pakistan's centrality to the endgame in the region. The role of Pakistan is going to expand significantly, with the US depending upon it to implement the interim deal. This will be a diplomatic victory for Pakistan.
- ***Impact on Kashmir:*** A Taliban comeback in Afghanistan is almost certain to embolden Islamist militancy in the region, including in Kashmir.
- ***Impact on militancy:*** Pakistan and China could face problems of their own. China has its own Islamist problem in Xinjiang and they are likely to cope by diverting the jihadist virus towards India. This would mean stepped up asymmetrical warfare against India.
- ***Uncertain election and domestic electoral problems:*** The internal situation in Afghanistan is aggravated now by the uncertainty of the democratic process.
- ***Chances for better outcome:*** While this decision could affect security and political stability in Afghanistan, it could also be a show of good faith for the Taliban to negotiate peace. This could also nudge the political process toward serious discussion of peace.
- ***Refugee crisis:*** The risk of pullout could send hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing across their borders.

As the U.S. troops withdraw

Following an arduous six days of talks between the U.S. and Taliban, peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said the militants have agreed on the draft of a framework accord. This graphic tries to trace the past of the conflict and looks at the possible future courses of action



Impact Of US Peace Talks With Taliban

- **Afghan government not consulted:** Talks with Taliban undermine and weaken the position of the current Afghan government. Taliban refuses to talk to Afghan government and in all probability, the Trump administration is going to finalise the deal with the Taliban without consulting President Ashraf Ghani, leave alone taking into consideration New Delhi's concerns. All talk of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process has vanished. Further, The U.S. and Russia have, in separate processes, agreed to sidestep the Ashraf Ghani regime in Kabul, and accepted the Taliban's condition that it will not negotiate with the elected Afghan government at this stage.
- **India marginalized:** Despite being an important stakeholder in Afghanistan, India finds itself increasingly marginalised in negotiations involving the key regional players. New Delhi is concerned about the vital role that all the powers are giving to Pakistan. Iran and Russia, two of India's closest allies during the Northern Alliance's battle against the Taliban regime in the 1990s, seem out of sync with New Delhi's interests.
- **India's interest in Afghan at stake:** Since the Taliban's ouster, Washington's financial, diplomatic and military support to the Kabul regime has allowed New Delhi to avoid direct military involvement in the Afghan conflict. India's developmental approach has earned it immense goodwill among the Afghan people. However, the soft power strategy has limitations.

- **Impact on Indian security:** An emboldened Taliban is sure to impinge on security scenario in India's troubled Kashmir Valley. The outfit seems positioned to emerge as the ideological bulwark of Kashmir's renewed insurgency.
- **Chabahar port futility:** New Delhi's Chabahar project to bypass Pakistan and access Afghan markets through the Iranian port may well amount to nothing in a fast changing Afghanistan.
- **Breach of earlier red lines:** The current talks with the Taliban are not within the red lines agreed to by all stakeholders in the past *i.e.* they are not Afghan led, owned or controlled, and the Taliban has not abjured violence or sworn allegiance to the Afghan constitution before joining talks.
- **Indo-US relations:** Trump's criticism of India's Afghan policy and his plans to exit could cast serious doubt on the US's role as a strategic ally for India. Trump's ill-conceived strategy gives India a chance to reconsider its long-standing belief that it has the US's backing in Afghanistan.
- **Vulnerable groups:** Several Afghans have expressed concerns over a framework that will allow the return of the Taliban; this is more evident among vulnerable groups like women and minorities, who suffered under the extremist regime in the late 1990s.

Why India Do Not Prefer To Talk To Taliban

- **Sensitivity of afghan government:** New Delhi has so far refrained from establishing formal contacts with the Taliban out of sensitivity for the Kabul government not wanting to talk directly to the Taliban as long as the Taliban refuse to acknowledge its legitimacy.
- **India want acceptance of red line before talks:** The red lines agreed to by all stakeholders in the past *i.e.* they are not Afghan led, owned or controlled and the Taliban has not abjured violence or sworn allegiance to the Afghan constitution before joining talks.

Way forward

- India must open channels with the Americans asking them not to withdraw precipitately as well as with Taliban asking them not to nurture anti-India terror groups at Pakistan's behest.
- India must also prepare a strategy to deal with it. This has to be a combination of strengthening its own defences, enhancing security coordination with friends and allies and bringing in a measure of cooperation among rival political parties domestically given the imminent threat that the nation, as a whole, faces.
- India has to invest more in building up its own hard power. That means larger defence outlays and greater bang for every buck allocated to every sector.

Electoral Reforms

One of the notable features for which India is known to the world is its electoral Democracy. The heart of India's democratic system witnesses regular elections with the participation of the largest electorate in the world. In order to safeguard the core values of fair and free elections in this dynamic scenario, it is important to have a just and unbiased electoral process with a greater citizen participation.

The issue of electoral reforms has been taken up by Parliament, the Government, the Judiciary, the Media and the Election Commission on numerous occasions. The Commission during all these times has striven to bring positive changes in the electoral system for better implementation. However, there are certain challenges and issues that electoral system has faced over the years. Trust and confidence of citizens in electoral system can be affected if these challenges remain unattended.

Proposed Reform Measures

1) *Constitutional Changes*

Removal of ECs

- A Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only through impeachment by Parliament. However, the President can remove the other ECs based on the recommendation of the CEC.
- It is proposed that the constitutional protection should be extended to other Election Commissioners as well.

Budget of Commission

- Presently, the administrative expenditure of the Commission is a voted expenditure. However, the expenditure of other independent constitutional bodies similar to the Commission i.e. the Supreme Court, Comptroller & Auditor General, Union Public Service Commission are charged on the Consolidated Fund of India/ non-votable expenditure.
- The Commission is of the opinion that a charged budget would be a symbol of the independence of the Commission and will secure its unconstrained functioning.

Independent Secretariat

- Currently, Election Commission of India has a separate secretariat of its own. However, the service conditions of its officers and staff is regulated by the rules made by the President under Article 309 of the Constitution which is similar to other departments and ministries of the Government of India.
- The officers at the higher level, such as the level of Deputy Election Commissioner are normally appointed on a tenure basis on deputation from the national civil services.

- The Commission proposes that it should have an independent Secretariat along the lines of the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and Registries of the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- This would help in insulating the Commission from the interference of the Executive in the matters pertaining to their appointments and promotions.

2) Matters Related to Electoral Roll

Common Electoral Rolls

- There is a non-uniformity of practice amongst States which causes duplication of essentially the same task between two different constitutional bodies i.e. the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commissions that entails the same effort and expenditure again by the States.
- Further, it creates a confusion amongst the voters, since they may find their names present in one roll, but absent in another.
- Thus, the use of common electoral rolls will overcome the issue of duplication and confusion and will also save the unnecessary effort and wastage of money.

Gender Neutral Electoral Laws

- Members of the armed forces, central armed police forces, personnel of state police forces posted outside their state and employees of the Centre posted outside India are eligible to be enrolled as service voters.
- As of now, an army-man's wife is entitled to be enrolled as a service voter, but a woman army officer's husband is not.
- The term wife should be replaced by the word spouse to make the provision gender neutral.

Overseas Electors

- Indian citizens living abroad owing to employment, education or otherwise, and have not acquired citizenship of another country, are entitled to be enrolled as elector in the native constituency in India.
- Voting in person is not a viable option for the overseas electors as they cannot be expected to travel to India for voting.
- Hence, overseas electors should be given the alternative option of proxy voting or postal ballot voting.

Voter Enrolment

- Currently, only those above 18 years as on January 1 are eligible to enrol themselves as voters that particular year. So a youth turning 18 on January 2 would have to wait until the next year for his/ her enrolment and could miss voting for election/s held that year.

- To address this, four cut-off dates for voter enrolment in a calendar year - on January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1- have been proposed.

3) *De-criminalisation of Politics*

Weeding out criminal elements

- People with criminal background, accused of serious offences contesting election sends a negative signal about the electoral process. Many such people facing charges of grave nature end up winning election.
- Hence, people charged with cognisable offences shall be de-barred from contesting in the elections, at the stage when charges are framed by the competent court provided the offence is punishable by imprisonment of at least 5 years, and the case is led at least 6 months prior to the election in question.

Bribery

- Bribery in elections is a non-cognisable offence where an investigation cannot take place without a magistrate's permission.
- The EC wants to make it a cognizable offence and bring in the category of "serious" crimes like murder, dowry, death and rape.

4) *Reforms related to political parties*

De-Registration of Political Parties

- Many political parties get registered, but never contest election. Such parties exist only on paper and are merely set up for availing provisions of income tax exemption.
- At present, the RP Act only provides for registration of political parties; the EC has no power to revoke that registration. Hence the EC should be given the powers to deregister the political parties.
- Further, provisions for exemption of Income Tax should be made applicable only to political parties that contest elections and win seat(s) in the Parliament or Legislative Assemblies

Disclosure of Donations

- Currently, parties are obligated to provide details of contributions of more than Rs 20,000.
- In the interest of transparency, it has been proposed that the parties should be made to disclose donations below Rs. 20,000 as well.

5) *Advertising*

Paid News

- Free and fair elections is the foundation of any democracy and this can only be achieved when there is an absence of influence by money in corrupting the electoral process.

- The right to know i.e. right to have accurate information is a necessity to make an informed choice for the electors however, paid news have a tendency to influence this choice in a negative manner.
- To make the matter worse, the whole exercise of publishing paid news involves use of unaccounted money and under reporting of election expenses of the candidates indulging in the malpractice.
- It has been proposed that acts of paid news should be dealt with a minimum punishment of two years.

Government Sponsored Advertising

- There is a trend wherein the Central and various State Governments embark upon 'election advertising' in the guise of providing information to the public.
- Such type of advertising released with an eye on the election contain material intended or likely to affect voting in an upcoming election.
- The Commission proposes that whenever any general election is due on the expiration of the term of the House, advertisements of achievements of the governments, should be prohibited for a period of six months prior to the date of expiry of the term of the House and in case of premature dissolution, the date of dissolution of the House.

6) Others

Filing False Affidavit

- At present false declaration attracts a six months' jail term.
- The Commission has proposed that the punishment should be increased to 2 years along with making it an 'electoral offence', as conviction in an electoral offence is a ground for disqualification.
- Jail term of six months does not instil fear. Disqualification would do so.

Cap On The Number Of Seats

- When a candidate contests from two seats, it is imperative that he/she has to vacate one seat if he/she wins both. This is injustice to the voters of constituency which the candidate is quitting from.
- It also leads to unavoidable financial burden on the public exchequer and the manpower and other resources for holding bye- election against the resultant vacancy.
- Law must be amended to provide that a person can contest from only one constituency at a time.
- In case the provision needs to be retained, the candidate must be required to bear the bye-election expenses.

The proposed reforms will prove to be extremely useful in addressing the existing issues and challenges and would go a long way in strengthening and enhancing the quality of democracy in India.

MAINS Q&A

1. **The Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral platform will not only help India to maintain its geostrategic space in the Eurasian supercontinent but is also useful for a variety of reasons. Discuss.**

Context:

- There has been an effort to **revive the RIC grouping** by the leaders of the member countries.
- In February 2019, Foreign Ministerial Meeting of this grouping took place in China which was the 16th such meeting.
- Recently, in June 2019, Russia-India-China Summit Meeting took place **at Osaka** on the margins of G20. This was the **second meeting** coming after the first meeting in Buenos Aires where the G20 was held in December 2018.

Answer

Conceived by the then Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov **in 1998**, the **Russia-China-India trilateral engagement** started as an attempt to **balance the US unipolarity**. Despite occasional meetings, the idea of the RIC never really took off unlike the BRICS. Nonetheless, in the current period of geopolitical transition, this grouping has assumed significance.

Importance of RIC

A. Weight it carries

- The RIC countries occupy over 19 % of global landmass and contribute to over 33 % of global GDP.
- All three are nuclear powers. Russia and China are permanent members of the UN Security Council, while India aspires to be one.
- RIC forms the core of both the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS.

B. Geostrategic Space in Eurasia

- If India wants to be a global power, it cannot cede geostrategic space in the Eurasian supercontinent to China.
- There are areas where interest of the member countries converge, like, for instance, on Afghanistan and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (which India wishes to join).
- In this context, it is an ideal platform for India as it brings together the three largest Eurasian countries which are also incidentally geographically contiguous.

C. New Economic Structure for the World

- With the rise of protectionism and trade wars, the three powerful economies could also contribute to creating a new economic structure for the world.
- Together they might offer some suggestions which could be acceptable to the US. Also they can be instrumental in reforming WTO.

D. New Opportunities

- The Northern Sea Route is opening up due to climate change. Hence, the RIC has a common interest in ensuring that it is not left to the West and Russia alone.

- With this platform, India can make the transition from rule followers to rule makers by helping formulate some of the rules governing the Arctic route.

Conclusion

The world is changing far too rapidly and Indian diplomacy is evolving equally fast to preserve its equities. The recent meeting of leaders of RIC at the sidelines of G 20 at Osaka is an example of this fact. However, India will have to tread cautiously so that fraught relations between India and China do not ruin the efficacy of RIC.

Extra Mile

Key Highlights Of RIC Summit

- **On Global Governance -**
 - Need to **strengthen the international system** led by the United Nations
 - Uphold international order based on accepted international norms and international law
 - Promote a multi-polar world
- **On the global trading regime -**
 - Rejected protectionist tendencies
 - Need for reform in WTO to cope with the current challenges
- **International and regional peace and security -**
 - Multilateral solutions are required
 - Consultations and peaceful negotiations should be the core of strategy
 - Urged the world to act through established institutions rather than in a unilateral fashion
 - Need for global international conference on terrorism

2. Indian National Movement of Independence has a great bearing on shaping our foreign policy. Examine.

Answer

The orientation of India's foreign policy was a product of the long drawn freedom struggle and Indian leadership's interaction with the outside world during that period.

National Movement and Foreign Policy

- **Preservation of Sovereignty and Independence** is one of the most important objectives of FP. At the time of India's independence, world was divided into two hostile camps and possibility of existence of third world independent country seemed bleak. The participation of India in various world affairs during British reign and the sacrifices made during freedom struggle led to the formulation of this objective.
- **National Development** formed an important pillar. It was during the national movement that the leaders of our country felt the necessity of becoming self reliant. It was the social, economic and political backwardness that led to situation where British ruled India for 200 years.
- **Protection of Interests of People of Indian Origin Abroad** - During the 19th century, many Indians settled in various countries of Africa, Asia and Asia-Pacific region. They made valuable contributions in development of economy and modern society in those countries. The national consciousness

aroused during the freedom struggle forced our leaders to consider the problems faced by these people.

- **Decolonization of Asia and Africa** - India had witnessed the misery and humiliation due to colonial rule for about two centuries. Therefore, it was natural for the Indian people to stand in solidarity with the colonized nations. To strengthen its position India hosted **Asian Relation Conference in 1947** to express its solidarity with African and Asian countries.
- **End to Racialism:** People of Indian origin were also victim of racial policies in South Africa and many other dominions in African continent. Our leaders like Mahatma Gandhi had to face discrimination. Hence India took staunch anti- racial stand in world arena.
- **Non- Alignment** - As is evident from the Nehru's speech given on 2nd September 1946, India promoted non alignment as its policy (mentioned at the starting of this answer).
- **Peaceful coexistence** - It can be seen from the resolution at Haripura Congress in 1938

Conclusion

National movement led to the creation of national consciousness, restored the pride and provided an ideological base for independent India. Hence, it has created a great impact on India's foreign policy.

3. The rediscovery of the India-Gulf relationship can be attributed to several factors. Discuss.

Context:

The outreach over the last five years towards West Asia, specifically the Gulf, by the current Government is widely regarded as successful by many analysts and foreign policy think tanks.

Answer

India's participation in **46th Session** of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation**, and visit of **Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to India** in February 2019 are few examples highlighting the rediscovery of India-Gulf relationship. India's '**Link West Policy**' is complementing the GCC's '**Look East Policy**' and the region is coming closer to India.

Factors Responsible For The India-Gulf Relationship

A. Indian Imperatives

- **Energy** – India is an energy hungry country. In 2013, India had already become the third largest energy consumer in the world. Due to geographical closeness, India looks upon this region to fulfill its energy requirement.
- **Economic** - The GCC grouping, as a region, is India's largest trading partner. Indian migrants in the GCC countries alone generated remittances worth \$40 billion in 2018. Countries like the UAE has Sovereign wealth funds which can be a source of funding for India's Infrastructure projects.
- **Strategic** - New Delhi wants increase the bandwidth of its foreign policy and find more areas of mutual interest and strategic convergence in this region without disrupting the balance. So far, India has been engaging with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel simultaneously without making any political comments that could affect any bilateral engagements.
- **Diaspora** – More than 7.5 million Indians work in the larger region. This necessitates New Delhi to micro-manage a diaspora bigger than the population of Finland.

B. Factors Which Pushed Gulf Countries Towards India

- **Diversification of Economy** – Gulf countries are trying to diversify their economies by readjusting their economic fundamentals amid low oil prices. Focus is to include IT, space tech, tourism, renewable energy etc. Against this backdrop, India-Gulf ties are headed for interesting economic times.
- **Security** - GCC's reliance on the decade-old U.S.-centric protection net is witnessing a change. India, as an aspirational power, is seen as a country which will not interfere in domestic or regional disputes.
- The **2010 Riyadh Declaration** and **2015 Abu Dhabi Declaration** strategically elevated the partnership to the next (comprehensive) level.
- In terms of hard security, the **India-Qatar defense cooperation pact** and the **India-Oman defense cooperation agreement** are templates for future security cooperation.

Conclusion

- The geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East have been changing in an unprecedented manner over the past few years. Against such a backdrop, a relationship based purely on economic engagement is untenable in the long run.
- Hence, the way forward rests on developing a relationship that hinges on 'strategic' political, economic, and security dimensions.
- With several factors contributing to the 'rediscovery' of the India-Gulf relationship, it is time to convert the 'opportunity' into a 'strategy'.

4. **The rapidly changing outer space domain makes it important that India takes effective steps to secure its interests in space. In the light of this statement, discuss the various steps taken by India to develop counter-space capabilities.**

Context:

- The Indian government is planning to conduct a **table-top war game** called "**IndSpaceEx**" involving all stakeholders including the military and the scientific establishment.
- Recently, government also gave its approval for setting up of a new agency called the **Defence Space Research Agency (DSRA)**.

Answer

The space landscape is changing rapidly. **Terrestrial politics is casting its shadow** on outer space. **Relevance of space to national security and conventional military operations** is increasing day by day. In an effort to deny an adversary advantages, countries are developing counter-space capabilities, which has sparked a fresh competition in outer space.

The first successful **Chinese anti-satellite (ASAT)** test took place in January 2007. China's recent **launch of a rocket from a ship** is an evidence of growing sophistication of the Chinese military space capabilities. Last year, US president announced the creation of **US Space force**. These incidents have provided an impetus to **India's changing approach to outer space**, moving from a **purely civilian and peaceful approach** to one where **certain military characteristics are evident**.

Steps Taken By Indian Government

- Our first **dedicated military satellite** was launched only in 2013.
- India's ASAT demonstration in March 2019 was important in validating its deterrence capability.

- The establishment of the **new tri-service Defence Space Agency (DSA)**, based in Bangalore, is an important institutional initiative.
- It **combines two key functions** performed by the Defence Imagery Processing and Analysis Centre (DIPAC) in Delhi and the Defence Satellite Control Centre in Bhopal, **representing the growing integration of India's space capabilities**.
- To promote R&D in this field, government gave its approval for setting up of a new agency called the **Defence Space Research Agency (DSRA)**.
- India is planning to conduct **new war game IndSpaceEx** to gain a better understanding of the **current and emerging challenges in the space security domain**.

Way forward

- In order to effectively defend our space assets, India must have the most reliable and accurate capabilities to **track space objects, from debris and spacecraft to celestial bodies**.
- For space defence to be effective, India must acquire a **minimum, credible offensive capacity** across the various types of space weapons, physical, electronic and cyber.
- Our broader space policy must acquire a new seriousness in **improving launch capabilities and spacecraft design**.
- ISRO's budgets must be enlarged and **private entrants should be encouraged** in everything from launches to specialized payloads.

Conclusion

Having demonstrated its ASAT capability, India is in an ideal place to **demonstrate its global governance credentials**. India must step up its efforts to develop global rules and norms which are comprehensive and inclusive. One such all-encompassing legally-binding instrument is the **Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)** that requires immediate attention.

Extra Mile

India's Adherence to Space Norms

- India believes in protecting space sustainability to allow peaceful uses of outer space by all stakeholders.
- The UN General Assembly (UNGA) had established a **Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS)** in 1959, and had proposed five treaties for approval and ratification by the member states.
- India is committed to the observance of the following UN conventions/guidelines that have broader global acceptability - India adheres to the **1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST)**, **1968 Rescue Agreement**, **1972 Liability Convention** and **1974 Registration Convention**. Also, India is a signatory to the **1979 Moon Agreement**.
- India is a member of the **Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC)** and adheres to the Debris Mitigation Guidelines of 2008.
- India actively participates in all discussions at the Conference on Disarmament (CD). India was the **co-sponsor of the UNGA resolution 68/29 on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)**.
- India is prepared (in principle) for deliberations on the revised Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space

Objects (PPWT) presented by Russia and China, as a contribution to the various proposals for negotiating a legally binding instrument in the CD.

Mission Shakti

- In March 2019, India shot down a live **Low-Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite** in space thereby showing India's growing space prowess.
- This was the **first Indian demonstration** of anti-satellite (ASAT) capability.
- This test was dubbed as **Mission Shakti**.
- With this feat, India became the 4th country in the world to have this capability. The **other three countries are U.S, Russia and China**.
- The project was commissioned two years back and the anti-satellite system was **developed by DRDO**.

Significance:

- The use of ASAT is seen as **crossing new frontier** just like India's 1998 nuclear tests.
- The acquisition and demonstration of this technology make India a **member of an elite group of countries**.
- Indigenous development of ASAT **adds to India's credentials**, given that for many decades *India was kept away from acquiring key technologies*.
- It shows India's **focus on security challenges**, emanating beyond Pakistan. Besides securing our land, water and air, we are now capable of defending our space.
- The acquisition of this technology **is expected to have spin-offs** that India can exploit for commercial use, both domestic and globally.
- It will also provide a boost to "**Make in India**" programme.
- The bigger significance of the test, however, lies in its latent indication that India has **attained the capability for exo-atmospheric interception of long-range missiles in their mid-course**.

Criticism:

- India has been an **ardent advocate** of mitigating arms race in space, and yet has contributed in **considerable measure towards the militarization** of outer space.
- ASAT test has provided '**credible deterrence**' against threats to space-based assets from long-range missiles.
- However, many analysts believe that this will not be effective at all as most of the countries' satellites **are in the higher orbit**, and with this India will **not be able to knock out those satellites**.
- ASAT weapons tests, like the one India carried, risk making a "**mess**" in space because of **debris fields they can leave behind**.

What are Anti-Satellite Weapons?

- They are missile-based systems to attack moving satellites. ASAT weapons are capable of shooting down space objects from ground or airborne sources.

5. Human rights activists constantly highlight the view that the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) is a draconian act leading to cases of human rights abuses by the security forces. What sections of AFSPA are opposed by the activists? Critically evaluate the requirement with reference to the view held by the Apex Court.

Context

- Centre has declared the entire State of Nagaland a “disturbed area” for six more months under the AFSPA.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs, in exercise of the powers conferred by **Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958**, has made this declaration.

Answer

AFSPA was **enacted in 1958** to give armed forces the power to maintain public order in disturbed areas. It has been in force in the North-East and Jammu and Kashmir. However, human rights activists are calling this act as one of the **primary facilitators of impunity** by security forces. They have highlighted multiple incidents of human rights abuses by security forces and have termed this as a draconian law.

Controversial Sections of AFSPA

- **Section 3** – It empowers the Centre to declare any area as Disturb Area without taking consent of the concerned state.
- **Section 4** – Accords certain power to an authorised officer which also include power to open fire at any individual even if it results in death.
- Under this section, the officer has also been given the power to (a) **arrest without a warrant**; and (b) **seize and search without any warrant any premise**.
- **Section 7** – It mandates **prior executive permission** from central or state authorities **for prosecution** of a member of the security forces.

Critical Evaluation of AFSPA

- In the **Naga People’s Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India** case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the law. However, the judgment made some notable conclusions, which pointed towards the possibility of the act being misused.
- **Santosh Hegde Committee**, constituted by SC, reported the use of disproportionate force and intrusion of security forces in areas which are not notified as disturbed areas.
- The activists are alleging that the act provides sweeping power to the security forces which encourages soldiers to kill, raid and rape and thereby leads to grave human rights violations.
- The power to shoot to the extent of causing death, and search without warrant are in contravention to the Article 21.
- Despite these allegations, AFSPA has given a tool to the armed forces - to tackle the security challenges faced by the country and thereby helping to maintain unity and integrity.
- So far, it has been successful in bringing normalcy to many regions of North East. In April 2018, Govt. lifted AFSPA from Meghalaya.

Conclusion

- Frequent misuse of AFSPA by security forces has led to widespread resentment against this act. However, annulment of the law would seriously affect the governance in insurgency-affected states.
- Hence, the need of the hour is to provide certain safeguards so as to prevent its misuse.
- **Establishing grievance cells** in each district where such law is in force, **ensuring accountability** of the officer in charge and **investigation by independent and impartial authorities** are few steps in this regard.

About AFSPA

- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was enacted in 1958 to bring under control **what the government of India considered 'disturbed' areas.**
- States under AFSPA included: **Assam, Nagaland, Manipur** (except the Imphal municipal area), **Arunachal Pradesh** (only the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts plus a 20-km belt bordering Assam), and **Jammu and Kashmir**. It was **completely lifted from Meghalaya** in April 2018.
- **Section (3)** of the AFSPA Act **empowers the governor of the state** or Union territory to issue an official notification on The Gazette of India, following which the **centre has the authority to send in armed forces for civilian aid.** It is still unclear whether the governor has to prompt the centre to send in the army or whether the centre on its own sends in troops.
- The AFSPA **gives power to the Army and Central forces** deployed in "disturbed areas" to kill anyone acting in contravention of law, arrest and search any premises without a warrant.
- Prosecution of the officer on duty needs prior permission of the Central Government.

About Disturbed Area

- The state or central government considers those areas as 'disturbed' "by reason of differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities."
- Once declared 'disturbed', the region has to maintain status quo for a minimum of three months, according to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976.
- The state governments can suggest whether the Act is required to be enforced or not. But under Section (3) of the Act, their opinion can still be overruled by the governor or the centre.

Various Judgements and Committee Reports on AFSPA

- In the **Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India** case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the law. However, the judgment made some notable conclusions such as:
 - Although Central Government is empowered to declare an area disturbed on its own, it is desirable that it consults the state before making such declaration
 - The act is not conferring any arbitrary powers to declare an area as a 'disturbed area'
 - The declaration should be for a limited duration and there should be periodic review at 6 months.
 - The officers should use minimal force necessary for effective action.
 - The authorized officer should strictly follow the 'Dos and Don'ts' issued by the army.
- **Santosh Hegde Committee** - The Committee, constituted by SC, reported the use of disproportionate force and intrusion of security forces in areas which are not notified as disturbed areas. The Commission even went to the extent of saying that AFSPA was an impediment to achieving peace in regions such as Jammu and Kashmir and the northeast.
- **B P Jeevan Reddy Committee** - Justice B P Jeevan Reddy committee was appointed in 2004 to review the provisions of the act in the north eastern states. This committee recommended that the AFSPA should be repealed and its appropriate provisions should be included in the UAPA. Further, the powers of the army / paramilitary officers should be clearly demarcated. Moreover, the

committee recommended that grievance cells should be created in each district where such law is in force. The report was endorsed by the 2nd ARC report also.

6. Due to various advantages inherent to it, cryptocurrencies like bitcoin are rapidly transforming into mainstream money. However, these virtual currencies are not entirely risk free. Discuss.

Context:

- **Inter-Ministerial Committee on Virtual Currencies** has submitted its Report along with **Draft Bill 'Banning of Cryptocurrency & Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2019'**.
- The committee was headed by **finance secretary Subhash Chandra Garg**.
- This Report and Draft Bill will now be examined in consultation with all the concerned Departments and Regulatory Authorities, before the Government takes a final decision.

Answer

Cryptocurrency is an electronic or digital currency that **works on a peer-to-peer basis**. It weeds out the need for a trusted third party such as a banks. Cryptocurrencies have shown impressive gains and many believe that it will offer serious competition to national currencies issued by central banks.

Advantages:

- Information is **Transparent** - With the block chain, all finalized transactions are available for everyone to see and anyone can verify the transaction.
- **User Anonymity** - Bitcoin purchases are discrete and cannot be traced back to him.
- **No Third-party Interruptions** - Governments, banks and other financial intermediaries have no way to interrupt user transactions or place freezes on Bitcoin accounts. As a result, users experience a greater degree of freedom than with national currencies.
- **Very Low Transaction Fees** - Since Bitcoin transactions have no intermediary institutions or government involvement, the costs of transacting are kept very low. This can be a major advantage for travelers and MSME sector.
- Additionally, any **transfer in Bitcoins happens very quickly**, eliminating the inconvenience of typical authorization requirements and wait periods.
- **Freedom in Payment** - Bitcoin users can pay for their coins anywhere they have Internet access. This means that purchasers never have to travel to a bank or a store to buy a product.

Risks posed by these Currencies:

- **Risk and Volatility** - There is no underlying or backing of any asset for these currencies and their value seems to be a matter of speculation. Huge volatility in their value has been noticed in the recent past.
- **Cyber Security Threat** – These are prone to losses arising out of hacking, loss of password, compromise of access credentials, malware attack etc.
- **Outside the regulatory zone** – These are being traded on exchange platforms set up in various jurisdictions whose legal status is unclear. Hence, the traders are exposed to legal as well as financial risks.
- **Source of Money Laundering and Terror financing** – Due to anonymity, black money can proliferate easily and terror funding becomes easy.

Conclusion

Cryptocurrency is still a relatively young and new currency. Global regulations must be passed at the earliest to govern crypto currency transactions across the world such that emerging economy concerns are addressed.

Extra Mile**Key Highlights**

- The report has highlighted the **positive aspect of distributed-ledger technology (DLT)** and suggested various applications, especially in financial services, for use of DLT in India.
- These applications are - loan-issuance tracking, collateral management, fraud detection and claims management in insurance, and reconciliation systems in the securities market etc.
- The report has **recommended banning of the cryptocurrencies** in India and **imposing fines and penalties** for carrying on of any activities connected with cryptocurrencies in India.
- As virtual currencies and its underlying technology are still evolving, the Group has proposed that the Government may establish a Standing Committee to revisit the issues addressed in the Report as and when required.

What Are Distributed Ledgers?

- A distributed ledger is a **database** that is **consensually shared and synchronized** across multiple sites, institutions or geographies.
- It allows **transactions to have public "witnesses,"** thereby making a cyberattack more difficult.

The participant at each node of the network can access the recordings shared across that network and can own an identical copy of it.

7. In the current scenario where the global political structure is changing even faster, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has lost its relevance. Do you agree? Justify your answer.

Context:

- Recently, **Ministerial meeting** of Coordinating Bureau of **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** was held in **Caracas (capital of Venezuela)**.
- **Theme** of the meeting - ***Promotion and Consolidation of Peace through Respect for International Law.***
- Venezuela held the presidency of NAM summit in 2016. **In October 2019**, it will be passed on to **Azerbaijan**.

Key Highlights Of NAM Summit

- Indian side was represented by Indian envoy to United Nations Syed Akbaruddin.
- India raised issues like Climate Change, Digital Technologies and Terrorism.
- It also urged the members to re-examine and revise the methodology employed by NAM to make it more relevant.

Answer

NAM founded in 1961 at Belgrade during the height of Cold war. It had been the vehicle for developing countries to assert their independence from the competing claims of the two superpowers.

However, the current global order has brought with it **multiple multilateral institutions and a promise to manage the global issues, democratically**. In this scenario, unless NAM redefines its role, the chances of losing its relevance are high.

NAM Has Lost Its Relevance

- **Emergence of Multipolar world and Multilateral Institutions** – Rise of countries like China and India, as well as the institutions like ASEAN, BRICS etc. are evident of this fact.
- **Failure to Push for Reforms in Multilateral Institutions** such as WTO, IMF, World Bank has made NAM irrelevant as far as global governance is concerned.
- **Failure to Address Multilateral issues** such as climate change, terrorism etc.
- Despite having many West Asian countries as its member, NAM has **failed to find solution to the West-Asian crisis**.
- **Withdrawal of one of its founding member** – Egypt- from NAM has further weakened this organization.
- Most of its members are facing **domestic political, social and economically crisis**.
- Many analysts believe that NAM was an outcome of political compulsions and friendship of leaders **rather than for a concrete purpose**.
- **Non-participation of Indian PM** in 2016 NAM Summit, held in Venezuela, has further added to this theory.

NAM Is Still Relevant

- It works on the **principles of Panchsheel** which is still relevant for preserving World Peace and maintaining territorial integrity.
- It is the **second largest international organization after UN** with 120 member states. Hence, it can act as **important voting group** in UN.
- It is a **Platform of Third World nations** in pursuit of **equality in world affairs**.
- NAM can create of a **new world based on rational, democratic, equitable and non-exploitative** inter-states relation.
- NAM countries are developing or under-developed. Hence their collaboration is necessary to ensure the **achievement of SDG goals**.
- NAM members have **favourable demography, market and suitable location**. Effective cooperation among them can lead to **higher and sustainable economic growth**.

Conclusion

- The nature of current global power equations actually justifies NAM. The organisation, which is only next to UN in its universal profile and broad base, **can indeed play a positive and harmonising multilateral role**.
- The need of the hour is to re-examine the methodology employed by NAM. This has been suggested by India in recent ministerial meeting of NAM.
- The scope of NAM should be expanded to include - economic & diplomatic cooperation as well as cooperation on important multilateral issues such as climate change. Long-term objective even being a **collective security pact**.

About NAM:

- **Established in** – Belgrade, 1961 (First NAM Summit)
- It was created by the then heads of Yugoslavia (Josip Broz Tito), India (Nehru), Egypt (Gamal Abdel Nasser), Ghana (Kwame Nkrumah) and Indonesia (Sukarno).
- It was during the **Asia-Africa Bandung Conference held in Indonesia (1955)**, that the basic idea of this group originated.
- **Purpose (As enumerated in Havana Declaration of 1979):** To ensure "the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries" in their struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign subjugation.
- Largely guided by **Panchsheel Principles**
- It is the 2nd largest international organization after United Nations (UN) with 120 member states.

8. Recently India along with 43 other nations abstained from voting on a General Assembly resolution aimed at examining options to end import, export and transfer of goods used for capital punishment. In this light discuss the need for abolishing capital punishment in light of recent developments.

Answer

Recently, the **193 UN members** adopted a resolution requesting the Secretary General to seek the views of member states on the feasibility and possible scope of establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of goods used for capital punishment.

The capital punishment also called as death penalty is the execution of an offender sentenced to death after conviction by a court of law. But this issue has become controversial in background of human rights, effectiveness *etc.*

Arguments Against Capital Punishment

- **India's peculiar circumstances:** In 1962, the **Law Commission (35th Report)** supported the death penalty stating that India's particular circumstances were such that it could not experiment with its abolition.
- **Controlling law and order:** In 1991, the Supreme Court cited its use in defending law and order as the reason for its continuance.
- **Problem of terrorism & neighbourhood:** India's neighbourhood is not peaceful, unlike Scandinavia. On the contrary, every day vested interests attempt to destabilize the very idea of our nation from across every border it shares. Moreover, cases of violent terror are constant reminders of the need to protect national stability by ensuring appropriate responses to such actions and the death penalty forms part of the national response.
- **Moral support for the death penalty:** A punishment cannot be judged by its impact on criminals but by its impact on those who are still innocent.
- **Retributive/Deterrence effect:** Those who defend the death penalty often do it on the basis of retributive justice. Moreover, its alleged usefulness extends from being a potential deterrent to serving as a primordial need for retribution.

- **Rarest of rare cases:** The death penalty is imposed only in rarest of rare cases that shock the conscience of society. This is reflective in the fact that in the **last 13 years, only four** people have been executed.

Arguments Against Death Penalty

- **Problems in implementation:** Implementation of the death penalty has also been deeply problematic. As the recent **Death Penalty India Report** by the **National Law University, Delhi** indicates, the structural flaws in our criminal procedure and criminal justice system are most pronounced in death penalty cases.
- **Arbitrary application:** There has been an arbitrary manner/application in which death penalty is awarded by different judges (**judge-centric variations**) and the way public discourse influences such decisions.
- **Pressure of public opinion on judiciary:** In individual cases the decision on death penalty depends on the nature of the crime, its gravity, cruelty and the number of fatalities. But in recent times, public outrage, the need for deterrence, and the clamour for a befitting punishment to render substantial justice have dominated the discourse.
- **Against reformation:** The death penalty has refused to consider the **Reformative theory of punishment** that focuses on reforming the individual.
- **Lack of deterrence effect:** No study has shown that the death penalty deters murder more than life imprisonment. The evidence is all to the contrary. For deterrence to work, the severity of the punishment has to coexist with the **certainty and swiftness of the punishment**. The death penalty has not deterred terrorism, murder or even theft.
- **Biasness:** Due to biases in criminal investigations, the marginalized, whether by **religious and caste denominations** or class are disproportionately subject to the death penalty.
- **Delay in criminal justice system:** The delays in the criminal justice system disproportionately affect those who suffer the tyranny of the uncertainty of their life.
- **International resolution:** In 2007, the **UN General Assembly** passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on the administration of the death penalty.

Way Ahead

Two-thirds of countries in the world has abolished it. India certainly does not need it as it serves no purpose. The evidence is all to the contrary. For deterrence to work, the severity of the punishment has to coexist with the certainty and swiftness of the punishment.

9. **The Union Home Ministry recently informed the Parliament that government has no plans to repeal sedition law as it is needed to effectively combat anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements. In this light discuss the challenges posed by Sedition Law and reform needed in the legal provision.**

Answer

Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code defines sedition as “whoever by words, either spoken or written or by signs or by visible representation or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life or with imprisonment which may extend to three years.

The Section 124A is supported on various grounds, some of them being as follows:

- After the Supreme Court directions, its jurisdiction has been narrowed down. It can be applied only on grounds laid down by the court.
- The application of Section 124A is a part of reasonable restrictions provided under the **Article 19(2)**.
- The Section does not really curb free speech as one can use any kind of strong language in criticism of the government without inviting sedition. However, such dissent should not be turned into some kind of persuasion to break the country.
- There is a persistent threats to unity and integrity of nation due to presence of anti-national elements and divisive Forces such as naxals, separatists who are receiving support from inside and outside the country.
- Moreover, mere misuse cannot be a ground of repeal rather provisions should be made where such misuse is eliminated.

But at the same time there are various problems posed by the implementation of Section 124A, some of them being:

- It stifles the democratic and fundamental right of people to criticize the government.
- The indian police does not have the requisite training to understand the consequences of imposing such stringent provisions.
- The Section has been used arbitrarily to curb dissent. In many cases the main targets have been writers, journalists, activists who question government policy and projects, and political dissenters.
- The Section has also been used to gag the press to avoid exposing deception in government.
- The Section is draconian in nature as it says that the offence will be **non-bailable, non-cognisable and punishment can extend for life**.

Way Forward

- The guidelines of the SC must be incorporated in Section 124A as well by amendment to IPC so that any ambiguity is removed.
- Further, the state police must be sufficiently guided as to where the section must be imposed and where not.
- Moreover, there is also the need for including provisions where the government can be penalized, if it misuses the section.

10. What are the Parliamentary privileges. Discuss the need for such privileges and issues arising out of their implementation. Also suggest suitable measures to overcome the present dilemma.

Context

Recently, Trinamool MP Mahua Moitra has moved a breach of privilege motion in Lok Sabha against a private Hindi news channel and its Editor for reporting that her first speech in Parliament was plagiarised

Answer

The Parliamentary privileges are certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament, individually and collectively, so that they can effectively discharge their functions. When any of these

rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is punishable under law of Parliament.

The Provision relating to breach of privilege has been incorporate under **Article 105 and Article 194** of the Constitution for the following purposes:

- Privileges protect the freedom of speech of parliamentarians and legislators and insulates them against litigation over matters that occur in these houses.
- Without these privileges the house can neither maintain their authority, dignity and honour nor can protect their members from any obstruction in discharge of their duties.
- The privileges are also essential for reducing adjournemnts and disruptions in the Parliament.

But at the same time the privileges also poses various issues arising out of its implementaion:

- It is sometimes used to counter media criticism of legislators and as a substitute for legal proceedings.
- Breach of privilege laws allow politicians to become judges in their own cause, raising concerns of **conflict of interest** and violating basic **fair trial quarantees**.
- Judicial scrutiny is barred in cases of privileges, which is against the doctrine of judicial review.
- Moreover, it is also invoked on trivial grounds such as defamation by individual members, while judicial remedy available under defamation and libel law.

Way Forward

- There is a need for proper codification of privileges. For example, **Australia** has passed **Parliamentary Privileges Act in 1987**, clearly defining privileges, the conditions of their breach and consequent penalties.
- The decisions of the speaker may be influenced by his/her political affiliations. Therefore, the trial must be conducted by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal.
- The Suporeme Court also must revisit earlier judgments to find right balance between fundamental Rights of the citizens and privileges of legislature.

11. Recently, 10 rebel MLAs from Karnataka face threat of disqualification for anti-party activities and defying party whip. Discuss forthwith the importance and need for revising anti-defection law in India.

Answer

The Anti defection has been incorporated by the Constitutional **52nd amendment (10th Schedule)** and sets the provisions for disqualification of elected members on the grounds of defection to another political party.

The Anti defection provisions have been important in Indian polity due to following reasons:

- The main intent of the law that was to combat the evil of political defections has been reduced to a large extent.
- The anti-defection provisions provide stability to the government by preventing shifts of party allegiance.
- These provisions also ensure that candidates elected with party symbols and on the basis of party manifestos remain loyal to party policies.
- The provision has also helped in reducing the cases of political corruption to the large extent.

However, there is a need to revisit the provisions of anti-defection law on following grounds:

- Distinction made between nominated and elected candidates is illogical and irrational.
- The law does not specify a time period for the Presiding Officer to decide on a disqualification plea.
- Speaker lacks expertise in deciding anti-defection matters which are quasi-judicial in nature.
- MP's/MLA's freedom of speech and expression is curbed and also undermines MP's capacity to be an effective legislator by expressing honest views on legislation rather than following the party line.
- The law has not been able to prevent defections as seen recently in case of Karnataka.

Way forward

- Instead of Presiding Officer, the decision to disqualify a member should be taken by the President (in case of MPs) or the Governor (in case of MLAs) on Election Commission's advice.
- The phrase such as 'voluntarily giving up membership' is too vague and requires comprehensive revision.
- As suggested by **Dinesh Goswami Committee and Law Commission**, the law should apply only to votes that determine the stability of the government like the passage of the annual budget or no-confidence motion.
- As in the UK, the MPs should be free to vote on legislation as they desire and should not be controlled by whips issued by parties.

Extra Mile

10th Schedule Provisions

The Anti defection law applies to the following situations:

- If a member of a house belonging to a political party:
 - a) Voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party, or
 - b) Votes, or does not vote in the legislature, contrary to the directions of his political party. However, if the member has taken prior permission, or is condoned by the party within **15 days** from such voting or abstention, the member shall not be disqualified.
- If an independent candidate joins a political party after the election.
- If a nominated member joins a party **six months** after he becomes a member of the legislature.

12. Recently, a Member of Parliament has moved a private member's bill that seeks to provide state funding of elections as part of reforms to the way polls are financed in India. In this light discuss the merits and demerits of the state funding of election.

Answer

State funding means that government gives funds to political parties or candidates for contesting elections. The idea has been proposed by the various committees including the **Dinesh Goswami Committee**.

Merits Of The State Funding

- Public funding can limit the influence of interested money and thereby help curb corruption.
- Public funding can increase transparency in party and candidate finance.

- If parties and candidates are financed with only private funds, economical inequalities in the society might translate into political inequalities in government.
- If parties and candidates receive at least a basic amount of money from the State the country could have a functioning **multi-party system**.

Arguments Against The State Funding

- It will divert the resources from welfare to the funding political parties.
- The opponents ask the government to channelize public resources towards and not diverted from such essential services.
- The state funding would encourage every second outfit to get into the political arena merely to avail of state funds.
- The state funding may not be able to stop the parallel private funding of the election.

A good start could be made with partial funding *i.e.* with the state taking care of certain expenditures of the recognised parties. Moreover, measure to improve transparency in the election funding also need to be taken simultaneously.

13. In 17th Lok Sabha a ruling party MP has introduced a Bill on topic 'The Compulsory Voting Bill, 2019'. Discuss the arguments for and against making the voting compulsory.

Answer

The idea was initially proposed in the Constituent Assembly but was rejected by Dr. B R Ambedkar on account of practical difficulties. Since then, many committees like Dinesh Goswami Committee (1990) have discussed this issue.

Arguments In Favour Of Compulsory Voting

- If compulsory voting was introduced, Parliament will be able to reflect more accurately, the will of the electorate.
- Compulsory voting will ensure that people take politics more seriously and will begin to take more proactive role.
- The citizens who live in a democratic state have a duty to vote, which is an essential part of that democracy.
- It will help in preventing extremist and special interest groups from grabbing power. Otherwise if less number of people vote then it becomes easier for the special interest groups to influence the outcome of the election process.
- Financial resources can be saved as Election Commission no longer needs to spend money in convincing people about the need to vote.

Arguments Against Making Voting Compulsory

- Practical difficulties may arise such as remoteness of polling booths.
- It may impact vulnerable sections like daily wage labourers, nomadic groups, disabled, pregnant women etc. in casting their vote.
- Compulsory voting may be in violation of the fundamental rights of liberty and expression that are guaranteed to citizens in a democratic state.
- Active participation in a democratic set up must be voluntary and not be coerced by external influence.

- The expenditure increases with enforcing compulsory voting. For ex- the cost per voter in **2009 Lok Sabha elections was Rs.12.**

Thus, any decision on compulsory voting must be taken after thorough analysis of the pros and cons. Moreover, it must also be ensured that the poor and vulnerable section are not impacted by such move.

14. The Parliament has passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage), Bill 2019. Discuss its salient features and possible impact on rights of married Muslim women.

Answer

The new bill passed by the Parliament criminalizes triple talaq and will replace the **1986 Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act**. The Bill was introduced after the Supreme Court's judgment in the **Shayara Bano case**, two years earlier, held that the practice of talaq-e-biddat (or triple talaq) unconstitutional. Triple Talaq (Talaq-e-biddat) refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.

Important Provisions Of The Bill

- The Bill makes all declaration of triple talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void and illegal.
- The Bill makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to **three years** imprisonment with a fine. Further, the offence will be cognizable only if information relating to the offence is given by the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared) or any person related to her by blood or marriage.
- The Bill provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused but only after hearing the woman.
- The offence may be **compounded by the Magistrate** upon the request of the woman (against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.
- A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek **subsistence allowance** from her husband for herself and for her dependent children.
- A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children.

The experts have declared the bill **significant on various grounds** such as:

- The proposed Bill will protect the rights of married Muslim women and prevent divorce by the practice of instantaneous and irrevocable 'talaq-e-biddat' by their husbands.
- It provides the rights of subsistence allowance, custody of minor children to victims of triple talaq i.e. talaq-e-biddat.
- The Act will supplement the decision of the SC in Shayra Bano Case, which became difficult to implement due to lack of legislative backing.

But at the same time there are **certain issues** with the bill:

- The Bill does not provide the victimized woman any additional benefits in terms of her rights in marriage and divorce.

- Since the Bill says that triple talaq is cognizable and non-bailable, married Muslim men may become vulnerable target.
- The bill provides extraordinary powers to policemen to arrest and investigate the accused with or without the complaint from wife or any other person.
- The divorce is a civil matter but the bill provides the criminal penalties for the same. Thus, in the process of criminalising triple Talaq the government has not paid attention to these sensitivities and the law in its effect has turned into a provision to criminalise men instead of assuring justice to the women.

Way forward:

Personal laws of other religious communities, have gone through renditions to address some concerns relating to gender equality in matters of inheritance and polygamy. Despite the gains, gender equality does not permeate all aspects of civil law. The legislation presents an opportunity to pervade equality—across faiths and gender and usher in a world where the women are not treated as second class citizens. Further, the legislation thus brings India at par with other Muslim majority states including ***Pakistan and Bangladesh.***

15. Discuss the provisions relating to the recent ‘the Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019’. Why there was controversy over such amendment and also suggest reforms for the same.

Answer

Recently, the Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019 that amends the Right to Information Act, 2005 was introduced in Lok Sabha. However, experts and RTI activists have come out strongly against such move.

Key Provisions Of The Bill

- ***Term & Conditions of Service:*** Bill allows Central government to notify term of office for Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners (ICs) while as per RTI Act, 2005, CIC at the central level and ICs at state level will hold office for a term of **5 years.**
- ***Quantum of Salary:*** Bill proposes that salaries, allowances, and other terms and conditions of service of CIC and ICs will be determined by central government. While as per RTI Act the salary of CIC and ICs will be **equivalent to the salary paid to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (EC)** respectively.
- ***Deductions in Salary:*** As per RTI Act, 2005 at time of the appointment of CIC and ICs, if they are receiving pension or any other retirement benefits for previous government service, their salaries will be reduced by an amount equal to pension. The **RTI (Amendment) Bill, 2019** removes these provisions.

Reason For The Amendment

- The mandate of ECI and Central and State Information Commissions are different. Hence, their status and service conditions need to be rationalized accordingly.
- CIC has been given the status of a Supreme Court Judge, but his judgments can be challenged in the High Courts.
- The amendments have been brought to correct certain anomalies in the RTI Act.

Reason For Opposition To The Amendment

- The amendments are being viewed as implying that the terms of appointment, salaries and tenures of the CIC and IC can be decided on a **case-to-case basis** by the government.
- The Bill is being seen as a **threat to the independence** of the CIC.
- By diminishing the status of the CIC, IC and State CIC from that of a Supreme Court judge would **reduce their ability to issue directives** to senior government functionaries.
- The government has brought about the Bill in **complete secrecy** and there have been no public consultations on the Bill.

Way forward

The amendment needs to be widely discussed and be referred to the Parliamentary standing Committee. Further, the opinion of the experts and the activist need to be given due importance to ensure removal of the apprehension over such amendment.

16. The National Medical Commission Bill has been passed by the Parliament. Delineate the provisions of the Bill while throwing light on the its impact.

Answer

The National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill that seeks to overhaul the medical education regulatory infrastructure has been duly passed by the Parliament.

Provisions Of The Bill

- **Constitution of the National Medical Commission:** Within three years of the passage of the Bill, state governments will establish State Medical Councils at the state level. The NMC will consist of 25 members, appointed by the central government.
- **Functions of the National Medical Commission:**
 - Framing policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals.
 - Assessing the requirements of healthcare related human resources and infrastructure.
 - Ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils of the regulations made under the Bill.
- **Medical Advisory Council:** The central government will constitute a Medical Advisory Council. The Council will be the primary platform through which the states/union territories can put forth their views and concerns before the NMC.
- **Autonomous Boards:** The Bill sets up autonomous boards under the supervision of the NMC. Each autonomous board will consist of a President and four members, appointed by central government.
- **The Under-Graduate Medical Education Board (UGMEB) and the Post-Graduate Medical Education Board (PGMEB):** These Boards will be responsible for formulating standards, curriculum, guidelines, and granting recognition to medical qualifications at the undergraduate and post graduate levels respectively.
- **The Medical Assessment and Rating Board (MARB):** MARB will have the power to levy monetary penalties on medical institutions which fail to maintain the minimum standards as laid down by the UGMEB and PGMEB. The MARB will also grant permission for establishing a new medical college, starting any postgraduate course, or increasing the number of seats.
- **The Ethics and Medical Registration Board:** It will maintain a National Register of all licensed medical practitioners, and regulate professional conduct. The Board will also maintain a register of all licensed community health providers in the country.

- **Community Health Providers:** Under the Bill, the NMC may grant a limited license to certain mid-level practitioners connected with the modern medical profession to practice medicine. These mid-level practitioners may prescribe specified medicines in primary and preventive healthcare.
- **Entrance Examinations:** There will be a uniform National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for admission to under-graduate and post-graduate super-speciality medical education in all medical institutions regulated under the Bill.
- The Bill proposes a common final year undergraduate examination called the **National Exit Test** for the students graduating from medical institutions to obtain the license for practice. This test will also serve as the basis for admission into post-graduate courses at medical institutions under this Bill.

Impact Of The Bill

- The Bill provides for a medical education system which ensures availability of adequate and high quality medical professionals, adoption of the latest medical research by medical professionals, periodic assessment of medical institutions and an effective grievance redressal mechanism.
- The NMC replaces the MCI an elected body where its members were elected by medical practitioners themselves, i.e., the regulator was elected by the regulated. There have been several issues with the functioning of the MCI with respect to its regulatory role, composition, allegations of corruption, and lack of accountability. By doing away with the MCI, the bill seeks to address the said problems.
- MCI has been noted to be non-diverse and consists mostly of doctors who look out for their own self-interest over public interest. In order to reduce the monopoly of doctors, time and again it has been recommended by experts that the MCI should include diverse stakeholders such as public health experts, social scientists, and health economists. Now, 15 out of 25 members (60%) of NMC will be doctors and in the process have a diverse representative group.

Way Ahead

- The NMC Bill opens the path to a long-awaited reform of medical education.
- Mid-level health workers like Community Health Providers are very much needed but their training programmes, competencies and roles have to be clearly defined to differentiate them from medical graduates.
- The Allied Healthcare Professionals Bill, which is to be examined by the Standing Committee, is the right place to position them.
- A common exit examination is needed for standardisation and postgraduate course selection but must be preceded by a college-level testing of practical clinical skills as a qualifier for the theory-based NEXT (National Exit Test).

Extra Mile

Critics Of The Bill

- As per the Bill, of the 25 members proposed for the NMC, only five would be elected which means the non-elected members would be either government officials or those nominated by the government.
- Disputes related to ethics and misconduct in medical practice may require judicial expertise. For example, in the UK, the adjudication decision and final disciplinary action is decided by the Tribunal. It is unclear why the NMC is an appellate authority with regard to matters related to professional or ethical misconduct of medical practitioners.
- The current system allows medical graduates to practise irrespective of the status of his/her PG NEET. The Bill condenses final year MBBS exam, Licentiate exam and PG NEET into one

examination. This effectively removes the opportunity to reappear for PG selection. Moreover, the examination being objective in nature, increases the workload and stress level of the students manifold.

- As per IMA, granting of licence to non-medical 'persons connected with modern scientific medical profession', to practise modern medicine is a process of legalising and promoting quackery in India.
- The provisions of the said bill promote gross incompetence and mockery of the professionals currently working in the medical profession.

17. Throw light on the recent controversy over the foreign currency overseas sovereign bonds. What are the merits and demerits of issuing foreign currency overseas sovereign bonds?

Answer

The recent budget presented for the fiscal year 2019-20 came with an announcement of issuing overseas foreign currency sovereign bonds in addition to raising funds from the domestic market. The government intends to mobilise about Rs 70,000 crore through this route as part of diversification of government's resource mobilisation. The issue has been fiercely debated with many economists including the former RBI governors and deputy governors, most of them arguing against the move.

Sovereign Bonds

- A sovereign bond is a specific debt instrument issued by the government. They can be denominated in both foreign and domestic currency. Just like other bonds, it promises to pay the buyer a certain amount of interest for a stipulated number of years and repay the face value on maturity.
- Apart from a fixed return, they offer a great deal of safety and are also actively traded in secondary market.
- In addition to financing government spending programs, these bonds can be used to repay older debts that may be maturing or cover interest payments coming due.
- Typically, the more financially strong a country, the more well respected is its sovereign bond. Some of the best known sovereign bonds are the Treasuries (of the United States), the Gilts (of Britain), the OATS (of France), the Bundesanleihen or Bunds (of Germany) and the JGBs (of Japan).
- The yield of the sovereign bond is the interest rate that the government pays on issuing bonds. Countries with volatile economies and high inflation rates have to issue higher interest returns on their bonds compared to more stable ones.

Need For The Step

- The Indian government's domestic borrowing is crowding out private investment and preventing the interest rates from falling even when inflation has cooled off and the RBI is cutting policy rates.
- If the government was to borrow some of its loans from outside India, there will be money left for private companies to borrow.
- Moreover, at less than 5%, India's sovereign external debt to GDP is among the lowest globally. Hence there is a scope for the Indian government to raise funds through this route without worrying too much about the possible negative effects.

Benefits

- **Global Market Indices:** India's representation in global debt market indices is small compared to other emerging markets. The step may facilitate inclusion of India's government bonds in the global debt indices. This may lead to higher foreign inflows into India.

- Moreover, inclusion in global benchmarks would also improve the attractiveness of rupee-denominated sovereign bonds.
- **Yield Curve:** A sovereign bond issue will provide a yield curve — a benchmark — for Indian corporates who wish to raise loans in foreign markets. This will help Indian businesses that have increasingly looked towards foreign economies to borrow money.
- **Low interest rates:** The timing is appropriate. Globally, and especially in the advanced economies where the government is likely to borrow from, the interest rates are low and due to the easy monetary policies of foreign central banks, there are a lot of surplus funds waiting for a product that pays more.
- **Improve credit rating:** When sovereign bonds will actually start trading, it will establish the credit risk premium for India. This could force credit rating agencies to improve India's ratings once a baseline has been established. It so happened in the case of Philippines and Indonesia.
- **Shore up forex reserves:** As the borrowing is in dollars, it adds to forex reserves and in a very unobtrusive manner steadies the exchange rate. The loans will have to be repaid only after, say, 10 years or more and, therefore, there are no pressures of outflows for this period.
- It could also make the Indian government more disciplined in **reining in the fiscal deficit**.

Demerits

- **Exchange rate risk:** The difference between issuing a bond denominated in rupees and issuing it in a foreign currency (say US dollar) is the incidence of exchange rate risk. If the loan is in terms of dollars, and if the rupee depreciates sharply during the bond's tenure, the government would end up paying more.
- **Inflation:** If fresh foreign currency comes into the economy, the RBI would have to "neutralise" it by sucking the exact amount out of the money supply. This, in turn, will require selling more bonds. If the RBI doesn't do it then the excess money supply will create inflation and push up the interest rates, thus disincentivising private investments.
- **Regular course:** It is quite likely that the government will be tempted to dip into the foreign markets for more loans every time it runs out of money. At some point, especially if India does not take care of its fiscal health, the foreign investors will pull the plug on fresh investments, creating dire consequences for India.
- **Reduced interest rates:** Such a move can lower yields on government bonds in the domestic market. Since interest rates on financial products track the movement in G-Sec yields, this can reduce interest rates offered on savings, post office savings and bank fixed deposit rates

Conclusion

The issuance of sovereign bonds involves a gamut of factors that have to be weighed before launching them. So if the government does issue foreign sovereign bonds, it should begin with small numbers and must also exercise caution in the process.

18. The Budget and the Economic Survey recently talked about making Indian a \$5 trillion economy by 2024. What are the challenges? What needs to be done to achieve the said target?

Answer

The Economic Survey and the Budget have set a task of converting India into a \$5 trillion economy by 2024. It has been claimed that with the given micro and macro foundations, the economy is ready to shift gears so that economic growth, jobs and exports can be pushed up to the next level.

In order to achieve the target, the required growth rate in real or inflation-adjusted terms has to be 9% per year. To get a perspective, India officially grew at 7.1% per year over the last five years, but the annual growth rate never touched 9%. China, with a historically unprecedented growth record in its best five years, during 2003-07, grew at 11.7%. While, South Korea, between 1983 and 1987, grew at 11%.

Challenges

- In the last five years, on average, the domestic saving rate was 30.8% of gross national domestic income (GNDI), and the investment rate (gross capital formation to GDP ratio) was 32.5%. But a 9% annual growth rate calls for 39% of domestic saving rate and 41.2% of investment rate.
- History shows that no country has succeeded in accelerating its growth rate without raising the domestic saving rate to around 40% of GDP.
- Post the 2008 economic crisis, India's economy has been fuelled predominantly by consumption. There are limits to the growth of a consumption driven economy.
- The banking sector's ability to boost credit growth is limited by non-performing assets (NPAs) and the governance crisis in the financial sector.
- Moreover, export to GDP ratio has declined rapidly, with a looming global trade war on the horizon.

Path to a \$5-trillion economy

International experience suggests that levels of growth required can be sustained by a "virtuous cycle" of savings, investment and exports catalysed and supported by a favourable demographic phase.

- a) Investment:** Investment is the key driver that drives demand, creates capacity, increases labour productivity, introduces new technology, allows creative destruction and generates jobs. Private investment should especially be promoted, while assuring that there is no crowding out of private investment because of the government. Higher share of private investment would also give government the space to stick to its path of fiscal consolidation.
- b) MSME**
 - 'Dwarf' firms (with less than 100 workers) account for more than 50% of all organised firms in manufacturing by number.
 - Despite this, their contribution to employment was just 14% and to productivity a mere 8%. Large firms, on the other hand, are just 15% in number but account for 75% employment and close to 90% of productivity.
 - They need to be nourished to create more jobs and become more productive, reduce the cost of capital, and rationalise the risk-return trade-off for investment.
- c) Labour Reform:** Factories in States that have flexible labour markets are much more productive than those in States with rigid laws. Hence there is an urgent need for widening and deepening the labour reforms.
- d) Legal system:** The Indian legal system, with its pending cases, is perhaps the single biggest constraint to doing business in the country and acts as an obstacle to attract investment. Hence, it is of utmost importance to unclog the legal system in order to improve the business environment.
- e) Policy making:** In order to unshackle the animal spirits of the economy it is important to create a certain and consistent policy environment.
- f) Improve Tax compliance**
 - **Boost tax morale:** Convince citizens that they pay tax commensurate to benefits received and correct any perception of unfairness.

- **Offer privileges:** Offer recognition to highest tax payers in a district, create exclusive membership clubs to honour honest tax payers; give them faster boarding, clearances at toll gates and special lanes at immigration counters.
- Remove barriers to filing taxes such as hassles and complexity in filling forms
- Information on peer behaviour can influence tax payers to report income
- Public shaming of individuals who don't pay taxes can also reduce non compliance

g) Increase non tax revenues: The non-tax revenues have a significant potential to expand, especially because the PSUs are sitting on large pools of land which can be monetised. There is also an opportunity for greater returns from divestment. The government can reduce its holdings in some PSUs to below the majority stake of 51% of direct control.

Though the task seems daunting, if the right steps are taken, the stature of Indian economy will rise and the country can brush its shoulders with the global giants in the times to come.

PRELIMS MCQS

1. Consider the following statements regarding European Commission (EC):
 1. It is the executive branch of the European Union.
 2. The EC also has legislative functions and judicial functions.

Which of the above statements is/are Incorrect?

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

Context

- **Ursula von der Leyen** has been confirmed as the European commission's **new President**.
- She will be the **first female president** and the **first German** in this job.
- She will replace **Jean-Claude Juncker** when he steps down on 31 October.

Answer – D

Explanation**About EC**

- It is an institution of the European Union (EU) and its constituent entities that makes up the **organization's executive arm**.
- It is responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions, upholding the EU treaties and managing the day-to-day business of the EU.
- It also has **legislative functions**, such as proposing new laws for the European Parliament, and **judicial functions**, such as finding legal solutions to business and trade issues between countries within the EU.
- Because of its responsibility to represent the European interest and enforce the treaties and legislation that provide the legal foundation for the EU and communities, the **EC is known as the guardian of the treaties**.

2. Consider the following places of the world

1. Prosecco Hills of Italy
2. Budj Bim Cultural Landscape of Australia
3. Babylon City of Iraq
4. Jaipur City of India

Which of the above places has/have been included in UNESCOS's World Heritage List?

- a) 1 and 4 only
- b) 2 and 4 only

c) 3 and 4 only

d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Context

Annual meeting of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee took place at Baku (capital of Azerbaijan). It added **29 new cultural and natural sites** to its World Heritage List.

Answer – D

Explanation

The **United Nations' cultural body** meets annually to approve the addition of cultural, natural and sites of mixed significance to its preservation list, which now has 1,121 sites of "outstanding universal value." The inscribed sites have to meet **one or more of 10 criteria**, including "representing a masterpiece of human creative genius" or "exceptional natural beauty" or being an **outstanding example of a traditional human settlement**. The World Heritage Committee is composed of representatives of 21 States Parties to the World Heritage Convention who meet annually. The Committee is in charge of implementing the Convention.

Prosecco Hills of Italy:

- The Hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene are the **eighth UNESCO World Heritage site in the Veneto region**, the **55th site in Italy**, and the **10th site in the world** to be registered under the category of "cultural landscape", in recognition of their unique interaction between man and the environment. In terms of its number of UNESCO sites, **Italy outranks any other country**.
- The landscape is characterized by 'hogback' hills, **cigloni** – small plots of vines on narrow grassy terraces – forests, small villages and farmland.
- Since the 17th century, the use of cigloni has created a particular **chequerboard landscape** consisting of rows of vines parallel and vertical to the slopes.
- In the 19th century, the **bellussera technique of training the vines** contributed to the aesthetic characteristics of the landscape.
- This region is home to world-famous sparkling wine Prosecco.

Budj Bim Cultural Landscape of Australia

- The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape is located in the **traditional Country of the Gunditjmara** Aboriginal people in **south-eastern Australia**.
- It consists of three serial components containing **one of the world's most extensive and oldest aquaculture systems**.
- The **Budj Bim lava flows** provide the basis for the complex system of channels, weirs and dams developed by the Gunditjmara in order to trap, store and harvest **kooyang (short-finned eel – Anguilla australis)**.
- It was created about 6,600 years ago by the Gunditjmara people and is older than pyramids, Acropolis and Stonehenge.
- It is the **20th site in Australia** to make it to **WHS list**. Other Australian World Heritage Sites includes- Great Barrier Reef, Sydney Opera House and Kakadu national park.
- It has got the distinction of becoming **1st site in Australia to receive world heritage protection only for its Aboriginal cultural importance**.

Ancient city of Babylon, Iraq

- Iraq had been lobbying since 1983 for the **4,000-year-old site** to be added to the United Nations' prestigious list.
- Babylon dates back to the **third millennium BCE**. It was the seat of successive powerful empires under such famous rulers as Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar.
- The city was famous for its **Hanging Gardens**, which were **among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World**.
- It was also famous for the Ishtar Gate and Tower of Babel.
- Other World Heritage Sites in Iraq include - the southern Mesopotamian marshes, Hatra, Samarra, Ashur and the Erbil citadel in northern Iraq.

Jaipur City, Rajasthan

- The fortified city of Jaipur, in India's north-western state of Rajasthan was founded in 1727 by Sawai Jai Singh II.
- With Jaipur's inclusion, the number of heritage sites across India that are on the UNESCO World Heritage list, has **grown to 38**, including **30 cultural properties, seven natural properties and one mixed** site.
- **Ahmedabad** became the first Indian city to get into the prestigious list in 2017.
- India had proposed the nomination of Jaipur as an exceptional urban example in indigenous city planning and construction in South Asia. Besides exemplary planning, its iconic monuments such as the Govind Dev temple, City Palace, Jantar Mantar and Hawa Mahal excel in artistic and architectural craftsmanship of the period.
- The city's urban planning shows an exchange of ideas from ancient Hindu and modern Mughal as well as Western cultures. The grid plan is a model that prevails in the West, while the organisation of the different districts refers to traditional Hindu concepts. Designed to be a commercial capital, the city has maintained its local commercial, artisanal and cooperative traditions to this day.

3. Consider the following statement regarding Gulf of Aqaba:

- 1. It is situated at the northern tip of the Red Sea and west of the Sinai Peninsula.**
- 2. Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia are the four countries which share its coastline.**

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context

- Jordan has unveiled its **first underwater military museum** off the **coast of Aqaba**.
- The vehicles, imitating a battle formation, have been stationed at a coral reef in the Red Sea.

Answer – B

Explanation

- Red sea is a narrow strip of water inlet of Indian Ocean. It extends south-eastward from Suez in Egypt, to Bab el-Mandeb Strait (it connects Red Sea to Gulf of Aden).
- **Gulf of Aqaba** is a large gulf at the northern tip of the Red Sea, east of the Sinai Peninsula and west of the Arabian mainland.
- Its coastline is divided between four countries: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.
- Aqaba is the **only coastal city in Jordan** and the largest and most populous city on the Gulf of Aqaba.



4. Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) is a project

- Launched by OECD
- Launched by IMF
- Launched by World Bank
- None of the above

Context:

- The Cabinet has approved ratification of a **Multilateral Convention to Implement (MLI) OECD's project on checking tax evasion**.
- The Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent **Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)** was signed by the then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in Paris on June 7, 2017.

Answer – A

Explanation

- India has **deposited the instrument of ratification** to OECD, Paris, along with its final position in terms of **covered tax agreements (CTAs)**, under the multilateral convention. The provisions enshrined in the framework will **come into effect from fiscal 2020-21** for bilateral tax treaties.
- The convention will modify India's treaties in order to curb revenue loss through treaty abuse and base erosion and profit shifting strategies
- It will ensure that profits are taxed where substantive economic activities generating the profits are carried out and where value is created.

Current Status

- Out of 93 CTAs notified by India, **22 countries have already ratified** the MLI as on date. Hence, the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with these countries will be modified by MLI.
- For the remaining CTAs, effect of MLI will take place as and when these countries ratify the MLI.

What is BEPS Project

This initiative is an OECD effort, approved by the G20, to design a globally standardized rules to check tax avoidance practices by the MNCs so that there will be no tax base erosion.

What Is BEPS

- It is a technical term indicating the tax avoidance strategies of MNCs that reduces the tax bases for countries.
- Usually, a company has to pay tax for its profit or income. Once profit is shifted to other countries or to tax havens, the tax base is eroded and there is no tax payment by the company in the concerned country.

How Profit Shifting Becomes Possible

The MNCs utilizes the **loopholes or opportunities available** with domestic tax laws as well as shifting income to tax havens to minimise taxes. Hence, tax avoidance is practiced by them to escape from taxes.

5. Consider the following statements regarding Border Road Organisation (BRO):

1. It has been entirely brought under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
2. It develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighboring countries.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context:

- The Defence Minister has inaugurated the **Ujh bridge (longest bridge constructed so far by BRO) in Kathua district**, and **Basantar bridge in Samba district** of Jammu & Kashmir.
- These bridges have been constructed by **Border Roads Organisation** under **Project Sampark**.
- These bridges will provide smooth connectivity and are vital for the Army for deployment on border areas.

Answer – B

Explanation

About Project Sampark:

- It was raised by Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in 1975. Its Headquarters is at Jammu.
- Area of responsibility - **Pir Panjal Range (in north) to Pathankot (in south)** and from **Poonch (in west) to Dalhousie (in east)**

About BRO

- The BRO was formed on 7 May 1960 to secure India's borders and develop infrastructure in remote areas of the north and north-east states of the country.
- It also develops and maintains road networks in friendly neighboring countries.

- It functions under the administrative control of **Ministry of Defence**.

Role of BRO**a. In Peace**

- Develop & Maintain the Operational Road Infrastructure of General Staff in the Border Areas.
- Contribute to the Socio-Economic Development of the Border States.

b. In War

- To Develop & Maintain Roads to Keep Line of Control through in Original Sectors and Re-Deployed Sectors.
- To Execute Addl Tasks as laid down by the Govt Contributing to the War Effort.

6. Bhabha Kavach is

- a) Missile defence system of India**
- b) India's lightest bullet-proof jacket**
- c) A project to protect a region from nuclear radiation**
- d) A technology by BARC to increase the shelf life of Mangoes**

Context

The Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) has received requests for around two lakh **'Bhabha Kavach'**.

Answer – B

Explanation**More About Bhabha Kavach**

- It is **country's lightest bullet-proof jackets** for the armed forces.
- The jacket gives **360 degree protection** against bullets and has achieved the protection level of **National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Level III+**.
- The jacket has been named Bhabha Kavach **as the nano-based technology was taken from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre**.

About Ordnance Factories Board

- It is a defense contractor owned by the Indian government which consists of the Indian Ordnance Factories. It functions under the Department of Defence Production of the Ministry of Defence.
- It is the world's **largest government-operated production** organization and the oldest organisation run by the Government of India.
- It is also called the **"Fourth Arm of Defence"**.
- Corporate HQ- Kolkata

7. Innovative Drone-delivery Project "Medicine From The Sky" is being launched in

- a) Tamil Nadu**
- b) Rajasthan**
- c) Gujrat**

d) Telangana

Context:

- The **World Economic Forum Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution Network** has announced that it will embark on an innovative drone-delivery project called '**Medicine from the Sky**' in **Telangana**.
- The project will run in partnership with the government of Telangana and Health Net Global.
- The pilot project will include a comprehensive study of **drone-based deliveries for blood, vaccines, medical samples and organs**.

Answer – D

- 8. Consider the following statements regarding the “Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963”:**
- 1. The treaty extensively talks about the protection of rights of the people and does not include economic, commercial, cultural and scientific relations among the countries.**
 - 2. Article 5 of the convention defines the consular functions.**
 - 3. Article 36 addresses communications between consular officers and nationals of the sending state.**

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 only**
- b) 1 and 2 Only**
- c) 2 only**
- d) 2 and 3 only**

Context:

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has **stayed the execution** of Kulbhusan Jadhav by Pakistan.

Answer – D

Explanation

- **Vienna Convention on Consular Relations** is an international treaty that defines a framework for consular relations between independent sovereign states.
- It extensively talks about the protection of rights of the people **along with economic, commercial, cultural and scientific relations among the countries**. Hence, **Statement 1 is wrong**.
- **Article 5** of the convention **defines the consular functions**. It lists **thirteen functions of a consul**, including "*protecting in the receiving State the interests of the sending State and of its nationals, both individuals and bodies corporate, within the limits permitted by international law*".
- **Article 36** addresses communications between consular officers and nationals of the sending state. The Convention provides that "consular officers shall be free to communicate with nationals of the sending State and to have access to them."

Background

- Jadhav had been arrested in Pakistan's restive province of Balochistan in 2016 after he reportedly entered from Iran and accused of terrorism, spying, and fomenting trouble in Balochistan.
- He was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court in 2017.
- In May 2017, India appealed against Pakistan in ICJ to render justice for Kulbhushan Jadhav.

Key Highlights Of The Recent Judgement

- ICJ, in a 15-1 decision, directed Pakistan to stay his execution and **allow him consular access**.
- **Violation of Vienna Convention** – It found that India had been deprived of the "right to communicate with and have access to Jadhav, to visit him in detention and to arrange for his legal representation", which is required under **Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations**.
- It also said that Islamabad **should take steps to remedy the violation of the rights** enshrined in the Vienna Convention.

Analysis

- After this verdict, Jadhav could now be **tried once again in either a civilian or military court**, but with proper legal assistance provided to him.
- The ICJ's rulings are obligatory and hence it is expected that Pakistan would follow the verdict.
- However, its **verdicts have not always been accepted** by member states. Speculations are rife that Pakistan could file a fresh petition before the ICJ seeking examination of new elements to support its case against Jadhav.
- This will cause **more friction between India and Pakistan**, against the background of ties between being strained following terrorist attacks in India.

About ICJ

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the **principal judicial organ** of the United Nations (UN).
- It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.
- The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands).
- All members of the UN are parties to the statute of the ICJ, and nonmembers may also become parties.
- The Court's role is to settle in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
- The Court is composed of **15 judges** who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
- It is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ. Its official languages are **English and French**.
- The court's judgment is **final and without appeal**.

9. Consider the following pairs:

| Exercise | Participating Countries |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Hand-in-Hand | India and China |

2. ISALEX

India and South Africa

3. Garuda

India and France

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

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

Context

- **India and China** will be carrying out a major military exercise called 'Hand-in-Hand' in December this year. The exercise will take place at **Umroi, Meghalaya** and will be based on counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.
- The exercise was previously held in December 2018 at Chengdu, China. In 2017, the exercise did not take place due to the 72-days long standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in Doklam.
- This exercise was **1st started in 2007** in Kunming (in China). However, after 2008 edition this exercise was halted due to stapled visa row only to be resumed in 2013.
- **2019 exercise will be the 8th edition of this exercise.**

Answer – B

Explanation

ISALEX

- **Abu Dhabi** has hosted the first ISA's (International Security Alliance) joint security exercise ISALEX19.
- The exercise will simulate a real-life security threat in a virtual context, to test the readiness of the different teams and to evaluate the tools, strategies and procedures developed jointly between member countries since the launch of the Alliance in 2017.
- The **International Security Alliance** was launched in **Abu Dhabi in 2017**.
- It is an **international working group** to confront organised, transnational and extremist crimes through joint security cooperation projects and the exchange of expertise across these countries.
- The alliance now **comprises nine countries** - the United Arab Emirates, France, the Italian Republic, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Kingdom of Spain, the Republic of Senegal, the Republic of Singapore, and the Slovak Republic.

Garuda 2019

- Ex Garuda 2019, a **bilateral Indo-French** large force employment warfare exercise hosted by **French Air Force (FAF)** from 01 to 12 Jul 19 at **Mont-de-Marsan France**, was successfully completed.
- **Garuda-VI** (this year is the **6th edition of exercise**) was the largest international air training exercise for the year 2019.
- The last edition of this joint exercise was held in **June 2014 at Air Force Station Jodhpur, Rajasthan**.

10. Consider the following statements regarding UKIERI Mobility Programme

1. It is a pilot programme between Universities UK International and Indian Energy Research Institute.
2. This programme would enable UK universities to send their students to India as part of their studies.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context:

- The **British Council of India and Universities UK International** have joined hands together for the launch of **UKIERI Mobility Programme: Study in India**.
- It will be a bilateral pilot programme which will enable UK universities to collaborate with Indian partners to send UK students to India as part of their studies

Answer – B

Explanation**Key Highlights of The Programme**

- This programme will open on July 2019 with an **aim to generate 200 opportunities** for undergraduate students at UK universities by March 2021.
- Priority will be given to students from **traditionally underrepresented groups**.
- The programme will support national and institutional-level **objectives** to:
 - Increase the **levels of outward student mobility from the UK** to 13% by 2020, as set out in UUKi's Go International: Stand Out campaign
 - Support the employability of UK graduates and help them prepare for a globally competitive workforce
 - Support the internationalization of Indian higher education through the diversification of the student body, and the consolidation of inter-institutional partnerships
- The programme **will be funded by** the UK and Indian Governments as part of Phase 3 of the UK-India Education Research Initiative and delivered by the British Council, Universities UK International and EdCIL in India.

About UKIERI:

- UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) **started in April 2006** with the aim of **enhancing educational linkages between India and the UK**.
- It is delivered by Universities UK International (UUKi) and British Council.

11. Which of the following Indian State celebrates “International Gita Jayanti Mahotsav”?

- a) Haryana

- b) Bihar
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) None of the above

Context:

- Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has **invited Nepal to be the partner country** for 2019 edition of "**Gita Jayanti Mahotsav**".
- This year's celebration is scheduled to be held at **Kuruksheetra from December 3 to 8**.

Answer – A

Explanation**About the Mahotsav**

- Celebrated on the **Shukla Ekadashi, 11th day of waxing moon of Margashirsha month** of the Hindu calendar
- In 2016, Government of Haryana organized International Gita Mahotsav from December 6 to 10 to mark the Gita Jayanti (birthday of Bhagvad Gita, the sacred text of Hindus).
- Every year a country is invited to **become the partner country** for the mega event.

Other Countries celebrating Gita Jayanti:

- **Mauritius** organised Gita Mahotsav in February 2019.
- The same will be organised in the **United Kingdom** from August 7 to August 9 this year.
- **Canada** has also proposed to organise a similar event there.

12. Which of the following personalities have been selected for 2019 Global Excellence Awards by US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF)?

- a) Rajat Gupta and Preeti Patel
- b) Narendra Modi and Mike Pompeo
- c) Ajay Banga and Azim Premji
- d) Jared Kushner and S Jaishankar

Context:

The **second annual Leadership Summit** of the **US India Strategic and Partnership Forum (USISPF)** was held at Washington DC on 11 July 2019.

Answer – C

Explanation**Key Highlights**

- The conference focused on two broad areas, defense and energy security.

- US – India Trade Report was presented during the conference. The report estimated that **U.S.-India bilateral trade** is likely to **grow from \$143 billion to \$238 billion by 2025**. This growth will occur if trade grows by 7.5% each year, as has been the trend for the last 7 years.
- The summit also presented the **2019 Global Excellence Awards** to **Mastercard CEO and president, Ajay Banga**, and **Wipro chairman, Azim Premji**, in recognition of their significant contributions to strengthening economic ties between the US and India.

About USISPF

- Headquartered in Washington DC, established in 2017
- USISPF has emerged as the top **India-centric advocacy group** in the United States for both corporate sector and strategic community in just a few years.

13. Shawala Teja Singh temple, an ancient Hindu temple, is located in

- A. Jammu & Kashmir, India
- B. Pakistan Occupied Kashmir
- C. Rajasthan, India
- D. Sialkot, Pakistan

Context

Shawala Teja Singh temple has been re-opened for devotees.

Answer – D

Explanation

- It is an ancient Hindu temple located in **Pakistan's Sialkot city** (Punjab province).
- Shawala Teja Singh temple was shut down during Partition.
- Protesting against the demolition of the Babri Masjid in India, a mob had reportedly damaged the temple in 1992.
- Built by **Sardar Teja Singh**, the temple is dedicated to **Hindu deity Shiva**.
- Pilgrims climb a steep staircase to reach the temple, which according to 'History of Sialkot' is about **1,000 years old**.

14. Consider the following statements regarding the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)

1. ICSID is an institution under World Bank group and is situated at Paris, France.
2. It was established in 1966 for international investment dispute settlement.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context

- **A World Bank arbitration court** has ordered the **Pakistani government to pay damages** of \$5.8 billion to **Tethyan Copper**, a joint venture between Chile’s Antofagasta Plc (ANTO.L) and Canada’s Barrick Gold (ABX.TO).
- Tethyan Copper discovered **vast mineral wealth** more than a decade ago **in Reko Diq** (at the foot of an extinct volcano near Pakistan’s frontier with Iran and Afghanistan).
- However, Pakistan’s government, in 2011, unexpectedly refused to grant them the mining lease.

Answer – B

Explanation

About Reko Diq

It is a small town in Chagai district in Balochistan that lies close to the border with Iran and Afghanistan. It is believed to have the world’s 5th largest gold deposit.

About International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID):

- Parent Organisation – World Bank
- ICSID is the world’s leading institution **devoted to international investment dispute settlement**.
- Its availability to **investors and States** helps to promote international investment by providing confidence in the dispute resolution process.
- It is also available for **state-state disputes** under investment treaties and free trade agreements, and as an administrative registry.
- It was **established in 1966** by the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States (the ICSID Convention).
- ICSID provides for settlement of disputes by **conciliation, arbitration or fact-finding**.

15. Consider the following pairs:

| Operation | Aim |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Operation Thirst | For Water Conservation |
| 2. Operation Milap | For rescuing kidnapped or trafficked children |
| 3. Operation Sudarshan | For promoting tourism |

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

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

Answer – D

Explanation

Operation Thirst

To curb the menace of **unauthorized PDW (Packaged Drinking Water)** in Railway premises, an all India drive named “Operation Thirst” was launched by the Railway Protection Force (RPF).

Operation Milap:

- Launched by Delhi Police in December 2014. Under this operation, kidnapped or trafficked children are rescued.
- Delhi Police Crime Branch has rescued 333 missing children from the city and handed them over to their families. These children were missing since January 2019 from various parts of country and were found in Delhi.

Operation Sudarshan:

- The Border Security Force (BSF) launched a massive exercise, code named ‘Sudarshan’, to **fortify the ‘anti-infiltration grid’** along the **Pakistan border in Punjab and Jammu**.
- The exercise will see the entire BSF’s senior field brass, thousands of troops and machinery being deployed in these forward areas.

16. Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti Aims

- a) **To provide a boost to the Intellectual Property Right (IPR) culture in indigenous defence industry.**
- b) **To showcase the achievements of DRDO to youths of India.**
- c) **To encourage Indian women to join the armed forces.**
- d) **None of the above**

Context:

- In a major boost to Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti, an MOU was signed between the Intellectual Property Facilitation Cell (IPFC), Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence and National Research Development Corporation (NRDC), Ministry of Science and Technology on 09 July 2019.
- The partnership between IPFC and NRDC is expected to bridge the capacity shortfall and provide a major fillip to the ongoing efforts of MoD towards promoting a culture of Innovation and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in Indian Defence industry.

Answer – A**Explanation**

- **Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti** was launched with the aim to **inculcate IP culture** in Indian defence manufacturing ecosystem.
- Under this mission, an **Intellectual Property Facilitation Cell (IPFC) has been established** under the aegis of Directorate General Quality Assurance (DGQA) which has within a short span of a year achieved challenging target of training more than 12,000 personnel on IPR and facilitating filing of more than 1000 new IPR applications.

17. Consider the following pairs:

| Date | International Day |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. 11 July - | World Population Day |
| 2. 17 July - | World Day for International Justice |
| 3. 28 July - | World Nature Conservation Day |
| 4. 29 July - | International Tiger Day |

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- a) 1 and 4
- b) 1,2 and 4
- c) 1, 3 and 4
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer – D

Explanation

11 July

- **World Population Day** is observed on July 11 every year with aims and objectives to spread knowledge about population related issues across the world.
- It was established by the then-Governing Council **of the UNDP in 1989**. The first celebration of World Population Day took place on **11 July 1990**.
- This year's World Population Day *calls for global attention to the unfinished business of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development*.
- During this conference, the participating governments recognized that **reproductive health and gender equality** are essential for achieving sustainable development.
- **Some facts:**
 - By 2030, World population is expected to 8.6 billion, and in 2050 by 9.8 billion.
 - Out of 7.4 billion people in the world, population of India is at 1.327 billion which is approximately **17.5% of the world population**.
 - India's **35% population** is living in **three states** that are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.
 - According to data provided by Pew Research Center, India will surpass China by 2100.

17 July

- It is celebrated as **World Day for International Justice** because on this day the Rome Statute was adopted in 1998.
- **On 1 June 2010**, at the **Review Conference of the Rome Statute** held in Kampala (Uganda), the Assembly of State Parties **decided to celebrate 17 July as the Day of International Criminal Justice**.
- It is celebrated to make people aware and united to support the justice and also to promote the rights of the victims.
- Theme for 2019 - '**If you want Peace and Development, Work for Social Justice**'

28 July

World Nature Conservation Day is celebrated on 28 July to increase awareness about protecting the natural resources and to make people understand about the importance of the conservation of nature.

July 29

- **International Tiger Day** has been held on the **29th July** every year since 2010 when it was **first created at the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit**.
- In this Summit, a declaration was made that Governments of tiger populated countries had **vowed to double tiger population by 2022**.
- Reasons behind the declining Tiger Population
 - Poaching and illegal trade; Habitat loss; Climate Change (the *rise of sea level due to climate change lead to wipe out of Sundarbans*)
 - Several diseases like Feline Panleucopania, tuberculosis etc.
 - Lack of protection infrastructure, Increasing tourism, Lack of funds for the conservation of tiger

All India Tiger Estimation Report 2018:

All India Tiger Estimation Report 2018 has been released by the Prime Minister. Key highlights of the report are:

- India has **achieved its 2022 target** of tiger population in the country. India now has **2,967 tigers**.
- The growth in the **4th cycle of the Tiger Census** has been a **33 percent**.
- **Madhya Pradesh** saw the highest number of tigers that is 526 which is closely followed by **Karnataka** at 524 and **Uttarakhand** with 442 tigers remaining at number 3 position.
- There is a **decline in the population of tiger in Chhattisgarh and Mizoram** while tiger numbers in **Odisha remained constant**.
- **According to 2014 Census**, total number of tigers in the **country was 2226** while according to **2010 census figure was 1706** and in **2006 figure was 1411**.

18. Consider the following statements regarding the European Central Bank (ECB):

1. It is the central bank of all the European Union countries.
2. It is headquartered at Frankfurt, Germany.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context

- Christine Lagarde has been appointed as the **next president of the European Central Bank**.
- She is the **current head of the International Monetary Fund** and had been chosen to **succeed Mario Draghi**, whose eight-year term ends in October.

Answer – B

Explanation

- The ECB is the central bank of the **19 European Union countries which have adopted the euro**.
- Its main task is to **maintain price stability in the euro area** and so preserve the purchasing power of the single currency.
- Established by the Treaty of Amsterdam, it is headquartered at Frankfurt, Germany.

19. The fifth international Dharma-Dhamma conference was held at:

- a) Rajgir, Bihar**
- b) Bodh Gaya, Bihar**
- c) Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh**
- d) Lumbini, Nepal**

Answer – A

Explanation

- 5th International Dharma-Dhamma conference was held on July 27-28 **in Rajgir, Bihar**.
- This conference is being hosted by Rajgir **for the second time**.
- The conference acts as a platform for the Hindu and Buddhist thinkers to express their views
- Organised by: **Nalanda University** (NU) in collaboration with New Delhi's Centre for Study of Religion and Society-India Foundation (CSRS-IF)

20. Recently, the Minister of State (I/c) of Culture and Tourism has informed Lok Sabha about JATAN software. It is related to:

- a) Creation of digital collections in various tourist spots**
- b) Creation of digital collections in various museums**
- c) Raising awareness about the responsible behavior among tourists**
- d) None of the above**

Answer – B

Explanation

- Recently, the Minister of State (I/c) of Culture and Tourism has informed Lok Sabha about **JATAN**.
- JATAN is a virtual museum builder software that enables creation of **digital collection management system** for Indian museums and is deployed in several national museums across India.
- It aims to **make a digital imprint of all the objects preserved in museums** and help researchers, curators and other people interested in the field.
- It has been developed by Human Centres Design and Computing Group, C-DAC, Pune, Maharashtra.

21. “Working on a warmer planet: The effect of heat stress on productivity and decent work” report has been released by
- Ministry of Labour and Employment, India
 - United Nations Environment Programme
 - International Labour Organization
 - World Economic Forum

Context:

International Labour Organization (ILO) has released a report titled- **Working on a Warmer Planet: The Impact of Heat Stress on Labour Productivity and Decent Work.**

Answer – C

Explanation

Key Highlights

- Global warming will make heat stress and extreme weather events more common and one result of this trend is the **loss of jobs and productivity.**
- The proliferation of so-called “**urban heat islands**”, areas of concentrated heat inside cities resulting from growing population numbers and urbanization, will further intensify the impact of heatwaves, aggravating the risks faced by workers.
- Heat is an occupational safety and health hazard. Temperatures above 24–26°C are associated with reduced labour productivity. At 33–34°C, a worker operating at moderate work intensity loses 50 per cent of his or her work capacity.
- Workers in all sectors are affected, but certain occupations are especially at risk because they involve more physical effort and/or take place outdoors.

India Specific Observation:

- Because of its large population, India will be the most affected country.
- India would lose 5.8% of working hours in 2030 due to global warming.
- India is expected to lose equivalent of 34 million full-time jobs in 2030 in productivity due to this.
- Most of global warming impact in India will be felt in agricultural sector.
- The report appreciated the fact that **Ahmedabad incorporated a cool roofs initiative into its 2017 Heat Action Plan.** Under this plan access to affordable cool roofs for the city’s slum residents and urban poor was provided.

22. What is “Strum Ataka ”, sometimes seen in the news?

- An Israeli radar system
- India's indigenous anti-missile programme
- A Russian anti-tank missile
- A defence collaboration between Japan and South Korea

Answer – C

Explanation

- India has signed a deal to acquire '**Strum Ataka**' anti-tank missile from Russia for its fleet of Mi-35 attack choppers.
- The deal for acquiring this missiles was signed with Russia **under the emergency clauses** through which the missiles would be supplied within three months of contract signing.

23. Consider the following statements regarding SAARC Film Festival:

1. It is organized by SAARC Film Centre which is situated in New Delhi, India.
2. SAARC Film Festival 2019 was the 9th edition of this event.
3. The movie Nagarkirtan won the best feature film award at 2019 edition of the festival.

Which of the above statements is/are Incorrect?

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

Context

Bengali movie **Nagarkirtan**, directed by Kaushik Ganguly, has won big at 2019 edition of SAARC film festival, bagging 4 awards including the **Best Feature Film Award**.

Answer – A

Explanation**About SAARC Film Festival**

- It is organized by **SAARC Cultural Centre (Colombo, Sri Lanka)**.
- 2019 Festival was the 9th edition. It focused on films created in South Asia and first screened after 1st May 2017.
- Indian Films which won the award at 2019 edition of the festival are:
 - Nagarkirtan (4 Award including **the Best Feature Film Award**)
 - **Na Bole Wo Haram** (a 20-minute film by debutant director Nitish Patan) – **Best Short Film Award**
 - **Walking With the Wind** (by Praveen Morchhale) - **Special Jury Award for Direction and Story**.

SAARC Cultural Centre

- It is situated in Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- This center was **established in 2009** with the mandate to promote regional unity through cultural integration and intercultural dialogue and contribute towards preservation, conservation and protection of South Asia's cultural heritage within the framework of the SAARC Agenda for Culture.

24. Consider the following statements regarding World Food Programme (WFP):

1. It is the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide.
2. This agency is not a part of the United Nations system.
3. The WFP operations are funded by voluntary donations.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context:

- A book has been launched to commemorate **five decades of partnership** between the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare** and the **UN World Food Programme** towards addressing food and nutritional security in India,
- Name of the book: **Coffee Table Book – 50 years of Partnership for Change.**
- The book showcases **key milestones achieved** by the Government of India in its efforts to make the nation free from hunger and malnutrition and WFP's role in this endeavour.

Answer – B

Explanation

- The World Food Programme is the **world's largest humanitarian agency** fighting hunger worldwide.
- It is a **part of the United Nations system** and is **voluntarily funded**.
- Born in 1961, WFP pursues a vision of the world in which every man, woman and child has access at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life.
- It works towards that vision with its **sister UN agencies in Rome -- the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and the **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** -- as well as other government, UN and NGO partners.

25. Consider the following statements regarding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA):

1. **It works under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.**
2. **UNRWA does not allow refugee status to be inherited by descendants of male refugee, including legally adopted children.**
3. **UNRWA itself runs camps and provides services in the camp.**

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) None of the above

Context:

- **India has pledged** to contribute **USD 5 million** in 2019 to the **UN Palestine refugee agency**.
- It has also voiced concern over the **agency's difficult financial situation** due to voluntary contributions from a limited donor base and called for ensuring sustained fiscal support for its work.

Answer – D

Explanation

- Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, UNRWA was established by **United Nations General Assembly Resolution of December 1949** to carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees. The Agency began operations on 1 May 1950.
- In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate, most recently extending it until 30 June 2020.
- UNRWA is the **only UN agency** dedicated to helping refugees from a specific region or conflict and **is separate from UNHCR**.
- Unlike UNRWA, UNHCR has a specific mandate to aid its refugees to eliminate their refugee status by local integration in current country, resettlement in a third country or repatriation when possible.
- **UNRWA allows refugee status to be inherited** by descendants of male refugee, including legally adopted children.
- For a camp to be recognized by UNRWA, there must be **an agreement between the host government and UNRWA** governing use of the camp.
- UNRWA **does not itself run camps**, has no police powers or administrative role, but **simply provides services in the camp**.
- UNRWA's headquarters are divided between the **Gaza Strip and Amman**. Its operations are **organised into five fields – Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank, and Gaza**.

26. GAFA Tax is related to:

- a) **Green tax levied by a country on the commercial flights passing through the airspace of that country.**
- b) **A digital tax on internet giants such as Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon.**
- c) **Green atmospheric tax levied by France on companies which are contributing to the environmental pollution.**
- d) **A digital tax on companies which want to establish electronic manufacturing unit in India.**

Context:

France's Lower House of Parliament has approved a small, pioneering **tax on Internet giants like Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple**. This tax is known as **GAFA tax**.

Answer – B

Explanation

Key Highlights

- Proposal is to levy **3% tax** on total annual revenues of largest technology firms providing services to French consumers.
- **Eligibility** - Digital companies with **global revenue of more than €750 million**, and **French revenue over €25 million** will be liable to pay this tax.
- It will be retroactively applied from early 2019, and is expected to raise about €400m this year.

- This step would make France the 1st major economy to levy such tax on these giants.

Rational Behind This Step

- At present, these companies are able to pay **little or no corporate tax** in countries **where they do not have a large physical presence**. They declare most of their profits where they are headquartered.
- The **European Commission estimates** that on average **traditional businesses face a 23% tax rate on their profits** within the EU, while **internet companies typically pay 8% or 9%**.
- France has long argued that taxes should be based on digital, not just physical presence.
- It announced its own tax on big technology firms last year after EU-wide efforts stalled (an EU levy would require consensus among members, **but Ireland, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Finland raised objections**).

Analysis

- The Trump administration has denounced the move and made an announcement to **start an investigation** which would determine whether it is discriminatory or unreasonable and burdens or restricts United States commerce.
- The dispute over digital tax could turn into a **source of conflict between US and France**.
- If France is going to take hundreds of millions of euros from the pockets of American tech giants, the US argument might be, then why shouldn't the US earn more money from what French do in the US?
- It took the same view with China and has buried itself **in a trade war** that has destabilised relations and has the potential to escalate even further.
- Digital firms pay less tax **partly because it is harder to determine where on the internet their revenue has been truly generated**, especially if the firms can **artificially shift profits to lower tax countries such as Ireland**.
- Hence, it can be said that in our **modern digital economy**, the **overhaul of how companies are taxed is long overdue**.

27. Consider the following statements regarding International Atomic Energy Agency:

1. It is an organization within the United Nations family.
2. It is widely known as the world's "Atoms for Peace and Development" organization.
3. It is headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Context

- IAEA confirmed that **Iran has exceeded a limit on its enriched uranium reserves** set by a 2015 nuclear deal.

- *As a reaction to sanctions reinstated by the US* after President Donald Trump abandoned the deal (officially known as the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action**), **Iran stepped up production of enriched uranium**, used to make reactor fuel but also potentially nuclear bombs.
- Under the nuclear deal, Iran is only permitted to produce **low-enriched uranium**, which has a **3-4% concentration of U-235**, and can be used to **produce fuel for nuclear power plants**.
- **Weapons-grade uranium is 90% enriched or more.**
- The deal also restricted Iran to **stockpiling no more than 300kg of the low-enriched uranium**. A stockpile of 1,050kg, however, could be further **enriched later into enough material to build one bomb**.

Answer – D

Explanation

- Widely known as the world's "**Atoms for Peace and Development**" organization within the United Nations family, the IAEA is the international centre for cooperation in the nuclear field.
- The Agency works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to **promote the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies**.
- The IAEA **was created in 1957** in response to the deep fears and expectations generated by the discoveries and diverse uses of nuclear technology.
- Headquarter – Vienna, Austria

28. Consider the following statements.

1. **Article 341 of the Constitution provides certain privileges and concessions to the members of Scheduled Castes**
2. **President alone is vested with the power to include or exclude any entry in the Scheduled Castes (SC) list.**
3. **There is provision for the reservation of Scheduled Castes both in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.**

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer: C

Explanation:

Article 341 of the Constitution provides certain privileges and concessions to the members of Scheduled Castes. Further, under the provision of Article 341, first list of SCs in relation to a states/UT is to be issued by a notified Order of the President after consulting concerned state Government. But the clause (2) of Article 341 envisages that, any subsequent inclusion in or exclusion from the list of Scheduled Castes can be effected through an Act of Parliament.

29. Article 371(A) of the Constitution provides special status to which of the following state:

- a) Assam
- b) Jammu and Kashmir
- c) Nagaland
- d) Maharashtra

Answer: C

30. With reference to the Ebola Virus Disease consider the following statements

- 1. It derives its name from a river
- 2. The virus spreads through direct contact with bodily fluids of an infected person.
- 3. It cannot spread to others until a person develops signs or symptoms of the disease.
- 4. The virus can continue to spread even from a person who has recovered from the disease.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 3 and 4
- c) 2 and 4
- d) All of the above

Context

- After holding itself back on three occasions, the World Health Organization has declared the Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.
- A single imported case of Ebola in Goma, a city in Congo with two million people and with an international airport bordering Rwanda, served as a trigger to finally declare a global emergency.
- The outbreak in Congo, has killed nearly 1,700 people and made more than 2,500 people ill. WHO defines a global emergency as an “extraordinary event” which constitutes a risk to other countries and requires a coordinated international response.
- Declaring an event as a global emergency ensures a coordinated international response and greater financial aid.
- This is the fifth time that the WHO has declared a global emergency. The earlier occasions were in February 2016 for Zika outbreaks in the Americas, August 2014 for Ebola outbreaks in western Africa, the spread of polio in May 2014, and the H1N1 pandemic in April 2009.

Answer: D

Explanation

- Ebola virus was first discovered in 1976 near the Ebola River in Zaire, what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) is a rare and deadly disease most commonly affecting people and nonhuman primates (monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees).
- The virus spreads through direct contact (such as through broken skin or mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, or mouth) with:

- Blood or body fluids (urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, breast milk, and semen) of a person who is sick with or has died from Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)
- Objects (such as needles and syringes) contaminated with body fluids from a person sick with EVD or the body of a person who died from EVD
- Infected fruit bats or nonhuman primates (such as apes and monkeys)
- Semen from a man who recovered from EVD.
- Symptoms of include fever, severe headache, muscle pain, weakness, fatigue, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal (stomach) pain, unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising).

Persistence Of The Virus

- There is no known risk of becoming infected with Ebola virus through casual contact with a survivor. However, the virus can remain in certain bodily fluids and continue to spread to others after a person has recovered from the infection.
- The virus can persist in semen, breast milk, ocular (eye) fluid, and spinal column fluid. Areas of the body that contain these fluids are known as immunologically privileged sites.
- These are sites of the body where viruses and pathogens, like Ebola virus, can remain undetected even after the immune system has cleared the virus from other sites of the body.

Vaccine

- Compared with the situation during 2014-2016, the availability of a candidate vaccine has greatly helped. Though the vaccine has not been licensed in any country, the ring vaccination strategy where people who come into contact with infected people, as well as the contacts of those contacts are immunised, has helped.
- Of the nearly 94,000 people at risk who were vaccinated till March, 2019, only 71 got infected compared with 880 unvaccinated who got infected. The vaccine has 97.5% efficacy.

31. With reference to the Chandipura virus consider the following statements

1. It is named after a village in Gujarat.
2. It is a vector borne Virus.
3. The geographical spread of the Virus is restricted to India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) 2 and 3
- d) 1 and 3

Context

- Four cases of suspected Chandipura virus infection have been reported in Gujarat's Dahod, two days after the blood samples of a five-year-old girl who died on June 30 tested positive for the virus.
- The Chandipura Vesiculovirus (CHPV), first discovered during a dengue outbreak, by two virologists of the Pune-based National Institute of Virology (NIV) in 1965, predominantly infects children. It is named after the town in Maharashtra where the discovery was made and isolated.
- For almost three decades after the first case, there was no report of this virus, until it struck again in 2003. The outbreak in Southern India impacted 329 children, 183 of whom contracted encephalitis and died.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- The vector (or carrier) of the virus is the female phlebotomine sandfly. The virus has been detected in sandflies in **Senegal, Nigeria as well as in India.**
- The virus predominantly infects children between the age group of 2-16, spreading through the bite of a sandfly, and in some cases, even the mosquito during the monsoon and pre-monsoon season.
- It is distantly related to the virus that causes rabies and is known to have a case fatality between 55-75 per cent. Its continuing mutating trend has enhanced its lethality to cause human infections.

Symptoms

- The symptoms include sudden high fever accompanied by headache, convulsions and vomiting, sometimes leading to unconsciousness.
- It is known to cause inflammation of the brain and progresses rapidly from an influenza-like illness to coma and death.

Treatment

- There is no specific medicine for its treatment. However with timely detection, hospitalisation and symptomatic treatment is given to the patient, which could help save lives.
- There is no known vaccine to treat or prevent the virus

Prevention

Prevention is the best method to suppress CHPV infection. According to NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information), for the containment of the disease transmitting vectors, it is essential to maintain good nutrition, health, hygiene and awareness in rural areas.

32. Which of the following communities are from Sikkim?

1. Limboo
 2. Tamang
 3. Bhutia
 4. Lepcha
- a) 1 and 2
b) 3 and 4
c) 2, 3 and 4
d) All of the above

Answer: D

Explanation:

- A proposal for reservation of seats for Limboo and Tamang communities in Sikkim Legislative Assembly is under consideration of the Government of India.
- According to the 2011 census, with 91,399 inhabitants, both the tribes total to about 14.97 per cent of the entire population of Sikkim.
- The two communities have been notified as Scheduled Tribes in 2003 and the tribal communities have nursed a sense of deprivation of their political and fundamental rights, ever since they have been declared a Scheduled Tribe under Article 342 of the Constitution.
- The reservation is considered under the Article 371F(f) and Article 332.

- Article 332 constitutionally mandates reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly, therefore, the tribal communities of Limboo and Tamang are entitled to get it.
- Article 371F spells out the special provision related to the state of Sikkim. As per 371F(f), the Parliament may make provisions for the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim, for the purpose of protecting the rights and interests of the different sections of the population of Sikkim.
- The legislative assembly of Sikkim has 12 seats reserved for Bhutias and Lepchas.

33. With reference to Nirbhaya Fund consider the following statements

- 1. The Fund is administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.**
- 2. Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal authority for appraising/recommending the proposals/schemes.**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1**
- b) Only 2**
- c) Both 1 and 2**
- d) Neither 1 nor 2**

Answer: B

Explanation:

- According to official data, the States and Union Territories have utilised less than 20% of the budget allocated to them under the Nirbhaya Fund by the Central government between 2015 and 2018. As per the data, of the ₹854.66 crore released by the Centre, a mere ₹165.48 crore has been spent by various States and UTs.
- The Nirbhaya Fund was set up in the aftermath of the gang rape of a paramedical student in New Delhi in December 2012 with an initial corpus of ₹1,000 crore. Over the years the non-lapsable corpus has swelled to ₹3,600 crore through allocation in the finance Budgets.
- The fund is administered by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal authority for appraising/recommending the proposals/schemes to be funded under Nirbhaya fund. The responsibility of the Fund went to the WCD, which replaced MHA as the nodal ministry in 2015 after questions were raised on the utilisation of the sanctioned amounts.

34. Which of the statements given below is/are correct?

- 1. Minimum Support Price (MSP) is determined by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).**
- 2. Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) is a price support mechanism for horticultural commodities.**
- 3. Market Intervention Scheme is an ad hoc mechanism.**

- a) Only 1**
- b) 2 and 3**
- c) 1 and 2**
- d) 1, 2 and 3**

Context

- The Centre has announced an increase in the minimum support price (MSP) of all 14 Kharif (summer-sown) crops for 2019-20.
- The increase is in line with the principle of fixing MSPs at a level which is at least 1.5 times the cost of production, which was announced last year.

Answer: D

Explanation:

- MSP were announced by the Government of India for the first time in 1966-67 for wheat in the wake of the Green Revolution, to save the farmers from depleting profits.
- It is a form of market intervention by the government to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices during bumper production years. It is an important part of India's agricultural price policy.
- The CCEA determines the MSP of various agricultural commodities in India based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Cost and Prices (CACP).
- For the calculation of the MSP, the CACP takes into account a comprehensive view of the entire structure of the economy of a particular commodity or group of commodities.
- Various supply related information viz. area, yield and production, imports, exports and domestic availability and stocks with the Government/public agencies or industry is taken into account.
- Cost of processing of agricultural products, cost of marketing – storage, transportation, processing, marketing services, taxes/fees and margins retained by market functionaries; etc. are also considered.
- Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) is a price support mechanism implemented on the request of State Governments for procurement of perishable and horticultural commodities in the event of a fall in market prices. The Scheme is implemented when there is at least 10% increase in production or 10% decrease in the ruling rates over the previous normal year.
- Market Intervention Scheme works in a similar fashion to MSP based procurement mechanism for food grains, but is an adhoc mechanism.

35. With reference to Kisan Credit Card Scheme, consider the following statements

1. It was launched in 1998.
2. Tenant farmers and share croppers are not eligible.
3. Fisheries and animal husbandry farmers are eligible.
4. KCC credit holders are covered under personal accident insurance.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1, 2, and 3
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1, 3 and 4
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: C

Explanation:

- The Government of India has extended the facility of Kisan Credit Card (KCC) to fisheries and animal husbandry farmers to help them meet their working capital needs.
- The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme is a credit scheme introduced in 1998 by Indian banks. This model scheme was prepared by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on the recommendations of R.V.GUPTA committee, to provide term loans for agricultural needs.
- Its objective is to meet the comprehensive credit requirements of the agriculture sector by giving financial support to farmers. Participating institutions include all commercial banks, Regional Rural Banks, and state co-operative banks.
- KCC credit holders are covered under personal accident insurance up to ₹50,000 for death and permanent disability, and up to ₹25,000 for other risk. The premium is borne by both the bank and borrower in a 2:1 ratio.

Eligibility

- All farmers – individuals/Joint cultivator owners
- Tenant farmers, oral lessees and share croppers
- SHGs or Joint liability groups including tenant farmers

36. With reference to the Finance Commission consider the following statements

1. It is constituted by the Ministry of Finance
2. It is a constitutional body
3. The first Finance Commission was constituted in 1951
4. Its recommendations are binding.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 1 and 4
- c) 2 and 3
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Context

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister has approved the extension of the term of Fifteenth Finance Commission up to 30th November, 2019. It will enable the Commission to examine various comparable estimates for financial projections in view of reforms and the new realities to finalise its recommendations for the period 2020-2025.

Answer: C

Explanation:

- The Finance Commission is a constitutional body and is constituted by the President of India under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution. It was formed to define the financial relations between the central government of India and the individual state governments.
- The Finance Commission (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1951 additionally defines the terms of qualification, appointment and disqualification, the term, eligibility and powers of the Commission.
- As per the Constitution, the Commission is appointed every five years and consists of a chairman and four other members.

Functions

- The commission is constituted to make recommendations to the president about the distribution of the net proceeds of taxes between the Union and States and also the allocation of the same among the States themselves.
- It is also under the ambit of the finance commission to define the financial relations between the Union and the States. They also deal with the devolution of unplanned revenue resources.

Members

- The Chairman is selected from people with experience of public affairs.
- The other four members should be
 - A judge of high court or one qualified to be appointed as one.
 - A person who has specialised knowledge of finance and accounts of the government
 - A person who has wide experience in financial matters and in administration.
 - A person who has special knowledge of Economics

Recommendations

The Commission submits its report to the President. He lays it before both the Houses of the Parliament, along with an explanatory memorandum as to the actions taken on its recommendations. The recommendations are only advisory in nature and not binding on the government.

37. The value of the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) is calculated from a weighted basket of the following currencies

1. U.S. Dollar
2. Euro
3. Chinese Yuan
4. Swiss Franc
5. Pound Sterling

- a) 1, 2 and 4
- b) 3, 4 and 5
- c) 1, 2, 3 and 5
- d) All of the above

Answer: C

Explanation:

- India's foreign exchange reserves have hit an all-time high of \$430.37. This is on the back of falling crude oil prices and a stem in the slide of the rupee.
- Foreign exchange reserves are the foreign currencies held by a country's central bank. The reserves in India are managed by the Reserve Bank of India for the Indian government
- The Foreign exchange reserves of India consist of Foreign Currency Assets, Gold, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), and Reserve Tranche Position

Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)

- SDR refer to an international type of monetary reserve currency created by IMF in 1969 that operates as a supplement to the existing money reserves of member countries.

- Created in response to concerns about the limitations of gold and dollars as the sole means of settling international accounts, SDRs augment international liquidity by supplementing the standard reserve currencies.
- SDRs are allocated by the IMF to its member countries and are backed by the full faith and credit of the member countries' governments. The IMF uses SDRs for internal accounting purposes.

Value of SDR

- The value of the SDR is calculated from a weighted basket of major currencies, including the U.S. dollar, the euro, Japanese yen, Chinese yuan, and British pound.
- The SDR basket is reviewed every five years, and sometimes earlier if warranted. Reviews take place to ensure that the SDR reflects the relative importance of currencies in the world's trading and financial systems.
- The current weights as determined in the 2015 review are
 - a) U.S. Dollar: 41.73
 - b) Euro: 30.93
 - c) Chinese Yuan: 10.92
 - d) Japanese Yen: 8.33
 - e) Pound Sterling: 8.09

38. Which of the following companies started the 'Internet Saathi' initiative?

1. Google
 2. Facebook
 3. Tata Trust
 4. Windows
- a) Only 1
 - b) Only 2
 - c) 1 and 3
 - d) 2 and 4

Answer: C

Explanation

- Google India and Tata Trusts' Internet Saathi initiative, that aims to facilitate digital literacy among women in rural India, will be expanded to villages in Punjab and Odisha. The programme began as a pilot in Rajasthan in 2015.
- The programme now reaches 2.6 lakh villages across 18 states and has trained 70,000 Internet Saathis, who have in turn impacted 2.6 crore women in the country.
- The initiative aims to work towards reaching the larger ambition of 300K villages across India i.e. covering 50% of the total villages in the country.
- Saathis are selected from among the village women and provided with internet training. They then pass on that knowledge, providing internet access, and becoming ambassadors of digital literacy in their communities.

Internet Penetration

- It is to be noted that India has taken the lead to become the fastest growing internet user market in the world, with a 31% growth in rural India. However, 75% of the rural population still doesn't have access to the internet and 40% claim to be unaware of the benefits of the internet.
- With over 400 million internet users (IAMAI 2017), India has the world's second-largest online population. However, only 30% of India's online users are women, and in rural areas, this number drops to 12%.

Impact

- It has contributed towards bridging the digital gender divide in rural India - female to male ratio was 1 in 10 in 2015 and in 2018, it has increased to 4 in 10.
- It was found that over time, women start to become more confident, becoming a key source of information for their village, and also help empower the next generation.
- There are also many who are driving awareness for issues like girl child education, menstrual hygiene and more within their communities.
- The programme led to a level of independence that creates financial opportunities for women to pursue their dreams. Data showed that three in 10 Saathis and two in 10 beneficiaries have set up some form of business.
- This, in turn, has provided economic growth, with the business often earning between Rs3,000 and Rs 5,000 every month while five in 10 Saathis have seen positive impact on employability.
- It has led to empowerment of women by improving their ability to express and has also contributed to an improvement in their children's education
- The program has shown that with the right opportunities, there is no limit to what women can achieve.

39. With reference to NAVIC consider the following statements

1. The primary service area extends up to 1500 km from the Indian boundary.
2. It has 7 satellites in Geostationary orbit.
3. It also provides a Restricted Service to authorised users.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 1 and 3
- c) 2 and 3
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is in talks with processing chip manufacturers such as Qualcomm to substitute the existing Global Positioning System (GPS) with the Indian version of satellite navigation. The Indian positioning system is called Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC).
- **Background:** The system was developed partly because access to foreign government-controlled global navigation satellite systems is not guaranteed in hostile situations, as happened to the Indian military in 1999 when it was dependent on the American Global Positioning System (GPS) during the Kargil War. The Indian government approved the project in May 2014.

- The regional navigation satellite system can provide accurate position information service to users in India and the region, extending up to 1,500 km from its boundary, which is its Primary Service Area.
- An Extended Service Area lies between the primary service area and a rectangle area enclosed by the 30th parallel south to the 50th parallel north and the 30th meridian east to the 130th meridian east, 1,500–6,000 km beyond borders
- **Satellites:** The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) consists of seven satellites, three of which are in Geostationary orbit and the remaining four are in Geosynchronous orbit.
- **Services:** NAVIC will provide two levels of service, the standard positioning service, which will be open for civilian use, and a restricted service (an encrypted one) for authorised users (including the military).
- **Applications:** The IRNSS has a position accuracy better than 20 metres in the primary service area. It can help in terrestrial, aerial and marine navigation; disaster management; vehicle tracking and fleet management; integration with mobile phones; precise timing; mapping and geodetic data capture; terrestrial navigation aid for hikers and travellers; visual and voice navigation for drivers.

40. Which of the following states have been allotted the GI tag for Rasogulla?

1. Odisha
 2. West Bengal
 3. Assam
 4. Tripura
- a) 1 and 2
b) Only 2
c) Only 1
d) 3 and 4

Answer: A

Explanation

- Less than two years after West Bengal won its own GI tag for Rasagulla, Odisha has also been granted the GI tag for Rasogulla.
- When West Bengal received its GI tag for its variety of rasagola in November 2017, many people wrongly believed that the GI Registry has recognized that the sweet originated in West Bengal. The GI tag for the same product to both the neighbouring states now recognizes two distinct varieties in taste and texture.
- While Bengalis claim the sweet was invented by Nobin Chandra Das (Birth: 1845) at his Bagbazar residence in Kolkata, Odias cite the tradition dating back to the 12th century of the cottage cheese dumpling being offered at the Puri Jagannath Temple.
- During the festival of "Niladri Bije", Lord Jagannath offers rasgulla to his disgruntled consort Goddess Laxmi on his return from a nine-day-long Rath Yatra. That day is now marked by Odias as Rasagola Dibasa (Day) every year.
- However, there was little written evidence available to support the claim by Odias. Odia cultural scholar, Asit Mohanty, then brought out unknown facts about the sweet. Mohanty found mention of the word rasagola in the 15th Century Odia Dandi Ramayan written by medieval poet Balaram Das.

- He also quoted many other Odiya and Sanskrit texts to prove that chhena, or cottage cheese, was known to Indians much before the Portuguese arrived in India.
- A GI refers to a name or distinctive sign that is used on a product i.e., usually owned collectively, and can be used to distinguish goods on the basis of its geographical origin and unique characteristics.
- Also, the GI tag helps in marketing and branding of a local product, and can draw penalties if someone is found copying outside that geographical region.

41. Hayabusa2 spacecraft belongs to which country?

- a) China
- b) South Korea
- c) Japan
- d) Taiwan

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Japan's Hayabusa2 spacecraft, which successfully made its second touchdown on asteroid Ryugu in July 2019, has become the first ever space probe to gather material from beneath the surface of an asteroid.
- The asteroid mission first reached Ryugu — a kilometre-wide asteroid, with a relatively dark surface and almost zero gravity — in June 2018 and made its first touchdown on the surface in Feb' 2019.
- A month later in April, the spacecraft hit the surface of Ryugu with a pellet and created a 10-metre-wide crater. It also exposed the materials under the asteroid's surface that were so far protected from the harsh effects of cosmic rays and charged particles of solar wind blasting through space.
- The materials may help JAXA researchers understand why Ryugu is so dark — darker than any known meteorite. Their work will also focus on whether the April impact made the material darker, or whether the crater's colour is typical of Ryugu's composition and the surface has been lightened by solar radiation.
- Hayabusa2 will deliver the material to Earth by the end of 2020, when it is expected to return to Earth.

42. Kharchi Puja is native to which state?

- a) Tripura
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Bihar
- d) Himachal Pradesh

Answer: A

Explanation:

- The centuries-old Kharchi Puja was recently inaugurated in Tripura. Originally a tribal Hindu festival, it is now observed by all communities and religions.
- The festival features 14 deities -- Shiva, Durga, Vishnu, Laxmi, Saraswati, Kartik, Ganesha, Brahma, Abadhi (God of water), Chandra, Ganga, Agni, Kamdev and Himadri (Himalaya).

- The worship starts with the dipping of 14 deities in the Howrah river, followed by the sacrifice of 108 animals, all at government expense.
- At the end of the 517-year rule by 184 kings, on October 15, 1949, the erstwhile princely state of Tripura came under the control of the Indian government after a merger agreement was signed between Kanchan Prabha Devi, then regent maharani, and the Indian Governor General.
- The merger agreement made it mandatory for the Tripura government to continue the sponsorship of 14 temples including the Mata Tripura Sundari Temple (one of the 51 Shakti Peethas in the country) run by the Hindu princely rulers.

Need For Establishing Human Rights Courts

- **Introduction:** The Supreme Court (SC) has recently asked the States and the UTs on the prolonged delay for establishing exclusive human rights courts in each district and appointing special public prosecutors in them.
- **1993 Act:** The **Human Rights Act** provides for the establishment of special courts in each district to conduct speedy trial of offences arising out of violation and abuse of human rights. Further, **Section 30** of the Act envisages that a State government, with the concurrence of the CJ of High Court specify for each district a **Court of Session** as a court of human rights for the speedy trial of violation of rights. Whereas **Section 31** of the Act provides the State government to specify and appoint a special public prosecutor in that court.
- **Need for special courts:** The aim is to uphold and protect the basic and fundamental rights of an individual. Moreover, to provide affordable, effective and speedy trial of offences related to violation of human rights.

UP Government Move To Include OBCs To SC List

- The BJP government in UP has made a move to include 17 OBC groups among Scheduled Castes (SC). The government refers to an order of the **Allahabad High Court judgement** that directed the district authorities to issue caste certificates to 17 OBCs after scrutiny of documents.
- **Rationale for inclusion:** These 17 castes make up around 15% of the state's population. Further, a caste in the SC list gets more government benefits than one in the OBC list. Also, since the OBC population is large, there is close competition among OBC groups for reservation benefits.
- **Criteria for recognising specific castes as SC and OBC:** Extreme **social, educational and economic backwardness** are common qualifications for both groups. However, in particular, SCs draw such backwardness from untouchability, while OBCs apart from social, educational and economic backwardness, lack of adequate representation in government posts and services is also a criterion.
- **Article 341:** **Article 341(1)** of the Constitution prescribes the procedure for recognising castes as SC. To make additions or deletions to the Schedule by amending the concerned Presidential Order, state governments should first propose to modify the Schedule. Only proposals agreed by both the Registrar General of India and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes are introduced as a Bill in the Parliament.
- **Concerns:** The positive rights guaranteed under the Constitution to SCs are to correct the historical wrongs of untouchability. So, there is now a concern that addition of other castes in the group would dilute this guarantee.

Consumer Protection Bill

The Lok Sabha has passed the Consumer Protection Bill 2019, which seeks to give enhanced protection to interests of consumers and timely settlement of their grievances.

Key Features of The Bill

- **Definition of consumer:** A consumer is defined as a person who buys any good or avails a service for a consideration. It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service

for commercial purpose. It covers transactions through all modes including offline and **online through electronic means**, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling.

- **Rights of consumers:** Six consumer rights have been defined in the Bill, including the right to: (i) be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property; (ii) be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services; (iii) be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices; and (iv) seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practices.
- **Central Consumer Protection Authority:** The central government to set up a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers.
- **Function of CCPA:** It will carry out the following functions (i) inquiring into violations of consumer rights, investigating and launching prosecution at the appropriate forum; (ii) passing orders to recall goods or withdraw services that are hazardous, reimbursement of the price paid, and discontinuation of the unfair trade practices, as defined in the Bill; (iii) issuing directions to the concerned trader/ manufacturer/ endorser/ advertiser/ publisher to either discontinue a false or misleading advertisement, or modify it; (iv) imposing penalties etc.
- **Penalties:** The CCPA may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement. In case of a subsequent offence, the fine may extend to Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of up to five years.
- **Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (CDRCs):** Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions (CDRCs) will be set up at the district, state, and national levels.
- **Jurisdiction of CDRCs:** The District CDRC will entertain complaints where value of goods and services does not exceed **Rs one crore**. The State CDRC will entertain complaints when the value is more than **Rs one crore but does not exceed Rs 10 crore**. Complaints with value of goods and services **over Rs 10 crore** will be entertained by the National CDRC.
- **Product liability:** Product liability means the liability of a product manufacturer, service provider to compensate a consumer for any harm or injury caused by a defective good or deficient service.

STRIDE

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has approved a new scheme - 'Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy' (STRIDE).
- Broadly, STRIDE will provide support to research projects that are socially relevant, locally need-based, nationally important and globally significant.

Objectives

Identify young talent, strengthen research culture, build capacity, promote innovation and support trans-disciplinary research for India's developing economy and national development.

Impact

- It will provide opportunity to build multi sectoral linkages between university-government-community-industry for national development.
- It will help in strengthening trans-disciplinary research culture in colleges and universities.
- In addition, it will give major impetus to high impact research in Humanities and Human Sciences. Focus on Humanities and Human Sciences will boost quality research on Indian languages and knowledge systems.

- It shall support creation, development and integration of new ideas, concepts and practices for public good and strengthening civil society.

Multidimensional Poverty Index

- The 2019 global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) has been released.
- The report underscored that the traditional concept of poverty is outdated, demonstrating more clearly than ever that labelling countries - or even households - as rich and poor is an oversimplification.
- To fight poverty, one needs to know where poor people live. They are not evenly spread across a country, not even within a household.
- Multi-dimensional poverty defines poor not only on the basis of income, but on other indicators, including poor health, poor quality of work and the threat of violence.

Global Findings

- In the 101 countries studied — 31 low income, 68 middle income and 2 high income - 1.3 billion people are “multidimensionally poor”.
- Globally, of the 1.3 billion people who are multidimensionally poor, more than two-thirds of them— 886 million— now live in middle-income countries. A further 440 million live in low-income countries.
- The report highlighted a positive trend that those furthest behind are moving up the fastest.
- Nearly half of the people living in multidimensional poverty — 663 million — are children, with the youngest children bearing the greatest burden. The vast majority of these children, around 85 per cent, live in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, split roughly equally between the two regions.
- Children suffer poverty more intensely than adults and are more likely to be deprived in all 10 of the MPI indicators, lacking essentials such as clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition or primary education.
- The report identifies 10 countries, with a combined population of around 2 billion people, to illustrate the level of poverty reduction, and all of them have shown statistically significant progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1, namely ending poverty “in all its forms, everywhere”.
- The 10 countries are Bangladesh, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru and Vietnam.
- The trends in these 10 countries also throw a light on where poverty reduction has been uneven, despite the good progress overall.
- In all 10 countries, rural areas are poorer than urban areas. In Cambodia, Haiti, India and Peru, poverty reduction in rural areas outpaced that in urban areas — demonstrating pro-poor development. And in Bangladesh and Democratic Republic of Congo poverty fell at the same speed in rural and urban areas.

Indian Findings

- India has significantly reduced deprivations in all 10 indicators, namely nutrition, sanitation, child mortality, drinking water, years of schooling, electricity, school attendance, housing, cooking fuel and assets.
- It lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2006 and 2016, recording the fastest reductions in MPI values during the period. India’s MPI value reduced from 0.283 in 2005-06 to 0.123 in 2015-16.

- According to the report, the positive trend of pro-poor poverty reduction was seen also across religions and caste groups. In both cases, the poorest groups (Muslims and Scheduled Tribes) reduced poverty the most over the ten years from 2005-06 to 2015-16. Yet these two groups still have the highest rates of poverty.

States

- Jharkhand showed the greatest improvement, with Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland only slightly behind. Jharkhand reduced the incidence of multidimensional poverty from 74.9 per cent in 2005-06 to 46.5 per cent in 2015-16.
- 4 poorest states – Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh – were home to 196 million multidimensional poor people – over half of all the people living in multidimensional poverty in India.
- Bihar is still the poorest state, with more than half of its population living in poverty.
- The poorest district is Alirajpur in Madhya Pradesh, where 76.5% of people are poor – the same as Sierra Leone in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The least poor regions were not stagnant either. Rather, they also saw reduction in poverty. Relative to their starting levels, they netted some of the highest rates of reduction. For example Kerala, one of the least poor regions in 2006, reduced its MPI by around 92%.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana III

In a major boost to rural road connectivity across the country, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, has given its approval for the launch of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III (PMGSY-III).

Details

- The project will run from 2019-20 to 2024-25 and is proposed to consolidate 1,25,000 Km road length in the States.
- It involves consolidation of Through Routes and Major Rural Links connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospital. This would facilitate easy and faster movement to and from these areas.
- Roads constructed under PMGSY would also be maintained properly.
- Selection of candidate roads will be based on the sum total of the marks obtained by particular road on the basis of parameters of population served, market, educational and medical facilities.
- It also envisages construction of bridges up to 150 m in plain areas and 200 m in Himalayan and NE States proposed, as against the existing provisions of 75 m and 100 m in plain areas and Himalayan and NE States respectively.

Funding

- It will entail an estimated cost of Rs 80,250 crore (Central Share-Rs 53,800 crore, State Share- Rs 26,450 crore).
- The funds would be shared in the ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and State for all States except for 8 North Eastern and 3 Himalayan States (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand) for which it is 90:10.

PMGSY-I

- PMGSY was launched in December, 2000 with an objective to provide single all-weather road connectivity to eligible unconnected habitation of designated population size (500+ in plain areas and

250+ in North-East, hill, tribal and desert areas as per Census, 2001) for overall socio-economic development of the areas.

- 97% of the eligible and feasible habitations have already been connected by all-weather roads.

PMGSY II

- The roads, both taken under the PMGSY - I as well as other schemes for rural roads, have not received the desired attention on the maintenance front for a number of reasons, including low contracting capacity, poor maintenance practices, inadequate feeling of ownership of the newly created roads at State level etc.
- This has led to erosion of assets created under various programmes and the sustainability of assets created has not been ensured.
- PMGSY-II envisages consolidation of the existing Rural Road Network to improve its overall efficiency as a provider of transportation services for people, goods and services.
- It aims to cover upgradation of existing selected rural roads based on their economic potential and their role in facilitating the growth of rural market centres and rural hubs.

Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism Area (RCPLWEA)

In the year 2016 Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism affected Areas was launched as a separate vertical under PMGSY to provide all-weather road connectivity with necessary culverts and cross-drainage structures in 44 districts (35 are worst LWE affected districts and 09 are adjoining districts), which are critical from security and communication point of view.

75% Jobs For Locals In Andhra Pradesh

- The Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly has passed the AP Employment of Local Candidates in Industries and Factories Bill, 2019.
- It has become the first state to enact a law which reserves 75% jobs for locals in private industrial units and factories, even if a firm has not received concessions from the government.
- **Rationale:** With growth in industries, the demand for land has been increasing. Since most of the land requirement is met by acquiring private agricultural lands, the land owners are being displaced and deprived of their occupation and thereby loss of income.

Provisions

- The people who forego their land for the development of industries will be given the first preference, along with other locals.
- It would be applicable to all existing and upcoming units, joint ventures and projects taken up under the public-private partnership mode. The existing units have been given three years to comply.
- In the event locals with requisite skills are not available, companies are required to train people along with the state government, and then hire them.

Analysis

- The law may be right in intent, but conceptually flawed and may have little practical value beyond political jingoism.
- Economic migration has always been the prime mover of industrialisation around the globe and areas that have hampered the process have remained remarkably rural in their characteristics and lagged in employment generation.

- The reservation would be counter-productive as industrialists look at returns on investments by hiring meritorious and skilled people
- Investments flow into places where compliance costs are low and companies are allowed to hire employees they prefer. Hence the law will hamper industrialisation, ease of doing business and economic growth in the state.
- The government has promised help to upskill the staff, but this could be time-consuming. Businesses that have to remain nimble to adapt their business strategies to changing market situations may find it tough to meet this requirement.
- Movement of labour has long been customary across India. Putting up barriers undermines Article 19 of the Constitution which guarantees freedom of movement to Indian citizens.

Wage Code Bill, 2019

The Code on Wages Bill, 2019 has been passed by both the houses of the Parliament. It seeks to regulate wage and bonus payments in all employments where any industry, trade, business, or manufacture is carried out.

Need for the Wage Code

- Present minimum wage system is complex with states fixing rates for 1709 scheduled employments and Centre for 45.
- Further, 62% of workforce is made up of casual workers who need a right to minimum wage.
- According to the labour Ministry 33% of wage workers were paid less than indicative minimum wage in 2009-10.

Provisions

- **Coverage:** The Code will apply to all employees. The central government will make wage-related decisions for employments such as railways, mines, and oil fields, among others. State governments will make decisions for all other employments.
- Wages include salary, allowance, or any other component expressed in monetary terms. This does not include bonus payable to employees or any travelling allowance, among others.
- **Floor wage:** According to the Code, the central government will fix a floor wage, taking into account living standards of workers. Further, it may set different floor wages for different geographical areas.
- The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments must be higher than the floor wage. In case the existing minimum wages fixed by the central or state governments are higher than the floor wage, they cannot reduce the minimum wages.
- **Fixing the minimum wage:** The Code prohibits employers from paying wages less than the minimum wages. Minimum wages will be notified by the central or state governments.
- The minimum wages will be revised and reviewed by the central or state governments at an interval of not more than five years.
- While fixing minimum wages, the governments may take into account factors such as skill of workers, and difficulty of work.
- **Gender discrimination:** The Code prohibits gender discrimination in matters related to wages and recruitment of employees for the same work or work of similar nature. Work of similar nature is defined as work for which the skill, effort, experience, and responsibility required are the same.

- **Overtime:** The central or state government may fix the number of hours that constitute a normal working day. In case employees work in excess of a normal working day, they will be entitled to overtime wage, which must be at least twice the normal rate of wages.
- **Advisory boards:** The central and state governments will constitute advisory boards.
- The Central Advisory Board will consist of employers and employees in equal numbers, independent persons, and five representatives of state governments.
- State Advisory Boards will consist of employers, employees, and independent persons.
- Further, one-third of the total members on both the central and state Boards will be women.
- The Boards will advise the respective governments on various issues including fixation of minimum wages, and increasing employment opportunities for women.
- **Offences:** The Code specifies penalties for offences committed by an employer, such as paying less than the due wages or for contravening any provision of the Code.
- Penalties vary depending on the nature of offence, with the maximum penalty being imprisonment for three months along with a fine of up to one lakh rupees.

Significance

- At present 60% of workers are not covered under the Minimum Wages Act. The new law will give the right to minimum wages to the entire 50 crore workforce, including domestic workers.
- It will help in removing multiplicity of definitions and authorities in the process improving ease of compliance.
- The use of Inspectors-cum-Facilitators in place of Inspectors will go a long way in removing arbitrariness and malpractices.
- Appointment of one or more authorities, instead of multiple ones at present, to decide claims and an appellate authority will lead to speedy, cheaper and efficient redressal of grievances.
- It will reduce exploitation of workers by providing minimum working hours, overtime and standard deductions.
- It aims to realise the long held demand of equal pay for equal work and in the process takes a big step in reducing gender discrimination in the domain of wages and recruitment.

Concerns

- The state governments might indulge in competitive populism by inflating minimum wages, which will make the industry unviable and uncompetitive.
- The formula for fixing minimum wage has been kept out of the Bill. By not putting the formula in place, the bill leaves it at the government's complete discretion.
- Different floor rates for different geographical areas, makes the concept of a national rate a misnomer.
- The Bill defines 'worker' and 'employee' differently which leaves room for exploitation of workers.
- The Economic Survey of 2018-19 had pointed out that one-third of workers covered under the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 have "fallen through the cracks and are not protected by the minimum wage law. Without the power of labour inspectors, it would be even more difficult to enforce the law with an increase in the number of workers covered under the law.

Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2019

- The Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2019 has been passed in both the houses of the Parliament. The Bill amends the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
- The Act provides for a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), State Human Rights Commissions (SHRC), as well as Human Rights Courts.

Provisions of The Bill

- **Composition of NHRC:** Under the Act, the chairperson of the NHRC is a person who has been a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The Bill amends this to provide that a person who has been Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, or a Judge of the Supreme Court will be the chairperson of the NHRC.
- The Act provides for two persons having knowledge of human rights to be appointed as members of the NHRC. The Bill amends this to allow three members to be appointed, of which at least one will be a woman.
- Under the Act, chairpersons of various commissions such as the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, and National Commission for Women are members of the NHRC. The Bill provides for including the chairpersons of the National Commission for Backward Classes, the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities as members of the NHRC.
- **Chairperson of SHRC:** Under the Act, the chairperson of a SHRC is a person who has been a Chief Justice of a High Court. The Bill amends this to provide that a person who has been Chief Justice or Judge of a High Court will be chairperson of a SHRC.
- **Term of office:** The Act states that the chairperson and members of the NHRC and SHRC will hold office for five years or till the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier. The Bill reduces the term of office to three years or till the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier.
- Further, the Act allows for the reappointment of members of the NHRC and SHRCs for a period of five years. The Bill removes the five-year limit for reappointment.
- **Powers of Secretary-General:** The Act provides for a Secretary-General of the NHRC and a Secretary of a SHRC, who exercise powers as may be delegated to them. The Bill amends this and allows the Secretary-General and Secretary to exercise all administrative and financial powers (except judicial functions), subject to the respective chairperson's control.
- **Union Territories:** The Bill provides that the central government may confer on a SHRC human rights functions being discharged by Union Territories. However, functions relating to human rights in the case of Delhi will be dealt with by the NHRC.

Positives

- The Amendment will strengthen the Human Rights Institutions for effective discharge of their mandates, roles and responsibilities.
- The amended Act will be in sync with the agreed global standards and benchmarks.
- The amendment will also make National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) more compliant with the **Paris Principle** concerning its autonomy, independence, pluralism and wide-ranging functions in order to effectively protect and promote human rights.
- The bill makes the provisions to make the Commission more inclusive by mandating the presence of a woman member along with the representation of members from various other Commissions.

- By incorporating a mechanism to look into the cases from Union territories, it has expanded its scope, which was much needed.

Criticisms

- As the chairperson need not be a former chief justice anymore but can be any judge of the Supreme Court. This may create options for favouritism and partisan selection of the chairperson.
- The number of non-judge members has been increased from two to three, but the imprecise provision of keeping the coveted positions open to any person of the government's unguided choice remains unchanged. Time and again governments filled them with its retired officers, hence this will give the government a chance to meddle with the type of members to be instituted on the Commission.
- Increasing the number of ex officio members will lead to more adjunct instead of full time members. Instead, of the heads of its sister-bodies engaged in class-specific work, it would have been more fruitful to associate with NHRC representatives of a few leading NGOs, like Amnesty International promoting human rights in general.
- With a view to ensuring the independence of the commission, its Act prohibits further government employment for its chair and members. Nevertheless, greener pastures technically not covered by the phraseology of the ban have always been waiting for them. The practice was started with the first commission itself, when two of its sitting members were given gubernatorial positions and continues till date. The new amendment bill does not disturb the related provision of the Act.
- The NHRC's main function is to inquire into complaints of "violation of human rights or abetment thereof, or negligence in the prevention of such violation, by a public servant". But it cannot execute its decisions based on its findings. For that, it has to depend either on the central or state government or on the judicial hierarchy in the country — from the top court down to magistrates. The statutory provisions to this effect are not touched by the new amendments.

The changes made by the bill leaves a great deal to be desired. By all counts, the NHRC is yet to be assigned its rightful role in the affairs of the country and the society and continues to be the toothless tiger it has been since its inception.

Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019

- The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019 has been passed by both the houses of the Parliament.
- The Bill provides for reservation of teaching positions in central educational institutions for persons belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, socially and educationally backward classes and economically weaker sections.

Background

- In 2006, the University Grants Commission (UGC) issued guidelines for teacher reservations in central educational institutions. These guidelines required central educational institutions to consider a university as one unit for the purpose of reservation.
- However, the UGC Guidelines were challenged in the Allahabad High Court in 2017.
- The Court found that individual departments should be taken as a unit for the purpose of reservation, instead of universities. It held that taking a university as a unit could result in some departments having only reserved candidates and others having only unreserved candidates.

- In March 2019, the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Ordinance, 2019 was promulgated, and has been passed as a Bill now. The Bill overturns the Allahabad High Court judgment.

Provisions

A. Reservation of posts

- The Bill provides for reservation of posts in direct recruitment of teachers in central educational institutions. For the purpose of such reservation, a central educational institution will be regarded as one unit.
- This implies that the allocation of teaching posts for reserved categories would be done on the basis of all positions of the same level (such as assistant professor) across departments.

B. Coverage and exceptions

- The Bill will apply to 'central educational institutions' which include universities set up by Acts of Parliament, institutions deemed to be a university, institutions of national importance, and institutions receiving aid from the central government.
- However, it excludes certain institutions of excellence, research institutions, and institutions of national and strategic importance which have been specified in the Schedule to the Bill. It also excludes minority education institutions.

Impact

- It will help in filling up of more than 7000 existing vacancies in Central Educational Institutions and pave the way for filling up 3 lakh vacancies in the Government (Central and State) Educational institutions by direct recruitment.
- It will ensure compliance of the Constitutional Provisions of Articles 14, 16 and 21.
- It will also ensure full representation of the Scheduled Castes/ the Scheduled Tribes, the socially and Educationally Backward Classes and Economically Weaker Sections in direct recruitment in teachers' cadres.

Meghalaya's Draft Water Policy

- Amid the water crisis in the country, the Meghalaya cabinet became the first state to approve a draft water policy to address water issues, conservation and protection of water sources in the state.
- Meghalaya, being a hilly State, receives a lot of rainfall but the same water cannot be retained and all of the water reaches Bangladesh in no time.
- The policy's objective is to recognise water resources as a common pool resource, to provide hygienic water for drinking, domestic needs, sanitation and livelihood development.
- It intends to achieve sustainable development, management and use of water resources.
- Issues such as protection of catchment areas and river pollution have also been outlined in the policy.
- All issues related to utilization of water and livelihood and how to preserve water bodies have been outlined in this policy including community participation in the implementation of this policy by constituting a water sanitation village council at the village level
- Also, the department will also monitor the quality of the water to check if it has a high content of iron or if it's acidic.
- It includes measures like building check dams to conserve rainwater, rainwater harvesting systems, controlling inappropriate use of groundwater and maintaining the quality of water.

Impact

- This will improve health and livelihood and reduce vulnerability among the people.
- This will also assure of good governance for present and future generations through integrated water resources management and environmental sustainability

POCSO Courts

- Anguished over the slow pace of action on protection of children from sexual predators, the Supreme Court on directed the Centre to set up within 60 days one dedicated court in each district where over 100 cases under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act are pending trial.
- As children were the victims in such cases, there was no excuse for a long delay in justice for them. The traumatised victims needed to be treated with compassion and kindness. And a completely different approach was required while investigating and trying POCSO cases.

Status

- As per the available data, number of victims compensated under PoCSO were 3% in 2015, 4% in 2016, and 5% in 2017.
- Further, around 1.5 lakh cases are pending trial before 670 designated courts.
- Kerala has the worst judge-case ratio, as it has set up just three designated courts for 14 districts with each required to deal with 2,211 cases. Chhattisgarh and Punjab have the lowest average of 51 cases per designated court.
- Though the Act mandates trial to be completed in one year, the deadline is impossible to achieve as each designated trial judge is saddled with a few hundred cases in addition to the trial of other cases.

Directions

- The courts will be funded by the central government. The fund will not only take care of the appointment of the presiding officer but also appointments of support persons, special public prosecutors, court staff and infrastructure, including creation of child friendly environment and vulnerable witness court rooms.
- The support persons in these special courts, who perform the crucial role of a bridge between the child victim and the court's officers and investigators, should comprise dedicated people who had excellent academic qualifications and are devoted to child rights.
- Though the court deferred any orders for the establishment of exclusive forensic laboratories for POCSO cases, it ordered the directors of the existing ones to deal with POCSO case evidence promptly to cause no delay in the probe or trial of such cases.
- It directed the WCD ministry to facilitate screening of short clips intended to spread awareness of the subject in general, namely, prevention of child abuse and prosecution of crimes against children, in every movie hall and could also be transmitted by various television channels at regular interval
- A child helpline number should also be displayed in such clips and at schools and other public places.

Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative

- After launch of the National Health Mission (NHM), there has been substantial increase in the number of institutional deliveries. However, this increase in the numbers has not resulted into commensurate improvements in the key maternal and new-born health indicators.

- It is estimated that approximately 46% maternal deaths, over 40% stillbirths and 40% newborn deaths take place on the day of the delivery.
- A transformational change in the processes related to the care during the delivery, which essentially relates to intrapartum and immediate postpartum care, is required to achieve tangible results within short period of time.
- ‘**LaQshya**’ programme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare aims at improving quality of care in labour room and maternity Operation Theatre (OT).

Objectives

- To reduce maternal and newborn mortality & morbidity
- To improve Quality of care during the delivery and immediate post-partum care, stabilization of complications and ensure timely referrals, and enable an effective two-way follow-up system.
- To enhance satisfaction of beneficiaries visiting the health facilities and provide Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) to all pregnant women attending the public health facility.

Interventions

- Ensuring availability of optimal and skilled human resources as per case-load and prevalent norms through rational deployment and skill upgradation.
- Sensitising care-providers for delivery of respectful maternity care and close monitoring of language, behaviour and conduct of the labour room, OT & HDU Staff.
- Creating an enabling environment for natural birthing process.

Non-Resident Keralites Investment Company

- The Kerala Government has decided to form a Non-Resident Keralites Investment company. The Indian diaspora comes to about 24 lakh mainly in Gulf countries.
- 74% of the capital will be raised by issuing shares to NRKs and the Government will have 26 % stake in the NRK Investment and Holding company ltd.
- The main aim is to utilise NRI investments for implementing various projects. For this, a separate or a subsidiary company may be set up under the holding company.
- Developing NRK townships and infrastructure development are among the projects that are likely to be taken up. The projects planned under ‘**Rebuild Kerala**’ initiative will also be a priority for the new company.
- The government will be in constant touch with the diaspora, especially businessmen, and facilitate their investments in schemes through a single window channel.
- The NORKA (Non-Resident Keralites Affairs) Roots chief executive officer will be appointed as the company's special officer.

NORKA Roots

- The Non Resident Keralites Affairs abbreviated as NORKA is a department of the Government of Kerala formed in 1996 to redress the grievances of Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs).
- The field agency of NORKA is known as the NORKA Roots, which was set up in 2002 to act as an interface between the NRKs and the Kerala Government. It also acts as a forum for addressing the NRKs problem, safeguarding their rights and rehabilitating the returnees.

Port Integrity Campaign

- Maritime Anti-Corruption Network (MACN) has announced the launch of a Port Integrity Campaign in India. It is a collective action of MACN, the Government of India, international organizations, and local industry stakeholders.
- The campaign aims to reduce and (in the long term) eliminate integrity issues and bottlenecks to trade during operations in Indian ports. The main activities of campaign include implementation of integrity training for port officials and the establishment of clear escalation and reporting processes. It will try to ensure that vessels calling port in India do not face unnecessary obstacles or illicit demands.
- Tackling these issues will not only help the shipping industry and the port workers but will also propel India's image as a trade destination.
- The pilot of the campaign will take place in Mumbai ports (MbPT and JNPT) and will run until October this year. Following the pilot, MACN plans to expand the program to other Indian ports.

MACN

- The Maritime Anti-Corruption Network (MACN) is a global business network working towards the vision of a maritime industry free of corruption that enables fair trade to the benefit of society at large.
- Established in 2011 by a small group of committed maritime companies, MACN has grown to include **over 100 members** globally, and has become one of the pre-eminent examples of collective action to tackle corruption.
- It works towards its vision through objectives and goals divided into three pillars: Capability Building, Collective Action, and Culture of Integrity.

Chief Minister's Panel On Agriculture Reforms

The Centre has set up a high-powered committee of seven chief ministers, led by Maharashtra's Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis as its convenor, for suggesting measures to transform Indian agriculture and to raise farmers' income.

Terms of Reference of the Committee

- Suggestions on modalities for adoption and time-bound implementation of the following key model Acts, by the States.
 - Agriculture Market Reforms - Agriculture Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2017 (APLM Act, 2017).
 - Contract farming - Agriculture Produce and Livestock, Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2018.
- Examine various provisions of Essential Commodity Act (ECA), 1955 and situations that require ECA and suggest changes in ECA to attract private investments in agricultural marketing & infrastructure.
- ECA in its present forms creates uncertainty in the minds of private investors as they fear that the government law may prohibit sale and export of commodities in certain situation under existing law.
- Suggest mechanisms for linking of market reforms with e-NAM, GRAM and other relevant Centrally Sponsored Schemes.
- Suggest policy measures to boost agricultural export, raise growth in food processing, and attract investments in modern market infrastructure, value chains and logistics.
- Suggest measures to upgrade agri-technology to global standards and improve access of farmers to quality seed, plant propagation material and farm machinery in agriculturally advance countries.

- Propose any other relevant reforms for transformation of agriculture sector and raising farmers' income.

Committee On DFI

The panel will also study various proposals of the inter-ministerial committee on Doubling Farmers' Income (DFI) which suggested specific action points for reforms in the farm and allied sectors. The points suggested by the committee on DFI are

- Developing demand driven agricultural logistic system for post-production operations such as produce aggregation, transportation and warehousing.
- Agri-market intelligence system to help farmers take demand driven decision.
- Farmer-centric marketing infrastructure in rural areas and
- Development of irrigation and micro-irrigation networks across the country.

Working Group for Core Investment Companies

- The Reserve Bank of India has constituted a working group that will review the regulatory and supervisory framework for core investment companies.
- Over the years, corporate group structures have become more complex involving multiple layering and leveraging, which has led to greater inter-connectedness with the financial system through their access to public funds.
- Experts have been seeking review of CIC guidelines ever since defaults by IL&FS, a large systemically important core investment company. In light of recent developments, the RBI felt a need to strengthen the corporate governance framework of CICs.

Terms of Reference of the Working Group

- To examine the current regulatory framework for CICs in terms of adequacy, efficacy and effectiveness of every component and suggest changes therein.
- To assess appropriateness of and suggest changes to the current approach of the Reserve Bank of India towards registration of CICs including the practice of multiple CICs being allowed within a group.
- To suggest measures to strengthen corporate governance and disclosure requirements for CICs
- To assess the adequacy of supervisory returns submitted by CICs and suggest changes therein
- To suggest appropriate measures to enhance RBI's off-sight surveillance and on-site supervision over CICs.

Core Investment Companies

- CICs are non-banking financial companies with asset size of ₹100 crore and above, which carry on the business of acquisition of shares and securities, subject to certain conditions.
- CICs, which are allowed to accept public funds, hold not less than 90% of their net assets in the form of investment in equity shares, preference shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in group companies.

Government e Marketplace

Ministry of Commerce and Industry recently held a meeting to review and formulate an action plan for Government e Marketplace (GeM) to achieve a target for Rs 1 lakh crore gross merchandise volume (GMV) on the marketplace in FY 2019-20.

Suggestions

- The Ministry has directed officials handling the public procurement portal to make it more simple, less time consuming and attractive to attract vendors, especially from the MSME sector.
- Possibilities will be explored for incentivising ministries and states who procure more products and services from GeM. The officers were also directed to maximise the use of GeM to ensure transparency and saving in procurements.
- Ease of getting registered on the GeM platform has to be ensured so that public sector banks, PSUs, ministries and departments of states and local bodies at the district level are able to procure from the platform easily and smoothly.
- It also discussed ways of bringing in external technical experts for specialized products required by railways, oil companies, and health sector so that more categories are created in GeM in shortest time and complaints about substandard material are completely eliminated.
- Greater transparency and quality of products must be ensured on the platform in order to get railways, defence, telecom and PSUs like oil, power, heavy industry to place orders worth more than Rs 1 lakh crore through the GeM.

GeM

- Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is a one stop portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organizations / PSUs.
- It aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement. It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users achieve the best value for their money.
- All Central government and State Government Ministries/Departments including its attached/subordinate offices, Central and State autonomous bodies, Central and State Public Sector Units and local bodies etc. are authorized to make procurement through GeM portal.
- As of now, over ten lakh goods and over 13,000 services are registered on the platform.

Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme

The Department of Commerce has approved financial assistance for three trade promotion centres under the 'Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES).

TIES

- The scheme was launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Commerce. It replaced the Assistance to States for Development of Export Infrastructure and Allied Activities (**ASIDE**) **Scheme**.
- The objective of the scheme is to enhance export competitiveness by bridging gaps in export infrastructure, create focused export infrastructure, first mile and last mile connectivity for export-oriented projects and address quality and certification measures.
- The Central and State Agencies, including Export Promotion Councils, Commodities Boards, SEZ Authorities and Apex Trade Bodies recognised under the EXIM policy of Government of India are eligible for financial support under the scheme.
- The Central Government funding is in the form of grant-in-aid, normally not more than the equity being put in by the implementing agency or 50% of the total equity in the project.
- In case of projects located in North Eastern States and Himalayan States including J&K, this grant can be upto 80% of the total equity.

Amendment to SEBI Act

- The Central government has amended the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Act, 1992 through a clause in the Finance Bill whereby SEBI will have to transfer surplus funds from its general funds after transferring part of the money to a newly created Reserve Fund.
- For the last many years, the CAG has been pulling up India's financial regulators for sequestering their surpluses from the Consolidated Fund of India, as this undermines Parliamentary scrutiny of public money.
- While the CAG's point on the accountability of public institutions is valid, there is merit in SEBI's reluctance to clean out its reserves as the Government demands.

Amendments

- It provides for constitution of a **Reserve Fund**, where 25 per cent of the annual surplus of the General Fund in any year has to be credited. Further, the size of such reserve fund cannot exceed the total of annual expenditure of the preceding two financial years.
- After incurring all the expenses mandated under the law, like salaries, which go out from the General Fund, and the proposed transfer to the Reserve Fund, 75% of the remaining surplus would be transferred to the Consolidated Fund of India, which is the fund maintained by the Central government for its income and expenditure.
- Earlier, the rule was that only penalties raised by SEBI were being credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- The amendment also provides for the Central government's approval of capital expenses to be incurred by the SEBI Board. Earlier, such approval was not needed.

Criticisms

- The amendments have been criticised to be as regressive as the SEBI does not have any mandate to raise revenue for the government.
- There seems to be little merit in the decision as it is highly unlikely that the quantum of funds that the government is likely to receive from SEBI will make much of a difference to the government's overall fiscal situation.
- Hence, it is believed that the amendment seems to be motivated by the desire to increase control over the regulator rather than by financial considerations.
- Given the increasing sophistication of market offenders, SEBI sorely needs to expand its staff strength and buttress its in-house legal, technical and technological capabilities to function as an effective regulator.
- Forcing SEBI to disgorge the bulk of its reserves would therefore materially dent its income, impairing its ability to invest in regulatory capacity-building.
- The proposal would be akin to an additional tax on market participants. As, the regulator already levies fees on intermediaries for rendering services.
- The amendments will put the regulatory agency at the mercy of the government to run its financial and administrative operations. This would curtail its independence and would result in compromising the autonomy and its ability to function effectively towards the progress and development of the Indian securities market.
- The involvement of the government in capital expenditure approval, in addition to the process of board approval, will not add any benefit to institutional efficiency, but rather slow down decision-making and would be contrary to the principle of minimum government and maximum governance,

Way Ahead

- Substantive amendments to the SEBI Act should not be done through a money bill, rather such amendments should be debated in the Parliament before the law is changed.
- The Centre perhaps believes it can do a better job of regulating the economy by consolidating all existing powers under the Finance Ministry. But such centralisation of powers will be risky.
- Regulatory agencies such as SEBI need to be given full powers over their assets and be made accountable to Parliament. Stripping them of their powers by subsuming them under the wings of the government will affect their credibility.
- Having said this, given the dated audited accounts that SEBI has put out in the public domain, the CAG is quite right to critique the opaque manner in which India's financial regulators manage public money. While demanding greater financial autonomy, regulators must also show themselves to be accountable to the public by being more transparent about their financial affairs.

About SEBI

- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the regulator for the securities market in India.
- It was established in 1988 as a non-statutory body. However, in 1992, the SEBI was given statutory powers by the Government through the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.
- It is managed by its members, which consists of following:
 - The chairman who is nominated by Union Government of India.
 - Two members, i.e., Officers from Union Finance Ministry.
 - One member from the Reserve Bank of India.
 - The remaining five members are nominated by Union Government of India, out of them at least three shall be whole-time members.

Companies Amendment Bill, 2019

The Companies Amendment Bill, 2019 has been passed by both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha in the current session.

CSR As Per Companies Act, 2013

- Every company, private limited or public limited, which either has a net worth of Rs 500 crore or a turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or net profit of Rs 5 crore, needs to spend at least 2% of its average net profit for the immediately preceding three financial years on corporate social responsibility activities.
- In determining CSR activities to be undertaken, preference has to be given to local areas and the areas around where the company operates.

Irregularities

- **Backward Districts:** It has been observed that with time the CSR expenditure by the companies has gone up. However, the country's most backward districts that require maximum CSR support, remain deprived. The most backwards districts got only 13% of the last year's funds and not more than 25% of the total projects.
- **One-time activity:** Instead of engaging with communities to uplift them, companies do a one-time cheque-signing exercise by transferring CSR funds to government programmes such as Prime Minister's Relief Fund. CSR policy stipulates that one-time activity cannot be considered responsible business.

- **Non-compliance:** In July 2018, a good 272 companies were served notices by the Registrar of Companies for non-compliance with CSR expenditure. The three principal areas of non-compliance identified are disclosure of direct and overhead expenditure on projects, details of overhead expenses, and keeping these overhead expenses below 5 per cent of total CSR spends.

Amendments

The amendments aim to ensure more accountability and better enforcement, strengthen the corporate governance norms and compliance management in corporate sector. Below mentioned are the proposed amendments -

- 1) Dematerialised shares:** Under 2013 Act, certain classes of public companies can issue shares only in demat form. The Bill states this may be prescribed for other classes of unlisted companies as well.
- 2) CSR**
 - Till now, if a company was unable to fully incur the CSR expenditure in a given year, it could carry this amount forward and spend it in the next 12 months, in addition to the money for that year and it only had to disclose the reasons for not spending the amount in the annual report.
 - As per the amendments, any unspent annual CSR funds must be transferred to one of the funds under Schedule 7 of the Act (e.g., PM Relief Fund) within six months of the financial year.^[1]
 - However, if the CSR funds are committed to certain ongoing projects, then the unspent funds will have to be transferred to an 'Unspent CSR Account' within 30 days of the end of the financial year, and spent within three years.
 - Any funds remaining unspent after three years will have to be transferred to one of the funds under Schedule 7 of the Act.
- 3) Penalties:** Any violation may attract a fine between Rs 50,000 and Rs 25,00,000 and every defaulting officer may be punished with imprisonment of up to 3 years or fine between Rs 50,000 and Rs 25,00,000, or both.
- 4) Re-categorisation of Offences**
 - The 2013 Act contains 81 compoundable offences punishable with fine or fine or imprisonment, or both. These offences are heard by courts.
 - The Bill re-categorizes 16 of these offences as civil defaults, where adjudicating officers (appointed by the central government) may now levy penalties instead.
- 5) Debarring Auditors**
 - Under the Act, the National Financial Reporting Authority can debar a member or firm from practising as a Chartered Accountant for six months to 10 years in case of proven misconduct.
 - The Bill amends this punishment to provide for debarment from appointment as an auditor or internal auditor of a company, or performing a company's valuation, for the same period.
- 6) Change In Approving Authority**
 - Under the Act, change in period of financial year for a company associated with a foreign company, has to be approved by the National Company Law Tribunal.
 - Similarly, any alteration in the incorporation document of a public company which has the effect of converting it to a private company, has to be approved by the Tribunal.
 - Under the Bill, these powers have been transferred to central government.
- 7) Bar On Holding Office**
 - Under the Act, the central government or certain shareholders can apply to the NCLT for relief against mismanagement of the affairs of the company.

- The Bill states that in such a complaint, the government may also make a case against an officer of the company on the ground that he is not fit to hold office in the company, for reasons such as fraud or negligence.
- If the NCLT passes an order against the officer, he will not be eligible to hold office in any company for five years.
- 8) Registration of charges:** The Act requires companies to register charges (e.g., mortgages) on their property within 30 days of creation of charge, extendable upto 300 days with the permission of the RoC. The Bill changes the deadline to 60 days (extendable by 60 days). ^[1]_[SEP]
- 9) Compounding:** Under the Act, a regional director can compound (settle) offences with a penalty of up to five lakh rupees. The Bill increases this ceiling to Rs 25 lakh.
- 10) SFIO:** The bill aims to strengthen provisions that enable the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) to ensure speedy and more effective enforcement.

Criticisms

- The proposed changes come in an environment where profit has become a dirty word. Starting from the budget, which increased taxes on the rich, this is seen as another move aimed at penalizing the private sector.
- Across the world, there are only three countries where CSR spending is mandatory - Indonesia, Mauritius and Nepal, however they do not have penal provisions. This makes India the only country to penalise such an act.
- The penal provisions have been termed as a retrograde step as it violates the principle of minimum government and maximum governance.
- The current amendments will transform the CSR funding into a tax and it no longer remains to be a way of promoting socially responsible behaviour.
- Further, it has also been complained that the ill thought move will go on to punish the whole industry for a few bad eggs in the basket.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Amendment Bill, 2019

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Amendment Bill, 2019 has been passed by both houses of Parliament.
- It is aimed at fixing gaps in the existing law and providing clarity in its implementation, while at the same maximising value from the resolution process.

IBC

- India's banking industry has been in the throes of a crisis as bad debts have been piling up. Freeing up this money is crucial for the banking sector to go about its business.
- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code was passed in 2016 and was aimed at speedy winding up of insolvent companies, lowering NPAs, and redeploying capital productively.
- **Time Bound Resolution:** It provides for a time-bound process to resolve insolvency. When a default in repayment occurs, creditors gain control over debtor's assets and must take decisions to resolve insolvency within a given time frame.
- **Immunity:** To ensure an uninterrupted resolution process, the Code also provides immunity to debtors from resolution claims of creditors during this period.
- The adjudicating authority is the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for companies and limited liability partnerships, and the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) for individuals and partnership firms.

Need For The Amendments

Delays

- Prior to the amendment IBC corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) was to be completed within a maximum of 270 days. But many cases involving large amounts are going on for more than 270 days due to litigation at appellate tribunal and in courts.
- As on March, 2019, out of total 1,143 cases that were undergoing resolution under the IBC, a total of 548 exceeded the 180-day deadline. A total of 362 cases surpassed the outer limit of 270 days.

Cause of Delay

- Delays in admission of applications, lack of infrastructure and absence of specific provisions under the Code.
- Differences among the lenders and legal challenges posed by operational creditors.
- Promoters of large bankrupt companies have been steadfastly resisting loss of control over their business by challenging decisions of lenders and bankruptcy tribunals in higher courts.

Amendments

A. Extended Deadline

The bill proposes to extend the deadline for completing insolvency resolution from 270 days to 330 days, including the time spent in litigation or judicial process after the plan is admitted.

B. Resolution Plan

- The existing provisions in the code did not provide for inclusion of any alternative restructuring plan.
- The amendment seeks to add clarity on the inclusion of alternative restructuring schemes such as mergers, demergers and amalgamations as part of the resolution plan.

C. More Powers to CoC

- It proposes to enhance the powers of the Committee of Creditors by allowing it to decide how claims will be distributed on the basis of commercial consideration.
- Under the code, financial creditors have a priority over operational creditors in case of distribution under a resolution plan.
- As of now, there is no clarity on distribution to creditors other than the financial & operational creditors.
- The amendment will empower the CoC to decide distribution to such creditors on the basis of commercial consideration.

D. Distribution of Claims

- It proposes to equate distribution of amounts under a resolution plan with the manner it's allowed in case of liquidation, maintaining the hierarchy of lenders. The change will be retrospective, making it applicable for ongoing cases.
- The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal had ruled in the Essar Steel Ltd.'s case that the CoC had no role in distribution of claims, and brought lenders (financial creditors) and vendors (operational creditors) on a par.
- This proposal in amendment bill is intended to reiterate the position of creditors in a liquidation process by giving secured creditors a higher priority over unsecured and other operational creditors

E. Voting

- While earlier a decision of financial creditors could only be approved if 66 per cent of total creditors voted in favour of the decision, the Cabinet approved that now the decision will be approved if 50 per cent of those 'present and voting' vote in favour of the decision.

- This will lead to faster approval of resolution plan and will remove stalemate. On several occasions it is seen that around 20-30 per cent of the financial creditors are absent and in such a scenario it is very tough to get the decision approved, due to the need of 66 per cent of total financial creditors.
- The amendment gives more powers to other creditors such as homebuyers as their votes will be treated separately and if 50 per cent of homebuyers vote in favour of a resolution, it will be treated as an affirmation of the entire class of homebuyers.

F. Makes Resolution Binding

- The bill states that a plan will be binding on all stakeholders including the central and any state government or a local authority which has dues from a corporate debtor.
- This will prevent state authorities including income tax officials from questioning a rescue plan adopted in a court-monitored process.

G. Liquidation

The committee of creditors may take a decision to liquidate a corporate debtor at any time after the constitution of CoC and before preparation of information memorandum—a document prepared by a resolution professional with details and information about the formulation of a resolution plan.

Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019

- The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019 which aims to protect investors from fraudulent investment schemes, has been passed by the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha.
- The bill seeks to amend three laws, i.e., the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992 and the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002.<sup>[L]
[SEP]</sup>

Ponzi Schemes

- A common type of scam involving unregulated deposits is the Ponzi scheme, a type of investment fraud wherein one party promises high returns on an investment with little to no risk.
- The early investors in a Ponzi scheme are repaid by the scheme acquiring new investors. Once there are no longer enough people to secure a new round of investments, the scheme collapses and the investors lose their money.

Features Of The Bill

A. Deposits

- The Bill defines a deposit as an amount of money received through an advance, a loan, or in any other form, with a promise to be returned with or without interest. Such deposit may be returned either in cash or as a service, and the time of return may or may not be specified.
- Further, the Bill defines certain amounts which shall not be included in the definition of deposits such as amounts received in the form of loans from relatives and contributions towards capital by partners in any partnership firm.<sup>[L]
[SEP]</sup>

Deposit Taker

- It defines deposit takers as an individual, a group of individuals, or a company who asks for (solicits), or receives deposits. Banks and entities incorporated under any other law are not included as deposit takers.
- In the event of prosecution, it is the deposit-taker who is liable to be prosecuted, and not those who made the deposits.

- **Unregulated deposit scheme:** It bans unregulated deposit schemes. A deposit-taking scheme is defined as unregulated if it is taken for a business purpose and is not registered with the regulators listed in the Bill.

Regulators

- Currently, nine regulators oversee and regulate various deposit-taking schemes. These include the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, and State and Union territory governments.
- For example, RBI regulates deposits accepted by non-banking financial companies, SEBI regulates mutual funds, State and Union territory governments regulate chit funds, among others. All deposit-taking schemes are required to be registered with the relevant regulator.^[1]_[SEBI]

Competent Authority

- It provides for the appointment of one or more government officers, not below the rank of Secretary to the state or central government, as the Competent Authority.
- The Competent Authority can provisionally attach (a protective measure to seize property) the property of deposit taker, as well as all deposits received; summon & examine any person it considers necessary for the purpose of obtaining evidence, and order the production of records and evidence.
- It will have powers similar to those vested in a civil court.

Designated Courts:

- It provides for the constitution of one or more Designated Courts in specified areas. This Court will be headed by a judge not below the rank of a district and sessions judge, or additional district and sessions judge.
- The Designated Court will have the power to
 - Make the provisional attachment absolute
 - Vary or cancel the provisional attachment
 - Finalise the list of depositors and their respective dues, and
 - Direct the Competent Authority to sell the property and equitably distribute the money realised among the depositors.
- Court will seek to complete the process within 180 days of being approached by the Competent Authority.

Central Database

- The central government will additionally designate an authority to establish an online database with information on various deposit-takers. The database will be used to ascertain which deposit-takers are regulated, and which are not.
- Deposit-takers will be required to inform the authority in charge of the database about their actions and the state of their business.
- Further, the Competent Authority will be required to share all information on unregulated deposits with the authority.

Offences

- The Bill defines three types of offences
- Running unregulated deposit-taking schemes (which includes advertising, operating, and accepting money for such schemes).

- Fraudulently defaulting on regulated deposit schemes.
- Wrongfully inducing depositors to invest in unregulated deposit schemes by willingly falsifying facts.

Penalties

- Accepting unregulated deposits will be punishable with imprisonment between two and seven years, along with a fine ranging from three to 10 lakh rupees.
- Defaulting in repayment of unregulated deposits will be punishable with imprisonment between three and 10 years, and a fine ranging from five lakh rupees to twice the amount collected from depositors.
- Further, repeated offenders under the Bill will be punishable with imprisonment between five to 10 years, along with a fine ranging from Rs 10 lakh to five crore rupees.

The bill will help to tackle the menace of illicit deposit-taking activities, which exploit regulatory gaps and lack of strict administrative measures and protect people from being robbed of their hard-earned savings by operators of such schemes.

Pradhan Mantri Laghu Vyapari Maan-dhan Yojana

The Labour Ministry has notified the Pradhan Mantri Laghu Vyapari Maan-dhan Yojana, which was cleared by the Cabinet in its first meeting in this term.

Background

- India has a rich tradition of trade and commerce and the traders continue to make a strong contribution to India's economic growth.
- However, the operations of such small traders are generally characterised by family-owned establishments, small scale of operations, labour intensive, inadequate financial aid, seasonal in nature and extensive unpaid family labour.
- Hence the scheme has been launched to provide them a life of dignity and financial security especially during their old age.

Scheme Details

- It is a voluntary and contribution based Central Sector Scheme, administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and implemented through LIC. It would benefit more than 3 crore small shopkeepers and traders.
- Under this scheme all shopkeepers, retail traders and self-employed persons are assured a minimum monthly pension of Rs. 3,000 per month after attaining the age of 60 years.
- The contribution under the scheme is payable by the subscriber and the Central Government, in equal share, i.e. 50:50 basis.
- In order to transfer the pension amount to the beneficiary's account, there would be a requirement of Aadhaar and bank account.
- **Pension Fund:** The Central Government shall for the purposes of this Scheme, establish a Pension Fund. LIC will be the pension fund manager and responsible for pension pay out.

Eligibility

- The applicant should be between the age group of 18-40 years.
- All small shopkeepers and self-employed persons as well as the retail traders registered with GSTN and a turnover below Rs. 1.5 crore.

- The applicants should not be covered under the National Pension Scheme, Employees' State Insurance Scheme and the Employees' Provident Fund or be an Income Tax assessee.

Exit Provisions

- In case the subscriber exits the Scheme **within a period of less than ten years** from the date of joining the Scheme, then only the share of contribution by him/her will be returned with savings bank rate of interest payable.
- If an eligible subscriber exits **after completion of a period of ten years or more** from the date of joining the Scheme but before the age of sixty years, then only his/her share of contribution shall be returned along with accumulated interest as actually earned by the Pension Fund or the interest at the savings bank interest rate, whichever is higher.

Dragonfly

- NASA has announced that it is sending a drone-style quadcopter to Titan, Saturn's largest moon. It will be launched in 2026 and arrive in 2034. The mission will be developed and led from the Applied Physics Laboratory at Johns Hopkins University.
- Once at Titan in 2034, Dragonfly will have a life span of at least two-and-a-half years, with a battery that will be recharged with a radioactive power source between flights. Cameras on Dragonfly will stream images during flight, offering people on Earth a bird's-eye view of the Saturn moon.
- In addition to a camera, it will carry an assortment of scientific instruments, spectrometers to study Titan's composition; a suite of meteorology sensors; and even a seismometer to detect titan quakes when it lands on the ground. Drills in the landing skids will collect samples of the Titan surface for onboard analysis.
- Part of the Dragonfly mission is to study whether the moon of Saturn could now be, or once was, home to life.
- During its 2.7-year baseline mission, Dragonfly will explore diverse environments from organic dunes to the floor of an impact crater where liquid water and complex organic materials key to life once existed together for possibly tens of thousands of years.

Why Titan?

- Titan is an incredibly unique opportunity scientifically, as it is not only an ocean world — an icy satellite with a water ocean in its interior — but it is the only satellite with an atmosphere.
- The atmosphere at Titan has methane in it. Methane on Titan plays the role that water plays on Earth. Its methane cycle is analogous to Earth's water cycle. It has methane clouds, methane rain and methane lakes and seas on the surface.
- Chemically, it is very much like Earth's primordial past. The surface pressure of Titan is one-and-a-half times the surface pressure of Earth, and the same sort of interactions between air, land and sea take place.

PUNCH (Polarimeter to Unify the Corona and Heliosphere) Mission

- NASA has planned to launch the PUNCH Mission in 2022.
- It will include four suitcase-sized microsatellites designed to image the outer solar corona, or the sun's atmosphere, where the solar wind emerges before traveling throughout the solar system. It will give the first clear images of the entire system connecting the sun and Earth.

- The interplanetary space is not completely empty, it is actually filled with a tenuous, hypersonic solar wind that streams out from the corona and affects spacecraft and planets. The Mission will give the first clear images of the entire system connecting the sun and Earth.
- It will image and track the solar wind and also the coronal mass ejections – which are huge masses of plasma that get thrown out of the Sun's atmosphere. The coronal mass ejections can affect and drive space weather events near the Earth.
- Most of what is known about the space weather delivered by the solar wind comes from direct sampling by spacecraft embedded in it.
- It is like understanding global weather patterns based on detailed measurements from a few individual weather stations on the ground. PUNCH is more like a weather satellite that can image and track a complete storm system as it evolves across an entire region.
- Since the Sun's corona is much fainter than its surface layers, it cannot be viewed by the instruments directly. So PUNCH will block out the light from the Sun to view its corona and the structures in it.

IBM - Government AI pact

- The government has inked a pact with IBM India for undertaking a pilot study to utilise Artificial Intelligence (AI) and weather technology solutions in agriculture.
- The study will be conducted for the Kharif crop season 2019 in three districts - Bhopal, Rajkot and Nanded - in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra, respectively.
- IBM's Watson Decision Platform will give solution in the field of agriculture through AI and weather technology at village level/ farm level to provide weather forecast and soil moisture information on pro bono basis to help farmers for taking decisions regarding water and crop management for better production and productivity.
- It will help to leverage digital technologies to help farmers to increase their income and will take a step to transform Indian agriculture.

Ramanujan Machine

- Scientists from Technion — Israel Institute of Technology have developed a concept they have named the Ramanujan Machine, after the Indian mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan.
- The Ramanujan machine is more of a concept than an actual machine—it exists as a network of computers running algorithms dedicated to finding conjectures about fundamental constants in the form of continued fractions.
- With most computer programs, humans input a problem and expect the algorithm to work out a solution. With the Ramanujan Machine, it works the other way round. Upon feeding in a constant, say 'pi', the algorithm will come up with an equation involving an infinite series whose value, it will propose, is exactly pi.
- The purpose of the machine is to come up with conjectures (in the form of mathematical formulas) that humans can analyze, and hopefully prove to be true mathematically.

Why Ramanujan?

- The algorithm reflects the way Srinivasa Ramanujan worked during his brief life (1887-1920). With very little formal training, he engaged with the most celebrated mathematicians of the time, particularly

during his stay in England (1914-19), where he eventually became a Fellow of the Royal Society and earned a research degree from Cambridge.

- Instead of pounding away at math proofs, he obtained results to famous problems through intuition and then let others find the proofs for them. Because of this, he was sometimes described as a conjecture machine, pulling formulas out of thin air.
- In his thirty-two years of existence, he independently compiled almost 3,900 identities and equations.
- He is therefore referred to as one of the most prominent and path-breaking mathematicians of the 20th century.

Importance

- Conjectures are a major step in the process of making new discoveries in any branch of science, particularly mathematics. New conjectures in mathematics, however, have been scarce and sporadic. The idea is to enhance and accelerate the process of discovery.
- The team that created the machine is hoping that their idea will inspire future generations of mathematicians—to that end, any new algorithms, proofs or conjectures developed by a participant will be named after them. The machine has already discovered dozens of new conjectures.

Chandrayaan-2

- India's quest to land its first spacecraft on the moon got off to a smooth start with the successful launch of Chandrayaan-2 mission aboard the country's most powerful rocket - GSLV Mk-III.
- Chandrayaan-2 will spend 23 days circling around the earth, incrementally raising its orbit, before it would embark on a seven-day journey to enter an orbit around the moon.

Components

- The mission involves a lander, a rover and an orbiter and will have 14 payloads
- **Lander:** Named Vikram after Dr Vikram A Sarabhai, Father of the Indian Space Programme. The Vikram Lander has been designed to be able to communicate with the Indian Deep Satellite Network near Bengaluru, as well as with the Orbiter and Rover.
- **Orbiter:** It is capable of communicating with Indian Deep Satellite Network near Bengaluru, and with the Lander. It will go around the moon for the next one year in an orbit of 100 km from the lunar surface.
- **Rover:** A 6-wheel robotic vehicle named Pragyan (wisdom). It can travel up to 500 m and will leverage solar energy for its functioning. It can only communicate with the Lander.
- **Payloads:** While the orbiter will carry eight payloads, the lander will have four and the rover, which will roll out on the moon's surface, will have two payloads. Unlike last time when Chandrayaan-1 mission, launched in 2008, carried five foreign payloads (three from Europe and two from the US), the current mission will carry only Indian payloads
- It will spend 14 earth days on the moon for carrying out different scientific experiments. The rover will analyse the content of the lunar surface and send data and images back to the Earth through the orbiter

GSLV Mk-III

- GSLV (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle) rockets use a different fuel, and have a thrust that is far greater than PSLV's.

- They can, therefore, carry heavier payloads and travel deeper into space. Chandrayaan-2, for example, had a total mass close to 4,000 kg.
- It is powered by a core liquid engine, has two solid boosters that are used to provide the massive thrust required during liftoff, and a cryogenic engine in the upper stage.

Significance of the Mission

Technical

The mission will help India and the world gain a better understanding of the origin and evolution of the Moon by conducting detailed topographical studies, comprehensive mineralogical analyses, and a host of other experiments on the lunar surface.

Understanding of the Solar System

- Unlike the earth, the moon does not have a tilt around its axis. It is almost erect, because of which some areas in the polar region never receive sunlight.
- Anything here remains frozen, almost for eternity. Scientists believe that rocks found in these craters could have fossil records that can reveal information about the early solar system.

Quest for Water

- Two instruments on board Chandrayaan-1 provided irrefutable evidence of water on the Moon, something that had been elusive for more than four decades.
- Chandrayaan-2 will take the search further, trying to assess the abundance and distribution of water on the surface.

Colonisation

- It is very difficult for humans to survive on Moon's surface due to hazardous radiation, micro-meteoritic impacts, extreme temperature and dust storms.
- It will try to find possibilities of sustaining human life on Earth's natural satellite with an aim to colonising it.
- It is also likely to look for a large cave, whose images were captured by Chandrayaan-1 orbiter, that could serve as a base for future manned missions.

Geopolitical

- **Illustrious league:** With Chandrayaan 2, the country has joined the illustrious league of four nations (China, US and former USSR) across the world to make a soft landing on the lunar surface. This puts India among the global leaders for space technology and research, while the discoveries during the mission will scale new frontiers for science.
- **Indigenous development:** The mighty launch vehicle GSLV Mk -III has been completely designed and made within the country, making it a fully home-grown technology, hence Chandrayaan 2 is a fully indigenous mission.
- **Frugal Engineering:** Chandrayaan 2 also stands out for its frugal cost of engineering as its total cost is way lower than several other lunar missions. ISRO has carved a niche for itself across the globe, in the sphere of astronomy and space research for running cost-effective as well as less expensive projects.

Led by India's 'Rocket Women'

- Apart from having many first-time milestones, the Chandrayaan 2 project is being spearheaded by two senior women scientists of ISRO.

- The mission will inspire a future generation of scientists, engineers and explorers including women who will not only endeavour to break the doors of patriarchy but rise high above in the space.

Neutrino Observatory

- The Union Government has approved a project to build the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) at Pottipuram in the Theni District of Tamil Nadu. There is no other neutrino detector anywhere in India at present. It is the latest in a series of neutrino detectors, neutrino factories and experiments being set up worldwide to promote research in particle physics.
- The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research is the nodal institution. The observatory is to be built jointly with the Department of Atomic Energy and the Department of Science and Technology.
- The Kolar Gold Field mines housed one of the earliest laboratories to study and detect neutrinos. It was located at a depth of 2,000 m. The first atmospheric neutrinos were detected here in 1965. The laboratory was shut following the closure of the mines.

Neutrinos

- Proton, neutron, and electron are tiny particles that make up atoms. The neutrino is also a tiny elementary particle, but it is not part of the atom. Such particles are also found to exist in nature.
- Neutrino has a very tiny mass, no charge and spin half. It interacts very weakly with other matter particles. So weakly that every second trillions of neutrinos fall on humans and pass through the bodies unnoticed.
- Neutrinos come from the sun (solar neutrinos) and other stars, cosmic rays that come from beyond the solar system, and from the Big Bang from which the Universe originated. They can also be produced in the lab.
- Neutrinos come in three types or “flavours” – electron neutrino, tau neutrino and muon neutrino.
- They can change from one flavor to another as they travel. This process is called neutrino oscillation and is an unusual quantum phenomenon.
- The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) will study atmospheric neutrinos only. Solar neutrinos have much lower energy than the detector can detect.

Observatory

- It is an underground project and will comprise a complex of caverns. The main cavern, which will house the huge neutrino detector [50-kilo tonne magnetised iron calorimeter], will be 130 m long, 26 m wide, and 30 m high.
- Two smaller caverns will be used for setting up experiments for neutrino double detector and dark matter.
- The Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector will observe naturally occurring atmospheric neutrinos in a cavern at the end of an approximately 2 km long tunnel in a mountain.
- This will help to reduce the noise from cosmic rays that is ever present over-ground and which would outnumber the rare neutrino interactions even in a detector as large as ICAL.

Applications

Properties of the sun

- The visible light that reaches the Earth from the sun is emitted from the surface of the sun. The neutrinos which also take close to this time to reach Earth from the sun, known as solar neutrinos, were produced in the core of the sun.

- Therefore they give information about the interior of the sun. Studying these neutrinos can help in understanding what goes on in the interior of the sun.

Universal makeup

- Light coming from distant stars can be studied by astronomers, for example, to detect new planets. Light is the visible part of the electromagnetic spectrum, other parts are used in for example radio astronomy.
- Likewise, if the properties of neutrinos are understood better, they can be used in astronomy to discover what the universe is made up of.

Probing Early Universe

- Neutrinos interact very little with the matter around them, so they travel long distances uninterrupted. Since they take time to cross these distances, they are in effect uninterrupted for very long times.
- The extragalactic neutrinos may be coming from the distant past. These inviolate messengers can give a clue about the origin of the universe and the early stages of the infant universe, soon after the Big Bang.

Medical Imaging

Apart from direct future uses of neutrinos, there are technological applications of the detectors that will be used to study them. For instance, X-ray machines, PET scans, MRI scans, etc., all came out of research into particle detectors. Hence the INO detectors may have applications in medical imaging.

Opposition

- Locals fear that the excavation and blasts needed to bore the tunnel in the mountains will endanger the biodiversity of the Western Ghats.
- Further there are concerns regarding radiation and emission of hazardous chemicals.
- Scientists have junked all these claims as baseless and unfounded. They claim that the INO project does not disturb the ecosystem around the site and does not release any radiation, as it does not have any radioactive substance.

Automated Facial Recognition System

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has released a Request for Proposal for an Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS) to be used by police officers across the country.

AFRS

- AFRS works by maintaining a large database with photos and videos of peoples' faces. A new image of an unidentified person — often taken from CCTV footage — is compared to the existing database to find a match and identify the person.
- The artificial intelligence technology used for pattern-finding and matching is called “neural networks”.
- While fingerprints and iris scans provide far more accurate matching results, automatic facial recognition is an easier solution especially for identification amongst crowds.
- AFRS can play a very vital role in improving outcomes in the area of criminal identification and verification by facilitating easy recording, analysis, retrieval and sharing of Information between different organisations.

NCRB request

- The NCRB, which manages crime data for police, would like to use automated facial recognition to identify criminals, missing people, and unidentified dead bodies, as well as for crime prevention.
- Its Request for Proposal calls for gathering CCTV footage, as well as photos from newspapers, raids, and sketches
- It will be a mobile and web application hosted in NCRB's Data Centre in Delhi, but used by all police stations in the country.
- NCRB has proposed integrating this facial recognition system with multiple existing databases. The most prominent is the NCRB-managed Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS).
- It will also be integrated with Integrated Criminal Justice System (ICJS), as well as state-specific systems, the Immigration, Visa and Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT), and the Khoya Paya portal on missing children.

Concerns

- Cyber experts across the world have cautioned against government abuse of facial recognition technology, as it can be used as tool of control and risks inaccurate results.
- India does not have a legal framework for data protection or oversight of surveillance systems, this makes Indian citizens even more vulnerable to the associated abuses.
- International organisations have also condemned the Chinese government on its use of surveillance cameras and facial recognition to constrict the rights of Uighurs, a mostly Muslim minority.

NCRB

- NCRB, is an Indian government agency responsible for collecting and analysing crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL).
- It was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi and is part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Interministerial Group Suggests Ban On Cryptocurrencies

- An inter-ministerial group has recommended a ban on all private cryptocurrencies in India.
- The committee has also suggested a draft legislation - the Banning of Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2019.
- This report and the draft bill will now be examined in consultation with all the departments concerned and regulatory authorities, before a final decision is taken by the government.

Virtual Currencies

- A virtual currency is a digital representation of value that can be digitally traded and functions as a medium of exchange, a unit of account, and a store of value, but, unlike fiat currency like the rupee, it is not legal tender and does not have the backing of a government.
- A cryptocurrency is a subset of virtual currencies, and is decentralised, and protected by cryptography.

Global Scenario

- There are around 2,116 cryptocurrencies globally with a market capitalisation of \$119.46 billion. Other than bitcoin, other popular ones include ethereum, ripple and cardano.

- There is wide divergence in the treatment of virtual currency globally. For example, while Japan has recognised bitcoin as a means of payment, China has imposed a complete ban. However, no country treats virtual currencies as legal tender.

Recommendations

- Under the proposed legislation people won't be allowed to "mine, generate, hold, sell, deal in, issue, transfer, dispose of or use cryptocurrency in India."
- The draft law proposed entails that any direct or indirect use of cryptocurrency shall be punishable with a fine or imprisonment which shall not be less than one year but which may extend up to 10 years.
- A repeat offence, it said, shall be punishable with imprisonment of up to five years that could extend to 10 years with a fine. The fine could be three times the loss or harm caused by the person or three times the gain made by a person or up to Rs 25 crore.
- However, it would be advisable to have an open mind regarding the introduction of an official digital currency in India. It also highlighted that enabling provisions exist in the RBI Act that permit the central government to approve a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) recommended by the RBI to be a "bank note" and therefore, legal tender in India.

Distributed Ledger Technology

- Meanwhile, the report has also highlighted the positive aspect of distributed-ledger technology (DLT) and suggested various applications, especially in financial services, for use of DLT in India.
- The DLT can be of great benefit to India in several financial and non-financial areas. In finance, DLT can be particularly beneficial in the areas of trade financing, lowering the costs of personal identification for KYC related issues, and improving access to credit.
- DLT-based systems can be used by banks and other financial firms for processes such as loan-issuance tracking, collateral management, fraud detection and claims management in insurance, and reconciliation systems in the securities market.

Concerns

- While it is true that the technology used in virtual currencies has immense potential, without a central regulating authority, they can have numerous downsides.
- Non-official virtual currencies can be used to defraud consumers, particularly unsophisticated consumers or investors. The IMC gives the example of the Rs 2,000 crore scam involving GainBitcoin in India where investors were duped by a Ponzi scheme.
- Moreover, such currencies often experience tremendous volatility in their value. For example, Bitcoin was selling at \$20,000 per coin in December 2017 but in less than a year, it was trading at \$3,800 per coin. In a country where lakhs of traders get involved in such currencies, this could have huge implications.
- Scaling up such a currency system over a large population would require crippling levels of energy resources. Currencies such as Bitcoin require humongous processing power. According to a report by the Bank of International Settlement, Bitcoin processing already uses as much energy as is used by Switzerland.
- If private cryptocurrencies are allowed to function as legal tender, the RBI would lose control over the monetary policy and financial stability, as it would not be able to keep a tab on the money supply in the economy and it would destroy the macroeconomic and financial stability.

- The anonymity of private digital currencies make them vulnerable to money laundering and use in terrorist financing activities while making law enforcement difficult.
- Further, there is no grievance redressal mechanism in such a system, as all transactions are irreversible.

Deep Ocean Mission

- A five-year, Rs 8,000-crore plan to explore the deepest recesses of the ocean has got the green signal from the government.
- The 'Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)' to be led by the Union Earth Sciences Ministry will commence from October. A major thrust of the mission will be looking for metals and minerals.

Background

- India was the first country in the world to have been given the Pioneer Area for exploration of deep-sea mineral viz. Polymetallic nodules in the Central Indian Ocean Basin in 1987.
- India had signed a 15 year contract for exploration of Polymetallic Nodules in Central Indian Ocean Basin with the International Seabed Authority on March 25, 2002 with the approval of Cabinet.

Poly metallic nodules

- Polymetallic nodules (also commonly called manganese nodules) are rounded accretions of manganese and iron hydroxides that cover vast areas of the seafloor, but are most abundant on abyssal plains at water depths of 4000-6500 metres.
- They form through the aggregation of layers of iron and manganese hydroxides around a central particle (such as a shell or small rock fragment), and range in size from a few millimeters to tens of centimeters.
- Growth of these nodules is extremely slow, at a rate of millimetres per million years, and they remain on the seafloor surface, often partially buried in a thin layer of sediment.
- **Composition:** The composition of nodules varies with their environment of formation, but in addition to manganese and iron, they can contain nickel, copper and cobalt in commercially attractive concentrations as well as traces of other valuable metals such as molybdenum, cadmium, vanadium, titanium and zirconium.

Distribution

- Areas of economic interest have been identified in the north central Pacific Ocean, the Peru basin in the southeast Pacific, and the centre of the north Indian Ocean.
- The most promising deposits with respect to resource and metal content occur between the Hawaii Islands and Central America in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

Deep Ocean Mission

- Exclusive Economic zones are boundaries prescribed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which give the rights to a state regarding the exploration and use of marine resources. India has an allocated Exclusive Economic zone of 2.2 Million sq.Km which is unexplored and unutilised.
- Deep Ocean mission is a Government of India mission to study the various aspects of ocean in an integrated framework as the Indian space research organisation (ISRO) has been studying the space.

- The Mission is an integrated programme where several scientific departments of the government such as ISRO, DBT, DST, DRDO and ICAR will work together for sustainable harnessing of ocean resources.
- **Projects:** Two key projects planned under DOM include a desalination plant, powered by tidal energy; and a submersible vehicle that can explore depths of at least 6,000 meters.
- **Tasks:** The mission focus on technologies for deep-sea mining, underwater robotics, underwater vehicles and ocean climate change.

Significance

- **Meet Energy Needs:** It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of PMN are available at the bottom of the seas in the Central Indian Ocean. It is estimated that 10% of recovery of that can meet India's energy requirement for next 100 years.
- **Strategic Presence:** Further, it would provide strategic importance for India in terms of enhanced presence in the Indian Ocean.
- **Coastal Economy:** It will give a much needed thrust to the coastal economy and development of blue economy.

Ecological impact

- Research shows that polymetallic nodule fields are hotspots of abundance and diversity for a highly vulnerable abyssal fauna. Nodule mining could affect tens of thousands of square kilometers of these deep sea ecosystems.
- It can cause habitat alteration, direct mortality of benthic creatures, or suspension of sediment, which can smother filter feeder.

ISA

- The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an intergovernmental body based in Kingston, Jamaica, that was established to organize, regulate and control all mineral-related activities in the international seabed area beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, an area underlying most of the world's oceans.
- It was established under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- The ISA, under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), governs non-living resources of the seabed of international waters.

Ban on Costilin

- The Health Ministry has banned the manufacture, sale and distribution of antibiotic, Colistin and its formulations for food producing animals, poultry, aqua farming and animal feed supplements in a bid to preserve the drug's efficacy in humans.
- The ban has been imposed under provisions of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- Colistin is a valuable antibiotic that saves lives and in recent years, medical professionals have been alarmed by the number of patients who have exhibited resistance to the drug.
- It is the last resort drug against multidrug resistant infections such as pneumonia and bacteremia in critically ill patients in intensive care units.
- It is an antibiotic for therapeutic purpose in veterinary. But the drug is highly misused in poultry industry as a growth promoter for prophylactic purpose.

- Costilin resistant bacteria have been found in food samples in India in meat, mutton, fish, fruits and vegetables.
- Excessive use of any drug leads to resistance. If the use of costilin in animals is limited to therapeutic usage only, the chances of developing resistance to it will go down.

Background

- WHO has marked costilin as 'Reserved', meaning it should only be used as a last resort when all other antibiotics have failed.
- The IACG (Interagency Coordination Group on Antimicrobial Resistance) in its April 2019 report to the United Nations had recommended an urgent action from member states, which included India, to phase out use of antimicrobials for growth promotion in animals starting with an immediate end to the use of highest priority critically important antibiotic (HPCIA) that includes colistin.

Global status

- Globally, several countries have banned colistin for animal use. In China, for instance, colistin was banned for use in food animals in 2016 after mcr-1 gene, which confers resistance to colistin, was detected in food samples.
- But, contrary to the practice in its own territory, China exports nearly 100 metric tonnes of colistin-premixed animal feed, supplements and additives per year to India.
- Many countries, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore and those of the European Union (EU), prohibit antibiotic use as growth promoters in animal feed. This by definition would also include prohibiting colistin.

Way Ahead

- Although the step has been hailed across the medical community, it might be a challenge to implement the order.
- Most of the farmers are not aware of the presence of colistin, since it comes mixed in the feed. Hence, awareness programmes need to be conducted for farmers, telling them about the danger of using colistin in feed.
- Further, since the bulk of colistin (nearly 95%) is imported from China, it would not be a big task to stop importing it within a short time.

HT Bt Cotton

- Farmers in Haryana have symbolically sowed Herbicide Tolerant (HT) Bt cotton seeds at a farm openly defying the government ban on the genetically modified (GM) crop.
- Under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, growing GM crops that are not approved by the government can lead to a five-years jail term and a Rs 1 lakh fine.
- According to the report of a high-level committee submitted to the government in 2018, nearly 15% of cotton grown in India—across Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat— could be illegal HT Bt cotton

HT Bt cotton

- Herbicide-tolerant Bt (HT Bt) Cotton is genetically modified crop of unapproved genes which is not permissible in India.
- Technically, herbicide is like a poison which is used to destroy unwanted vegetation. The technique in the HT Bt Cotton makes the crop resistant to herbicide following modification in genes of the seeds.

- Normally, when an herbicide is sprayed, then it destroys unwanted vegetation along with causing harm the cotton crop also. So, farmers use less herbicide in their fields.
- But with the introduction of HT Bt Cotton, there won't be any impact of herbicide on the cotton crop while the unwanted vegetation will be destroyed.

Benefits

- It is preferred to reduce the cost of labour as de-weeding is an extremely labour intensive activity involving 40 per cent of the total cost for growing cotton.
- The farmers have felt the impact in terms of reduced crop losses leading to higher production and income.

Proponents

- Across the world a dozen GM crops have been approved so far, and these are being grown on over 185 million hectares in more than two dozen countries. By resisting genetic engineering technologies, India risks falling behind the rest of the world where scientists are deploying gene editing tools to improve yields, disease resistance and shelf life of crops.
- Powered by BT Cotton, Indian farmers, in just ten years, have made India the biggest cotton producer, and the second largest exporter of cotton in the world. Citing the growth in Cotton production farmers are of the opinion that they should be allowed to use the latest technologies in agriculture including genetically modified (GM) crops.
- As the farmers want improved seeds and technology for better crops, they have urged the government to allow the farmers to undertake field trial for HT Bt cotton to further improve their cotton production.

Opponents

- The opponents consider the protests as a part of tactics used by seed companies to use farmers to propagate demand for such seeds.
- If farmers use unapproved seeds, not only will farmers not have any recourse in case of crop failure, such usage also breaches environmental and health safety of consumers.

Japan Resumes Commercial Whaling

Japan has officially resumed commercial whaling from July 1 after more than 30 years of limiting whale hunts to "scientific" purposes.

Background:

- In December 2018, Japan announced that it would withdraw from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) moratorium on whale hunting.
- In 1988, Japan had agreed to **only hunt whales for scientific purposes** (such as collecting population data), thereby joining the moratorium of IWC.
- Now **Japan joins Iceland and Norway** as the **only nations to allow commercial whaling** despite the IWC moratorium.

Reasons for withdrawal from IWC:

- Japan was infuriated in September 2018 when anti-whaling nations, including Australia and the US, along with the EU, **rejected its proposal** for reform of the IWC.
- Japan claims that its plan would have created a **new committee to set catch limits** for "sustainable" whaling.

- Japan also argues that the IWC has **departed from its original purpose** as a body to manage whale stocks and become **solely dedicated to conservation**.
- Japan insists whale stocks have now recovered sufficiently to allow commercial hunting to resume.

Analysis

- Many countries have termed this **step against the fight for the welfare** of these majestic mammals.
- After the withdrawal, Japan would no longer be part of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW). Hence, it **cannot pursue scientific whaling** and there will be no more whales killed in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary by Japan.
- Currently, Japan uses a *clause in the IWC moratorium* allowing it to conduct so-called “**research hunts**” in the Southern Ocean and then sell the resulting whale meat.
- However, the problem is that for whaling in the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the scientific evidence suggests that stock levels are low, and do not show the levels of robust recovery seen elsewhere.
- So, while there is a gain for whales in the Southern Ocean, the **threat to northern Pacific populations increases**.
- **Environmental governance would also take a hit**. By remaining in the ICW until now, Japan has faithfully followed international protocol, including the decision by the International Court of Justice in 2014 following the challenge by Australia to Japan's "scientific whaling".
- **Norway and Iceland** both catch whales **in defiance of the IWC moratorium**. They are founders of the **North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission**, an alternative management body for whaling.
- Japan is a leading voice among pro-whaling countries, its withdrawal may inspire **other countries, such as South Korea and Russia, to follow suit**.

About IWC

- The IWC was set up under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) which was signed in Washington DC in December 1946.
- its purpose is to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry.
- It introduced a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1986 after some species had been fished to near extinction.
- The commission, with 89 member governments, banned commercial whaling in 1986.

Kartarpur Sahib Corridor

- Pakistan has agreed in principle to allow **visa-free, year-long travel** to the Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara for **Indian passport holders** and **Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card holders**.
- Throughout the year, 5000 pilgrims will be allowed to visit the Gurudwara per day. The pilgrims will be allowed to travel as individuals or in groups and also on foot.
- Pakistan also assured that “**no anti-India activity would be allowed**”.
- The corridor links India's **Dera Baba Nanak shrine** in Gurdaspur district with **Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara** in Pakistan's Punjab province.
- The Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara **across the Ravi river** is built on the historic site where **Guru Nanak Dev spent his final days**.

- It was at this place that Guru Nanak Dev assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539.

Second India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue

- The Second India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue (IRSED) was held in New Delhi.
- **Held under the Chairmanship** - Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, **National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog** and Mr. Timur Maksimov, **Deputy Minister of the Economic Development of the Russian Federation**.
- **Six Core areas of cooperation:**
 - Development of Transport Infrastructure and Technologies;
 - Development of Agriculture and Agro-Processing sector;
 - Small and Medium Business support;
 - Digital Transformation and Frontier Technologies;
 - Cooperation in Trade, Banking, Finance, and Industry; and
 - Tourism & Connectivity.
- **Parallel roundtables explored** the future roadmaps in different areas of cooperation. These were:
 - The roundtable on Digital transformation and Frontier Transformation
 - Development of Transport Infrastructure and Technologies roundtable
 - Roundtable for increasing collaboration and cooperation between Small and Medium Businesses in India and Russia
 - Roundtable on Tourism and Connectivity
 - Roundtable on Agriculture and Agro-processing
 - Roundtable on Industrial Trade and Cooperation
- **Need for Such Dialogue** – Such discussions will help enhance strategic economic cooperation between the two countries. It will lead to preparation of specific proposals for joint action in the future and establish economic relations which reflect the potential of cooperation between the two countries.

About IRSED:

- It was established following a **bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** signed between NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation during the **19th edition of the Annual India-Russia Bilateral Summit**, which was held on October 5, 2018, in New Delhi.
- The First India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue was held in St. Petersburg in November 2018.

Houses for Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine

- India has handed over 250 prefabricated houses to the Myanmar government for use by the Rohingya Muslims when they return.
- The houses, measuring 40 square metres each, are designed to survive quakes and cyclonic storms.
- The project is **part of an agreement signed by the two governments in 2017**, under which the government had committed to spending \$25 million over five years.

Rohingya Muslims fled the violence that started after a local militant group ARSA attacked several Myanmar police posts in August 2017, killing about 12 and also Hindus in nearby Rakhine villages.

In attacks on the Muslim Rohingya, termed 'retaliatory' by Myanmar's Junta and the majority Buddhist community, thousands were killed.

Nearly a million Rohingya, including about 400 Hindu families, are now living in precarious conditions in the **Bangladesh's mud tracts in Kutupalong camp.**

Digital India and Equality Of Women as Motto Haj 2019

- Saudi Arabia has adopted **equality of women as one of its motto in hosting** the pilgrims.
- The Haj authority is also encouraging Digital India by introducing the Haj app, that will provide all sorts of help to the Haj pilgrims.

More About Haj App

- **Indian Haj Information System (Haj App)** is developed by the Indian consulate in Saudi Arabia to receive feedback and grievances from Hajjis.
- Currently, it receives feedback in English, Hindi and Urdu, other regional languages will be incorporated later.
- The app also connects with the pilgrims to Haj service coordinators known as Qadimul Hajjaj of their respective states. Qadimul Hajjaj are government employees who are deputed to assist pilgrims during Haj season.
- **e-MASIHA (Medical Assistance System for Indian Hajjis Abroad)** – An online facility which would **retrieve pilgrims' health information** to apply **appropriate treatment** whenever he or she visits Indian medical facilities during Haj.

About Haj 2019

- It will begin on 9th August and will end on 14th August.
- A total of 2 lakh Indian pilgrims are expected to travel for Haj this year (In February 2019, Saudi Arabian government had notified an **increase in India's Haj quota** to 2 lakh from 1.75 lakh).
- This year 2332 single women are travelling for Haj under Centre government's **Haj without 'Mehram' initiative** (current government has allowed single muslim women above the age of 45 to apply for Haj).

A *Meharam* in Islam is a person in front of whom, a woman can *take off her hijaab*.

First Model Village Built in Sri Lanka

- A model village **built with Indian assistance** as part of a **housing project meant for war affected people and estate workers** was inaugurated in Sri Lanka.
- India has partnered with the Ministry of Housing and Construction and Cultural Affairs to build **100 model villages** consisting of a total of **2,400 houses** all across Sri Lanka with **Indian grant of USD 17.5 million**.
- These houses are in addition to the 60,000 accommodations built under the **Indian Housing Project meant for war affected people in the north and east Sri Lanka** and the estate workers in the plantation areas.

- India has undertaken more than 70 people-oriented development projects in various fields including health, education, housing, skill development, infrastructure and vocational training across Sri Lanka.

India to Train Bangladeshi Civil Servants at Mussoorie

- Eighteen hundred Bangladeshi **mid-career civil servants** will be trained at the **National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG)** in **Mussoorie** between 2019-2025.
- This step is based on the **Memorandum of Understanding signed in February** this year in the **Fifth meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission**.
- This would be the **2nd time that NCGG has signed an MOU** for a training programme for Bangladesh civil servants. Under the 1st MOU signed 5 years ago, 1,500 Bangladeshi civil servants were trained.
- NCGG is an institute **under Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG)**.

MoU between India and Maldives for Shipping

- The Union Cabinet has given approval for the MoU between India and Maldives for the **establishment of passenger and cargo services by sea**.
- This MoU was signed on June 8, 2019 during the visit of Prime Minister of India to Maldives.
- It will pave way for ferry services between Maldives and Kerala by Connecting **Kochi with Male & Kulhudhuffushi** in Maldives by Sea route. While Male is situated at a distance of 708 Kms from Kochi, Kulhudhuffushi is 509 Kms away.
- This step would contribute in promoting people to people contact and in boosting bilateral trade.

Ship Carrying Cargo From Bhutan To Bangladesh Flagged off From Assam

A ship of the Inland Waterways Authority of India, carrying stone from Bhutan to be delivered in Bangladesh, was flagged off.

Key Highlights:

- The ship has set sail from Dhubri in Assam and will travel to Narayanganj in Bangladesh. It will sail over river Brahmaputra and the Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route.
- This is the **first time an Indian waterway** is being used as a channel for transport of cargo between two countries, **using India for transit**.

Benefit:

- Strengthen relations between the neighbouring countries
- Helpful in promoting sub-regional architecture within the framework of SAARC
- Will cut short travel time by 8 to 10 days, and reduce transportation cost by 30%, thereby bringing down logistics costs.
- Open up an alternate route to our North Eastern states

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| Various Initiatives To Increase The Use Of Inland Waterways And Coastal Shipping |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least 10 other National Waterways are under development currently |
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- Providing assured depth of water in the channels, navigation aids like GPS and River Information System, terminals at regular intervals, facilities for mechanized handling of cargo handling etc.
- A minimum 40 % discount and priority in berthing is being given to coastal vessels at major ports.
- Licensing relaxations have been made under section 406 and 407 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1958 for fertilizers, agricultural products, fisheries, horticultural, and animal husbandry products.
- Empty containers and containers being transshipped from another Indian port.
- Special vessels such as Ro-Ro, Ro-Pax, Project cargo/ODC.

NATO ally-like Status to India

- The US Senate has passed a legislative provision that brings India at par with America's NATO allies and countries like Israel and South Korea for increasing defence cooperation.
- The **National Defense Authorisation Act or NDAA for the fiscal year 2020** that contained such a proposal was passed by the US Senate.
- The bill would be signed into law after both the chambers of the US Congress – the House of Representatives and the Senate – passes it.

Significance Of This Step:

- Increased defence cooperation in the Indian Ocean in areas of humanitarian assistance, counter-terrorism, counter-piracy and maritime security.
- It would enable India to access the state-of-the-art weapons and sensitive technology.

Other Agreements Promoting Defence Cooperation:

- The US recognised India as a '**major defence partner**' in 2016.
- **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement** in 2016
- The US-India had signed **Communication, Compatibility and Security Agreement in 2018**. As a result, both countries are sharing sensitive information.
- In July 2018, US granted India status of **Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1)** country.
- **2+2 dialogue** (started in September 2018)

First Sitting US President To Enter North Korea

- US President Donald Trump became the **first sitting US president to set foot in North Korea**.
- He met Kim Jong Un, in the **Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)** between the two Koreas (North and South Korea) and agreed to resume stalled nuclear talks.
- This was the **third meeting** between these two leaders.

Key Highlights:

- Trump arrived in South Korea for talks with Moon after attending a Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan.
- It was during this visit that he made an offer to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and met him in the so-called Joint Security Area (JSA), which is patrolled by soldiers from both Koreas.
- Later, South Korean President Moon Jae-in joined the two making it an unprecedented 3-way gathering.

Summits Between US President and North Korean Leader**1st Summit:**

- The **first summit** between US President and North Korea leader **took place in Singapore** on 12 June 2018.
- A comprehensive document aimed at the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula was signed.
- In exchange to denuclearisation, US has agreed to "provide security guarantees" to North Korea.

2nd Summit:

- It took place at Hanoi, Vietnam in February 2019. This summit was abruptly cut short as both the leaders **failed to reach an agreement** over how North Korea should denuclearise.
- **The American sides blamed North Korea** for this impasse. According to them, Kim had insisted all economic sanctions against North Korea were lifted while not agreeing to give up his entire nuclear arsenal.
- On the other hand, North Korea said that the US rejected its proposal to dismantle the **Yongbyon nuclear complex** and demanded Pyongyang take further disarmament steps.

Why These Summits Taking Place?

- North Korea has pursued nuclear and missile programmes for years in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions which resulted into increased tension between US and North Korea.
- Easing tensions with North Korea and bringing peace to the Korean Peninsula has become the top foreign policy priorities of US.

North and South Korean Leaders Hold Historic Summit

- The leaders of North and South Korea, Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in, met in the demilitarised zone between the two countries on 27 April 2018.
- The aim of this summit was to discuss the 'denuclearisation' of the Korean peninsula and the official end to the Korean War (1950-53) which has technically still not concluded.
- Both the leaders signed the **Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification on the Korean Peninsula**.
- In this declaration, both leaders agreed to work to remove all nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula and, within the year, pursue talks with the United States to declare an official end to the Korean War, which ravaged the peninsula from 1950 to 1953.
- The leaders vowed to negotiate a treaty to replace a truce that has kept an uneasy peace on the divided Korean Peninsula for more than six decades.
- A peace treaty has been one of the incentives North Korea has demanded in return for dismantling its nuclear program.

KOREAN WAR

- Since the beginning of the 20th century, Korea had been a part of the Japanese empire, and after World War II it fell to the Americans and the Soviets to decide what should be done with their enemy's imperial possessions.
- In August 1945, Korean peninsula was divided in half along the 38th parallel. The Russians occupied the area north of the line and the United States occupied the area to its south.
- In 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, starting the three-year Korean War.

- American troops had entered the war on South Korea's behalf. As far as American officials were concerned, it was a war against the forces of international communism itself.
- Finally, in July 1953, the Korean War came to an end **by signing of the armistice agreement in 1953.**
- Since the signing of the armistice agreement, North and South Korea have been divided by a **4km wide demilitarised zone** stretching 250km.

UK's New Prime Minister

- Boris Johnson has become the UK's new prime minister on July 24 **following the resignation of Theresa May.**
- A member of Conservative Party, former foreign minister, and former mayor of London, Boris Johnson was the frontrunner to replace outgoing Prime Minister Theresa May.
- Theresa May was forced to step aside **after failing to deliver a Brexit deal.**

About Electoral System of UK:

- The UK is divided into 650 constituencies and each constituency is represented by one MP elected in the House of Commons (the UK's lower chamber of parliament).
- It follows "**first past the post**" system to decide the winner in each constituency.
- The members of the **upper chamber of the parliament, the House of Lords**, are not elected. **The Queen on the advice of the prime minister** appoints them.
- To govern, a winning party needs to win more than half of the 650 seats.
- The **leader of the winning party is appointed** by the Queen as prime minister and forms a Cabinet of senior politicians.

Different Voting Systems for Other Elections in UK

Alternative Vote (AV)

- It is used to **elect the majority of chairs of select committees** in the House of Commons. It is also used for the **election of the Lord Speaker and by-elections** for hereditary peers.
- Under AV, voters rank candidates in order of preference by marking 1, 2, 3 and so on next to names of candidates on a ballot paper. A voter can rank as many or as few candidates as they like or just vote for one candidate.

Supplementary Vote (SV)

- It is used to **elect the Mayor of London and other elected mayors** in England and Wales.
- The SV system is very similar to the AV system. Under SV, voters are limited to a first and second preference choice.

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

- It is used to elect the **Deputy Speakers in the House of Commons.**
- STV is also used for electing the **Northern Ireland Assembly**, local elections in *Scotland and Northern Ireland* and *European Parliament elections in Northern Ireland.*

Additional Member System (AMS)

- It is used to elect the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the London Assembly.
- Under AMS, voters are given two votes; one for an individual candidate and one for a party.

Sanctions against Myanmar Military Chief

- The US has slapped sanctions against Myanmar's chief of military and three other top officers and barred their entry into America.
- It has been imposed for gross human rights violations, including killing of Rohingya Muslims.
- With this announcement, the **United States is the first government** to publicly take action with respect to the most senior leadership of the Burmese military.

Who are rohingya muslims?

- Rohingyas are ethnic Muslims of Myanmar living in Rakhine province in the Arakan region.
- However, Myanmar government does not recognise Rohingyas as “citizens” and not even as “ethnic group” according to the 1982-citizenship law of Myanmar.
- Rohingya Muslims are referred to as Bengalis in Myanmar for their roots in Bangladesh and these people are practically stateless for 35 years.

Rohingyas in India

- Rohingyas entered into northeast India through various routes. They avoided staying near the Myanmar's borders.
- Rohingyas spread over a large area across various states. They have their camps in Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.
- There are about 40,000 Rohingya Muslims living illegally in India. According to Centre's estimates, Rohingya's population has increased four times in India over the last two years.
- The maximum concentration of Rohingya Muslims is reported to be in Jammu. The central government maintains that there could be around 10,000-11,000 Rohingyas in Jammu.

Why India wants to deport Rohingys?

- Most of the Rohingya Muslims living in India are registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). But the government has stated its decision to deport Rohingyas because –
 - 1) There are security concerns for India due to influx of large number of illegal Rohingya Muslims in Jammu. This has potential to convert Hindu majority Jammu region to a Muslim majority area which can lead to tensions
 - 2) India is **not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention of the UN** or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.
 - 3) There have been intelligence reports regarding involvement of Rohingyas in terrorist attacks in past (BODHGAYA Terrorist Attack).

Book on Fire and Fury Corps Released

- A book showcasing the **history and achievements** of the **Fire and Fury Corps** has been released.
- Title of the book - '**Fire and Fury Corps -- Saga of Valour, Fortitude and Sacrifice**'

- The Fire and Fury corps of Indian army guards the Line of Control (LoC) and Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir.

INAS 313

- The Indian Navy has commissioned its **fifth Dornier Aircraft Squadron — Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 313** — in Chennai.
- The Squadron will be operating from Chennai International Airport. With commissioning of INAS 313, the State of Tamil Nadu will have **three naval air bases**; which is the highest number for any Coastal State.
- **INS Rajali at Arakkonam** and **INS Parundu at Ramnad** are the other two air bases in Tamil Nadu.

More About INAS 313:

- It derives its name '**Sea Eagle**' from the bird of prey family **Accipitridae**. The **insignia of the squadron** depicts a '**Greater Spotted Eagle**' searching over the vast blue and white sea waves.
- The Squadron will operate **Dornier aircraft** which is a multi-role **Short Range Maritime Reconnaissance** aircraft manufactured by HAL.
- The aircraft is used for **maritime surveillance, Search and Rescue Operations** and to provide **targeting data to weapon platforms**.

DefExpo India 2020

- The **11th edition of the biennial DefExpo** will be held in **Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh**, in 2020.
- The **theme of the DefExpo India- 2020** will be '**India: The Emerging Defence Manufacturing Hub**' and focus will be on '**Digital Transformation of Defence**'.
- The mega expo will showcase India`s Defence Manufacturing Prowess.
- 10th edition (2018) was held in Chennai.

Uttar Pradesh has a strong defence industrial infrastructure, including

- Four units of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd at Lucknow, Kanpur, Korwa and Naini (Prayagraj),
- Nine ordnance factory units, including Kanpur, Korwa, Shahjahanpur, Firozabad and
- One unit of Bharat Electronics Limited at Ghaziabad.
- Uttar Pradesh is also set to get one of the two Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs) of the country.

Israeli MRSAM Systems for Indian Navy

- Israel Aerospace Industries has signed a \$50 million follow-up agreement with India to provide complementary **Naval MRSAM (medium range surface-to-air missile) systems** to the Indian Navy.
- MRSAM provides broad as well as topical defence against a range of assault air, marine and ground threats.

Boeing AH-64E Apache Helicopters

- The first batch of Boeing AH-64E Apache Guardian Attack helicopters has arrived at the Indian Air Force's Hindon airbase.

- These are the first four of the 22 choppers ordered by India from the US.
- The AH-64E Apache is the world's most advanced multi-role combat helicopter and is also used by the US Army.

Landing Craft Utility L56 Commissioned

- Indigenously built Landing Craft Utility L56, the **sixth ship of the LCU MK IV class**, has been commissioned into the Indian Navy.
- This Landing Craft Utility is **100th warship** built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd (GRSE), Kolkata (*this shipyard has become the first in India to achieve do so*).
- LCU 56 is an amphibious ship with its primary role being transportation and deployment of Main Battle Tanks, Armoured Vehicles, Troops and Equipment from ship to shore and vice versa.
- It would be administered and based in Port Blair under Naval Component Commander in Andaman and Nicobar Command.

India to Get R-27 Missile from Russia

- India has signed a deal to buy **R-27 air-to-air missiles from Russia**. These missiles will be equipped on the Su-30MKI fighter jets.
- It would boost the capabilities of Indian Air Force (IAF) in beyond visual targets.
- The missiles have been acquired **under 10-1 projects** which mandate the three services to maintain critical weapon systems and spares for a specified minimum period, which is known as **War Wastage Reserve**.

After the Pulwama attack, the Central government had given **emergency powers to the three services** to buy whatever equipment is required by them for safeguarding the borders with Pakistan.

Under the powers given, the security forces can buy the equipment of their **choice within three months at the cost of up to Rs 300 crore per case**.

NIA (Amendment) Bill 2019

- The Lok Sabha has passed the National Investigation Agency (Amendment) Bill, 2019.
- There has been three major amendments in the existing bill.

Key Changes

1. Expansion of circle of investigation

- Under the existing Act, the NIA can investigate offences under Acts such as the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967.
- Now the NIA would be able to **additionally investigate offences** related to *human trafficking, counterfeit currency, manufacture or sale of prohibited arms, cyber-terrorism, and offences under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908*.

2. Increase in jurisdiction

- The amendment gives NIA officers the **power to investigate offences committed outside India** subjected to international treaties and domestic laws of other countries.

3. Special trials courts

- The existing Act allows the Centre to constitute special courts for NIA's trials.
- However, the amendment enables the Central government to designate sessions courts as special courts for such trials.

About NIA

- It is a central agency established by the Indian Government to combat terror in India.
- It was created in December 2008 after the Mumbai terror attacks.
- Headquartered in New Delhi, the NIA has branches in Hyderabad, Guwahati, Kochi, Lucknow, Mumbai, Kolkata, Raipur and Jammu.

Pata Gold Award 2019 to Incredible India Campaign

- **The Incredible India "Find the Incredible You"** campaign has been declared winner of the PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) Gold Award 2019 in the "Marketing - Primary Government Destination" category.
- The '**Incredible India 2.0**' Campaign was **launched in September 2017**. It marks a shift from generic promotions undertaken across the world to *market specific promotional plans and content creation*.

About the campaign:

- The campaign focuses on digital and social media and the promotion of Niche Tourism products of the country.
- As part of the 2.0 Campaign, five new television commercials were produced by the Ministry of Tourism, which were aired globally. These were:
 - Yoga : "The Yogi of the Racetrack"
 - Wellness : "The Reincarnation of Mr. and Mrs. Jones"
 - Luxury : "The Maharani of Manhattan"
 - Cuisine : "The Masala MasterChef"
 - Wildlife : "The Sanctuary in Paris"
- The campaign strategy was to shift the focus from the external experience of tourist destinations to the internal experience of travelers themselves.
- This series of transformative experiences was brought alive through unique storytelling in the format of autobiographies of travelers, **with the tagline "Find the Incredible You"**.

About PATA Gold Awards:

These are given to tourism industry organizations and individuals making outstanding contribution towards the successful promotion of the travel industry throughout the Asia Pacific Region.

Markandeshwar Temple

- The Archaeological Survey of India has taken up the restoration work of Markandeshwar temple.
- Known as the "Khajuraho of Vidarbha", the temple of Markandadeo is situated on the bank of River Wainganga in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra.
- The temples belong to the Nagara group of temples of North India.
- They belong to saiva, vaishnava and sakta faith.

- Most of the temples have a simple plan, with ardhmandapa, mandapa, antarala and garbhagriha forming the component of the entire set up.

Jagannath Rath Yatra

- The Jagannath Rath Yatra was recently celebrated in Puri, Odisha.
- Popularly known as the Festival of Chariots, one of the biggest festivals in India, Rath Yatra marks the Journey of Lord Jagannath along with his siblings Lord Balarama and sister Subhadra from Jagannath temple to Gundicha temple.
- After nine days of stay at their aunt's place, the deities are taken back to Jagannath Temple. This journey is named as Bahuda Yatra.
- As per Odia calendar, the Rath Yatra begins on the second day of Shukla Paksha of the Hindu lunar month of Ashadha.
- The chariots of Lord Jagannath, Lord Baladev and Goddess Subhadra are called Nandighosh, Taladhwaaja and Devadalana respectively.
- The three chariots are newly constructed every year with wood of specified trees like phassi, dhausa, etc. They are customarily brought from the ex-princely state of Dasapalla by a specialist team of carpenters who have hereditary rights and privileges for the same.

Some More Facts

- **ITBP Director General S S Deswal** has been given additional charge of counter-terror force National Security Guard (NSG).
- **IPS officer V. K. Johri** has been appointed as New BSF Director General.
- **Badri Narain Sharma** has been appointed as chairman of National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA).
- **Priti Patel** is Britain's first Indian-origin Home Secretary.
- **Anshula Kant**, managing director of the State Bank of India, has been **appointed as managing director and chief financial officer of the World Bank**.
- **Justice A K Sikri**: Former Supreme Court judge has been appointed as an International Judge of Singapore International Commercial Court. He was recently appointed as the **Chairperson of the News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA)** by the News Broadcasters Association (NBA). The SICC is a **division of the Singapore High Court** and part of the Supreme Court of that country. It is designed to deal with **transnational commercial disputes**.