



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

- IAS SELF STUDY GUIDE -

CURRENT AFFAIRS

APRIL 2018

© INSIGHTS ACTIVE LEARNING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<p>GS PAPER - I _____ 8</p> <p><i>Paper 1 Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times. _____ 8</i></p> <p>1. Konark Sun Temple _____ 8</p> <p>2. Kalamkari art _____ 8</p> <p>3. Adopt a Heritage Project _____ 9</p> <p>4. National Culture Fund _____ 9</p> <p>5. Walmiki and Malhar, two new languages discovered _____ 10</p> <p>6. 11th World Hindi Conference _____ 10</p> <p>7. Baisakhi _____ 11</p> <p>8. Bagh-e-Naya Qila _____ 12</p> <p>9. Adilabad Dokra and Warangal Durries get GI tag _____ 12</p> <p>10. Adopt a Heritage' scheme _____ 13</p> <p>11. Saraswati Samman _____ 14</p> <p>12. Krishna Circuit _____ 14</p> <p>13. International Buddhist Conference _____ 14</p> <p>14. Silappathikaram _____ 15</p> <p><i>Paper 1 Topic: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors /contributions from _____ 16</i></p> <p>“Satyagraha se Swachhagraha” campaign _____ 16</p> <p><i>Paper 1 Topic: Role of women and women’s organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues. _____ 17</i></p> <p>1. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) _____ 17</p> <p>2. Swadhar Greh Scheme _____ 18</p> <p>3. Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme _____ 18</p> <p><i>Paper 1 Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies. _____ 19</i></p> <p>1. Happy cities summit _____ 19</p> <p>2. Smart rating of garbage free cities _____ 19</p>	<p>GS PAPER - II _____ 20</p> <p><i>Paper 2 Topic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure. _____ 20</i></p> <p>Right to convert is part of fundamental right of choice _____ 20</p> <p><i>Paper 2 Topic: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions. _____ 20</i></p> <p>1. Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal _____ 20</p> <p>2. PIL misuse _____ 21</p> <p>3. Scheduled areas _____ 22</p> <p><i>Paper 2 Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act. _____ 23</i></p> <p>Simultaneous elections _____ 23</p> <p><i>Paper 2 Topic: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies. _____ 24</i></p> <p>1. Process to impeach the Chief Justice of India _____ 24</p> <p>2. First Woman Lawyer to be Appointed As Supreme Court Judge: _____ 25</p> <p><i>Paper 2 Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies. _____ 25</i></p> <p>1. Fast track task Force _____ 25</p> <p>2. Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) _____ 25</p> <p>3. NCLT _____ 26</p> <p>4. Competition Commission of India _____ 26</p> <p>5. Drugs Technical Advisory Board _____ 27</p> <p>6. National Company Law Appellate Tribunal _____ 28</p> <p>7. National Commission for Safai Karamcharis _____ 29</p> <p>8. Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) _____ 29</p> <p>9. Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) _____ 30</p> <p>10. National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) _____ 31</p> <p>11. Defence Planning Committee (DPC) _____ 32</p> <p>12. National Commission for Minorities (NCM) _____ 33</p> <p>13. Island Development Agency _____ 34</p>
---	--

14. MoU between ICI and IGNTU _____	34
15. Zonal Council _____	35
16. Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) _____	35
17. National Safety Council _____	36
<i>Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.</i>	
_____	36
1. National Register of Citizens (NRC) _____	36
2. 'one candidate, one seat' _____	37
<i>Paper 2 Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.</i>	
_____	38
1. POSHAN Abhiyaan _____	38
2. PM Ujjwala Yojana _____	38
3. NITI Forum for Northeast _____	39
4. WHO directives call for support for breastfeeding	40

5. Aspirational District Programme _____	40
6. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana _____	41
7. TRIFED _____	42
<i>Paper 2 Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.</i>	
_____	43
1. SC/ST Atrocities Act _____	43
2. Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018 _____	44
3. Oxytocin _____	44
4. Phosphorus pentoxide: _____	45
5. Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) _____	45
6. Gram Swaraj Abhiyan _____	46
7. e-FRRO scheme _____	46
8. DARPAN-PLI App _____	47
9. Cabinet to discuss death penalty for rape of minors _____	47
10. Inter-country removal & retention of children	49

11. National Biopharma Mission _____	50

Paper 2 Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources. _____ 50

1. NIRF India Rankings 2018 _____ **50**

2. FSSAI introduces Project Dhoop _____ **51**

3. Viral hepatitis _____ **52**

Paper 2 Topic: Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders. _____ 53

1. Gram Swaraj Abhiyan _____ **53**

2. Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0 _____ **53**

Paper 2 Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance-applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures. _____ 54

1. POCSO e-Box _____ **54**

2. Integration of e-SANAD portal and NAD – National Academic Depository _____ **55**

3. Make BCCI a public body _____ **55**

4. e-Vidhan project _____ **56**

Paper 2 Topic: Role of civil services. _____ 56

Civil Services Day _____ **56**

Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations. _____ 57

1. Kishanganga project _____ **57**

2. India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway _____ **57**

Paper 2 Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. _____ 58

1. Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Competency of Seafarers _____ **58**

2. G7 foreign ministers' summit _____ **59**

3. Peace Mission 2018 _____ **59**

Paper 2 Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora. 60

1. US places India under watch list _____ **60**

2. Study in India programme _____ **60**

Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate. _____ 61

1. Guidelines for accreditation of journalists _____ **61**

2. World Heritage Site _____ **62**

3. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) _	63
4. UN Disarmament Commission _____	64
5. International Energy Forum _____	64
6. Regional 3R Forum _____	65
7. Headquarters Agreement between India and the International Solar Alliance _____	66
8. Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) _____	67
9. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) _	68
10. UN launches road safety trust fund _____	68
11. Asian premium _____	69
12. Weisbaden conference _____	70
13. World heritage day _____	71
14. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) __	72
15. Meeting of the Development Committee (DC) and IMFC of the World Bank Group and the IMF	72
16. South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) _____	73
17. World Press Freedom Prize _____	73
18. World Immunization Week _____	73
19. World Press Freedom Index _____	74
GS PAPER - III _____	76
<i>Paper 3 Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development.</i>	
_____	76
1. RBI bars banks from dealing with virtual currencies _____	76
2. Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) _____	76
3. Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework _	77
4. Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) _____	78
5. Inflation targeting _____	78
6. Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) _____	79
<i>Paper 3 Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.</i>	
_____	80
Economic freedom index _____	80
<i>Paper 3 Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.</i>	
_____	81
1. Sovereign Gold Bond scheme _____	81
2. International SME Convention-2018 _____	81

Paper 3 Topic: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers. _____ 82

Uttarakhand's second mega food park at Udham Singh Nagar _____ 82

Paper 3 Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing. _____ 83

1. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) _ 83

2. 'Samridhi – the virtual assistant' _____ 84

3. Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) ___ 84

4. National Bamboo Mission _____ 85

Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. _____ 86

1. Bharatmala Programme _____ 86

2. Char Dham project _____ 87

3. UDAN – RCS _____ 88

4. National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) _____ 89

5. SEBI amends norms for REITs _____ 89

6. FAME scheme _____ 89

7. PMGSY _____ 90

8. Uniform road tax _____ 91

9. Leisang in Manipur _____ 92

Paper 3 Topic: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology. _____ 92

1. Road map for drones _____ 92

2. Commonwealth innovation index _____ 93

3. Commonwealth Innovation Fund _____ 94

4. Atal Tinkering Labs _____ 94

5. Earth BioGenome Project _____ 95

6. Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project ___ 96

7. Atal New India Challenge _____ 96

8. Bhabha Kavach _____ 97

Paper 3 Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights. _____ 97

1. RemoveDebris system _____ 97
2. Point Nemo _____ 98
3. Advanced Supersonic Parachute Inflation Research Experiment (ASPIRE) _____ 99
4. Icarus- farthest star _____ 99
5. BIS Act 2016 _____ 100
6. Newly discovered antibiotic class, Odilorhabdins _____ 100
7. Parker Solar Probe _____ 101
8. IIT-Delhi launches first 5G radio lab _____ 102
9. IRNSS-1I _____ 102
10. Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) _____ 103
11. Lunar 'Gateway' space station _____ 103
12. Bureau of Indian Standards _____ 104
13. Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Service (INCOIS) _____ 104
14. ESA's space observatory Gaia _____ 105
15. National Intellectual Property (IP) Award 2018 _____ 105
16. Priority watch list _____ 106
17. Resource Prospector mission _____ 106
18. Hubble captured first image of surviving companion to supernova _____ 107
19. Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport (InSight) _____ 107
20. Sentinel-3B satellite _____ 108

Paper 3 Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment. _____ 109

1. Delhi becomes first city to roll-out Euro VI fuel _____ 109
2. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) _____ 110
3. Van Dhan Vikas Kendra _____ 110
4. Manas National Park _____ 111
5. Kaleswaram project _____ 111
6. NAAMES Mission _____ 112
7. National Clean Air Programme _____ 113

8. Rushikulya _____ 113
9. Coastal Regulation Zone _____ 114
10. Ramsar tag likely for Sunderbans _____ 115
11. Earth Day 2018 _____ 115
12. New system to measure air quality _____ 116
13. World's smallest land fern _____ 116
14. Fejervarya goemchi _____ 116
15. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) _____ 117
16. Great Barrier Reef _____ 117
17. Trapdoor matriarch _____ 118

Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management. _____ 118

- National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP) _____ 118**

Paper 3 Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas. _____ 119

1. Protected Area Permit regime _____ 119
2. AFSPA lifted in Meghalaya _____ 120

Paper 3 Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate. _____ 121

- Narcotics Control Bureau _____ 121**

Paper 3 Topic: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention. _____ 122

1. 'Internet Security Threat Report' _____ 122
2. Financial Action Task Force (FATF) _____ 122
3. Cybersecurity Tech Accord _____ 123
4. Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance 2018 _____ 124

- Facts for Prelims _____ 126**

1. India's longest elevated road _____ 126
2. India is now second largest mobile phone producer _____ 126
3. "Thank You India" Campaign 2018 _____ 126
4. Walong tri-junction _____ 126
5. Malaysia approves law against fake news _____ 126
6. Fimbristylis agasthyamalaensis _____ 126
6. India pips Japan, becomes second largest manufacturer of crude steel _____ 127
7. Samta Diwas _____ 127
8. UTTAM APP for Coal Quality Monitoring _____ 127

9. National Maritime Day _____	127	22. India Mobile Congress - 2018 _____	129
10. Gaganshakti-2018 _____	127	23. Babur cruise missile _____	129
11. 'Chakravat' _____	127	24. Film Friendly Award _____	130
12. Sahyog – Hyeoblyeog 2018 _____	128	25. Kayakalp awards _____	130
13. Railway link between India and Nepal _____	128	26. First Indian IT Company To Touch 100 Billion Dollar Market Value _____	130
14. "Desert Tiger 5" _____	128	27. Madras HC to introduce e-court fee payment	130
15. Sugar tax comes into effect in the UK _____	128	28. Which city in India recently became the first city to run on 100% Renewable Energy during Daytime? _____	130
16. World's first microfactory to help tackle e-waste hazard _____	128	29. India highest recipient of remittances _____	130
17. Delhi's IGI airport among the top 20 busiest airports _____	128	30. Sagar Kavach _____	130
18. Equatorial Guinea _____	129	31. HARIMAU SHAKTI 2018 _____	130
19. Ratnagiri Mega Refinery _____	129	32. What is underwriting rule? _____	131
20. Exercise Gaganshakti-2018 _____	129		
21. Defence, aerospace SME fund _____	129		

GS PAPER - I

Paper 1 Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

1. Konark Sun Temple

Context:

- An aesthetically designed interpretation centre with world-class facilities that showcases the unique architectural features of Kalingan era was recently inaugurated at Sun Temple, Konark.
- **The Indian Oil Foundation has developed the interpretation centre and the tourist facilitation centre** at a cost of Rs. 45 crore.



Key facts for Prelims:

- Built in the 13th century, the Konark temple was conceived as a gigantic chariot of the Sun God, with 12 pairs of exquisitely ornamented wheels pulled by seven horses.
- It was built by **King Narasimhadeva I**, the great ruler of Ganga dynasty.
- The temple is included in **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 1984 for its architectural greatness and also for the sophistication and abundance of sculptural work.
- The temple is perfect blend of **Kalinga architecture**, heritage, exotic beach and salient natural beauty.
- It is protected under the National Framework of India by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act (1958) and its Rules (1959).
- The Konark is the **third link of Odisha's Golden Triangle**. The first link is Jagannath Puri and the second link is Bhubaneswar (Capital city of Odisha).
- This temple was also known as **'BLACK PAGODA'** due to its dark color and used as a navigational landmark by ancient sailors to Odisha. Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the "White Pagoda".
- It remains a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the **Chandrabhaga Mela** around the month of February.

Sources: pib.

2. Kalamkari art

Context:

- A 'Kalamkari art museum' has been opened at Pedana in Andhra Pradesh. The museum traces the history of the art and displays the process of extraction of natural colours from various sources.

Kalamkari:

- Kalamkari is **an ancient style of hand painting done on cotton or silk fabric with a tamarind pen, using natural dyes**. The word Kalamkari is derived from a Persian word where 'kalam' means pen and 'kari' refers to craftsmanship.
- There are **two identifiable styles of Kalamkari art in India – Srikalahasti style and Machilipatnam style**.
 - In the Machilipatnam style of Kalamkari, motifs are essentially printed with hand-carved traditional blocks with intricate detailing painted by hands.



- On the other hand, Srikalahasti style of painting draws inspiration from the Hindu mythology describing scenes from the epics and folklore. This style holds a strong religious connect because of its origin in the temples.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Kalamkari and its subtypes.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Adopt a Heritage Project**Context:**

- Infrastructure conglomerate GMR and tobacco company ITC Ltd are currently bidding to adopt the Taj Mahal under the 'Adopt a Heritage' project. The iconic tomb in Agra was not initially on the list of monuments to be adopted under the Adopt a Heritage scheme, because of its importance.
- However, it was added to the list in February and a seven-member Oversight and Vision Committee will now decide whom to hand over the bid to.

**ADOPT A HERITAGE****Adopt a Heritage Project:**

- **What is it?** The 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme' of Ministry of Tourism was launched on World Tourism Day i.e. 27th September, 2017. **This project is a key initiative of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archeological Survey of India (ASI)**, to develop the heritage sites / monuments and making them tourist-friendly to enhance the tourism potential and their cultural importance in a planned and phased manner.
- **How it works?** The project plans to entrust heritage sites/monuments and other tourist sites to private sector companies, public sector companies and individuals for the development of tourist amenities. The project aims to develop synergy among all partners.
- **Monument Mitras:** Successful bidders selected for adopting heritage sites / monuments by the Oversight and Vision Committee shall be called as Monument Mitras. The basic and advanced amenities of the tourist destinations would be provided by them. They would also look after the operations and the maintenance of the amenities. The 'Monument Mitras' would associate pride with their CSR activities.

Facts for Prelims:

- In 2007, the government of Maharashtra had announced its own adopt-a-monument scheme, inviting private and public sector companies to adopt heritage sites for a period of five years.
- This was extended to 10 years in 2014 because of the poor response from companies. So far, the only site to be adopted by a private company under this scheme is Osmanabad district's Naldurg fort, where tourism amenities are now being managed by Unity Multicons.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Adopt a Heritage, Monument Mitras and World Tourism Day.
- **For Mains:** Need for conservation of heritage sites.

Sources: pib.

4. National Culture Fund**Context:**

- As per latest data released by the government, 34 projects have been successfully implemented under National Culture Fund Scheme till date, thus, promoting, protecting and preserving India's cultural heritage.

About National Culture Fund:

- National Culture Fund (NCF) was set up as a Trust under the Charitable Endowment Act, 1890 in November 1996 by the Government, with a view to mobilize extra resources through Public Private Partnerships.

- **The National Culture Fund is managed and administered by a council headed by Hon'ble Culture Minister** to decide the policies and an Executive Committee headed by Secretary, Culture to actualize those policies.
- The Fund aims at inviting the participation of the corporate sector, non-government organizations, private/public sector as well as individuals in the task of promoting, protecting and preserving India's cultural heritage.
- All the projects undertaken by the NCF are completed within a specified period, in accordance with an MoU signed by NCF with the concerned donor organization.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** National Culture Fund.

Sources: pib.

5. Walmiki and Malhar, two new languages discovered

Context: Researchers have discovered two new languages- Walmiki and Malhar.

Key facts for Prelims:

- The languages are **categorised 'endangered'** as the number of people speaking is small. These languages are spoken in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Only a few people living in the forest and hilly areas speak these languages.
- **Walmiki is spoken in Koraput of Odisha and on the bordering districts of Andhra Pradesh.** Walmiki is an isolate language i.e. it does not belong to a family of languages. The name of the language is also interesting and indicative because the speech community claims descent from the great Indian saint-poet Valmiki.
- **Malhar is spoken in a remote and isolated hamlet which is almost 165 km from Bhubaneswar.** The community consists of about 75 speakers including children. **It belongs to the North Dravidian subgroup of the Dravidian family of languages** and has close affinities with the other North Dravidian languages like Malto and Kurux spoken in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar.

Background:

- The Union Government has been making efforts to document the endangered tribal and minor languages. There are several languages unknown to the world and waiting to be discovered and documented.
- India is also considered a linguists Paradise and termed a sociolinguistic giant.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Walmiki and Malhar.
- **For Mains:** Need for protection of endangered languages.

Sources: the hindu.

6. 11th World Hindi Conference

Context:

- The 11th World Hindi Conference (WHC) is being organized in August 2018 in Mauritius by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India in association with the Government of Mauritius.

About the conference:

- **The event, held once in three years, is dedicated to Hindi language.** It sees participation from Hindi scholars, writers and laureates from different parts of the world who contribute to the language.

Key facts for Prelims:

- The decision to organize the 11th edition of the Conference in Mauritius was taken at the 10th World Hindi Conference held in Bhopal, India in September 2015.
- The first World Hindi Conference was held in 1975 in Nagpur, India. Since then, ten such Conferences have been held in different parts of the world.
- The main theme of the Conference is "Vaishvik Hindi Aur Bharatiy Sanskriti".

- The MEA has also set up the World Hindi Secretariat in Mauritius. The main objective of the WHS is to promote Hindi as an international language and further its cause for recognition at the United Nations as an Official Language.

What's important?

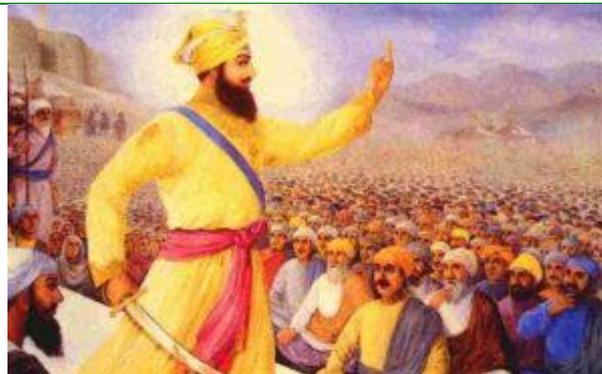
- **For Prelims:** World Hindi Conference, World Hindi Secretariat.
- **For Mains:** Need for recognition of Hindi at UN as an Official language.

Sources: the hindu.

7. Baisakhi

Context:

- Festival of Baisakhi is usually celebrated on April 13, but once in every 36 years the festival is celebrated on April 14. This year the occasion will be commemorated on April 14. It marks the advent of Baisakhi, which is an auspicious day primarily for the Sikh community, and is also known as Vaisakhi, Khalsa Sirjana Diwas, or the birth of Khalsa.



About Baisakhi:

- The word is derived from 'Baisakh', which is the second month of the Sikh calendar (Nanakshahi calendar). It signifies a new year of harvest for the community.
- The festival is primarily a thanksgiving day when farmers pay tribute to their deity for the harvest and pray for prosperity in future.
- Sikhs follow **a tradition named Aawat Pauni on Vaisakhi**. People gather to harvest wheat that grew in the winter. Drums are played and people recite Punjabi doha (couplet) to the tune while harvestin on Baisakhi day.
- Baisakhi also marks **the birth of Khalsa**, the collective body of all initiated Sikhs, also called the "Guru Panth"—the embodiment of the Guru. On March 30 in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh gathered his followers at his home in Anandpur Sahib, a city which is now home to several Gurdwaras. At this gathering, Khalsa was inaugurated.

The birth of five 'K's:

- The five 'K's are the five principles of life that are to be followed by a true Khalsa. These include 'Kesh' or hair, which implies to leave the hair uncut to show acceptance towards the form that God intended humans to be in; 'Kangha' or wooden comb, as a symbol of cleanliness; the third of the marks of being a Sikh pronounced on Baisakhi day was 'Kara' or iron bracelet, as a mark to remind a Khalsa of self-restraint; 'Kacchera' or knee-length shorts, to be worn by a Khalsa for always being ready to enter battle on horseback; and 'Kirpan', a sword to defend oneself and the poor, the weak and the oppressed from all religions, castes and creeds.

Science behind Baisakhi:

- The festival of Baisakhi is celebrated amongst farmers as the festival of harvest. The month of April is considered as the harvesting time for the Rabi Crops, the crops which are sown during winter seasons.
- Since the photoperiod becomes larger, the short day plants start to flower and give fruits and grains, which are now ready to be harvested. Therefore, the farmers gear up in their fields and start harvesting the crops.

Facts for Prelims:

- In other parts of India at this time, Bengalis celebrate Poila Boishakh (Bengali New Year), Assamese celebrate Bohag Bihu (Assamese New Year) and Puthandu (Tamil New Year) is celebrated in Tamil Nadu— as New Year festivals such as Baisakhi.

Sources: the hindu.

8. Bagh-e-Naya Qila

Context:

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will be using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to map the contours of the area around the Bagh-e-Naya Qila excavated garden inside the Golconda Fort. It has roped in the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) to carry out the mapping.

About Bagh-e-Naya Qila:

- The Naya Qila garden inside Golconda Fort was built by successive rulers of the Deccan and is one of the few symmetrical gardens extant.
- There are strange figures and animals worked out of stone and stucco on the walls of the outer fort facing the Naya Qila.
- In 2014, when the ASI excavated the area after diverting the water flow, it discovered water channels, settlement tanks, walkways, fountains, gravity pumps, and a host of other garden relics.

Applications:

- GPR can have applications in a variety of media, including rock, soil, ice, fresh water, pavements and structures. In the right conditions, practitioners can use GPR to detect subsurface objects, changes in material properties, and voids and cracks.

Limitations:

- The most significant performance limitation of GPR is in high-conductivity materials such as clay soils and soils that are salt contaminated. Performance is also limited by signal scattering in heterogeneous conditions (e.g. rocky soils).

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Naya Qila and GPR technology.
- For Mains:** GPR technology, applications and limitations.

Sources: the hindu.

What is Ground penetrating radar (GPR) technology?

- Ground-penetrating radar (GPR) is a geophysical method that uses radar pulses to image the subsurface.
- This nondestructive method uses electromagnetic radiation in the microwave band (UHF/VHF frequencies) of the radio spectrum, and detects the reflected signals from subsurface structures.

How it works?

- Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) uses a high frequency radio signal that is transmitted into the ground and reflected signals are returned to the receiver and stored on digital media.
- The computer measures the time taken for a pulse to travel to and from the target which indicates its depth and location. The reflected signals are interpreted by the system and displayed on the unit's LCD panel.

9. Adilabad Dokra and Warangal Durries get GI tag

Context:

- Two craft forms that are unique to Telangana were recently granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the GI registry in Chennai.

Adilabad Dokra:

- It is an ancient metal craft that is popular in the state's tribal regions.
- The uniqueness of this art form is that no two sculptures are the same, as they are not made out of a pre-designed cast.
- The craftsmen of this art form belong to the Woj community, commonly referred to as Wojaris or Ohjas in the rural areas of Telangana.
- They use brass as their main material and an ancient casting technique called 'cire perdue'. As part of this technique, the craftsmen use clay and design a model of the sculpture that they want to create. They wrap the clay with wax threads before baking the mould, so that the wax melts away and the molten metal is poured into the mould.



- The common items made by the craftsmen include small idols and statues of tribal deities, jewellery, bells, small-scale animal sculptures and others.

Warangal durries:

- In this style of durries, weavers create beautiful patterns and dye them using vegetable colours, which are washed in flowing water after the printing process.
- Warangal district became a renowned hub for weaving these rugs due to the availability of cotton, which is grown by farmers in the area.

About GI tag:

What is it?

- A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.

Significance of a GI tag:

- Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

Security:

- Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

Sources: the hindu.

10. Adopt a Heritage' scheme

Context:

- The Tourism ministry has awarded the Letters of Intent to nine agencies for 22 monuments of Phase-IV of the scheme, including the Taj Mahal in Uttar Pradesh, Chittorgarh Fort in Rajasthan.
- The private players will undertake gap analysis of the actual requirement of the basic and advanced amenities, within the permissible guidelines of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and prepare a Vision Bid Proposal accordingly for the site opted by them.
- Once vision bid is accepted, MoU will be signed with the related party for upkeep of the Monument for overall enhanced tourist experience.

Adopt a Heritage Project:

- **What is it?** The 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme' of Ministry of Tourism was launched on World Tourism Day i.e. 27th September, 2017. This project is a key initiative of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archeological Survey of India (ASI), to develop the heritage sites / monuments and making them tourist-friendly to enhance the tourism potential and their cultural importance in a planned and phased manner.
- **How it works?** The project plans to entrust heritage sites/monuments and other tourist sites to private sector companies, public sector companies and individuals for the development of tourist amenities. The project aims to develop synergy among all partners.
- **Monument Mitras:** Successful bidders selected for adopting heritage sites / monuments by the Oversight and Vision Committee shall be called as Monument Mitras. The basic and advanced amenities of the tourist destinations would be provided by them. They would also look after the operations and the maintenance of the amenities. The 'Monument Mitras' would associate pride with their CSR activities.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Adopt a Heritage, Monument Mitras and World Tourism Day.
- **For Mains:** Need for conservation of heritage sites.

Sources: pib.

11. Saraswati Samman

Context:

- Gujarati poet, playwright and academic Sitanshu Yashaschandra has been selected for the 2017 Saraswati Samman for his collection of verses titled Vakhar.

About the award:

- Saraswati Samman is the annual award given to an outstanding literary work in any Indian language mentioned in Schedule VIII of the Constitution and published in 10 years preceding the specified award year.
- It is the highest recognition in the field of Indian literature in the country and carries a citation, a plaque and award money of ₹15 lakh.
- The award, now in its 27th year, is presented by the KK Birla Foundation, a literary and cultural organisation that also gives the Vyas Samman for Hindi, and Bihari Puraskar for Hindi and Rajasthani writers of Rajasthan.

12. Krishna Circuit

Context:

- The PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) and the Indian Yoga Association (IYA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to facilitate interaction and cooperation between the two organisations to promote wellness, spiritual and cultural tourism in the Krishna Circuit.

Krishna Circuit:

- Krishna Circuit is among the thirteen thematic circuits identified for development under Swadesh Darshan Scheme.
- Twelve destinations have been identified for development under Krishna circuit namely Dwarka (Gujarat), Nathdwara, Jaipur & Sikar (Rajasthan), Kurukshetra (Haryana), Mathura, Vrindavan, Nandgaon, Gokul, Barsana, & Govardhan (Uttar Pradesh) and Puri (Odisha).

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- The Tourism Ministry had launched 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme with an objective to develop theme-based tourist circuits in the country. These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- The scheme is 100% centrally funded for the project components undertaken for public funding.
- To leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.
- Funding of individual project will vary from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by PMC (Programme Management Consultant).
- A National Steering Committee (NSC) will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.
- A Mission Directorate headed by the Member Secretary, NSC as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/ UTs governments and other stake holders.
- PMC will be a national level consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Krishna Circuit and Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

Sources: the hindu.

13. International Buddhist Conference

Context:

- As part of 2562nd Buddha Jayanti celebrations, International Buddhist Conference was held in Lumbini, the birth place of Gautama Buddha.
- The basic objective of the conference was to disseminate teachings of Gautam Buddha and spread the messages of nonviolence, brotherhood, co-existence, love and peace to the international community.

14. Silappathikaram

Context:

- A rare dance panel of Nayak period and an inscribed pillar of Chola period have been found on an abandoned brick mound at Pathalapettai near Kiliyur in Tiruchi.
- **Silappathikaram** has references to such ritualistic performances by rural folks.

The dance panel:

- The dance panel is depicted on a stone slab that measures 1.21 metres in length and 33 centimetres in height.
- Four pairs of well dressed male and female dancers, holding some object in one of their hands, are seen engaged in a ritualistic dance in the panel. Three pairs are shown hugging each other while the last pair is dancing keeping a distance between.
- All of them are decked with ornaments and different head gears. The female deity with a flower in the right hand seen between the first two pairs and the pot depicted between the last two pairs denote the ritualistic nature of the dance.

About the pillar:

- The pillar found at the spot has an inscribed base. The base has a Tamil inscription of Chola paleography with a few Grantha letters used in between.
- Though seven lines are visible, the last two are not readable.
- The inscription records that a certain Rejaladeviyar Sativinjei, queen of Iladevayan, had gifted that pillar.
- A sketchy figure of a Mugalinga is seen sculpted on the first half of the pillar, suggesting its conversion into a Linga.

Silappatikaram:

- It is one of the Five Great Epics of Tamil Literature according to later Tamil literary tradition. A poet-prince from Kodungallur near Kochi, referred to by the pseudonym Ilango Adigal, is credited with this work.
- The epic revolves around Kannagi, who having lost her husband to a miscarriage of justice at the court of the Pandyan Dynasty, wreaks her revenge on his kingdom.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Silappatikaram.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 1 Topic: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors /contributions from

“Satyagraha se Swachhagraha” campaign

Context:

- To commemorate the launch of Champaran Satyagraha over a century ago on 10th April, 1917, **Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, in coordination with the Government of Bihar, is working to spread the message of Swachhata** across the country by initiating the “**Satyagraha se Swachhagraha**” campaign.
- Under the campaign, Swachhagrahis from different parts of the country were invited to Bihar, where they worked with 10,000 Swachhagrahis from Bihar to “trigger” behaviour change throughout the 38 districts of the State and build momentum of the jan andolan further.

Significance of the campaign:

- Mahatma Gandhi launched the Champaran Satyagraha over a century ago, on 10th April, 1917, to give the country freedom from foreign rule.
- April 10th, 2018 marks the end of the centenary year celebrations of the Champaran Satyagraha, and is going to be celebrated through the “Satyagraha se Swachhagraha” campaign, which is aimed at achieving freedom from filth.

About SBM- Gramin:

- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Gramin, launched on October 2, 2014 is the largest behaviour change campaign ever attempted in the field of sanitation in the world.
- It aims to build an ODF (Open Defecation Free) and Swachh Bharat by October 2, 2019 as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.
- SBM-Gramin mainly focuses on ensuring the use of toilets, besides their construction. The States and their implementing agencies will be given incentives for meeting performance standards: reducing open defecation, sustaining their open defecation-free status and improving solid and liquid waste management in rural areas.

Significance of the scheme:

- In Rural India, this would mean improving the levels of cleanliness through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making villages Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitised.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Satyagraha se Swachhagraha, SBM- Gramin and Champaran Satyagraha.

About the Champaran Satyagraha:

- It was undertaken in the erstwhile undivided Champaran district in northern Bihar. Mahatma Gandhi went there in April, 1917 on learning about the abuses suffered by the cultivators of the district, forced into growing indigo by British planters/estate owners.
- Even Gandhi was reluctant to commit himself to task in the beginning. But he was so thoroughly persuaded by Rajkumar Shukla, an indigo cultivator from Champaran that he decided to investigate into the matter.
- Gandhi's method of inquiry at Champaran was based on surveys by the volunteers. The respondents who willingly gave statements should sign the papers or give thumb impressions.
- For those unwilling to participate, the reasons must be recorded by the volunteers. The principal volunteers in this survey were mostly lawyers like Babu Rajendra Prasad, Dharnidhar Prasad, Gorakh Prasad, Ramnawami Prasad, Sambhusaran and Anugraha Narain Sinha.

Outcomes:

- In June 1917, the British administration declared the formation of a formal inquiry committee with Gandhi aboard. The Government accepted almost all its recommendations.
- The principal recommendation accepted was complete abolition of Tinkathia system. It was a major blow to the British planters who became resentful. But they could not prevent the passage of Champaran Agrarian Act in Bihar & Orissa Legislative Council on March 4, 1918.

Sources: pib.

Paper 1 Topic: Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

1. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)

Context:

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has made total payment of Rs. 271.66 crores to beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY).
- The payment has been made to 11,47,386 beneficiaries across the country.

Need for special attention:

- Under-nutrition continues to adversely affect majority of women in India. In India, every third woman is undernourished and every second woman is anaemic.
- An undernourished mother almost inevitably gives birth to a low birth weight baby.
- When poor nutrition starts in-utero, it extends throughout the life cycle since the changes are largely irreversible.
- Owing to economic and social distress many women continue to work to earn a living for their family right up to the last days of their pregnancy.
- Furthermore, they resume working soon after childbirth, even though their bodies might not permit it, thus preventing their bodies from fully recovering on one hand, and also impeding their ability to exclusively breastfeed their young infant in the first six months.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** PMMVY.
- **For Mains:** Need for the scheme and its significance.

About PMMVY:

- Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is **a maternity benefit rechristened from erstwhile Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)**. The IGMSY was launched in 2010.
- The scheme is **a conditional cash transfer scheme** for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births.

Exceptions: The maternity benefits under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) are available to all Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers (PW&LM) except those in regular employment with the Central Government or State Government or Public Sector Undertaking or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.

Funding: The scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40 while for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States; it is 90:10. It is 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

Sources: pib.

2. Swadhar Greh Scheme

Context:

- Recently released government data shows that there are 559 Swadhar Greh presently functional in the country with 17231 beneficiaries. Swadhar Greh is a DBT compliant scheme.

As per guidelines of the Swadhar Greh Scheme, to seek financial assistance the agency should meet following requirements:

- The agency should be either recognized by State/UT under existing law or should be well known with the experience or working in the field for at least 3 years and its work should be reported satisfactory by the State Govt./UT Administration concerned.
- It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women's welfare/social welfare for a minimum period of two years.
- Its financial position should be sound.
- It should have facilities, resources, experience and personnel to undertake the management of such project.
- It should run Swadhar Greh on a no-profit basis.
- It should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc at Swadhar Greh.

What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Swadhar Greh Scheme and its significance.

About Swadhar Greh Scheme:

- The Swadhar scheme was launched by **the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development** in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.
- The scheme provides shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need.
- The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.

Implementation of the scheme:

- The State Governments/UT Administration invite applications from eligible organizations and the proposals which fulfil the norms are placed before a Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) chaired by Secretary(WCD) of the State/UT concerned.

Sources: pib.

3. Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme

Context:

- Government of India is implementing Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme to empower rural women through community participation. The scheme is envisaged to work at various levels, and at the National level (domain based knowledge support) and State level (State Resource Centre for Women) technical support to the respective governments on issues related to women is provided.

About Mahila Shakti Kendra:

What is it?

- It is envisioned as a one-stop convergence support service for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition.

What it does?

- It will aim to improve declining child sex ratio, ensure survival and protection of the girl child, ensuring her education and empowering her to fulfil her potential. It will provide an interface for rural women to approach the government for getting their entitlements and for empowering them through training and capacity building.
- At the national level, the Mahila Shakti Kendra will provide domain-based knowledge support while at the state level, it will cater to the State Resource Centre for Women that will provide technical support to the respective government on issues related to women, the district and block level centres, and will provide support to the PMMSK and also give a foothold to Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao in 640 districts.

Sources: pib.

Paper 1 Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

1. Happy cities summit

Context: The 2018 Happy Cities Summit is being held in Andhra Pradesh.

About the summit:

- The first 'Happy Cities Summit: Amaravati 2018' is a unique event bringing the best of minds in urban innovation across the world. While the Government of Andhra Pradesh is hosting it, the event partners are Dalberg, Confederation of Indian Industries, and Centre for Liveable Cities (Singapore).
- The Happy Cities Summit: Amaravati 2018 will be centered on the foundational principles of happy cities: 'Citizen-centric governance', 'Liveable Communities', 'Clean & Healthy Environment', and 'Vibrant Economies'.
- Objective of the summit is to evolve a framework for thinking about and measuring 'city happiness' as well as a declaration and set of principles for guiding policy and action in the development of 'happy cities', especially relevant for cities in the developing world.
- Thinkers, designers, architects, planners, city leaders, and entrepreneurs will discuss and share best practices, innovations and ideas for enhancing societal happiness in the cities of the 21st century.

2. Smart rating of garbage free cities

Context:

- The ministry of urban affairs has launched the first workshop on star rating of garbage-free cities under the Swachh Bharat Mission. The star rating of garbage-free cities would create healthy competition among cities across the country.

About the star rating initiative:

- **What is it?** The star-rating initiative, developed by the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban will be rating cities on a 7-star rating system based on multiple cleanliness indicators for solid waste management.
- **Indicators:** These include Door to Door Collection, bulk generator compliance, source segregation, sweeping, scientific processing of waste, scientific land filling, plastic waste management, construction and demolition management, dump remediation & citizen grievance redressal system etc.
- **Vision:** Vision statement of the star-rating protocol states that "All cities achieve "Garbage Free" status wherein at any point of time in the day, no garbage or litter is found in any public, commercial or residential locations (including storm drains and water bodies) in the city (except in litter bins or transfer stations); 100% of waste generated is scientifically managed; all legacy waste has been remediated and city is scientifically managing its municipal solid waste, plastic waste and construction & demolition waste. Additionally, there must be a steady reduction in the waste generated by the city and visible beautification of the city to achieve a clean & aesthetically pleasing city".
- **Rating:** Cities can be rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 star based on their compliance with the protocol conditions specified for each of the rating. Further city should be ODF (Open Defecation Free) before it could be given rating of 3 star or above. While cities may self-declare themselves as 1-star, 2-star or 4-star, MoHUA will carry out an additional verification through an independent third party to certify cities as 3-star, 5-star or 7-star. Cities will need to get recertified themselves every year to retain their star-status.
- **Significance of the initiative:** The most significant feature of the rating protocol is that it provides stakeholders with a single metric to rate a city's cleanliness, rather than separately evaluating multiple factors which contribute to a city's overall cleanliness and garbage free status. The distinctive feature of Star Rating System will be that many cities can have higher stars as compared to only one city can be "Cleanest city" under Swachh Survekshan.

Background:

- The Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) focuses on two key objectives- eradication of open defecation and 100 per cent scientific solid waste management across all 4,041 statutory towns and cities.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Star rating initiative and Swachh Bharat Mission.
- **For Mains:** Issues related to solid waste management.

GS PAPER - II

Paper 2 Topic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Right to convert is part of fundamental right of choice

Context:

- The Supreme Court has held that a person's right to choose a religion and marry is an intrinsic part of her meaningful existence. Neither the State nor "patriarchal supremacy" can interfere in her decision.

Background:

- The observations are part of the 61-page reasoned judgment published by the Supreme Court in the case of Hadiya, a 26-year-old Homeopathy student who converted to Islam and married a Muslim man.
- The case first gained attention as a case of forced conversion.

Important observations made by the court (Key points for mains):

- Freedom of faith is essential to his/her autonomy; Choosing a faith is the substratum of individuality and sans it, the right of choice becomes a shadow.
- Matters of belief and faith, including whether to believe, are at the core of constitutional liberty. The Constitution exists for believers as well as for agnostics.
- Constitution protects the ability of each individual to pursue a way of life or faith to which she or he seeks to adhere. Matters of dress and of food, of ideas and ideologies, of love and partnership are within the central aspects of identity. Society has no role to play in determining choice of partners.
- The absolute right of an individual to choose a life partner is not in the least affected by matters of faith. The Constitution guarantees to each individual the right freely to practise, profess and propagate religion. Choices of faith and belief as indeed choices in matters of marriage lie within an area where individual autonomy is supreme.

Article 25 and forced conversions:

- Article 25 states that subject to public order, morality and health, and to the other fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution, all persons are equally entitled to "freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion."
- The word "propagate" mean "to transmit or spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets," but does not include the right to convert another person to one's own religion. It has to be remembered that Article 25(1) guarantees 'freedom of conscience' to every citizen, and not merely to the followers of one particular religion and that, in turn, postulates that there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one's own religion because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion, that would impinge on the 'freedom of conscience' guaranteed to all the citizens of the country alike.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

1. Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal

Context:

- Central Government recently handed over reference of Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal under Section 5 (1) of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act (ISRWD), 1956 to Chairman of the tribunal and Supreme Court Judge, Justice A M Khanwilkar.

Background:

- The Tribunal has been constituted following orders of the Supreme Court. The Government of Odisha has sought to refer the water dispute regarding the inter-state river Mahanadi and its river valley to a Tribunal for adjudication under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.

Legal provisions in this regard:

- The tribunal will be formed according to the provisions of the Inter-State River Water Disputes (ISRWD), 1956.
- It will have a chairperson and two other members nominated by the Chief Justice of India from among the judges of the apex court or high courts.
- As per provisions of the ISRWD Act, 1956 the Tribunal is required to submit its report and decision within a period of 3 years which can be extended to a further period not exceeding 2 years due to unavoidable reasons.

What's the dispute?

- Odisha and Chhattisgarh are locked in a dispute over the Mahanadi waters since the mid-80s. Odisha claimed that Chhattisgarh government has been constructing dams in the upper reaches of the Mahanadi, depriving its farmers who are heavily dependent on the rivers waters.
- Chhattisgarh has been against the setting up of a tribunal, and argued that the water sharing agreement was with the erstwhile Madhya Pradesh government, before the state was carved out in 2000.

Way ahead:

- To chalk out the future course of action in view of the disputes regarding the use of Mahanadi river water, a well-rounded strategy that includes both the people and policymakers is needed.
- The strategy must allow for dialogue by rebuilding trust and should look at arbitration and negotiation as methods of conflict resolution.
- It is necessary to evolve a strategy that optimises the rational usage of Mahanadi water to benefit people from both Chhattisgarh and Odisha, coupled with the implementation of a multi-stakeholder forum that finds peaceful solutions and minimises areas of contention in a negotiable and consensual manner.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Composition of tribunal, Mahanadi river.
- **For Mains:** Dispute resolution- challenges, issues and solutions.

Sources: the hindu.

2. PIL misuse

Context:

- While rejecting a bath of PILs in a case, the Supreme Court has observed that Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have been brazenly misused by people with political agenda and they pose a grave danger to the entire judicial process.

Concerns:

- It is a travesty of justice for the resources of the legal system to be consumed by an avalanche of misdirected petitions purportedly filed in public interest that are found to promote a personal, business or political agenda. This has spawned an industry of vested interests in litigation.
- Frivolous or motivated petitions, detract the time and attention that courts must devote to genuine causes. Besides, such petitions pose a grave danger to the credibility of the judicial process.
- Also, PILs have been used to seek publicity, instituted at the behest of business or political rivals to settle scores behind the facade of public interest.

What is PIL?

- 'Public Interest Litigation' denotes a legal action initiated in a court of law for the enforcement of public interest where the rights of an individual or a group have been affected.

Why we need PIL?

- In Public Interest Litigation (PIL) vigilant citizens of the country can find an inexpensive legal remedy because there is only a nominal fixed court fee involved in this.
- Further, through the so-called PIL, the litigants can focus attention on and achieve results pertaining to larger public issues, especially in the fields of human rights, consumer welfare and environment.

Demerits of PIL:

- The genuine causes and cases of public interest have in fact receded to the background and irresponsible PIL activists all over the country have started to play a major but not a constructive role in the arena of litigation. Of late, many of the PIL activists in the country have found the PIL as a handy tool of harassment since frivolous cases could be filed without investment of heavy court fees as required in private civil litigation and deals could then be negotiated with the victims of stay orders obtained in the so-called PILs.
- The flexibility of procedure that is a character of PIL has given rise to another set of problems. It gives an opportunity to opposite parties to ascertain the precise allegation and respond specific issues.
- The credibility of PIL process is now adversely affected by the criticism that the judiciary is overstepping the boundaries of its jurisdiction and that it is unable to supervise the effective implementation of its orders.
- It has also been increasingly felt that PIL is being misused by the people agitating for private grievance in the grab of public interest and seeking publicity rather than espousing public cause.

Way ahead:

- PIL now does require a complete rethink and restructuring. Anyway, overuse and abuse of PIL can only make it stale and ineffective. Since it is an extraordinary remedy available at a cheaper cost to all citizens of the country, it ought not to be used by all litigants as a substitute for ordinary ones or as a means to file frivolous complaints.
- It is, indeed, time that the PIL was reclaimed for its original constituents by limiting it to matters concerning the protection of fundamental rights of the disadvantaged and underprivileged. This would help restore the legitimacy and efficacy not only of the PIL as a means of providing access to justice to the poorest of the poor, but also of the judiciary as an institution.

What's important?

- **For Mains:** All about PILs and associated issues.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Scheduled areas

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given approval to the declaration of Scheduled Areas in respect of Rajasthan under Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of India.
- This will ensure that the Scheduled Tribes of Rajasthan will get benefits of protective measures available under the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

What are scheduled areas?

- As per the Fifth Schedule {Article 244(1)} to the Constitution of India, the expression 'Scheduled Areas' means 'such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas'.
- Alternation of boundaries: In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6(2) of the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution, the President may at any time by order increase the area of any Scheduled Area in a State after consultation with the Governor of that State; rescind, in relation to any State or States, any order or orders made under this paragraph, and in consultation with the Governor of the State concerned, make fresh orders redefining the areas which are to be Scheduled Areas.
- The current fifth scheduled areas are in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.

What are Scheduled Areas?

- Indian Constitution, under Article 244(1) of the Fifth Schedule, defines the term 'Scheduled Areas' as "such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas"
- The Scheduled Areas, have been declared in eight States, viz A.P., Bihar, Gujarat, H.P., Maharashtra, M.P., Odisha and Rajasthan.
- The president may schedule, reschedule and alter Scheduled Areas in a state after consultation with the Governor of that state.

Administration of these areas:

- The Executive power of the Union shall extend to giving directions to the respective States regarding the administration of the Scheduled Areas.
- The Governors of the State in which there are “Scheduled areas” have to submit reports to the President regarding the administration of such Areas, annually or whenever required by the President.
- Tribes Advisory Councils are to be constituted to give advice on such matters as welfare and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes.
- The Governor is authorised to direct that any particular Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State shall not apply to a Scheduled Area or shall apply, only subject to exceptions or modifications. The Governor is also authorised to make regulations to prohibit or restrict the transfer of land by, or among members of the Scheduled Tribes.
- The Governor may make regulations for the peace and good government of any area in a State which is for the time being a Scheduled Area.
- These provisions of the Constitution relating to the administration of the Scheduled Areas and Tribes may be altered by Parliament or by ordinary legislation.
- The Constitution provides for the appointment of a Commission to report on the administration of the Scheduled Areas and the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in the States.
- The President may appoint such Commission at any time, but the appointment of such Commission at the end of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution was obligatory.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims:** TAC, Fifth schedule areas.
- **For Mains:** Schedule areas- their significance, need, administration and challenges.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: *Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act.***Simultaneous elections****Context:**

- A draft white paper released by the Law Commission of India has recommended holding of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, possibly in 2019.
- It suggests amending the Constitution to realise this objective.

Background:

- Simultaneous elections were held in the country during the first two decades after Independence up to 1967.
- Dissolution of certain Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 followed by the dissolution of the Lok Sabha led to the “disruption of the conduct of simultaneous elections.

Simultaneous elections: Is it a good idea?

- This will help save public money.
- It will be a big relief for political parties that are always in campaign mode.
- It will allow political parties to focus more on policy and governance.

Need for simultaneous elections:

- To reduce unnecessary expenditures: Elections are held all the time and continuous polls lead to a lot of

**Key recommendations made by NITI Aayog in this regard:**

- Simultaneous elections in the country may be restored in the nation by amending the Constitution, Representation of the People Act of 1951 and the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha and Assemblies.
- The leader of the majority party be elected as PM or the CM by the entire house for stability.
- In case a government falls midterm, the term of the new government would be for the remaining period only.
- A no-confidence motion against the government should be followed by a confidence motion. No-confidence motion and premature dissolution of House are major roadblocks to simultaneous elections. Parties which introduce the no-confidence motion should simultaneously give a suggestion for an alternative government.
- The “rigours” of the anti-defection law in the Tenth Schedule should be relaxed to prevent a stalemate in the Lok Sabha or Assemblies in case of a hung Parliament or Assembly.

expenditure. More than Rs1,100 crore was spent on the 2009 Lok Sabha polls and the expenditure had shot up to Rs4,000 crore in 2014.

- To reduce the unnecessary use of manpower: Over a crore government employees, including a large number of teachers, are involved in the electoral process. Thus, the continuous exercise causes maximum harm to the education sector.
- Security concerns: Security forces also have to be diverted for the electoral work even as the country's enemy keeps plotting against the nation and terrorism remains a strong threat.

Way ahead:

- The time is ripe for a constructive debate on electoral reforms and a return to the practice of the early decades after Independence when elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies were held simultaneously. It is for the Election Commission to take this exercise forward in consultation with political parties.

Facts for Prelims:

- Law Commission of India is an executive body established by an order of the Government of India. Its major function is to work for legal reform. Its membership primarily comprises legal experts, who are entrusted a mandate by the Government.
- The Commission is established for a fixed tenure and works as an advisory body to the Ministry of Law and Justice
- The first Law Commission was established during the British Raj era in 1834 by the Charter Act of 1833. After that, three more Commissions were established in pre-independent India. The first Law Commission of independent India was established in 1955 for a three-year term.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

1. Process to impeach the Chief Justice of India

Context:

- The Congress and six other opposition parties have moved a notice for the impeachment of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra, accusing him of "misbehaviour" and "misusing" authority. ***So far, no Chief Justice has ever been impeached in India.***

Procedure for removal of CJI:

- **Article 124(4)** of the Constitution lays down the procedure for removal of a judge of the Supreme Court, including the CJI, who can be impeached on grounds of "misbehaviour or incapacity".

The process:

- **Step 1:** A removal motion signed by 100 members of Lok Sabha or 50 members of Rajya Sabha has to be submitted to the Speaker of the Lower House or Chairperson (ie Vice President) of the Upper House. This can be in either of the Houses of Parliament.
- **Step 2:** The Speaker/Chairperson can either accept or reject the motion.
- **Step 3:** If the motion is admitted, then the Speaker/ Chairperson forms a three-member committee comprising a senior judge of the Supreme Court, a judge of a high court and a distinguished jurist to investigate the charges leveled against the CJI.
- **Step 4:** If the committee supports the motion, it can be taken up for discussion. It must be passed by a special two-third majority of MPs in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
- **Step 5:** After it is passed in both Houses, it is presented to the President, who can pass a Presidential Order for removal of the CJI.

Can CJI continue to work during this period?

- Both the Constitution and the Judges (Inquiry) Act of 1968 are silent on whether a judge facing impeachment motion should recuse from judicial and administrative work till he is cleared of the charges against him.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** CJI- appointment and impeachment.
- **For Mains:** Judicial autonomy and issues associated.

Sources: the hindu.

2. First Woman Lawyer to be Appointed As Supreme Court Judge:**Context:**

- Senior lawyer Indu Malhotra will be the first woman lawyer to be directly appointed as a Supreme Court judge.

**Key facts:**

- Of the top court's 24 judges, only one is a woman, Justice R Banumathi. She was elevated to the top court in August 2014. Justice Banumathi was the sixth woman to become a Supreme Court judge. Justice Fathima Beevi was the first in 1989.
- The Supreme Court of India comprises the Chief Justice and not more than 30 other Judges appointed by the **President of India**. Supreme Court Judges retire upon attaining the age of **65 years**. In order to be appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court, a person must be a citizen of India and must have been, for **at least five years**, a Judge of a High Court or of two or more such Courts in succession, or an Advocate of a High Court or of two or more such Courts in succession for at least 10 years or he must be, in the **opinion of the President**, a **distinguished jurist**. Provisions exist for the appointment of a Judge of a High Court as an Ad-hoc Judge of the Supreme Court and for retired Judges of the Supreme Court or High Courts to sit and act as Judges of that Court.

Paper 2 Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1. Fast track task Force**Context:**

- **The fast track task Force, a body under Ministry of Electronics and IT**, has set target to achieve around 500 million mobile phone production in India by 2019, with value estimated to be around USD 46 billion.

About Fast track task force:

- **Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) formed a Fast Track Task Force** to re-establish growth in the country's mobile handset and component manufacturing eco-system.
 - It has **members from industry and government**.
 - It **promotes large-scale manufacturing/assembling activity to achieve production of 500 million units by 2019**. This can create additional employment opportunities for 1.5 million approximately.
 - The task force has to create a roadmap to align technology, demand, standards and regulations for enhancing the competitiveness of domestic manufacturing across the supply chain for manufacturing mobile phone.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Fast Track Task Force and its objectives.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)**Context:**

- The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is planning to use Aadhaar to track the ill-gotten wealth of corrupt bureaucrats.

Significance of this move:

- Aadhaar is being made mandatory for numerous financial transactions and property deals. Information made available through a person's Permanent Account Number (PAN) and Aadhaar cards could help the CVC check if financial deals carried out by the cardholder were within his or her means.

About CVC:

- It is the apex vigilance institution. It was created via executive resolution (based on **the recommendations of Santhanam committee**) in 1964 but was **conferred with statutory status in 2003**. It submits its report to the President of India.
- **Composition:** Presently, the body consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.
- **Appointment:** They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
- **Term:** Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- **Removal:** The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** CVC.
- **For Mains:** Corruption- issues, challenges and ways to prevent.

Sources: the hindu.

3. NCLT

Context:

- The government is planning to have more benches of the National Company Law Tribunal on the basis of case load, amid rising number of insolvency cases coming up before the NCLT.

Background:

- Currently, there are 11 NCLT benches in different parts of the country, including two in the national capital.

About National Company Law Tribunal:

- **What is it?** National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is a quasi-judicial body that will govern the companies in India. It was established under the Companies Act, 2013 and is a successor body of the Company Law Board.
- **Powers:** NCLT will have the same powers as assigned to the erstwhile Company Law Board (which are mostly related to dealing with oppression and mismanagement), Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR)(revival of sick companies) and powers related to winding up of companies (which was available only with the High Courts).
- **Background:** The setting up of NCLT as a specialized institution for corporate justice is based on the recommendations of the Justice Eradi Committee on Law Relating to Insolvency and Winding up of Companies.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** NCLT.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Competition Commission of India

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for rightsizing the Competition Commission of India (CCI) from One Chairperson and Six Members (totalling seven) to One Chairperson and Three Members (totalling four).

- **Section 8(1)** of the Competition Act, 2002 (the Act) provides that the Commission shall consist of a Chairperson and not less than two and not more than six Members.

About Competition Commission Of India:

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) was established under the Competition Act, 2002 for the administration, implementation and enforcement of the Act, and was duly constituted in March 2009. **Chairman and members are appointed by the central government.**

The following are the objectives of the Commission:

- To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition.
- To promote and sustain competition in markets.
- To protect the interests of consumers.
- To ensure freedom of trade.

Functions of the commission:

- 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.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

The Competition Act:

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** CCI, Competition Act.

Sources: pib.

5. Drugs Technical Advisory Board

Context:

- The Union Health Ministry has banned over-the-counter sale of around 14 creams containing steroids and antibiotics under **the Schedule H category** by making amendments to certain Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945.
- The decision was made following consultation with **the Drugs Technical Advisory Board** which recommended a ban on the sale of such creams without prescription and had also submitted their recommendations to the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation.

Functions:

- Laying down the safety and quality standards for drugs, cosmetics, diagnostics, and devices.
- Regulatory the marketing of new drugs.
- Publishing and updating the Indian Pharmacopoeia.
- Guiding on technical matters and monitoring adverse drug reactions.
- Screening the drug formulations that are available in the Indian market.

What necessitated this move?

- The move comes in the wake of dermatologists' complaints that pharmaceutical companies were selling steroid-based creams and ointments without medical guidance.

About CDSCO:

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.

- Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, CDSCO is responsible for approval of New Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, laying down the standards for Drugs, control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country and coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations by providing expert advice with a view of bring about the uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
- Further CDSCO along with state regulators, is jointly responsible for grant of licenses of certain specialized categories of critical Drugs such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.

About DTAB:

- Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) is the highest decision-making body under the Union health ministry on technical matters.
- Director General of Health Services (DGHS) is the ex-officio chairman of this statutory body which is constituted by the ministry under section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

What are Schedule H drugs?

- Schedule H is a class of prescription drugs listed under Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 which governs manufacture and sale of all drugs in India.
- These drugs cannot be purchased over counter without the prescription of a doctor.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** DTAB, CDSCO and Schedule H drugs.

Sources: the hindu.

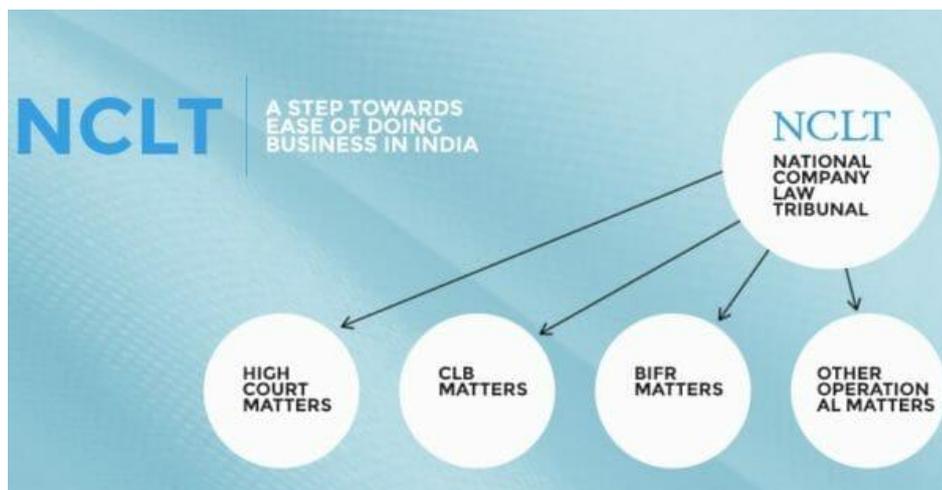
6. National Company Law Appellate Tribunal

Context:

- Online search giant Google has filed an appeal at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal against an order from India's competition watchdog that found it guilty of "search bias" and abuse of its dominant position.

What's the issue?

- In February, the Competition Commission of India imposed a 1.36 billion rupees (\$20.95 million) fine on Google, saying it was abusing its dominance in online web search and online search advertising markets, in the latest regulatory setback for the world's most popular internet search engine.



About NCLAT:

- National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 for hearing appeals against the orders of National Company Law Tribunal(s) (NCLT), with effect from 1st June, 2016.
- NCLAT is also the Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC).
- NCLAT is also the Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India under Section 202 and Section 211 of IBC.
- NCLAT is also the Appellate Tribunal to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

Composition:

- The President of the Tribunal and the chairperson and Judicial Members of the Appellate Tribunal shall be appointed after consultation with the Chief Justice of India

- The Members of the Tribunal and the Technical Members of the Appellate Tribunal shall be appointed on the recommendation of a Selection Committee consisting of:
 - Chief Justice of India or his nominee—Chairperson.
 - A senior Judge of the Supreme Court or a Chief Justice of High Court— Member.
 - Secretary in the Ministry of Corporate Affairs—Member.
 - Secretary in the Ministry of Law and Justice—Member.
 - Secretary in the Department of Financial Services in the Ministry of Finance— Member.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** All about NCLAT.

Sources: the hindu.

7. National Commission for Safai Karamcharis

Context:

- A new website a mobile app has been launched for the 'National Commission for Safai Karamcharis'.
- The Mobile App will help the Commission in addressing the grievances/complaints of petitioners in an efficient manner.

About NCSK:

- National Commission for Safai Karamcharis is an Indian statutory body was established through National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993. It aims to promote and safeguard the interests and rights of Safai Karamcharis.
- The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis seeks to study, evaluate and monitor the implementation of various schemes for Safai Karamcharis as an autonomous organisation and also to provide redressal of their grievances.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NCSK.
- **For Mains:** Mechanisms and institutions for the protection of vulnerable sections of the society.

Sources: pib.

8. Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB)

Context:

- India's downstream oil and gas regulator Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) is set to take up the role of the market regulator for the natural gas sector, when the planned natural gas trading hub comes into being, much on the lines of the capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Need for a natural gas trading platform:

- The plan to establishing a natural gas trading platform is part of a larger effort by the government to build a vibrant and transparent gas market in India. The idea is to create an ecosystem where the competing buyers would be able to buy gas from competing sellers and transport the same from gas source to the place of their requirement by getting a non-discriminatory access to the pipeline capacity. This end-to-end solution would reduce customer risk and enhance customer confidence on gas as an alternate fuel and feed.

What needs to be done?

- The Government has envisaged ushering into a gas-based economy by increasing the share of natural gas in the primary energy mix of the country from current level of about 6% to 15% by 2030.
- The thrust now should be on increasing the availability of natural gas by enhancing the domestic production, encouraging the import of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), completion of national pipeline grid and speedier roll out of City Gas Distribution network in the country.

About PNGRB



- ❖ The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) was constituted under The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, 2006 (NO. 19 OF 2006)
- ❖ The Act provide for the establishment of Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board to protect the interests of consumers and entities engaged in specified activities relating to petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas.

PNGRB:

- The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) was constituted under The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, 2006.
- The Act provide for the establishment of Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board to protect the interests of consumers and entities engaged in specified activities relating to petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas and to promote competitive markets and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- The board has also been mandated to regulate the refining, processing, storage, transportation, distribution, marketing and sale of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas excluding production of crude oil and natural gas so as and to ensure uninterrupted and adequate supply of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas in all parts of the country.

Facts for Prelims:

- The world's biggest natural gas hub is the Henry Hub in the US state of Louisiana. Gas delivered at this point is the basis of most US natural gas futures.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** PNGRB and its functions.
- **For Mains:** Need for a natural gas trading platform.

Sources: the hindu.

9. Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)

Context:

- 7th edition of Home Expo India 2018 was recently organized by EPCH at India Expo Centre and Mart, Greater Noida. The fair is a three segmented categories show comprising Housewares, Textiles and Furniture under one roof at the same time making it a One-Stop Expo for every visitor.

About EPCH:

- Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) under the aegis of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India is a non-profit organization, established under the EXIM policy of Government of India in the year 1986-87.
- The objective is to promote, support, protect, maintain and increase the export of handicrafts.



Functions of the council:

- It is an apex body of handicrafts exporters for promotion of exports of Handicrafts from country.

- The Council has created necessary infrastructure as well as marketing and information facilities, which are availed both by the members exporters and importers.
- The Council is engaged in promotion of handicrafts from India and project India's image abroad as a reliable supplier of high quality handicrafts.

Composition of the council:

- The Council is run and managed by team of professionals headed by Executive Director. The Committee of Administration consists of eminent exporters, professionals. The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts has a rarest distinction of being considered as MODEL COUNCIL that is self-sustaining and where all the promotional activities are self-financed.

VRIKSH:

- "VRIKSH" is a program by EPCH which is totally based on the timber legality assessment and verification standard for verification of legality and legal origin of wood and wooden products. It is intended for entities who want to accurately track and make claims about the legal origin and transport of their products.
- The VRIKSH standard conforms to all major compliance requirements including the new CITES notification.
- To fulfil the obligation, the Vriksh shipment certificate, issued exclusively by EPCH is mandatory to go along with all shipments of two Dalbergia's species (Rosewood and Sheesham) products.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** EPCH and Vriksh initiative.
- **For Mains:** Need for promotion of Indian handicrafts and its significance.

Sources: pib.

10. National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI)

Context:

- The Supreme Court has ruled all questions relating to conferring minority status on educational institutions are to be decided by the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) and quashed the order of the Calcutta high court, which had said the body had no original jurisdiction on the issue.

What has the court said?

- NCMEI has the power to decide any question that might arise, which relate directly or indirectly, with respect to the status of an institution as a minority educational institution.
- As per Section 11 of the Act, NCMEI could declare an establishment as a minority educational institution "at all stages."
- Only the Commission has the power to decide on granting a 'no objection' certificate to an institution that wanted to convert into a minority institution.

Background:

- The Calcutta HC had held that NCMEI had no original jurisdiction to declare the minority status. Other high courts had also taken contradictory stand on the power of the Commission in granting minority status to educational institutions.
- Besides Calcutta HC, Bombay HC and Punjab & Haryana HC have also taken the view that the Commission had no original power to decide on minority status. On the other hand, the Allahabad HC had held that Commission had jurisdiction to decide the issue.

What the law says?

- The NCMEI Act empowers the Commission "to decide all questions relating to the status of an institution as a minority educational institution and to declare its status as such."

Significance of the judgment:

- The Constitution grants a fundamental right to all minorities, whether based on religion or language, to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- The wide power given to an independent forum like the NCMEI to declare an institution as a minority educational institution furthered the fundamental right guaranteed under Article 30.

About NCMEI:

- The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions was set up in 2004. The Government brought out an Ordinance in November 2004 establishing the Commission. Later a Bill was introduced in the Parliament in December 2004 and both Houses passed the Bill.
- The Commission is mandated to look into specific complaints regarding deprivation or violation of rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- The Commission is a quasi-judicial body and has been endowed with the powers of a Civil Court.
- It is to be headed by a Chairman who has been a Judge of the High Court and three members are to be nominated by Central Government.

Roles:

- The Commission has 3 roles namely adjudicatory function, advisory function and recommendatory powers.
- So far as affiliation of a minority educational institution to a university is concerned, the decision of the Commission would be final.
- The Commission has powers to advise the Central Government or any State Government on any question relating to the education of minorities that may be referred to it.
- The Commission can make recommendations to the Central Government and the State Governments regarding any matter which directly or indirectly deprives the minority community of their educational rights enshrined in Article 30.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NCMEI.
- **For Mains:** Minority institutions and their significance.

Sources: the hindu.

11. Defence Planning Committee (DPC)

Context:

- The Centre has set up a Defence Planning Committee (DPC) chaired by National Security Advisor (NSA) to facilitate "comprehensive" planning for the defence forces besides focusing on military doctrines to deal with emerging security challenges.



The Defense Planning Committee

The Defense Planning Committee (DPC) is normally composed of permanent representatives but meets at the level of defense ministers at least twice a year, and deals with most defense matters and subjects related to collective defense planning. All the member countries are represented in this forum.

About the DPC:

- The DPC will be a permanent body chaired by the National Security Advisor.

The committee will comprise:

- National Security Advisor (NSA).
- Foreign secretary.
- Chairman of chiefs of staff committee.
- The Army, Navy and Air Force chiefs.
- Secretary (expenditure) in the Finance Ministry.

The chairman of the DPC can co-opt experts into it depending on requirement.

Functions of the committee:

- Prepare drafts of national security strategy and doctrines, international defence engagement strategy and roadmap to build defence manufacturing ecosystem.
- Work on strategy to boost defence exports, and prioritised capability development plans for the armed forces.
- Analyse and evaluate all relevant inputs relating to defence planning and foreign policy imperatives besides focusing on defence acquisition and infrastructure development plans including the 15-year-long integrated perspective plan.
- Work on development of Indian defence industry and technology advancements.

Benefits of having DPC:

- Because the Prime Minister's Office, the defence ministry, the finance ministry and the three services are part of the same committee, decisions on military purchases could now happen much faster.

Report:

- The DPC would submit its draft reports to the Defence Minister according to "given timelines" following which further approvals will be obtained as required.

Significance of the move:

- While India does have a defence planning architecture in place, this is the first time it is creating a body that will factor in everything from foreign policy imperatives to operational directives and long-term defence equipment acquisition and infrastructure development plans to technological developments in other parts of the world while coming up with a plan.
- The move, which is a significant change in India's defence strategy architecture, comes as the country faces several potential threats in a highly militarised neighbourhood; is trying to balance budgetary constraints with its need for arms; and is working on increasing its own expertise in manufacturing and exporting defence equipment. Until now, defence planning has been synonymous with hardware acquisition.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Details of the DPC.
- **For Mains:** Defence expenditure and the need for planning.

Sources: the hindu.

12. National Commission for Minorities (NCM)

Context:

- The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has decided to approach the government for granting it Constitutional status to protect the rights of minority communities more effectively.

**Need for Constitutional status:**

- In its present form, the NCM has powers to summon officials, including chief secretaries and director generals of police, but has to rely on departments concerned to take action against them. If granted constitutional status, the NCM will be able to act against errant officials who do not attend hearings, follow its order or are found guilty of dereliction of duty. Also, the NCM can penalise or suspend an officer for two days or send him/her to jail.
- The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (2017-18), in its 53rd report had also noted that the NCM is "almost ineffective" in its current state to deal with cases of atrocities against minorities.

About NCM:

- The Union Government set up the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.
- Six religious communities, viz; Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains have been notified in Gazette of India as minority communities by the Union Government all over India. Original notification of 1993 was for Five religious communities Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, Christians and Muslims.
- **Composition:** The Commission shall consist of a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson and five Members to be nominated by the Central Government from amongst persons of eminence, ability and integrity; provided that five Members including the Chairperson shall be from amongst the minority communities.
- **Grievance redressal:** Aggrieved persons belonging to the minority communities may approach the concerned State Minorities Commissions for redressal of their grievances. They may also send their representations, to the National Commission for Minorities, after exhausting all remedies available to them.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Particulars of NCM.
- **For Mains:** NCM- need for constitutional status, challenges and issues.

Sources: the hindu.

13. Island Development Agency

Context:

- The Union Home Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh, recently chaired the third meeting of the Island Development Agency (IDA). The Island Development Agency reviewed the progress made towards preparation of Development Plans for identified Islands.

About the Island Development Agency (IDA):**What is it?**

- The IDA was set up on June 1 this year following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's review meeting for the development of islands. The meetings of the agency are chaired by the Union Home Minister.

Composition:

- Members of the IDA include cabinet secretary, home secretary, secretary (environment, forests and climate change), secretary (tourism) and secretary (tribal welfare).

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** IDA and its composition.
- **For Mains:** Need for special focus on Island development.

Sources: pib.

14. MoU between ICI and IGNTU

Context:

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed between the Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism, and Indira Gandhi National Tribal University (IGNTU), Amarkantak.
- The MOU was signed for imparting collaborative degree programmes including research in the field of culinary arts.

About Indian Culinary Institute (ICI):

- ICI is *an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism*.
- The main objective of setting up of the ICI was to institutionalize a mechanism to support efforts intended to preserve, document, promote and disseminate Indian Cuisine, meet the sectoral requirement of specialists specific to Indian Cuisine, as also of promoting Cuisine as a Niche Tourism product.

Functions:

- The ICIs will offer structured regular programmes of study specific to culinary arts and culinary management leading to graduate and post graduate level degrees, promote research and innovation, organize demand driven certificate and diploma courses, document and create data base specific to Indian cuisine and commission studies and survey on cuisine.
- The ICIs will also help the local youth to get trained in these streams as well as create entrepreneurs and make them self-sufficient.
- The hotel and tourism industry will also get benefitted by getting the trained and skilled manpower which in turn will enhance their business and thus generate gainful employment.

Facts for Prelims:

- Indira Gandhi National Tribal University is located in Amarkantak, Anuppur district, Madhya Pradesh.
- It was established through an Act of Parliament, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University Act, 2007.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** IGNTU, ICI.

Sources: pib.

15. Zonal Council**Context:**

- The 23rd meeting of the Western Zonal Council was recently held at Gandhinagar, Gujarat and the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh chaired the meeting.

There are 5 five Zonal councils namely:

- The Northern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh.
- The Central Zonal Council, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- The Eastern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.
- The Western Zonal Council, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- The Southern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

What are zonal councils?

- Zonal councils have been established by the Parliament to promote interstate cooperation and coordination.
- They are statutory bodies established under the States Reorganisation Act 1956 and not constitutional bodies. They are only deliberative and advisory bodies.

Composition:

- **Chairman** – The **Union Home Minister** is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- **Vice Chairman** – The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- **Members**- Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.
- **Advisers**- One person nominated by the Planning Commission (which has been replaced by NITI Ayog now) for each of the Zonal Councils, Chief Secretaries and another officer/Development Commissioner nominated by each of the States included in the Zone.
- Union Ministers are also invited to participate in the meetings of Zonal Councils depending upon necessity.

The main objectives of setting up of Zonal Councils are:

- Bringing out **national integration**.
- Arresting the growth of acute State consciousness, regionalism, linguism and particularistic tendencies.
- Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate and exchange ideas and experiences.
- Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States for successful and speedy execution of development projects.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Zonal Councils and their composition.
- **For Mains:** Zonal Councils and their significance.

Sources: pib.

16. Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)**Context:**

- In a boost to indigenisation and in realisation of India's growing technological prowess, the DAC has approved procurement of Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO's) designed and developed NAG Missile System (NAMIS) at the cost of Rs 524 crore.

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC):

- **What is it?** To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- **Objective:** The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- **Functions:** The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans. It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

About NAG missile and the system:

- The NAG missile is a third generation anti-tank guided missile, which has top attack capabilities that can effectively engage and destroy all known enemy tanks during day and night.
- The system includes a third generation Anti-Tank Guided Missile, the NAG, along with the Missile Carrier Vehicle (NAMICA).

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NAG missile and DAC.

Sources: pib.

17. National Safety Council

Context: NSCI Safety Awards for the year 2017 were recently awarded.

About the National Safety Awards:

- The NSCI Safety Awards are much coveted national level Awards in the field of occupational safety, health and environment and are given in recognition for effective Safety Management System and excellent safety & health performance by the organizations in Manufacturing, Construction and MSME Sectors during the relevant assessment periods.
- These Awards are adjudged and declared every year by the National Safety Council.

About the National Safety Council:

- National Safety Council is a premier, non-profit, self-financing and tripartite apex body at the national level in India.
- It is **an autonomous body, which was set up by the Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment** in 1966 to generate, develop and sustain a voluntary movement on Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) at the national level.
- It was registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and subsequently, as a Public Trust under the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950.
- To fulfil its objective NSC carries out various activities. These include organising and conducting specialised training courses, conferences, seminars & workshops; conducting consultancy studies such as safety audits, hazard evaluation & risk assessment; designing and developing HSE promotional materials & publications.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** National Safety Council.

Sources: pib.

Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

1. National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Context:

- The verification of citizenship documents of 29 lakh married women, mostly migrant Muslims, for the Supreme Court-monitored exercise to update the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC) has begun in Assam.
- The verification of family trees and the documents of married women has to be completed by May 31, the deadline set by the court.



Why is the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is being updated in Assam?

- National Register of Citizens (NRC) updation basically means the process of enlisting the names of those persons (or their descendants) whose names appear in any of the Electoral Rolls up to 1971, 1951 NRC or any of the admissible documents stipulated.
- The NRC will be updated as per the provisions of The Citizenship Act, 1955 and The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.

Significance of the move:

- The publication of the updated NRC is indeed a positive step in so far as it puts to rest wild speculations about the extent of the illegal migrant population in Assam and the resulting polarisation that political parties have been exploiting to make electoral gains.

Way ahead:

- The absence of any clear policy as to how to deal with the proclaimed illegal migrants has created a sense of unease in the minds of many presently residing in Assam.
- Further, while the NRC is being updated for Assam, there is no plan to prepare similar NRCs for the other states in the North East where illegal migration continues to be a volatile issue.
- The need of the hour therefore is for the Union Government to allay apprehensions presently in the minds of the people of Assam and take steps to contain any adverse fallout after the publication of the final draft of the NRC. At the same time, it also needs to spell out what it intends to do with the persons whose names do not figure in the final NRC.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NRC.
- **For Mains:** Need for policy on migrants.

Sources: the hindu.

2. 'one candidate, one seat'**Context:**

- The Election Commission has told the Supreme Court that it supports the proposal to allow one candidate to contest from only one constituency in an election.
- The EC expressed this view in an affidavit it filed in the petition over the matter.

Background:

- The Supreme Court had in December 2017 issued notices seeking replies from the Election Commission and the Centre on the issue. At the time, the Supreme Court had said the practice of one candidate contesting multiple seats was a drain on the exchequer since it necessitated bypolls.
- A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court challenging Section 33(7) of the Representation of the People Act of 1951 that allows a person to contest elections to Parliament and state assemblies from two constituencies and sought an end to the practice.

Why candidates should be barred from contesting from more than one seat?

- One person, one vote & one candidate, one constituency is the dictum of democracy. However, as per the law, as it stands today, a person can contest the election for the same office from two constituencies simultaneously.
- When a candidate contests from two seats, it is imperative that he has to vacate one of the two seats if he wins both. This, apart from the consequent unavoidable financial burden on the public exchequer, government manpower and other resources for holding bye-election is also an injustice to the voters of the constituency which the candidate is quitting from.

Alternative suggested by the Election commission:

- The ECI has alternatively suggested that if existing provisions are retained then the candidate contesting from two seats should bear the cost of the bye-election to the seat that the contestant decides to vacate in the event of his/her winning both seats.
- The amount in such an event could be Rs 5 lakh for assembly election and Rs 10 lakh for parliament election.

What's the issue?

- Political parties across the country field senior leaders from more than one seat in a bid to ensure victory.
- If they win from multiple seats, these leader are then required to vacate other seats and continue to hold only one. This means a general election is usually followed closely by a bye-election to the seats that have been vacated.

Section 33(7) of RPA:

- Section 33(7) of the Representation of People's Act permits a candidate to contest any election (Parliamentary, State Assembly, Biennial Council, or bye-elections) from up to two constituencies.
- The provision was introduced in 1996 prior to which there was no bar on the number of constituencies from which a candidate could contest.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Section 33(7) of RPA.
- **For Mains:** One candidate one seat- need, issues, challenges and solutions.

Sources: toi.

Paper 2 Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

1. POSHAN Abhiyaan

Context: The annual targets set under POSHAN Abhiyaan beginning 2017-18 are as under:

Targets:

- Prevent and reduce stunting in children (0-6years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Prevent and reduce under-nutrition (underweight prevalence) in children (0-6 years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of anemia among young Children(6-59 months): By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of anemia among Women and Adolescent Girls in the age group of 15-49 years: By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce Low Birth Weight (LBW): By 6% @ 2% p.a.

About POSHAN Abhiyaan:

- POSHAN Abhiyaan was **launched on International Women's day (March 8)** in 2018 to boost nutrition among children and women.
- The Abhiyaan **targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight** by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
- The target of the mission is to bring down stunting among children in the age group 0-6 years from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** POSHAN Abhiyaan and targets under the scheme.
- **For Mains:** Schemes for the welfare of weaker sections of the society.

Sources: pib.

2. PM Ujjwala Yojana

Context:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has been launched in Delhi. The Cabinet, in February 2018, had approved the increase in the target for the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana to eight crore from the earlier five crore.
- This has to be achieved by 2020.

About the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.

Implementation:

- Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
- Eligible households will be identified in consultation with state governments and Union territories.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

- About 75 crore Indians, especially women and girls, are exposed to severe household air pollution (HAP) from the use of solid fuels such as biomass, dung cakes and coal for cooking. A report from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare places HAP as the second leading risk factor contributing to India's disease burden.
- According to the World Health Organization, solid fuel use is responsible for about 13% of all mortality and morbidity in India (measured as Disability-Adjusted Life Years), and causes about 40% of all pulmonary disorders, nearly 30% of cataract incidences, and over 20% each of ischemic heart disease, lung cancer and lower respiratory infection.

Way ahead:

- The PMUY is a bold and much-needed initiative, but it should be recognised that this is just a first step.
- The real test of the PMUY and its successor programmes will be in how they translate the provision of connections to sustained use of LPG or other clean fuels such as electricity or biogas.
- Truly smokeless kitchens can be realized only if the government follows up with measures that go beyond connections to actual usage of LPG.
- This may require concerted efforts cutting across Ministries beyond petroleum and natural gas and including those of health, rural development and women and child welfare.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** PMUY.
- **For Mains:** Need for LPG adoption.

Sources: pib.

3. NITI Forum for Northeast

Context:

- The first meeting of Newly constituted NITI Forum for North East was recently held in Agartala, Tripura. The meeting was chaired by the Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog.
- Strategies for improving Road, Rail and Air Connectivity in the North East Region, improvements in agriculture and allied sectors, water management were some of the key focus area during the meeting.

About NITI Forum for Northeast:

- The Union Government set up the 'Niti Forum for North-East' in February 2018.
- The forum will be **co-chaired by the Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Minister of State (I/C)**, Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER).
- The forum will have its Secretariat in the Ministry of DoNER.
- The NITI Forum for Northeast is tasked to identify various constraints on the way of accelerated, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the North East Region of the country and to recommend suitable interventions for addressing identified constraints. It will also review the development status in the NER.
- The Forum includes representation from all NE States, their Chief Secretaries and Secretaries of relevant Central Ministries/Departments, Directors of reputed institutions (IIT, IIM etc), experts and journalists have been included as members.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NITI Forum for North East.
- **For Mains:** Significance of North East region and need for special attention.

Sources: pib.

4. WHO directives call for support for breastfeeding

Context:

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have issued a new 10-step guidance to increase support for breastfeeding in health facilities that provide maternity and newborn services, which provide the immediate health system platform to help mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour and breastfeed exclusively for six months.

Highlights:

- The guidelines describe how hospitals should have a written breastfeeding policy in place, required staff competencies, and antenatal and post-birth care, including breastfeeding support for mothers.
- It also recommends limited use of breast milk substitutes, rooming-in, responsive feeding, educating parents on the use of bottles and pacifiers, and support when mothers and babies are discharged from hospital.

Significance of breastfeeding:

- Breastfeeding is an important efficient and cost-effective intervention promoting child survival and health. Breastfeeding within an hour of birth could prevent 20% of the newborn deaths. Infants who are not breastfed are 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia and 11 times more likely to die from diarrhoea than children who are exclusively breastfed, which are two leading causes of death in children under-five years of age.
- In addition, children who were not breastfed are at increased risk for diabetes, obesity, allergies, asthma, childhood leukemia, sudden infant death syndrome etc. Apart from mortality and morbidity benefits, breastfeeding also has tremendous impact on improved IQ.

MAA programme:

- To intensify the efforts further for promotion of breastfeeding, the Health Ministry has initiated a nationwide programme called "MAA-Mother's Absolute Affection" to bring undiluted focus on promotion of breastfeeding and provision of services towards supporting breastfeeding, along with ongoing efforts of routine health systems.
- The key components of the MAA programme are awareness generation, promotion of breastfeeding & inter personal counselling at community level, skilled support for breastfeeding at delivery points and monitoring and Award/ recognition of health facility.
- Under this programme, ASHA has been incentivized for reaching out to pregnant and lactating mothers and provide information on benefits and techniques of successful breastfeeding during interpersonal communication. ANMs at all sub-centres and health personnel at all delivery points are being trained for providing skilled support to mothers referred with issues related to breastfeeding.
- Under NHM, funding support has been recommended for all States and UTs for successful implementation of the MAA programme.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** MAA programme and significance of breastfeeding.

Sources: the hindu.

5. Aspirational District Programme

Context:

- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has charted a plan to promote micro enterprises in 115 aspirational districts across the country to contribute in their development. The bank has tied up with Common Service Centre (CSC) to meet this objective.

About Transformation of Aspirational Districts Programme:

- 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' was launched in January with an aim to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts in the country.

Implementation strategy:

- The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a mass Movement.
- This will converge the central and state schemes, collaborate central, state and district collectors to strengthen these districts by identifying the low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress and then rank the district by getting the data on a real-time basis.

Selection of backward districts:

- The 115 districts, including 35 affected by left-wing extremism, were selected on parameters like deprivation (extent of landless households), health & nutrition (institutional delivery, stunting of children and wasting in children), education (elementary dropout rate and adverse pupil-teacher ratio) and infrastructure (un-electrified homes, lack of toilets, villages not connected by road and lack of drinking water).

Significance of the scheme:

- With states as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
- Under the programme, identified districts are prodded and encouraged to first catch-up with the best district within their state, and subsequently aspire to become one of the best in the country, by competing with, and learning from others.

Need for the development of backward districts:

- India cannot grow at a high rate on a long run until these districts catch up, whatever high are the GDP number, it has no meaning until the benefit of growth percolates down to very basic level. Ensuring progress in areas facing the most severe challenges and improving conditions in remote and rural regions are prerequisites for India to reach the next stage of its economic and human development.
- Through its massive scale and innovative use of data, the aspirational districts programme (ADP) will help India move towards its goals.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Transformation of Aspirational Districts programme, Prabhari officers.
- **For Mains:** Cooperative federalism and its significance.

Sources: pib.

6. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

Context:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) was launched in the state of Telangana on the birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

About the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.
- Who is eligible? Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
- Identification of households: Eligible households will be identified in consultation with state governments and Union territories. The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Some of the objectives of the scheme are:

- Empowering women and protecting their health.
- Reducing the serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuel.
- Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
- Preventing young children from significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning the fossil fuel.

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

- About 75 crore Indians, especially women and girls, are exposed to severe household air pollution (HAP) from the use of solid fuels such as biomass, dung cakes and coal for cooking. A report from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare places HAP as the second leading risk factor contributing to India's disease burden.
- According to the World Health Organization, solid fuel use is responsible for about 13% of all mortality and morbidity in India (measured as Disability-Adjusted Life Years), and causes about 40% of all pulmonary disorders, nearly 30% of cataract incidences, and over 20% each of ischemic heart disease, lung cancer and lower respiratory infection.

Significance of the project:

- PMUY has been a revolutionary initiative that has transformed the lives of more than 3.57 crore households spanning across the length and breadth of the country.
- The initiative is in line with Governments aim to eradicate energy poverty, thereby promoting economic empowerment.

Way ahead:

- The PMUY is a bold and much-needed initiative, but it should be recognised that this is just a first step. The real test of the PMUY and its successor programmes will be in how they translate the provision of connections to sustained use of LPG or other clean fuels such as electricity or biogas.
- Truly smokeless kitchens can be realized only if the government follows up with measures that go beyond connections to actual usage of LPG. This may require concerted efforts cutting across Ministries beyond petroleum and natural gas and including those of health, rural development and women and child welfare.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** PMUY.
- **For Mains:** PMUY and its significance.

Sources: pib.

7. TRIFED**Context:**

- Due to the massive drive of scaling up the retail marketing activities by TRIFED, the value of Sales has increased from Rs. 11.37 crores in 2016-17 to Rs.20.08 Crores during 2017-18, a record increase of 77% and a record sale in the history of TRIFED.

About TRIFED:

- TRIFED is an apex organisation at National Level and functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

What it does?

- TRIFED is serving the interests of Tribals, who are engaged in collection of NTFP and making of Tribal Art & Handicraft Products for their livelihood so as to ensure better remunerative price for their products as well as for the socio-economic betterment through Self Help Groups, Empanelled NGOs, State level Tribal Development Corporations, Forest Development Corporations for undertaking marketing development of the tribal products.
- It also organizes exhibitions like National Tribal Craft Expo called "Aadi Mahotsav" etc. in which it promotes and markets tribal products.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** TRIFED.
- **For Mains:** Tribal development- challenges, need and solutions.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

1. SC/ST Atrocities Act

Context:

- The government has filed a petition seeking review of the Supreme Court order diluting the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, which protects marginalised communities against discrimination and atrocities.

What's the issue?

- On March 20, the Supreme Court banned automatic arrests and registration of criminal cases under the SC/ST Act, triggering widespread criticism and outcry from the dalit community.
- The apex court said public servants can't be prosecuted without the approval of the appointing authority, and private citizens too should be arrested only after an inquiry under the law.
- It further ruled that preliminary inquiry in a case under the Act would be conducted by the Deputy Superintendent of Police to ensure the allegations are not frivolous.
- The amendment in the law was a bid to protect honest public servants discharging bona fide duties from being blackmailed with false cases under the Act.

What's the concern now?

- Dalit organisations and some political parties fear the dilution of the provisions of the Act might lead to increase in violence against Dalits.

About SC/ST Act:

- The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, or simply the Atrocities Act. The SC/ST Act was enacted on September 9, 1989. The rules for the Act were notified on March 31, 1995.
- The SC/ST Act lists 22 offences relating to various patterns or behaviours inflicting criminal offences and breaking the self-respect and esteem of the scheduled castes and tribes community. This includes denial of economic, democratic and social rights, discrimination, exploitation and abuse of the legal process.
- According to the SC/ST Act, the protection is provided from social disabilities such as denial of access to certain places and to use customary passage, personal atrocities like forceful drinking or eating of inedible food sexual exploitation, injury etc, atrocities affecting properties, malicious prosecution, political disabilities and economic exploitation.
- For speedy trial, Section 14 of the SC/ST Act provides for a Court of Session to be a Special Court to try offences under this Act in each district.
- The prime objective of the SC/ST Act is to deliver justice to marginalised through proactive efforts, giving them a life of dignity, self-esteem and a life without fear, violence or suppression from the dominant castes.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** SC/ST Act.
- For Mains:** Need for review of the act and issues related to judicial overreach.

ABOUT THE ATROCITY ACT

- The act was enacted by the parliament of India on 9th september, 1989 (Act 33).
- The act was implemented to prevent the atrocities against SC/ST.
- It extends whole of India except the state of Jammu & Kashmir.
- Article 17 enacted in 1955 to abolish untouchability with objective to remove humiliation & multifaceted harassments of dalits.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018 for better protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

Salient Features of the Bill:

- It proposes to include “National Commission for Protection of Child Rights” as deemed Member of the Commission;
- It proposes to add a woman Member in the composition of the Commission;
- It proposes to enlarge the scope of eligibility and scope of selection of Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission as well as the State Human Rights Commission; and
- It proposes to incorporate a mechanism to look after the cases of human rights violation in the Union Territories.
- It proposes to amend the term of office of Chairperson and Members of National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commission to make it in consonance with the terms of Chairperson and Members of other Commissions.

Benefits:

- The Amendment will strengthen the Human Rights Institutions of India further for effective discharge of their mandates, roles and responsibilities.
- Moreover, the amended Act will be in perfect sync with the agreed global standards and benchmarks towards ensuring the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual in the country.

Background:

- The amendment to the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 will make National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) more compliant with the **Paris Principle** concerning its autonomy, independence, pluralism and wide-ranging functions in order to effectively protect and promote human rights.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Key features of the bill, NHRC and SHRC.
- For Mains:** Human Rights related issues.

Sources: pib.

3. Oxytocin

Context:

- The Union government has banned imports of the hormone oxytocin to stop its misuse in the livestock industry, where activists say it causes hormonal imbalances and shortens the lives of milch animals.
- The government has also asked customs officials to step up vigilance against those likely to try and smuggle oxytocin into India.
- The government has decided to rely on domestic production to satisfy requirements of the hormone.

Oxytocin

Biosynthesis of Oxytocin



Oxytocin is a cyclic nona peptide that differs from vasopressin by only two amino acids. It is synthesized as a larger precursor molecule in cell bodies of the paraventricular nucleus, and to a lesser extent, the supraoptic nucleus in the hypothalamus.

The precursor is rapidly converted by proteolysis to the active hormone and its neurophysin, packaged into secretory granules as an oxytocin-neurophysin complex, and secreted from nerve endings that terminate primarily in the posterior pituitary gland (neurohypophysis).

Background:

- A panel of top drug experts had recommended an import ban in February. It also recommended that sale be limited to registered government hospitals and clinics, a bar code system used on all forms of the drug to ensure tracking and prevent abuse.

Concerns:

- The drug is used by dairy owners and farmers to boost milk production and make vegetables look bigger and fresher. But, it was found that indiscriminate use of Oxytocin in milch animals and by farmers was causing irreversible hormone damage.
- The drug's abuse in animals shortens their lives and makes them barren sooner.
- Implications to human health are humongous, from reproductive complications to hormonal imbalances.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Oxytocin.
- **For Mains:** Associated concerns.

About Oxytocin:

- Oxytocin has also been dubbed the hug hormone, cuddle chemical, moral molecule, and the bliss hormone due to its effects on behavior, including its role in love and in female reproductive biological functions in reproduction.
- Oxytocin is a hormone that is made in the brain, in the hypothalamus. It is transported to, and secreted by, the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain.
- It acts both as a hormone and as a brain neurotransmitter.
- The release of oxytocin by the pituitary gland acts to regulate two female reproductive functions: Childbirth and Breast-feeding.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Phosphorus pentoxide:**Context:**

- The government has imposed anti-dumping duty on import of Phosphorus pentoxide from China to protect the domestic manufacturers from cheap shipments.

Key facts:

- Phosphorus Pentoxide is used as a powerful desiccant and dehydrating agent and is a useful building block and reagent in the chemical industry.
- Phosphorus pentoxide is not flammable.
- It reacts vigorously with water and water-containing substances like wood or cotton, liberates much heat and may even cause fire. It is corrosive to metal.

5. Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)**Context:**

- In line with the Government initiative of ease of doing business, the Union Cabinet has given its approval for delegating the powers to Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Finance Minister to award the Blocks/Contract Areas to successful bidders under Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) after International Competitive Bidding (ICB) based on the recommendations of Empowered Committee of Secretaries (ECS).

Significance of this move:

- Under HELP, Blocks are to be awarded twice in a year. Therefore, this delegation of powers will expedite the decision making process on awarding blocks and give a boost to the initiative of ease of doing business.

Hydrocarbon Exploration Licensing Policy (HELP)**Salient Features**

- **Single License for exploration and production of conventional as well as non-conventional hydrocarbon resources**
- **Open Acreage Policy-option to select the exploration blocks without waiting for formal bid round.**
- **Revenue Sharing Model-simple, easy to administer- no cost recovery - no micro-management by the Government - operational freedom to the operator**
- **Pricing and Marketing Freedom- a major incentive for investment**

About Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP):

- Government of India launched a new policy regime for Exploration & Production (E&P) sector namely Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) in 2016 which is paradigm shift from earlier policy regime.
- **The main features of new Policy regime** are Revenue Sharing Contract, single Licence for exploration and production of conventional as well as unconventional Hydrocarbon resources, marketing & pricing freedom, etc.
- **Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)** under HELP, is main innovative feature wherein investor can carve out Blocks of their own interest and submit an Expression of Interest (Eoi) throughout the year. Based on the areas for which expression of interest has been expressed bidding will be conducted every 6 months.

What was the need for the new Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)?

- India is the 3rd largest consumer of crude oil and petroleum products with oil and gas contributing 34.4% to primary energy consumption. In 2015-2016, India's crude oil import dependence rose to 81% from 78.5%. In last five years, India has seen overall decline in exploration and production of conventional resources. New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) created in 1997 ended the state dominance and created a competitive environment leading to liberalization of oil and gas exploration and production industry. However, it failed to keep the momentum of production growth and attracting the foreign investment.
- Bureaucratic hurdles like multiple approvals and sanctions, cost overruns, and disputes led to some oil majors leaving their awarded blocks and exit from the space.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** OALP, HELP.
- **For Mains:** Need for HELP and its significance.

Sources: pib.

6. Gram Swaraj Abhiyan**Context:**

- Haryana government has decided to launch 'Gram Swaraj Abhiyan', an outreach campaign, in the state on the birth anniversary of Dr B R Ambedkar on April 14, which will continue till May 5.

About Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:

- "Gram Swaraj Abhiyan" will be organised starting from 14th April to 05th May, 2018.
- The campaign, undertaken under the name of "Sabka Sath, Sabka Gaon, Sabka Vikas", is to promote social harmony, spread awareness about pro-poor initiatives of government, reach out to poor households to enroll them as also to obtain their feedback on various welfare programmes.
- **As a special endeavour during the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, saturation of eligible households/persons would be made** under seven flagship pro-poor programmes in 21,058 identified villages.
- **The programmes covered** are Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Saubhagya, Ujala scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Mission Indradhanush.

Sources: pib.

7. e-FRRO scheme**Context:**

- The government has launched the web-based application 'e-FRRO' (e-Foreigners Regional Registration Office) which aims to provide efficient visa related services online to foreigners visiting India.

About 'e-FRRO' scheme:

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

- **Features:** under the scheme, foreigners would be able to get as many as 27 Visa and Immigration related services in India from the comfort of their place of stay. Using the e-FRRO application, foreigners can apply online on the portal and obtain the service(s) through email/post without appearing in person at the FRO/FRRO office.
- **Advantages of e-FRRO** include facilitation of legitimate foreigners through “Digital India” vision of the Government, foreigners need not visit FRRO/FRO office – “Services from the comfort of home”, convenient and Time saving, exclusive dashboard for User friendly experience and Uniform & Standardized Services across the Country.

Significance of the scheme:

- In 2017, more than one crore foreigners visited India and out of them approximately 3.6 lakhs had to visit FRRO offices spread across the country for various visa-related services.
- With the launch of the online e-FRRO scheme, their physical visit to the FRRO offices thus been obviated.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims:** e- FRRO scheme.
- **For Mains:** Efforts to promote India as a tourist destination.

Sources: pib.

8. DARPAN-PLI App

Context:

- The government has launched DARPAN-Postal Life Insurance App. The App will help in collection of premium for postal life insurance and rural postal life insurance policies at branch post offices anywhere in India, with online updation of the policies.

DARPAN project:

- With a view to achieve total digitisation of postal operations in the country, the department has launched Digital Advancement of Rural Post office for a new India (DARPAN) Project, which aims at connecting all one lakh 29 thousand Rural Branch Post Offices.

9. Cabinet to discuss death penalty for rape of minors

Context:

- The Union Cabinet is planning on bringing an Ordinance to award death penalty to those convicted of sexually assaulting a child.
- The criminal law amendment ordinance seeks to amend the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Evidence Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act to introduce a new provision to sentence convicts of such crimes punishment of death.

Background:

- Law Ministry has approved a proposal received from the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) to amend the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, and a final decision on whether to bring it in the form of an Ordinance will be taken by the cabinet.

Why this may not be a good idea?

- Tracking down sexual crimes has proved difficult because — as pointed out by National Crime Records Bureau reports since 2014 — in over 90% of such crimes, the perpetrators are known to the victim. A report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs noted that, “child sexual abuse and related crimes remain overwhelmingly under-reported due to the associated stigma and propensity of parents/guardians to not involve the police in these matters”.
- A study by the National Law School of India University (NLSUI) also reported that in 67% of child rape cases, the survivors gave up on the trial or changed their statement. Therefore, introducing the death penalty in the POCSO Act will aggravate this problem.

Is death penalty the only solution?

The demand for death penalty for sexual crimes stems primarily from a society's desire for revenge, not redress. A growing body of literature now emphasises that the death penalty is not a deterrent against any kind of crime — better policing, social welfare and effective implementation of the due processes are. Also, separate courtrooms exclusively for child abuse cases should be established.

Facts for Prelims:

- Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have passed a Bill providing for death penalty to those convicted of raping girls of 12 years and below.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Death penalty bill by states.
- **For Mains:** Need for death penalty, alternatives available.

Sources: the hindu.

10. Inter-country removal & retention of children

Context:

- Committee headed by Justice Rajesh Bindal has submitted its report on legal issues related to Inter-country removal & retention of children to the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

'Inter Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority':

- The Committee has recommended that the Government may establish an 'Inter Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority'.

Composition of the authority:

- The Authority may be chaired by a retired High Court Judge, with Members from Legal and Social sector background along with representatives from key Ministries.

Functions of the authority:

- The authority has been envisaged to provide a one window solution in cases of inter country removal and retention of Children.
- The Authority may examine the inter country cases of removal and retention of children vis-a-vis the cultural context, merit of the case, and the best interest of the Child.

Concerns associated with Inter Country Child Abduction:

- Over three crore Indians living abroad have cross-border marriages. When such a diverse family unit breaks down, children suffer as they are dragged into an international legal battle between their parents. Inter-spousal child removal is one of the most unfortunate outcomes of such break ups.
- Children are "abducted" by one parent and taken to a country with a different culture. This can be traumatic as they are also cut off from the other parent.

The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (1980):

- The Hague Convention is a multilateral treaty whereby the contracting states will have to cooperate with each other in expeditiously sending back the runaway parent and the child to the country of the child's 'habitual residence'.
- It seeks to return children abducted or retained overseas by a parent to their country of habitual residence for the courts of that country to decide on matters of residence and contact.
- The convention shall apply to any child, up to the age of 16 years who is a habitual resident of any of the contacting states.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** International Child Abduction Bill, Hague convention.
- **For Mains:** Need for law on Child Abduction.

International Child Abduction Bill:

- The Protection of Children (Inter-Country Removal and Retention) Bill, 2016 seeks to address the issue. The Bill is in consonance with the principles of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, 1980, which seeks to protect a child from the harmful effect of wrongful removal and secure prompt return and reintegration of the child in an environment of his/her 'habitual residence'.
- **Definition:** The Bill defines 'wrongful removal or retention' as an act in breach of custody to a person or an institution or any other body under the law of the country in which the child was habitually resident immediately before the removal or retention. The law will be applicable to those wrongfully removed or retained children in India who have not completed 16 years.
- **Central Authority:** The Bill recommends the setting up of a Central Authority tasked with discovering the whereabouts of the child. The Authority will further act to prevent harm to the child, secure the voluntary return of the child to his or her habitual residence, exchange information relating to the child with the appropriate authorities of the contracting state, institute judicial proceedings in the High Court concerned to secure the return of the child, provide free legal aid advice, and make administrative arrangements for the return of the child.
- **Return of the Child:** The court can order the return of a child who has been wrongfully removed or retained in India and if a period of one year has not elapsed from the date of removal or retention. However, the one-year cap is not final. The court can order return if it is established that the child is not settled in his/her new environment. It can refuse to order return if returning would expose the child to harm or if the child, on attaining an age and level of maturity, refuses to go back, among other conditions.

Sources: pib.

11. National Biopharma Mission

Context:

- The Union Government has entered into agreement with World Bank for flexible financing arrangement to accelerate research towards early development for biopharmaceuticals under National Biopharma Mission.
- **The agreement was signed between the project implementing agency – BIRAC** a PSU of DBT, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (on behalf of World Bank).

Significance of the programme:

- The programme will specifically focus on the development of new vaccines, bio-therapeutics, diagnostics and medical devices to better address the rising burden of diseases in the country.
- It will also bring isolated centres of excellence together, enhance regional capabilities and strengthen the current bio-clusters network in terms of capacities as well as quantity and quality of output.
- This would strengthen translational capability of academic researchers; empower bio-entrepreneurs and SMEs by decreasing the cost and risk during early stages of product development and also elevate the innovation quotient of the industry.

Challenges:

- India has been an active player in the pharmaceutical industry and has contributed globally towards making life saving drugs and low cost pharmaceutical products accessible and affordable for those in need.
- Be it the Rotavirus vaccine, heart valve prosthesis or affordable insulin, India has been a forerunner in these and many more. Despite, these advances Indian biopharmaceutical industry is still 10-15 years behind their counterparts in the developed countries and faces stiff competition from China, Korea and others.
- The lacuna primarily exists due to disconnected centers of excellence, less focus on translational research and staggered funding.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** National Biopharma Mission and its significance, BIRAC.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1. NIRF India Rankings 2018

Context:

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) India Rankings 2018 have been announced. NIRF Indian Rankings 2018 was the third edition of the rankings that were introduced in the year 2016.

What is NIRF?

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country.
- The parameters for ranking broadly cover "Teaching, Learning and Resources," "Research and Professional Practices," "Graduation Outcomes," "Outreach and Inclusivity," and "Perception".
- The 2018 rankings include nine different categories-overall, universities, engineering, colleges, management, pharmacy, medical, architecture, and law. Out of which **sections like medical, architecture and law have been introduced this year.**

Performance of various institutions:

- The Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru and Delhi's Miranda House are India's best university and college this year.
- All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi, Nalsar University of Law in Hyderabad and Indian Institute of Technology in Kharagpur ranked number 1 in their respective categories.
- Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras was declared the best engineering college.
- Delhi University's Miranda House topped the college category this year as well.
- Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad occupied the top position among management institutions this year also.

Significance of NIRF:

- Ranking promotes competition among the Universities and drive them to strive for excellence. The rankings assume significance as performance of institutions has been linked with "Institutions of Eminence" scheme.

Institutions of Eminence scheme:

- **The institutes of eminence scheme under the Union human resource development (HRD) ministry** aims to project Indian institutes to global recognition.
- The 20 selected institutes will enjoy complete academic and administrative autonomy.
- The government will run 10 of these and they will receive special funding.
- **The selection shall be made through challenge method** mode by the Empowered Expert Committee constituted for the purpose.
- **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 Institutions of Eminence can also come up as greenfield ventures provided the sponsoring organisation submits a convincing perspective plan for 15 years.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NIRF rankings, Institutes of eminence scheme.
- **For Mains:** Higher education reforms.

Sources: the hindu.

2. FSSAI introduces Project Dhoop

Context:

- In order to address rising incidence of Vitamin 'D' Deficiencies (VDD), particularly amongst the young people, FSSAI has launched a unique initiative, 'Project Dhoop' in association with NCERT, NDMC and North MCD Schools.

About Project Dhoop:

- Project Dhoop urges schools to shift their morning assembly to noon time, mainly between 11am and 1pm to ensure maximum absorption of Vitamin D in students through natural sunlight.

Significance of micronutrients for the body:

- Micronutrients including vitamins are needed by people in only very small amounts, but these are the "magic wands" that enable the body to produce enzymes, hormones and other substances essential for proper growth and development.
- As tiny as the amounts are, the consequences of their absence are severe. Vitamin A, D, B12, Iron, Folic Acid and Iodine, are the most important; their lack represents a major threat to the health and development of populations the world over, particularly children and pregnant women in countries like India.

Concerns:

- Most parts of India receive abundant sunshine all the year through. Yet shockingly, studies have found that more than 90% of boys and girls across various Indian cities are deficient in Vitamin D. In Delhi alone, 90-97% of school children (aged 6-17 years) have Vitamin 'D' Deficiencies (VDD) and around 10-11% of these children exhibit signs of VDD.

How to prevent Vitamin D deficiency in school children?

- Vitamin D deficiency occurs due to overuse of sunscreen, wearing clothes that cover most of the skin, working all day in an air-conditioned atmosphere, and other factors. Also, the school uniforms need to be designed in a way that at least face and arms are exposed to sunlight, which would be equivalent to 18 per cent of body surface, and the exposure has to be at least for 30-40 minutes.
- Additionally, opting for fortified foods (with +F symbol) is a simple and inexpensive way to address micronutrient deficiencies without any radical change in behaviour or eating patterns.

About FSSAI:

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.
- It was created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the Administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI.
- The Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) are appointed by Government of India.
- The Chairperson is in the rank of Secretary to Government of India.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** FSSAI, Vitamin D and its significance for the body, Project Dhoop.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Viral hepatitis**Context:**

- With viral hepatitis becoming as serious health problem as the “big three” communicable diseases — HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis — in the country, the Union Health Ministry is ready to roll out a Rs 500 crore-three-year comprehensive integrated national action plan to check morbidity and mortality due to the disease that inflicts the liver.
- The action plan has been developed with the key objective to provide an actionable framework of evidence based, priority interventions to support the national response for prevention, control and management of viral hepatitis in the country.

Concerns:

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has already recognised viral hepatitis as a serious public health problem in India which is home to over 52 million people infected with chronic hepatitis. This is placing a huge disease, social and economic burden on the affected families as well as the health system, as per the UN agency.
- Latest assessment by WHO shows that in 2016, of the 400 million people infected by viral hepatitis globally, about 13% were Indians. A bigger concern is that most people infected with the virus are unaware and experts point out that with challenges such as awareness, accessibility, compliance and affordability, India can only eradicate hepatitis by 2080 (as against global goal of 2030) if they start acting now.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Viral hepatitis and the need for elimination of the disease.

Sources: et.

What is viral hepatitis?

- Inflammation of liver is usually referred as hepatitis. Viral hepatitis is a widespread infectious disease normally caused by the hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D and E. The condition can progress to liver fibrosis (scarring), cirrhosis or liver cancer. It can be caused by any of the known five hepatotropic viruses, namely — hepatitis A, B, C, D and E which are highly divergent in their structure, epidemiology, mode of transmission, incubation period, signs/symptoms, diagnosis, prevention and treatment options.

Paper 2 Topic: Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

1. Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

Context:

- As part of the “Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan”, the “Swachh Bharat Parva” was recently organized all over the country.

About Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:

- “Gram Swaraj Abhiyan” is being organised between 14th April to 05th May, 2018.
- The campaign, undertaken under the name of “Sabka Sath, Sabka Gaon, Sabka Vikas”, is to promote social harmony, spread awareness about pro-poor initiatives of government, reach out to poor households to enroll them as also to obtain their feedback on various welfare programmes.
- As a special endeavour during the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, **saturation of eligible households/persons would be made under seven flagship pro-poor programmes** in 21,058 identified villages.
- The programmes covered** are Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Saubhagya, Ujala scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Mission Indradhanush.



What's important?

- For Prelims and Mains:** Gram Swaraj Abhiyan.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0

Context: Human Resource Development Ministry has launched Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0.

About Unnat Bharat Abhiyan:

- Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, with the intention to enrich Rural India.
- It aims to leverage the knowledge base and resources of the Premier Institutions of the country to bring in transformational change in rural developmental process.
- It also aims to create a vibrant relationship between the society and the higher educational institutes, with the latter providing the knowledge and technology support to improve the livelihoods in rural areas and to upgrade the capabilities of both the public and private organisations in the society.

Significance of the programme:

- Institutes through their faculty and students, will carry out studies of living conditions in the adopted villages, assess the local problems and needs, workout the possibilities of leveraging the technological interventions and the need to improve the processes in implementation of various government schemes, prepare workable action plans for the selected villages. Such knowledge inputs would make their way into the development programmes in rural areas.
- The Institutes would be expected to closely coordinate with the district administration, elected public representatives of panchayat / villages and other stakeholders and will become very much a part of the process of development planning and implementation. In this process, faculty and students of such institutes

Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0:

- Under the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0, the institutions have been selected on a Challenge Mode and the scheme has been extended to 750 reputed Higher Educational Institutes (both public and private) of the country.
- Also, scope for providing Subject Expert Groups and Regional Coordinating Institutes to handhold and guide the participating institutions has been strengthened.
- IIT Delhi has been designated to function as the National Coordinating Institute for this programme** and the Ministry intends to extend the coverage to all the reputed Higher Educational Institutes, in a phased manner. Each selected institute would adopt a cluster of villages / panchayats and gradually expand the outreach over a period of time.

would be re-oriented and connected to the rural realities so that their learning and research work also becomes more relevant to the society.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Unnat Bharat Abhiyan.
- **For Mains:** Need for involvement of premier institutions in bringing transformational change in rural developmental process.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance-applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

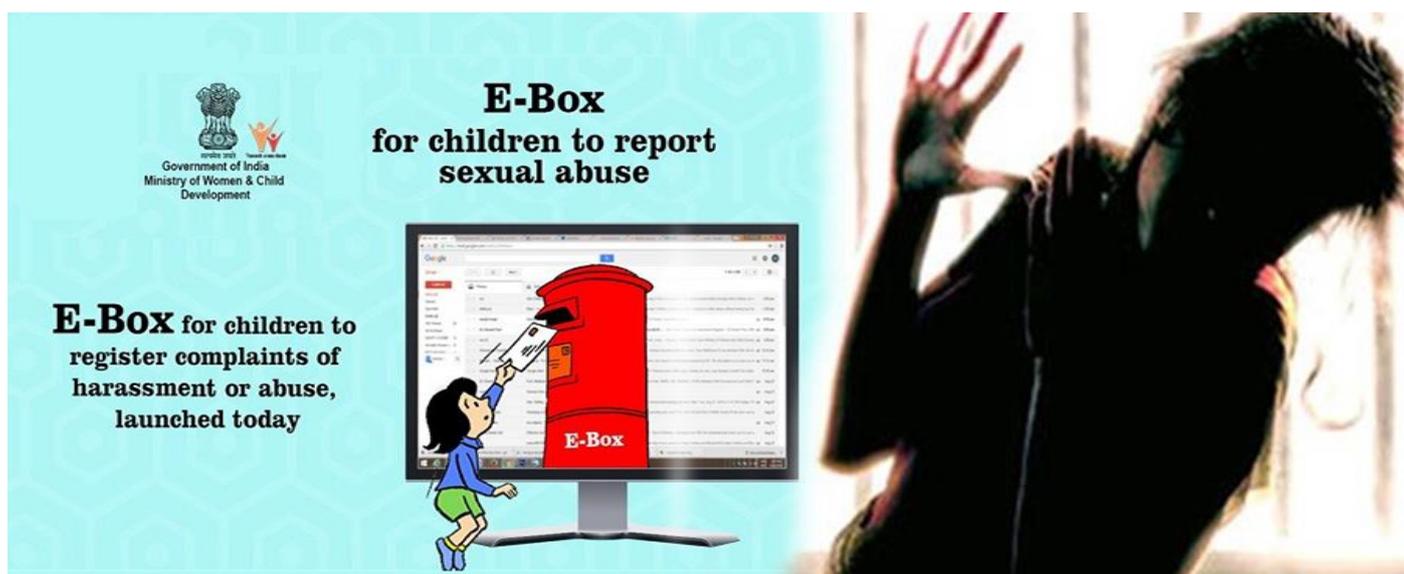
1. POCSO e-Box

Context:

- To equip the children with the information regarding the possible modes of protection/complaints, the National Council Of Educational Research And Training (NCERT) has published the information regarding Childline (1098) 24x7 Helpline for children and POCSO e-box on the back side of the front cover of all course books from Class 6 to Class 12.

About POCSO e- Box:

- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), e-Box, is an online complaint management system for easy and direct reporting of sexual offences against children and timely action against the offenders under the POCSO Act, 2012. E-Box is very simple to operate and will help to maintain the confidentiality of the complaint.



Background:

- Sexual offences against children are rampant but only a small percentage gets reported. According to a study, about 53% of children surveyed, reported having faced one or the other form of sexual abuse in their lifetime. In most cases, the offender is a family member/near relative or an acquaintance.
- The child victim in such cases generally does not report these offences. Sexual abuse scars the psyche of the affected child for entire life. A child who is sexually abused has to face very serious consequences such as cognitive impairment, violent and risk behaviour including depression and anxiety. Feeling shame and guilt with poor interpersonal relationship & self esteem are other consequences of sexually abused children.

About POCSO Act:

- Being concerned about offences against children, the Government enacted POCSO Act, 2012 to protect them from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, while safeguarding the interest of the child at every stage of the judicial process.
- This is achieved by incorporating child friendly mechanisms for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and speedy trial of offences through designated Special Courts.
- Any human being up to the age of 18 years is recognised as a child under the POCSO Act.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** POCSO Act, e- Box.
- **For Mains:** Prevention of sexual offences against children.

Sources: pib.

2. Integration of e-SANAD portal and NAD – National Academic Depository**Context:**

- In a bid to make education system in India more transparent, the integration of e-SANAD portal and NAD – National Academic Depository has been launched by the Union HRD Ministry.

What is e-SANAD?

- e-Sanad is a project aimed at online submission/verification of documents with an ultimate object to extend contact less, cashless, faceless and paperless document attestation service for apostille and normal attestation to applicants in India (to be extended to Indians residing abroad as well in a phased manner).
- The project is being implemented by NIC in coordination with CBSE, States/UTs and the Ministry of External Affairs in a phased manner.

About National Academic Depository (NAD):

- National Academic Depository (NAD) is a 24X7 online store house of all academic awards viz. certificates, diplomas, degrees, mark-sheets etc. duly digitised and lodged by academic institutions / boards / eligibility assessment bodies.
- The UGC has signed a tripartite agreement with NSDL Database Management Limited (NDML) and CDSL Ventures Limited (CVL) for operationalising NAD.
- NAD not only ensures easy access to and retrieval of an academic award but also validates and guarantees its authenticity and safe storage.
- National Academic Depository comprises of two interoperable digital depositories viz. CDSL Ventures Limited (CVL) and NSDL Database Management Limited (NDML).

Sources: pib.

3. Make BCCI a public body**Context:**

- The Law Commission has suggested to the government that it turn the Board of Control of Cricket in India into a government-controlled body.
- The Commission has asked the government to classify BCCI as a national sports federation and bring it under the ambit of the Right to Information Act (RTI).

**Need for declaring BCCI as a public body:**

- By virtue of being the organisers of competitive cricket, BCCI is de facto legislating on sport-related activities.
- BCCI, though not a national sports federation, nominates cricketers for the Arjuna Awards. Therefore, the BCCI virtually acts as a national sports federation.
- It receives “substantial financing” from governments in the form of tax exemptions and land grants.
- Also, functioning of BCCI shows that the government does exercise control over its activities and functioning.
- Non-consideration of the role played by the BCCI as monopolistic in the regulation of the game of cricket has resulted in the board “flying under the radar of public scrutiny, encouraged an environment of opacity and non-accountability”.

Key recommendations made by the law commission:

- BCCI should be classified as “state” under Article 12 of the Constitution so that it is answerable to authorities like the Supreme Court.
- RTI Act should be made applicable to BCCI along with all of its constituent member cricketing associations, provided they fulfill the criteria applicable to BCCI.

Way ahead:

- Since BCCI exercises 'state-like' powers affecting the fundamental rights of the stakeholders, guaranteed under the Constitution, it should be viewed as an agency or instrumentality of the state, under Article 12 of the Constitution, thereby making it amenable to the writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court under Article 32.

Who is a public authority?

- The RTI Act defines "public authorities" in Section 2(h): A "public authority" means any authority or body or institution of self- government established or constituted:
 - By or under the Constitution.
 - By any other law made by Parliament.
 - By any other law made by State Legislature.
 - By notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any – Body owned, controlled or substantially financed and Non-Government organization substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** RTI, definition of public authority.
- **For Mains:** BCCI and need for bringing it under the ambit of RTI.

Sources: pib.

4. e-Vidhan project

Context:

- The central government has launched Central Project Monitoring Unit for e-Vidhan project at Parliament House Annexe.

About e-Vidhan project:

- e-Vidhan is a mission mode project to digitize and make the functioning of State Legislatures in India paperless.
- It is a part of the broader Digital India Programme of the Government and is likely to contribute to the cleanliness & environment by reducing the use of papers to a great extent.
- The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is the Nodal Ministry for the project.

Facts for Prelims:

- In 2014, Himachal Pradesh became the first state in the country to implement e-Vidhan as a pilot project.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** e- Vidhan project.
- **For Mains:** Digital India Programme and its significance.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Role of civil services.

Civil Services Day

Context:

- 12th Civil Services Day was celebrated on April 21st, 2018. It focussed on 'Evolving Strategies for Transforming Aspirational Districts'.

About the Civil Services Day:

- The Government of India celebrates April 21 every year as 'Civil Services day' as an occasion for the civil servants to rededicate themselves to the cause of citizen and renew their commitments to public service and excellence in work.
- This date is chosen to commemorate the day when first Home Minister of Independent India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed the probationers of Administrative Services Officers in 1947 at Metcalf House, Delhi.

- As part of Civil Servant Day, Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration are presented to Districts/Implementing Units for implementation of Priority programme and innovation categories.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. Kishanganga project

Context:

- Pakistan has informed the World Bank about India's completing of the Kishanganga hydropower project during the bank's "pause" period and has urged it to "recognise its responsibility" under the Indus Waters Treaty.

What's the issue?

- Pakistan has approached the World Bank, the mediator between the two countries of the water distribution treaty, in the past and raised issues over Kishanganga and Ratle projects in Jammu and Kashmir.
- It has been flagging concern over designs of India's five hydroelectricity projects – Pakal Dul (1000 MW), Ratle (850 MW), Kishanganga (330 MW), Miyar (120 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW) – being built/planned in the Indus river basin, contending these violate the treaty.



Background:

- In December 2016, the world bank had announced that it had "paused" the process for either appointing a Court of Arbitration (COA) or a neutral expert and started mediation between the two countries on how to advance and develop consensus in the light of the treaty on the mechanism for resolution of faulty designs of the two projects. Since then, the bank has arranged two rounds of talks between the two sides.

About the projects:

- The Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant** is an \$864 million dam which is part of a run-of-the-river hydroelectric scheme that is designed to divert water from the Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin. It is located 5 km north of Bandipore in Jammu and Kashmir, India and will have an installed capacity of 330 MW. Construction on the dam was temporarily halted by the Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration in October 2011 due to Pakistan's protest of its effect on the flow of the Kishanganga River (called the Neelum River in Pakistan). In February 2013, the Hague ruled that India could divert a minimum amount of water for power generation.
- The Ratle Hydroelectric Plant** is a run-of-the-river hydroelectric power station currently under construction on the Chenab River, downstream of the village of Ratle in Doda district of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The project includes a 133 m (436 ft) tall gravity dam and two power stations adjacent to one another.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** IWT, Kishanganga and Rattle projects.
- For Mains:** IWT and related issues.

Sources: the hindu.

2. India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway

Context:

- Work on the 1,000 km-long India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway officially started with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) signing an agreement with a joint-venture (JV) between Punj Lloyd and Varaha Infra to upgrade the Yagyi-Kalewa section of the India-Myanmar Friendship Road in Myanmar.

- **This is NHAI's first international project agreement.** The project has been funded by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and would be executed on EPC mode at a cost of Rs.1177 crores.

About IMT Highway:

- The 1,000 km India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway will run from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar. The highway will facilitate easy movement of goods and people among the three countries.

Significance of the Highway:

- Once completed, greater flows of trade and investment will take place along the route, stimulating the movement of goods and people, creating jobs, promoting tourism as well as raising the livelihoods of the peoples in the region.

Why is this highway crucial for India?

- First, it will help improve connectivity between India's remote Northeastern part and Southeast Asia. For long, the lack of physical connectivity with Southeast Asia has been an Achilles' heel in India's "Act-East Policy." The trilateral highway will improve India's connectivity with Myanmar and Thailand, and in the future there are plans to connect it with pre-existing roads and take it all the way to Vietnam.
- Secondly, with the construction of this road, which started as the India-Myanmar friendship road way back in 2001, the recent non-attendance by India at China's Belt and Road Forum in Beijing seems to have injected a new measure of earnestness among Indian policy planners when it comes to executing such road projects.
- Thirdly, Northeast India has been lagging behind other parts of the country when it comes to infrastructure. When completed, the IMT highway will also give easy access to the Northeastern states to the sea (via Myanmar).

About NHAI:

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHA) is an autonomous agency of the Government of India, responsible for management of a network of over 70,000 km of National Highways in India. It is a nodal agency of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- The NHA was created through the promulgation of the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988. In February 1995, the Authority was formally made an autonomous body.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** NHAI, IMT Trilateral highway.
- **For Mains:** Development of North East and the need for integration.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1. Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Competency of Seafarers

Context:

- India has signed an MoU with the Republic of Korea on Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Competency of Seafarers.

Significance of the MoU:

- The MoU will pave way for recognition of maritime education and training, certificates of competency, endorsements, training documentary evidence and medical fitness certificates for seafarers issued by the Government of the other country in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 1/10 of the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention, and cooperation between the two countries in training and management of seafarers.

About STCW convention:

- The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (or STCW), 1978 sets qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel on seagoing merchant ships.
- **STCW was adopted in 1978 by conference at the International Maritime Organization (IMO)** in London, and entered into force in 1984. The Convention was significantly amended in 1995.
- The 1978 STCW Convention was the first to establish basic requirements on training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers on an international level.
- The Convention prescribes minimum standards relating to training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers which countries are obliged to meet or exceed.
- **One important feature of the Convention is that it applies to ships of non-party States** when visiting ports of States which are Parties to the Convention.
- **The Manila amendments to the STCW Convention** and Code were adopted on 25 June 2010, marking a major revision of the STCW Convention and Code.

Sources: pib.

2. G7 foreign ministers' summit

Context:

- G7 foreign ministers' summit is being held in Toronto. Participants discussed tensions with Moscow, Iran and North Korea.

About G7:

- The Group of 7 (G7) is a group consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The European Union is also represented within the G7.
- These countries are the seven major advanced economies as reported by the International Monetary Fund: the G7 countries represent more than 64% of the net global wealth (\$263 trillion).
- A very high net national wealth and a very high Human Development Index are the main requirements to be a member of this group.

3. Peace Mission 2018

What is it?

- It is a multi-nation counter-terror exercise that will take place under the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The main aim of the exercise will be to enhance counter-terror cooperation among the eight SCO member countries.
- Peace Mission exercises are held once in two years. This year's exercises will be the 10th edition. The last time, it was held in 2016 in Kyrgyztan.

Where is it being held? The 2018 edition will be held in the Ural mountains of Russia.

Significance of this edition:

- In a first, India and Pakistan will be part of this exercise.
- It will be for the first time since Independence that India and Pakistan will both be part of a military exercise, though the armies of the two nations have worked together in UN peace keeping missions.

SCO:

- The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the Presidents of Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- India and Pakistan were admitted as observers of the grouping in 2005. Both the countries were admitted as full members of the bloc last year.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** SCO and Peace mission.
- **For Mains:** Significance of counter terror exercises and the need for international cooperation.

Paper 2 Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. US places India under watch list

Context:

- The United States Treasury Department has put India again on the currency manipulator watchlist as the country's foreign exchange net addition and the bilateral trade surplus with the US have breached two of the three criteria determining manipulation.

What is Treasury report all about?

- The Treasury report is required by Congress to identify countries that are trying to artificially manage the value of their currency to gain a trade advantage, for example by keeping the exchange rate low to promote cheaper exports.

The US Treasury Department uses three parameters to determine a currency manipulator: Bilateral trade surplus with the US to be \$20 billion, current account surplus at 3% of country's GDP, and net purchases of foreign currency to 2% of country's GDP over a year.

Key facts:

- The "monitoring list" includes those "major trading partners that merit close attention to their currency practices."
- In addition to India, the other countries in the list are China, Germany, Japan, Korea and Switzerland.
- Countries remain on the list for two report cycles "to help ensure that any improvement in performance versus the criteria is durable and is not due to temporary factors."

Way ahead:

- The report called for all the countries on the list to implement economic reforms to address their surpluses.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Study in India programme

Context:

- With an aim to provide students across the world an opportunity to study in Indian educational institutions, the Union HRD Ministry has launched "Study in India" programme.

About the "Study in India" programme:

- What is it?** The "Study in India" is an innovative initiative to attract students from countries in South Asia, South-East Asia, Middle East and Africa to come and experience the very best of academic learning from the top institutions in India.
- Key features:** Under the programme, meritorious students would also be provided with fee waiver and scholarship. The Institute concerned will bear the expenditure on the fee waiver based on cross-subsidisation or through its existing funding. One of the objectives for the programme is to improve global ranking for Indian educational institutes.
- Implementation:** This will be achieved through systematic brand-building, identifying quality institutions for receiving the students, creating suitable infrastructure and facilitation structures.
- Significance of the move:** The programme will not only encourage more foreign students to choose India as a destination for higher education but will also double India's market share of global education exports from less than 1% to 2%. The move is also aimed to improve global ranking of Indian educational institutes.

Why India?

- India's system of higher education is the third largest in the world. While the engineering schools have been the flag bearers of the India's higher education, in keeping with the times and the skill needs of the global workforce India universities are offering a host of other courses such as Masters in Business Administration, Sciences, Liberal Arts, Artificial Intelligence, Photonics and Design Thinking among others.

- As a result, many of its higher education institutions figure in the top 100 Asian Universities as per QS and The World University rankings of 2018. At the same time, interesting and niche courses such as Yoga, Ayurveda or Buddhism are also on offer.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Study in India programme.
- **For Mains:** Significance of higher education and opportunities in India.

Sources: pib.

Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

1. Guidelines for accreditation of journalists

Context:

- Noticing the increasing instances of fake news in various mediums including print and electronic media, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has amended the Guidelines for Accreditation of Journalists.

Highlights:

- Accreditation of a journalist (both television and print) can be cancelled/annulled if the news reported by them is found to be "fake".
- On receiving complaints of "fake news" will be referred to Press Council of India (PCI) if it pertains to print media & to News Broadcasters Association (NBA) if it relates to electronic media.
- Both the agencies will have to dispose off each complaint within 15-days. During the period of probe, the journalist's accreditation will be suspended.
- The Accreditation Committee of the Press Information Bureau, which consists of representatives of both the Press Council of India and NBA, shall be invariably be reached out to for validating any accreditation request of any news media agency.
- If publishing or telecast of fake news is confirmed, the journalist's accreditation shall be suspended for 6 months for first violation, one year for second violation and will be permanently cancelled if there is a third violation.
- Additionally, while examining the requests seeking accreditation, the regulatory agencies "will examine whether the 'Norms of Journalistic Conduct' and 'Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards' prescribed by the PCI and NBA respectively are adhered to by the journalists" and it would be "obligatory for journalists to abide by these guidelines".

What's the concern?

- Some incidents in the past few years have shown that society and its conflicts manifest themselves in what has come to be known as "fake news" — and the internet does aid its rapid distribution. That is not the malaise of the internet or social media platforms, however.
- It is the actors, very often, competing political and other special interests which are producers of such content. But, fake news is a huge problem and demands an urgent solution.

Way ahead:

- Social media platforms are a modern-day Roman Forum. These platforms are agnostic wondrous architectures, enabling different forms and types of self-expression. However, the need for checks around credibility and authenticity seem to have long forgone.
- What stays is the need for freedom. Which is warranted, of course. Yet, at the same time, need a sense of direction. With a critical sense of objectivity. Social media services can simply not afford to step in the conversation and regulate it.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Important guidelines.
- **For Mains:** Fake news menace- challenges, concerns and legislations in this regard.

Sources: the hindu.

2. World Heritage Site

Context:

- As many as 6 monuments/historical sites in the North Eastern states have been identified tentatively for listing under World Heritage Site.

Monuments/sites identified/placed under tentative list for listing under world heritage in the north eastern states are:

- Apatani Cultural Landscape, Arunachal Pradesh.
- Iconic Saree Weaving Clusters of India.
- Moidams – the Mound – Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty, Assam.
- Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh.
- River Island of Majuli in midstream of Brahmaputra River in Assam.
- Thembang Fortified Village, Arunachal Pradesh.

UNESCO world heritage site:

- A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.
 - The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee**, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.
 - Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located** and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.
 - As of July 2017, 1,073 sites are listed: 832 cultural, 206 natural, and 35 mixed properties, in 167 states. Italy is the home for the largest number of sites with 53.

Selection of a site:

- 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 our intellectual history on the planet.

Legal status of designated sites:

- UNESCO designation as a World Heritage Site provides prima facie evidence that such culturally sensitive sites are legally protected pursuant to the Law of War, under the **Geneva Convention, its articles, protocols and customs, together with other treaties including the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property** in the Event of Armed Conflict and international law.

What are endangered sites?

- A site may be added to the List of World Heritage in Danger if there are conditions that threaten the characteristics for which the landmark or area was inscribed on the World Heritage List. Such problems may involve armed conflict and war, natural disasters, pollution, poaching, or uncontrolled urbanization or human development.
 - This danger list is intended to increase international awareness of the threats and to encourage counteractive measures. Threats to a site can be either proven imminent threats or potential dangers that could have adverse effects on a site.
 - The state of conservation for each site on the danger list is reviewed on a yearly basis, after which the committee may request additional measures, delete the property from the list if the threats have ceased or consider deletion from both the List of World Heritage in Danger and the World Heritage List.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

Context:

- Second lead-up Conference to 3rd Annual Meeting of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) on **'Enhancing Port and Coastal Infrastructure'** is being held Visakhapatnam. The Regional Conference is being organized by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India in collaboration with AIIB, CII and Research and Infrastructure System (RIS) for Developing Countries.
- The panel discusses various issues relating to trade promotion through sea route, building-up robust port & coastal infrastructure and revising & relaxing maritime regulatory issues to promote blue economy in India.

What is AIIB?

- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond.
- It is **headquartered in Beijing**.
- It commenced operations in January 2016 and has now grown to 84 approved members from around the world.
- By investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors today, it aims to connect people, services and markets that over time will impact the lives of billions and build a better future.

AIIB founding members



Various organs of AIIB:

- **Board of Governors:** The Board of Governors consists of one Governor and one Alternate Governor appointed by each member country. Governors and Alternate Governors serve at the pleasure of the appointing member.
- **Board of Directors:** Non-resident Board of Directors is responsible for the direction of the Bank's general operations, exercising all powers delegated to it by the Board of Governors. This includes approving the Bank's strategy, annual plan and budget; establishing policies; taking decisions concerning Bank operations; and supervising management and operation of the Bank and establishing an oversight mechanism.
- **International Advisory Panel:** The Bank has established an International Advisory Panel (IAP) to support the President and Senior Management on the Bank's strategies and policies as well as on general operational issues. The Panel meets in tandem with the Bank's Annual Meeting, or as requested by the President. The President selects and appoints members of the IAP to two-year terms. Panelists receive a small honorarium and do not receive a salary. The Bank pays the costs associated with Panel meetings.

Significance of AIIB:

- The United Nations has addressed the launch of AIIB as having potential for “scaling up financing for sustainable development” for the concern of global economic governance.
- The capital of the bank is \$100 billion, equivalent to 2/3 of the capital of the Asian Development Bank and about half that of the World Bank.

Sources: pib.

4. UN Disarmament Commission

Context:

- India has voiced opposition to the “weaponization” of outer space, saying it should not become an area of conflict while calling for collective efforts to strengthen safety and security of the space-based assets.
- India voiced its concerns in the recently held UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) session.

About UNDC:

- The United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) is a deliberative body and a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly which is mandated to consider and make recommendations on various disarmament related issues and to follow up the relevant decisions and recommendations of the special sessions devoted to disarmament held so far.
- **The Disarmament Commission was re-established at the first Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament in 1978** to succeed an earlier Disarmament Commission, which ceased to convene after 1965.
- Since 1978, the Disarmament Commission has dealt with numerous disarmament related questions, both nuclear and conventional, and has submitted guidelines and principles on various subject items, including guidelines for appropriate types of confidence-building measures, guidelines and recommendations for regional approaches to disarmament within the context of global security, and guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters.

Significance of UNDC:

- At a time of growing mistrust and rising international tensions as well as numerous challenges to both the disarmament agenda and the disarmament machinery, the role of the UNDC as a platform for dialogue and cooperation assumes a greater significance.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** UNDC.
- **For Mains:** Need for disarmament and need for international cooperation in this regard.

Sources: the hindu.

5. International Energy Forum

Context: India is hosting the 16th International Energy Forum (IEF) Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi.

About the IEF Ministerial meeting:

- The IEF Ministerial meetings are informal dialogues, at both the political and technical levels, aimed to improve policy and investment decisions, and through increased knowledge and experience sharing.
- The **biennial IEF Ministerial Meetings are the world's largest gathering of Energy Ministers** who engage in a dialogue on global energy issues.

About IEF:

- The International Energy Forum (IEF) is **an inter-governmental arrangement** set up in 1991. It is based in Riyadh.



- **Functions:** It serves as a neutral facilitator of informal, open, informed and continuing global energy dialogue among its members comprising of energy producing and energy consuming states, including transit countries.
- **Members:** There are 72 member countries of IEF, including India, covering all six continents, which are signatories to the Charter of the IEF. Its membership accounts for 90% of global supply and demand for oil and gas.

Executive board:

- The Executive Board (EB) set up in 2002 comprising of 31 designated representatives of Ministers of the member states comprise the governing board of IEF.
- It meets twice a year.
- International Energy Agency (IEA) and Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are non-voting members of the Executive Board.
- The EB is chaired by the Host State of the next biennial Ministerial Meeting. Currently, India is the Chair of the Executive Board of IEF.

Key facts for Prelims:

- By virtue of being among the top 11 largest consumers of oil and gas (India is presently 4th), India has been the Permanent Member of the Executive Board since its set-up in 2002.
- India had earlier hosted the 5th IEF Ministerial in 1996 at Goa.

Need for international platforms:

- Energy security continues to top the political agenda for energy importing as well as exporting countries, for industrialized as well as developing economies. This time of heightened energy consciousness is also a time of uncertainties and increasing interdependencies among nations.
- This has prompted some to re-think fundamental policies. And the policy tuning of one country to meet new challenges and to reduce its particular energy uncertainties can in itself exacerbate uncertainties or create new ones for others. Not least considering the interrelationship between energy, environment and economic development. As well as the links between energy and geopolitics. Global producer-consumer dialogue acquires increasing importance as nations revisit and modify established policies, and shape new ones, in their quest for energy security.

Way ahead:

- The world will need more and cleaner energy, used in a more efficient way, accessible and affordable to a larger share of the world's population.
- The political challenge lies in operationalizing this energy imperative in a fair and sustainable way. Through national policies as well as in bilateral, regional and wider global co-operation.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** IEF, ministerial meeting.
- **For Mains:** Energy security and the need for international cooperation.

Sources: pib.

6. Regional 3R Forum

Context:

- The Eighth Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific is being held in Indore. The event will see participation of around 40 mayors of cities around the world and mayors of more than 100 cities across India.

Who is hosting?

- The 8th Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific is co-organized by the Ministry of Housing and Affairs, Government of India, the Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Japan (MOEJ), and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (**UNCRD**).
- The Indore Municipal Corporation, Government of Madhya Pradesh, and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) have been designated as the City Partner, Organizing State Partner and Industry Partner

Theme:

- “Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency – A 21st Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities”.

About 3R Forum:

- **Establishment:** In 2009, the Regional 3R Forum in Asia was established at Japan’s proposal as a platform for broad cooperation on promotion of the 3Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle – in Asia. After the fourth forum, the name was changed to Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific.
- **Members:** Members include central governments, international agencies, aid agencies, private sector entities, research bodies, NGOs and other relevant parties.

Key facts:

- Forum members hold discussions on policies, provided support for the implementation of 3R projects in member countries, shared useful information, and are building networks for the further promotion of 3R initiatives.
- Japan hosted the inaugural Regional 3R Forum in Tokyo in 2009, and has cosponsored subsequent Forums together with the governments of host countries and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD).

Ha Noi 3R Declaration:

- The Fourth Regional 3R Forum – held in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, in March 2013 – adopted the Ha Noi 3R Declaration - Sustainable 3R Goals for Asia and the Pacific for 2013-2023.
- It is a legally non-binding and voluntary document which aims to provide a basic framework for Asia-Pacific countries to develop measures and programs to promote 3Rs including a set of 3R indicators for monitoring specific progress.

About UNCRD:

- The United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) was founded in 1971 as an instrument to help achieve the strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade.
- Created by an agreement between the UN and the Government of Japan, its operations are supported by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA).
- UNCRD’s vision is to achieve sustainable living environment for all. Its mission is to assist developing countries in their efforts to achieve sustainable development.
- UNCRD’s interventions in developing countries are clustered under three main thematic interrelated and complementary areas of work – (a) Integrated Regional Development Planning; (b) Sustainable Urban Management; and (c) Knowledge Management.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** 3R Forum, UNCRD and Ha Noi declaration.

Sources: pib.



7. Headquarters Agreement between India and the International Solar Alliance

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for entering into Headquarters (Host country) Agreement between India and the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and authorizing the Ministry of External Affairs for signing the Headquarter Agreement.

Significance of the agreement:

- The Headquarters Agreement will institutionalize the functional arrangements between India and ISA. It will help in smooth transition of ISA as international inter-governmental organization. Creation of ISA will lead to accelerated solar technology development and deployment in ISA member countries including India.

Significance of ISA:

- There is no specific body in place to address the specific solar technology deployment needs of the solar resource rich countries located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. Most of these countries are geographically located for optimal absorption of the sun's rays. There is a great amount of sunlight year-round which can lead to cost effective solar power and other end uses with high insolation of almost 300 sunny days in a year. Most of the countries have large agrarian populations.
- Many countries face gaps in the potential solar energy manufacturing eco-system. Absence of universal energy access, energy equity and affordability are issues common to most of the solar resource rich countries. International Solar Alliance (ISA) is conceived as a coalition of solar resource rich countries to address their special energy needs and will provide a platform to collaborate on addressing the identified gaps through a common, agreed approach.

Significance of ISA for India:

- The ISA is not only expected to spur innovation in the RE space but also help make India a technological hub with independent manufacturing capabilities of RE equipment like solar panels, rather than being dependent on imports, through initiatives like 'Make in India'. India's Ministry of External Affairs is expected to play a role in "marrying Indian tech and finance capabilities with specific projects around the world".
- India announced a goal of obtaining 40% of its electricity from non-fossil fuels by 2030 at the Paris climate change summit. It is close to achieving 20 GW grid connected solar power generation capacity this fiscal year (2018), in pursuit of achieving its target of 100 GW by 2022.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** ISA.
- **For Mains:** Renewable energy and its significance, India's leadership in the sector.

Sources: pib.

About ISA:

- The Paris Declaration establishes ISA as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar energy among its member countries. The ISA is the first international body that will have a secretariat in India.
- **Objectives:** The ISA's major objectives include global deployment of over 1,000GW of solar generation capacity and mobilisation of investment of over US\$ 1000 billion into solar energy by 2030.
- **What it does?** As an action-oriented organisation, the ISA brings together countries with rich solar potential to aggregate global demand, thereby reducing prices through bulk purchase, facilitating the deployment of existing solar technologies at scale, and promoting collaborative solar R&D and capacity building.
- **When it entered into force?** When the ISA Framework Agreement entered into force on December 6th, 2017, ISA formally became a de-jure treaty based International Intergovernmental Organization, headquartered at Gurugram, India.

8. Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH)**Context:**

- PMNCH Delegation recently called on the Prime Minister and presented the logo for the 2018 Partners' Forum.

About PMNCH Delegation:

- The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (The Partnership, PMNCH) is an alliance of more than 1000 organizations in 77 countries from the sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health communities, as well as health influencing sectors.
- The Partnership is governed by a Board, and administered by a Secretariat hosted at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.



- The Partnership provides a platform for organizations to align objectives, strategies and resources, and agree on interventions to improve maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health.
- The Partnership's role complements the work and accountability processes of its individual members, enabling them to deliver more collectively than they would alone.
- This Partner-centric approach mobilizes, engages and empowers different implementing partners. It allows them to coordinate their actions and activities, and encourages and promotes mutual accountability.

Sources: pib.

9. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

Context:

- India has emerged as the biggest beneficiary of the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, soaking up a quarter of all its investment commitments to date, despite continuing diplomatic tension between New Delhi and Beijing.
- In the first two years of its existence, the AIIB — conceived by China as an alternative to the World Bank — approved \$4.3bn worth of funding for infrastructure projects around Asia, over \$1bn worth of which is due to go to schemes in India.

About AIIB:

- **What is it?** The AIIB was established as a new multilateral financial institution aimed at providing “financial support for infrastructure development and regional connectivity in Asia.” It was founded in October, 2014, and has its headquarters in **Beijing**. Its goals are also to boost economic development in the region, create wealth, prove infrastructure, and promote regional cooperation and partnership.
- **Funding:** The value of AIIB's authorized capital amounts to \$100 billion, with almost \$30 billion invested by China. **India** is not only one of the **founding members** of AIIB but is also the 2nd largest shareholder in AIIB.
- **Board of Governors:** All powers of the Bank are vested in our Board of Governors, which is the highest decision-making body under the Articles of Agreement. It consists of one Governor and one Alternate Governor appointed by each member country. Governors and Alternate Governors serve at the pleasure of the appointing member.
- **Board of Directors:** Our non-resident Board of Directors is responsible for the direction of the Bank's general operations, exercising all powers delegated to it by the Board of Governors. This includes approving the Bank's strategy, annual plan and budget; establishing policies; taking decisions concerning Bank operations; and supervising management and operation of the Bank and establishing an oversight mechanism.
- **International Advisory Panel:** The Bank has established an International Advisory Panel (IAP) to support the President and Senior Management on the Bank's strategies and policies as well as on general operational issues. The Panel meets in tandem with the Bank's Annual Meeting, or as requested by the President. The President selects and appoints members of the IAP to two-year terms. Panelists receive a small honorarium and do not receive a salary.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** AIIB- structure, voting and share of countries.
- **For Mains:** AIIB- significance, need for infrastructure funding.

Sources: the hindu.

10. UN launches road safety trust fund

Context:

- UN has launched road safety trust fund aimed at spurring action to help save lives in road accidents.

Significance of the fund:

- It is estimated that every \$1,500 contributed to the Fund could save one life, prevent 10 serious injuries and leverage \$51,000 towards investments in road safety.
- The United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund has the potential to galvanize our global efforts to address the road safety situation, building on the progress made and experience gained over the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020.

A global concern:

- Road traffic deaths and injuries have become a serious and urgent global concern. Around 1.3 million drivers, passengers and pedestrians die each year, and up to 50 million are injured on the world's roads.
- Beyond human suffering, road traffic deaths and injuries cause significant economic losses to individuals and societies, keeping millions of people in poverty and creating an estimated \$1.85 trillion burden on the global economy each year. This makes addressing road safety one of the most pressing social, economic, health and development challenges of our time.

Resolution on road safety:

- The UN General Assembly also adopted a resolution on road safety, sponsored by Russia, in which it called for a host of measures to prevent road accidents and to minimising the resulting damage. One of the measures, it urged, the adoption policies and measures to implement vehicle safety regulations to ensure that all new motor vehicles meet applicable minimum regulations for the protection of occupants and other road users, with seat belts, airbags and active safety systems fitted as standard equipment.

Facts for Prelims:

- The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015, contains targets on road safety in two of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals:
- **Sustainable Development Goal 3:** "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".
- **Target 3.6:** By 2020, halve the number of global deaths from road traffic accidents.
- **Sustainable Development Goal 11:** "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".

**About the Fund:**

- The **United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund** aims to accelerate progress in improving global road safety by bridging the gaps in the mobilization of resources for effective action at all levels.
- The Fund will mobilize resources from governments, intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and individuals.
- **UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)** will be the secretariat for the Trust Fund.
- The Trust Fund will support efforts along the five pillars of the **Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety**, which include strengthened road safety management capacities, improved safety of road infrastructure and broader transport networks, enhanced safety of vehicles, improved behaviour of road users and improved post-crash care.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Road safety fund, SDGs on road safety, resolution on road safety.
- **For Mains:** Road safety and the need for international collaboration in this regard.

Sources: the hindu.

11. Asian premium

Context:

- India is planning to coordinate with China and other Asian countries to voice against the "Asian Premium" being charged by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Soon, the countries will chalk out the strategy that would result in getting better price from OPEC countries.

Why countries, including India, are against Asian premium?

- India, which sources 85% of its crude oil supplies from OPEC member countries, wants producers to offer discounts rather than charge a premium, as today it has become buyer's market.
- The direction of crude flow from West Asia has now shifted to Asia. Besides, with OPEC deciding not to reduce production, there is a tilt in the demand-supply balance.

Asian premium:

Asian Premium is the **extra charge** being collected by **OPEC countries** from Asian countries when selling **oil**. The premium is determined in large part by the official selling prices (OSPs) set by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait, which supply about 15 percent of the world's crude among them. They set differential prices against benchmarks on a monthly basis, adjusting them to account for regional variations.

- Earlier, crude flow was from West Asia to North America and the pricing also depended on the market. Now, with the shale revolution, the flow has shifted to Asia.

Impacts:

- If crude is received at a fair price without paying Asian Premium, gross refining margins will improve and it will result in competitively priced petroleum products.

Way ahead:

- Asian Premium was historically never justified and so not justifiable in the changed market scenario where Asian countries are the major buyers.
- Therefore, any measure that erodes the advantage of geography for Asian countries and promotes a policy of subsidising oil traffic to distant destinations is not, and cannot be, in the interest of sustainable development.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Asian premium and Opec.
- **For Mains:** Asian premium- need for elimination and impacts on developing countries.

Sources: the hindu.

OPEC:

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a permanent, intergovernmental Organization, created at the **Baghdad Conference** in September **1960**, by **Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela**.
- Currently, the Organization has a total of 14 Member Countries.
- OPEC had its headquarters in **Geneva**, Switzerland, in the first five years of its existence. This was moved to **Vienna**, Austria, on September 1, 1965.
- OPEC's objective is to co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry.

12. Weisbaden conference

Context:

- Wiesbaden Conference 2018 was recently held in India. Representatives from the 39 countries, as well as experts from the **UNSC 1540 Committee** and **UN Office for Disarmament Affairs** in New York, participated in the conference.
- The conference provides an opportunity to participants to share experiences on their export control systems and to identify legal and technical assistance, action plans and challenges in the national implementation of UNSC 1540.

Key facts:

- The title of the Conference is 'Securing Global Supply Chains through Government-Industry Partnerships towards Effective Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540'.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in cooperation with Germany and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) hosted the conference.
- Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) was the industry partner for the event.

The resolution includes three primary obligations:

- All States are prohibited from providing any form of support to non-state actors seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction, related materials, or their means of delivery.
- All States must adopt and enforce laws criminalizing the possession and acquisition of such items by non-state actors, as well as efforts to assist or finance their acquisition.
- All States must adopt and enforce domestic controls over nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, their means of delivery, and related materials, in order to prevent their proliferation.

About Weisbaden process:

- The Wiesbaden Process was initiated by the Government of Germany in **2012** to strengthen the implementation of UNSC 1540 through Government-Industry partnerships.

UN Security Council Resolution 1540:

- The UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) establishes **legally binding obligations on all States** to adopt and enforce appropriate and effective measures to **prevent the proliferation to non-State actors of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons** and their delivery systems.
- It requires, therefore that States implement appropriate and effective measures to prevent non-state actors such as terrorists, from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Implementation:

- UNSCR 1540 requires all states to adopt and enforce laws that will ensure implementation of the obligations laid down in the WMD treaties, especially with a view to prevent proliferation to non-state actors. It does not create very specific legal obligations for those states that are not party to existing WMD treaties, because it only requires them to take 'measures' against proliferation of WMDs and their means of delivery.

Opposition:

- Many states in the non-aligned movement have criticised resolution 1540 for being cumbersome and ill-adapted to their situations, an attempt by the US to co-opt others into its war on terror, interference by the UN in states' national sovereignty and a drain on resources that could better be used on problems that are of more direct local relevance.

Facts for Prelims:

- Wiesbaden is the city, capital of state Hesse in central **Germany**. It is situated on the right bank of Rhine River and on the foot of Taunus Mountains.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Weisbaden conference and UNSC Resolution 1540.
- For Mains:** UNSCR 1540 and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

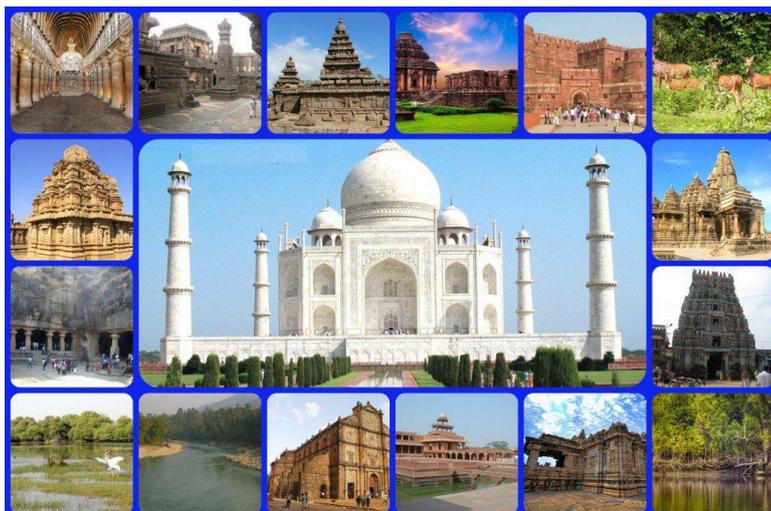
13. World heritage day

Context:

- Every year, 18th April is celebrated Worldwide as World Heritage Day to create awareness about Heritage among communities.

2018 theme: Heritage for Generations.**What is a World Heritage site?**

- A World Heritage site is classified as a natural or man-made area or a structure that is of international importance, and a space which requires special protection. These sites are officially recognised by the UN and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, also known as UNESCO. UNESCO believes that the sites classified as World Heritage are important for humanity, and they hold cultural and physical significance.

**Background:**

- In 1982, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) announced, 18 April as the "World Heritage Day", approved by the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1983, with the aim of enhancing awareness of the importance of the cultural heritage of humankind, and redouble efforts to protect and conserve the human heritage.

Key facts for Prelims:

- As of 2018, India has 36 world heritage sites, the sixth most of any country.
- Italy leads with 53 sites followed by China with 52 sites.

Sources: the hindu.

14. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

Context:

- India is all set to take part in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, which has been scheduled for April 24. These are the first SCO meetings after India and Pakistan were admitted into the eight-member group.

About SCO:

What is it?

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also known as the **Shanghai Pact**, is a **Eurasian political, economic, and military** organisation which was founded in **2001** in Shanghai by the leaders of **China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan**. Apart from Uzbekistan, the other five countries have been a part of the Shanghai 5 since 1996. The cooperation was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation after Uzbekistan joined the organisation in 2001.
- New members: India and Pakistan** joined SCO as full members in June 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan.
- The SCO counts four observer states, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Mongolia.
- The SCO's main goals are: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** SCO.
- For Mains:** Need for regional cooperation and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

15. Meeting of the Development Committee (DC) and IMFC of the World Bank Group and the IMF

Context:

- Meeting of the Development Committee (DC) of the World Bank Group and the IMF and the Restricted Session of the International Monetary and Finance Committee (IMFC) were recently held in Washington D.C.

About Ministerial Committees:

- The IMF Board of Governors is advised by two ministerial committees, the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) and the Development Committee.

IMFC:

- Composition:** The IMFC has 24 members, drawn from the pool of 187 governors. Its structure mirrors that of the Executive Board and its 24 constituencies. As such, the IMFC represents all the member countries of the Fund.
- Functions:** The IMFC meets twice a year, during the Spring and Annual Meetings. The Committee discusses matters of common concern affecting the global economy and also advises the IMF on the direction its work.
- At the end of the Meetings, the Committee issues a joint communiqué summarizing its views. These communiqués provide guidance for the IMF's work program during the six months leading up to the next Spring or Annual Meetings. **There is no formal voting at the IMFC, which operates by consensus.**

Development committee:

- The Development Committee is a joint committee, tasked with advising the Boards of Governors of the IMF and the World Bank on issues related to economic development in emerging and developing countries.
- The committee has 24 members (usually ministers of finance or development). It represents the full membership of the IMF and the World Bank and mainly serves as a forum for building intergovernmental consensus on critical development issues.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** IMFC and Development committee.
- **For Mains:** IMF and World Bank Group reforms.

Sources: pib.

16. South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF)

Context:

- Pune hosted the 12th edition of the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) meeting. The Forum was attended by meteorologists from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.
- ***This was the sixth SASCOF meeting hosted by India.***

About SASCOF:

- South Asian nations, supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), have been conducting the South Asian Seasonal Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) since 2010.
- SASCOF was established as a platform where meteorologists from South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member countries along with Myanmar, could discuss some of the common weather and climate-related matters.
- All these South Asian countries — except for Afghanistan, which is located in extreme northwest — experience common weather and climatological characteristics, like Southwest monsoon.

Functions:

- SASCOFs prepare consensus seasonal climate information on a regional scale that provide a consistent basis for preparing national level outlooks.
- Such forums also serve to interface with user sectors to understand and enhance the use of climate information as orchestrated and supported by the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS).

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** SASCOF and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

17. World Press Freedom Prize

Context:

- The United Nations' cultural agency has awarded the World Press Freedom prize to an imprisoned Egyptian photographer- Mahmoud Abu Zeid, known as Shawkan.
- UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize:
 - Created in 1997, 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.
 - The Prize was established on the initiative of UNESCO's Executive Board and is formally conferred by the Director-General of the Organization, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May.
 - 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.

18. World Immunization Week

Context: World Immunization Week is celebrated from 24th- 30th of April by the World Health Organization (WHO) in order to increase awareness about vaccination.

Aim: It aims to highlight the collective action needed to ensure that every person is protected from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Theme: "Protected together, #VaccinesWork".

Background:

- Immunization saves millions of lives and is widely recognized as one of the world's most successful and cost-effective health interventions. Yet, there are more than 19 million unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children in the world, putting them at serious risk of these potentially fatal diseases. Of these children, 1 out of 10 never receive any vaccinations, and most likely have never been seen by the health system.

Why immunization matters now more than ever?

- Expanding access to immunization is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Routine immunization is a building block of strong primary health care and universal health coverage—it provides a point of contact for health care at the beginning of life and offers every child the chance at a healthy life from the start.
- Immunization is also a fundamental strategy in achieving other health priorities, from controlling viral hepatitis, to curbing antimicrobial resistance, to providing a platform for adolescent health and improving antenatal and newborn care.

Global efforts:

- The **Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP)** – endorsed by 194 Member States of the World Health Assembly in May 2012 – aims to prevent millions of deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases by 2020 through universal access to immunization.
- Despite improvements in individual countries and a strong global rate of new vaccine introduction, all of the GVAP targets for disease elimination—including measles, rubella, and maternal and neonatal tetanus—are behind schedule.

Way ahead:

- In order for everyone, everywhere to survive and thrive, countries must make more concerted efforts to reach GVAP goals by 2020.
- Additionally, those countries that have achieved or made forward progress towards achieving the goals must work to sustain those efforts over time – so that no person goes without life-saving vaccines.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** GVAP.
- **For Mains:** Immunization- ned, challenges and significance.

Sources: the hindu.

19. World Press Freedom Index

Context: World Press Freedom Index for the year 2018 has been released.

What is it?

- Published every year since 2002 by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the World Press Freedom Index is an important advocacy tool based on the principle of emulation between states.

What does it measure?

- The Index ranks 180 countries according to the level of freedom available to journalists. It is a snapshot of the media freedom situation based on an evaluation of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists in each country.
- It does not rank public policies even if governments obviously have a major impact on their country's ranking. Nor is it an indicator of the quality of journalism in each country.

Indicators:

- Along with the Index, RSF calculates a global indicator and regional indicators that evaluate the overall performance of countries (in the world and in each region) as regards media freedom. It is an absolute measure that complements the Index's comparative rankings.
- The global indicator is the average of the regional indicators, each of which is obtained by averaging the scores of all the countries in the region, weighted according to their population as given by the World Bank.

Press freedom map:

- The press freedom map, which is distributed in print and digital versions, offers a visual overview of the situation in each country in the Index. The colour categories are assigned as follows: good (white), fairly good (yellow), problematic (yellow), bad (red) and very bad (black).

Press Freedom Index 2018- Highlights:

- In this year's index, Norway is first for the second year running, followed — as it was last year — by Sweden.
- India has dropped from rank 136 last year to rank 138 this year. India fared poorly on indicators such as hate speeches, attacks on journalists on social media, trolling them and targeting their reputation.
- SAARC nations: Afghanistan (118), Bhutan (94), Nepal (106), the Maldives (120), and Sri Lanka (131), all performed better than India; with Pakistan (139) and Bangladesh (146) performing worse.
- North Korea continues to rank last.

Sources: the hindu.

GS PAPER - III

Paper 3 Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development.

1. RBI bars banks from dealing with virtual currencies

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has asked banks to stop providing service to any entity dealing with virtual currencies, with immediate effect.
- It has also asked regulated entities that are already providing such services to exit the relationship within three months.



Background:

- Widely seen as a disruption for the traditional banking and financial institutions, cryptocurrencies have gained significant traction over the last half a decade, at the same time creating a regulatory nightmare for banking regulators across the globe. At present, there are around 969 cryptocurrencies in existence across the globe, with a total market capitalisation close to 116 Billion USD.

What are virtual/ cryptocurrencies?

- Founded as a peer-to-peer electronic payment system, cryptocurrencies enable transfer of money between parties, without going through a banking system.
- These digital payment systems are based on cryptographic proof of the chain of transactions, deriving their name, Cryptocurrency.
- These employ cryptographic algorithms and functions to ensure anonymity (privacy) of the users (who are identified by an alphanumeric public key), security of the transactions and integrity of the payment systems.

Associated concerns:

- Despite numerous advantages and user friendly processes, cryptocurrencies have their own set of associated risks in the form of volatility in valuation, lack of liquidity, security and many more.
- Cryptocurrencies are being denounced in many countries because of their use in grey and black markets. There are two sets of interconnected risks; one being to the growth and expansion of these platforms in the uncertain policy environment, and the other being the risks these platforms pose to the users and the security of the state.
- They also have the potential use for Illicit Trade and Criminal Activities and can be used for Terror Financing.
- They also have the Potential for Tax Evasion.

Regulation of these currencies:

- The acceptability of cryptocurrencies as a legal instrument currently varies from country to country; while some are in the process of formulating laws and measures, others are yet to respond to this disruptive change.
- The burgeoning use of cryptocurrencies in terror financing, ransoms, illicit drugs or arms trade and cybercrime has also raised red flags among the security and law enforcement agencies.
- They may well have the potential to displace the existing financial systems which enable electronic flow of money across different political boundaries.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS)

Context:

- The Reserve Bank has deferred the implementation of the Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) by one year as many banks are not prepared to migrate to the new accounting system.
- The earlier deadline for banks to switch to the Ind AS was from April 1 2018.

What is it?

- Ind AS or Indian Accounting Standards govern the accounting and recording of financial transactions as well as the presentation of statements such as profit and loss account and balance sheet of a company.
- Ind AS has been evolved as a compromise formula that tries to harmonise Indian accounting rules with the IFRS.

**Facts for Prelims:**

- The implementation of IndAS for public sector banks requires an amendment to the Banking Regulation Act. The schedule in BR Act relating to financial statement disclosures needs to be changed to the IndAS format.
- Section 29 of the BR Act deals with the accounts and balance sheets of public sector banks. Private sector banks are covered by the Companies Act, which is based on the new accounting standards.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework

Context:

- Eleven public sector banks have been brought under the central bank's Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework with an aim to check NPAs. This comes months after the central government had allocated capital of Rs 52,311 crore to 11 "weak banks" to maintain their minimum capital requirement.

What is PCA?

- PCA norms allow the regulator to place certain restrictions such as halting branch expansion and stopping dividend payment.
- It can even cap a bank's lending limit to one entity or sector. Other corrective action that can be imposed on banks include special audit, restructuring operations and activation of recovery plan.
- Banks' promoters can be asked to bring in new management, too.
- The RBI can also supersede the bank's board, under PCA.

When is PCA invoked?

- The PCA is invoked when certain risk thresholds are breached. There are three risk thresholds which are based on certain levels of asset quality, profitability, capital and the like.
- The third such threshold, which is maximum tolerance limit, sets net NPA at over 12% and negative return on assets for four consecutive years.

What are the types of sanctions?

- There are two type of restrictions, mandatory and discretionary. Restrictions on dividend, branch expansion, directors compensation, are mandatory while discretionary restrictions could include curbs on lending and deposit. In the cases of two banks where PCA was invoked after the revised guidelines were issued — IDBI Bank and UCO Bank — only mandatory restrictions were imposed. Both the banks breached risk threshold 2.

What will a bank do if PCA is triggered?

- Banks are not allowed to re new or access costly deposits or take steps to increase their fee-based income. Banks will also have to launch a special drive to reduce the stock of NPAs and contain generation of fresh NPAs.
- They will also not be allowed to enter into new lines of business. RBI will also impose restrictions on the bank on borrowings from interbank market.

Impact:

- Small and medium enterprises will have to bear the brunt due to this move by RBI. Since the PCA framework restricts the amount of loans banks can extend, this will definitely put pressure on credit being made available to companies especially the MSMEs.
- Large companies have access to the corporate bond market so they may not be impacted immediately. It has been predicted that if more state-owned banks are brought under PCA, it will impact the credit availability for the MSME segment.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** PCA.
- **For Mains:** PCA- need, significance, sanctions and challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS)

Context:

- The Reserve Bank has tightened reporting norms for the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS). Now banks will be required to upload daily transaction-wise information undertaken by them under LRS.

What is it?

- Under LRS, all resident individuals can freely remit \$250,000 overseas every financial year for a permissible set of current or capital account transactions.
- **Permitted:** Remittances are permitted for overseas education, travel, medical treatment and purchase of shares and property, apart from maintenance of relatives living abroad, gifting and donations. Individuals can also open, maintain and hold foreign currency accounts with overseas banks for carrying out transactions.
- **Not permitted:** However, the rules do not allow remittances for trading on the foreign exchange markets, margin or margin calls to overseas exchanges and counterparties and the purchase of Foreign Currency Convertible Bonds issued by Indian companies abroad. Sending money to certain countries and entities is also barred. Under LRS, people can't send money to countries identified as 'non cooperative' by the Financial Action Task Force. Remittances are also prohibited to entities identified as posing terrorist risks.

Why is it important?

- The LRS represents India's baby steps towards dismantling controls on foreign exchange movements in and out of the country. It has allowed large numbers of Indians to study abroad and diversify their portfolios from purely desi stocks and property.
- Ideally speaking, capital controls in any form have no place in a liberalised economy. But for India, which is heavily dependent on imports of critical goods and perpetually spends more foreign exchange than it earns, it is difficult to free up remittances because of the havoc this can wreak on exchange rates.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Liberalised remittance scheme.
- **For Mains:** Need for control of foreign exchange movements.

Sources: the hindu.

5. Inflation targeting

Context:

- Making a case for doing away with inflation targeting by the RBI, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) member Surjit Bhalla recently said it has made zero impact on prices. Under the new policy framework, the RBI aims to contain inflation at 4% with a band of (+/-) 2%.

Concerns:

- Average inflation in 2017-18 was 3.5%. India's real interest rate is higher by 2.5%, which is 3rd highest in the world.

What is inflation targeting?

- Inflation targeting is a monetary policy in which a central bank has an explicit target inflation rate for the medium term and announces this inflation target to the public. It will have price stability as the main goal of monetary policy.
- Many central banks adopted inflation targeting as a pragmatic response to the failure of other monetary policy regimes, such as those that targeted the money supply or the value of the currency in relation to another, presumably stable, currency.

Why it is good?

- It will lead to increased transparency and accountability.
- Policy will be linked to medium/long term goals, but with some short term flexibility.
- With inflation targeting in place, people will tend to have low inflation expectations. If there was no inflation target, people could have higher inflation expectations, encouraging workers to demand higher wages and firms to put up prices.
- It also helps in avoiding boom and bust cycles.
- If inflation creeps up, then it can cause various economic costs such as uncertainty leading to lower investment, loss of international competitiveness and reduced value of savings. This can also be avoided with targeting.

Associated concerns:

- Inflation targeting puts too much weight on inflation relative to other goals. Central Banks Start to Ignore More Pressing Problems. Inflation target reduces “flexibility”. It has the potential to constrain policy in some circumstances in which it would not be desirable to do so.

Not a panacea:

- Inflation targeting has been successfully practiced in a growing number of countries over the past 20 years, and many more countries are moving toward this framework.
- Over time, inflation targeting has proven to be a flexible framework that has been resilient in changing circumstances, including during the recent global financial crisis.
- Individual countries, however, must assess their economies to determine whether inflation targeting is appropriate for them or if it can be tailored to suit their needs. For example, in many open economies, the exchange rate plays a pivotal role in stabilizing output and inflation.
- In such countries, policymakers must debate the appropriate role of the exchange rate and whether it should be subordinated to the inflation objective.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims:** MPC and inflation targeting.
- **For Mains:** Inflation targeting- need, significance and challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP)

Context:

- Finland-headquartered Nokia has invoked the mutual agreement procedure (MAP) under the India-Finland Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, to resolve the Rs 2,000-crore tax dispute with the Indian tax department.
- Now, the competent authorities of the two countries — India and Finland — will sit at the negotiating table and decide how the dispute should be resolved.

What’s the issue?

- Indian income tax department had slapped a Rs 2,000-crore tax demand on Nokia India over alleged default on tax deduction at source (TDS) on software-related payments made to Nokia Finland for six years.
- The IT department had concluded that payments made by Nokia India to Nokia

What is a Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP)?

- **The MAP article in DTA allows the competent authorities from the governments of the contracting states to interact with the intent to resolve international tax disputes.**
- **These disputes involve cases of double taxation (juridical and economic) as well as inconsistencies in the interpretation and application of a DTA.**

What is MAP?

- MAP is an alternative available to taxpayers to resolve disputes giving rise to double taxation, whether juridical or economic in nature. An agreement for avoidance of double taxation between countries would give authorisation for assistance of Competent Authorities (CAs) in the respective jurisdiction under MAP.
- The main benefit of pursuing MAP is the elimination of double taxation (either juridical or economic). The MAP resolution, once accepted, eliminates protracted litigation.

Finland for software downloads — which got embedded in the Nokia handsets manufactured in India — were taxable in India as royalty.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** MAP and DTAA.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Economic freedom index

Context:

- The Heritage Foundation has released its Index of Economic Freedom report 2017.
- The Heritage Foundation is an American conservative public policy think-tank based in Washington.

About the index:

- Economic freedom is measured based on 12 quantitative and qualitative factors, grouped into four broad categories, or pillars, of economic freedom:
 - Rule of Law (property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness).
 - Government Size (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health).
 - Regulatory Efficiency (business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom).
 - Open Markets (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom).
- Each of the ten economic freedoms within these categories is graded on a scale of 0 to 100. A country's overall score is derived by averaging these ten economic freedoms, with equal weight being given to each.

Highlights of the report:

- India's economic freedom score is 54.5, making its economy the 130th freest in the 2018 Index. In 2017, India with a score of 52.6 points was ranked at 143 among 180 countries.
- India is ranked 30th among 43 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages.
- China is ranked 111 and Pakistan is now at 131 position.

India's performance:

- India is developing into an open-market economy. However, traces of its past autocratic policies still remain. Economic liberalisation measures, including industrial deregulation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises and reduced controls on foreign trade and investment, that began in the early 1990s, accelerated growth.
- More recently, the government reformed one of its more opaque operational practices to make the auctioning of rights to exploit state-owned resources more transparent.

Challenges:

- Corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, a restrictive and burdensome regulatory environment, and poor financial and budget management continue to undermine overall development.
- The judiciary is independent, but the Indian courts are understaffed and lack the technology necessary to clear an enormous backlog. Although officials are often caught accepting bribes, a great deal of corruption goes unnoticed and unpunished.
- Non-tariff barriers significantly impede trade. The government's openness to foreign investment is below average. State-owned institutions dominate the financial sector, and foreign participation is limited. In public-sector banks, troubled assets account for about 10% of total assets.

What is economic freedom?

- Economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labor and property. In an economically free society, individuals are free to work, produce, consume, and invest in any way they please. In economically free societies, governments allow labor, capital, and goods to move freely, and refrain from coercion or constraint of liberty beyond the extent necessary to protect and maintain liberty itself.

What are the benefits of economic freedom?

- Economic freedom brings greater prosperity. The Index of Economic Freedom documents the positive relationship between economic freedom and a variety of positive social and economic goals.
- The ideals of economic freedom are strongly associated with healthier societies, cleaner environments, greater per capita wealth, human development, democracy, and poverty elimination.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Economic Freedom Index.
- **For Mains:** Ease of Doing Business and need for economic freedom.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

1. Sovereign Gold Bond scheme

Context:

- The government of India has announced that the first tranche of Sovereign Gold Bond scheme for the current year 2018-19 will shortly be opened for subscription.

Key facts:

- **Eligibility:** The bonds will be restricted for sale to resident Indian entities, including individuals, HUFs, trusts, universities and charitable institutions.
- **Denomination and tenor:** The bonds will be denominated in multiples of gram(s) of gold with a basic unit of 1 gram. The tenor will be for a period of 8 years with exit option from the 5th year to be exercised on the interest payment dates.
- **Minimum and Maximum limit:** The minimum permissible investment limit will be 1 gram of gold, while the maximum limit will be 4 kg for individual, 4 kg for HUF and 20 kg for trusts and similar entities per fiscal (April-March) notified by the government from time to time.
- **Joint Holder:** In case of joint holding, the investment limit of 4 kg will be applied to the first applicant only.
- **Collateral:** Bonds can be used as collateral for loans. The loan-to-value (LTV) ratio is to be set equal to ordinary gold loan mandated by the Reserve Bank from time to time.

About the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:

- The sovereign gold bond was introduced by the Government in 2015. While the Government introduced these bonds to help reduce India's over dependence on gold imports, the move was also aimed at changing the habits of Indians from saving in physical form of gold to a paper form with Sovereign backing.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Features of the SGB scheme.
- **For Mains:** The scheme and its significance for India.

Sources: pib.

2. International SME Convention-2018

Context:

- First Ever International SME Convention-2018 is being held in New Delhi. 150 participants from 31 countries and 400 entrepreneurs from India participated in the convention. The convention has specific focus on inclusion of MSMEs in the Make in India program & empowering women entrepreneurs.

Key facts:

- **Organizers:** The SME International Convention – 2018 is being organised by the Ministry of MSME and National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) along with KVIC and Coir Board.
- **Theme:** "Business beyond Borders".

About SME Convention:

- The International SME Convention 2018 is a platform for intensive business discussion, progressive interaction and trade association between progressive entrepreneurs from all over the world and offers a special focus on business and trade opportunities in India for International Entrepreneurs.
- The platform facilitates exchange of relevant business partnerships and trade opportunities for India's Best Small and Medium Enterprises.

Significance of MSMEs:

- India is home to more than 60 million MSMEs, majority of who are in low-tech areas and serve the local domestic markets. Of these, a small percentage, have the ability and capability to derive access to International Markets, with the vast majority of enterprises working as ancillaries.
- Together the MSMEs constitute a single largest employer after the Agriculture sector in India. Highly developed economies have banked on their small and medium enterprises for both GDP Growth as well as higher employment resulting in higher per capita incomes.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** SME Convention.
- **For Mains:** MSMEs and their significance for overall development of the economy.

Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Uttarakhand's second mega food park at Udham Singh Nagar

Context:

- Uttarakhand's second mega food park has been set up at Udham Singh Nagar. The park- M/s Himalayan Mega Food Park Private Ltd has been set up at a cost of Rs 99.96 crore and will benefit around 25,000 farmers in this as well as neighbouring districts.
- The first Mega Food Park in the state located at Haridwar has already become operational.

About Mega Food Parks:

Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.

- The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastages, increasing farmers' income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.
- These food parks give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables.
- A maximum grant of R50 crore is given for setting up a MFP, in minimum 50 acres of contiguous land with only 50% contribution to the total project cost.

Mode of operation:

- The Scheme has a cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model. It includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure at Central Processing Centre (CPC).
- The PPCs are meant for functioning as a link between the producers and processors for supply of raw material to the Central Processing Centres.
- CPC has need based core processing facilities and basic enabling infrastructure to be used by the food processing units setup at the CPC. The minimum area required for a CPC is 50 acres.
- The scheme is demand-driven and would facilitate food processing units to meet environmental, safety and social standards.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Mega food park scheme and mega food parks in the country.
- **For Mains:** Need for Mega food parks and other related agricultural issues.

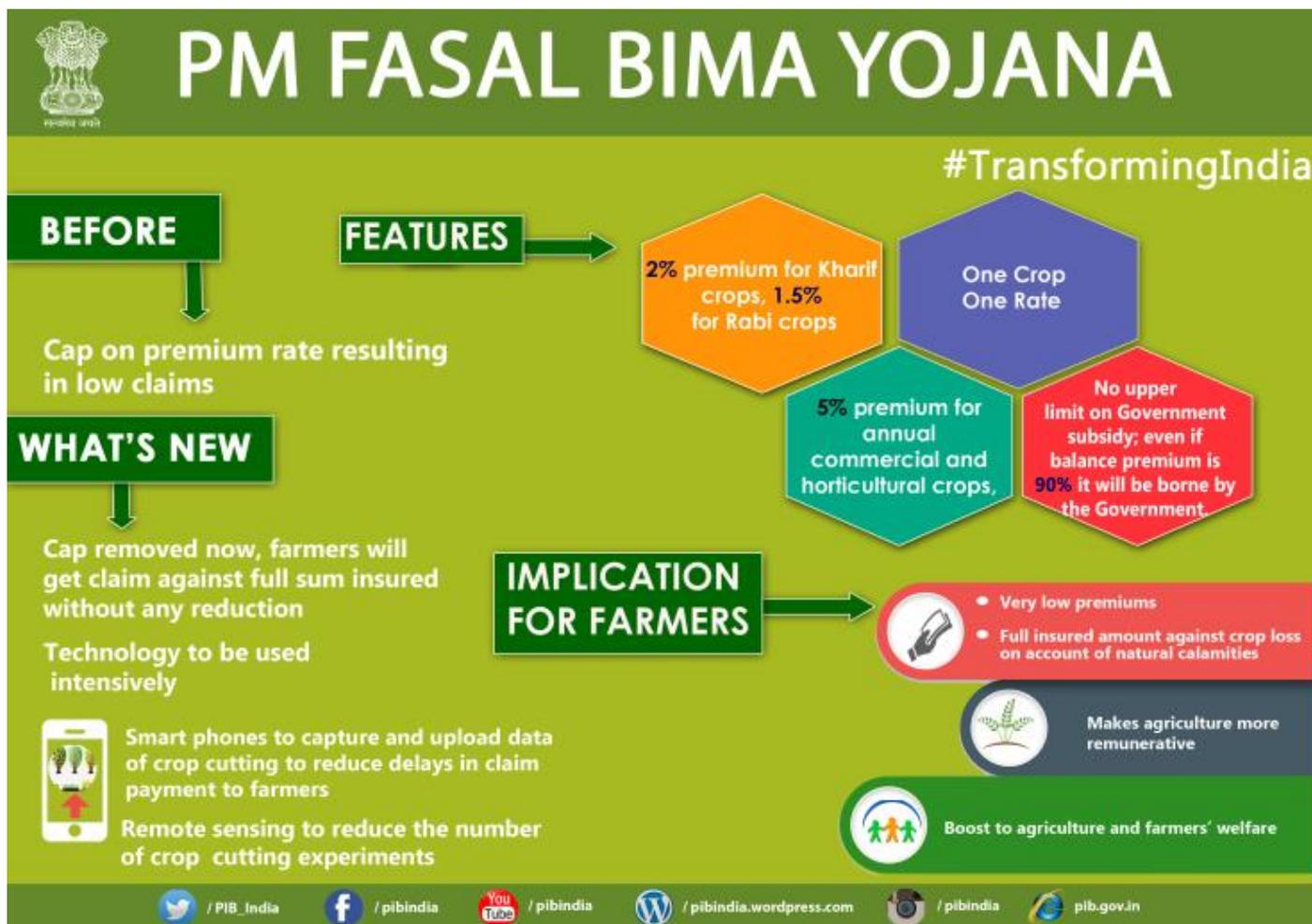
Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

1. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

Context:

- The Centre has allowed states to set up their own insurance companies for implementing Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
- Presently, five public sector insurers and 13 private insurance companies are empanelled for implementation of the scheme.



Background:

- The move comes after several requests from states as well as observations made by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in its 2017 report that old crop insurances schemes which have now been merged with PMFBY, were poorly implemented during 2011-2016.

About PMFBY:

What is it?

- The PMFBY, launched in April 2016, compensates farmers for any losses in crop yield. In the event of a crop loss, the farmer will be paid based on the difference between the threshold yield and actual yield.
- The threshold yield is calculated based on average yield for the last seven years and the extent of compensation is set according to the degree of risk for the notified crop.
- The scheme is compulsory for farmers who have availed of institutional loans.
- The scheme insures farmers against a wide range of external risks — droughts, dry spells, floods, inundation, pests and diseases, landslides, natural fire and lightning, hailstorms, cyclones, typhoons, tempests, hurricanes and tornadoes. The scheme also covers post-harvest losses up to a period of 14 days.

- The Scheme covers all Food & Oilseeds crops and Annual Commercial/Horticultural Crops for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are conducted being under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

Implementation:

- The scheme is implemented by empanelled general insurance companies. Selection of Implementing Agency (IA) is done by the concerned State Government through bidding.
- The scheme is compulsory for loanee farmers availing Crop Loan /KCC account for notified crops and voluntary for other others. The scheme is being administered by Ministry of Agriculture.

Why is it important?

- While the idea of insuring farmers against crop losses isn't new, the PMFBY is an attempt to plug the holes in the older crop insurance schemes — the National Agriculture Insurance scheme (NAIS) introduced in 1999 and the Modified NAIS (mNAIS) introduced in 2011.
 - These older schemes didn't find too many takers among farmers, the main dampener being their limited risk coverage. In mNAIS, the premium was capped at 8 to 12 per cent of the sum insured to limit the government's subsidy outgo. Thus, for crops where actuarial rates were higher (that is, the premiums were steeper), insurance companies proportionally reduced the sum insured. Many a time, the 'compensation' fell way short of even the farmer's cost of production.
 - The Fasal Bima Yojana has done away with this cap on premium. The sum insured per hectare for a farmer is now decided by the District Level Technical Committee and is pre-declared and notified by the State Level Coordination Committee on Crop Insurance.
 - **The farmer also pays less — the premium he shells out is 2 per cent of the sum insured for all kharif crops and 1.5 per cent of it for all rabi crops. For horticulture and commercial crops, the premium is 5 per cent of sum covered.** The remaining premium is paid by the government.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** PMFBY.
- **For Mains:** Crop insurance- need, challenges and significance.

Sources: the hindu.

2. 'Samridhi – the virtual assistant'

Context:

- SIDBI celebrated its Foundation day on April 2nd with launch of 'Samridhi – the virtual assistant'. It will answer standard queries of aspirants 24*7.



SMALL INDUSTRIES DEVELOPMENT BANK OF INDIA

About SIDBI:

- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) was set up on 2nd April 1990 under an Act of Parliament.
- It acts as the Principal Financial Institution for Promotion, Financing and Development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector as well as for co-ordination of functions of institutions engaged in similar activities.

Sources: pib.

3. Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)

Context:

- According to revised guidelines of the centre's flagship scheme to promote organic farming, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), farmers will be eligible for an assistance of Rs 48, 700 per hectare for a three-year period for adopting these traditional methods of cultivation.

Who is eligible?

- According to the revised guidelines, farmers practising traditional methods of organic farming like yogik farming, gou mata kheti, Vedic farming, Vaishnav kheti, Ahinsa farming, Adhvoot Shivanand farming, and rishi

krishi will be eligible for financial assistance, in addition to those adopting standard organic farming practices like zero-budget natural farming and permaculture.



What is?

- **Yogik farming** refers to a system where it is believed that farmers can channelize cosmic energy to their fields by performing yoga.
- **Rishi krishi** is based on pre-Vedic, Vedic and medieval texts like Vishvavallava, Kashyapiykrishisukti, and Surapala's Vrikshayurveda.
- **Gou mata kheti** is a system of farming which uses cow dung and urine from indigenous breeds of lactating cows.

Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY):

- Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana is an elaborated component of Soil Health Management (SHM) of major project National Mission of Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).

Implementation:

- Under PKVY Organic farming is promoted through the adoption of the organic village by cluster approach and PGS certification.
- Fifty or more farmers will form a cluster having 50-acre land to take up the organic farming under the scheme.
- The produce will be pesticide residue free and will contribute to improving the health of the consumer.

Sources: the hindu.

4. National Bamboo Mission

Context:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National Bamboo Mission (NBM) under **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)** during remaining period of Fourteenth Finance Commission (2018-19 & 2019-20).
- The Mission would ensure holistic development of the bamboo sector by addressing complete value chain and establishing effective linkage of producers (farmers) with industry.

The restructured NBM strives to:

- To increase the area under bamboo plantation in non forest Government and private lands to supplement farm income and contribute towards resilience to climate change.

- To improve post-harvest management through establishment of innovative primary processing units, treatment and seasoning plants, primary treatment and seasoning plants, preservation technologies and market infrastructure.
- To promote product development at micro, small and medium levels and feed bigger industry.
- To rejuvenate the under developed bamboo industry in India.
- To promote skill development, capacity building, awareness generation for development of bamboo sector.

Implementation:

- The Mission will focus on development of bamboo in limited States where it has social, commercial and economical advantage with focus on genetically superior planting material of bamboo species of commercial and industrial demand.
- Adoption of end to end solution in bamboo sector i.e. complete value chain approach starting from bamboo growers to consumers would be emphasized.
- Mission has been developed as a platform for integration of Ministries/ Departments/Agencies with implementation responsibilities given based on their mandate.
- Capacity building of the officials, field functionaries, entrepreneurs and farmers through skill development and trainings will be emphasised.
- Focus will be given on Research & Development (R&D) to increase the production and productivity of bamboo.

Beneficiaries:

- The scheme will benefit directly and indirectly the farmers as well as local artisans and associated personnels engaged in bamboo sector including associated industries.
- Since it is proposed to bring about one lakh ha area under plantation, it is expected that about one lakh farmers would be directly benefitted in terms of plantation.

States/ districts covered:

- The Mission will focus on development of bamboo in limited States where it has social, commercial and economical advantage, particularly in the North Eastern region and States including Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

What was the need for restructuring?

- National Bamboo Mission (NBM) started as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme in 2006-07, was mainly emphasizing on propagation and cultivation of bamboo, with limited efforts on processing, product development and value addition.
- There, was weak linkage between the producers (farmers) and the industry. The restructured proposal gives simultaneous emphasis to propagation of quality plantations of bamboo, product development and value addition including primary processing and treatment; micro, small & medium enterprises as well as high value products; markets and skill development, thus addressing the complete value chain for growth of the bamboo sector.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** NBM and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.**1. Bharatmala Programme****Context:**

- In order to keep up the pace to implement ambitious Bharatmala Programme, the NHAI is planning to award 3,000-odd km of projects in the next couple of months of the new fiscal.
- The increase in awarding of the project in FY18 is due to Bharatmala Programme.

What is Bharatmala project?

- Bharatmala Project is **the second largest highways construction project in the country since NHDP**, under which almost 50,000 km or highway roads were targeted across the country. Bharatmala will look to improve connectivity particularly on economic corridors, border areas and far flung areas with an aim of quicker movement of cargo and boosting exports.



- Bharatmala includes economic corridors of around 9,000 km, inter-corridor and feeder routes of around 6,000 km, 5,000 km roads under the National Corridors Efficiency Program, border and international connectivity roads of around 2,000 km, coastal and port connectivity roads of around 2,000 km, expressways of around 800 km and 10,000 km of NHDP roads. The total length in phase 1 comes to around 34,800 km.

Significance of the project:

- The project is expected to create nearly 100 million man days of jobs during the road construction and subsequently 22 million jobs as a result of the increased economic activity across the country.

About NHAI:

- **The National Highways Authority of India was constituted by an act of Parliament, the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988.**
- It is responsible for the development, maintenance and management of National Highways entrusted to it and for matters connected or incidental thereto. The Authority was operationalised in Feb, 1995.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Bharatmala, NHAI.
- **For Mains:** Infrastructure development- need, challenges and solutions.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Char Dham project

Context:

- Ministry of road, transport and highway (MORTH) in their affidavit submitted recently before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in matter of Char Dham widening road in Uttarakhand stated that in all the total 53 projects/stretch of Char Dham, none is above 100 km which is why no environmental clearance was obtained.

Char Dham Highway Development Project

Project is an ambitious initiative to improve connectivity to the Char Dham pilgrimage centres	Objective is to Develop around 900 km of national highways
	Connectivity & tourism will get a strong boost through the project
	Adding of bypasses, tunnels, bridges & flyovers will ease travel
	Proper slope stabilization will ensure protection against landslides
	It involves widening the existing, geometrically deficient highway that connects the four abodes
	Environment friendly techniques are being incorporated in the design to make these zones safer

Background:

- Stretches upto 100 km are exempted from environmental clearance under Environmental Clearance Notification.

What's the issue?

- A petition was filed which said that the entire project of 900 km was misleadingly fragmented into segments which are actually continuous stretches of five national highway to avoid environmental clearance. It stated that the criteria of Cumulative Impact Assessment and carrying capacity study must be followed for Himalayan terrain while considering any infrastructural projects.

Chardham project:

- The project involves developing and widening 900-km of national highways connecting the holy Hindu pilgrimage sites of; Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri at an estimated cost of Rs.12,000 crores. The roads will be widened from 12m to 24m and the project will involve construction of tunnels, bypasses, bridges, subways and viaducts.

Sources: et.

3. UDAN – RCS**Context:**

- Pathankot gets Operationalized as the 21st airport under UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) – RCS (Regional Connectivity Scheme).

Need for schemes like Udan:

- There are as many as 398 “unserved” airports which have no commercial flights and 18 “under-served” airports host less than seven flights per week.
- Besides, a major reason for the poor regional air connectivity in India is that airlines do not find it lucrative to operate from small cities. The government has tried to address this concern by an adroit combination of subsidies and fare caps.

Significance of the scheme:

- Providing regional air connectivity is an important policy goal for the government. Such services deliver a host of benefits by fulfilling latent consumer demand for convenient travel, making businesses and trade more efficient, unlocking India’s tourism potential, enabling fast medical service and promoting national integration.
- Moreover, building connections to tier-2 and tier-3 cities also generates powerful network effects with many regional passengers transferring on to the national aviation network between tier-1 cities. The Udan (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) programme is designed to jump start the regional aviation market by improving the profitability of under-developed regional routes. It will strengthen the overall aviation network at a modest market-discovered price.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** UDAN.
- **For Mains:** Need for regional integration- challenges and solutions.

Sources: pib.

About UDAN:

- UDAN is a market-based policy intervention that builds on similar programmes in the US, Canada and Australia. It is also consistent with universal service approaches established for other network-based services such as railways and telecom.
- The objective of the Scheme is to make flying affordable for the masses, to promote tourism, increase employment and promote balanced regional growth. It also intends to put life into un-served and under-served airports.
- It **offers viability gap funding** to operators to fly smaller aircraft to such airports with a commitment to price tickets for at least half of the seats at ₹2,500 for an hour-long flight.

4. National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)

Context:

- The government's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) is in talks with private equity firm Everstone Group for a tie-up to manage its Green Growth Equity Fund (GGEF).

About GGEF:

- The Green Growth Equity Fund will be **the second investment platform to be set up by NIIF**.
- GGEF, which will invest in renewable energy assets, is a joint venture between NIIF and the UK government.
- **GGEF would be managed by a third-party investment manager, selected by NIIF Limited and the UK government** through an efficient and robust screening and selection process.

About NIIF:

- NIIF was set up in 2015 as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects in the infrastructure sector.
- NIIF will invest in areas such as energy, transportation, housing, water, waste management and other infrastructure-related sectors in India.
- The corpus of the fund is proposed to be around Rs40,000 crore, with the government investing 49% and the rest to be raised from third-party investors such as sovereign wealth funds, insurance and pension funds, endowments etc.
- NIIF's strategy includes anchoring equity, quasi-equity and debt funds in partnership with investors targeting investments across the relevant sectors in India.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** NIIF and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

5. SEBI amends norms for REITs

Context:

- Sebi has amended REITs and InvITs regulations to facilitate the growth of such trusts. As per the amendments, REITs and InvITs will now have to provide a mechanism for resolution of disputes with their shareholders and partners in the holding firm.

What are REITs?

- REITs are similar to mutual funds. While mutual funds provide for an opportunity to invest in equity stocks, REITs allow one to invest in income-generating real estate assets.

How does an REIT work?

- REITs raise funds from a large number of investors and directly invest that sum in income-generating real estate properties (which could be offices, residential apartments, shopping centres, hotels and warehouses).
- The trusts are listed in stock exchanges so that investors can buy units in the trust. REITs are structured as trusts. Thus, the assets of an REIT are held by an independent trustee on behalf of unit holders.

Sources: the hindu.

6. FAME scheme

Context:

- The government has decided to extend the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid) and Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme by six months until 30 September 2018, or till the time the second phase of the scheme is approved by it.

About FAME India scheme:

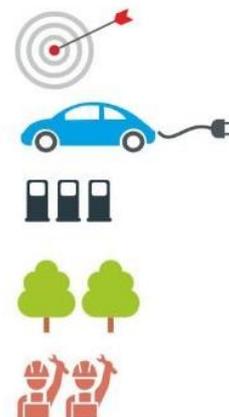
- **What is it?** With an aim to promote eco-friendly vehicles, the government had launched the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME-India) scheme in 2015.
- **Aim:** The FAME India Scheme is aimed at incentivising all vehicle segments, including two-wheelers, three wheeler auto, passenger four-wheeler vehicle, light commercial vehicles and buses. The scheme covers hybrid and electric technologies like a strong hybrid, plug-in hybrid and battery electric vehicles.
- **Facts:** FAME India – Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles in India – is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan. The scheme envisages Rs 795 crore support in the first two fiscals. It is being administered by the Heavy Industries Ministry.

WHAT IS FAME?

Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric (Hybrid) Vehicles in India is a scheme under **National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP)**

Target of NEMMP - 2020

- **6-7 million** Hybrid & Electric Vehicle sale by 2020
- **9500 million** litres of estimated cumulative fuel saving
- **2 million** tonnes reduction in pollution & green house gas emissions
- **65,000** Direct & **3,00,000** Indirect jobs

**Way ahead:**

- Electric vehicles (EVs) seem to be gaining in prominence as part of the renewable energy zeitgeist.
- However, mainstreaming electric vehicles will require an overhaul of the country's energy and transport infrastructure. For example, EV charging stations will have to be set up on a war footing, and electricity generation will have to improve significantly even as its piggybacks on the push for solar energy.
- EV technology (especially the battery) will have to become much cheaper before it can perform well in a price-sensitive market like India.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** FAME scheme.
- **For Mains:** Need for EV policy.

Sources: the hindu.

7. PMGSY

Context:

- A parliamentary panel has found discrepancies including diversion of funds, issuing tenders prior to technical sanctions, incomplete projects, preference to certain villages etc. in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY) — a flagship programme of the Central government to provide rural last mile connectivity.
- The panel also found that some states had deviated from the prescribed procedures. Consequently eligible habitations were either left out or wrongly shown as connected.

About PMGSY:

- PMGSY was launched on 25th December 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country.
- The programme's target is to connect the 178,184 habitations identified as unconnected when the programme was launched. The present government has set an accelerated goal of achieving this target by 2019, ahead of the initial timeline of 2022.
- For most intensive Integrated Action Plan (IAP) blocks as identified by Ministry of Home Affairs the unconnected habitations with population of 100 and above (as per 2001 Census) are eligible to be covered under PMGSY.

The aim was to provide roads to all villages:

- With a population of 1000 persons and above by 2003.
- With a population of 500 persons and above by 2007.
- In hill states, tribal and desert area villages with a population of 500 persons and above by 2003.
- In hill states, tribal and desert area villages with a population of 250 persons and above by 2007.

Background:

- Rural Road Connectivity is not only a key component of Rural Development by promoting access to economic and social services and thereby generating increased agricultural incomes and productive employment opportunities in India, it is also as a result, a key ingredient in ensuring sustainable poverty reduction.
- Notwithstanding the efforts made, over the years, at the State and Central levels, through different Programmes, many Habitations in the country are still not connected by All-weather roads.

Sources: pib.

8. Uniform road tax

Context:

- A group of ministers (GoM) on transport constituted by the roads ministry has recommended a uniform road tax structure for vehicles across states.

Background:

- The group was constituted to find a solution to the various problems plaguing the road sector in the country. It was also asked to suggest ways to improve road safety and facilitate ease of transport.

Important recommendations made:

- **One national bus and taxi permit:** The GoM has recommended one national bus and taxi permit on the lines of permits for goods transporters. Public transport in the country is growing annually at a rate of just about 2%, as against a 20% annual growth in private transport. Therefore, a national permit will give the much-needed fillip to public transport and help reduce road congestion.
- **Boost to electric vehicles:** The GoM proposed to liberalize the permit system for electric vehicles to promote alternative fuels. It suggested raising the tax on diesel vehicles by 2% while lowering the tax on electric vehicles.

Way ahead:

- The **One Nation – One Permit** proposal will have farther fetching results. With an easier structure to transport goods across the country, the struggling road transport segment will see a most certain boost in morale, which could also lead to a reduction in prices of essential commodities like food, etc.
- The standardized permit will be an additional boost to the industry that already has seen a big improvement since GST came along and scrapped the state excise policies.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** nothing much.
- **For Mains:** Uniform road tax- need, challenges and benefits.

Sources: pib.

9. Leisang in Manipur

Context:

- Leisang in Manipur has become the last village to be added to the national power grid under the Rural Electrification Scheme.

Definition:

- The government considers a village electrified if it has basic electrical infrastructure and 10% of its households and public places including schools, local administrative offices and health centres have power.

Background:

- The government had allocated Rs75,893 crore for the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana with the aim of providing electricity access to all villages.

The Yojana also includes the components:

- To separate agriculture and non agriculture feeders facilitating judicious rostering of supply to agricultural and non-agricultural consumers in rural areas and
- Strengthening and augmentation of sub transmission and distribution infrastructure in rural areas, including metering of distribution transformers/feeders/consumers.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** DDUGJY.
- For Mains:** Significance of rural electrification and electricity for all.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1. Road map for drones

Context:

- With an aim to prepare a road map and fast-track the implementation of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology, or drones, in the country, the Centre has announced setting up of a 13-member task force headed by Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha.

Terms of reference:

- Apart from developing a road map, the task force would also lay down implementable recommendations for central and state governments, industry and research institutions.
- The committee's road map would also focus on R&D, acquisition and commercialisation, application and adoption in specific sectors, regulatory framework as well as preference for Make in India.

What necessitated this move?

- That drones have tremendous practical applications can no longer be disputed. Some of India's startups are revolutionising drone applications in areas as diverse as disaster management, precision agriculture and crop insurance, mining, infrastructure projects, and land records.
- The increasing use of drone-enabled solutions by various state departments and ministries — such as the railways, surface transport, power, and law enforcement — further validates their efficacy. Yet, the Indian regulatory approach has been unfriendly thus far towards drone innovations and applications.

Draft Regulation on Civil Use of Drones Announced:

- The Directorate General of Civil Aviation, in November 2017, announced draft regulations on civil use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, commonly known as Drones.

- As per the draft, all commercial categories of drones except those in the Nano category and those operated by government security agencies, will have to be registered by DGCA in the form of Unique Identification Number (UIN).
- The Mini and above categories will require Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP), but the model aircraft up to maximum take-off weight of 2 Kgs flown below 200 feet inside educational institution premises will not require UIN/UAOP.
- The draft regulation also mandates remote pilots to undergo requisite training, except for Nano and micro categories. As per the draft regulation, the Micro and above category drones will have to be equipped with RFID/SIM, return to home option and anti-collision lights.
- The draft regulation also specifies certain restricted areas for operations of drones. Drones cannot be operated within an area of 5km from airport, within permanent or temporary Prohibited, Restricted and Danger Areas as notified by AAI in AIP and without prior approval over densely populated areas or over or near an area affecting public safety or where emergency operations are underway and within 50 km from international border and beyond 500 m (horizontal) into sea along the coastline.

Way ahead:

- Flying drones safely in India will require research and development to understand how they can be best used in India's unique landscape.
- Such R&D occurs best in a market-oriented environment, which will not happen unless civilian drone use is permitted. Building profitable companies around drone use can be complicated when the core business model is illegal.

What's important?

- **For Mains:** Drones- civil and military uses, their regulation- need and challenges.

Sources: pib.

2. Commonwealth innovation index

Context:

- A new Commonwealth Innovation Index has been launched as part of a new Commonwealth Innovation Hub on the sidelines of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) being held in London.

About the index:

- The index has been created in partnership with the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and its annual Global Innovation Index (GII).
- It is aimed at providing a tool that allows member states, organisations and citizens to benchmark themselves against 53 countries of the Commonwealth, with the new innovation hub offering a dedicated online space for Commonwealth countries to showcase what they have to offer and share with other members.

Performance of countries:

- India is ranked 10th.
- Bangladesh has been ranked 24th.
- The index is topped by the UK, Singapore and Canada.

About GI:

- The Global Innovation Index (GII), co-published by World-Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Cornell University and INSEAD with CII as a Knowledge Partner since inception, has been ranking world economies including India since 2007 according to their innovation capabilities and outcomes using 82 indicators among a host of other important parameters.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Commonwealth Innovation Index and Global Innovation Index.

Sources: et.

3. Commonwealth Innovation Fund

Context:

- A new Commonwealth Innovation fund has been launched on the sidelines of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) being held in London.

About the Commonwealth Innovation Fund:

- The Global Innovation Fund (GIF) will work as the delivery partner to host a new Commonwealth Innovation Fund (CIF), which will use GIFs existing due diligence processes for sourcing, evaluating and investing to generate a high-quality portfolio of enterprises that are aligned with the Commonwealth Secretariats priorities.
- The GIF will manage the fund and its investments, which will be targeted at innovative projects across Commonwealth countries that “save and improve lives”.
- The new partnership aims to provide financing for incubating and accelerating impact-oriented ideas and innovations within the Commonwealth countries.
- It is a \$200 million venture capital firm that invests in social innovations that aim to improve lives and opportunities in the developing world through the use of grants and risk capital.

About the Global Innovation fund:

- The Global Innovation Fund is a non-profit innovation fund headquartered in London with an office in Washington D.C. that invests in the development, rigorous testing, and scaling of innovations targeted at improving the lives of the world’s poorest people.
- GIF is a unique hybrid investment fund that supports the piloting, rigorous testing, and scaling of innovations targeted at improving the lives of the poorest people in developing countries.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** CIF and GIF.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Atal Tinkering Labs

Context:

- The ATL Community Day was held across India, over the course of April 13 – 16. The initiative is an effort to spread awareness as well as engage the local communities in the neighbourhood of an Atal Tinkering Lab, to come and experience the exciting new world of science and future technologies.
- AIM has selected more than 2400 schools in 2017 for establishing Atal Tinkering Labs.



What are ATLs?

- With a vision to ‘Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators’, Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India.
- **Objective:** The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing etc.
- **Financial Support:** AIM will provide grant-in-aid that includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and operational expenses of Rs. 10 lakh for a maximum period of 5 years to each ATL.
- **Eligibility:** Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.

Significance of ATLs:

- Atal Tinkering Labs have evolved as epicenters for imparting these 'skills of the future' through practical applications based on self-learning.
- Bridging a crucial social divide, Atal Tinkering Labs provide equal opportunity to all children across the spectrum by working at the grassroot level, introducing children to the world of innovation and tinkering.

Way ahead:

- As the world grapples with evolving technologies, a new set of skills have gained popular acceptance and have come to be in high demand. For India to contribute significantly during this age of rapid technological advancement, there is an urgent need to empower our youth with these 'skills of the future'.
- Equipped with modern technologies to help navigate and impart crucial skills in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the ATLs are at the vanguard of promoting scientific temper and an entrepreneurial spirit in children today.

AIM:

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) endeavours to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Its objective is to serve as a platform for promotion of world-class Innovation Hubs, Grand Challenges, Start-up businesses and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology driven areas.

The Atal Innovation Mission shall have two core functions:

- Entrepreneurship promotion through Self-Employment and Talent Utilization, wherein innovators would be supported and mentored to become successful entrepreneurs.
- Innovation promotion: to provide a platform where innovative ideas are generated.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** AIM, ATLs and their key features.
- **For Mains:** Need for innovation and efforts by government in this regard.

Sources: pib.

5. Earth BioGenome Project

Context:

- Scientists have proposed Earth BioGenome project, a massive project to sequence, catalog and analyze the genomes of all eukaryotic species on the planet.

What are Eukaryotes?

- Eukaryotes include all organisms except bacteria and archaea.
- It includes plants, animals, fungi and other organisms whose cells have a nucleus that houses their chromosomal DNA. There are an estimated 10-15 million eukaryotic species on Earth.

**About the project:**

- The central goal of the Earth BioGenome Project (EBP) is to understand the evolution and organization of life on our planet by sequencing and functionally annotating the genomes of 1.5 million known species of eukaryotes.
- The project also seeks to reveal some of the estimated 10 to 15 million unknown species of eukaryotes, most of which are single cell organisms, insects and small animals in the oceans.
- The Project also plans to capitalize on the "citizen scientist" movement to collect specimens.
- The initiative is led by a coordinating council with members from the United States, the European Union, China, Brazil, Canada, Australia and some African countries.
- This will take 10 years, cost \$4.7 billion and require more than 200 petabytes of digital storage capacity.

Significance of the project:

- The benefits of the project promise to be a complete transformation of the scientific understanding of life on Earth and a vital new resource for global innovations in medicine, agriculture, conservation, technology and genomics.
- The project is also being seen essential for developing new drugs for infectious and inherited diseases as well as creating new biological synthetic fuels, biomaterials, and food sources for growing human population.
- The project will likely enable the development of new technologies, such as portable genetic sequencers and instrumented drones that can go out, identify samples in the field, and bring those samples back to the laboratory.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Earth BioGenome project, Eukaryotes.
- **For Mains:** Significance of the project.

Sources: the hindu.

6. Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project

Context:

- India has signed a loan agreement with World Bank for US\$ 125 million for “Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project”.

About the project:

- The project seeks to nurture indigenous innovation, foster local product development and accelerate commercialization process by bridging critical skill and infrastructure gaps to promote affordable and innovative healthcare products generation for inclusive development and increasing competitiveness in India.
- The project would support consortia of public, private, and the academic institutions to overcome the key market failures currently holding back the development of an innovative biopharmaceutical and medical devices industry in India.

The project consists of the following parts:

- Strengthening of pilot-to market innovation ecosystem.
- Acceleration of the pilot –to-market process for specific products.
- Project Management and monitoring & Evaluation.

Sources: pib.

7. Atal New India Challenge

Context:

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) under the NITI Aayog has launched the Atal New India Challenge.

About the Atal New India Challenge:

- It shall be run in collaboration with various ministries- Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation and Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation.
- **What it does?** Under the Atal New India Challenge, AIM will invite prospective innovators/MSMEs/start-ups to design market-ready products, using cutting edge technologies or prototypes across 17 identified focus areas such as Climate Smart Agriculture, Smart Mobility, Predictive Maintenance of Rolling Stock, Waste Management etc.
- **Grants:** Applicants showing capability, intent and potential to productize technologies will be awarded grants up to Rs. One crore. This grant will be further supplemented by mentoring, handholding, incubating and other support as needed at various stages of commercialisation, while generating wider deployment for the product.

About AIM:

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is Government of India's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.
- AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country and revolutionizing the innovation eco-system – touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.
- Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) create innovators, Atal Incubation Centre and support to Established Incubation Centre will take the innovations to the market and a network of Incubators shall help create enterprises around these innovations.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** AIM, Atal new India Challenge.
- **For Mains:** Need for innovation and support by the government.

Sources: pib.

8. Bhabha Kavach

What is it?

- It is an armour panel developed by BARC which gives personal protection against bullets of different threat levels.

Key features:

- Bhabha Kavach made up of BARC Nano-Sheets are lighter in weight with reduced trauma level with respect to the existing jackets.
- The jacket is made using extremely hard boron carbide ceramics that is hot-pressed with carbon nano-tubes and composite polymer.

Paper 3 Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1. RemoveDebris system

Context:

- **RemoveDebris system, a UK-led experiment to tackle space junk** is set to head into orbit. The system is going to the International Space Station where astronauts are expected to set the experiment running in late May.

How it works?

- A microsatellite called here RemoveSAT, will release, capture and deorbit two space debris targets, called DebrisSats, in sequence using various rendezvous, capture and deorbiting technologies thus demonstrating in orbit, key ADR technologies for future missions in what promises to be the first ADR technology mission internationally.

Background:

- Space junk is an ever-growing problem with more than 7,500 tonnes of redundant hardware now thought to be circling the Earth. Ranging from old rocket bodies and defunct spacecraft through to screws and even flecks of paint – this material poses a collision hazard to operational missions.

About the RemoveDebris mission:

- RemoveDebris is an EU (European Union) research project to develop and fly a low cost in-orbit demonstrator mission that aims to de-risk and verify technologies needed for future ADR (Active Debris Removal) missions.
- RemoveDebris is aimed at performing key ADR technology demonstrations (e.g., capture, deorbiting) representative of an operational scenario during a low-cost mission using novel key technologies for ADR. The project is based on and aimed at contributing to global/European ADR roadmaps.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Point Nemo

Context:

- Scientists were initially planning to push the Tiangong-1 satellite to Point Nemo. However, they could not do so as they lost control of it.
- China's defunct Tiangong-1 space lab mostly broke up on re-entering the Earth's atmosphere above the South Pacific.

About Point Nemo:

- Point Nemo, or "ocean point of inaccessibility," is **a region in the South Pacific that is the loneliest place on the planet**. It is used as a graveyard for controlled re-entries and a place where space junk can be dropped safely.



Where is it located?

- Point Nemo, named after the submarine captain in Jules Verne's classic science fiction novel 20,000 Leagues Under The Sea, is about 2,688 kilometers from the nearest land – Pitcairn Islands – which lies to the north of this point.
- Also, Motu Nui — one of the Easter Islands — lies to the northeast and Maher Island, part of Antarctica, to the south.

Why this place?

- The region is safe to land all kinds of waste because there is also not much life in the water here. Coincidentally, it is also biologically not very diverse.
- So it gets used as a dumping ground — 'space graveyard' would be a more polite term — mainly for cargo spacecraft.

What is China's Tiangong 1?

- The Tiangong 1 module is China's first spacecraft designed for orbital docking tests and space research. Its name translates to "Heavenly Palace" in English.

- The Tiangong 1 space lab intended to serve as a space station module prototype for China, which is the third country (after Russia and the United States) to develop the capability to launch astronauts into space and return them safely to Earth.

Sources: et.

3. Advanced Supersonic Parachute Inflation Research Experiment (ASPIRE)

Context:

- A supersonic parachute that will help NASA missions to land on Mars, was successfully launched into the sky during a key test designed to mimic the conditions of entering the red planet.
- **The Advanced Supersonic Parachute Inflation Research Experiment (ASPIRE)** was launched aboard a sounding rocket from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in the US.



Background:

- An ambitious NASA Mars rover mission set to launch in 2020 will rely on a special parachute to slow the spacecraft down as it enters the Martian atmosphere at over 12,000 mph (5.4 kilometers per second).
- The Mars 2020 mission will seek signs of ancient Martian life by investigating evidence in place and by caching drilled samples of Martian rocks for potential future return to Earth.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** ASPIRE.

Sources: the hindu.

4. Icarus- farthest star

Context:

- NASA's Hubble Space Telescope has discovered the farthest individual star ever seen — an enormous blue stellar body nicknamed Icarus located over halfway across the universe.

Key facts:

- The star, harboured in a very distant spiral galaxy, is so far away that its light has taken nine billion years to reach Earth. It appears to us as it did when the universe was about 30% of its current age.
- The star, located in a distant spiral galaxy, is at least 100 times further away than any other star previously observed, with the exception of things like the huge supernova explosions that mark the death of certain stars.

Significance of this discovery:

- These observations by astronomers from NASA provide a rare and detailed look at how stars evolve, especially the most luminous stars. Detecting the amplification of a single and pinpoint background star has provided a unique opportunity to test the nature of dark matter in the cluster.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Gravitational lensing, Icarus and hubble telescope.

Gravitational lensing:

- The scientists took advantage of a phenomenon called "gravitational lensing" to spot the star. It involves the bending of light by massive galaxy clusters in the line of sight, which magnifies more distant celestial objects. This makes dim, faraway objects that otherwise would be undetectable, like an individual star, visible.

About the Hubble Space Telescope:

- The Hubble Space Telescope is a large telescope in space. NASA launched Hubble in 1990.
- It was built by the United States space agency NASA, with contributions from the European Space Agency.
- Hubble is the only telescope designed to be serviced in space by astronauts.
- Expanding the frontiers of the visible Universe, the Hubble Space Telescope looks deep into space with cameras that can see across the entire optical spectrum from infrared to ultraviolet.

Sources: the hindu.

5. BIS Act 2016

Context:

- A Parliamentary Consultative Committee recently reviewed the activities of Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and laid emphasis on easy redressal mechanism of complaints, mandatory certification, enhancing consumer confidence through publicity and various other interactive measures.
- It also stressed on the effective implementation of the provisions of new BIS Act 2016.

BIS Act 2016:

- Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016 which was notified on 22nd March, 2016, came into force with effect from 12th October, 2017. Parliament had in March 2016 passed the law to replace the BIS Act of 1986.

Highlights of the act:

- **National standards body:** The Act establishes the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) as the National Standards Body of India.
- **Compulsory certification:** The Act has enabling provisions for the Government to bring under compulsory certification regime any goods or article of any scheduled industry, process, system or service which it considers necessary in the public interest or for the protection of human, animal or plant health, safety of the environment, or prevention of unfair trade practices, or national security.
- **Hallmarking:** Enabling provisions have also been made for making hallmarking of the precious metal articles mandatory.
- **Simplified conformity:** The new Act also allows multiple type of simplified conformity assessment schemes including self-declaration of conformity against a standard which will give simplified options to manufacturers to adhere to the standards and get certificate of conformity.
- **Authority for verification:** The Act enables the Central Government to appoint any authority/agency, in addition to the BIS, to verify the conformity of products and services to a standard and issue certificate of conformity.
- **Repair or recall:** There is also a provision for repair or recall, including product liability of the products bearing Standard Mark but not conforming to the relevant Indian Standard.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** BIS, BIS Act.

Sources: pib.

About BIS:

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the national Standards Body of India working under *the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution*.
- It is established by *the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986*.
- *The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control* of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.
- As a corporate body, it has 25 members drawn from Central or State Governments, industry, scientific and research institutions, and consumer organisations.
- *It also works as WTO-TBT enquiry point for India.*

6. Newly discovered antibiotic class, Odilorhabdins

Context: Researchers have discovered a new class of antibiotics- Odilorhabdins.

Key facts for Prelims:

- Called odilorhabdins, or ODLs, the antibiotics are produced by symbiotic bacteria found in soil-dwelling nematode worms that colonise insects for food.
- The bacteria help to kill the insect, and secrete the antibiotic to keep competing bacteria away.

How they function?

- ODLs act on the ribosome — the molecular machine that makes proteins cells needed to function — of bacterial cells. When bound to the ribosome, the antibiotic disrupts its ability to interpret and translate genetic code.
- When ODLs are introduced to the bacterial cells, they impact the reading ability of the ribosome and cause the ribosome to make mistakes when it creates new proteins," said Mankin. "This miscoding corrupts the cell with flawed proteins and causes the bacterial cell to die.

Significance of the discovery:

- Odilorhabdins is unique and promising on two fronts: its unconventional source and its distinct way of killing bacteria, both of which suggest the compound may be effective at treating drug-resistant or hard-to-treat infections.

Background:

- According to the World Health Organization, antibiotic resistant is one of the biggest threats to global health today and a significant contributor to longer hospital stays, higher medical costs and increased mortality.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Odilorhabdins.
- **For Mains:** Issues related to antibiotic resistance.

Sources: the hindu.

7. Parker Solar Probe

Context:

- Parker Solar Probe, which is humanity's first mission to the Sun, has begun final preparations for its launch in July. After launch, it will orbit directly through the solar atmosphere – the corona – closer to the surface than any human-made object has ever gone.

About the Parker solar probe:

- **What is it?** NASA's historic Parker Solar Probe mission will revolutionize our understanding of the sun, where changing conditions can propagate out into the solar system, affecting Earth and other worlds. Parker Solar Probe will travel through the sun's atmosphere, closer to the surface than any spacecraft before it, facing brutal heat and radiation conditions — and ultimately providing humanity with the closest-ever observations of a star.
- **Journey:** In order to unlock the mysteries of the sun's atmosphere, Parker Solar Probe will use Venus' gravity during seven flybys over nearly seven years to gradually bring its orbit closer to the sun. The spacecraft will fly through the sun's atmosphere as close as 3.9 million miles to our star's surface, well within the orbit of Mercury and more than seven times closer than any spacecraft has come before.
- **Goals:** The primary science goals for the mission are to trace how energy and heat move through the solar corona and to explore what accelerates the solar wind as well as solar energetic particles.

Parker Solar Probe has three detailed science objectives:

- Trace the flow of energy that heats and accelerates the solar corona and solar wind.
- Determine the structure and dynamics of the plasma and magnetic fields at the sources of the solar wind.
- Explore mechanisms that accelerate and transport energetic particles.

Why do we study the sun and the solar wind?

- The sun is the only star we can study up close. By studying this star we live with, we learn more about stars throughout the universe.
- The sun is a source of light and heat for life on Earth. The more we know about it, the more we can understand how life on Earth developed.
- The sun also affects Earth in less familiar ways. It is the source of the solar wind; a flow of ionized gases from the sun that streams past Earth at speeds of more than 500 km per second (a million miles per hour).
- Disturbances in the solar wind shake Earth's magnetic field and pump energy into the radiation belts, part of a set of changes in near-Earth space known as space weather.
- Space weather can change the orbits of satellites, shorten their lifetimes, or interfere with onboard electronics. The more we learn about what causes space weather – and how to predict it – the more we can protect the satellites we depend on.
- The solar wind also fills up much of the solar system, dominating the space environment far past Earth. As we send spacecraft and astronauts further and further from home, we must understand this space environment just as early seafarers needed to understand the ocean.

Sources: the hindu.

8. IIT-Delhi launches first 5G radio lab

Context:

- In an effort to establish India as a key global player in the standardisation, research and development and manufacturing of 5G equipment, a Massive MIMO radio laboratory has been set up at IIT Delhi.
- This will be the first such lab in India.

What is MIMO Technology?

- Multiple-input multiple-output, or MIMO, is a radio communications technology or RF technology that is being mentioned and used in many new technologies these days.
- Wi-Fi, LTE; Long Term Evolution, and many other radio, wireless and RF technologies are using the new MIMO wireless technology to provide increased link capacity and spectral efficiency combined with improved link reliability using what were previously seen as interference paths.

How it works?

- MIMO technology uses a natural radio-wave phenomenon called multipath.
- With multipath, transmitted information bounces off walls, ceilings, and other objects, reaching the receiving antenna multiple times at different angles and slightly different times. In the past, multipath caused interference and slowed down wireless signals.
- With multipath, MIMO technology uses multiple, smart transmitters and receivers with an added spatial dimension, increasing performance and range.

Significance of Massive Multiple-Input Multiple-Output (MIMO) technology:

- In Massive MIMO technology, several antennas are deployed at the base station as compared to only a few antennas in 3G/4G. This large antenna array at the base station allows the network to communicate reliably with a very large number of mobile terminals simultaneously at the same time and on the same frequency channel.
- **Benefits:** It will help curb the emittance of radiation harmful to our health and also will allow less radio interference for better communication.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** All about MIMO technology.

Sources: the hindu.

9. IRNSS-1I

Context:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has launched the IRNSS-1I satellite through its PSLV-C41. It was the 20th flight of PSLV-XL version. This satellite will transmit signals for the accurate determination of position, navigation and time.
- Like all other IRNSS satellites, IRNSS-1I will also carry two payloads – navigation payload and ranging payload – the former to transmit signals for determining position, velocity and time and the latter for determining the frequency range of the satellite.

Background:

- Navigation satellite IRNSS-1I has been launched to replace India's first navigation satellite IRNSS-1A, whose three Rubidium atomic clocks had stopped working two years ago.
- The malfunctioning of the Europe-imported atomic clocks in IRNSS-1A made it difficult to measure precise locational data from the satellite. When the time signal is missing, getting true positional accuracy becomes a problem. Therefore, ISRO felt a need to replace faulty satellite IRNSS-1A.

What is IRNSS?

- IRNSS stands for Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System. It is a set of satellites which together can provide India a regional positioning system similar to the GPS. According to the ISRO website, the system is designed

to give position accuracy better than 20 metres to users in its primary coverage area. It can also service regions extending up to 1500 km around India's boundary. NavIC is the operational name for the IRNSS.

How many IRNSS satellites are up there now?

- There are currently seven IRNSS satellites (1A to 1G) in orbit. A, B, F, G are placed in a geosynchronous orbit, which means they seem to be at a fixed location above the Earth and they orbit along with the Earth. The remaining three, C, D, E, are located in geostationary orbit—they seem to be at a fixed location above the Earth along the equator and orbit along with the Earth.
- The last IRNSS, 1H, which was launched on August 31, 2017 was unsuccessful as the satellite did not come out of its heat shield.

What are the applications of IRNSS?

- These satellites help not just in land navigation but also in marine and aerial navigation. The data from these satellites can be used to give vehicle drivers visual and voice navigation assistance. They also help in disaster management and in proper time-keeping.

Which Other Countries / Space Agencies Have Similar Navigational Systems?

- India's (ISRO's) NavIC joined the elite league of four countries / space agencies which have similar navigation capabilities. These include GPS (United States), GLONASS (Russia), Galileo (European Union), BeiDou (China). Japan is also planning a similar project with three of its own satellites. Japan's system will be called the QZSS.

Sources: the hindu.

10. Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)

Context:

- TESS, NASA's planet-hunting satellite was recently launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

About TESS mission:

- The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is a NASA mission that will look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth's sky.
- **Mission:** The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets. TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure of solar systems outside of our Earth, and provide insights into how our own solar system formed.
- **Orbit:** TESS will occupy a never-before-used orbit high above Earth. The elliptical orbit, called P/2, is exactly half of the moon's orbital period; this means that TESS will orbit Earth every 13.7 days. Its closest point to Earth (67,000 miles or 108,000 kilometers) is about triple the distance of geosynchronous orbit, where most communications satellites operate.



Sources: the hindu.

11. Lunar 'Gateway' space station

Context:

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) is planning to award its first contract for the lunar "Gateway" program in 2019.

About the Lunar Orbital Platform-Gateway:

- The Lunar Orbital Platform-Gateway is NASA's planned "staging" area intended for studies of the moon and the deep-space environment. Eventually, it will function as a way station for astronauts travelling to and from Mars.
- The Gateway would also further NASA's goal of another human landing on the moon and will help determine whether water near the surface could be used to manufacture propellant for deep-space missions.

- The moon's gravity could also help a spacecraft reduce the blistering speeds used for six-month voyages back-and-forth to Mars, thus facilitating re-entry to Earth's atmosphere.

Sources: toi.

12. Bureau of Indian Standards

Context:

- Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) granted First Licence to M/s Gujarat Alkalies and Chemicals Ltd for Liquid Chlorine on All India basis.
- This is the First Licence granted on All India basis. License for Liquid Chlorine will facilitate industry to get a quality product with Standard Mark under BIS Certification Marks scheme.

About Liquid Chlorine:

- The product is in liquid form and stored in metal containers. It is usually used as a gas obtained by evaporating the liquid from the metal container.
- It is used mainly in paper, pulp, textile bleaching, water sterilization and manufacture of chemicals.

About BIS:

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), the National Standards Body of India is a statutory organization under the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986. The organisation was formerly the Indian Standards Institution (ISI), set up under a Resolution.
- It works under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India.
- The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.
- As a corporate body, it has 25 members drawn from Central or State Governments, industry, scientific and research institutions, and consumer organisations.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** BIS, liquid chlorine.

Sources: pib.

STANDARDIZATION IN INDIA AND ROLE OF BIS



- Standardization activity in India started with establishment of Indian Standards Institution (ISI) in 1947
- Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) took over work of ISI through enactment of BIS Act (1986) by the Indian Parliament

Objectives:

- ✓ Harmonious development of activities of standardization, marking and quality certification
- ✓ Conformity Assessment
- ✓ Anything connected therewith and incidental thereto

13. Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Service (INCOIS)

Context:

- In Kerala, the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) is planning to provide real-time information on the market price of fishes and allied news through the GPS-enabled GEO Augmented Navigation (GAGAN).

Significance:

- India is the fourth country to offer space-based satellite navigation services to the aviation sector.
- The system bridges the gap in the coverage areas of the European

About GAGAN:

- GAGAN was developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) at a cost of Rs. 774 crore, over 15 years.
- GAGAN will provide augmentation service for the GPS over the country, the Bay of Bengal, South East Asia and Middle East and up to Africa.
- Some of its benefits are improved efficiency, direct routes, increased fuel savings, approach with vertical guidance at runways, significant cost savings because of the withdrawal of ground aids and reduced workload of flight crew and air traffic controllers.
- Gagan works by augmenting and relaying data from GPS satellites with the help of two augmentation satellites and 15 earth-based reference stations.
- The system utilises the satellite-based wide area augmentation system (SBAS) technology which has been developed by Raytheon.

Union's European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) and Japan's Multi-functional Satellite Augmentation System (MSAS).

- The system would be available for the member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
- It is intended to serve as a low-cost substitute for instrument landing system (ILS) and provide very accurate route guidance for the aircraft to save time and fuel.
- The guided approach landing with the help of GAGAN would immediately benefit nearly 50 airports in India.

About INCOIS:

- Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) is an autonomous organization of the Government of India, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- INCOIS is mandated to provide the best possible ocean information and advisory services to society, industry, government agencies and the scientific community through sustained ocean observations and constant improvements through systematic and focussed research.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** INCOIS, GAGAN- their significance.

Sources: the hindu.

14. ESA's space observatory Gaia

Context:

- ESA's Gaia mission has produced the richest star catalogue to date, including high-precision measurements of nearly 1.7 billion stars and revealing previously unseen details of our home Galaxy.
- Preliminary analysis of this phenomenal data reveals fine details about the make-up of the Milky Way's stellar population and about how stars move, essential information for investigating the formation and evolution of our Galaxy.

About GAIA:

- Gaia is an ambitious mission to chart a three-dimensional map of our Galaxy, the Milky Way, in the process revealing the composition, formation and evolution of the Galaxy.
- The mission relies on a huge human collaboration to make sense of a large volume of highly complex data. It demonstrates the need for long-term projects to guarantee progress in space science and technology and to implement even more daring scientific missions of the coming decades.
- Launched on December 19, 2013, the Gaia satellite both rotates and orbits around the Earth, while surveying the sky with its two telescopes.
- Gaia will provide unprecedented positional and radial velocity measurements with the accuracies needed to produce a stereoscopic and kinematic census of about one billion stars in our Galaxy and throughout the Local Group. This amounts to about 1 per cent of the Galactic stellar population.

Sources: et.

15. National Intellectual Property (IP) Award 2018

Context:

- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is awarded the National Intellectual Property (IP) Award 2018 in the category "Top R&D Institution / Organization for Patents and Commercialization".

About the award:

- The Indian Intellectual Property Office confers National Intellectual Property (IP) Award on outstanding innovators, organizations and companies in the fields of patents, designs, trademarks and geographical indications on the occasion of World IP Day every year.

16. Priority watch list

Context:

- In its latest 2018 Special 301 Report, the USTR has placed 12 countries on its priority watch list.

Highlights of the report:

- India continues to remain on the priority watch list for longstanding challenges in its intellectual property framework and lack of sufficient measurable progress. As per the report, the country is also one of the world's most challenging major economies in the area.
- Other countries on the list are Algeria, Argentina, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Indonesia, Kuwait, Russia, Ukraine, and Venezuela.

About the Special 301 Report:

- The special 301 report identifies US trading partners that do not adequately or effectively protect and enforce IP rights or otherwise deny market access to its innovators and creators that rely on protection of their IP rights.
- The IP issues in these countries will be the subject of intense bilateral engagement during the coming year.

Why India continues to remain on the priority watch list?

- India remains on the priority watch list this year for longstanding challenges in its IP framework and lack of sufficient measurable improvements, particularly with respect to patents, copyrights, trade secrets, and enforcement, as well as for new issues that have negatively affected US right holders over the past year.
- The longstanding IP challenges facing US businesses in India include those which make it difficult for innovators to receive and maintain patents in India, particularly for pharmaceuticals.
- Among other issues include India's enforcement action and policies that are insufficient to curb the problem, copyright policies that do not properly incentivise the creation and commercialisation of content, and an outdated and insufficient trade secrets legal framework.
- New and growing concerns, including with respect to reductions in transparency by India's pharmaceutical regulator through the removal of a requirement that applicants submit information about a product's patent status, continue to generate skepticism about whether India is serious about pursuing pro-innovation and pro-creativity growth policies.

Challenges:

- Indian government has taken several steps to improve its IP environment.
- In 2017, India continued to carry out high-level initiatives involving IP, including the **2016 National IP Policy** and **Startup India**.
- However, they have failed to draw a direct link to specific IP reforms that would best help achieve these goals.
- India's overall levels of IP enforcement remain deficient, and the lack of uniform progress across the country threatens to undercut the positive steps that certain states have taken.
- It is time for India to address these challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

17. Resource Prospector mission

Context:

- NASA has cancelled Resource Prospector Mission, a mission to assay the resources that may be available to humans on the moon.

Significance of the mission:

- Scientists know that water ice exists on the moon, but the Resource Prospector would have provided scientists with a more complete understanding of these deposits.
- Such knowledge is crucial in expanding a human presence on the moon. Lunar ice can potentially be melted and split into

About the Resource Prospector Mission:

- The Resource Prospector mission would have sent a rover to the moon's polar regions to learn about water and other deposits on and just beneath the lunar surface.
- The Resource Prospector mission consisted of a lander and a solar-powered rover equipped with a drill. The rover would have scouted the lunar surface, digging up soil for analysis.

oxygen and hydrogen, providing a local source of water, oxygen and rocket propellant. Not only would this help make human activities more self-sustaining, but it would also dramatically reduce launch costs, because much of these vital resources could be produced on site.

What's important?

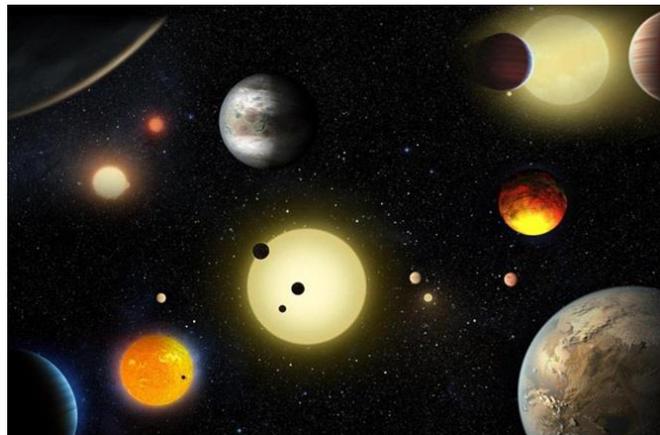
- **For Prelims:** Resource Prospector Mission.
- **For Mains:** Significance of the mission.

Sources: et.

18. Hubble captured first image of surviving companion to supernova

Context:

- NASA's Hubble Space Telescope has captured the first image of a surviving companion to a supernova, a compelling evidence that some supernovas originate in double-star systems.



Background:

- Seventeen years ago, astronomers had witnessed a supernova go off 40 million light-years away in the galaxy called NGC 7424, located in the southern constellation Grus, the Crane, the NASA statement said. The image of the companion star was seen in the fading afterglow of that supernova, called SN 2001ig. SN 2001ig is categorised as a Type IIb stripped-envelope supernova. This type of supernova is unusual because most, but not all, of the hydrogen is gone prior to the explosion.

About the Hubble Space Telescope:

- The Hubble Space Telescope is a large telescope in space. NASA launched Hubble in 1990.
- It was built by the United States space agency NASA, with contributions from the European Space Agency.
- Hubble is the only telescope designed to be serviced in space by astronauts.
- Expanding the frontiers of the visible Universe, the Hubble Space Telescope looks deep into space with cameras that can see across the entire optical spectrum from infrared to ultraviolet.

Sources: et.

19. Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport (InSight)

Context:

- NASA is set to launch Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport (InSight) on May 5, the first-ever mission to study the heart of Mars.

About InSight Mission:

- InSight is part of NASA's Discovery Program, managed by the agency's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.
- It will be the first mission to peer deep beneath the Martian surface, studying the planet's interior by measuring its heat output and listening for marsquakes, which are seismic events similar to earthquakes on Earth.
- It will use the seismic waves generated by marsquakes to develop a map of the planet's deep interior.



Significance of the mission:

- The findings of Mars' formation will help better understand how other rocky planets, including Earth, were and are created. But InSight is more than a Mars mission – it is a terrestrial planet explorer that would address

one of the most fundamental issues of planetary and solar system science – understanding the processes that shaped the rocky planets of the inner solar system (including Earth) more than four billion years ago.

- By using sophisticated geophysical instruments, InSight would delve deep beneath the surface of Mars, detecting the fingerprints of the processes of terrestrial planet formation, as well as measuring the planet's "vital signs": Its "pulse" (seismology), "temperature" (heat flow probe), and "reflexes" (precision tracking).
- InSight seeks to answer one of science's most fundamental questions: How did the terrestrial planets form?

MarCo:

- The rocket that will loft InSight beyond Earth will also launch a separate NASA technology experiment: two mini-spacecraft called Mars Cube One, or MarCO. These briefcase-sized CubeSats will fly on their own path to Mars behind InSight.
- Their goal is to test new miniaturized deep space communication equipment. This will be a first test of miniaturized CubeSat technology at another planet, which researchers hope can offer new capabilities to future missions.
- If successful, the MarCOs could represent a new kind of communication capability to Earth. InSight's success is independent of its CubeSat tag-alongs.

Why Mars?

- Previous missions to Mars have investigated the surface history of the Red Planet by examining features like canyons, volcanoes, rocks and soil. However, signatures of the planet's formation can only be found by sensing and studying its "vital signs" far below the surface.
- In comparison to the other terrestrial planets, Mars is neither too big nor too small. This means that it preserves the record of its formation and can give us insight into how the terrestrial planets formed. It is the perfect laboratory from which to study the formation and evolution of rocky planets. Scientists know that Mars has low levels of geological activity. But a lander like InSight can also reveal just how active Mars really is.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** InSights mission and its significance, MarCo.

Sources: et.

20. Sentinel-3B satellite

Context:

- The European Union has successfully managed to launch its new, highly-advanced Sentinel Earth observation satellite into space. The earth observing satellite is called Sentinel-3B and it flew to space atop a Russian Rocket launcher.

Key facts:

- The main aim of the Sentinel-3B satellite is to monitor the Earth's ocean. Along with that it will map the vegetation growth on the earth surface and will measure the thinning ice sheets.
- The Sentinel-3B was the seventh rocket that was launched by the European Union for its ambitious Copernicus mission.

About Copernicus programme:

- Copernicus is the most ambitious Earth observation programme to date. It will provide accurate, timely and easily accessible information to improve the management of the environment, understand and mitigate the effects of climate change and ensure civil security.
- Copernicus is the new name for the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security programme, previously known as GMES.
- This initiative is headed by the European Commission (EC) in partnership with the European Space Agency (ESA).
- ESA coordinates the delivery of data from upwards of 30 satellites. The EC, acting on behalf of the European Union, is responsible for the overall initiative, setting requirements and managing the services.
- **Services provided by Copernicus:** land management, the marine environment, atmosphere, emergency response, security and climate change.

- **Sentinel:** ESA is developing a new family of satellites, called Sentinels, specifically for the operational needs of the Copernicus programme. The Sentinels will provide a unique set of observations, starting with the all-weather, day and night radar images.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Copernicus programme and its significance.

Sources: et.

Paper 3 Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. Delhi becomes first city to roll-out Euro VI fuel

Context:

- **New Delhi has become the first city in India to deploy Bharat Stage 6 Fuel for both petrol and diesel.** two years ahead of the rest of the country.
- The idea behind this implementation two years ahead of the previously scheduled date of April 1, 2020, is to help battle Delhi's long-standing terminal pollution problem.

Why is it important to upgrade these norms?

- Upgrading to stricter fuel standards helps tackle air pollution.
- Global automakers are betting big on India as vehicle penetration is still low here, when compared to developed countries.
- At the same time, cities such as Delhi are already being listed among those with the poorest air quality in the world.
- The national capital's recent odd-even car experiment and judicial activism against the registration of big diesel cars shows that governments can no longer afford to relax on this front.
- With other developing countries such as China having already upgraded to the equivalent of Euro V emission norms a while ago, India has been lagging behind.
- The experience of countries such as China and Malaysia shows that poor air quality can be bad for business. Therefore, these reforms can put India ahead in the race for investments too.

The government could face two key challenges in implementing the decision:

- First, there are questions about the ability of oil marketing companies to quickly upgrade fuel quality from BS-III and BS-IV standards to BS-VI, which is likely to cost upwards of Rs 40,000 crore.
- Second, and more challenging, is the task of getting auto firms to make the leap.
- Automakers have clearly said that going to BS-VI directly would leave them with not enough time to design changes in their vehicles, considering that two critical components — diesel particulate filter and selective catalytic reduction module — would have to be adapted to India's peculiar conditions, where running speeds are much lower than in Europe or the US.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** BS Norms and composition.
- **For Mains:** BS norms- implementation- issues, challenges and solutions.

Sources: the hindu.

What are BS norms?

- The BS — or Bharat Stage — emission standards are norms instituted by the government to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles.
- India has been following the European (Euro) emission norms, though with a time-lag of five years.

Difference between BS-IV and the new BS-VI:

- The major difference in standards between the existing BS-IV and the new BS-VI auto fuel norms is the presence of sulphur.
- The newly introduced fuel is estimated to reduce the amount of sulphur released by 80 per cent, from 50 parts per million to 10 ppm. As per the analysts, the emission of NOx (nitrogen oxides) from diesel cars is also expected to reduce by nearly 70 per cent and 25 per cent from cars with petrol engines.

2. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

Context:

- The world's chemical watchdog is meeting after a British laboratory said it had not proved that Russia manufactured a deadly nerve agent used to poison a former Russian spy.
- The talks at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have been requested by Moscow which said it wanted to "address the situation around the allegations in regards to the incident in Salisbury."

The OPCW Member States share the collective goal of preventing chemistry from ever again being used for warfare, thereby strengthening international security. To this end, the Convention contains four key provisions:

- Destroying all existing chemical weapons under international verification by the OPCW.
- Monitoring chemical industry to prevent new weapons from re-emerging.
- Providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats.
- Fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry.

The Chemical Weapons Convention prohibits:

- Developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, or retaining chemical weapons.
- The direct or indirect transfer of chemical weapons.
- Chemical weapons use or military preparation for use.
- Assisting, encouraging, or inducing other states to engage in CWC-prohibited activity.
- The use of riot control agents "as a method of warfare."

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** OPCW and CWC.

Sources: et.

About OPCW:

- The OPCW is an independent, autonomous international organisation with a working relationship with the United Nations.
- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997.
- As of today OPCW has 192 Member States, who are working together to achieve a world free of chemical weapons.
- The organisation was **awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize** "for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons".

3. Van Dhan Vikas Kendra

Context:

- Ministry of Tribal Affairs is planning to launch first ever "Van Dhan Vikas Kendra" at Bijapur, Chhattisgarh for value addition of Forest Produce.
- Value addition assumes critical importance in ensuring remunerative prices to the tribals in this approach.

Key facts:

- This first model Van Dhan Vikas Kendra is being implemented for training of 300 beneficiaries with a total outlay of Rs 43.38 lakhs for training, providing equipments & tools for primary level processing and infrastructure & building for housing the Kendra.
- It provides skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility.
- The selection of the tribal beneficiaries and formation of the SHGs under this has been undertaken by TRIFED.

Significance of MFP:

- Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income.
- It provides them critical subsistence during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter gatherers, and the landless. Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP on which they spend major portion of their time.

- This activity has strong linkage to women's financial empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and used/sold by women. MFP sector has the potential to create about 10 million workdays annually in the country.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Van Dhan Vikas Kendras.
- **For Mains:** MFP and its significance.

Sources: pib.

4. Manas National Park

Context:

- **Assam Spring Festival** is being held at the Manas National Park where visitors will get to experience the state's local food, music, handloom and handicrafts.
- The aim of the event is to promote the local food and culture of the fringe villagers. It is an attempt to create a model of alternative livelihood through food, handloom and culture.



Key facts on Manas National Park:

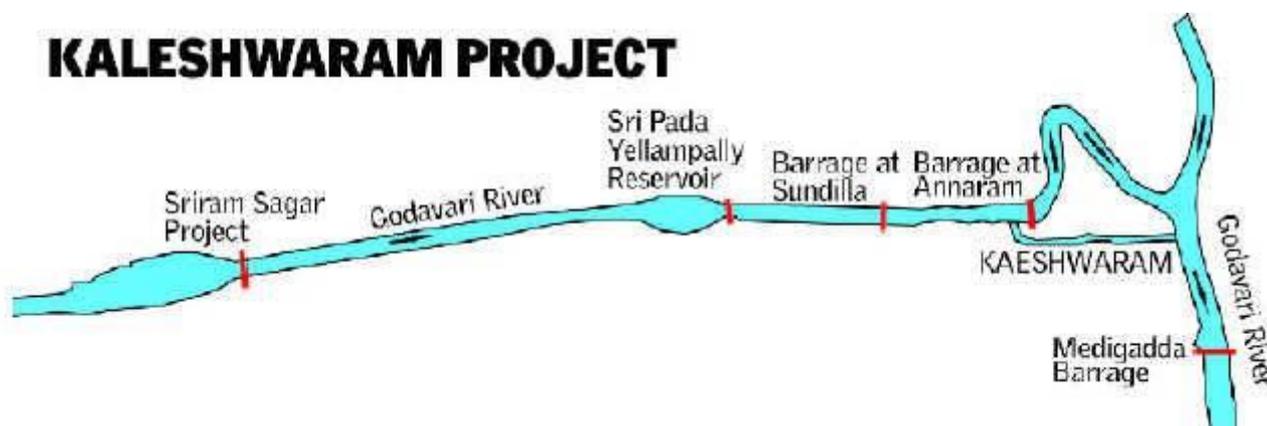
- Manas National Park is a national park, **UNESCO Natural World Heritage site**, a **Project Tiger reserve**, an **elephant reserve** and a **biosphere reserve** in **Assam, India**.
- Located in the Himalayan foothills, it is contiguous with the Royal Manas National Park in **Bhutan**.
- The **Manas river** flows through the west of the park and is the main river within it. It is a major tributary of Brahmaputra river and splits into two separate rivers, the **Beki** and **Bholkaduba** as it reaches the plains.
- The **Manas river** also serves as an international border **dividing India and Bhutan**.
- The bedrock of the savanna area in the north of the park is made up of limestone and sandstone, whereas the grasslands in the south of the park stand on deep deposits of fine alluvium.
- The combination of Sub-Himalayan **Bhabar Terai formation** along with the riverine succession continuing up to Sub-Himalayan mountain forest make it one of the **richest areas of biodiversity** in the world.
- The park is well known for species of rare and endangered wildlife that are not found anywhere else in the world like the **Assam roofed turtle**, **hispid hare**, **golden langur** and **pygmy hog**.

5. Kaleswaram project

Context:

- Central Water Commission (CWC) recently appreciated the Telangana government for the speedy execution of work on the Kaleswaram irrigation project aimed at creation of over 18 lakh acres of new irrigation potential and stabilising another 18 lakh acres of the existing command area.

KALESHWARAM PROJECT



What's the project?

- The Kaleshwaram project is an off-shoot of the original Pranahitha-Chevella Lift Irrigation Scheme taken up by the Congress government in 2007 when Andhra Pradesh was not divided. After the formation of Telangana in 2014, the TRS government redesigned the project on the ground that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision — only about 16.5 tmc ft.
- After conducting a highly advanced Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for a couple of months, the government separated the original component serving the Adilabad area as the Pranahitha project and renamed the rest as Kaleshwaram by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system based on the data of availability of water at different locations along the course of the Godavari and its tributaries.

Impact:

- The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about 148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days. The project is designed to irrigate 7,38,851 hectares (over 18.47 lakh acres) uplands in the erstwhile districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy.

What's unique?

- According to engineers, KLIP has many unique features, including the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia, running up to 81 km, between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir. The project would also utilise the highest capacity pumps, up to 139 MW, in the country to lift water.

Sources: the hindu.

6. NAAMES Mission

Context:

- In a first, NASA is conducting a study of the world's largest phytoplankton bloom in the North Atlantic, named the North Atlantic Aerosols and Marine Ecosystems Study (NAAMES) mission, to see how the tiny sea critters influence the climate in every season.
- It is the first research mission to conduct an integrated study of all four distinct phases of the world's largest phytoplankton bloom.

About NAAMES Mission:

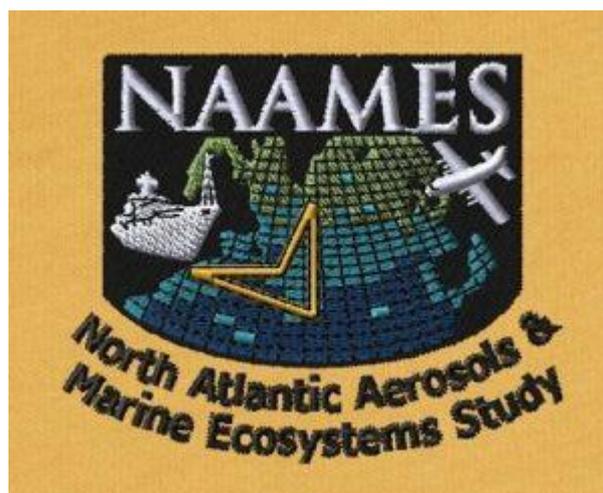
- The North Atlantic Aerosols and Marine Ecosystems Study (NAAMES) is an interdisciplinary investigation resolving key processes controlling marine ecosystems and aerosols that are essential to our understanding of Earth system function and future change.
- NAAMES is funded by the NASA Earth Venture Suborbital Program and is the first EV-S mission focused on studying the coupled ocean ecosystem and atmosphere.
- NAAMES consists of four, combined ship and aircraft field campaigns that are each aligned to a specific event in the annual plankton lifecycle.

Scientific objectives:

- The North Atlantic Aerosols and Marine Ecosystems Study (NAAMES) studies the world's largest plankton bloom and how it gives rise to small organic particles that leave the ocean and end up in the atmosphere, ultimately influencing clouds and climate.

Background:

- The North Atlantic plankton bloom is among the most conspicuous biological events annually recorded by satellite ocean color measurements, yet even fundamental controls on the bloom's magnitude and interannual variability are controversial.
- The bloom climax is one event within an annual plankton cycle that essentially oscillates between a decreasing-biomass phase beginning in the summer and an increasing-biomass phase beginning in Winter-Spring and ending with the bloom climax in Spring.



Significance of the mission:

- NAAMES is a five year investigation to resolve key processes controlling ocean system function, their influences on atmospheric aerosols and clouds and their implications for climate.
- Observations obtained during four, targeted ship and aircraft measurement campaigns, combined with the continuous satellite and in situ ocean sensor records, will enable improved predictive capabilities of Earth system processes and will inform ocean management and assessment of ecosystem change.

Sources: the hindu.

7. National Clean Air Programme

Context:

- The Environment Ministry has come out with a draft national action plan proposing multiple strategies to reduce air pollution.

Measures proposed:

- Under the NCAP, the ministry plans to take a host of measures to bring down air pollution.
- These include augmenting the air quality monitoring network, identification of alternative technology for real-time monitoring, setting up of 10 city super network, indoor air pollution monitoring and management and air pollution health impact studies.
- Other measures include air quality forecasting system, issuance of notification on dust management, a three-tier mechanism for review, assessment and inspection for implementation and a national emission inventory.

Objectives of NCAP:

- To augment and evolve an effective and a proficient ambient air quality monitoring network across the country to ensure comprehensive and reliable database.
- To have efficient data dissemination and a public outreach mechanism for timely measures for prevention and mitigation of air pollution.
- To have a feasible management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.

What's missing ?

- The draft has received mixed response. Activists claimed that the draft lacked its earlier set target of bringing down air pollution by 50% in five years.
- It is being said that the absence of these targets and sectoral based targets is limiting and feeble.

Need for an action plan:

- More than 80% of cities in the country where air quality is monitored are severely polluted and it impacts 47 million children across the country.
- Also, 580 millions number of people in India don't even have a single air quality monitoring stations in districts they are living.

Sources: the hindu.

8. Rushikulya

Context:

- In a rare occurrence, olive ridley turtles have turned up for mass nesting for the second time at Rushikulya rookery on Odisha coast.
- The Rushikulya coast, in Ganjam district of Odisha, is considered to be a major nesting site in the world and lakhs of olive ridleys come here every year to lay eggs.

About Olive Ridley turtles:

- Also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle, Olive turtles are a medium-sized species of sea turtle found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- They are best known for their behavior of **synchronized nesting in mass numbers**.



- The olive ridley is classified as **Vulnerable** according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), and is listed in **Appendix I of CITES**.
- The Convention on Migratory Species and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles have also provided olive ridleys with protection, leading to increased conservation and management for this marine turtle.

9. Coastal Regulation Zone

Context:

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has framed a new draft Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2018.

The salient features of the draft CRZ Notification, 2018 and changes with respect to CRZ Notification, 2011, are as under:

- **CRZ limits on land** along the tidal influenced water bodies has been proposed to be reduced from 100 meters or the width of the creek, whichever is less, to 50 meters or the width of the creek, whichever is less.
- **A No Development Zone (NDZ)** of 20 meters has been proposed to be stipulated for all Islands close to the main land coast and for all Backwater Islands in the main land.
- **For CRZ-III areas**, two separate categories have been proposed viz.: CRZ-III A – Densely populated rural areas with a population density of 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas shall have an NDZ of 50 meters from the HTL as against 200 meters from the HTL stipulated in the CRZ Notification, 2011. CRZ-III B – Rural areas with population density of below 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas shall continue to have an NDZ of 200 meters from the HTL.
- **Ease of procedures:** Only such projects/activities, which are located in the CRZ-I & IV areas, shall be dealt with for CRZ clearance by the MoEF&CC. For all other project activities located in CRZ-II/III areas, CRZ clearance shall be considered at the level of the CZMA.
- **FSI:** As per CRZ, 2011 Notification, for CRZ-II areas, Floor Space Index (FSI) or the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) had been frozen at 1991 Development Control Regulation (DCR) levels. In the Draft CRZ, 2018 Notification, it has been proposed to de-freeze the same and permit FSI for construction projects.
- **Mining:** Regulated limestone mining is proposed to be permitted, subject to strict Environmental safeguards, in areas adequately above the height of HTL, based on recommendations of reputed National Institutes in the Mining field.
- **Disposal of plastics and mangroves:** The norms also prevent the disposal of plastic into the coastal waters and mandate the compensatory plantation of three times the mangrove area destroyed for development works. Mangroves in private land will not require a buffer zone.
- **Eco-tourism activities** such as mangrove walks, tree huts, nature trails, and so on will be allowed in these areas through the development of coastal zone management plans (CZMPs) and public consultation.

Way ahead:

- The relaxations/amendment proposed in the CRZ Notification, 2018 shall, however, come into force only after the respective Coastal Zone Management Programme (CZMP) framed to the CRZ Notification, 2011 have been revised/updated by the States/UTs, as per the provisions of the CRZ, 2018 Notification and approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change.

What is CRZ ?

Coastal Regulation Zone or CRZ is a coastal land up to **500m** from the High Tide Line and a range of **100m** along banks of creeks, estuaries, backwaters and rivers subject to tidal fluctuations is CRZ. According to Coastal Regulation Zone notifications, it is divided into 4 zones:

- ✚ **CRZ I** – It refers to the ecologically sensitive areas, essential in maintaining ecosystem of the coast. These lie between the HTL and LTL. Only exploration of natural gas and extraction of salt is permitted.
- ✚ **CRZ II** – These areas form up to the shoreline of the coast. Authorized structures are not allowed to be constructed in this zone.
- ✚ **CRZ III** – This includes rural and urban localities. Only certain activities relating to agriculture and public utilities allowed here.
- ✚ **CRZ IV** – This includes the aquatic area up to the territorial limit (12 nautical miles). Fishing and allied activities permitted in this zone. Solid waste can be let off in this zone.

Sources: pib.

10. Ramsar tag likely for Sunderbans

Context:

- The West Bengal government has given its approval to the State Forest Department to apply for recognition of Sunderban Reserve Forest under the Ramsar Convention.

Significance of the move:

- Being conferred the status of a wetland of international importance will not only be a matter of pride for the Sunderbans but also bring a lot of international scientific attention and intervention to the area.
- Once conferred a Ramsar site status, it will be the largest protected wetland in the country. It will also help promote the Sunderbans as an eco-tourism hotspot.

About Sunderbans:

- The Indian Sunderbans, with 2,114 sq. km. of mangrove forests, comprise almost 43% of the mangrove cover in the country according to a 2017 Forest Survey of India report.
- Other than the forests, home to about 100 Royal Bengal tigers, the creeks and river systems of the Sunderbans are also part of the reserve forest.

Its significance:

- Apart from being the world's largest tiger habitat, the mangrove forest in the Sunderbans is remarkable for the protection it provides to nearly 4.5 million people on the Indian side and another 3.5 million on the Bangladesh portion from tidal surge generated by cyclonic depression in the Bay of Bengal.
- About one-third of the total area is used as protected area for the conservation of biological diversity. In addition, the abundant fish and biomass resources – timber, fuelwood, pulpwood, leaves, shells, crabs, honey and fish – are harvested by local communities.
- The Sunderbans is also a major pathway for nutrient recycling and pollution abatement. The biodiversity of the Sunderbans is also diverse. The delta has the distinction of encompassing the world's largest mangrove forest belt with 84 identified flora species, of which 34 are true mangroves.

Threats:

- Sunderbans is a contiguous ecosystem spread across India and Bangladesh. Other than threats such as climate change, sea level rise, widespread construction and clearing of mangrove forests for fisheries is posing a danger to the Sunderbans.

Sources: the hindu.

Ramsar convention:

- The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- Adopted in 1971 in Ramsar, an Iranian city, the Convention came into force in 1975. Since then, almost 90% of UN member states have acceded to become "Contracting Parties".
- There are currently 26 sites in India recognised as Ramsar wetland sites of international importance, including the East Kolkata Wetlands also in West Bengal.

11. Earth Day 2018

Context:

- Earth Day was celebrated on April 22nd across the globe. It is considered to be the largest secular world event.

Theme of Earth Day 2018: End Plastic Pollution.

Background:

- This day was first celebrated on April 22, 1970 and has ever since been an annual event. The person credited for organising the event 48 years ago is US Senator Gaylord Nelson.



12. New system to measure air quality

Context:

- India is tying up with the United States and Finland to develop a pollution-forecast system that will help anticipate particulate matter (PM) levels at least two days in advance and at a greater resolution than what is possible now. The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) will be coordinating this exercise and the plan is to have a system in place by winter.
- The new system, to be jointly developed with expertise from the Finnish Meteorological Institute and the U.S.' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will use a different modelling approach as well as computational techniques from that employed in the SAFAR model.

Background:

- Currently, the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), run out of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, serves as the apex forecaster of pollution trends in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Ahmedabad.
- It generates a likely air quality profile, a day in advance, for these cities.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** SAFAR.
- For Mains:** Air pollution- challenges, mitigation and concerns.

Sources: the hindu.

About SAFAR:

- The **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**, Government of India, has introduced the **System of Air Quality Forecasting And Research (SAFAR)**.
- It has been introduced for greater metropolitan cities of India to provide location-specific information on air quality in near real time and its forecast 1-3 days in advance for the first time in India.
- It has been introduced for greater metropolitan cities of India to provide location-specific information on air quality in near real time and its forecast 1-3 days in advance for the first time in India.
- The **World Meteorological Organization** has recognised SAFAR as a prototype activity on the basis of the high quality control and standards maintained in its implementation.
- The ultimate objective of the project is to increase awareness among general public regarding the air quality in their city well in advance so that appropriate mitigation measures and systematic action can be taken up for betterment of air quality and related health issues.

13. World's smallest land fern

Context:

- Researchers have discovered the world's smallest land fern in the Ahwa forests of the Western Ghats in Gujarat's Dang district.

Key facts:

- The size of the new Malvi's adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum malviae* is just one centimetre.
- The fingernail-sized fern belongs to a group known as the adder's-tongue ferns, named after their resemblance to a snake's tongue.
- The ferns are seasonal and grow with the first monsoon rains. They last only for a few months and new plants are born through their spores next year.



14. Fejervarya goemchi

Context:

- In the **Western Ghats** parts of **Goa**, scientists have identified a new species of frog called Fejervarya goemchi.

Key facts:

- The new species is named after the historical name of the state of Goa.
- Although most of these frogs are terrestrial, they need water bodies to continue for survival.



15. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Context:

- A four-day Asia Pacific Regional Workshop of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), jointly hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and UNCCD Secretariat, to build the capacity of the Asia-Pacific Region to monitor and report on land degradation, was recently held in New Delhi.



United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

About UNCCD:

- Established in 1994, the United Nations to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
- It is the only convention stemming from a direct recommendation of the Rio Conference's Agenda 21.
- To help publicise the Convention, 2006 was declared "International Year of Deserts and Desertification".
- The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.
- Its 197 Parties aim, through partnerships, to implement the Convention and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The end goal is to protect land from over-use and drought, so it can continue to provide food, water and energy.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the nodal Ministry for this Convention.

Way ahead:

- The new UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework is the most comprehensive global commitment to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in order to restore the productivity of vast expanses of degraded land, improve the livelihoods of more than 1.3 billion people, and reduce the impacts of drought on vulnerable populations to build.
- By sustainably managing land and striving to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality, now and in the future, not only will the impact of climate change be reduced, but a conflict over natural resources will be avoided.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** UNCCD.
- **For Mains:** Land Degradation- issues, challenges and solutions.

Sources: pib.

16. Great Barrier Reef

Context:

- Australia has pledged Aus \$500 million (\$379 million) in new funding to restore and protect the Great Barrier Reef. The reef is a critical national asset, contributing Aus\$6.4 billion a year to the Australian economy.

Threats to the great barrier reef:

- It is reeling from significant bouts of coral bleaching due to warming sea temperatures linked to climate change.
- It is also under threat from the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish, which has proliferated due to pollution and agricultural run-off. The predator starfish feeds on corals by spreading its stomach over them and using digestive enzymes to liquefy tissue.
- With its heavy use of coal-fired power and relatively small population, Australia is considered one of the world's worst per-capita greenhouse gas polluters.

About the Great barrier reef:

- The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef system composed of over 2,900 individual reefs and 900 islands stretching for over 2,300 kilometres over an area of approximately 344,400 square kilometres.
- The reef is located in the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland, Australia.
- The Great Barrier Reef can be seen from outer space and is the world's biggest single structure made by living organisms.
- This reef structure is composed of and built by billions of tiny organisms, known as coral polyps.
- It was selected as a World Heritage Site in 1981.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** Great barrier reef and its significance.

Sources: the hindu.

17. Trapdoor matriarch**What is it?**

- It is the world's oldest known spider which died recently at the ripe old age of 43 after being monitored for years during a long-term population study in Australia.

Key facts:

- The trapdoor matriarch comfortably outlived the previous record holder, a 28-year-old tarantula found in Mexico.

*Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management.***National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP)****Introduction:**

- The Government of India has initiated the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP) with a view to address cyclone risks in the country. The overall objective of the Project is to undertake suitable structural and non-structural measures to mitigate the effects of cyclones in the coastal states and UT's of India.
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) under the aegis of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will implement the Project in coordination with participating State Governments and the National Institute for Disaster Management (NIDM).
- The Project has identified 13 cyclone prone States and Union Territories (UTs), with varying levels of vulnerability. These States/UT have further been classified into two categories, based on the frequency of occurrence of cyclone, size of population and the existing institutional mechanism for disaster management. These categories are:
 - **Category I:** Higher vulnerability States i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.
 - **Category II:** Lower vulnerability States i.e. Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Pondicherry, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Mission Statement:

- The National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project seeks to minimize vulnerability in the cyclone hazard prone states and Union Territories of India and make people and infrastructure disaster resilient, in harmony with conservation of coastal ecosystems.
- The **Project aims** to fulfill its Mission by undertaking following structural and non structural measures,
 - a) Early warning and communication system by improving the Last Mile connectivity.
 - b) Construction and sustainable maintenance of Multi-purpose Cyclone Shelters (MPCSs), Improved access and evacuation to these and already existing MPCSs and habitations through construction of roads and bridges, construction of coastal embankments in selected places for protection against storms, flooding and storm surge in high risk areas and underground cabling.
 - c) Enhanced capacity and capability of local communities to respond to disasters, and Strengthening Disaster Risk Mitigation (DRM) capacity at Central, State and Local levels in order to enable mainstreaming of risk mitigation measures into the overall development agenda.

Project Objectives:

- The Project development objective of the NCRMP is to reduce vulnerability of coastal communities to cyclone and other hydro meteorological hazards through
 - (i) improved early warning dissemination systems
 - (ii) enhanced capacity of local communities to respond to disasters
 - (iii) improved access to emergency shelter, evacuation, and protection against wind storms, flooding and storm surge in high areas
 - (iv) strengthening DRM capacity at central, state and local levels in order to enable mainstreaming of risk mitigation measures into the overall development agenda.

Paper 3 Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas.

1. Protected Area Permit regime

Context:

- The Union Home Ministry has decided to relax the six-decade-old Protected Area Permit regime from Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur for five years with effect from April 1.

Implications:

- Foreign tourists, except those from Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, would now be allowed to visit some of the most pristine locations of the country which, so far, were out of bounds for them without a special permit.

How are these regions different?

- As per the guidelines, a foreign national is not normally allowed to visit a protected or restricted area unless the government is satisfied that there are extra-ordinary reasons to justify his or her visit.
- Every foreigner, except a citizen of Bhutan, who desires to enter and stay in a protected or restricted area, is required to obtain a special permit from a competent authority having the power to issue such permits to a foreigner, seeking it.
- In cases, where the power to issue such permits has not been delegated to a subordinate authority by the Union government, the application for the special permit has to be referred to the Ministry of Home Affairs for prior approval, at least eight weeks before the date of the expected visit.

Who can issue such permits?

- Necessary powers have been delegated to various authorities to issue such special permits without the prior approval of the Union home ministry to facilitate foreign tourists subject to the certain exceptions.
- In cases of foreign diplomats, including the members of the United Nations and international organisations holding diplomatic or official passports, the special permits to visit such protected or restricted areas are issued by the Ministry of External Affairs.
- In cases of the citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals of Pakistani origin, no permit, however, can be issued without the prior approval of the Union home ministry.

What's important?

- **For Prelims and Mains:** All about Protected area permit regime.

What is Protected area permit?

- Under the **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958**, all areas falling between the Inner line and the International Border of some states have been declared as protected areas.
- The protected areas currently include whole of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim, besides parts of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir. Some parts of Sikkim fall under the protected area regime while others under the restricted area.

Sources: the hindu.

2. AFSPA lifted in Meghalaya

Context:

- The Centre has removed the AFSPA from Meghalaya, from April 1 onwards. Earlier, the Act was effective in the State in the 20 km area along its border with Assam. In Arunachal Pradesh, the AFSPA has been restricted to eight police stations, instead of 16 earlier.

What is a “disturbed area” and who has the power to declare it?

- A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
- The Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area. A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette. As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary”.

What does the AFSPA mean?

- In simple terms, AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”. They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law. If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search a premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.
- Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.

What’s the origin of AFSPA?

- The Act came into force in the context of increasing violence in the Northeastern States decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control.
- The **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Bill** was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and it was approved by the President on September 11, 1958. It became known as the **Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958**.

Which States are, or had come under this Act?

- It is effective in the whole of **Nagaland, Assam, Manipur** (excluding seven assembly constituencies of Imphal) and parts of **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The Centre revoked it in Meghalaya on April 1, 2018. Earlier, the AFSPA was effective in a 20 km area along the Assam-Meghalaya border.
- In Arunachal Pradesh, the impact of AFSPA was reduced to eight police stations instead of 16 police stations and in Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts bordering Assam. Tripura withdrew the AFSPA in 2015.
- **Jammu and Kashmir too has a similar Act.**

How has this Act been received by the people?

- It has been a controversial one, with human rights groups opposing it as being aggressive.
- Manipur’s Irom Sharmila has been one of its staunchest opponents, going on a hunger strike in November 2000 and continuing her vigil till August 2016.
- Her trigger was an incident in the town of Malom in Manipur, where ten people were killed waiting at a bus stop.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

Narcotics Control Bureau

Context:

- The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has raised concerns about the abuse and trafficking of Tramadol, a pain killer and suggested that the availability of Tramadol be substantially reduced in order to track its movement in the market.
- It is proposed to bring Tramadol, a painkiller, under the ambit of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

Suggestions by NCB:

- Manufacture Tramadol and codeine-based cough syrups in small batches to enable authorities to track the manufacturer.
- Verify the existence of sale premises before a licence is granted by the states and conduct surprise raids in this regard.
- All the state licensing authorities should re-consider proposal of reduction in batch size for manufacturing such drugs to control the diversion towards its abuse and misuse.

About NCB:

- The Narcotics Control Bureau is the apex coordinating agency. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 which came into effect from the 14th November, 1985 made an express provision for constituting a Central Authority for the purpose of exercising the powers and functions of the Central Government under the Act.
- The Bureau, subject to the supervision and control of the Central Government, is to exercise the powers and functions of the Central Government for taking measures with respect to:
 - Co-ordination of actions by various offices, State Governments and other authorities under the N.D.P.S. Act, Customs Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act and any other law for the time being in force in connection with the enforcement provisions of the NDPS Act, 1985.
 - Implementation of the obligation in respect of counter measures against illicit traffic under the various international conventions and protocols that are in force at present or which may be ratified or acceded to by India in future.
 - Assistance to concerned authorities in foreign countries and concerned international organisations to facilitate coordination and universal action for prevention and suppression of illicit traffic in these drugs and substances.
 - Coordination of actions taken by the other concerned Ministries, Departments and Organizations in respect of matters relating to drug abuse.



Key facts for Prelims:

- The National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is based on the Directive Principles, contained in Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, which direct the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drugs injurious to health.
- The government's policy on the subject which flows from this constitutional provision is also guided by the international conventions on the subject.
- India is a signatory to the single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the Conventions on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988.

Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

1. 'Internet Security Threat Report'

Context:

- 'Internet Security Threat Report' has been released by Symantec. Countries are ranked based on their vulnerability.
- These rankings are based on eight parameters – malware, spam, phishing, bots, network attacks, web attacks, ransomware and cryptominers.

Indian scenario:

- India is the third-most vulnerable country in terms of cyber threat risks including malware, spam, ransomware and one of the most recent and difficult-to-detect ones – cryptominers.
- India continues to be second-most impacted by spam and bots and third-most impacted by network attacks and fourth-most impacted by ransomware.
- In terms of cryptomining activities, India has ranked second in Asia-Pacific and Japan region (APJ), and ninth globally.

Global scenario:

- The US was most vulnerable to attacks at 26.61% followed by China at 10.95%.

Concerns:

- With the threat landscape becoming more diverse, attackers are working harder to discover new avenues of attack and cover their tracks.
- From the sudden spread of WannaCry and Petya/NotPetya, to the swift growth in coinminers, 2017 that digital security threats can come from new and unexpected sources.
- Cryptojacking has captured the top slot at the attacker toolkit, which signals a massive threat to cyber and personal security. Cryptojacking is defined as the secret use of a computing device to mine cryptocurrency.
- There is also a 200% increase in attackers injecting malware implants into the software supply chain in 2017. Threats in the mobile space continue to grow year-over-year, including the number of new mobile malware variants rising 54%.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Cryptojacking, wannacry and petya.
- **For Mains:** Cyber security threats- challenges and solutions.

Sources: the hindu.

2. Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

Context:

- India will have to make money laundering an explicitly standalone offence to upgrade its compliance ahead of the on-site mutual evaluation by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which is due in November-December 2020.

Background:

- FATF had undertaken mutual evaluation of India in 2010 when the body expressed satisfaction with the measures taken by the country. However, in its report, the FATF highlighted a number of lacunae in the then extant legislation, for which it suggested changes.

What's the issue?

- As per FATF recommendations, money laundering should be made a standalone offence. However, despite several amendments, the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) remains a predicate-offence-oriented law. This means a case under the Act depends on the fate of cases pursued by primary agencies such as the CBI, the Income Tax Department or the police.

About FATF:**What is it?**

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7. It is a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.

Objectives:

- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

What it does?

- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally.
- In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims:** FATF, PMLA.
- **For Mains:** PMLA amendments, Terrorist funding- prevention and issues.

Sources: the hindu.

3. Cybersecurity Tech Accord

Context:

- Dozens of major technology companies including Microsoft, Facebook, Cisco, and SAP have signed onto a pledge, known as Cybersecurity Tech Accord, to protect their users around the globe against cybersecurity threats and to abstain from helping any government launch a cyber attack.
- This is hailed as a “watershed agreement” among companies representing every layer of internet communication.

About the Accord:

- The tech sector accord will help companies take a principled path towards more effective steps to work together and defend customers around the world.
- The accord declares that the signatories will protect all of their customers from threats and will not “help governments launch cyberattacks against innocent citizens and enterprises from anywhere.”

The accord rests on four pillars:

- **Protect all of our users and customers everywhere.** The companies commit to protect their users and customers from cyberattacks, and to design, develop and deliver products and services that prioritize security, privacy, integrity, and reliability.
- **Oppose cyberattacks on innocent citizens and enterprises from anywhere.** The companies commit to protecting against tampering with or exploitation of their products and services. They further commit not to help governments launch cyberattacks against innocent citizens or enterprises.
- **Help empower users, customers and developers to strengthen cybersecurity protection.** The companies commit to provide their users, customers, and developers with information and tools to understand and protect against cybersecurity threats, and to support civil society, governments, and international organizations to advance cybersecurity globally.
- **Partner with each other and with likeminded groups to enhance cybersecurity.** The companies commit to work with each other and establish formal and informal partnerships with other industry and civil society groups to improve technical collaboration, vulnerability disclosure, and threat sharing.

Sources: et.

4. Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance 2018

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Finance Ministry's proposal of promulgating the Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance, 2018 which will empower authorities to attach and confiscate properties and assets of economic offenders like loan defaulters who flee the country.



Important provisions under the ordinance:

- Special court:** The ordinance makes provisions for a special court under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002 to declare a person as a Fugitive Economic Offender. Scheduled offences worth Rs. 100 crore or more will come under the purview of the ordinance.
- Power To Attach Properties:** With the assent of the President of India, Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance, 2018 is promulgated. The new Law lays down the measures to empower Indian authorities to attach and confiscate the proceeds of crime associated with economic offenders and properties of economic offenders.
- Trial In The PMLA Courts:** Since the proposed law would utilise the existing infrastructure of the Special Courts constituted under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) and the threshold of scheduled offence is high at Rs. 100 crores or more, no additional expenditure is expected on the enactment of the Bill.
- No Immunity To Offenders:** The ordinance would also enable the courts and tribunals to disallow the fugitive economic offender from putting forward or defending any civil claim.
- Aim Of Deportation:** Major impact will be that the offenders will return to India to submit to the jurisdiction of Courts in India to face the law in respect of the scheduled offences. Other Major Impact will be that it will help the banks and other financial institutions to achieve higher recovery from financial defaults committed by such fugitive economic offenders, improving the financial health of such institutions.

Definitions:

- A **Fugitive Economic Offender** is a person against whom an arrest warrant has been issued in respect of a scheduled offence and who has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or being abroad, refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution.
- A **scheduled offence** refers to a list of economic offences contained in the Schedule to this Ordinance.

Need for a law in this regard:

- The ordinance was mooted in response to the growing practice of debt-laden Indian citizens flying abroad in a purported attempt to evade the law-enforcement agencies of India.

Significance of this move:

- The Ordinance is expected to re-establish the rule of law with respect to the fugitive economic offenders as they would be forced to return to India to face trial for scheduled offences.
- This would also help the banks and other financial institutions to achieve higher recovery from financial defaults committed by such fugitive economic offenders, improving the financial health of such institutions.

Background:

- The government had in Budget 2017-18 announced that it was considering a law that would enable it to seize the property such absconders, following which the Union Cabinet had on March 1, 2018 approved the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill 2018 to be introduced in Parliament.
- The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 12, but was not passed due to disruptions and adjournments in both Houses of Parliament.

What's important?

- For Prelims:** Key provisions in the Bill.
- For Mains:** Need for law in this regard.

Sources: pib.

Facts for Prelims

1. India's longest elevated road

Context: India's longest elevated road was recently inaugurated in Uttar Pradesh.

Key facts:

- The expressway is a 10.3 km long elevated road, making it the longest elevated road in the country.
- The Hindon Elevated Road will be connecting Raj Nagar Extension in Ghaziabad to UP Gate.

2. India is now second largest mobile phone producer

Context: India has emerged as the second largest mobile phone producer in the world after China.

Key facts:

- According to the data shared by ICA, annual production of mobile phones in India increased from 3 million units in 2014 to 11 million units in 2017.
- India replaced Vietnam to become second largest producer of mobile phones in 2017.
- With the rise in mobile phone production, imports of the devices in the country also reduced to less than half in 2017-18.

3. "Thank You India" Campaign 2018

What is it? The exiled government of Tibet has launched a year-long 'Thank you India' campaign to mark the 60th year of the arrival of the spiritual leader Dalai Lama to India.

4. Walong tri-junction

Context: Indian troops have increased their patrolling at a tri-junction of India, China and Myanmar to prevent a repeat of a Doklam-like standoff.

Where is it? The tri-junction is located around 50 km from Walong, India's easternmost town in **Arunachal Pradesh**, near the Tibet region. It is situated on the bank of Lohit river.

5. Malaysia approves law against fake news

- **Context:** Malaysia has approved a law banning fake news ahead of elections.
- **Key facts:** The law makes "fake news" punishable with a maximum six-year jail term. The law covers all media and extends even to foreigners outside Malaysia.
- **Concerns:** Critics fear the law will be abused to silence dissent ahead of a general election.

6. Fimbristylis agasthyamalaensis

- **Context:** *Researchers have reported the discovery of a new plant species from the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot.*
- Classified as a sedge, the grass-like plant has been named Fimbristylis agasthyamalaensis, after the locality from which it was found.



Key facts:

- The new species belongs to the Cyperaceae family. In India, the genus is represented by 122 species, of which 87 are reported from the Western Ghats. Many of the known Cyperaceae species are medicinal plants or used as fodder.
- The researchers have recommended a preliminary conservation assessment of the plant *as 'critically endangered,' according to IUCN criteria.* The report says the species is highly prone to wild grazing.

6. India pips Japan, becomes second largest manufacturer of crude steel

Context: India has overtaken Japan to become the world's second largest producer of crude steel in February. Growth is attributed to Centre's steps to curb imports, 'Make in India' among others.



Key facts: At present, China is the largest producer of crude steel in the world, accounting for more than 50% of the production.

7. Samta Diwas

What is it? Samta Diwas is the celebration of birth anniversary of nationalist politician Babu Jagjivan Ram.

When is it? It is celebrated on April 5. 2018 marks his 111th birth anniversary.

Significance of the day: The day emphasizes on bringing about equality among all spheres of the society.

About Babu Jagjivan Ram: His beliefs were of great significance in the past era as there was predominance of multi layered society. He focused on the harsh rules of the society and pressed for the abolishment of this society. His 50 years as a MP is a world record. He took part in India's independence struggle and was founder member of the All India Depressed Classes League, an organisation dedicated to attaining equality for untouchables. He had also led the rural labour movement.

8. UTTAM APP for Coal Quality Monitoring

Context: The government has launched UTTAM App for Coal Quality Monitoring.

Key facts:

- UTTAM stands for – Unlocking Transparency by Third Party Assessment of Mined Coal.
- The Ministry of Coal and Coal India Limited (CIL) has developed the App.

- It aims to provide an App for all citizens and coal consumers to monitor the process of Third Party Sampling of coal across CIL subsidiaries.
- UTTAM App ensures accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency in coal ecosystem. It provides a platform for monitoring of sampling and coal dispatches.

9. National Maritime Day

Context: April 5 is celebrated as the National Maritime Day in India every year.

Why April 5? It was on this day 99 years ago in 1919 when the country's navigation history set sail with SS Loyalty, the first ship of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company Ltd started for the United Kingdom from Mumbai (then British Bombay).

Theme: In 2018, the theme of the occasion is 'Indian Shipping – An Ocean of opportunity'.

Varuna award: An award called Varuna is conferred to those who have made an outstanding contribution to the Indian maritime sector on this day.



10. Gaganshakti-2018

Context: An all encompassing coordinated and composite exercise named Gaganshakti is being conducted by the IAF.

The aim of this exercise is real time coordination, deployment and employment of Air Power in a short & intense battle

scenario. During Gaganshakti IAF will exercise the entire machinery to validate its concept of operations and war waging capability.



11. 'Chakravat'

Context: Kochi along with Indian Navy is hosting multi-agency rescue exercise- Chakravat. It is for the first time that the yearly exercise is being conducted in Kochi.

What is it? It is a multi-agency humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) exercise to review the response mechanism in the event of a cyclonic storm.

Participants: Chakravat meaning 'cyclone' will see participation by the three Services, the Coast Guard,

State administration, State Disaster Management Authority, National Disaster Response Force, Fisheries Department, Coastal Police, and members of the fishing community.

12. Sahyog – Hyeoblyeog 2018

- **What is it?** It is a bilateral joint search and rescue exercise between **Indian Coast Guard** and **Korea Coast Guard**. The joint exercise is part of a proposed establishment of a MoU between the two Coast Guards to improve maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.



- The recently held exercise included scenarios of the hijacking of a merchant vessel and its subsequent rescue, interdiction of a pirate vessel, cross boarding, external fire fighting and the SAR (search and rescue) demonstration.

13. Railway link between India and Nepal

Context: India will build a strategic railway link between Raxaul in Bihar and Kathmandu in Nepal to facilitate people-to-people contact and bulk movement of goods.

Significance: The proposal to link Raxaul to Kathmandu gains significance as it comes nearly two years after China, in March 2016, agreed to construct a strategic railway link with Nepal through Tibet with an apparent aim of reducing Kathmandu's dependence on India. It also comes in the backdrop of recent Chinese linkages with Nepal as it took on building three highways to be completed by 2020.

14. "Desert Tiger 5"

What is it? It is a joint military exercise between United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Malaysia. It is aimed at sharing expertise and enhancing joint military actions.

- The drill was also aimed at raising the level of performance and combat efficiency and working together based on a strategy to improve the overall ability and combat readiness of the ground forces.

15. Sugar tax comes into effect in the UK

Context: The sugar tax has come into force in the UK placing a levy on soft drink manufacturers. The money from the tax will go to the Department for Education.

What necessitated this move? The move aims to help tackle childhood obesity. Sugar-sweetened soft drinks are now the single biggest source of dietary sugar for children and teenagers.

Where else has it been tried? A similar scheme has been tried in a handful of Scandinavian countries as well as France and Hungary. Mexico and Norway have shown positive outcomes.

16. World's first microfactory to help tackle e-waste hazard

Context: An Indian-origin scientist in Australia has launched the world's first microfactory that can transform the components from electronic waste items such as smartphones and laptops into valuable materials for re-use.

What is a microfactory? A microfactory is one or a series of small machines and devices that uses patented technology to perform one or more functions in the reforming of waste products into new and usable resources. The e-waste microfactory that reforms discarded computers, mobile phones and printers has a number of small modules for this process and fits into a small site.

Significance: The e-waste microfactory has the potential to reduce the rapidly growing problem of vast amounts of electronic waste causing environmental harm and going into landfill. It can also turn many types of consumer waste such as glass, plastic and timber into commercial materials and products.

17. Delhi's IGI airport among the top 20 busiest airports

Context: As per ACI's World Airport Traffic Forecasts, the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport, operated by the Delhi International Airport Ltd, has emerged as one of the busiest airports in the world and is in fact among the top 20.

About ACI: Founded in 1991 with the objective of fostering cooperation among its member airports and other partners in world aviation, ACI is the trade association of the world's airports, currently serving 641 members operating from 1,953 airports across 176 countries.

Key facts:

- As per the latest statistics of Airports Council International, IGI Airport jumped six notches to be in the top 20 busiest airports in the world for 2017 in terms of traffic volume. It jumped from 22nd rank in 2016 to 16th.
- Delhi has also been ranked first in airport service quality for airports above 40 million passengers per annum along with the Mumbai airport.
- Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) was ranked the busiest airport in the world.

18. Equatorial Guinea

Context: President of India is visiting Equatorial Guinea. This is the first time ever that a head of state from India is visiting Equatorial Guinea.

About Equatorial Guinea:

- Equatorial Guinea is a small country on the west coast of Africa.
- Equatorial Guinea is the **only** sovereign African state in which **Spanish** is an official language.
- It is made up of a mainland territory called Rio Muni, and five islands including Bioko, where the capital Malabo is located.

19. Ratnagiri Mega Refinery

Context: An Indian Consortium consisting of IOCL, BPCL and HPCL and Saudi Aramco signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here today to



jointly develop and build an integrated refinery and petrochemicals complex, Ratnagiri Refinery & Petrochemicals Ltd. (RRPCL) in the State of Maharashtra.

What it does? The strategic partnership brings together crude supply, resources, technologies, experience and expertise of these multiple oil companies with an established commercial presence around the world.

20. Exercise Gaganshakti-2018

What is it? An all encompassing coordinated and composite exercise named Gaganshakti is being conducted by the IAF.

- The aim of this exercise is real time coordination, deployment and employment of Air Power in a short & intense battle scenario. This exercise will

hone the war fighting skills of the air warriors in a real time scenario thus affirming the IAF's role as the cutting edge of our nation's military capability.

21. Defence, aerospace SME fund

Context: Department of Defence Production has announced the creation of a dedicated defence and aerospace small and medium enterprises (SME) fund.

Key facts:

- The fund will be registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), where a minority stake could be taken by investors.
- This fund would help channelise investments into the two defence corridors announced by the Government in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

22. India Mobile Congress - 2018

Context: India Mobile Congress will be held in October 2018, at Aerocity, New Delhi.

Theme: "NEW DIGITAL HORIZONS: Connect. Create. Innovate."



About IMC: The India Mobile Congress 2018, hosted by the Department of telecommunications and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), is an excellent platform for policy makers, industry and regulators to engage in meaningful deliberations to drive the future direction of this important sector.

23. Babur cruise missile**Context:**

- Pakistan has successfully test fired an enhanced version of indigenously-built Babur cruise missile.

Key facts:

- 'Babur Weapon System-1 (B)' is a low-flying, terrain-hugging missile, which carries certain stealth features and is capable of carrying various types of warheads. It can deliver conventional and non-conventional weapons with a range of 700 kilometres.
- It incorporates advanced aerodynamics and avionics that can strike targets both at land and sea with high accuracy.
- It is equipped with the Terrain Contour Matching (TERCOM) and all time Digital Scene Matching and Area Co-relation (DSMAC) technologies, which enable it to engage in various types of targets with pinpoint accuracy even in the absence of GPS navigation.

24. Film Friendly Award

Most Film Friendly Award: State of Madhya Pradesh was conferred the award for the Most Film Friendly State for its efforts towards easing filming in the State by creating a well-structured web site, film friendly infrastructure, offering incentives, among others.

Special Mention Certificate: State of Uttarakhand is given a Special Mention Certificate to recognize the efforts made by the State of Uttarakhand towards creating a film friendly environment.

Jury: The jury for selecting the Most Film Friendly State Award 2017 was chaired by acclaimed filmmaker Shri Ramesh Sippy and comprised of renowned filmmakers.

25. Kayakalp awards

Context: Kayakalp awards were recently given to felicitate Public Health Facilities for maintaining high standards of sanitation and hygiene.

About Kayakalp awards: Kayakalp – Award to Public Health Facilities” was instituted as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on 15th May 2015 as a National Initiative to give Awards to those public health facilities that demonstrate high levels of cleanliness, hygiene and infection control focuses on promoting cleanliness in public spaces.

26. First Indian IT Company To Touch 100 Billion Dollar Market Value

Context: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has become the first Indian IT Company to Touch 100 Billion Dollar Market Value.

27. Madras HC to introduce e-court fee payment

Context: The Madras High Court has become the first court in south India and eighth in the country to introduce e-court fee payment facility.

Facts: So far only the Supreme Court and the High Courts in Delhi, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh had introduced the e-court fee payment facility.

28. Which city in India recently became the first city to run on 100% Renewable Energy during Daytime?

Diu Smart City has become the first city in India, that runs on 100% renewable energy during daytime.

29. India highest recipient of remittances

Context: As per the World Bank’s latest Migration and Development Brief, India has retained the top position as a recipient of remittances with its diaspora sending about \$69 billion back home last year.

Other countries: India is followed by China (\$64 billion), the Philippines (\$33 billion), Mexico (\$31 billion), Nigeria (\$22 billion) and Egypt (\$20 billion).

30. Sagar Kavach

Context: Coastal security exercise “Sagar Kavach” was recently held in Goa.



Key facts:

- The exercise is conducted half yearly with an objective to check coastal security mechanism and validate standard operating procedures.
- The organisations participating in the exercise are Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, Coastal Police, Police Special Branch, Intelligence Bureau, Customs, Department of Port, Department of Fisheries, Director General of Lighthouses and light ships and Fishing Community.

31. HARIMAU SHAKTI 2018

Context: As part of ongoing Indo-Malaysian defence cooperation, a joint training exercise HARIMAU SHAKTI is being conducted in Malaysia.

- The exercise is aimed at bolstering cooperation & coordination between armed forces of both the nations and to share the expertise of both the contingents in conduct of counter insurgency operations in jungle terrain.

32. What is underwriting rule?

Context: The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) has asked the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to review the regulations for underwriting of a public issue, the model agreement for which was framed back in 1993 and has since been in operation.

What is underwriting? Underwriting is the mechanism by which a merchant banker gives an undertaking that in the event of an initial public offer (IPO) remaining undersubscribed, the banker would subscribe to unsold shares. The underwriting clause, mandatory in all SME IPOs, ensures the issue does not fail due to low demand from investors.

