



VAJIRAM & RAVI

(Institute for Civil Services Examination)

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the RECITALS

Explore Current Affairs Through Q&A



Featured
Articles



Mains
Q & A



Prelims
Q & A



Bridging
Gaps

G20 And The Osaka
Declaration

Weaponisation
Of Space

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Mob Lynching

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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

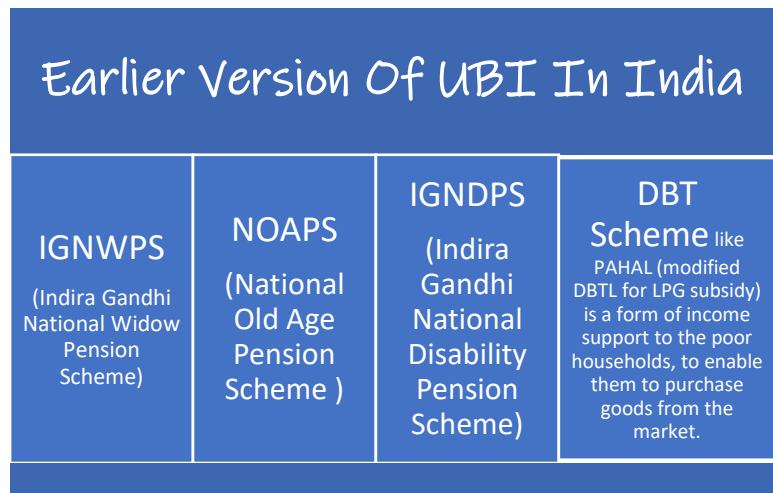
Universal Basic Income

In its manifesto for the Lok Sabha Elections 2019, the Congress party has announced a Minimum Income scheme **Nyuntam Aay Yojna (Nyay)** as a surgical strike against poverty. Further, the Sikkim Democratic Front also intended to make implementation of Universal Basic Income (UBI) a key promise in its manifesto for the assembly elections in April-May 2019.

At least two States, Telangana and Odisha, are already experimenting in a limited way with income support schemes, focused on the farm sector. In Telangana, the government is providing farmers income support payment under **Rythu Bandhu programme** at the rate of Rs. 10,000/ha (Rs. 4,000/acre). Odisha's recently notified **KALIA (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Assistance)** under which it proposes to transfer Rs. 5,000 in cash per season (Rs. 10,000 per year for double-cropped land) to the State's 30 lakh marginal farmers

About UBIS

A basic income is a regular, periodic cash payment delivered unconditionally to all citizens on an individual basis, without requirement of work or willingness to work. The **five broad features** of such schemes are: payments at periodic regular intervals (not one-off grants), payments in cash (not food vouchers or service coupons), payments to individuals, universality and unconditionality.



In the West, economists are advocating universal basic income to fight inequality and slow wage growth, allay fears that immigrants will take away jobs and advance automation. **Finland** that also started UBIS, recently concluded a two-year experiment on its effects on unemployed citizens, which commenced in January 2017. Earlier, the **Government of Ontario, Canada**, had announced a plan to test a kind of unconditional income guarantee, and enrolled participants in three areas of the province for a guaranteed income for up to three years. Barcelona in Spain has tested several potential changes to its anti-poverty programmes, including unconditional cash payments.

Not A New Idea

- This is an old idea, going back at least to 1960s, when, interestingly, it drew support both from right-wing libertarians like **Milton Friedman** and centre-left Keynesians like **John Kenneth Galbraith**.
- The 1960s brought about the war on poverty, waged through federally funded social service and healthcare programmes. Milton Friedman sought a negative income tax, eliminating the need for a minimum wage and potentially the “welfare trap”, while bureaucracy could be curtailed. **Richard Nixon** supported and yet failed to push through a “Family Assistance Plan” while George McGovern’s 1972 campaign sought a \$1,000 “demogrant” for all citizens.
- In 1974, the Canadian government conducted a randomised controlled trial in Winnipeg, Dauphin and rural Manitoba in which lower-income households were given income guarantee. This negative income tax experiment, termed “**Mincome**”, helped over a thousand families below the poverty line in Dauphin earn a liveable income. It offered financial predictability, food security, improved health-care outcomes, better education, and social stability. With the onset of 1970s stagflation, induced by the oil crisis, such schemes were abandoned. But briefly, there was a town with no poverty.

Benefits of UBIS

- **Empower People To Take Decision:** By providing every household a minimum income through unconditional cash transfers, the beneficiaries of government programmes cease to be subjects. Instead, they are seen as having agency and as being better placed to take economic decisions in their own interest than an all-knowing state.
- **Benefit Poor Population:** The UBI dole is expected to take care of half the nutritional requirements of a family of five in rural areas and one third requirement of those who make the urban poor. Persons below poverty line are estimated to be 27.5 per cent of the country’s population.
- **A Part Of Right To Life:** It is a part of a citizen’s *right to minimum economic security*, a right which many countries recognize, and falls under the definition of right to life in the Constitution.
- **Economic Survey:** The UBI proposal was also dealt in 2017 Economic Survey and described it to provide social justice and dignity, reducing poverty and increasing administrative efficiency.
- **Act As A Safety Net:** A certain assured income also provides a safety net in a market economy where job losses, health shocks or death of breadwinners can push back families to below subsistence levels.
- **Easy to Implement:** UBI is, moreover, easy to implement, unlike anti-poverty schemes that suffer errors both of exclusion (the deserving being left out) and inclusion (the undeserving benefiting) even

with the best of targeting. And with Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts becoming ubiquitous, there's nothing simpler and less leakage-prone than transferring a predetermined sum of money.

- **Boost Consumption And Growth:** The stimulus in form of universal basic income will boost growth, which has been fading rapidly in the last several months.
- **Other Benefits:** While job guarantee programmes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, lock up beneficiaries in low productivity work, income supplements allow them to continue to look for better employment options.

Thus, UBIS has an overall good outcome. A pilot project conducted between 2010 and 2013, covering 6,000 beneficiaries in Delhi and Madhya Pradesh, yielded encouraging results. It confirmed that at high levels of impoverishment, even the smallest income supplement can improve nutrient intake, school enrolment and attendance of female students, and reduce incidence of indebtedness. The study showed that consumption of pulses went up by 1,000%, fresh vegetables by 888%, and meat by 600% among the beneficiaries.

Challenges

- **Overall Issues:** There are multiple challenges, starting with the costs of funding such a scheme, with the most conservative estimates putting the tab for even a targeted minimum income guarantee at close to or over **2 % of the GDP**; issue of defining poverty; determining an appropriate threshold; identifying the beneficiaries, besides the risk of moral hazard.
- **Fiscal Challenges:** It could inaugurate a race to the bottom, which poses a grave threat to fiscal and financial stability.
- **Inflation and Ultimate Impact on Poor:** Increasing the fiscal deficit for funding such scheme hurts the poor, for it sparks off inflation and cannot be the way to fund income transfers.
- **Lack of Bank Account:** There is a question of reaching to the people who do not have bank accounts or access to banking agents.
- **Fear of Exclusion:** The cash transfers to the poor may also face challenges on account of gross exclusionary errors of identification.
- **Does Not Resolve Underlying Issue Of Poverty:** The cash transfer in itself do not ensure accessibility, affordability or even sustained economic security given falling real wages.

| THE PROS & CONS OF UBI | |
|--|--|
| FOR | AGAINST |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Poverty and vulnerability reduction ■ More choice to citizens on spending ■ Better targeting of aid ■ Insurance against shocks ■ Boost to financial inclusion ■ Psychological aid to people ■ More administrative efficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gender disparity induced by cash ■ Fiscal cost given political economy of exit ■ Conspicuous spending ■ Could put stress on banking system ■ Political opposition to transfers to rich people ■ Exposure to market risks (cash vs food) ■ Reduction in labour supply |

- ***Fear Of Misuse Of Money:*** The scheme also doesn't indicate where that money would be spent by the beneficiaries. The basic income support may be utilised for questionable purposes, such as for buying alcohol.
- ***May Replace Existing Welfare Schemes:*** More importantly, the concern is that these cash transfers could replace, rather than supplement, existing schemes that provide subsidized goods and services. This would imply that citizens could be left at the mercy of private, for-profit players to avail even basic services. This might incentivize the state to shirk its constitutional responsibility of providing basic entitlements to all. Thus, replacing existing scheme with it may be counterproductive.

Way forward

UBIS is a policy issue that requires our serious attention and deliberation. Moreover, a simplistic UBI will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy. An unavoidable solution to fix India's fundamental problems is the strengthening of institutions of the state to deliver the services (public safety, justice, and basic education and health), which should be available to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay for them.

It makes sense, if at all, to go in for a UBI in a calibrated manner, starting with monthly pensions for all households having senior citizens and pegging this at a minimum Rs 1,000. The UBI net can be gradually widened by giving beneficiaries the choice of either availing it or continue with their existing entitlements.

India In Indo-Pacific Region

The term “Indo-Pacific” has emerged as a new geopolitical frame of reference. Its significance is embedded in the **growing strategic importance of the maritime domain** and the **rise of states** that have demonstrated the ability to ‘transcend’ their respective sub-regions.

US strategic ‘pivot’ or ‘rebalancing’ towards Asia has reinforced this concept as it called on the regional powers to share the burdens of regional security. India has the ability to facilitate the emergence of this region as the dominant strategic geography of Asia. This has consolidated India’s position in this region as an integral member.

Indo-Pacific Region: As Viewed By India

The term Indo-Pacific achieved operational clarity after the **Indian vision** was presented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his keynote address at the **Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018**. According to this speech, the **geography of the Indo-Pacific** stretches from the **eastern coast of Africa to Oceania** (from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas) **which also includes in its fold the Pacific Island countries**.

Worldwide, the Indo-Pacific is still an evolving concept and as such, continues to compete with alternative conceptions of regional space in Asia.

Difference Between “Indo-Pacific” and “Asia-Pacific”

Asia-Pacific

- The ‘Asia Pacific’ relates to that part of **Asia which lies in the Pacific Ocean**. It is an idea proposed and supported by Asia’s Pacific powers who sought a term to describe their common region.
- Asia Pacific, therefore, has three major constituents: **Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania (South Western Pacific)**.
- **India is not a part of the region**.
- Asia-Pacific is **more of an economic conception**, rather than a security related notion. It has been popular as a **zone of emerging markets** that have been experiencing rapid economic growth.
- The only multilateral institution that effectively represents the Asia Pacific is the **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC)**, which does not include India.

Indo-Pacific

- It is an integrated theatre **that combines the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean**, and the **land masses** that surround them.

- It is still an evolving concept, although, most analysts see it as an idea that captures **the shift in power and influence from the West to the East.**
- It is both a **strategic as well as an economic domain** comprising important sea-lines of communication that connect the littorals of the two oceans.
- Since it is primarily a maritime space, the Indo-Pacific is associated with **maritime security and cooperation.**

Significance Of This Region

A. Strategic Significance

- It has become a **theatre of Great Power competition and rivalry.** Traditional rivalries over maritime territory, sovereignty and resources have intensified which has larger bearing on peace and stability of the world.
- Through its **rebalance strategy towards the Indo-Pacific** region, US is trying to protect and promote American national interests.
- **Rise of China and its assertive foreign policy** has created geostrategic flux in the region.

B. Economic Significance

- It is **rich in natural resources**, especially hydrocarbons which fuel the industrial engines of the world's economies.
- In recent years, with the global economic power shift, it has swiftly emerged as a **centre of international trade and investments.**
- It **embodies a large market** which is defined by nearly half of the world's population.
- **Labour, capital and consumer goods** are also increasingly flowing from Asia to other regions of the world. As a matter of fact, the region constitutes the **engine of global economic growth and development.**

C. Security Aspect

- Regional peace and stability, **freedom of navigation** and **maritime security** have become very important as this region **consists of many of the world's vital choke** points for global commerce, including **the Straits of Malacca** which is very critical for the growth of world economy.
- **Terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking & climate change** have thrown new challenges for this region.
- The region has been termed by many security analysts as the **most militarized area in the world.**

Mechanisms Through Which India Is Pursuing Its Indo-Pacific Strategy

- India's **Act East policy** remains the **bedrock of the national Indo-Pacific vision**. India has been an active participant in mechanisms like:
 - The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN-led frameworks like the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus,
 - ASEAN Regional Forum, Mekong-Ganga Economic Corridor
 - Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
- India has also been convening the **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium**, in which the navies of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) participate.
- India has boosted its engagements with **Australia and New Zealand** and has deepened its cooperation with **the Republic of Korea**.
- Through the Forum for **India-Pacific Islands Cooperation**, India is stepping up its interactions with the Pacific Island countries.
- India's growing partnership with Africa can be seen through the convening of mechanisms like the **India-Africa Forum Summits**.
- India's multi-layered engagement with China as well as strategic partnership with Russia underlines its commitment to ensuring a stable, open, secure, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- Recently, in April 2019, India has set up a new **Indo-Pacific division in the foreign office** to deal with region's policy.

Regional Vision Articulated by Major Powers

- U.S. has renamed **Pacific Command to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command** and enacted **Asia Reassurance Initiative Act in December 2018**
- The **Free and Open Indo-Pacific** concept was unveiled by **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** in 2016, and Australia released its Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017, which details **Australia's Indo-Pacific vision** centred around security, openness and prosperity.

Factors Which Led To A Rise In India's Role And Influence In The Indo-Pacific Region

- As India's **economy grows**, its influence in the region is also seeing a commensurate rise.
- India has set up **additional naval bases** recently in its strategically-located Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which lie very close to the Straits of Malacca.
- New Delhi's strategic relations with countries like the US and Japan are improving rapidly.

- Concerns over **Beijing's growing assertiveness** in the region have brought together India, Japan, Australia and the US together in the '**Quad**'.
- New Delhi's **relations with regional groupings** like the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are also improving.

Challenges

- **Increased terrorism** in South Asia might bog down New Delhi in the subcontinent.
- **Many connectivity initiatives**, such as India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Indian-funded Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Corridor Project in Myanmar, are **running behind schedule**.
- India faces **huge domestic challenges** although it has become the "fastest growing major economy in the world".
- In addition, New Delhi runs a **huge trade deficit** with countries like China.
- The **integration of the Quadrilateral initiative**, which was revived in 2017, with its larger Indo-Pacific approach is a major challenge faced by India.
- There are **differences between India's vision and the U.S.'s strategy** for the Indo-Pacific.
- Countries like **China and Russia view the Indo-Pacific with suspicion**. In this case, it will be challenging to maintain a balance between the interests of all stakeholders.

Conclusion

India has been consistently **emphasising "inclusiveness"** in the Indo-Pacific framework. The creation of Indo-Pacific wing in MEA signifies the fact that **India views this region diplomatically and not as a security bloc**. As geopolitical tensions rise between China and the U.S., India will face a daunting task of maintain a balance between different stakeholders.

Depending on **who is defining it and for what purpose**, the term Indo-Pacific is still evolving. In this case, India will have to work hard so that **Indo-Pacific does not get closely tied to the US strategic 'rebalance'**. This will lead to **Chinese acceptance of this term**, which in turn would assist in developing a shared strategic vocabulary and perspective in Asia.

United Nations Security Council: Evaluation and Reforms

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN), charged with ensuring international peace and security, accepting new members to the United Nations and approving any changes to its charter. Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations and international sanctions as well as the authorization of military actions through resolutions.

Like the UN as a whole, the Security Council was created following World War II to address the failings of a previous international organization, the League of Nations, in maintaining world peace. The UN Charter gives all three powers of the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches to the Security Council.

The Security Council consists of fifteen members. The victors of World War II – the Soviet Union (now represented by Russia), the United Kingdom, France, Republic of China (now represented by the People's Republic of China), and the United States – serve as the body's five permanent members. In addition, the council has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve a term of two years. The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Evaluation Of Its Work

- The Security Council, has played a role in resolving multiple conflicts around the globe. A Rand Corporation 2005 study found the UN to be successful in two out of three peacekeeping efforts.
- Human Security Report produced at the University of British Columbia's Liu Institute documented a decline in the number of wars, genocides and human right abuses since the end of the Cold War and presented evidence, that international activism spearheaded by the UN is the reason for the decline.
- Glaring failures however, have not only accompanied UN's many achievements, they have overshadowed them. The Council has been criticized for failure in resolving many conflicts, viz. Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Libya, Syria, Kosovo and Palestine.
- Created in the post-War context, it doesn't actually reflect the changes that have occurred in the international system. Though the global economic architecture and the geopolitics have undergone massive changes, the Council has changed relatively little since 1945.
- The developing nations, now play a bigger role in international affairs. But within the UN, the five permanent veto-wielding members still effectively take all the crucial decisions and have created an exclusive club that addresses the strategic interests and political motives of the permanent members.
- The Council's effectiveness and relevance has been questioned all around, as, in most high-profile cases, there are essentially no consequences for violating a Security Council resolution.

- The democracy deficit in UNSC prevents effective multilateralism in global arena. This clearly points to a worsening institutional crisis within the UNSC and is testing multilateralism like never before.
- These complex challenges stem from simple fact that power is becoming more diffused in the international system. The UNSC, meant to centralise power after 1945, cannot avoid losing authority as a result.

Reforms in UNSC

- Reform of UNSC encompasses **five key issues**: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship.
- A very frequently discussed change to UN structure is to change the permanent membership of the Council, which reflects power structure of the era gone by. The Council does not reflect contemporary power realities and should therefore be reformed to reflect the new realities of 21st Century.
- There have been proposals of an alternative model for Council reform that would give permanent seats to regional organizations or blocs rather than individual countries. This could make the Council more representative without having to enlarge the Council too much.
- The veto power has been intensely controversial since the drafting of the UN Charter in 1945. The debate on the existence and use of the veto continues, reinvigorated by many cases of veto-threat as well as actual veto use.
- The Security Council has taken several steps to increase its efficiency and transparency in recent years. However, reform of the Council's working methods remains a work in progress. For it to become a preventive rather than a reactive UN body, it needs to gather information from external actors and other UN organs far more efficiently and further increase transparency of its proceedings.
- Further, the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly, should not be competitive or adversarial, but one of synergy and complementarity that benefits the UN objectives of the promotion of international peace and security. A relationship with the General Assembly based on transparency, mutual trust and frequent interaction with all member states will increase the credibility of the Council,
- The slow-moving Council reform is a very divisive and contentious issue and all the member States have to walk the extra mile as they work on divergences and commonalities to ensure the process does not become a zero-sum game.

Conclusion

Updating the current architecture of international institutions, which are so out of sync with the modern world, is imperative if new global challenges are to be met. Nowhere is this need for common purpose required more than in reforming the Security Council. The flaws need to be fixed before the technologies of the future sharpen the conflicts of the past, while the Council remains nursing its self-inflicted wounds of diminishing relevance.

1. BIMSTEC is a natural platform to fulfill our key foreign policy priorities of “*Neighborhood First*” and “*Act East*”. Due to its immense significance, India has been signaling its renewed interest in this organisation. Comment.

Context:

- In line with '**Neighbourhood First**' policy, Government of India has invited the **leaders of the BIMSTEC Member States for the Swearing-in ceremony**.
- The President of the Kyrgyz Republic, who is the current Chair of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, who was the Chief Guest at this year's Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, have also been invited.

Answer

Comprising of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan, BIMSTEC is home to 1.5 billion people, accounting for approximately 21 % of the world population, and a combined GDP of US\$ 2.5 trillion. In October 2016, India had hosted the BIMSTEC members at Goa during the BRICS Outreach Summit. On May 30, the Indian Government invited the leaders of BIMSTEC nations for the swearing-in ceremony, thereby, highlighting India’s renewed interest in this organization.

Significance Of BIMSTEC For India

- **Bridge-builder between the SAARC and the ASEAN** – Myanmar and Thailand are members of ASEAN while other member nations belong to SAARC. Hence, BIMSTEC is a robust platform for connecting South and South East Asia.
- **Neighbourhood First Policy** - BIMSTEC is an integral part of India’s ongoing efforts to map out new pathways of geo-economic cooperation among countries in the region which it sees as part of its extended neighbourhood.
- **Potential game-changer for the north-eastern states** - BIMSTEC has potential to unlock landlocked northeastern states of India which is home to 45 million people.
- **Strategic Significance** - China has diverted its attention to the Bay of Bengal with greater assertion. *The Bay of Bengal acts like a funnel to the Malacca Strait*, a major trade route for China, which has also undertaken massive infrastructure projects in BIMSTEC countries except India and Bhutan.
- **Resource rich region** - The Bay of Bengal is the route for about 25 per cent of global trade and has *huge untapped resources especially in the energy sector* - massive reserve of natural gas, the future of power supply.
- **In counterterrorism**, close cooperation between India and BIMSTEC countries can strengthen the fight against terrorism and illicit drug trafficking.
- **Attractive alternative to SAARC** - BIMSTEC more naturally lends itself to regional integration—physical connectivity as well as economic cooperation—than SAARC which is dominated by India and Pakistan and hamstrung by tensions between the two.

Conclusion

For BIMSTEC to become an enabler of regional cooperation, it will have to evolve as an organisation that works through a bottom-up approach. The people-centric approach seems to be the best as BIMSTEC seriously lags behind ASEAN and other regional organisations in terms of people-to-people contacts.

Why SAARC Gave Way to BIMSTEC?

SAARC is facing following challenges:

- **Often overshadowed by India-Pak tensions.**
- **Failed to promote economic integration** - In financial year 2015-16, the total India-SAARC trade stood at around \$21.5 billion, as against \$23.4 billion a year ago.
- Of this, India's trade with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka accounted for nearly 60%.
- **Failed to ensure regional integration** – In 2014, Pakistan pulled out of the Motor Vehicle Agreement which led to the promotion of sub-regional cooperation within South Asia with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal under a new forum that went by the acronym, BBIN.

Is BIMSTEC Ready To Replace SAARC?

In order to get desired results through BIMSTEC, the member nations must address the various issues and challenges faced by this organization. Contentious issues concerning BIMSTEC nations are:

- India and Bangladesh have huge reservations over the Teesta water sharing dispute and over the refugees.
- Bangladesh and Myanmar also have ongoing problems in regard to the Rohingya Muslims as refugees.
- India and Sri Lanka continue to have friction on the fishermen issue.
- Absence of a permanent secretariat for a long time and lack of commitment to invest in several priority areas identified by the member states were seen as some of the key institutional factors holding the BIMSTEC back.

2. **Rising US-Iran Hostilities have placed India in a difficult situation given its growing strategic partnership with the US on the one hand, and strong bilateral ties with Iran, on the other. Discuss.**

Context: India had stopped **buying oil from Iran after May 2** when the US ended its waivers that allowed the top buyers of Iranian oil, including India, to continue their imports for six months.

Answer

USA withdrew from the Iranian nuclear deal last year and has imposed stringent sanctions against Iranian regime. In April 2019, it designated Iran's Revolutionary Guard a foreign terrorist organization. These developments underline the growing tension in the Persian Gulf. As a result, India is facing a difficult situation - having to deal with the US pressure while simultaneously working to secure its interests vis-à-vis Iran.

Catch 22 Situation For India

Many countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and the US have publicly announced their willingness to help meet the shortfall in crude oil that India might face due to sanctions on Iran. Therefore, **managing the economic aspect** of continued flow of oil to India *might not be difficult*. However, the bigger challenge is the **political aspect of managing relations** with the US and Iran.

- On the one hand, if India were to stop sourcing oil from **Iran**, it will **affect bilateral relations**.
- Moreover, giving in completely to US pressure and cutting off Iranian oil imports does not comport with **India's pursuit of an independent foreign policy** and its endeavour to **maintain strategic autonomy**.
- As these sanctions are unilateral and do not involve UN, *India's action in this case will define its approach towards multilateralism*.
- On the other hand, if India were to continue to buy Iranian oil, it is likely to impact the **strategic relationship with the US**.

Way Forward

- India can join hands with the EU, Russia and China through the **INSTEX mechanism** or team up with a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) initiative to defy US sanctions.
- However, more plausible option is to **continue negotiating with the US** to either secure a formal waiver or to have an informal understanding to buy Iranian oil.
- In the meanwhile, India can offer to Iran to enhance its investments in the Chabahar Port development project as well as consider initiating other developmental and connectivity projects.
- This will help India not openly defy the US or subvert its policy towards Iran but also at the same time **ensure that its relationship with Iran** is not completely derailed and it is also able to **pursue an independent foreign policy**.

Extra Mile

Instrument In Support of Trade EXchanges (INSTEX)

- The 'INSTEX' mechanism has been set up by France, Britain and Germany for Iran to skirt U.S. sanctions.
- It is an European-government-controlled Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), a legal entity created specifically to allow companies based in the European Union—and, in the future, potentially elsewhere—to continue to engage in business with Iran without running afoul of U.S. sanctions.

Impact Of Sanctions On India

- **Other than the oil sector**, India is not directly affected by US sanctions on Iran.
- Though Indian companies involved in the Iranian automobile, iron & steel and mining sectors will be affected due to additional US sanctions on these sectors.
- The **Chabahar Port also does not come under US sanctions** and hence Indian investments and involvement in it will not be affected.
- Nonetheless, due to sanctions on the iron & steel sector and individuals and companies associated with IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), certain infrastructure development projects such as the Chabahar-Zahedan railway and gas pipeline, part of Iran's plan to develop Chabahar as a transit hub between Central Asia and the world, could be affected.

3. **IBSA alliance, a fascinating combination of the leading democracies of the three continents, has come to be marginalized by BRICS in recent years. But IBSA is equally important, if not more, for India. Critically comment.**

Context

- Foreign policy mandarins of **IBSA Dialogue Forum** met in Kochi recently.
- The central goal was to develop a *blueprint to rejuvenate IBSA, widely viewed as a unique voice for the Global South.*

Answer

- IBSA is a unique Forum which brings together India, Brazil and South Africa, three large democracies and major economies from three different continents, facing similar challenges.
- It was launched through the **Brasilia Declaration in 2003** and soon it became a unique voice for the Global South. However, it started to lose its relevance in the wake of the emergence of BRICS.

Marginalization of IBSA

- Since its first summit in 2009, BRICS today can be seen as an **important driver in the politico-economic sphere** among the comity of nations.
- The significance of BRICS was also substantially enhanced due to the **presence of Russia and China, both permanent members of the UNSC.**
- The BRICS nations collectively represent **26% of the landmass** of the world and 46% of its population. They collectively contribute to **18% of the global GDP.**
- BRICS leaders kept on **meeting at the regular interval.** On the other hand, IBSA has been unable, until now, to hold its sixth summit. *Last IBSA summit was held in 2011.*
- The BRICS countries' common interests are reflected in various policy areas: a joint development bank and the consolidation of an agreement for a reserve fund.
- However, IBSA's survival largely depends on the identification of common interests and India's greater engagement.

IBSA: Equally Important for India

- IBSA is the true **inheritor of solidarity among developing countries**, which was nurtured from the Bandung Conference (1955) through UNCTAD and G-77.
- It is the champion of **South-South Cooperation**, and the advocate of a coordinated response by developing economies to secure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The glue that binds IBSA countries together is their faith in democracy, diversity, plurality, inclusivity, human rights and rule of law.
- IBSA was found to **coordinate on global and regional political issues**, such as, the *reform of the global institutions of political and economic governance, WTO/Doha Development Agenda, climate change, terrorism etc.*
- IBSA Trilateral Forum cannot be rendered obsolete. The special responsibilities it bears cannot be discharged by BRICS.

Conclusion

- A series of events held during 2018-19, marking its 15th anniversary, and the recent meeting of experts in Kochi have imparted new momentum to the endeavour to revitalise IBSA.

- In fact, strengthening IBSA could increase the effectiveness of BRICS and encourage it to follow a more balanced approach on key issues of interest to India, Brazil and South Africa.

Extra Mile

Engagements At IBSA

- The three Foreign Ministers have been meeting regularly to provide a coordinated leadership to the grouping. The last meeting of the Trilateral Ministerial Commission took place in New York in September 2018.
- While the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (**IBSA Fund**) is small in monetary terms, it has **succeeded in implementing 31 development projects in diverse countries:** Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, State of Palestine, Cambodia and Vietnam, among others.
- India has been running an innovative **IBSA Visiting Fellows Programme** through the Delhi-based think tank RIS or Research and Information System for Developing Countries.
- One of the most significant commitments of the IBSA towards enhancing economic ties was the initiative to establish the **MERCOSUR-SACU-India Trilateral Free Trade Agreement (T-FTA)**.

4. ***As regards the increasing rates of melting of Arctic Sea ice, the interests of the Arctic Council nations may not coincide with those of the wider world. Explain.***

Context:

- On May 7, **Finland** hosted the **11th Arctic Council Ministerial meeting** in Rovaniemi.
- At this meeting, *India has been re-elected as an observer* to the Arctic Council.
- India had got observer status of this council in 2013.

Answer

The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. *Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States* are the **member nations** of this council.

Due to climate change, Arctic temperatures are rising twice as fast as in the rest of the world. This has increased the rate of melting of the Arctic Sea Ice thereby creating a conflict.

Interests of Arctic Council Nations

- Steady reductions in sea ice are **opening new passageways** and new opportunities for trade. This could potentially **slash the time it takes to travel** between Asia and the West by as much as 20 days. These nations believe that Arctic sea lanes could become the 21st-Century Suez and Panama Canals.
- Melting of ice has increased the access of **earlier hidden oil and gas resources**. Arctic council nations have rushed to claim their sovereignty over these resources.

Concerns of Wider World

- Retreat of Arctic sea ice **threatens polar bears and marine species**, but also contributes *to rising sea levels, adding to the risk of coastal flooding*.

- It presents **major pollution risk** if energy and transport firms find it easier to exploit the pristine Arctic wilderness.
- The melting of ice can also lead to **loosing climate history** stored in these ice sheets.

Conclusion

- Considering the Arctic as 'the common heritage of mankind', the scenario could result in strained relations.
- However, there is sufficient room to work provided Arctic Council Nations realize that climate change posed a serious threat to the Arctic and the wider world.
- This realization would force them to collaborate for scientific research as the region offers some unique opportunities to carry out research related to atmospheric and climate sciences that cannot be done anywhere else.

Extra Mile

About The Council

- Established by the eight Arctic States — the countries whose territories fall in the Arctic region — through the **Ottawa Declaration of 1996**.
- Besides them, **six organisations** representing the indigenous people of the Arctic region have been granted the **status of permanent participants**.

India's Involvement In The Arctic

- India is **Observer** to the Arctic Council. The Observer status is granted to entities that support the objectives of the Arctic Council, and have demonstrated capabilities in this regard, including the ability to make financial contributions.
- India is one of the very few countries to set up a permanent station in the Arctic for the purposes of scientific research. The **Himadri research station**, located in *Ny Alesund, Svalbard in Norway*, about 1200 km south of the North Pole, was started in July 2008.
- The Goa-based National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCOAR) is the nodal organisation coordinating the research activities at this station.

India's Interests

- With some parts of the Arctic melting due to global warming, the region also opens up the possibility of **new shipping routes** that can reduce existing distances.
- Countries which already have ongoing activities in the Arctic hope to have a stake in the **commercial exploitation of natural resources** present in the region.
- **Diversification of energy imports** remains a crucial endeavour for India. Arctic region has gas fields on Russian side and Oil fields on Norwegian side.
- **The Arctic region also holds mineral resources**, as mentioned earlier, including gold, nickel, cooper, graphite and uranium.
- These minerals are utilised in the manufacture of high-technology products such as mobile phones and nuclear energy, which can help push India's 'Make in India' programme.

5. Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in UN Security Council.**Context:**

- The Vice President of India has called for **renewed efforts** by India to gain permanent membership of the UN Security Council.
- Interacting with the Officer Trainees of the 2018 Batch of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Bhutanese Diplomats, the Vice President referred to the **growing prominence of India on the world stage** and underscored the *need for enhancing support from world nations and building a sustained dialogue in favor of UNSC reforms.*

Answer

India has been actively pursuing its quest for permanent membership of the UN Security Council (UNSC). It has pushed for text-based negotiations in the UN as a step to move forward the agenda of UNSC reform. However, it is facing several challenges in doing so.

Impediments

- **Resistance from P-5 countries** as these countries are reluctant to share the exclusive power with new entrants.
- **Absence of consensus on complex issues** such as the size of the expansion in the permanent and non-permanent categories, regional distribution, the working methods of the Security Council, its relationship with the UNGA, and veto powers.
- **Opposition from other countries** – Uniting for Consensus (UFC) countries (comprising countries like Pakistan, Italy, Mexico, Egypt, South Korea etc) have been leading the opposition to India's inclusion.
- **China Factor** as rise of India threaten China by creating its own rival power structure. Hence, it does not want India to be a member of Security Council. Except china, India's bid for permanent member of UNSC is now backed by four of the five permanent members.
- **Global image of India:** Many internal issues like prevalence of hunger, precarious health situation etc. is creating a negative global image. This is misinterpreted by P5 countries as India's inability to offer and sanction extreme measures.
- **India's economic contribution** - India's economic contribution to Security council budget is very minimal, which again discredits its claim to join council as a permanent group.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, the case of India provides one of the examples of a rising power coming to terms with its increased power, role and expectations of itself and of other powers, great and small, in negotiating its place in the reformed Council as a permanent member. India is the largest contributor to the UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO), with nearly 180,000 troops serving in various missions since it was established. It is also among the highest financial contributors to the UN. It is a responsible nuclear power with a strong record of non-proliferation and is the world's largest democracy and the third largest economy of the world (PPP terms). More importantly, India's foreign policy has historically been aligned with world peace, and not with conflicts.

As a permanent member of the UNSC it will be able to play a larger role concerning pressing international issues. Adoption of a negotiating text for Security Council reforms and re-election of Justice

Dalveer Bhandari as a judge at the International Court of Justice is reflective of the support India enjoys in the world body. However, we need more than goodwill among the world communities to gain the membership. In the 21st century, power boils down essentially to economic power. If India has to stake a claim to permanent membership, it has to single-mindedly focus on economic growth, with concomitant military might.

6. What is anti-microbial resistance and what are its fallouts? What needs to be done to curb the growing menace?

Context: The United Nation Ad Hoc Interagency Coordinating Group (IACG) on Antimicrobial Resistance has released its reports recently.

Answer

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the ability of a microorganism (like bacteria, viruses, and some parasites) to stop an antimicrobial (such as antibiotics, antivirals and antimalarials) from working against it. It is a global crisis that threatens a century of progress in the domain of health **by rendering antibiotics ineffective.**

AMR occurs naturally over time, usually through genetic changes but **convergence of factors such as poor public health infrastructure, rising incomes, a high burden of disease, and cheap, unregulated sales of antibiotics has created ideal conditions for a rapid rise in resistant infections in India.**

Consequences

Antimicrobial resistance poses a formidable challenge to achieving Universal Health Coverage and threatens progress against many of the Sustainable Development Goals, including in health, food security, clean water and sanitation, responsible consumption and production, and poverty and inequality.

- Currently, at least 700,000 people die each year due to drug-resistant diseases, including 230,000 people who die from multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.
- A UN report warns that if no action is taken, drug-resistant diseases could cause 10 million deaths each year by 2050 and damage to the economy will be as catastrophic as the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.
- Further, by 2030, antimicrobial resistance could force up to 24 million people into extreme poverty.

Lifesaving medical procedures are becoming much riskier and food systems are growing increasingly precarious. More and more common diseases, including respiratory tract infections, sexually transmitted infections and urinary tract infections, will become untreatable.

What Should Be Done

- Improving the capacity of **drug regulatory bodies** is essential to safeguard against powerful antibiotics being sold over the counter and to phase out the use of antimicrobial growth promoters in livestock when these drugs are medically important and when these are premixed with feed.
- **Behavioural change** is needed among physicians and patients. India has achieved remarkable reductions in smoking in buildings and workplaces through regulation and behaviour change communication. Similar campaigns could work to educate the public and physicians about the dangers of uncontrolled antibiotic use, as has been the case in high-income countries.
- To monitor antimicrobial resistance, it is necessary to have a **National Antimicrobial Policy**, the aim of which should be-

- Understanding emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance and the factors influencing it.
- Rapid and accurate diagnosis of infections and infectious diseases.
- Establish a nationwide well coordinated antimicrobial program with well defined and interlinked responsibilities and functions of different arms of the program
- Rationalizing the usage of available antimicrobials.
- Invest in ambitious R&D for new technologies to combat antimicrobial resistance.
- Promotion of discovery of newer and effective antimicrobials based on current knowledge of resistance mechanisms.
- Creation of **National Surveillance System** for antibiotic resistance
- Mechanism of monitoring prescription audits
- Foster sustainable food systems and farming practices that reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance by working together to promote viable alternatives to antimicrobial use.

Conclusion

The world is already feeling the economic and health consequences as crucial medicines become ineffective. If investments and action are further delayed, the world will have to pay far more in the future to cope with the disastrous impact of uncontrolled antimicrobial resistance. So, AMR must be addressed urgently, through a One Health approach involving bold, long-term commitments from governments and other stakeholders, supported by the international organisations.

7. In the recent case of sexual allegation against the CJI, the judiciary has failed to live up to its image. Comment.

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| <p>Context: Panel constituted by the Supreme Court exonerates CJI in the sexual harassment case against him.</p> |
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Answer

A panel of three Supreme Court judges has cleared the CJI of the allegations of sexual harassment levelled by an ex-staffer of the court. While the CJI stands vindicated, the procedure adopted by the panel in arriving at its conclusion has left much to be desired. The hurried manner in which the in-house panel was constituted and the abrupt acquittal of CJI, has raised serious questions on the integrity of the process.

In 1997 the Supreme Court had laid down formal guidelines for dealing with sexual harassment at the workplace in the form of **Vishakha Guidelines**. Sixteen years later, Parliament enacted **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013** for the same. According to the act, every institution that has more than 10 employees must have an *Internal Complaints Committee*. The committee inquiring into allegations of sexual harassment at the work place should be headed by a woman, and not less than half of its members should be women.

The Supreme Court has a **Gender Sensitisation and Internal Complaints Committee** headed by a woman judge, with a majority of woman members. The committee has a laid-down procedure for dealing with complaints of sexual harassment inside the premises of the court. But it has no power to deal with complaints against the CJI or judges.

In the current case the panel was set up under the SC's own procedure to examine whether the allegations warranted an inquiry. The intention behind adopting this procedure was to protect judges from motivated and false allegations. Reports of the panel are not made public, and are to be kept confidential, as laid down by the Supreme Court in **Indira Jaising case (2003)**.

Criticisms

- The process is being criticised on various accounts viz. not allowing the complainant to have a lawyer, not allowing video or audio recordings of the committee proceedings, not making the copies of the report public nor giving it to the complainant.
- Although the in-house procedure devised in 1999 envisages only a committee of three judges to deal with allegations against serving Supreme Court judges. The fact that a special law to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace is in force since 2013 appears to have made no difference.
- The law of the land cannot be ignored when it involves high-ranking individuals. By the same logic, many other organisations and institutions may adopt their own set of procedures on the plea that a non-internal inquiry may bring into disrepute not only the individual concerned but also the institution itself.
- When it comes to dealing with its own, the Supreme Court has come across as a prisoner of procedure and has displayed an alarming propensity to violate rule of law and principles of natural justice.
- In not making the report public, while citing the Indira Jaisingh case, little did the committee realise that the cited case was rendered before the advent of the Right to Information Act, 2005.
- The rule of law demands judicial accountability. Judicial accountability promotes at least three discrete values: the rule of law, public confidence in the judiciary, and institutional responsibility.

Conclusion

While judges indeed require powerful protection against motivated accusations, due process demands that an expeditious, thorough, fair and impartial probe is carried out in the matter to give the complainant a fair deal. Be you ever so high, the law is always above you.

8. What is Universal Health Coverage? Throw some light on what ails the Indian health sector and give measures for improvement.

Context: Participants at the 72nd World Health Assembly have adopted three resolutions on universal health coverage with a focus on primary healthcare

Answer

Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.

UHC is firmly based on the WHO constitution of 1948 declaring health a fundamental human right and on the Health for All agenda set by the Alma Ata declaration in 1978. UHC cuts across all of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and brings hope of better health and protection for the world's poorest.

Challenges In The Health Sector

- The **health infrastructure** is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the burgeoning population of the country. Although the government does offer healthcare services and free drugs at government hospitals, the hospitals are under staffed and under financed.
- India's **public health expenditure** is amongst the lowest in the world. India currently spends a little over 1% of GDP on health, far below Singapore which has the lowest public spend on health at 2.2% of GDP among countries with significant universal health coverage (UHC) service.
- An overwhelming 70% of healthcare expenses in India are met by **out of pocket expenditure** by the individual, due to which people living on the margins are just a disease away from being thrown below the poverty line.
- Besides, the majority of healthcare professionals happen to be **concentrated around urban areas** where consumers have higher paying power, leaving rural areas underserved.
- Further, there is a significant **imbalance in the distribution of secondary and tertiary care centres** in the country, further exacerbating the plight of the rural areas.
- Although Primary Health Centres (PHCs) are spread all over the country but the **quality of services** provided are not sufficient to deal with the health needs of the villages. While the corporate hospitals do claim to offer better services but the prohibitively high costs make them inaccessible to the common man.
- The information asymmetry in the domain of health, increase the probability of being over investigation and over treatment, which shows a lack of transparency in the sector.

Measures To Improve

- It is imperative to improve the health budget of the country to at least 3% of the GDP in order to provide better health care services. The increase in the spending should be accompanied by the changes in how the money is spent, by giving more focus to the primary health sector.
- Efforts have to be directed to address the quantity and quality of manpower in the rural areas, along with enhancing the technical and diagnostic capabilities of these centres.
- The ambitious health insurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat, marks a significant step towards universal health coverage but the government should ensure that it is sustainable and delivers the high-quality care that Indians need.
- A legislation should be introduced to prescribe minimum standards of patient care as in the absence of such standards and the reluctance of health insurance companies to standardise either price or quality, healthcare services continue to be expensive and of doubtful quality.

Conclusion

Health is a basic human right and it is imperative that every individual should have access to affordable, efficient and quality health services. Hence, it would serve the government well to address the inequities in the system to lay the foundations of a strong and a healthy India.

9. What is a middle-income trap? What are the factors that can lead India to a middle income trap? How can India stop itself from slipping into it?

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| <p>Context: Mr. Rathin Roy, a member of the economic panel advising the Prime Minister, recently pointed out that India is heading in the direction of a middle income trap.</p> |
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Answer

Middle income trap is a situation when hitherto rapidly growing economies stagnate at middle-income levels (of per capita income) and fail to graduate into the ranks of high-income countries. It is a risk that emerging economies are said to be vulnerable to.

It happens as a country runs out of new sources of growth after an initial burst of rapid expansion, due to the operation of several adverse factors. Countries seem to get stuck in a trap where the costs are escalating along with a loss of competitiveness. *Wealth inequality* and the *hierarchical distribution of income* in developing countries has long been identified as a growth barrier. The greater the gaps between strata, slower the upward mobility of families that are at lower levels. Such economies typically experience lopsided expansion, this phenomenon is exemplified by Brazil and South Africa.

Once a country falls in a middle-income trap, it is difficult to get out. A World Bank study found that out of the 101 middle-income countries in 1960, only 13 had become high-income by 2008.

Indian Scenario

- According to experts, for the next 5 to 6 years, India will grow at 5 to 6 per cent, but a time will come when it may come to a standstill.
- India's growth has mostly been driven by demand generated by 100 million-odd people at the top of the country's socio-economic pyramid. But that demand has begun to exhaust itself, and so India could slip into a middle-income trap.
- Demand for bank credit has spluttered, sales of cars have slumped to a seven-year-low, tractors and two-wheelers sales are down. Net profits for 334 companies are down 18% year-on-year
- It shows that fall in private consumption, muted rise in fixed investment, and sluggish exports have led to a slowdown in the economy.

Way Ahead

- The best insurance against the risk of slipping into a middle-income trap, would be to address mobility restraints at lower levels of the socio-economic pyramid. This would mean sharply upping the quality of healthcare, education and skill development for the deprived masses.
- Structural reforms need to be accelerated and the pace of industrialization needs to increase in order to raise the per capita income.
- Further, a shift in resources from low to high productivity sectors and robust exports should be used as growth aids.

These are long-gestation projects and the results could take decades. But the economy needs to rise as a whole and not in parts to escape the trap.

10. *Global production takes place in enmeshed networks, which is bound to be affected by the ongoing trade war between U.S and China. In the light of above statement, discuss the implications of this trade war for the world. How can India take advantage of it?*

Context: United States recently decided to raise tariffs to 25% on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods

Answer

A protracted trade war between US and China has been going on since America slapped heavy tariffs on imported steel and aluminium items from China in March 2018, and China responded by imposing tariffs on billions of dollars worth of American imports. The dispute escalated after Washington demanded

that China reduce its \$375 billion trade deficit with the US, and introduce verifiable measures for protection of Intellectual Property Rights, technology transfer, and more access to American goods in Chinese markets.

Tariffs imposed on Chinese goods, in theory, make US-made products cheaper than imported ones, and encourage consumers to buy American. They are also increasingly seen as a negotiation tactic in the trade war.

Impacts of Trade War

- As per the IMF, the US-China trade tension was one factor that contributed to a significantly weakened global expansion late last year, as it cut its global growth forecast for 2019.
- Further, OECD has warned that the escalation would hurt the rest of the world, shaving 0.7% from global growth by the year 2021 (roughly \$600 billion).
- The tariffs can also hamper the rebound in the US economy, with consumption and jobs likely to take a hit, as these tariffs would be paid by American consumers and businesses.
- It also exacerbates the uncertainty in the global trading environment, weakens the rules-based system, affects global sentiment negatively and adds to risk aversion globally.
- It could lead to the repricing of risk assets globally, tighter financing conditions, and slower growth.
- Almost two-thirds of US imports from China came in from companies with foreign capital and the capital largely comes from the US, Japan and South Korea. Due to this, the US economy might also have to bear the brunt of it.
- For China, the higher tariffs will have a significant negative effect on exports, against the backdrop of a slowing economy. Further policy easing will mitigate only some of the impact, and increased uncertainty and weaker business sentiment will hinder private investment decisions.
- There is **the possibility of China depreciating the currency** so as to get the competitive edge which cannot be ruled out. This happened in 2015 as well. A strong dollar and weak Yuan may not be good news for all countries.
- South Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore are the economies most at risk in Asia based on trade openness and exposure to supply chains involving China.

Impact on India

- It will adversely impact the value of rupee. The trend is correlated to the weakening of the dollar, which automatically creates a negative impact on the trade deficit of India, causing a chain of reaction.
- There will be an impact on the stock markets. The Sensex has been falling in line with global markets that have been spooked by the escalating trade war.
- According to UN, a slowdown in the US economy does not augur well for emerging markets, however, the trade war could have a silver lining for some countries. The trade war undoubtedly presents opportunities for India's job-led manufacturing sector.
- India can take the space vacated by the warring countries and narrow its deficit with both the countries by gaining in exports. Such opportunities for growing exports have come and passed earlier too. However, India fell behind countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh in capturing export share in these sectors

Way Ahead for India

- Sector-specific analysis must be done to assess where India can be a competitive supplier and purchaser for businesses both in the U.S. and China.

- India will have to step up its pace of regulatory and administrative reforms to boost investor confidence by addressing concerns like protectionist tariffs, retroactive tax regime, non-tariff barriers such as certification and licensing procedures, procedural irritants on the Ease of Doing Business index and difficult labour rules.
- A conducive business environment will help India to showcase its competitive advantages and leapfrog its integration into the global economy.

Extra Mile

Few trade experts have traditionally questioned the effectiveness of tariff wars, which hamper the basic efficiency of the market and fail to accomplish the desired objectives. A case in point is a set of rules known as the **Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act** enacted in the US, which is blamed in part for worsening the impact of the Great Depression in the late 1920s.

11. Throw some light on WTO's dispute settlement mechanism in light of the ensuing crisis.

Context: Over 20 developing countries recently met in New Delhi to discuss ways to prevent the WTO's dispute resolution system from collapsing due to the logjam in appointments.

Answer

The World Trade Organization's (WTO's) dispute settlement mechanism is going through a crisis as the body is struggling to appoint new members to its understaffed Appellate Body that hears appeals in trade. The Appellate Body, set up in 1995, is a standing committee of seven members that presides over appeals against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.

Dispute settlement is regarded by WTO as the central pillar of the multilateral trading system, and as the organization's unique contribution to the stability of the global economy. With over 500 international disputes brought to the WTO and over 350 rulings issued since 1995, the organisation's dispute settlement mechanism is one of the most active in the world, and the Appellate Body is the highest authority in these matters. The mechanism is seen as being vital to ensuring smooth international trade flows. The Appellate Body can uphold, modify, or reverse the legal findings of the WTO panel that heard the dispute.

Ensuing Crisis

- Over the last two years, the membership of the body has dwindled to just three persons instead of the required seven. United States has been blocking appointments of new members and reappointments of some members who have completed their four-year tenures, as it believes that the WTO is biased against it.
- Furthermore, two members will complete their tenures in December this year, leaving the body with just one member. At least three people are required to preside over an appeal, and if new members are not appointed to replace the two retiring ones, the body will cease to be relevant.
- The understaffed appeals body has been unable to stick to its 2-3 month deadline for appeals filed in the last few years, and the backlog of cases has prevented it from initiating proceedings in appeals that have been filed in the last year. The body has so far been unable to review at least 10 appeals that have been filed since July 2018.

Implications

- With the Appellate Body unable to review new applications, there is great uncertainty over the WTO's dispute settlement process. If the body is declared non-functional in December, countries may be compelled to implement rulings by the panel even if they feel that gross errors have been committed.
- Should such a country refuse to comply with the order of the panel on the ground that it has no avenue for appeal, it will run the risk of facing arbitration proceedings initiated by the other party in the dispute.
- This does not bode well for India, which is facing a rising number of dispute cases, especially on agricultural products. In the last four months alone, four cases have been brought to the WTO against India's alleged support measures for its sugar and sugarcane producers.
- Also, the overall weakening of the WTO framework could have the effect of undoing over two decades of efforts to avoid protectionism in global trade. This is a major concern currently, as trade tensions, for example between the US and China and the US and India, are on the rise.

Way Ahead

- While new appointments to the Appellate Body are usually made by a consensus of WTO members, there is a provision for voting where a consensus is not possible.
- The group of 17 least developed and developing countries, including India, that have committed to working together to end the impasse at the Appellate Body can submit or support a proposal to this effect, and try to get new members on the Appellate Body by a majority vote.
- If the WTO as an institution and all the principles that it stands for is to survive, there is no scope for rigidity. Negotiations, even if cumbersome, painstaking and incremental are the only solution. A trading system with an institution like the WTO is better off than one without it. The focus should be to arrive at a broad consensus through diplomatic negotiations to preserve the sole bulwark of international trade.

12. What are the issues plaguing the NBFC industry and what needs to be done to prevent the NBFC ship from sinking?**Answer**

India's non-banking financial companies (NBFC) sector is passing through a turbulent period following a series of defaults by Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) and the subsequent liquidity crunch.

Issues

- Several corporates, mutual funds and insurance companies had invested in short-term instruments such as commercial papers (CPs) and non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of the IL&FS group. This has stoked fears that many of them could have funds stuck in IL&FS debt instruments which, in turn could lead to a liquidity crunch in their own backyard.
- Banks have slowed down lending to NBFCs, virtually closing a major resource avenue for NBFCs and housing finance companies (HFCs). There are rising fears that the funding cost for NBFCs will zoom and result in a sharp decline in their margins.
- The recent adverse sentiment in the bond market could mean even higher borrowing costs which would further lower growth and margins.
- Asset liability mismatches (ALM), unbridled borrowing and lending to fuel super-growth and funnel out super-normal profits have not gone well with investors. This coupled with fear of defaults will keep potential investors away.

- On the other hand, RBI will progressively tighten the guidelines for NBFCs bringing them almost on par with commercial banks, further increasing pressure in the retail segments.
- Sharp losses in NBFC stocks triggered a vicious cycle as losses in leveraged positions led to selling in other stocks, which in turn has fuelled further losses in markets.
- NBFCs and HFCs are being compared with IL&FS, and their financials are put under deep scanners. Due to which, debt fund managers have started jettisoning NBFC papers in panic.

Measures To Revive

- There has already been a recognition that the number of NBFCs is far too unwieldy. Hence, it is important to cancel licences of NBFCs who have not met the minimum capital requirement.
- Further, given the growing size and dominance of the NBFC sector, it is important that the threshold capital levels for entry be substantially increased. It may be prudent for RBI to evaluate the need to shore up minimum capital requirements.
- The companies must be encouraged to streamline their portfolios by divesting from non core areas and focusing on core products and geographies.
- While RBI has identified systemically important NBFCs, it needs to step up the monitoring of NBFCs which belong to large, diversified groups. Checks and balances are needed to ensure that risks do not build up in the sector due to structures which are too-complex-to-manage. When there are multiple entities, the ability to shift assets from one balance sheet to another increases, leading to opaqueness in determining the actual quality of the asset.
- As per the recommendations of the Working group in issues and concerns in the NBGC sector chaired by Usha Thorat, liquidity coverage ratios must be introduced for NBFCs. This will help to ensure that NBFCs have cash balances and holdings of government securities which may fully cover gaps between cumulative outflows and cumulative inflows. It would also act as buffer in times of stress

Conclusion

NBFCs have touched lives in more ways than a bank. The contribution of NBFCs must not be undermined and it is important that requisite steps are taken to prevent the NBFC industry from going under the water, while ensuring that they continue to serve the needs of the society at large instead of serving the greed of a few.

Extra Mile

NBFCs are financial intermediaries engaged in the business of accepting deposits delivering credit and play an important role in channelizing the scarce financial resources to capital formation. They supplement the role of the banking sector in meeting the increasing financial needs of the economy.

Importance of NBFCs

- NBFCs are more profitable than the banking sector because of lower costs. This helps them offer cheaper loans to customers. As a result, NBFCs' credit growth is higher than that of the banking sector.
- NBFCs contribute largely to the economy by lending to infrastructure projects, which are very important to a developing country like India. But they require large amount of funds, and earn profits only over a longer time-frame, hence, these are riskier projects. This deters a lot of banks from lending to infrastructure projects.
- NBFCs play a big role in providing loans to the MSME sector by providing innovative financial products suitable to their business requirements. At the same time they play an important role in promoting inclusive growth, by catering to the diverse financial needs of bank excluded customers.

- Further they play a critical role in the development of an economy by providing a fillip to transportation, employment generation, wealth creation and development of financial markets.

13. Discuss the recent judgement of the Madras High Court in respect of relation between elected government and Lt. Governor of Puducherry? What is the way out of current problem?

Answer

The Madras High Court pointed out the significant differences in the powers conferred on the legislatures of Puducherry and Delhi under **Articles 239A** and **239AA** of the Constitution and quashed the two notifications issued by the Home Ministry. The judgement also clarified the relation between the Lt. Governor (L-G) and elected government. Some of the highlights of the judgement are as follows:-

- **Non-interference:** The L-G of Puducherry could not interfere with day-to-day administration of the Union Territory when an elected government was in place.
- **Position vis-à-vis Delhi:** Though **Article 239AA** imposes several restrictions on the legislature of Delhi, no such restrictions had been imposed explicitly in the case of Puducherry under **Article 239A**. Thus, the Article symbolizes the supremacy of the Legislature above the Administrator in case of the UT of Puducherry.
- **Government Secretaries:** The judge held that Government Secretaries of the Puducherry administration are bound by advice of Council of Ministers (CoM) headed by the Chief Minister on all official matters. The secretaries are not empowered to issue orders on their own or upon the instructions of the Administrator.
- **Public Interest Supreme:** *Section 44 of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963*, states that there shall be a CoM in each UT to aid and advice the Administrator who shall act in his/her discretion only in so far as any 'special responsibilities' are concerned. However, since the Act does not specify the 'special responsibilities' in relation to which the L-G could apply his/her discretion, it is the bounden duty of the Administrator and the CoM to avoid logjam and facilitate the smooth functioning of the government in public interest.

Conclusion

Thus, the Madras High Court settled the question on who ought to run the administration in the UT of Puducherry in favour of the legislature and the elected government. Moreover, the elected government is entrusted with the task of running the administration and it should be left to the electorate to punish the government if it fails to execute its mandate. The L-G, an appointee of the Centre and the representative of the President, ought to exercise powers only in the event of a constitutional breakdown. This is the spirit that underlies parliamentary democracy, which the Madras High Court invoked.

About Article 239AA:

- The Article was added by the **69th Constitutional Amendment Act**.
- As per Article 239AA- **Public Order, Police & Land** in NCT of Delhi fall within the domain and control of Central Government, which shall have the power to make laws on these matters.
- Further, for Offences against laws, Jurisdiction & powers of Courts (except SC) and Fees (except court fees) so far as they relate to Public Order, Police & Land in NCT of Delhi; Central Government would have power to make laws.
- The **President appoints** the Chief Minister and other Council of Ministers and their strength **can't be more than 10%** of the strength of the Legislative Assembly.

14. The issue of use of anti-defection law has become problematic in various senses. In this light discuss the changes required in the existing structure of the Schedule 10 of the Constitution?

Answer

The **Tenth Schedule** of Indian Constitution provides for Anti-Defection law that is applicable on a legislator under a particular set of circumstances. This issue recently arose when the Supreme Court (SC) stayed the proceedings initiated by Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker for the disqualification of three MLAs of the ruling AIADMK under the anti-defection law, when the motion for removal of Speaker was itself pending. The Speaker plea was that by supporting Mr. Dhinakaran's Party, the three MLAs had voluntarily given up membership of the party. It was the same ground on which 18 pro-Dhinakaran MLAs were disqualified in September 2017.

Problem with Anti-defection Law

- The Anti defection law has often been criticized for **curtailing freedom of speech** of the individual legislators. In *U.K, Australia and U.S*, parliamentarians and senators often take positions contrary to their parties or vote against the party's view, yet continue within the same party.
- Anti-Defection goes against the spirit of a **representative democracy** in which the elected representative is expected to act in public interest and not party interest. Thus, anti-defection law breaks the link between the elected representative and his electors.
- There have been several instances when the Speaker has decided on Anti Defection in **partisan manner**.
- The current provisions do not apply to the **pre-poll alliance and merger of 2/3** of the party's legislators.
- There has been **no time frame** within which the Speaker has to decide on the issue of Anti defection. Thus, creating opportunity for its misuse.

Course Correction

The above issue can be resolved by adopting following changes in the current law:

- Instead of making Speaker the authority for disqualification, the decision should be made by the **President or the Governor on the advice of the Election Commission**.
- The Law should also provide for **additional penalties** for defectors rather than just disqualification from the legislature.
- The phrase '**voluntarily giving up membership**' is too vague and needs further comprehensive revision.
- Political parties should **limit issuance of whips** in only instances of confidence and no confidence motion.

About Anti-defection Law

Articles 102(2) and 191(2) deals with anti-defection. The intention of the provision is to check the corruption/horse trading in Legislature. The Grounds of disqualification are as follows:

- If an elected member **voluntarily gives up his membership** of a political party.
- If he **votes or abstains from voting** in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorised to do so, without obtaining prior permission. Moreover, his abstention from voting should not be condoned by his party or the authorised person within **15 days** of such incident.

- **Independent members** would be disqualified if they join a political party.
- **Nominated members** who were not members of a party could choose to join a party within six months. If after that period, they join any political party they will be deemed to have been defected.

15. Whether the Supreme Court resorting to judicial activism rather than judicial restraint is problematic? Discuss this in light of recent judgements.

Answer

The recent trend in the Supreme Court (SC) is to rely more on the **sociological school of jurisprudence** and less on the **positivist school**. In other words, the court is resorting more to judicial activism rather than judicial restraint, which is problematic in some sense.

Some of the problems associated with the judicial activism can be elucidated with the help of various judgments. Earlier, SC order on time limits to burst firecrackers on Diwali, which is a function of the legislature; its judgment on linking rivers, for which there is no parliamentary legislation; and in its unpredictable decisions in cases relating to freedom of speech and expression, such as the recent one in which a BJP Yuva Morcha leader was asked in the bail order to apologize for sharing a meme, despite the guarantee in *Article 19(1)(a)* of the Constitution.

The negative impact of judicial activism can be categorised as follows:

- The judicial activism has been criticized on ground that it violates the provision of **separation of power**, which is the part of basic structure of the Constitution. Further, the judiciary has **neither expertise nor resources** to perform the functions pertaining to the legislature and the executive.
- The frequent use of this power has also **negative implication on the economic growth** of the nation. E.g. Ban on highway liquor.
- The judicial activism has many times **transformed into judicial overreach**, thereby constituting unreasonable, arbitrary intervention in legislative and executive jurisdiction. E.g. SC directions on interlinking of rivers.
- The judicial activism sometimes also **endangers democratic establishment** as well as may destabilize the governing machinery of the country.

But at the same time the positive impact of Judicial activism can't be ignored. Some of them are -

- The judicial activism has played a key role in **protecting the rights of downtrodden** and poor. E.g. SC decision on ban on child labour.
- The judicial activism has played an important role in **filling the grey areas of law**. E.g. the decision of SC on sexual harassment.
- The judicial activism has many times played the role as the **protector of the democracy**. E.g. recent decision in discarding the decision of speaker of Arunachal Pradesh before the trust vote that was favouring a particular party.

Thus, judiciary should not frequently use the power of judicial activism and it should be used as a tool of last resort. Moreover, there is also a need to strengthen the **participatory form of the governance**, where the common citizen through their activist role can pressurize the government for remedying any wrong.

16. To overcome the issues faced by First Past The Post method of election, some experts have suggested following Ranked-Choice Vote System. Discuss the significance of such method of electing representatives?

Answer

Currently, the elections to the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas take place under the first-past-the-post system (FPPS). Under the FPPS, a candidate only needs to get more votes than any other candidate to win a seat. But there are various problems with the FPP system of election. Some of these are as follows:

- The principal criticism leveled against the FPPS is that it **leads to the exclusion of small or regional parties** from the Parliament.
- There is common **discrepancy in the vote share and seat share** in results. E.g. in 2014 election, NDA won majority of the seats by receiving only 31% of the total votes cast and therefore 69% of those who voted did not vote in favor of it.
- FPPS often **encourages caste, religion, ethnicity and regional politics**.
- In FPPS the **election expenditure is higher**, this leads to issue such as higher corruption etc.

To overcome the above deficit **ranked-choice vote system (RCV)** has been proposed. It is variously called the preferential vote, alternative vote or ranked-choice vote system (RCV) and used in Australia, Papua New Guinea and the American state of Maine. Under the RCV, instead of voting for only one candidate, a voter ranks her candidates in order of preference for candidates of a particular constituency. In the first round of counting, every voter's first-ranked votes alone are counted. If any candidate reaches the 50 % mark, she is declared the winner. If not, the candidate with the lowest share of first-rank votes is eliminated and his votes are distributed among others on the basis of their second preference. This process of elimination and re-distribution is continued until either one candidate crosses the 50 % mark or is the last one standing.

Benefits of RCV are as follows-

- The **democratic deficit in RCV is markedly lower than FPP**, because the winning candidate secures or comes very close to the 50 % mark.
- The RCV should also **reduce political polarization**. Under this system, parties cannot win elections by relying solely on their base. They need not only enough first-rank votes but also a sufficient number of second and third-rank votes. This will require them to build broad social coalitions.
- An optional RCV is not only **constitutionally viable** but even endorsed by the Constitution in form of 'single transferable vote' for election of President and Vice President.

Way forward:

In Indian conditions, a limited optional RCV might be logistically better. Instead of mandating the ranking of all candidates, a voter can have the option of ranking up to three top choices. Such a 1-2-3-vote system would deepen democracy and reduce political polarization.

| BASIS FOR COMPARISON | FIRST PAST THE POST | PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Meaning | First Past the Post is a voting system, wherein people cast their votes to the candidate of their choice and the one getting the highest number of votes win. | Proportional Representation is an electoral device in which seats are allotted to the political parties on the basis of the number of votes polled for them. |
| Constituency | Entire country is segregated into various geographical units, i.e. constituencies. | Large geographical areas are termed as constituencies. |
| Representative | One representative is elected from each constituency. | One or more representative can be elected from one constituency. |
| Voting | Votes are casted for candidate. | Votes are casted for the party. |
| Seats | Votes may or may not be equal to the seats got. | A party gets seats, as per the proportion of votes, it gets. |
| Majority | Winning candidate may not gets the majority votes. | Winning candidate gets the majority votes. |
| Accountability | Exists | Does not exist |
| Clashing of Ideas | Does not prevail | May Prevail |

17. In the background of recent Parliamentary election, discuss the issues concerning Indian Parliament and implication of poor functioning of the parliament? Also suggest some measures to overcome such obstacles.

Answer

After the election of 17th Lok Sabha, the issue of Parliamentary functioning has again come into picture. Some of the major issues confronting Indian Parliament are as follow as:

- **Reduction In The Number Of Sittings:** The number of sitting days has come down from about **140 days** a year in the 1950s to an average of **65 days** over the past five years.
- **Discipline and Decorum:** Instances of interruptions and disruptions leading sometimes even to adjournment of the proceedings of the House have increased. This, not only, results in the wastage of time of the House but also affects adversely the very purpose of Parliament.
- **Declining Quality Of Parliamentary Debates:** Parliamentary debates, which once focussed on national and critical issues, are now more about local problems, viewed from a parochial angle.
- **Low Representation Of Women:** The Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha have not seen women MPs cross the 12% mark.
- **Bills Being Passed With No/Minimum Discussion:** In 2008, 16 Bills were passed with less than 20 minutes of debate. Further, till date, only 14 private member bills have been passed.

Implications Of Such Poor Functioning Of Parliament

- **Lack of accountability of the government:** If the parliament doesn't function properly, it cannot hold the government accountable for its actions.
- **Low productivity:** Productivity of Lok Sabha in the 2016 winter session was 14%, while that of the Rajya Sabha was 20%.
- **High cost to public exchequer in the form of wasting of taxpayer money:** But the real cost to society is huge. For Example- GST could have been passed four years ago. If we assume that the passage of GST will have added 1% to India's GDP then in the last four years we have lost 4% of GDP.
- **Delay in policy making:** Thus leading to rise of unconstitutional bodies to fill the legislative gap.
- **Declining faith in democratic process:** Parliament as an institution becomes less relevant for national policy making.

Suggestions To Overcome The Above Issues

- **Minimum working days:** National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution recommended the minimum number of days for sittings of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha should be fixed at 100 and 120 days respectively.
- **Disruptions:** If time is lost due to disruptions it should be compensated for, the same day, by sitting beyond normal hours.
- **Passage of the Women's Reservation Bill:** By reserving 33% of all seats in Parliament and State legislatures for women.
- **Systematic approach to legislative process:** Constitution committee to conduct priori scrutiny before the actual drafting of the proposal for constitutional reform.

- **The Anti-Defection Act:** It needs to be recast and used only in exceptional circumstances, allowing MPs free rein on their self-expression. The UK, for example, has the concept of a free vote allowing MPs to vote as they wish on particular legislative items.
- **Investing in Parliament's intellectual capital:** By providing budgetary support to LARRDIS (Parliament's Library and Reference, Research, Documentation and Information Service) while assisting MPs in employing research staff.
- **Improving the budget scrutiny process:** India needs a parliamentary Budget Office, akin to the US Congressional Budget Office. This can be an independent institution devoted to conducting a technical and objective analysis of any Bill with spending or revenue raising requirements.

18. In the light of recent controversy in the functioning of the Election Commission of India (ECI), discuss the challenges faced by the Commission in its functioning and also suggest some reforms for its reforms.

Answer

Recently, Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa recused himself from attending ECI's meetings on Model Code of conduct (MCC) as he disputed the poll body's decision to clear Prime Minister (PM) and BJP President of multiple charges of violating the MCC. In light of the above controversy some of the challenges faced by the ECI are as follows:

- **Lack of sufficient autonomy:** The Government in power on its own whims and fancies appoints the ECI and other Election Commissioner (EC). Moreover, there are no prescribed qualification criteria for appointment.
- **Fund:** The expenditure of the ECI is voted upon but it is not charged upon the Consolidated fund of India.
- **No security of tenure for the EC:** Only the CEC has been provided security of tenure and not other EC.
- **Post retirement jobs:** The Constitution has not barred the retiring EC from further appointment by the government.
- **Secretariat:** No Independent secretariat has been provided to the ECI.
- **Power:** The ECI does not have power to deregister any political party. Thus, ECI can only register any party not deregister it.

Reforms Needed

Thus, in light of the above issues faced by the ECI the following reform are needed:

- **Protection:** The protection of salary and other allied matters relating to the CEC and the EC should be provided for in the Constitution itself on the analogy of the provisions in respect of the Chief Justice and Judges of the Supreme Court.
- **Finance:** The expenditure of the Commission should be charged on the Consolidated Fund of India.
- **Independent secretariat:** The Secretariat of the EC consisting of officers and staff at various levels are also insulated from the interference of the Executive in the matters pertaining to their appointments, promotions, etc.
- **Legal amendments:** The ECI should be given the power to deregister political parties and election bribery be made a cognizable offence.

- **Other reforms:** Making paid news an electoral offence and political parties be brought under the purview of the RTI Act.

19. Recently, the use of the EVM has been challenged on various grounds. In this light, discuss the efficacy of use of the ballot paper instead of EVMs?

Answer

Recently, after the conclusion of the 17th Lok Sabha Election, the opposition parties have demanded re-polling claiming that EVMs are subject to hacking and tempering.

Some of the general complaints/challenges against the use of EVMs are as follows:

- **Charges against EVM:** From charges of tampering to planting chips in EVMs to hacking them all kinds of charges have been levelled against the voting machine.
- **Technical snag:** One genuine complaint heard in almost all polls is that pertaining to a technical snag in EVMs in polling booths in remote villages. EC authorities unfortunately take their own time to get replacements.
- **Booth capturing possible also in EVM era:** With inadequate security, booth capturing could have been in vogue even in an EVM era.
- **Original purpose of shifting to EVM no longer an issue:** With each polling booth video recorded by the EC and mobile phones ubiquitous enough to send out proof of booth capturing or rigging by anyone the original reason to shift to EVMs has certainly diminished if not disappeared.
- **Many developed countries uses ballot papers:** Many democracies like Britain, Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Italy use or have gone back to using ballot paper.

But at the same time, although the above issues show the efficacy of use of ballot paper but the ballot paper suffers challenges on various counts. These are as follows:

- **High chances of booth capturing:** There is a concern that using ballot papers will bring back the bad old days of booth capturing and rigging.
- **Cumbersome exercise and not eco-friendly:** Counting ballot papers is a cumbersome, time-consuming process considering the large number of electorates in India not to mention the amount of trees consumed for holding paper polls.
- **No one challenged that EVM can't be hacked:** While political parties are quick to accuse rivals of tampering with EVMs, no party came forward after the EC had challenged any outfit to hack EVMs after there were complaints that machines were hacked during the 2017 Uttarakhand assembly polls.
- **Use of VVPAT will ally the concern:** The VVPAT that has been recently added to the EVM to audit the voter tallies stored in the machine will further ally the concern of the people.

Conclusion

Thus, in light of the above arguments, it will be correct to say that the parties are right to raise their concerns. But they must not interpret the malfunctioning of a few units of EVMs to suggest that the entire EVM machine model is flawed. Moreover, the onus also lies upon the ECI to make the process even more robust, fully transparent, allay doubts and ensure that efficiency does not come at the cost of credibility.

20. Discuss the issues pertaining to the Judicial Accountability. And also suggest the reforms for effective judicial accountability.

Answer

The issue of Judicial probity has become a recurrent phenomenon recently after the allegation of sexual harassment against the sitting CJI of India. The issue also arose in the past over the work such as the case allocation, master of the roster issue, corruption charges against the retired CJI etc.

Issues Pertaining To Judicial Accountability

- ***Inadequacy in legislative mechanisms to tackle judicial corruption:*** There are legislative difficulties such as IPC Section 77 and Judges (Protection) Act, 1985 in implicating and prosecuting judges.
- ***Judicial accountability v/s independence of judiciary:*** The demand of judges being investigated by CBI, CVC or other such bodies can be misused to seek recusals of judges and may undermine independence of judiciary.
- ***Problems with Impeachment:*** It is a long drawn out and difficult process along with its political overtone.
- ***Judges appointing Judges:*** The collegium system in India presents a unique system wherein the democratically elected executive and Parliament at large has no say in appointing judges.
- ***Other issues:*** Non-declaration of assets of judges and judiciary being beyond the purview of RTI further needs a course correction.

Reforms For Effective Judicial Accountability

- The cardinal principle that the **CJI is the master of the roster** must be re-examined as was done in U.K. Although it is a tenet of judicial discipline, but it cannot be considered as an absolute principle of justice delivery.
- A **two-level judicial discipline model** with first level as a disciplinary system that can admonish, fine or suspend judges for misdemeanours along with providing them some limited measures of immunity; and second level as a system of removal of judges for serious misconduct, including corruption must be established.
- It is also impertinent that the *scope of judicial accountability must be widened* from the issues relating to judicial ethics and judicial misconduct and bring in the issues of “efficiency and transparency” through the adoption of a new **Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill**.
- It should also be brought under **Right to Information Act**. Transparency and openness is an accepted principle of democracy and good governance.

Extra Mile

Highlights of Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill 2010

- The Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill, 2010 requires judges to declare their assets, lays down judicial standards, and establishes processes for removal of judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- Judges will be required to declare their assets and liabilities, and also that of their spouse and children.

- The Bill establishes the **National Judicial Oversight Committee**, the **Complaints Scrutiny Panel** and an **Investigation Committee**. Any person can make a complaint against a judge to the Oversight Committee on grounds of 'misbehavior'.
- A motion for removal of a judge on grounds of misbehavior can also be moved in Parliament. Such a motion will be referred for further inquiry to the Oversight Committee.
- Complaints and inquiries against judges will be confidential and **frivolous complaints will be penalized**.
- The Oversight Committee may issue **advisories or warnings to judges** and also **recommend their removal** to the President.

21. Regulation of the NGO is essential but at the same time there are also issues pertaining to the implementation of Foreign Contribution regulation Act (FCRA), 2010. Thus, in such light what steps should be taken to resolve the issue?

Answer

The NGOs are private organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering and promote interest of poor. They have played an important role in India's development process. But at the same time the NGOs have also come under scrutiny for various issues. Some of them are as follows:

- **Misappropriation of Funds:** Many NGOs don't have sophisticated finance and legal teams, nor do they have the funds to conduct audits.
- **External Issue Of Funding:** According to government data, a total of 3,068 NGOs received foreign funding above Rs. 22,000 Cr in 2014-15. It is often said that foreign-funded NGOs tries to propagate the foreign propaganda to stall developmental projects. Example:- Kudankulam Protest.
- **Non-accountable, non-transparent functioning:** CBI records filed in the Supreme Court show that only 10% of total registered NGOs under Societies Registration Act file annual financial statements.
- **Money Laundering:** Corrupt or unscrupulous NGOs that receive foreign funds may serve as conduits for money laundering.

So, in 2010 to regulate foreign funding of the NGOs, the **FCRA Act** was passed but there are various issues with its implementation. Some of these are as follows:

- **Abuse of Legal Procedures:** Government seems to be rejecting licenses non-objectively. This has been observed by NHRC as well.
- **Arbitrarily Curbing Dissent:** The Act could be used to silence any opposition to government and target rights-based advocacy groups
- **Human Rights Issue:** The excessive curbs on NGOs may affects human right of people as they have served basic facilities to citizens of India since decades.
- **Non-conformity to International Standards:** India is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights under which right to freedom of association is incorporated.
- **Multiplicity Of Regulations Under FEMA and FCRA:** Presently, Home Ministry monitors foreign funds donated to NGOs and organisations through the FCRA. But for effective monitoring it also wants to monitor NGOs under FEMA (under finance ministry) as many International donors such as the Ford Foundation, Canada's International Development Research Centre etc. are registered under it. So, this also shows the multiplicity of regulations for governing NGOs.

So in light of the above issues, the way forward will be as follows:

- **Legitimate Restrictions:** Although freedom of association is not an absolute right, restrictions should be precisely articulated as criteria of “public interest” and “economic interest” give states discretion.
- **National Accreditation Council of India:** An autonomous and self-regulating body should be established to regulate corrupt and unscrupulous NGOs that may be laundering money.
- **FCRA-PFMS System:** Envisioned as far back as in 2015, this system needs to be operated smoothly. Thus, NGOs that have received foreign funding should have their bank accounts with institutions that have core-banking facilities, so that RBI and therefore the MHA have real-time updates on transactions.

Extra Mile

Salient Features of 2010 Act:

- The 2010 act has the provision for **suspension as well as cancellation of registrations** granted to NGOs was made. Such provision was not there in previous act.
- FCRA, 2010 provides that the certificate granted for accepting foreign contribution shall be valid for a period for **five years**.
- A new provision was introduced to the effect that the assets of any person who has become defunct shall be disposed of in such manner as may be, specified by the Central Government.
- No funds, other than foreign contribution shall be deposited in the **FCRA account** to be separately maintained by the associations etc. Every bank shall report to such authority, as may be prescribed, the amount of foreign remittance received, sources and manner and other particulars.
- Provision has been made for **inspection of accounts**, if the registered person or person to whom prior permission has been granted fails to furnish or the intimation given is not in accordance with law.

22. The decade-long effort for listing Masood Azhar showcases the pragmatism that marks India's multilateral diplomacy and goes beyond the label of 'symbolic diplomatic victory.'
Comment.

Context:

- Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar was listed as a **designated terrorist** by the **UN Security Council 1267 Committee**.
- The listing would mean would mean a travel ban, arms embargo and asset freeze on Azhar.

Fact Check

- Currently, there are 14 sanctions committees under the UNSC, tasked with various responsibilities such as political settlement of conflicts, nuclear non-proliferation and counter-terrorism.
- Sanctions committees comprise of all 15 members of the Security Council, and each committee is chaired by a non-permanent member on a rotational basis.
- Their work is guided by specific mandates, which list out the functions that they have to carry.

- The **ISIL (Da-esh) and Al Qaida sanctions committee**, also known as the **1267 sanctions committee**, oversees sanctions measures related to individuals, entities and groups, associated with the aforementioned organizations.

Answer

The UN Security Council finally added Mohammed Masood Azhar Alvi as the **422nd global terrorist to the UN sanctions List** of individuals and entities after China withdrew its objection to the listing proposal. For India, this marks pragmatism in India's approach and can be termed as political triumph - beyond the label of diplomatic victory.

Success: Beyond The Label Of Symbolic Diplomatic Victory

- For India, in many ways, it is a triumph that goes beyond the label of 'symbolic diplomatic victory.'
- First, it is a **success in terms of power politics and projection**. The UN Security Council is a testing ground of power politics.
- Once the interests of great powers get involved, a resolution against their interest is difficult both in the Council and in the UN's subsidiary organs.
- However, by being patient about China's concerns and at the same time exerting pressure on Beijing at various levels, India managed to get the desired outcome.
- Second, it shows **how consistent and pragmatic has been India's multilateral policy**.

Pragmatism in India's Multilateral Diplomacy

- The fundamental character of multilateral diplomacy is incrementalism. Therefore, expecting favourable outcomes immediately is a suboptimal approach in multilateral engagements.
- Despite initial unfavourable results, India kept on pursuing the matter with patience and perseverance which led to lead to a favourable outcome.
- The listing **questions** the general perception that **India's multilateral approach is ambivalent and inconsistent**.
- Through this success, India reminded the world community that in international politics there are no permanent friends or enemies.

Conclusion

- Besides highlighting India's success in global politics, the listing of Azhar also provides an opportunity to **restore the Wuhan spirit**.
- It also reinforces the necessity of **persevering in the efforts to gain membership in the UN Security Council** and the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** despite all the setbacks hitherto.

Extra Mile

Criticism of Sanctions Procedure

- The **1267 sanctions committee**, oversees sanctions measures related to individuals, entities and groups, associated with the aforementioned organizations.
- The decisions are **adopted by "consensus"**. This requirement effectively **gives a veto to all 15 members of the committee (10 non-permanent + 5 permanent)**, and not just the permanent members (P5) alone.

- A committee member to place a “hold” on the decision should they require more time and information to consider the matter at hand.
- As per the guidelines, a hold can last for **as long as 6 months at a time**, but can be **extended further under “extraordinary circumstances”**. Apart from this vague condition, there is no restriction on repeatedly invoking a hold.
- Committee meetings take place in **closed sessions, with no publication of the agenda, proceedings and voting records of the committee.**

23. The entire world is witnessing an increase in number of isolated terrorist attacks called ‘lone wolf attack’. What do you understand by ‘lone wolf attack’? Do you think India is vulnerable to such attacks? Give your opinion.

Answer

- Lone wolf attack is undertaken by very small group or an individual without the overall support of a terrorist organisation. Shooting at the gay club in Orlando (USA), or at Bangladesh in July this year are few examples of such attacks.
- Different terror groups (including IS) encourage this by its supporter who are not formally enlisted cadres. In this sense, these isolated attacks act as a tool for spreading terror across the world on behalf of these groups.
- Recently, groups like Al Qaeda and IS have **urged Indian youths** to mount lone wolf attack. However, carrying out such attacks in India will not be an easy task.

Reasons are-

- Due to **license regime**, accessibility of high grade weapons in India is tough compared to USA.
- Indians have so far **not displayed the psychological willingness** to undertake high risk attacks.
- Absence of past examples of lone wolf attacks in India inculcates **fear of unknown** among the minds of Indian youths.
- **Traditional social control** still exists in India. As a result, different activities of youths are often scrutinised by their peer groups and families.

However, that **does not mean India is not vulnerable to such attacks.**

Vulnerabilities

- Reaction of local police, who are the first responder, is often inadequate.
- Heavy concentration of public in public area makes it a potential target.
- More number of youths is getting radicalized on social media platforms. Many of them have even travelled to join ISIS.
- Radical ideological pursuit due to domestic communal tension is increasing. E.g. – After the Muzzafarnagar riots (UP), the fringe elements were active in rehabilitation camps trying to radicalize the youths.

Conclusion

We must not lose our guards against these threats. Online monitoring of activities, awareness, detection and remedial actions must be taken in synchronised manner so as to nullify the threats.

General Characteristics of Lone Wolf Attack:

- Mostly carried out by **individuals or small groups** influenced by the perception of injustice and persecution.
- Persons from **age group 18-30 years** are the most vulnerable group and are widely active in such attacks.
- These volunteers are mostly from **middle class and educated families** (All the youths of Dhaka attack were well educated and financially well off).
- They are **exploited by the terror organisations over social media** platform and hence these organisations play an important role in their radicalization.
- Family members of these youths remain unaware and hence there is no reporting at early stage.

24. The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 (UAPA) is an undemocratic law that allows governments to use the cover of 'terrorism' to stifle dissent. Critically Comment.**Context:**

- The Centre has set up a tribunal for adjudicating whether or not there is sufficient reason to continue the ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) under UAPA.
- Such a **tribunal is constituted under the UAPA** to give an opportunity to the banned entity to present its case.
- Earlier in May 2019, the central government has extended for five more years the ban on the LTTE.

Answer

- UAPA was introduced as a legislation to set out **reasonable restrictions** on the freedoms under Article 19(1) of the Constitution. Its main objective is **to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India**.
- However, arrests of several activists in recent times have pointed towards possible misuse of the draconian UAPA law. As many as 22 of 33 cases (67 per cent) under the UAPA ended in acquittal or discharge in 2016.

Criticism

- The provisions of UAPA have an **extremely wide ambit**, which makes it possible to use them against not just criminals and terrorists, but even authors, academics, lawyers for alleged terrorists, and human rights activist.
- The definition of unlawful activities includes terms which are vague and broad. For instance, questioning the territorial integrity of India and activities to cause "**disaffection against India**" are an unlawful activity.
- There is no definition of membership in the UAPA, making it susceptible to misuse.
- SC in 2011 had ruled that **mere membership** of a banned organization **will not make a person a criminal**. However, under UAPA, if one is found to be a member of banned organisations, he/she **could be imprisoned for life**.

- Some of the provisions such as **extended detention periods, no anticipatory bail, no bail if case seems prima facie true** etc. have been termed as draconian.
- It contains **no sunset clause** and **provisions for mandatory periodic review**, which makes UAPA a permanent statute.

Way Forward

- There is an urgent need for **some sort of checks and balances** that will safeguard the interest of any innocent accused while still enforcing the spirit behind this act.
- A simple yet effective safeguard might be a **periodical review of the Act and sunset clauses**.
- **Re-defining terrorism** with a reduced ambit and **fixing the accountability** in case of misuse will be very useful.

PRELIMS MCQs

1. With reference to PCPNDT Act, consider the following statements

- I. The PCPNDT Act was passed to stop foetal sex determination and sex selective abortions.
- II. The Act empowers appropriate authorities with the powers of civil court for search and seizure.
- III. It prohibits the use of Ultrasound to detect the genetic abnormalities in the foetus

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) I and III
- b) II and III
- c) I and II
- d) All of the above

Context: The Supreme Court has upheld provisions in the anti-pre-natal sex determination law which 'criminalises' non-maintenance of medical records by obstetricians and gynaecologists and suspend their medical licence indefinitely.

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to stop female foeticide and arrest the declining sex ratio in India. The Act provides for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception.
- It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect genetic abnormalities, metabolic disorders, chromosomal abnormalities, certain congenital malformations and sex linked disorders.
- It empowers appropriate authorities with the power of civil court for search, seizure and sealing of machines and equipments of the violators

2. Which of the following statements are true regarding Malaria?

- I. It is caused by *Aedes mosquito*.
- II. World's first malaria vaccine, Mosquirix was recently launched in Malawi.
- III. DAMaN is an initiative launched by the state of Gujarat to combat malaria.
- IV. Malaria is not a contagious disease.

- a) Only I
- b) II and IV
- c) I, II and III
- d) All of the above

Context: The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Algeria and Argentina as malaria-free, with no recorded cases of indigenous transmission of the disease since 2013 and 2010 respectively.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Malaria is a mosquito-borne infectious disease that affects humans and other animals. People get malaria by being bitten by an infective female Anopheles mosquito. Only Anopheles mosquitoes can transmit malaria and they must have been infected through a previous blood meal taken from an infected person.
- As the malaria parasite is found in red blood cells of an infected person, malaria can also be transmitted through blood transfusion, organ transplant, or the shared use of needles or syringes contaminated with blood. Malaria may also be transmitted from a mother to her unborn infant before or during delivery (“congenital” malaria).
- Malaria is not contagious as it cannot spread from person to person like a cold or the flu, and it cannot be sexually transmitted. One cannot get malaria from casual contact with malaria-infected people, such as sitting next to someone who has malaria.
- Five species of Plasmodium can infect and be spread by humans. Most deaths are caused by *P. falciparum* because *P. vivax*, *P. ovale*, and *P. malariae* generally cause a milder form of malaria. The species *P. knowlesi* rarely causes disease in humans.
- Recently the world’s first malaria vaccine – Mosquirix was launched in Malawi.
- In India, Odisha has emerged as an inspiration in the fight against malaria. In recent years it has dramatically scaled-up efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat malaria through its Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative, which has produced impressive results in a short span of time.
- Algeria is where the malaria parasite was first discovered in humans almost a century and a half ago, and that was a significant milestone in responding to the disease
- While Algeria is the second African country to be officially recognised as malaria-free, after Mauritius (certified in 1973), Argentina is the second country in the Americas to be certified in 45 years, after Paraguay in June 2018.
- To receive WHO certification, a country has to prove that it has interrupted indigenous transmission of the disease for at least three consecutive years. A total of 36 countries and territories have received this WHO certification.

3. With reference to Institutes of Eminence Scheme consider the following statements

- I. The scheme comes under Ministry of Human Resource and Development**
- II. Only institutes placed under top 100 of NIRF rankings can apply for the tag**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only I**
- b) Only II**
- c) Both I and II**
- d) Neither I nor II**

Context: The Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry is likely to move the Cabinet soon to increase by half the number of educational establishments that can be tagged institutes of eminence, or IoEs, offering them greater autonomy. The ministry wants the number increased to 30 from the original 20.

Answer: A

Explanation:

- The scheme has been launched with an objective to provide world class teaching and research facilities to Indian students within the country and enhance general level of education of the country.
- Institutions shall be selected as IoEs by the Empowered Expert Committee (EEC), constituted for this purpose. Each Public Institution selected as IoE will be provided financial assistance up to Rs. 1000 Cr over a period of five years.
- Only higher education institutions currently placed in the top 500 of global rankings or top 50 of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) are eligible to apply for the eminence tag.
- The private IoEs can also come up as greenfield ventures, provided the sponsoring organisation submits a convincing perspective plan for 15 years.
- The IoEs are proposed to have greater autonomy compared to other higher education institutions. For instance, they will be free to decide their fee for domestic and foreign students, and have a flexible course duration and structure.
- Their academic collaborations with foreign institutions will be exempt from approvals of government or UGC except institutions based on a list of negative countries prepared by the External Affairs and Home ministries.
- Once identified, the target for the IoEs would be to break into the top 500 in at least one internationally reputed ranking framework in 10 years and come up in the top 100 over time.

4. With reference to Measles, consider the following statements

- I. Measles is caused by bacteria**
- II. There is no vaccine available for Measles**
- III. Measles is a contagious disease**
- IV. Measles is only found in Humans**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) I and III**
- b) I, III and IV**
- c) III and IV**
- d) II and IV**

Context: U.S. is facing an outbreak of measles with the greatest number of cases reported since 1992 and after measles was declared eliminated in 2000.

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Measles is a highly contagious infectious disease caused by the measles virus. It is an airborne disease which spreads easily through the coughs and sneezes of infected people. It may also be spread through direct contact with mouth or nasal secretions. Nine out of ten people who are not immune and share living space with an infected person will be infected.
- Symptoms usually develop 10–12 days after exposure to an infected person and last 7–10 days. Initial symptoms typically include fever, often greater than 40 °C (104 °F), cough, runny nose, and inflamed eyes. Small white spots known as Koplik's spots may form inside the mouth two or three days after the start of symptoms. A red, flat rash which usually starts on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body typically begins three to five days after the start of symptoms
- Common complications include diarrhea (in 8% of cases), middle ear infection (7%), and pneumonia (6%). These occur in part due to measles-induced immunosuppression.
- The MMR (Measles Mumps and Rubella) vaccine is used for Measles and it is highly effective. Two doses of measles vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles if exposed to the virus. One dose is about 93% effective.
- Measles is a disease of humans; measles virus is not spread by any other animal species.

5. Which of the following statements are true regarding Trans Fatty Acids (TFAs)

- I. TFAs are created by adding carbon dioxide to liquid vegetable oils
- II. TFAs pose a higher risk of heart disease than saturated fats
- III. TFAs occur naturally
- IV. TFAs are unsaturated fats

- a) I and II
- b) II and IV
- c) II, III and IV
- d) I, II and III

Context: WHO has joined hands with International Food and Beverage Alliance (IFBA) to achieve its target to eliminate trans fats from the global food supply by 2023.

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Fats contain long hydrocarbon chains, which can be either unsaturated, i.e., have double bonds, or saturated, i.e., have no double bonds. Trans fatty acid is a type of unsaturated fat that occurs in small amounts in nature
- There are two broad types of trans fats found in foods: naturally-occurring and artificial trans fats. Naturally-occurring trans fats are produced in the gut of some animals and foods made from these animals (e.g., milk and meat products) may contain small quantities of these fats.

- Artificial trans fats are created in an industrial process that adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils to make them more solid. The primary dietary source for trans fats in processed food is partially hydrogenated oil.
- TFAs pose a higher risk of heart disease than saturated fats, as saturated fats raise cholesterol levels while TFAs not only raise the bad cholesterol levels (LDL) but also lower the good cholesterol levels (HDL). It is also associated with a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- TFAs are easy to use, inexpensive to produce and last a long time. It gives food a desirable taste and texture. Many restaurants and fast-food outlets use it to deep-fry foods because oils with trans fats can be used many times in commercial fryers.

6. Which of the following statements are true regarding drugs pricing.

- I. National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority is under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**
- II. NPPA controls prices of drugs as per the Essential Commodities Act, 1955**
- III. Pharmaceutical drugs are considered as Essential Commodities**

- a) II and III**
- b) I and III**
- c) I and II**
- d) All of the above**

Context: NPPA caps prices of 9 non-scheduled cancer drugs by up to 87%

Answer: A

Explanation:

- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) is a government regulatory agency that controls the prices of pharmaceutical drugs in India. It was formed in 1997 and operates under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- The Drugs Prices Control Order, 1995 is an order issued by the Government of India under Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to regulate the prices of drugs. The Order provides the list of price controlled drugs, procedures for fixation of prices of drugs, method of implementation of prices fixed by Govt and penalties for contravention of provisions. Later, the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) 2013 was notified
- Since drugs are essential for the health of the society, they have been declared as Essential and accordingly put under the Essential Commodities Act.
- The NPPA has approved a formula which restricts the trade margin of the selling price by up to 30%. The trade margin rationalisation has been rolled out as proof of concept, stressing on the new paradigm of self-regulation by the industry.

7. With reference to Open Market Operations (OMO), consider the following statements

- I. OMO is the sale and purchase of government securities by RBI
- II. OMO is used to regulate the money supply in the economy
- III. RBI carries out the OMO through commercial banks and does not directly deal with the public

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) I and II
- b) II and III
- c) Only I
- d) All of the above.

Context: The Reserve Bank of India recently said it will inject Rs 15,000 crore into the financial system next month through the Open Market Operations.

Answer: D

Explanation:

- Open market operations are conducted by the RBI by way of sale or purchase of government securities (g-secs) to adjust money supply conditions. The central bank sells g-secs to suck out liquidity from the system and buys back g-secs to infuse liquidity into the system.
- These operations are often conducted on a day-to-day basis in a manner that balances inflation while helping banks continue to lend. The RBI uses OMO along with other monetary policy tools such as repo rate, cash reserve ratio and statutory liquidity ratio to adjust the quantum and price of money in the system.
- RBI carries out the OMO through commercial banks and does not directly deal with the public.

8. With reference to Ongole cattle, consider the following statements

- I. Ongole cattle is an indigenous cattle breed of India.
- II. It has resistance to both foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease.
- III. It is only found in India

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) I and II
- b) Only III
- c) Only I
- d) All of the above

Context: Vice President of India has lamented the neglect of the Ongole cattle breed and called for protecting and promoting the animal.

Answer: A

Explanation:

- Ongole cattle is an indigenous cattle breed that originates from Prakasam District in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. The breed derives its name from the place the breed originates i.e., Ongole.
- The Ongole breed of cattle, *Bos Indicus*, has a great demand as it is said to possess resistance to both foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease.
- These cattle are commonly used in bull fights in Mexico and some parts of East Africa due to their strength and aggressiveness. They also participate in traditional bull fights in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

9. With reference to Competition Commission of India (CCI), consider the following statements

- CCI is a statutory body**
- Only a retired judge of the High Court/Supreme Court can be the chairperson of CCI.**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- Only I**
- Only II**
- Both I and II**
- Neither I nor II**

Context: The Competition Commission of India (CCI) celebrated its 10th Annual Day on 20th May.

Answer: A

Explanation:

- CCI is a statutory body of the Government of India responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an appreciable adverse effect on competition in India.
- It was established on 14 October 2003. It became fully functional in May 2009 with Dhanendra Kumar as its first Chairman.
- The Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and Merger and acquisition), which causes or are likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.
- CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government. It is the duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- Statement 2 is wrong as there is no such criteria

10. Which of the following statements are true regarding NEFT and RTGS.

- NEFT and RTGS are both maintained by RBI**
- Fund transfers under RTGS take place on a real time basis.**

III. RTGS can be used to transfer funds outside India while NEFT cannot be used for the same.

- a) Only I
- b) Only II
- c) I and II
- d) All of the above

Context: Reserve Bank of India has proposed the possibility of extending the availability of NEFT round the clock.

Answer: C

Explanation:

- RTGS (real time gross settlement) and NEFT (national electronic funds transfer) are electronic payment systems that allow individuals to transfer funds between banks. Both these systems are maintained by the Reserve Bank of India. It is applicable only for money transfer **within the country**.
- Under RTGS, the funds transfer takes place on a real time basis, or in other words, at the time the request is received. It is one of the fastest interbank money transfer facility available through banking channels in India. The beneficiary bank has to credit the recipient's account within 30 minutes of receiving the funds transfer message.
- On the other hand, NEFT operates on a deferred settlement basis. Fund transfer under NEFT is settled in batches as opposed to the real-time settlement process in RTGS. The batches are settled in hourly time slots.
- RTGS facility is meant for large value transactions. For retail customers, the minimum amount remitted through RTGS is Rs. 2 lakh.

11. Which of the following statements are true regarding Asian Development Bank?

- I. It was established in 1966
 - II. It is headquartered in Tokyo
 - III. All the members of ADB are from Asia.
 - IV. Japan and US are its largest shareholders.
- a) I and IV
 - b) I and II
 - c) I, II and III
 - d) All of the above

Context: According to Asian Development Bank projections, Asia-Pacific will grow at 5.7% this year.

Answer: A

Explanation:

- ADB was established on 19 December 1966, as a financial institution that would be Asian in character and foster economic growth and cooperation in one of the poorest regions in the world.
- Headquartered in the the city of Manila, Philippines, it assists its members and partners by providing loans, technical assistance, grants, and equity investments to promote social and economic development.
- It envisions a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty in the region.
- It has 68 members, of which 49 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 from outside. Japan and United States hold the largest proportion of shares at 15.607%. China holds 6.444% and India holds 6.331%.

12. Which of the following statements are true regarding NABARD?

- I. NABARD was established in 1982**
- II. Nabventures is a subsidiary of NABARD**
- III. It was established on the recommendations of Narsimham committee.**
- IV. The Government of India holds 100% stake in NABARD**

- a) I and II**
- b) II, III and IV**
- c) I, II and IV**
- d) All of the above**

Context: NABARD has announced a Rs 700-crore venture capital fund for equity investments in agriculture and rural-focused startups.

Answer: C

Explanation

- NABARD recently announced a Rs 700-crore venture capital fund for equity investments in agriculture and rural-focused startups. It has been contributing to other funds till now and this is the first time that the rural development bank has launched a fund of its own.
- The fund has been launched by Nabventures, a subsidiary of NABARD. NABARD has given an anchor commitment for the fund, which will be investing across startups engaged in agriculture, food and rural development space.
- NABARD was established on the recommendations of **B. Sivaraman Committee**, on 12 July 1982 to implement the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Act 1981. It replaced the Agricultural Credit Department (ACD) and Rural Planning and Credit Cell (RPCC) of Reserve Bank of India, and Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC).
- It is one of the premier agencies providing developmental credit in rural areas and is India's specialised bank for Agriculture and Rural Development in India.
- The Reserve Bank of India has divested its entire stake in NABARD to the government. With this divestment, the government now holds 100 percent stake in it.

13. Which of the following statements are correct?

- I. Masala Bonds are denominated in US dollars.
- II. First Masala Bond was issued by International Finance Corporation.
- III. Gujarat is the first state in India to issue Masala Bonds.

- a) I & II
- b) Only II
- c) Only III
- d) All of the above

Context: Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board recently issued Masala Bonds.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- While Indian companies have been raising debt from overseas markets for decades including through bond offerings, those borrowings have been denominated in dollar or other currencies. Masala Bonds, on the other hand, are rupee-denominated bonds i.e the funds would be raised from overseas market in Indian rupees. So, I is incorrect.
- The first Masala bond was issued by the World Bank backed IFC in 2014 when it raised 1,000 crore bond to fund infrastructure projects in India. Later in August 2015, IFC for the first time issued green masala bonds. So, II is correct.
- Recently, the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board issued Masala Bonds to raise funds from the overseas market, making it the first state-owned entity to issue masala bonds. Kerala is also the first state in India to issue masala bonds. So, III is incorrect.
- While companies can raise funds through these bonds, there are limitations for the use of such proceeds. RBI mandates that the money raised through such bonds cannot be used for real estate activities other than for development of integrated township or affordable housing projects. It also can't be used for investing in capital markets, purchase of land and on-lending to other entities for such activities
- The Rupee denominated bonds can only be issued in a country and subscribed by a resident of such country that is a member of financial action task force and whose securities market regulator is a member of International Organisation of Securities Commission.
- While residents of such countries can subscribe to the bonds, it can also be subscribed by multilateral and regional financial institutions where India is a member country.
- According to RBI, the minimum maturity period for Masala Bonds raised up to Rupee equivalent of USD 50 million in a financial year should be 3 years and for bonds raised above USD 50 million equivalent in INR per financial year should be 5 years.

14. Which is not one of the criteria for reservation in promotion as per latest decision of SC?

- I. Administrative efficiency
- II. Social and educational backwardness
- III. Quantifiable data

IV. Poverty

- a) Option I, II and III
- b) Option I and II
- c) Option I, II, III and IV
- d) None of the above

Answer: B

15. Which is the correct option with respect to governance of State of Delhi and Puducherry?

- I. Article 239A deals with Puducherry and 239AA deals with Delhi
- II. State of Puducherry has more power than that of State of Delhi
- III. Land, public order and police in State of Puducherry lies with Central Government but not so in Delhi
- IV. Both Puducherry and Delhi have administrator

- a) Option I and II
- b) Option I, II, III and IV
- c) Option III and IV
- d) Option I and III

Answer: A

Explanation: Refer Q no 8

16. Which is the correct option with respect to Anti defection law provisions in Constitution of India?

- I. Anti defection law applies when elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- II. Anti- defection law applies when legislator he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party.
- III. Independent members would be disqualified if they joined a political party.
- IV. Nominated members can never be disqualified under the Anti defection law.

- a) Option I, II, III, IV
- b) Option I, III, IV
- c) Option I, II and III
- d) None of the above

Answer: C

Explanation: Refer Q no 10

17. Which of the following Statements is correct regarding the Election Commission of India?

- a) It is an independent and statutory body.
- b) It consists of members having a tenure of six years.
- c) It acts as a court for arbitration of disputes related to granting of recognition to political parties.
- d) Being an all-India body, it is also concerned with the elections to Gram Panchayats and State Municipalities.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- It is a constitutional body create under Article 324.
- The ECI does not have power to deregister any political party. Thus, ECI can only register any party not deregister it.
- Power wrt elections to Gram Panchayats and State Municipalities is vested in State Election Commission under Article 243K.

18. Which of the following Indian States have a Bicameral Legislature?

- I. Uttar Pradesh
 - II. Bihar
 - III. Chhattisgarh
 - IV. Jammu and Kashmir
- a) I and II
 - b) II and IV
 - c) I, II and III
 - d) I, II and IV

Answer: D

Explanation

7 States have a bicameral legislature- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and J&K.

19. The Non voteable charges or 'Charged Expenditure' in the Union Budget include:

1. Salary and Allowances of the Presiding Officers of the house of Parliament.
2. Salary and Allowances of the Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts.
3. Salary and Allowances of the CAG.
4. Pension of the retired of the retired Judges of the Supreme Court.
5. Pension of the retired Judges of High Courts.

Select the option(s) which is/are correct?

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

Answer: D

20. Who among the following king is also known by the title “King Rama X”?

- a) King Maha Vajiralongkorn of Thailand
- b) King Maha Vajiralongkorn of Cambodia
- c) King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand
- d) King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Indonesia

Answer: A

Explanation:

- Thailand’s King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun officially crowned as the 10th king of Chakri dynasty on May 4.
- He is now known as **Rama X**.
- He inherited the throne in 2016 when his long-reigning father Bhumibol Adulyadej died.
- Thailand has a **constitutional monarchy**.
- Thailand also has strict laws, called *lese majeste*, which ban criticism of the monarchy. The laws have shielded the royal family from public view and scrutiny.

21. Consider the following statements regarding Sea of Japan:

1. It is bordered by five countries namely Japan, Korea (North and South), Russia and China.
2. It is almost completely closed off from the Pacific Ocean and hence it has almost no tidal activity.
3. Sakhalin island along with Russian mainland forms the northern boundary of this sea.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

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

Context: North Korea launched a “barrage” of unidentified **short-range projectiles** into Sea of Japan.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- This marginal sea is bordered by the countries South Korea, North Korea, Russia, and Japan.
- Because it is almost completely closed off from the Pacific Ocean, it has almost no tidal activity and it also has lower salinity than the ocean.
- The Sea of Japan has three major basins including the Tsushima Basin in the southwest region, the Japan basin in the northern region, and the Yamato basin in the southeast region.



22. “Operation Swift Retort” is related to
- a) Balakot airstrike conducted by Indian Air force
 - b) Surgical strike conducted by Indian Army
 - c) Pakistan Air Force’s response to Indian aggression
 - d) None of the above

Answer: C

Explanation:

Pakistan will observe the Pakistan Air Force’s retaliatory action on 27th February 2019 against India as ‘Operation Swift Retort’.

23. Consider the following statements regarding Chagos Archipelago:
1. It comprises of group of atolls lying north of the equator in Indian Ocean.
 2. The Chagos Archipelago contain the world's largest coral atoll called The Great Chagos Bank.
 3. The largest individual island of this archipelago is Diego Garcia.

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:

- The United Nation General Assembly has passed a non-binding resolution asking United Kingdom (UK) to return Chagos Archipelago in Indian Ocean to Mauritius.

- The General Assembly resolution passed 116 to six, with France, Germany and 54 other countries abstaining.

Background:

- In February 2019, the International Court of Justice had ruled that **continued British occupation** of the remote Indian Ocean archipelago is **illegal**.
- The court in its order said that the detachment of the Chagos archipelago in 1965 from Mauritius had not been based on a **“free and genuine expression of the people concerned”**.
- The UK formally **disaggregated the Chagos Islands from Mauritius** during independence negotiations in 1965, paying Mauritius a sum of £3 million.
- Mauritius was granted independence in 1968.
- Between 1967 and 1973, **UK forcibly removed the islands’** more than 3,000 occupants, moving them to Seychelles and Mauritius.
- The government refers to it as **British Indian Ocean Territory or BIOT**.
- Since then, the Island is used by UK and USA for defence purposes.
- US also established a military base on **island of Diego Garcia which is largest of all islands**.

Answer: B

Explanation:

About Chagos Archipelago

- The Chagos Archipelago are a group of **seven atolls lying south of the equator** in the Indian Ocean.
- This chain of islands is the **southernmost archipelago of the Chagos-Laccadive Ridge**, a long submarine mountain range in the Indian Ocean.
- The United States has built a military base on **Diego Garcia, the largest of the Chagos Islands**.
- The Great Chagos Bank is the **largest acknowledged atoll structure of the world** (the completely submerged **Saya de Malha Bank is larger**, but its status as an atoll is uncertain).



24. Consider the following statements regarding “Golden Card”:

1. It is a permanent residency scheme for expatriates launched by UAE.
2. UAE-based Indian businessman, M.A. Yusuffali has become the first expat to get the residency under this scheme.

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 **UAE** has launched a **permanent residency scheme** for expatriates dubbed the '**Golden Card**'.
- This step has been taken in an attempt to woo wealthy individuals and exceptional talents from all over the world.

Answer: C

Explanation:

- No. of Qualified individuals in the first round to obtain the golden card – 6800
- Approximate total investments by qualified expats to obtain the golden card – AED 100 billion
- Categories of individual to get benefitted from this – Investors, Entrepreneurs, Special Talents, Researchers, and Outstanding Students.
- The UAE's move also comes soon after **Saudi Arabia implemented a 'green card'-style residency scheme for expats.**
- **M.A. Yusuffali:**
 - **UAE-based Indian businessman**, LuLu Group chairman **M.A. Yusuffali** has become the first expat to get the exclusive Permanent Residency 'Golden Card'.
 - The Abu Dhabi-based **Keralite tycoon** is worth \$4.7 billion - ranked the richest expat in UAE according to Forbes magazine's 2019 list of billionaires.

25. Which of the following city has been termed as World's Southernmost City?

- a) Ushuaia, Argentina
- b) Puerto Williams, Argentina
- c) Ushuaia, Chile
- d) Puerto Williams, Chile

Answer: D

Explanation

- **Puerto Williams** has been upgraded to the category of "**city**" by **Chilean authorities**. (*Upgraded from Hamlet to City*)
- With this upgradation, it has become the **world's southernmost city**.
- It **took over the title from Ushuaia in Argentina** which was world's southernmost city till recently.
- **Geographical Facts about Puerto Williams:**
 - It is situated **on Navarino Island in Chile**.
 - It faces **the Beagle Channel**.
 - The port attracts tourists going to Cape Horn or Antarctica.

• About Ushuaia:

- It is the capital of **Tierra del Fuego, Argentina**.
- It is located in a wide bay on the southern coast of **Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego**, bounded on the north by the **Martial mountain range**, and on the south by the **Beagle Channel**.

26. Consider the following passes:

1. **Nathu La**
2. **Shipkila**
3. **Lipulekh (or Lipulech)**
4. **Sela**

Which among the above represent(s) open trading border post(s) between India and China?

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

Context

- The **14th edition** of the **annual Sino-Indian border trade** has opened at Nathu La in Sikkim.
- The bilateral border trade between the two countries is organised four days a week for six months, between May 1 and November 30.
- It was resumed in 2006 after a gap of 44 years.

Answer: C

Explanation:

There are **three open trading border posts** between India and China. These are:

- Nathu La in Sikkim
- Shipkila in Himachal Pradesh
- Lipulekh (or Lipulech) in Uttarakhand

The Sela Pass is the high-altitude mountain pass located in Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh state of India.

27. Consider the following statements regarding Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

1. **Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are the members of SCO.**
2. **India along with Pakistan is a full member of SCO since 2017.**
3. **The SCO Secretariat is based in Beijing while the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent.**

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:

- The **Second SCO Mass Media Forum** was held at Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from 23-26 May, 2019.
- A Delegation from I&B Ministry represented India at the Forum.
- The Forum aims to strengthen the exchange and cooperation in the field of mass media amongst SCO countries to strengthen its positive image in the global information space.
- The **first SCO Media Summit** was held in Beijing on 1 June 2018.
- This event was held under the motto “**Development of the “Shanghai Spirit” and opening of a new era in the mass media cooperation**”.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- The SCO comprises **eight member states**, namely the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.
- The historical meeting of the Heads of State Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was held on 8-9 **June 2017 in Astana**. In the meeting, **the status of a full member** of the Organization was granted to **India and Pakistan**.
- The organisation has **two permanent bodies** — the *SCO Secretariat based in Beijing* and the Executive Committee of the *Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent*.

28. Consider the name of following countries:

1. India
2. China
3. Japan
4. Sri Lanka

Which of the above countries is/are involved in the development of East Container Terminal at the Colombo Port?

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

Answer: A

Explanation:

- **Sri Lanka, Japan and India** have signed an agreement to jointly develop the East Container Terminal at the Colombo Port.
- As per the agreement, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) retains **100% ownership of the East Container Terminal (ECT)**, while the Terminal Operations Company, conducting its operations, is jointly owned.
- The ECT is located some *3 km away from the China-backed international financial city, known popularly as “port city”*, being built on reclaimed land on Colombo’s sea front.
- Over 70 per cent of the transshipment business at the strategically located ECT is linked to India.

29. Consider the following statements regarding the Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT):

1. **CSAT is London based tribunal constituted for resolving disputes involving Commonwealth international.**
2. **The members of this tribunal are selected by the President of the Commonwealth Secretariat on a regionally representative basis.**
3. **The judgment of the Tribunal is final and non-binding on the parties.**

Which of the above statement(s) is/are Incorrect?

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

Context:

- **K S Radhakrishnan**, former Supreme Court Judge, has been **appointed as a member** of the Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal, London.
- He will render his services as a member of the Tribunal **for a period of four years** from 1st of June, 2019 to 31st of May, 2023.

Answer: C

Explanation:

- **CSAT is London based tribunal** constituted for resolving disputes involving Commonwealth international or intergovernmental organizations which agree to submit to the jurisdiction of the CSAT.
- The members to this tribunal are **selected by Commonwealth Governments** on a **regionally representative basis**.
- The members are **appointed on a four year** term which may be **renewed only once**.
- To consider a case before it, the Tribunal is normally composed of a panel of three including the President and two other members selected by the President.
- The judgment of the Tribunal shall be **final and binding** on the parties and **shall not be subject to appeal**

30. Consider the name of following personalities:

1. Kyaw Soe Oo
2. Wa Lone
3. Jamal Khashoggi
4. Mahmoud Abu Zeid

Who among the above has/have been given the 2019 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 1 and 2
- c) 3 only
- d) 3 and 4 only

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Journalists **Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone** (Myanmar) were given this year's UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize.
- The **UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize** was awarded on 2 May as part of the celebration of **World Press Freedom Day (3 May)** which is taking place in **Ethiopia this year**.
- The **theme chosen** for the celebration this year is "**Media for Democracy: Journalism and elections in times of disinformation.**"
- The award was created in 1997.
- It is named in honour of **Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist** who was assassinated in front of the offices of his newspaper El Espectador in Bogotá, Colombia on 17 December 1986.

31. Consider the following statements regarding India International Institute of Democracy & Election Management (IIIDEM):

1. It has been set up by Election Commission of India in collaboration with World Bank.
2. The Institute serves as a national and international hub for exchange of good practices in election management.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are Incorrect?

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

Context

- Heads and representatives of 20 Election Management Bodies (EMBs) from across the world and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) arrived in New Delhi to witness the ongoing General Elections.

- The delegation also visited the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM).

Answer: A

Explanation:

- The Election Commission of India, in **June 2011**, has set up the **India International Institute of Democracy & Election Management (IIIDEM)** as its *advance training and resources wing*.
- The new training and research campus of the ECI is located at Dwarka which has the capacity to train close to 900 personnel at one go.

32. Consider the following statements regarding World Customs Organisation (WCO):

1. **WCO is an independent intergovernmental body to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.**
2. **Currently, it represents 183 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.**
3. **At present, India is the Vice-Chair (Regional Head) of the Asia Pacific Region of WCO.**

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

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

Context:

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has organised a meeting of the Regional Heads of Customs Administration of Asia Pacific Region of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) in Kochi from 08th to 10th May, 2019.

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The World Customs Organization (WCO) was established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC).
- It is an **independent intergovernmental body** whose mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.
- Today, the WCO represents **183 Customs administrations** across the globe that collectively process **approximately 98% of world trade**.
- The WCO has divided its Membership into **six Regions**. Each of the six Regions is represented by a regionally elected Vice-Chairperson to the WCO Council.
- **India** has become the **Vice-Chair (Regional Head) of the Asia Pacific Region** of World Customs Organisation (WCO) for a **period of two years**, from July, 2018 to June, 2020.

33. Consider the following statements regarding “World No Tobacco Day”

1. Every year, on May 30, World Health Organization (WHO) and its global partners celebrate World No Tobacco Day.
2. Theme for year 2019 was ‘tobacco and lung health’.
3. Madhya Pradesh government’s Medical & Health Department has been awarded Tobacco Control Award for year 2019.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Every year, on **31 May**, the World Health Organization (WHO) and global partners celebrate World No Tobacco Day (WNTD).
- The annual campaign is an opportunity to raise awareness on the harmful and deadly effects of tobacco use and second-hand smoke exposure, and to discourage the use of tobacco in any form.
- The focus of World No Tobacco Day 2019 is on "**tobacco and lung health.**"
- **Tobacco Control Award:**
 - WHO has selected the **Rajasthan government’s Medical & Health Department** for its **award this year** in recognition of its achievements in the field of tobacco control.
 - Individuals and institutions in **each of the six WHO regions** were recognised every year for their accomplishments in the area of tobacco control.
 - This year, WHO has selected five organisations from the South-East Asian region for the prestigious award.
 - Three other organisations in the South-East Asian region have been selected from Thailand and Indonesia, while the Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute, New Delhi, is also among the recipients of the award.
 - **Rajasthan’s Medical and Health Department** was the **only government body in country** which was awarded for its tobacco-free initiatives.

34. Consider the following statements regarding UN Habitat:

1. It is one of the principal organs of United Nations.
2. “New Urban Agenda” was signed by member states at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development – Habitat III.
3. In 2019, India has been elected to the Executive Board of the first UN-Habitat Assembly.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

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

Answer – C

Explanation:

- **India has been elected to the Executive Board** of the first UN-Habitat Assembly.
- The **first ever UN-Habitat Assembly** took place at the headquarters of UN-Habitat in Nairobi from 27-31 May 2019. Task undertaken by the assembly –
 - Review and approve **UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2025** and
 - Review Progress in implementation of **New Urban Agenda**.
- The special theme for the UN-Habitat Assembly is "**Innovation for Better Quality of Life in Cities and Communities**".
- The United Nations has **six principal organs**: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat. Hence, statement 1 is wrong.

About UN Habitat

- The **United Nations Human Settlements Programme (Habitat)**, established in 1978, is the **lead agency within the UN system** for coordinating activities in the field of human settlement development.
- The establishment of UN-Habitat was an outcome of First United Nation (UN) Conference on Human Settlements and Sustainable Urban Development held in 1976 in Vancouver (Canada).
- Headquarter – Nairobi, Kenya

About New Urban Agenda

- In October 2016, at the **UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development – Habitat III** – member states signed the **New Urban Agenda**.
- This is an action-oriented document which sets global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities.

35. Consider the following pairs:

| | Name of the personality | Award Won |
|----|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | Jokha Alharthi - | Nine Dots Prize |
| 2. | Annie Zaidi - | International Booker Prize |
| 3. | Dr. Pramod Kumar Mishra - | Sasakawa Award |

Which of the above pairs is/are NOT Correctly Matched?

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

Answer – A

Explanation:

The International Booker Prize:

- The International Booker Prize is awarded annually for a single book, translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland.
- The vital work of translators is celebrated, with the prize money divided equally between the author and translator.
- The 2019 Winner - **Celestial Bodies** by **Jokha Alharthi** (Translated by Marilyn Booth from Arabic)

Nine Dots Prize:

- The **Nine Dots Prize** aims to reward original thinking in response to contemporary societal issues.
- Each Prize cycle lasts two years, with a new question being announced every other October.
- All those 18 years of age and over can participate but responses and the resulting book must be in English.
- Mumbai based journalist and playwright **Annie Zaidi** has declared the winner of the Nine Dots Prize-2019 for her essay **Bread, Cement, Cactus**.

Sasakawa Award:

- **United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)** has conferred **Sasakawa Award 2019** for Disaster Risk Reduction to **Dr. Pramod Kumar Mishra**, Additional Principal Secretary to Prime Minister of India.
- It was announced during 6th Session of **Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) 2019 at Geneva**.
- It is the most prestigious international award in the area of Disaster Risk Management.
- It was instituted more than 30 years ago and is jointly organized by the **UNDRR and the Nippon Foundation**.
- The theme of the 2019 Sasakawa award was “**Building Inclusive and Resilient Societies**”.

36. Consider the following statements regarding U20 initiative:

1. It seeks to coordinate a joint position among the Mayors of G20 cities to inform and enrich the discussions of G20 national leaders.
2. Recently, Tokyo has hosted the second U20 Mayors Summit.
3. This initiative was developed in 2017 under the leadership of the Mayor of Buenos Aires and Mayor of Paris.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

- Governor of Tokyo had hosted the **second Urban 20** (U20) Summit on 21-22 May 2019.
- The summit addressed issues like climate action, circular economy, social inclusion, sustainable economic growth, and gender equality, as well as their linkages with the 2030 Agenda.
- During the Summit, U20 Mayors handed a Communique with their joint policy positions to the G20 Chair.

About U20

- U20 is an initiative developed under the leadership of Mayor of Buenos Aires and Mayor of Paris in 2017.
- It seeks to coordinate a joint position among the Mayors of G20 cities to inform and enrich the discussions of G20 national leaders.
- The initiative aims to highlight the expertise of cities in a range of global development issues; contributing with solutions to the G20, and formulating clear recommendations to national governments.

37. Consider the following statements regarding World Health Assembly:

1. **The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO.**
2. **It is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.**

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 72nd World Health Assembly convened in Geneva.
- **Professor Balram Bhargava**, Director General of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) jointly won the 2019 **Dr Lee Jong-wook Memorial Prize for Public health**.
- During this assembly, WHO has for the first time recognised **“burn-out”** in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD).
- **WHO Definition of Burn Out** - A syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

Answer – C

Explanation:

- The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO. It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.

- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.
- The Health Assembly is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

38. Consider the following Statements:

1. Raising day of Border Road Organisation (BRO) is celebrated on 7th May.
2. BRO functions under the administrative control Of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
3. Department of Border Management is attached to MHA.

Which of the above statements is/are *Incorrect*?

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

Answer: B

Explanation:

- On **7th May 2019**, BRO celebrated its Raising Day. 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 functions under the administrative control of **Ministry of Defence**. Hence Statement II is wrong.
- Department of Border Management - under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Some of the challenging works done by BRO includes **Delaram-Zaranj Highway in Afghanistan in 2008**, Restoration and repair of **the Farkhor and Ayni air bases** of Tajikistan.

39. Consider the following statements regarding joint exercise Varuna

- I. It is a joint military exercise between India and France.
- II. "Varuna 2019" was the 17th edition of the bilateral exercise.
- III. This joint naval exercise between these two countries was first initiated in 1983.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are Correct?

- a) II and III only
- b) II only
- c) I and II only
- d) I, II and III

Answer: A

Explanation:

- Varuna exercise is a **joint naval exercise** between India and France. Hence Statement I is **incorrect**.

- The first part of **17th edition of 'Varuna' 2019**, was conducted off the Goa coast from 1st to 10th May.
- Second part of this exercise is slated to be held at Djibouti.
- The joint naval exercise **was first initiated in 1983** and was named as **'Varuna' in 2001**.

40. Consider the following statements:

- I. **INS Ranjit is the fourth Indian Navy Scorpene-class submarine.**
- II. **INS Vela is a Frontline missile destroyer of Indian Navy.**

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- I Only
- II Only
- Both I and II
- Neither I nor II

Answer: D

Explanation:

INS Ranjit

- Completing its journey of 36 years, **INS Ranjit**, a **Rajput class** missile destroyer was decommissioned recently at Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam.
- Apart from being a part of various naval operations including **Operation Talwar**, it also came to the rescue of the nation by participating in **relief operations post the Tsunami** in 2004.
- INS Ranjit was the third of the five Kashin-class destroyer built by erstwhile USSR.

INS Vela:

- Indian shipbuilder Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) **has launched the fourth Indian Navy Scorpene-class submarine INS Vela.**
- The submarine is fourth of overall six units that will be delivered to the Indian Navy through a transfer of technology agreement with France's Naval group.
- The lead boat in the class, INS Kalvari, was commissioned in December 2017 and the launch of the third boat, INS Karanj, took place in January 2018.

41. Consider the following statements:

1. **ABHYAS - High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT) is an aerial exercise conducted by Indian Air Force.**
2. **SIMBEX is an annual Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise.**

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: B

Explanation:

ABHYAS - High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT)

- India has successfully conducted the flight test of ABHYAS - High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT) from a test range in Odisha.
- The trial was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- Abhyas is **drone** involving designed for autonomous flight with the help of an autopilot.
- The configuration of ABHYAS is designed on an in-line small gas turbine engine and it uses indigenously developed MEMS based navigation system.

SIMBEX

IN ships Kolkata and Shakti participated in the annual Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise SIMBEX-2019 scheduled from 16 May to 22 May 19.

42. Consider the following pairs:

| | Missile | | Type |
|----|----------------|---|------------------------|
| 1. | Akash | - | Air-to-Air missile |
| 2. | Astra | - | Surface to Air Missile |
| 3. | BrahMos | - | Cruise Missile |
| 4. | Nag | - | Anti Tank Missile |

Which of the above pairs is/are Correctly matched?

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

Answer: C

Explanation:

Akash:

- DRDO has **successfully test fired** the **new version of the Akash** missile system with a new indigenously-developed seeker.
- Akash missile is a **medium range Surface to Air Missile** with multi-target engagement capability.
- The **supersonic Akash missile** has a range of around 25 km and up to the altitude of 18,000m.

BrahMos:

- A BrahMos **Supersonic Cruise Missile** was successfully test-fired by a Unit of Eastern Command, Indian Army from Car Nicobar Islands.
- The BrahMos (designated PJ-10) is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from submarine, ships, aircraft, or land.
- It is the fastest supersonic cruise missile in the world. The missile travels at speeds of Mach 2.8 to 3.0, which is significantly higher than the speed of sound.
- It is a joint venture between the Russian Federation's NPO Mashinostroyeniya and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) who have together formed the BrahMos Aerospace.
- It is based on the Russian P-800 Oniks cruise missile and other similar sea-skimming Russian cruise missile technology.
- The name BrahMos comes from the names of two rivers, the Brahmaputra of India and the Moskva of Russia.
- It has a range of 290 kms as MTCR guidelines prohibit its members from transfer, sale or joint production of missiles beyond 300-km range with countries outside the club.
- In 2016, as India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), India and Russia are now planning to jointly develop a new generation of Brahmos missiles with 600 km-plus range and an ability to hit protected targets with pinpoint accuracy.
- BrahMos-II, is also presently under development with a speed of Mach 7-8 to boost aerial fast strike capability. It is expected to be ready for testing by 2020.

Astra:

An all-weather beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile developed by the DRDO.

43. Operation Safed Sagar is related to:

- a) **Role of Indian Air Force during Kargil War**
- b) **Role of Indian Air Force in supporting Indian Navy in high seas**
- c) **Role of Indian Navy in the fight against Maritime Piracy**
- d) **None of the above**

Answer – A

Explanation:

- Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa visited Sarsawa Air Force Station on 28th May to **commemorate the sacrifice of warriors** who laid down their **life during Operation Safed Sagar** in the Kargil war.
- The Air Force Chief also took part in the '**Missing Man Formation**' flypast in Mi-17 V5 helicopter to pay respect to the fallen air warriors.
- Operation Safed Sagar was undertaken by the Air Force jointly to **flush out infiltrators in the Kargil sector along the Line of Control**.

44. With reference to the National Technology Day consider the following statements

1. It is celebrated on the birth anniversary of Indian physicist C.V. Raman
2. It was first celebrated in 1986

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: D

Explanation:

- India celebrates National Technology day on 11th May to mark the historic feat of test-firing its nuclear-capable missile back in 1998.
- The nuclear tests that took place on May 11, 1998 saw the Indian team of scientists successfully test-firing the Shakti-1 nuclear missile at Rajasthan's Pokhran test range.
- Apart from the nuclear tests being conducted, India's first indigenous aircraft – **the Hansa 3** – also took flight in the state of Bengaluru. Designed by National Aerospace Laboratory, India, the light, two-seater aircraft was aimed to serve pilot training, surveillance, aerial photography and other such purposes.
- DRDO added to the day's importance by successfully completing the test-fire sessions of India's Surface-to-Air **Trishul missile**. The missile was then introduced to the Indian Army and Airforce and came as a part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme of India.
- With all these technological advancements being completed on the same day, then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced May 11 as the National technology Day. The first National Technology Day was celebrated in 1999.

45. Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) belongs to

- a) ISRO
- b) JAXA
- c) NASA
- d) Roscosmos

Answer: C

Explanation:

- A new study based on NASA's Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) satellite, shows that China and India are leading the increase in greening efforts across the world.
- China alone accounts for 25% of the global net increase in leaf area, while India has contributed a further 6.8%.
- The study shows that the change driving these efforts emerges from China's ambitious tree-planting programmes and intensive agriculture practised in both countries.

46. What is Artemis Mission?

- a) NASA's mission to Sun**
- b) NASA's mission to Moon**
- c) NASA's mission to Mars**
- d) NASA's mission to Jupiter**

Answer: B

Explanation:

- NASA has unveiled the schedule for the Artemis program that will return astronauts to the Moon for the first time in half a century, including eight scheduled launches and a mini-station in lunar orbit by 2024.
- The original lunar missions were named for Apollo - Artemis was his twin sister in Greek mythology, and the goddess of hunting, wilderness and the Moon.
- Artemis 1 will be an uncrewed mission around the Moon planned for 2020. Artemis 2, will orbit Earth's satellite with a crew around 2022; followed finally by Artemis 3 that will put astronauts on lunar soil in 2024, including the first woman.
- The three will be launched into space by the biggest rocket of all time, the Boeing-led Space Launch System (SLS), which is currently under development

Monkeypox Virus

- Singapore has reported its first case of the rare monkeypox virus brought to its shores by a Nigerian man. It was first identified in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then known as Zaire) in a 9 year old boy.
- The virus is similar to human smallpox, a disease that has been eradicated in 1980. Although monkeypox is much milder than smallpox, it can be fatal.

Monkeypox

- Monkeypox is a rare viral zoonotic disease that occurs primarily in remote parts of central and west Africa, near tropical rainforests.
- The virus is mostly transmitted to people from various wild animals, but has limited secondary spread through human-to-human transmission. In Africa, monkeypox infection has been found in various animal species like rope squirrels, tree squirrels, gambian rats, striped mice, dormice and primates.
- The infection can be divided into two periods:
 - The invasion period (0-5 days) characterized by fever, intense headache, lymphadenopathy (swelling of the lymph node), back pain, myalgia (muscle ache) and an intense asthenia (lack of energy).
 - The skin eruption period (within 1-3 days after appearance of fever) in which the various stages of the rash appear often beginning on the face and then spreading elsewhere on the body.
- Typically, fatality case in outbreaks has been between 1% and 10%, with most deaths occurring in younger age groups.
- There are no specific treatments or vaccines available for the infection, but outbreaks can be controlled. Vaccination against smallpox has been proven to be 85% effective in preventing monkeypox in the past, but the vaccine is no longer available to the general public after it was discontinued following global smallpox eradication.

Transmission

- Infection of index cases results from direct contact with the blood, bodily fluids, or cutaneous or mucosal lesions of infected animals.
- Secondary, or human-to-human, transmission can result from close contact with infected respiratory tract secretions, skin lesions of an infected person or objects recently contaminated by patient fluids or lesion materials.
- There is no evidence to date, that person-to-person transmission alone can sustain monkeypox infections in the human population.

World Press Freedom Prize

- Journalists Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone of Myanmar have been awarded this year's UNESCO Press Freedom Prize, following the recommendation an international jury of media professionals.
- Both laureates are serving seven-year prison sentences. At the time of their arrest in Yangon in December 2017, they were working for the Reuters news agency, reporting on alleged human rights violations in Myanmar's state of Rakhine.

- Created in 1997 and conferred on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on 3rd May, the annual UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize honours a person, organization or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence and, or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world, and especially when this has been achieved in the face of danger.
- It is named in honour of Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist who was assassinated in front of the offices of his newspaper in Colombia in December 1986.

International Labour Day

- May 1 is celebrated as International Labour Day or International Workers' Day in many countries around the world to honour the contributions of the labourers or working class people.
- The theme for Labour Day 2019 is Uniting Workers for Social and Economic Advancement.

History

- During the rise of industrialisation, 19th century industrialists in the US exploited the labour class and made them work for up to 15 hours a day.
- At its national convention in Chicago, held in 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (which later became the American Federation of Labor), proclaimed that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886.
- Finally, on May 1, 1886, the labour class derived the courage to unite and raised their voice against the unfair treatment, and demanded paid leaves, proper wages and breaks for the workforce.
- The labour movement is thus also known as the eight-hour day movement as it supported a day-to-day routine allocating eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for rest.
- In Chicago, on May 4, 1886, a bomb blast killed seven police officers and four civilians. The blast was carried out as a response to the police who had killed peaceful demonstrators the day before.
- Eight anarchists were convicted of conspiracy after the bombing and sentenced to death. The Haymarket Massacre made to the headlines across the world because of suggestions that none of those convicted eight men had thrown the bomb.
- Three years later, a French socialist party chose May 1 as the International Workers' Day to honour the labour movement and commemorate the Haymarket Massacre.
- The first celebration of May Day in India was organised in Madras (Chennai) by the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan on May 1, 1923. This was also the time when the Red Flag which symbolises Labour Day was first used in India.

Global Drug Survey

- Global Drug Survey, an independent research company based in London, has recently released its report for this year. Respondents from India were polled for the first time.
- It is an anonymised, online survey that assesses trends in drug use and self-reported harms among regular drug users and early adopters of new trends.
- Though the survey is not designed to determine the prevalence of drug behaviour in a population, it throws light on stigmatised behaviours and health outcomes of a hidden population that is otherwise difficult to reach and can be used to inform targeted interventions

Findings

- Apart from alcohol and tobacco, the most used drugs globally were cannabis, MDMA (Ecstasy), cocaine, amphetamines, LSD, magic mushrooms, benzodiazepines, prescription opioids, ketamine, nitrous oxide.
- Over the last 6 years, there has been a year on year increase in the percentage of participants obtaining drugs on the darknet in most countries.
- **Australia** and **Denmark** had the highest reported rate of police encounters of people who had used drugs, in contrast New Zealand had one of the lowest rates.
- Psychedelic assisted therapies were more acceptable to people with recognition that it can get to the roots of mental health problems but among drug naive groups there are still challenges to overcome the stigma.
- One third of the female respondents reported having been taken advantage of sexually whilst under the influence of alcohol and other drugs. The finding debunks common rape myths like, women are most likely to be raped when outside alone at night.

Indian Findings

- Alcohol, tobacco and cannabis were the most common stimulants used by Indians.
- Indians reported being drunk on an average of 41 times in the last 12 months — behind the U.K., the U.S., Canada, Australia and Denmark in that order but well above the global average of 33 times.
- Indians — more than from other nationalities — are seeking help to reduce their alcohol intake. It reflects high levels of concern among drinkers of being aware of consuming at levels known to be harmful.
- About 6% of the female Indians surveyed reported seeking emergency medical treatment in the last 12 months. The global female average was about 13%.
- While 43% of about 250 Indians surveyed reported using cannabis, only 2% sought emergency medical treatment after using cannabis but, similar to alcohol use, 51% said they wanted to use less cannabis; more than any other nationality and well above the global average of 31%.

ILO Report on Women in Business and Management

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) recently released its second global report, titled “Women in Business and Management: The Business Case For Change”. It surveyed around 13,000 enterprises in 70 countries.
- The report explores the business case for gender diversity in the workplace, women’s representation at management and board level and the various success factors that drive enterprise behaviour for inclusion.

Findings

- The report adds to the growing body of evidence that shows many enterprises are actively pursuing initiatives to boost the number of women in their talent pool but also shows that these efforts alone are insufficient. Enterprises still need to translate their policies into concrete action and critically address gender diversity within their organizational culture.
- A critical mass of 30 per cent women is the need of the enterprises in order to reap the benefits of gender diversity. Almost half of the surveyed enterprises reported women holding less than 30 per cent of entry-level management positions.

- Men are still more likely to participate in the labour market than women. The average global labour force participation rate of women in 2018 stood at 48.5 per cent, while that of men was 75 per cent. This equates to a 26.5 percentage point gender gap in labour force participation.
- Just for Asia and the Pacific, the average female labour force participation rate has declined from 52.9 in 1991 to 45.3 per cent in 2018, dropping by 7.6 percentage points.
- Over 78 per cent of enterprises surveyed reported having a male CEO. With increasing enterprise size, the percentage of female CEOs drops from 26 per cent in small enterprises, to 20 per cent in mid-sized enterprises, to only 16 per cent in large enterprises.
- Many managers are segregated by gender, and women are more often managers in support functions, such as human resources, finance and administration, while men dominate functions that are considered to be more strategic, such as research and development, operations and profit and loss that typically lead to the chief executive level and board membership.
- There is a positive association between having a female CEO and greater gender diversity in middle, senior and top management positions, indicating that the presence of a female CEO creates incentives for gender diversity.
- Enterprise cultures that predominately require “anytime, anywhere” availability create an unfair impact on women, who generally carry greater household and family responsibilities. Policies that can lead to greater inclusivity and work-life balance for both men and women, such as flexible working hours and paternity leave, are important and worth exploring.

Benefits

- Enterprises with gender-inclusive cultures are over 60 per cent more likely to have improved profits and productivity and they are almost 60 per cent more likely to experience enhanced reputation, greater ease in attracting and retaining talent, and greater creativity and innovation.
- Enterprises that report these results see gender diversity as part of a larger dynamic of innovative and sustainable business practices, which also contribute to improved outcomes.
- Gender equality is also good economics. Increasing women’s labour force participation has been shown to boost the gross domestic product at the national level.
- The report also points to a study by the World Economic Forum - if the global gender gap in labour market participation is closed by 25 per cent by 2025, an additional \$5.3 trillion would be added to GDP globally.

Recommendations

- In an era of skill shortages, women represent a formidable talent pool that companies aren’t making enough use of. Smart companies who want to be successful in the global economy should make genuine gender diversity a key ingredient of their business strategy.
- Representative business organizations and employer and business membership organizations must take a lead, promoting both effective policies and genuine implementation.

ILO

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social justice and promote decent work by setting international labour standards. It was the first specialised agency of the UN.
- It has 187 member states: 186 of the 193 UN member states plus the Cook Islands are members of the ILO. The tripartite structure is unique to the ILO where representatives from the government, employers and employees openly debate and create labour standards.

- The International Labour Office is the permanent secretariat of the International Labour Organization. It is the focal point for International Labour Organization's overall activities.
- In 1969, the ILO received the Nobel Peace Prize for improving fraternity and peace among nations, pursuing decent work and justice for workers, and providing technical assistance to other developing nations.

EQUIP Project

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development is in the process to launch an ambitious ₹1.5 lakh crore EQUIP project to improve the quality and accessibility of higher education over the next five years. It is meant to bridge the gap between policy and implementation in the field of higher education and its accessibility.
- EQUIP stands for the **Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme** and was crafted by ten committees led by experts.
- The committees have drafted a strategy to:
 - Improve access to higher education, especially for underserved communities
 - Improve the gross enrolment ratio
 - Improve teaching and learning processes
 - Build educational infrastructure
 - Improve the quality of research and innovation
 - Use technology and online learning tools
 - Work on accreditation systems, governance structures and financing
- Given that the last budget only allocated ₹37,461 crore to the higher education department, the EQUIP project will need to mobilise money from the marketplace through the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA).
- This would go beyond HEFA's current ambit. The joint venture between the HRD Ministry and Canara Bank, set up in 2017, has been tasked with raising ₹1 lakh crore to finance infrastructure improvements in higher education by 2022.

Social and Labour Convergence Program

- The Social and Labor Convergence Programme (SLCP), an initiative for the textile and clothing industry, will be launched in India shortly. In the first roll-out phase, it will launch operations in India as well as China, Sri Lanka and Taiwan.
- The issues of Social and Labour Compliance become highly relevant in industries which are labour-intensive, and the textile and clothing industry is one such sector.
- There are many certifications and audits in the market currently and exporters spend huge sums and time for all such certifications.
- The mission of the SLCP is to improve working conditions by allowing resources that were previously designated for compliance audits to be redirected towards the improvement of social and labour conditions.
- The Social & Labor Convergence Program (SLCP) is an initiative led by the world's leading manufacturers, brands, retailers, industry groups, (inter)governmental organizations, service

providers and civil society organizations, to eliminate audit fatigue by replacing current proprietary tools with a standard-neutral Converged Assessment Framework.

- The SLCP is not a code of conduct or compliance program. It is a tool which provides a data set with no value judgement or scoring. It is however compatible with existing audit systems and codes of conduct. This means that the same data set can be used by a wide-range of stakeholders & interpreted according to their interests and criteria.

Benefits

- The benefits of SLCP for facilities are that it addresses audit fatigue by reducing the number of social audits and facilitates measuring of employment practices, thus improving working conditions & employee relations.
- It also redeploys resources towards improvement actions and fosters trust and collaboration between supply chain partners.
- Findings from research show that adoption of SLCP could unlock resources worth over \$1.5 million spent on duplicative audits in 2019 alone, rising to \$200 million by 2023.

Prepaid Payment Instruments

- The Reserve Bank of India has imposed penalties on five prepaid payment instrument (PPI) issuers (My Mobile Payments, PhonePe, Y-Cash Software Solutions, Vodafone m-pesa, and GI Technology) for violation of regulatory norms.
- The penalties have been imposed under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

Prepaid Payment Instruments

- PPIs are generally issued in the form of mobile wallets, smart cards and internet accounts/wallets and come with a pre-loaded value and in some cases a pre-defined purpose of payment. PPIs in the form of paper vouchers are no longer issued.
- They facilitate the purchase of goods and services, including financial services as well as inter-personal remittance transactions such as sending money to a friend or a family member.
- A company incorporated in India and registered under the Companies Act, 1956/ Companies Act, 2013 can issue and operate PPIs. They are **licensed and regulated by the Reserve Bank of India**.
- The cash loading of PPIs is limited to Rs 50,000 per month subject to overall limit of the PPI. No interest is payable on PPI balances.
- Amounts up to Rs 50,000 from individual inward Money Transfer Service Scheme (MTSS) remittances are permitted to be loaded or reloaded in PPIs.
- Any cross-border outward fund transfer for making remittances is not allowed.

Types of PPIs

- **Closed system PPIs**
 - The most common example of a closed system PPI is a brand-specific gift card. Such cards, physical or otherwise, can be used only at specific locations, and cannot be used to transfer funds from one account to another.
 - As these instruments cannot be used for payments or settlement for third party services, the issuance and operation of such instruments is not classified as payment systems requiring approval/authorisation by the RBI.

• Semi-closed System PPIs

- These PPIs are issued by banks (approved by RBI) and non-banks (authorized by RBI) and can be used at a group of clearly identified merchant locations/establishments which have a specific contract with the issuer (or contract through a payment aggregator/payment gateway) to accept the PPIs as payment instruments. Common examples are Oxigen and Mobikwik.
- These instruments do not permit cash withdrawal, irrespective of whether they are issued by banks or non-banks.

- **Open system PPIs:** The open system PPIs can be issued only by banks (approved by RBI) and can be used at any merchant outlet for any purchase or even cash withdrawal. A travel card is a type of open system PPI.

Service Trade Restrictiveness Index

- A study commissioned by the Commerce Ministry has found problems with the current method under which OECD ranks countries based on their services trade policies, indicating the outcomes are biased and counter-intuitive.
- Launched in 2014, the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (STRI), computed by the OECD, is available for a total of 45 economies (36 OECD and the rest non-OECD) and 22 sectors.

Criticisms

- The index seems to show the Indian services sector as one of the most restrictive, particularly in policy areas like foreign entry. This seems surprising as since 1991, the one area that has seen maximum liberalisation in India is FDI.
- The study suggests that there are both theoretical and empirical inconsistencies in the OECD methodology, for example, change in regulatory measures in one policy area can lead to dramatic changes in the STRI in another policy area which is not very useful for policy purposes.
- In addition, the data seems to have been generated by rather arbitrary procedures and reflects a developed country bias.
- In order to rectify this, the team of econometricians have designed a new way of measuring restrictiveness in the services trade that would be more robust and would not have a bias either for developed or developing countries.

About STRI

- Services are a major part of the global economy, generating more than two-thirds of global gross domestic product (GDP), attracting over three-quarters of foreign direct investment in advanced economies, employing the most workers, and creating most new jobs globally.
- Obstacles to global services trade, however, remain pervasive as national trade and regulatory policies in individual services sectors are often made with limited regard for economy-wide impacts.
- The STRI helps to identify which policy measures restrict trade. It provides policy makers and negotiators with information and measurement tools to improve domestic policy environment, negotiate international agreements and open up international trade in services.
- It can also help governments identify best practice and then focus their domestic reform efforts on priority sectors and measures.
- STRI indices take the value from 0 to 1, where 0 is completely open and 1 is completely closed.

3 Million Tech Jobs By 2023

- As per the Indian Staffing Federation (ISF), the apex body for the 'flexi' working industry, the Indian tech industry will add another three million new jobs in the next five years. With the additions, the size of the country's tech army will be 7 million by 2023.
- The ISF's tech employment projection comes as a big relief to millions of young techies and software engineering students amid talks of the move towards jobless growth with automation that replaces humans with robots.
- The numbers are based on the interactions with a wide range of companies, including Indian tech firms, MNCs, global capability centres of hundreds of international firms, enterprises across segments including e-commerce, pharma and telecom.
- There is a visible behavioural change happening in the IT and ITes sectors and the new jobs would come up in digital technology areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, Internet of things (IOT), data science, analytics, big data, blockchain and augmented reality.
- Jobs would also be created in newer technology areas that are presently unknown but are expected to emerge and evolve in the next few years.
- It also emphasised that India does not have a job problem rather an employed poverty problem and the only sustainable way to address this problem is through **formalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and financialization of the human capital**.
- India now has about 1,300 captive units and around 400 new captive units are coming up in 2019. The shift is attributed to a sharp rise in hiring by existing and new global in-house centres (GICs) due to technology innovation activities in India for their global markets.

India Staffing Federation (ISF)

- India Staffing Federation (ISF) is a global multinational organisation operating in the **United States**, that acts as an organizing union primarily for ethnic Indians in the field of job recruitment, as well as a source for business process outsourcing functions such as employment background screening.
- The Federation currently runs a network of over 20,000 job recruitment and BPOS businesses in the United States. They are primarily focused on placement in technology and science related professions, and other service industries requiring temporary employees.

Chief Risk Officer for NBFCs

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently directed that non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) with assets of more than ₹5,000 crore will have to appoint a Chief Risk Officer (CRO). The move comes in the wake of ongoing rating downgrades of non-banks which has raised fears of another liquidity crisis.

Background

- Many NBFCs have been under stress following the beleaguered Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS) group defaulting on its debt obligations, triggering panic in the financial markets.
- There is an imminent crisis in the NBFC sector due to credit squeeze, over-leveraging, excessive concentration and massive mismatch between assets and liabilities.
- Since then, the NBFCs have been struggling to get funds for their operations, as banks and mutual funds have been very cautious lending to them. Moreover, the cost of borrowing for these entities has also gone up as they rely more on retail bond issuances, external commercial borrowings, masala bonds, and securitisation for funds.

Guidelines

- The CRO shall be involved in the process of identification, measurement, and mitigation of risks and all credit products of NBFCs have to be inspected by the CRO, but his role in deciding credit proposals shall be limited to being an advisor.
- The risk officer is required to function independently to ensure highest standards of risk management. Hence, the CRO shall report directly to the managing director and chief executive officer or the risk management committee (RMC) of the board. Moreover, the board shall meet the CRO in the absence of the MD and CEO, at least on a quarterly basis.
- The CRO shall be a senior official in the hierarchy of an NBFC and shall possess adequate professional qualification or experience in the area of risk management.
- The CRO shall be appointed for a fixed tenure with the approval of the board and can be transferred or removed from the post before completion of the tenure only with the approval of the board and such premature transfer or removal shall be reported to the department of non-banking supervision of the regional office of RBI under whose jurisdiction the NBFC is registered.
- In case the NBFC is listed, any change in incumbency of the CRO should also be reported to the stock exchanges.
- The CRO will be entitled to voting rights in finance companies which use a committee structure to clear high-value loans with CRO as panel member.

United States' Currency Monitoring Watchlist

- United States has removed India from its currency monitoring watchlist. In its semi-annual foreign-exchange report to the US Congress, the Treasury Department did not mention India's name in its watchlist of countries with potentially questionable foreign exchange policies and currency manipulation.
- For India, this comes amid the ongoing trade spat between Washington and New Delhi. US has repeatedly claimed that India is a tariff king and imposes tremendously high tariffs on American products.
- The US compiles a list of countries which intervene in currency movements to obtain what it believes to be an unfair trade advantage.
- India, alongside China, Japan, Germany, Switzerland and South Korea, was placed in the bi-annual currency watch list in October last year. While India is dropped from the list, China continues to figure in it.

Criteria

- Countries with a current-account surplus equivalent to 2 % of GDP are eligible for the list.
- Other thresholds include repeated intervention in the currency markets and a trade surplus with the US of at least \$20 billion.

Significance

- Tweaks in currency policy has been used by America to browbeat countries that, from Washington's perspective, have hurt American businesses and consumers. It aims to dismantle unfair barriers to trade and achieve fairer and more reciprocal trade with major US trading partners.
- While the designation of a country as a currency manipulator does not immediately attract any penalties, it tends to dent the confidence about a country in the global financial markets.

RBI's Regulatory Cadre

- The Board Of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to create a specialised supervisory and regulatory cadre within the RBI in order to strengthen the supervision and regulation of commercial banks, urban cooperative banks and non-banking financial companies.
- The decision follows a series of events including the IL&FS defaults, ICICI Bank loan issue, Punjab National Bank fraud and the liquidity issues in the NBFC sector in the last two years.
- The board also reviewed the present structure of supervision at the RBI in the context of the growing diversity, complexities, and interconnectedness within the Indian financial sector.
- There were complaints that the RBI has been lax in the supervisory functions, especially in timely detection of frauds and poor governance in the banking sector.
- Last year even the Standing Committee on Finance had questioned the RBI for failing to take preemptive action in checking bad loans in the banking system prior to the Asset Quality Review undertaken in December 2015.
- The RBI has in its defence claimed that with the number of commercial bank branches being more than 1,16,000 in the country, it would be impossible to cover each and every branch under the RBI's supervisory process. However, the cadre will help the RBI in improving its supervisory capabilities significantly.

FCRA Act

- The Home Ministry has cancelled the FCRA licence of Infosys Foundation. The licence was cancelled at their own request and there was no violation.
- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and rules framed under it regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs in India.
- Being non-profit organisations, operations of NGOs are entirely reliant on donations, both domestic and foreign. In recent times, many NGOs have come under the government scanner for alleged contravention of FCRA and consequently many have lost their permit to receive foreign contribution.

Provisions of The Act

- The intent of the Act is to prevent use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activity detrimental to the national interest.
- It has a very wide scope and is applicable to a natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities (whether incorporated or not) as well as NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India. It is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It defines the term foreign contribution to include currency, article other than gift for personal use (not exceeding the value of INR 25,000) and securities received from foreign source.
- The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.
- The registration certificate is valid for a period of five years and must be thereafter renewed in the prescribed manner.

- NGOs not eligible for registration can seek prior approval from FCRA for receiving foreign funding. This permission is granted only for a specific amount of foreign funding from a specified foreign source for a specific purpose. It remains valid till receipt and full utilisation of such amount.

Criteria For Registration

- In order to be registered under the FCRA, an NGO must be in existence for at least three years and must have undertaken reasonable activity in its field for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be utilised.
- Neither the applicant nor any of its office bearers must have any records of conviction under any law or be under prosecution for any offence.
- The applicant must not have been found guilty of diversion or mis-utilisation of its funds.
- Acceptance of foreign contribution by the applicant must not prejudicially impact the sovereignty and integrity of India.

RBI's Vision 2021 Document

- RBI has recently released the Vision 2021 document for payment systems. It envisages to achieve a highly digital and cash-lite society through the goal posts of competition, cost effectiveness, convenience and confidence (4Cs).
- Payment and settlement systems are the backbone of any economy. The last decade has witnessed substantial developments in this area of activity across the country.
- The RBI, under powers from the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, has endeavoured to ensure that India has state-of-the-art payment and settlement systems.
- The endeavour is to also ensure increased efficiency, uninterrupted availability of safe, secure, accessible and affordable payment systems as also to serve segments of the population which are hitherto untouched by the payment systems.
- With this in view, the Vision aims to
 - Enhance customer experience, including robust grievance redressal
 - Empower payment System Operators and Service Providers;
 - Enable the Eco-system and Infrastructure;
 - Put in place a Forward-looking Regulation;
 - Undertake Risk-focussed Supervision

Initiatives

- Offer services that are affordable, accessible and inclusive.
- Harmonize turnaround time for resolution of customer complaints, including for card transactions.
- Set up a 24x7 helpline that will help in instilling confidence in customers regarding the digital payments system.
- Foster innovation in a responsible environment through regulatory sandbox.
- Encourage adoption of new technologies including for enhancement of services.

Other Backward Classes Commission

- Earlier, the Central government had appointed the Commission under **Justice (Retd) G Rohini** for examining the sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), which is set to submit its report.
- This is the first government-mandated exercise to quantify the skewed flow of benefits among different OBC communities and suggest steps to correct the imbalance.

Possible Suggestions

- **Current Situation:** Till date, sub-categorization of OBCs as recommended by a few Commissions and implemented by some states have all used indicators of social backwardness as the criteria.
- **Suggestion Of The Earlier Committees:** The **First Backward Class Commission report of 1955**, also known as the *Kalekar report*, had proposed sub-categorization of OBCs into backward and extremely backward communities. In the **Mandal Commission** report of 1979, a dissent note by member L R Naik proposed sub-categorization in intermediate and depressed backward classes. In 2015, former National Commission for Other Backward Classes under **Justice (Retd) Eswaraiah** asked for sub-categorization within OBCs into Extremely Backward Classes (Group A), More Backward Classes (Group B) and Backward Classes (Group C).
- **Sub quota:** The Committee is set to recommend a fixed quota, possibly between 8 and 10 % of the 27 per cent OBC quota for about **1,900 of the 2,633 castes** on the central list. Presently, half of these 1,900-odd castes have availed less than three per cent of reservation in jobs and education and the rest availed zero benefits during the last five years.
- **Benefits Cornered By Few:** Five year data on OBC quota implementation in central jobs and higher educational institutions showed that a very small section has cornered the lion's share.
- **New Method Of Classification:** In addition to fixed quotas within quotas, a significant recommendation of the Commission is that the **classification be based on relative benefits availed and not relative social backwardness**, which involves parameters such as social status, traditional occupations, religion, *etc.* Thus, using the quantum of benefits enjoyed by different communities to sub-categorize OBCs is a major departure from recommendations of several Commissions in the past.

The Rules Followed By Election Commission In Case Of Disagreement

- While the Election Commission is supposed to transact its business unanimously as far as possible, Commissioner **Ashok Lavasa** has dissented with the opinion of his colleagues in some recent matters.
- The ECI mainly has administrative functions in the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of elections. The Commission has to exercise its powers and perform its functions under **Article 324** in conformity with the provisions of **Sections 9 to 11** of the **Election Commission Act, 1991**.

The Current Practice

- **Procedure In Executive Matters:** In normal practice, while communicating the decision of the Commission in executive matters, the **majority view** is conveyed to the parties concerned. The dissent remains recorded in the file. Thus, all opinions carry equal weight, which means the CEC can be overruled by the two ECs.
- **Procedure In Judicative Matters:** In case dissent is to be recorded in a case of judicative nature — for example, in references by the President under **Article 103** of the Constitution or by the Governors under **Article 192** or in matters relating to splits in recognised national or state political parties under

the Symbols Order, the dissenting member may record a separate opinion/order. **For example-** separate opinions were recorded by the two ECs (S Y Quraishi and Navin Chawla) and the CEC (N Gopalaswami) in 2009 in the matter of alleged disqualification of Sonia Gandhi on the conferment of an honour by the government of Belgium.

- **General Working:** However, despite the existence of the provision to take decisions by majority since 1993, very rarely has dissent been recorded. When a matter is deliberated upon by the three Commissioners in a Commission meeting, they normally agree to a common course of action.

Karnataka Law On SC/ST Promotion Quota Upheld

- The Supreme Court upheld a 2018 Karnataka law, which grants reservation in promotion and consequential seniority to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in government services in the State.
- The 2018 law protects consequential seniority from April 24, 1978. The Karnataka legislature enacted the 2018 law after the Supreme Court invalidated the 2002 Act in **B K Pavitra vs Union of India**. Striking down the 2002 law in 2017, the Supreme Court had said that **Sections 3 and 4** of the Act were ultra vires of **Articles 14 and 16** of the Constitution on the ground that the exercise mandated in the Nagaraj judgment had not been carried out.
- The judgment is significant as it is the first verdict after a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, in the **Jarnail Singh Case** that declared that a State does not really have to collect quantifiable data on SC/ST backwardness before implementing reservation. To this extent, the Jarnail Singh judgment had modified a 2006 judgment in the Nagaraj case. The latter case had called for collection of quantifiable data on backwardness.

Jarnail Singh Case Decision

Offering respite

The Supreme Court has held that there is no need to collect quantifiable data of backwardness to provide reservation in promotions in government jobs for SCs/STs

The Nagaraj verdict

- The court in the M. Nagaraj verdict in 2006 had said that States were bound to provide quantifiable data on the backwardness of SCs/STs before providing them quota in promotions



The Indra Sawhney verdict of 1992

- The Supreme Court had held that a "test or requirement of social and educational backwardness cannot be applied to SCs/STs, who indubitably fall within the expression 'backward class of citizens'"

The court held that the portion of data collection in the Nagaraj judgment was "contrary" to the Indra Sawhney verdict, and held it "invalid"

What next?

The judgment will boost efforts to provide "accelerated promotion with consequential seniority" for Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes members in government services

SC Decision

- The reservation in promotion is step towards establishing the position of the **SCs and STs as worthy participants** in the affairs of governance is intrinsic to an equal citizenship.
- The **administrative efficiency** is an outcome of the actions taken by officials after they are appointed or promoted. It is not tied to the selection method itself.

Final Analysis

Policy-makers should heed the appeal contained in the judgment *i.e.* there is **no antithesis between the concept of efficiency and the inclusion of diverse sections of society** in the administration. While data on representation may be a requirement, the idea that reservation has an adverse effect on administration must be rejected.

NSSO and CSO Merger

- The government recently decided to merge the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) and formation of an overarching body called **National Statistical Office (NSO)**.
- Objective of restructuring is to strengthen and streamline the present nodal functions of Ministry and to bring in more synergy by integrating its administrative functions within the Ministry.
- **Criticism:** The recent order skips any mention of **National Statistical Commission (NSC)**, which has been overseeing body for all the statistical work done in India. Unlike the earlier resolution notified by MoSPI in June 2005, the recent order does not equate the Secretary (Statistics and Programme Implementation) with Chief Statistician of India. Thus, the order is being widely perceived as a dent on autonomy of Indian statistical system. Moreover, after being merged with CSO the character of NSSO will change and it will lose its existence. The changed character of NSSO will also bring it out of NSC's control.

Ban on Niqab in Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka has effectively banned the niqab, the face covering worn by some Muslim women.
- This step has been taken in the aftermath of Easter Sunday bombings.
- Sri Lanka is possibly the only country in Asia to pass such an order, and has joined several European nations in taking this step.
- The niqab is currently banned in **France and Belgium** (since 2011), **Austria** (since 2017), **Denmark** (since 2018).
- The **Netherlands** has a partial ban on wearing any kind of face cover in public transport, schools and hospitals.
- In **Germany**, the niqab is banned while driving. The full face veil is banned in **Quebec in Canada**, and in **Barcelona in Spain**.

UN Extends Sanctions Against South Sudan

- The U.N. Security Council approved a resolution extending an arms embargo and other sanctions against South Sudan.
- Although the resolution saw opposition from Russia, China and African countries, it managed to get 10 votes in favour while 5 were abstaining from the 15 member UNSC. As per the rule, in the 15-member council, a resolution presented for vote requires a minimum of nine votes for adoption.

Background

- In September 2018, a peace deal was signed to end a five-year civil war that killed nearly 400,000 people. Through this deal, President Salva Kiir's administration agreed to share power with rebels led by Riek Machar, his former deputy.
- But the committee overseeing its implementation says key elements have yet to be put in place and therefore justified the sanction.

All About UN Sanction

- The Security Council can take action to maintain or restore international peace and security **under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter**.

- Sanctions measures, **under Article 41**, encompass a broad range of enforcement options that do not involve the use of armed force.
- Today, there are **14 ongoing sanctions regimes** which focus on supporting political settlement of conflicts, nuclear non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism.
- Each regime is administered by a sanctions committee chaired by a non-permanent member of the Security Council.
- In the **2005 World Summit declaration**, the General Assembly called on the Security Council, to ensure that fair and clear procedures are in place for the imposition and lifting of sanctions measures.

Sovereign Internet Law Of Russia

Context

- Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed into law a “sovereign internet” bill.
- This will allow Russian authorities to isolate the country’s internet thereby creating its own, independent internet.

Key Highlights

- The new law aims to protect Russia from foreign online restrictions by creating "sustainable, secure and fully functioning" local internet.
- The law calls for the **creation of a monitoring and a management center** supervised by Roskomnadzor, Russia's telecoms agency.
- The measures proposed by law also include *creating technology to monitor internet routing and to steer Russian internet traffic away from foreign servers*, ostensibly to **prevent a foreign country from shutting it down**.

Will The New Law Lead To Even Greater Censorship In Russia?

- While it is true that Russia has banned certain services and websites in the past, it has been very selective with this approach.
- However, in this case, a full cut-off that suddenly isolates Russia from the Internet would almost certainly disrupt all of these services causing a non-trivial economic impact.

Will this law affect the rest of the internet and could it possibly lead to internet fragmentation?

- The Internet is still largely open. All sorts of public and private organisations are interconnected through a variety of points.
- Its Internet has evolved in a much more integrated way, along with European and global Internet services.
- Now that these roots are firmly intertwined, it will be **very difficult to separate**.

Extra Mile

Why China Became Successful In Implementing Massive Internet Censorship?

In case of China, it has been possible because of two reasons:

- Firstly, some **monopolies**, which are **state-run, control telecommunications** within China and when it was decided to add a layer of censorship to the Internet, these state-run telecom firms complied. This created the largest filtering infrastructure of Internet traffic in the world, with a few choke points in and out of the country.

- Secondly, China **introduced the policy in a much earlier era of the Internet**, allowing the complete ecosystem to evolve in an organic manner, while a great firewall was also firmly in place.

UK Parliament Declares Climate Change Emergency

Context

- Lawmakers in the UK Parliament have declared "**an environment and climate emergency**".
- Through this, UK has become the **first country in the world** to do so.
- The **non-binding motion** calls the government to **make proposals** to Parliament in the **next six months** to "**restore the UK's natural environment and to deliver a circular, zero-waste economy.**"

What Is A Climate Emergency?

- There is no single definition of what is climate emergency but many analysts believe that they want to be carbon-neutral by 2030.
- Some councils have promised to introduce electric car hubs or build sustainable homes to try to achieve that goal.

Significance Of This Step

- **Largely symbolic** as it does not legally compel the government to act.
- However, many believe that it is a **first step to radical action** and will enable councils to help reduce carbon emissions.

New Points-Based Green Card System By US

Context

- U.S. President Donald Trump has announced to unveil a **new merit and points-based immigration policy** that will bring significant changes to the way green cards are allocated.
- Every year, the US issues nearly 1.1 million green cards, which gives foreign nationals life-time permission to live and work in the US and a path to citizenship in five years.
- Currently about **12% of those receiving green cards** entered the U.S. based on skill-based visas (such as the H1B), while some **66% are family-based green cards**.

Proposed Changes

- It will dramatically **reduce the number of family-based green cards** and moving towards a **points-based ("merit-based") system** that will reward, among other factors, education, skills and English language proficiency.
- Points will be awarded to applicants **based on their education, work experience, age (more points for younger workers), English language ability** etc.
- New immigrants will have to show that they can financially support themselves and will need to pass a civics exam.
- The new proposal will increase **skills-based green cards** to 57%.
- People given Green Cards on **humanitarian and diversity grounds** will now only constitute **10% of all Green Card recipients**.
- The existing green cards will be replaced with '**Build America**' visa.

Impact On India

- Over 70% of H1B visas, for skilled workers, went to Indians in fiscal year 2018. Many of these are eventually converted to green cards.
- Indian residents getting green cards have been in the range of 57,000-62,000 in the 2015-2017 period.
- Though this step provides a **greater opportunity for skilled Indians**, it is **far from clear** that a shift towards a points-based system will make the prospects of Indian skilled migrants wanting to settle in the U.S. easier, **as bringing family members over, especially elderly parents, may get more com**

US Removes India from Currency Monitoring List

News

- The US government has removed India from its **currency monitoring watchlist**.
- In October 2018, India, alongside **China, Japan, Germany, Switzerland and South Korea**, was placed in the bi-annual currency watch list.

Criteria For Inclusion In The List

Country’s inclusion is based on the three key criteria:

- (1) a significant **bilateral trade surplus** (equivalent to \$20 billion) with the United States,
- (2) a material **current account surplus** (equivalent to 2 per cent of gross-domestic product), and
- (3) engaged in persistent **one-sided intervention in the foreign exchange** market.

Countries remain on the list for two report cycles to ensure that if there are any improvements in the performance of the country it should not be due to temporary reasons.

What Happens If A Country Gets Included In The List?

- The designation of a country as a currency manipulator *does not immediately attract any penalties*.
- However, it tends to dent the confidence about a country in the global financial markets.

Why India Was Included In This List?

- Last year, India met two of the three criteria. India had a significant bilateral goods trade surplus with the United States, totalling USD 23 billion in 2017.
- India increased its purchases of foreign exchange over the first three quarters of 2017. Despite a sharp drop-off in purchases in the fourth quarter, net annual purchases of foreign exchange reached \$56 billion in 2017, equivalent to 2.2 per cent of GDP.

Why India Has Been Removed Now?

India did not qualify for inclusion in the currency manipulator list on at least two of three criteria.

| New US treasury threshold for trade partners | | | |
|--|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Benchmark | Previous Threshold | New Threshold | Where India Stands |
| Goods surplus with the US | \$20 billion | \$20 billion | \$21 billion* |
| Current account balance | 3% of GDP | 2% of GDP | -2.40% |
| Net forex purchases | 2% of GDP | 2% of GDP | -1.70% |

Black List of Indian-origin People

The Home Ministry has decided to do away with its **‘Black List’ of Indian-origin people** (also known as local adverse lists)

About Black List

- The Indian-origin people who took asylum abroad under the plea of alleged persecution in India are included in the list.

- It is maintained by Indian missions and posts abroad.
- Those who are in the Black list *are denied visa services by Indian missions and posts.*

Impact Of This Step

With the cancellation of black listing, such asylum seekers along with their family will be granted visa and consular services at par with foreigners of the country in which they are living.

Visit of Vice President of India to Vietnam

Vice President of India Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu paid an **Official Visit to Vietnam** from 9-12 May 2019.

Key Highlights

- VP delivered the Keynote Address at the **16th United Nations Day of Vesak Celebration** at Tam Chuc Pagoda, Ha Nam Province.
- He also met the Indian community and Vietnamese beneficiaries of the **Jaipur Foot Artificial Limb Fitment** Camp organized in Vietnam under the '**India for Humanity**' initiative launched to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

About 16th United Nations Day of Vesak

- It was celebrated at Tam Chuc pagoda in Vietnam's northern Ha Nam province.
- This year's theme: '**Buddhist Approach to Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Sustainable Societies**'.
- Vesak (also known as **Buddha Jayanti or Buddha Purnima**) is celebrated to commemorate *birth of Lord Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment (nirvana) his passing away*, equivalent time is the **Full Moon day in the month of May**.
- The UN Day of Vesak Celebration is internationally a cultural and humanistic festival of the United Nations International Organizing Committee.
- The established process of this celebration commenced in year 2000.

GSP (Generalised System Of Preferences) Trade Preference Programme

A group of 25 influential American lawmakers has urged the US Trade Representative not to terminate the GSP programme with India after the expiry of the 60-day notice ending on May 3. They claimed that the country's companies seeking to expand their exports to India could be affected.

What Is Generalised System Of Preferences?

- GSP program is a preferential tariff system extended by developed countries to developing countries. It is a preferential arrangement in the sense that it allows **concessional low/zero tariff imports** of some eligible products from developing countries to the markets of GSP providing countries.
- However, the GSP has criteria which include the beneficiary nations in respecting arbitral awards in favour of United States citizens or corporations, combating child labour, respecting internationally recognised worker rights, providing adequate and effective intellectual property protection, and providing the United States with equitable and reasonable market access.

Background

- The Trump administration, which periodically reviews the GSP eligibility, launched a review of India's compliance with GSP market eligibility criteria last April.
- The process of evaluating GSP eligibility provides a discretionary criteria to the US President.

- Under this, the President must take into account while determining the GSP eligibility is the “extent to which such country has assured the United States that it will provide equitable and reasonable access to its markets and basic commodity resources and the extent to which it has assured the United States it will refrain from engaging in unreasonable export practices.”
- A **mandatory 60 days** must pass after notice has been given to the beneficiary countries and to Congress, during which time there is, at least technically, the possibility of negotiation.
- After the 60-day period, a beneficiary country can be taken off the GSP list by a presidential proclamation.

Possible Impact Of This Step

- Around **US\$5.7 billion of exports by India** to the US in 2017 were under the GSP, **amounting to 13 per cent** of total Indian exports to the US. If removed from the beneficiaries' list, India would no longer be allowed to enter the United States duty-free.
- However, India has maintained that since **most of its US-bound shipments are already out of the GSP purview**, the impact of Trump's new decision **may not be very significant**.
- Under the existing GSP framework, India was getting **tariff preference on 5111 tariff lines** out of 18770 tariff lines in the US -and on only 2165 tariff lines, the tariff advantage was 4% or more.
- India's exports to the US stood at \$50.57 billion in 2017 with a GSP tariff advantage of only \$190 million, which was less than 0.4% of our exports. Naturally, its withdrawal will have a marginal impact.

International Day of UN Peacekeepers

- Observed on – May 29
- 2019 Theme - “Protecting Civilians, Protecting Peace”
- This year’s theme has been selected to mark the upcoming 20th anniversary when for the **first time the Security Council explicitly mandated a peacekeeping mission (UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone)** to protect civilians.
- The **first UN peacekeeping mission** - established on **29 May 1948**, with deployment of a small number of UN military observers to the Middle East to form the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to monitor the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

International Religious Freedom 2019 Report

Released by - US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

Key Facts (India Specific)

- India continues to remain a **Tier 2 country**, a list it has been *unable to get off of since 2009*.
- Tier 2 countries are those in which “violations engaged in or tolerated by the government during 2018 are serious and characterized by at least one of the elements of the ‘systematic, ongoing, and egregious” CPC (Country of Particular Concern) standard.
- India is facing declining religious freedom, apart from increased securitisation and politicisation of religion.
- **Reasons cited** for deteriorating minority condition - Role of Hindutva/Hindu extremist groups, India’s anti-conversion laws, cow-protection lynch mobs, etc.

- Commission Chairperson, **Tenzin Dorjee**, **dissented with the view that India's religious freedoms continued to decline in 2018.**

RISAT-2B

- PSLV-C46 successfully launched the RISAT-2B satellite from Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.
- Developed for - **military and general surveillance purposes.**
- RISAT-2B is a radar imaging earth observation satellite weighing about 615 kg. The satellite is intended to provide services in the field of Agriculture, Forestry and Disaster Management.
- The radar imaging satellite can observe and image the earth from about 500 km. It is an improvement over the remote sensing satellites in natural resources observation and management.
- It has a sensor called the 'Synthetic Aperture Radar', which takes high-quality radar images. With a mission life of five years, the satellite would also be used for military surveillance.
- In the past decade, ISRO has launched two satellites in the RISAT series, beginning in 2009 with the Israeli-built RISAT 2, and the second one, -RISAT 1, in 2012. The RISAT 1 is no longer operational.
- According to the space agency, it will launch 4-5 more such satellites in 2019 to form a constellation and substantially increase the country's capabilities.

India Joins Global Fight in Action Against Online Extremism

- Initiative - "**Christchurch Call to Action**"
- Launched by - France and New Zealand
- *Aims at curbing the posting and spread of extremist violence and hate speech on the Internet, looking to stop the use of social media as a tool for terrorism*
- USA - **not part of the initiative** for now

Army Scout Masters Competition

- **5th edition** of International Army Scouts Competition 2019 to be held in **Jaisalmer** City, Rajasthan.
- Aim - to enhance international military to military and technical co-operation between the States participating in the Scout Masters Competition.
- This is the **first time that India is the venue** for this Competition, which is part of **International Army Games steered by Russia.**
- Since 2015, Russia has been holding International Army Games which involves around 30 countries.

New Chief of Indian Navy

- Admiral Karambir Singh took charge as the **24th Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS)** from Adm. Sunil Lanba.
- He is the first helicopter pilot of the Navy to become the CNS.
- The tenure of a Service Chief is three years or 62 years of age, whichever is earlier.

Indian Coast Guard Ship Vigraha

- It was decommissioned at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
- It was a frontline Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) built by Mazagaon Dock Ltd, Mumbai.
- It was also leased to Sri Lankan Navy on a dry lease from August 2008 to January 2011.

Indo – Myanmar Coordinated Patrol

- 8th Indo-Myanmar Coordinated Patrol (IMCOR) - held at Port Blair between Navies of India and Myanmar
- Also Known as CORPAT
- CORPAT - first held in March 2013
- Aim - to address issues of terrorism, illegal fishing, drug trafficking, human trafficking, poaching and other illegal activities inimical to the interest of both nations

MANAV Atlas

- Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has launched the MANAV Project to create an open and interactive atlas of human biology.
- It aims to create a unified human atlas by mapping the molecular details of every cell, tissue and organ in the human body by curating all the available information present in scientific literature and public databases.
- MANAV is funded by DBT and co-funded by the technology company Persistent Systems. It will be executed by two of India's major research Institutes, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, and National Center for Cell Sciences (NCCS), Pune
- It is for the first time that Indian scientists will be mapping every single tissue of the human body to have a deeper understanding of the roles of tissues and cells linked to various diseases.
- The project can be signed up by students who are in their final year graduation and above. Participants having a science background but not necessarily involved in active scientific research can be part of this network.

Significance

- Recent times have witnessed an explosion in the amount of biological data generated. There are millions of research articles with pivotal information on human health and disease, spanning from single molecule resolution to the level of the whole organism.
- However, this information is scattered in different databases, repositories and in the text of journal articles. MANAV will help in extracting and correlating this unstructured data.
- So far, researchers and students have had little or no expertise in reading scientific literature and develop or build further information on the same. This platform will impart key skills to the student community to read classified scientific literature, in this case, on individual tissue-basis, and perform annotation and curation.
- The project aims to understand and capture the human physiology in two stages – in a normal stage and while in a disease stage. Such a database, once ready, can come handy in tracing the causes of a disease, understanding specific pathways and ultimately decode the body's disease stage linked to tissues and cells.

- The reliably collated data can be useful for both future researchers and parallelly, to the clinicians and drug developers, who finally handle human bodies in disease conditions.
- Structuring such unstructured data would help to attain a holistic view of how changes at the molecular level affect the organ and human body. It would also help in pinpointing gaps in the current knowledge towards which the future research goals can be directed.
- Eventually, such a database would be used by researchers for disease modelling, drug discovery and personalized healthcare.

Square Kilometre Array (SKA)

- Scientists at Cambridge have finished designing the 'brain' of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), the ***world's largest radio telescope***.
- When complete, the SKA will enable astronomers to monitor the sky in unprecedented detail and survey the entire sky much faster than any system currently in existence.
- SKA's Science Data Processor's (SDP) estimated computing power would be around 250 PFlops - 25 percent faster than IBM's Summit, the current fastest supercomputer in the world.
- In total, up to 600 petabytes of data will be distributed around the world every year from SDP — enough to fill more than a million average laptops.

About SKA

- The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project is an international effort to build the world's largest radio telescope, with eventually over a square kilometre (one million square metres) of collecting area. The SKA will eventually use thousands of dishes and up to a million low-frequency antennas
- Its unique configuration will give the SKA unrivalled scope in observations, largely exceeding the image resolution quality of the Hubble Space Telescope.
- It will also have the ability to image huge areas of sky in parallel a feat which no survey telescope has ever achieved on this scale with this level of sensitivity
- SKA scientists have focussed on various key science goals for the telescope, each of which will re-define the understanding of space such as
 - Challenge Einstein's seminal theory of relativity
 - How the very first stars and galaxies were formed just after the Big Bang
 - Help scientists understand the nature of a mysterious force known as dark energy
 - Understand the vast magnetic fields which permeate the cosmos

Athena and LISA Missions

- Scientists are in the process of combining the observing power of two future European Space Agency missions, Athena and LISA, that would for the first time allow them to study the cosmic clash of two supermassive black holes and their mysterious aftermath.
- Supermassive black holes, with masses ranging from millions to billions of Suns, sit at the core of most massive galaxies across the Universe. It is not known how these huge, enormously dense objects took shape, nor what triggers a fraction of them to start devouring the surrounding matter at extremely intense rates, radiating copiously across the electromagnetic spectrum and turning their host galaxies into 'active galactic nuclei'.

- Tackling these open questions in modern astrophysics is among the main goals of two future missions in ESA's space science programme: Athena, the Advanced Telescope for High-ENERgy Astrophysics, and LISA, the Laser Interferometer Space Antenna. Currently in the study phase, both missions are scheduled for launch in the early 2030s.
- Scientists expect that a fraction of the mergers found by LISA, especially those within distances of a few billion light years from the earth, will give rise to an X-ray signal that can be eventually seen by Athena

Athena

- It will be the largest X-ray observatory ever built, investigating some of the hottest and most energetic phenomena in the cosmos with unprecedented accuracy and depth.
- It is designed to answer two fundamental questions: how supermassive black holes at the centre of galaxies form and evolve, and how 'ordinary' matter assembles, along with the invisible dark matter, to form the wispy 'cosmic web' that pervades the Universe.
- It will measure several hundreds of thousands of black holes, from relatively nearby to far away, observing the X-ray emission from the million-degree-hot matter in their surroundings.

LISA

- It will be the first space-borne observatory of gravitational waves—fluctuations in the fabric of spacetime produced by the acceleration of cosmic objects with very strong gravity fields, like pairs of merging black holes.
- Gravitational-wave astronomy, inaugurated only a few years ago, is currently limited to the high-frequency waves that can be probed by ground-based experiments like LIGO and Virgo.
- These experiments are sensitive to the mergers of relatively small black holes—a few times to a few tens of times more massive than the Sun.
- LISA will expand these studies by detecting low-frequency gravitational waves, such as the ones released when two supermassive black holes collide during a merger of galaxies. If two supermassive black holes merge anywhere in the cosmos, LISA will see it.

CCMB Scientists Sequence Asiatic Lion Genome

- For the first time, the entire genome of Asiatic lion, an endangered species, has been sequenced by scientists from CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology.
- This firsthand information would help to better understand the evolution of Asiatic lions and also make possible comparative analysis with other big cats as the complete genome of royal Bengal tiger, African Cheetah and Jaguar are already available.
- The study noted that the evaluation of genetic diversity placed the Asiatic lion in the lowest bracket of genomic diversity index highlighting the gravity of its conservation status.
- The genome sequencing would enable scientists to develop specific markers to study population genetics (the differences at the gene level within a population) and get newer insights into its population status and subsequent disease and population management.
- The final objective is to understand the species at DNA level and study if there are any specific problems with regard to adaptability to environment or behaviour vis-à-vis other big cats.

Asiatic Lion

- The population of the Asiatic lion is very low — only 523 animals remain.

- Its range is restricted to the Gir National Park in the Indian state of Gujarat.
- It is classified as Endangered under the IUCN Red List, because of its small population size and area of occupancy

World Heritage Site

- The architectural heritage of Orchha town in Madhya Pradesh, which depict peculiar style of the Bundela dynasty, have been included in the tentative list of the UNESCO's world heritage sites following a proposal sent by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to the United Nations (UN) body.
- According to the rules, to be a part of UNESCO's World Heritage sites, the heritage or any historical site first has to be on the tentative list. After it makes to the tentative list, another proposal is sent to the UNESCO

Orchha

- Orchha is situated on the banks of the Betwa river. It is located around 80 km away from Tikamgarh district in Madhya Pradesh and 15 km from Jhansi of Uttar Pradesh.
- Orchha was built by king Rudra Pratap Singh of Bundela dynasty in the 16th century. The ancient town is famous for its Chaturbhuj Temple, Orchha fort complex, Raja Mahal among others.
- The Bundela architecture has Mughal influence since the two dynasties were very close. The famous King of Bundela dynasty Veer Singh Dev was a close friend of Mughal emperor Jahangir and fought wars as Akbar's aid.
- Orchha is also famous for its two elevated minaret called Saavan and Bhadon and its four palaces -- Jahangir Palace, Raj Mahal, Sheesh Mahal and Rai Praveen Mahal -- and for its concept of open bungalows, stone work windows, animal statues depicting the culture of Bundelkhand.
- It is the only place in India where Lord Ram is worshipped as a king with a dedicated temple in his name called Sri Ram Raja Mandir

WHS

- A **World Heritage Site** is a landmark or area which is selected by UNESCO as having cultural, historical, scientific or other form of significance, and is legally protected by international treaties. The sites are judged important to the collective interests of humanity.
- To be selected, a World Heritage Site must be an already classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area). It may signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of the intellectual history on the planet.
- The sites are intended for practical conservation for posterity, which otherwise would be subject to risk from human or animal trespassing, unmonitored/uncontrolled/unrestricted access, or threat from local administrative negligence.

Pattachitra Paintings

- Cyclone Fani has teared down an artists' village in the coastal district of Puri, in the process destroying many Pattachitra paintings
- In the Sanskrit language, Patta means cloth and Chitra means picture. It is a general term for traditional, cloth-based scroll painting, based in the eastern Indian states of Odisha and West Bengal.

- It is known for its intricate details as well as mythological narratives and folktales inscribed in it. Most of these paintings depict stories inspired by Jagannath and Vaishnava sect
- The creativity of Pattachitra artists is not just limited to canvas and cloth. They celebrate the art form by painting murals on the outer walls of their houses.
- A floral border is a must in Pattachitra paintings, and so is the use of natural colours, restricting them to a single tone. This creates a distinct look and feel that is typical to Pattachitra.
- It has largely remained uninfluenced by the other schools of Indian paintings, namely the Mughal and Pahadi styles as Odisha had remained uninvaded by the Mughals for a fairly long time, giving the art form a window to evolve its own unique styles which gave birth to the Puri school of painting.

Sri Vedanta Desikan

- The Vice President, recently released a postage stamp to commemorate the 750th birth anniversary of Sri Vedanta Desikan.
- Initiatives like bringing out commemorative postage stamps are not only meant to pay tribute to the great contributions of visionaries like Sri Vedanta Desikan but also aimed at inspiring the younger generation to follow in their footsteps.

About Sri Vedanta Desikan

- Sri Vedanta Desikan was a Sri Vaishnava guru/philosopher and one of the most brilliant stalwarts of Sri Vaishnavism in the post-Ramanuja period.
- Born in the year 1268 CE, he was a poet, devotee, philosopher and master-teacher (desikan).
- He was the disciple of Kidambi Appullar, also known as Aathreya Ramanujachariar, who himself was of a master-disciple lineage that began with Ramanuja.
- He is considered to be an avatar (incarnation) of the divine bell of Venkateswara of Tirumalai by the Vadakalai sect of Sri Vaishnavite.
- He composed many different works in languages such as Tamil, Sanskrit, Prakrit and Manipravala (a mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil) that revealed his ingenuity, creativity, logic, linguistic expertise, devotional fervour and erudite scholarship.
- One of the essential features of his philosophy was the aspect of inclusion, anyone irrespective of caste and creed could join the Sri Vaishnava fold. It a truly democratizing movement that obliterated caste distinctions.

Buddha Purnima

- Buddha Purnima is a festival traditionally celebrated to commemorate the birth of the Prince Siddhartha Gautama, later the Gautama Buddha and founder of Buddhism.
- It is also celebrated in South and Southeast Asia as Vesak, which also acknowledges the enlightenment and death (mahaparinirvan) of the Buddha.
- Gautama Buddha was born in Lumbini in modern-day Nepal, and raised in the Shakya capital of Kapilvastu, in the present day Tilaurakot, Nepal.
- At the age of thirty five, he attained enlightenment (nirvana) underneath a Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya. He delivered his first sermon at Sarnath. At the age of eighty, he died at Kushinagar, India.

Thrissur Pooram

- Thrissur Pooram is an annual Hindu festival held in Kerala, India. It is held at the Vadakkunnathan Temple in Thrissur every year on the Pooram day - the day when the moon rises with the Pooram star in the Malayalam Calendar month of Medam. It is the largest and most famous of all poorams.
- Thrissur Pooram was the brainchild of Raja Rama Varma, famously known as Sakthan Thampuran, the Maharaja of Cochin.
- The pooram festival mainly happens between two groups representing the geographic divisions of Paramakkavu and Thiruvambadi. They compete in their respective presentations of richly caparisoned elephants and traditional orchestra called panchavadyam.
- The goddesses of Thiruvambadi and Paramakkavu are believed to be taking part in the pooram. Though the presiding deity at Thiruvambadi is Lord Krishna, it is the second in importance deity of Goddess Bhagavati that takes part in the pooram.

Stucco Sculpture Found at Phanigiri

- Archaeologists in Telangana have unearthed a rare treasure in the form of a life-sized stucco sculpture from a Buddhist site at Phanigiri in Suryapet. It is the biggest stucco sculpture found in the country so far.
- The 1.74 metre statue has been put on display nearly 1700 years after it was created by the craftsmen at Phanigiri during the peak of Ikshvaku dynasty rule.
- According to officials of department of heritage, the life-size figurine found in the excavations is thought to represent one of Bhodhisattva in Jathaka Chakra.
- Apart from the life-sized stucco, these excavations brought to light a Mahastupa, apsidal chaitya grihas, votive stupas, pillared congregation halls, viharas, platforms with staircases at various levels, sculptural panels with Brahmi inscriptions.
- The unearthing of a large number of artefacts and structures at Telangana's Phanigiri site has thrown light on the Buddhist civilisation that thrived there.
- Measures are being taken to mend the sculpture and conserve it for future generations.

Bodhisattva

- A bodhisattva is a Buddhist deity who has attained the highest level of enlightenment, but who delays its entry into paradise in order to help the earthbound.
- The bodhisattva, known in Sanskrit as Avalokitesvara, takes both male and female form and is associated with the qualities of mercy and compassion.
- Its Chinese incarnation, Guanyin – who is always represented as female – translates as the 'perceiver of sounds'.

Vinayak Savarkar

- Vinayak Damodar Savarkar popularly known as Veer Savarkar was born in 1883. He was an Indian independence activist, politician, lawyer, writer, and the formulator of the Hindutva philosophy.
- As a response to the right wing Muslim league, Savarkar joined the Hindu Mahasabha and popularized the term Hindutva, previously coined by Chandranath Basu.

- Savarkar was also a pragmatic practitioner of Hindu Philosophy. He advocated for validating religious myths/blind faith against the test of modern science. In that sense he was also a rationalist and a reformer.
- Savarkar's revolutionary activities began while studying in India and England, where he was associated with the India House and founded student societies including Abhinav Bharat Society and the Free India Society, as well as publications espousing the cause of complete Indian independence by revolutionary means.
- Savarkar published *The Indian War of Independence* about the Indian rebellion of 1857 that was banned by British authorities.
- He was arrested in 1910 for his connections with the revolutionary group India House. Following a failed attempt to escape Savarkar was sentenced to two life terms of imprisonment totaling fifty years and was moved to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, but released in 1921.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

- One of Bengal's towering cultural icons, and among the greatest personalities of the Bengal Renaissance, Vidyasagar was a polymath who reconstructed the modern Bengali alphabet and initiated pathbreaking reform in traditional upper caste Hindu society.
- The focus of his social reform was women — and he spent his life's energies trying to ensure an end to the practice of child marriage and initiate widow remarriage.
- Vidyasagar's Bengali primer, *Borno Porichoy*, remains, more than 125 years after his death in 1891, the introduction to the alphabet for nearly all Bengali children.
- Born in 1820 in a Brahmin family, he studied Sanskrit grammar, literature, Vedanta philosophy, logic, astronomy, and Hindu law for more than 12 years at Sanskrit College in Calcutta, and received the title of Vidyasagar — Ocean of Learning — at the age of just 21.
- Privately, Iswar Chandra studied English literature and philosophy and was appointed principal of Sanskrit College in 1851 at the young age of 31 years old.
- Vidyasagar followed in the great reformist tradition of Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833), and argued, on the basis of scriptures and old commentaries, in favour of the remarriage of widows in the same way as Roy did for the abolition of Sati.
- His earliest effort at social reform, however, came in the second half of 1850 when, in a paper on the evils of child marriage, he launched a powerful attack on the practice of marrying off girls aged 10 or even younger, pointing to social, ethical, and hygiene issues, and rejecting the validity of the Dharma Shastras that advocated it.
- In January and October 1855, Vidyasagar wrote his two famous tracts on the Marriage of Hindu Widows, basing his argument entirely on reason and logic, and showing that there was no prohibition on widows remarrying in the entire body of 'Smriti' literature (the Sutras and the Shastras).