



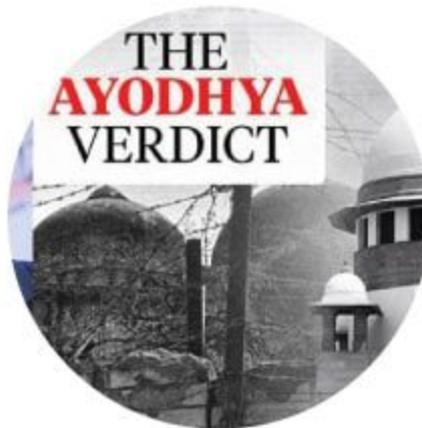
VAJIRAM & RAVI

(Institute for Civil Services Examination)

NOVEMBER 2019

the RECITALS

Explore Current Affairs Through Q&A



Featured
Articles

Mains
Q & A

Prelims
Q & A

Bridging
Gaps

11th BRICS Summit

Regional Comprehensive
Economic Partnership (RCEP)

Artificial intelligence (AI)

VAJIRAM & RAVI
INDEX

Message From The Desk Of Director	1
1. Feature Article	2-13
a. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)	
b. Artificial Intelligence and IndiaArtificial Intelligence	
c. 11th BRICS Summit	
2. Mains Q&A	14-41
3. Prelims Q&A	42-71
4. Bridging Gaps	72-122
1. Gottiprolu	
2. Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019	
3. UNESCO World Heritage Week	
4. Centrally Protected Monuments	
5. India International Science Festival	
6. NASA's all-electric Aircraft	
7. Patent Prosecution Highway Programme	
8. Indian Brain Atlas	
9. India Justice Report 2019	
10. Alzheimer's Disease	

11. Accidental Death and Suicide Report
12. Road Accident Report
13. Lancet Child and Adolescent Health Study
14. QS World University Rankings for Asia
15. Diabetes Atlas
16. UNDP Accelerator Lab
17. National Registry of Voluntary Organ Donors
18. Maternal Mortality Ratio
19. National Health Profile
20. Survey on Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition
21. Disabled Quota In Chattisgarh Panchayats
22. IMD Talent Ranking
23. Global Markets Dependency On The US Currency
24. Strategic Sale In 5 PSUs
25. CMIE Report
26. Financial Firms Under IBC
27. NBFC Liquidity Norms
28. Steel Scrap Recycling Policy
29. Global Microscope On Financial Inclusion
30. 15-Point Reform Plan For Parliament
31. Kerala To Achieve 100% Internet Penetration
32. FCRA
33. India Corruption Survey, 2019
34. Registration Of Political Parties U/nder Section 29A, RP Act, 1951
35. Daman And Diu, Dadra And Nagar Haveli To Be Merged
36. CIC Annual Report
37. Arunachal Pradesh Seeks Separate Bureaucrats' Cadre
38. Brown to Green Report, 2019
39. Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Initiative
40. Plastic Parks
41. Sumatran Rhino
42. Government Junks Plan To Amend Forest Act, 1927
43. EU Declares Climate Emergency
44. Malabar Tree Toad
45. Zero Carbon Law

46. Climate Change And Its Impact On Health
47. Swachh-Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan
48. Dal Lake Area To Be Eco-Sensitive Zone
49. Green Climate Fund
50. Cooking Oil For Biodiesel Use
51. 35th ASEAN Summit
52. India-ASEAN Summit 2019
53. 14th East Asia Summit
54. India Proposes Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
55. Sri Lanka Presidential Election 2019
56. State Visit Of President Of Sri Lanka To India
57. Visit of Chancellor of Germany To India
58. Defence Minister Visit to Singapore
59. 2+2 Dialogue Between India and Japan
60. Visa-on-Arrival Facility for UAE Nationals
61. First BIMSTEC Conclave of Ports
62. India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation
63. 8th Indo-German Energy Forum
64. Pact Between India-Chile for Avoidance of Double Taxation
65. 5th India – Europe 29 Business Forum
66. 19th IORA Council of Ministers Meeting
67. Paris Peace Forum
68. Global Diplomacy Index 2019
69. Freedom on Net 2019 Report
70. Bribery Risk Matrix 2019
71. 6th World Congress on Rural and Agricultural Finance
72. International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
73. Kung Fu Nuns of the Drukpa Order
74. Sanskrit Bharati Vishwa Sammelan
75. Meghalaya-Based Insurgent Group Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council Banned
76. FACT Check Module To Curb Fake News
77. 11th Maitree Diwas
78. Defence Innovations Conference
79. Fast Patrol vessel to Coast Guard Delivered
80. SCOJtEx-2019

- 81. 71st Raising Day of NCC
- 82. Mine Counter Measure Exercise
- 83. First Counter-terrorism Cooperation Exercise for 'Quad' Countries
- 84. Prithvi-II
- 85. Spike LR missile
- 86. First Country to Introduce New Vaccine to Combat Typhoid
- 87. Miscellaneous Points



From the Desk of the Director

Dear Students

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

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

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

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

Thanks

Best Wishes

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

India has announced its decision of not joining the mega RCEP agreement. The Indian Prime Minister went on to state that the present form of the RCEP Agreement does not fully reflect the basic spirit and the agreed guiding principles of RCEP. Furthermore, it does not address satisfactorily India's outstanding issues and concerns. However, a joint leaders' statement indicated that despite India's "unresolved" outstanding issues, other countries were prepared to go ahead with the RCEP agreement.

Background

- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia. Much has changed on the international trade scene since this 16-member grouping led by the ASEAN and China started bargaining to get past their differences.
- The negotiations on crucial issues at the WTO have been slow and unable to keep up with the ebbs and flows of international trade and investment — shifting the focus to mega-trade deals.
- The unique element about RCEP that it includes developed as well as the less developed countries has resulted in slower progress in talks due to a combination of technical hurdles, domestic politics, and rising protectionism in the Asia-Pacific region.

What Is RCEP

- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a trade deal that has been under negotiations among 16 countries.
- It includes 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six Asia-Pacific states with which ASEAN has existing free trade agreements
- The ASEAN has FTAs with India, Australia, China, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand.
- The purpose of RCEP is to create an integrated market spanning all 16 countries, making it easier for products and services of each of these countries to be available across this region.
- The deal will provide a framework aimed at lowering trade barriers and securing improved market access for goods and services for businesses in the region.
- The negotiations are focussed on areas like trade in goods and services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property, competition, dispute settlement, e-commerce, and small and medium enterprises.

Significance of RCEP

- It accounts for around 30% of global GDP, 30% of global trade, 26% of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and 45% of the total population.
- RCEP's share of the global economy could account for half of the estimated \$0.5 quadrillion global (GDP, PPP) by 2050.
- India's exports to RCEP account for about 15% of its total exports and imports from RCEP comprise 35% of total imports.
- The initiative is the largest FTA negotiation in Asia, and the biggest FTA negotiation that India has ever participated in. If negotiated successfully, it would create the world's largest trading bloc.

Merits For India

- It will help India to tap the economic complementarities that get generated due to the interlinkages among various segments of trade.
- It will foster India to become a part of the Asian value and supply chain and will go a long way in making the Make in India programme a big success.
- Per-unit foreign exchange realization from exporting products will be greater than per-unit foreign exchange expenditure on imports of similar products within intra-industry trade pattern.
- Apart from making the Indian economy competitive in the long run, the RCEP can substantially increase investment in India from countries like Japan and South Korea.
- India's demographic dividend is concomitant to the aging population in most RCEP countries. This gives India a great opportunity to export its skilled professionals to these economies.

Concerns For India

A. The China Factor

- China is India's biggest trading partner, accounting for almost 10% of overall trade. Sino-Indian bilateral trade increased from a mere \$1.8 billion in FY2000 to \$72 billion in FY2017.
- RCEP will only end up opening the market to China, with which India has a massive trade deficit. Of India's \$105-billion trade deficit with RCEP countries, nearly half was with China.
- At a time of growing protectionism and the US' stance towards China, opening the market to China can be prove to be disastrous, given that proper standards and processes are not in place in India.

B. Circumvention Of Rules Of Origin

- Many fear that the new rules being used in RCEP will make it easier for Chinese goods to be routed into India via a third country.
- While India will lower import duty on 80% of goods coming from China over a 20-year period, in case of Asean countries, the coverage will be around 90%.
- So if a Chinese company cannot export an item into India at a concessional duty, it may just route it through Vietnam.

C. Market Access For India

- India has also not received any credible assurances on its demand for more market access, and its concerns over non-tariff barriers.
- RCEP participants like China are known to have used non-tariff barriers in the past to prevent India from growing its exports to the country.

D. Base Year Negotiation

- During negotiations, India was also not able to get a favourable outcome on its demands on the base year that would be used to reduce the tariffs on the products.
- India had sought to safeguard the interests of its domestic industry through measures like seeking a 2014 base year for tariff reductions instead of 2013, when negotiations on RCEP began.
- As it has raised import duties on several products between 2014 and 2019. Using a base year before 2014 would mean a drastic drop in the import duties on these products.

E. Insignificant Gains On The Services Front

- While more services trade may be touted as the big takeaway from RCEP, experience with Singapore and Asean shows that Indian professionals have not gained much.
- For instance, Singapore had virtually stopped issuing visas to Indian IT professionals, although it had committed to it under the FTA.
- India's demands on services have not found much traction and suggestions such as visa-free travel in the region for Indian businessmen have been trashed by negotiators from other countries, although the facility is available to the Chinese.
- In any case, negotiators from other countries have focused on extracting more on goods trade than offering any openings on services.

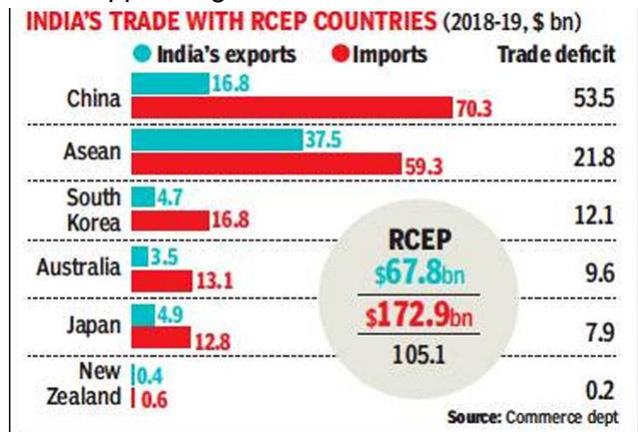
F. Lack Of Reforms

- Another point of contention lies with exposing vulnerable sectors to market forces and the vagaries of competition emerging from global trade.
- Even after more than quarter of a century of economic reforms, Indian manufacturing is yet to mature to be competitive enough to face the vagaries of competition brought about by international trade.
- This situation prevails also because of a host of unimplemented reforms in the product and the factor of markets.
- Despite low relative labour cost, labour productivity in India in manufacturing is still one of the lowest in the world, and spatially fragmented labour laws escalate costs of transaction. Under such circumstances, the Indian industry is hardly in a position to compete in a level playing ground in a free-trade region.

Past Experience

- The literature on international trade claims that for small economies preferential trade agreements (PTA) are not really the best moves.
- India, despite its huge population and increasing income levels, is a price-taker, rather than “price-maker” in the global trade.
- When a country preferentially reduces trade barriers with its partners in a PTA, it is raising the relative trade barrier against countries that are not members of the agreement.

- The Indian resistance can further be traced to the disappointing outcomes of earlier FTAs with Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and Korea. Indian industry accuses these FTAs of largely increasing imports into India from regional markets.
- India runs a trade deficit with 10 of 16 RCEP countries at a whopping \$104 billion — 64 % of India’s total trade deficit in 2017-18. Moreover, this deficit has reportedly been growing in the past few years.



Industries That Will Be Impacted

- Industries ranging from textiles and industry to steel, electronics and even defence, want that import restrictions should be maintained and duties should not be lowered.

- Hundreds of women from south Gujarat, associated with the dairy industry, have been requesting an exemption for the industry from (RCEP) agreement. If the dairy industry does not get the said exemptions, livelihood of thousands of women will be severely impacted.

Way Ahead

- By walking out of RCEP, India has signalled to its trade allies that it is unwilling to do business on their terms but remains open for business.
- The idea is to be selective, especially with countries with which India has a massive trade deficit, such as China.
- The Indian government is expected to pursue separate trade agreements with some of the countries that will be part of the bloc, such as Australia and New Zealand.
- It will also explore agreements where negotiations have not made substantial progress in recent years, such as the European Union.
- As all other RCEP nations have agreed to sign the treaty on the terms negotiated, they will likely try to persuade India to agree to the same. It remains to be seen whether those efforts ultimately bear fruit.

Artificial Intelligence and India

The government is aiming to encourage research and innovation in artificial intelligence (AI) to make India a hub for the same. On the other hand, **NITI Aayog has partnered with IBM** to develop AI-enabled yield-prediction and real-time advisory to the farmer on productivity, pest-warning *etc.* using data gathered from remote-sensing satellites, soil health cards, IMD and various other sources. India initially plans to fund its AI programme from the Rs. 200 crore allocated under the Atal Innovation Mission.

Meaning Of AI

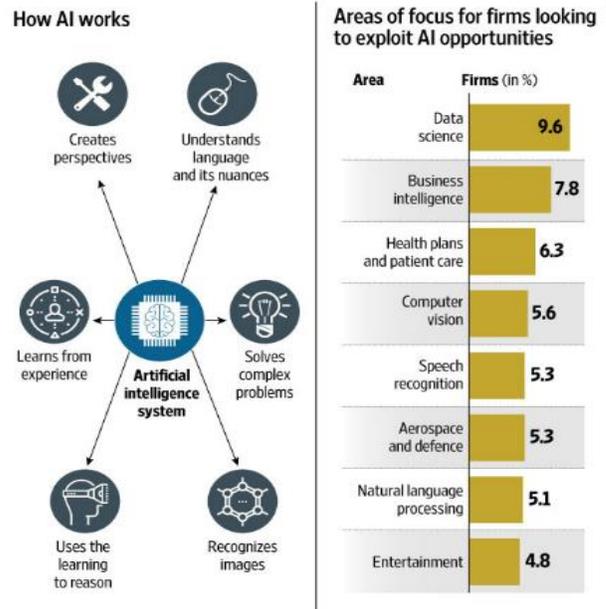
- The term was coined in 1956 by **John McCarthy** at the Dartmouth conference, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- AI in the simple sense means the use of computers to mimic human cognitive processes for decision-making. Thus, AI is the simulation of human intelligence and learning by machines. The early indicators of AI are Auto-corrects on phones, smart speakers and advertisements for those shoes you had once searched for but now doggedly follow you around the Internet. Around the corner are self-driving cars, cashier-less stores, and smart streetlights.

- Hence Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the ability of machines to learn and reason through analogy, analyze, interpret information, recognize speech, visual perception and take decisions. In other words, AI is application of human intelligence by the machines.

Benefits of AI

- Contribution to Economy:** Indeed, adopting AI means a 15% boost for the gross value added (GVA) for the economy by 2035. Moreover, NITI estimates that AI could potentially add **\$957 billion to India’s \$6397 billion-dollar GVA** projected for that year.
- Access To Affordable Healthcare:** The application of AI could increase access to and affordability of quality healthcare. India, with its acute shortage of specialist doctors in rural areas, could benefit greatly from such a tool.
- Benefits In Agriculture:** It can enhance farmer’s income, increase productivity and reduce wastage when used in agriculture. **For ex-** in agriculture, Microsoft, in collaboration with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (Icrisat), has developed and AI-enabled sowing app that sends advisories to farmers on the best date to sow, soil-test based fertilizer application, manure application, seed treatment, optimal sowing depth, etc. In 2017, 3,000 farmers in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Karnataka used the app, resulting in a 10-30% increase in kharif yields across crops.
- Benefit in Education:** In areas of education AI can improve access and quality of education. For ex- to tackle school dropout, the AP government has partnered Microsoft—an app powered by the company’s Azure Machine Learning processes to keep track of data relating to student’s gender, demographic details, past and current academic performance, teacher skills *etc.* to identify those likely to drop out.
- Benefit In Infrastructure And Transportation Sector:** The AI can also help in improving connectivity and safer modes of transportation when put to infrastructure and transportation sectors.
- Gaming:** AI has a crucial role in strategic games such as chess, poker, tic-tac-toe *etc.*, where the machine can think of a large number of possible positions based on heuristic knowledge.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



- **Manufacturing Sector:** Robots are being used for manufacturing since a long time now, however, more advanced exponential technologies have emerged such as additive manufacturing (3D Printing), which with the help of AI can revolutionize the entire manufacturing supply chain ecosystem.
- **Legal Sector:** Automation can lead to faster resolution of already pending cases by reducing the time taken while analyzing cases thus better use of time and more efficient processes.

Opportunities For India

- **Versatile Platform:** With a billion-plus people populating the unique-ID system Aadhaar and the India Stack of digitally enabled offerings built on top of Aadhaar, the country has a platform for growth unlike any other in the world. It can in principle catalyze innovative applications, nurture an entrepreneurial ecosystem and generate a massive amount of data that can train algorithms and help develop more intelligence.
- **India As A Promising Market:** The global AI majors are active in India and view it as one of the world's most promising digital growth markets and **58% of the companies** using AI in India are working with the technology at scale.
- **Abundant Applications:** The technology can address long-standing societal and human development problems of the kind that abound in India.

Challenges In AI

- **Overall Challenges:** The Aayog identified barriers that need to be surmounted to achieve success in the use of AI. These include lack of expertise, absence of enabling data ecosystem, high resource cost and low awareness, privacy and security issues, and absence of collaborative approach to adoption and application of AI.
- **Lack of AI Expertise:** India hardly has any AI expertise today. As only around 4% of Indian AI professionals are trained in emerging technologies such as deep learning. To truly harness AI's transformative potential India must address its lack of expertise in AI research and application the demand for AI and machine learning specialists in India could rise by 60% this year alone and a demand-supply gap of 2 lakh data analytics professionals by 2020 is likely as also its lack of high-quality data ecosystems across sectors.
- **Lack Of Adequate Data:** Machine learning, the set of technologies used to create AI, is a data-guzzling monster. It takes reams of historical data as input, identifies the relationships among data elements, and makes predictions. Unfortunately, India has sparse data in sectors like agriculture, and this is already hampering AI-based businesses today. Where data exist, this is poorly annotated making it unusable by AI systems.

- **Challenge Posed By IP:** The current IP regime with its stringent and narrowly focused patent laws is posing a challenge to AI applications given the unique nature of AI solution development. For instance, the algorithms and data used in an AI-powered application are key elements and hence the intellectual property regime in the context of AI must be robust and enforceable for innovators to have the confidence that they will be able to make profits from and take credit for their work. This will help in promoting innovation, entrepreneurship and core and applied research in the field of AI.
- **Lack Of Funding And Deadline:** It is one of the major challenges faced by the AI sector in India.
- **Unemployment:** Other major concerns is the possibility of human beings losing out on employment opportunities due to machines' ability to perform the same tasks more efficiently. Automation has already rendered a huge number of people jobless all around the world.
- **Challenge In Form Of Regulations:** Another major concern is about difficulties in regulation of machines in the human society. For ex- how can the self-driven cars that crash be held accountable for their actions?
- **Loss of ethics:** Along with the human sentiments, basic human values like morality and ethics would not exist in a machine dominated world. Such a society can lose out on factors like belongingness, warmth, brotherhood etc.

Recommendations of NITI Aayog

- **Centre For Research Excellence:** Recognizing the importance of research and its commercial adoption in success of AI, the Aayog proposed setting up of a **centre of research excellence** to focus on developing better understanding of existing core research.
- **International Center For Transforming AI:** It also proposed setting up of international centres of transformational AI with a mandate to develop and deploy application-based research in collaboration with private players.
- **Umbrella Organization To Address Various Issues:** In addition, an umbrella organisation should be established to address issues relating to access to finance, social sustainability and global competitiveness of the technologies developed.

Final Analysis

- It is a tall order, but several countries have similar ambitions. The U.S., Japan and China have published their AI strategy documents and importantly put their money where their aspirations are. China, for example, plans to hand out a million dollars in subsidies to AI firms as well as to run a five-year university programme for 500 teachers and 5,000 students.

- With data being the spine of AI adoption there will be privacy and data security concerns that the government must address on a war footing though with the **Srikrishna committee's report** this could soon be addressed.
- The trick will also be to follow it up with action, which will demand a strong buy-in from policymakers and substantial funds.

11th BRICS Summit

Prime Minister of India visited Brasilia on 13th - 14th November 2019 to attend the 11th BRICS summit. The **theme** of the BRICS summit this year was "**Economic Growth for an Innovative Future.**" This is Prime Minister's **second visit to Brazil** and his first visit after the new administration led by the president Bolsonaro assumed office on 1st January 2019.

Backdrop Against Which 11th Summit Took Place

- India is undergoing a severe economic slowdown, Brazil is growing at only 1.1 per cent and there are no signs of recovery.
- South Africa is also experiencing 0.8 per cent growth, soaring youth unemployment and high debt.
- China is suffering low economic growth due to trade war with the US.
- Russia is dealing with US and EU sanctions and its growth rate has been 1.1 per cent for 2019

Key Highlights

- During a restricted session. BRICS leaders discussed **challenges and opportunities for the exercise of National Sovereignty** in the contemporary world. The challenges arise from a range of factors including terrorism which seeks to undermine the nation State, technology's impact, especially digital technology etc.
- In this session, Indian PM underlined the importance of a **rule-based world order** which respects diversity and equality and eschews unilateral policies or the use of force.
- BRICS Summit deliverables on a range of areas include –
 - **Innovation BRICS Network (iBRICS)** – It will include networking of research institutes like science parks, incubators, accelerators etc.
 - **BRICS New S,T & I Architecture,**
 - **BRICS Institute of Future Networks** and

- The establishment of the **Women's Business Alliance**.
- MoU between **trade and investment promotion agencies** of BRICS
- Terrorism has been an important area of focus in BRICS and, Brazil just hosted the **first BRICS Seminar on Strategies to counter terrorism**.
- This summit has set up **5 sub working groups on terrorism** - — one each focusing on terrorist financing, use of the internet for terrorist purposes, countering radicalisation, the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, and capacity-building.
- There was the announcement of **opening of New Development Bank regional offices** in member countries and one will be **opened in New Delhi in 2020**.
- BRICS reiterated its support for the ongoing collaboration to **develop BRICS' own local bond markets**.

Significant Announcements Made by Indian PM

- India will host the **BRICS Digital Health Summit on Innovative Solutions** to Healthy Lifestyle. It will seek to integrate digital technology with healthcare informatics and diagnostics.
- Another initiative was on **Sustainable Water Management**. PM has offered to host the **first BRICS Water Ministers Meeting in India**.
- India will host the BRICS Film technology Symposium in conjunction with FICCI-FRAMES in Mumbai in March 2020.
- India will host a **BRICS workshop on Digital Forensics**.
- PM also mentioned that **India will host the BRICS Youth Summit** with focus on areas like start ups, hackathon, games etc.
- PM announced his intention to **initiate BRICS internship and fellowship Programme** for students from all BRICS countries.

9th BRICS Trade Ministers Meet

- It was held in Brazil. India was represented by Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.
- Discussions focused on opportunities for enhanced **intra-BRICS trade and investment cooperation**.
- Issues like cooperation in e-commerce, investment facilitation, MSMEs and intellectual property rights was also debated.

Different Bilateral Meets on the Margins of BRICS Summit**A. Meeting with President of Russia**

- The meeting took place on 13 November 2019. This was the 4th time the two leaders have met this year.
- The two leaders noted with satisfaction that the **USD 25 billion target of bilateral trade by 2025 has already been achieved.**
- It was decided that the **1st Bilateral Regional Forum** at the level of Russian Provinces and Indian States be held next year to dismantle the barriers of trade at regional level.
- The two leaders also reviewed the progress made in the field of Infrastructure particularly railways in context of raising the speed of the **Nagpur-Secunderabad sector railway line.**
- Russian President invited Indian PM to visit Moscow **to participate in the Victory Day celebrations** next year, which PM gladly accepted.

B. Meeting With President Of China

- Meeting took place on 13th November.
- Chinese President invited Indian PM for the **3rd informal summit in China** in 2020.
- President Xi thanked PM for **India's substantial participation in the just concluded China Import Export Expo in Shanghai.**
- The leaders reviewed preparations for celebrating the **70th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries next year.**

C. Meeting with President of Brazil

- Indian PM met **Jair Messias Bolsonaro**, President of Brazil on 13 November 2019.
- PM Modi invited the President of Brazil to be the **Chief Guest at the Republic Day 2020.**
- Indian PM welcomed the decision of President to **grant visa free travel** to Indian citizens.

BRICS

- BRICS brings together five major emerging economies comprising **42 percent of the world's population**, having **23 percent of the global GDP** and around **17 percent of the share and world trade.**
- Last year BRICS commemorated its 10th anniversary in Johannesburg.

Different Areas of Cooperation

- BRICS cooperation has **two pillars** including **consultations on issues** of mutual interest through meeting of leaders and ministers as well as **cooperation through meeting of senior officials** in a number of areas including trade, finance, health, education, science and technology, agriculture, communications IT etc.
- The **Sherpa mechanism** is also an important mechanism at senior officials level to take stock and give direction.
- It also includes people-to-people exchanges including participation of youth and many other similar exercises. Several people-to-people initiatives of BRICS include *BRICS Film Festival, BRICS Young Scientist Forum, intensified engagement with BRICS youth* etc.
- India will also host the **first BRICS Film Technology Symposium** in March 2020.

Role of BRICS: An Analysis

- **New Development Bank and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement** are actually the flagship outcome of BRICS.
- BRICS which started off primarily with an economic pillar, has now diversified considerably to include security, health, science and technology, culture and civil society.
- Under the chairmanship of Brazil, more than a **hundred meetings relating to BRICS were held in 2019**. Terrorism was one of the priority areas of 2019 BRICS summit. It has gone into socio-economic issues and people-to-people type of engagements.
- Role of BRICS has also been very important in the context of **being a pressure group** on the question of **reform of multilateralism** and also on the question of **reform of global governance institutions**.
- BRICS sees itself as a **bridge between the developing countries and the developed world** and takes up issues which are very relevant to the developing countries.

Challenges Faced by BRICS

- Lack of a binding ideology,
- Bilateral differences,
- Diversity in terms of socio-cultural and political systems, and
- China's overwhelming presence, which reduces the space for other countries in the grouping
- Economic slowdown faced by member countries as mentioned in the previous section.

MAINS Q&A

1. **The recent decision of President to reject petition for disqualification of AAP MLAs shows that the issue of office of profit is a controversial topic. In this light, discuss the meaning of Office of profit and suggest suitable measures to overcome the controversial issue of office of profit.**

Answer

Recently, President Ram Nath Kovind has rejected a petition demanding **disqualification of 11 AAP MLAs** of Delhi Legislative assembly for allegedly holding office of profit as co-chairperson of a **District Disaster Management Authority**. The rationale was that no remuneration is attached to the office by way of salary and allowances. Similarly, The Punjab Assembly also passed a legislation excluding the six ruling Congress MLA appointed as advisers to the Chief Minister from the office of profit category.

Basic disqualification criteria for legislator is laid under **Article 102 and Article 191** of the Constitution. In light of these Article, the **Office of Profit means** if a legislator holds a government office and receives benefits from it, then that office is termed as an “office of profit”. The decision relating to disqualification under this is taken by the President/ Governor on the advice of Election Commission.

Further, the SC in **Guru Gobind Basu v. Sankari Parasad Ghosal (1963) case** laid down five criteria/ tests to determine office of profit that are as follows:

- Whether the government makes the appointment?
- Whether the government has the right to remove or dismiss the holder?
- Whether the government pays the remuneration?
- What is the function of the holder?
- Does the government exercise any control over the performance of these functions?

The **rationale** for bringing the office of profit criteria is to ensure **independence of legislator** from the executive, to ensure **separation of power** and to **prevent conflict of interest**. However, the issue of declaring the office of profit has become controversial due to following reasons:

- The expression “**office of profit**” **has not been defined** in the Constitution or in the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- Further, the courts have decided this issue in the context of **specific factual situations** rather than **laying down certain general principles**.
- The Legislature have kept on expanding the list of exemptions from office of profit without any proper rationale.
- Many **exempted posts are used to appease and leverage legislators** as way of buying peace for the government.

Thus, to end the recurring controversy over the office of profit there is a need to adopt following steps:

- There is a need to define **office of Profit** to avoid any future confusion.
- The matter of disqualification should be referred to the **Joint Parliamentary Committee to determine** which of the offices should attract disqualification.
- The **international best practice** should be adopted like in **England** whenever a new office is created the law also lays down that whether it will be office of profit or not.

2. The five-judge bench of the Supreme Court (SC) has recently decided that the office of CJI is a 'public authority' under RTI Act. In this light discuss the outcome and significance of this judgement.

Answer

A five-judge Constitution Bench in leading case of **CPIO, Supreme Court v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal** declared that the office of the CJI is a 'public authority' under the RTI Act, 2005.

The SC decision in this matter is as follows:

- Court held that the **SC is a "public authority"** and the office of the CJI is part and parcel of the institution. Hence, if the SC is a public authority, so is the office of the CJI.
- Court said that the **transparency does not undermine judicial independence**. Judicial independence and accountability go hand in hand.
- However, the decision also laid down that **RTI cannot be used as a tool of surveillance** and that judicial independence has to be kept in mind while dealing with transparency.
- On the issue related to appointment of judges, the Court held that only the names of the judges recommended by the Collegium for appointment can be disclosed, not the reason thereof.

In this light, the judgement has following outcome/ significance:

- The **office of the CJI will now entertain RTI applications** for disclosure of the information.
- The step is also significant considering that it **brings in transparency** in what earlier has been a opaque system.
- The decision will **increase the accountability of the judiciary** as judges can be held accountable for their decision.
- Moreover, it will increase the **faith of people in judiciary** and that will facilitate **rule of law**.
- The verdict also underlines the measures taken by the SC to **balance the need for transparency and protecting its independence**.
- The Ruling sets an example for **political parties, trusts and PPP Models** who earlier resisted categorisation as 'public authorities' under the Act.

Thus, the decision is important, however, specific exemptions need to be made with respect to: **sub-judice cases** where disclosure of information can influence judge's verdict; confidential information to maintain **unity and integrity of nation** and if the information **does not deal with issue of public importance**.

3. The President decided to bring Maharashtra under President's rule after none of the party was able to form the government. In this light discuss the role of Governor in inviting the parties to form government. Also mention the misuse in imposing President's rule.

Answer

Recently, President has approved a proclamation imposing President's Rule in Maharashtra under **Article 356(1) of the Constitution**, following a recommendation from Governor. **President's Rule implies** the suspension of a state government and the imposition of direct rule of the Centre.

The decision was taken after the Governor was of the opinion that a situation had arisen in which it is **impossible to constitute or form a stable government** in the State and the **government could not be carried on as per the Constitution**.

Under such circumstances the Governor is expected to go as per an **order of preference** set out in **Sarkaria Commission recommendations** *i.e.*:

- Firstly, a **pre-poll alliance** of parties.
- Secondly, **invite the single largest party** which stakes a claim to form government.
- Thirdly, invite a **post-poll alliance of parties** with all the partner in the coalition joining the government.
- Finally, inviting a **post-poll alliance of parties**, with some becoming part of the government and some supporting from outside.

The President's rule is generally imposed under following circumstances:

- President's rule can be imposed where union may take steps to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance. **(Article 355)**
- **Article 356** mentions that the President, on receipt of the report from the Governor of the State or otherwise, is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution then President's rule may be imposed in a state.
- If any state fails to comply with directions of union then President Rule can be imposed. **(Article 365)**

However, the imposition of President rule has been nired with many controversies due to discretion and misinterpretation of provisions. To prevent any misuse of Article 356, there is a need for implementing the recommendation of the **Sarkaria commission** and **Puchhi Commission** (and as suggested by the SC in **Bommai case**) such as:

- The President's Proclamation should **state the reasons** as to why the State cannot be run as per the provisions of the Constitution.
- It practicable, the Centre should issue a **warning to the State government** before resorting to the use of Article 356.
- Presidential proclamation should **not be used to serve political purposes**.
- President be empowered to **dissolve the State Legislature only after approval by the Parliament**.

4. **Recently, the Supreme Court has held former Ranbaxy promoters Malvinder and Shivinder Singh guilty of contempt for violating its order. In this light, discuss the arguments for and against the use of Contempt power by the Higher Courts.**

Answer

The makers of the constitution to uphold the sanctity and prestige of the highest court introduced provisions relating to contempt under **Articles 129 and 215** of the constitution. These provisions enable

the courts to hold individuals in contempt, if they **scandalise or lowers the authority of any court or interferes in the administration of justice** in any manner. The contempt power is also regulated by **the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971**.

In this light, the power of contempt is supported on various grounds such as follows:

- The object is not only to **protect the dignity of the Court** but to protect the **administration of justice**.
- The purpose of contempt jurisdiction is also to uphold the **majesty and dignity of justice delivery system**.
- Contempt power helps judges to do their duties of **deciding cases without fear, favour, affection or ill will**.
- Contempt and malign of judiciary **decrease the respect for judiciary** and the **confidence reposed in the courts**. Therefore, the contempt power is essential to ensure public faith in purity of justice.

However, there are various arguments against the power of using contempt jurisdiction:

- Contempt of Court proceedings have the **effect of muzzling free speech** guaranteed under **Article 19(1)(a)** of the Indian Constitution.
- Article 19(2) that includes 'contempt of court' as a reasonable restriction on free speech but in its present form it is **not tenable in a democracy**.
- The use of such power opens up the possibility of **gross judicial abuse of such powers**.
- In England, whose laws of contempt India have adopted, there hasn't been a single conviction for scandalising the court.
- Finally, the **contempt of court is a vague term** as it has not been specifically defined.

Analysis

- The Contempt powers should be used in such a way as **not to violate Right to Freedom of Speech**, while also ensuring independence of the Judges.
- Further, the contempt power being extraordinary, it must be **used sparingly** and only when there is **public interest demand**.

5. **The Supreme Court in its recent decision has refused to stay the usage of Electoral bonds. In this light discuss the reasons that led to introduction of electoral bonds and criticism in relation to their use.**

Answer

The Supreme Court (SC) has refused to stay the usage of electoral bonds for political donation. However, it has directed that all parties must reveal the details to the Election Commission in a sealed cover by **May 30, 2020**. High expenditure in the elections is one of the most critical problems of India's electoral system. As per the Report of the **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution**

There are two types of contempt of Court:

Civil contempt that is a wilful disobedience to any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other processes of a Court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to the court.

Criminal contempt, which is the publication of any matter or the doing of any other act whatsoever which scandalises or lowers the authority of any court or prejudices or interferes with the due course of any judicial proceeding.

The Contempt of Courts Act, 1971 very clearly states that fair criticism of any case which has been heard and decided is not contempt.

(NCRWC) high cost of elections creates a high degree of compulsion for corruption in the public life. To deal with this issue the electoral bonds were introduced.

Electoral bonds are **bearer instrument** like Promissory notes. It can be purchased by an **Indian citizen or a body incorporated in India**. A political party registered under **Representation of People's Act, 1951** that secures at least **one percent of votes** is eligible to receive funds under this scheme. Further, donations made through these bonds are **exempt from taxes**.

In this light, the arguments in favour of the electoral bond are as follows:

- It provides a **transparent mechanism for political funding** as donor buys electoral bonds after furnishing KYC details to the bank.
- Further, as per **ADR (Association for Democratic Rights) 69% of political funding** in India comes from unknown sources. In this context, Electoral bonds provide an alternate, transparent route for parties to raise funds.
- It also preserves **anonymity of donors** that is essential to be protected against any post-poll intimidation or harassment by political opponents.
- Besides, the life of these bonds is only **15 days** which **limits the scope for misuse**.
- Also, political parties are supposed to **disclose the contributions received through electoral bonds to the Election Commission**, thus further adding to transparency measures.
- The bonds provide **tax advantage** to donors, thus making it an attractive tool for political donations.

However, use of electoral bond as a mode of funding has become controversial due to the following reasons:

- Firstly, there is **no ceiling on party expenditure** and the EC (Election Commission) cannot monitor the scheme as the **government administers it**.
- Further, there is no surety that the money that is being invested in the scheme is not **black money** as there is **secrecy of the donor**.
- Even foreign money can come under the scheme so *prima facie* there is a chance that **domestic independence of the government** may be lost.
- The scheme **removes an existing condition** that had prohibited companies from donating anything **more than 7.5% of their average net profit** over the **previous three years**. This now means that even loss-making entities can make unlimited contributions.
- Additionally, the requirement that a corporation ought to have been in existence for **at least three years before** it could make donations, a system that was meant to stop shell concerns from being created with a view purely to syphoning money into politics has also been removed.

Way forward

- There is a need for creating **National Election Fund** and it can be declared as the only channel through which businesses and individuals can contribute to political parties.
- It is also imperative that the government implements the recommendations of **Law Commission 255th report** on electoral reforms.
- Unless drastic/ radical steps are taken corruption will continue to corrode the vitals of the country.

6. **The standard criticism for coalition government is that they form 'khichdi' governments that are unable to rule due to frequent dissensions among themselves and ultimately fall apart from their internal contradictions. In this light analyse the feasibility of coalition government in context of Indian polity.**

Answer

After the fall of the Devendra Fadnavis government, an ‘**aghadi**’ or **coalition of Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP** formed the government in Maharashtra. A coalition government is formed when two or more political parties enter into an alliance, willingly or unwillingly, compromising upon their respective party’s policy and agenda.

The formation of a coalition government is criticised on various grounds such as:

- Critics argue that coalitions are **unstable, create policy gridlock and slow growth**. While, a strong, majority governments are decisive and better for the economy.
- Coalitions come into existence because they are a **political necessity**, but different partners may have mutually conflicting interests.
- The **other casualty of the coalition era has been the Parliament**, which has seen much greater logjam.
- Further, the coalition government is actually **less democratic** as the balance of power is held by the smaller parties who can barter their support for concessions from the main groups within coalition.
- Coalition government is **less transparent** because the manifestos that the parties present to the public become irrelevant and often wildly unrealistic.
- Coalitions provide are often **symbolised by bad governance** as they are unable to take a long term view.
- Further, coalition governments **are very unstable** that greatly restricts their ability to deal with major reforms.

However, the coalition government is also advocated on various grounds such as:

- Coalition governments are **not necessarily truly democratic but are truly representative**. As they can at least be plural in the views and adequately representative of smaller sections, regions, communities *etc.*
- Coalition government can **generate more inclusive policies** because the coalitions represent a wider array of groups and communities.
- Further, coalition constraints on the government’s ability to **change policy suddenly and arbitrarily**. **For ex-** demonetisation would have been hard to conceive in a coalition government.
- Coalition governments do not seem to harm economic performance either in India or elsewhere. **For ex-** coalition governments have hardly hindered India’s transition to a high-growth trajectory since the 1980s.
- The **developed countries had a positive experience with coalition** as seen in Europe.

It can be said that the concept of coalition government is good, however, its success depends on the manner in which the coalitions are forged and how governance percolates down. That is equally true of single party governments.

Extra Mile**Types of Coalition Government**

- ✓ **Ideological coalitions** emerge when different parties agree to form government based on some ideological similarities.
- ✓ A **surplus coalition government** features a party that already has the strength to form a government but has taken on board other coalition partners.

- ✓ **Coalitions of convenience** tend not to have coherent policy agendas and tend to be divided from within. Coalitions of convenience tend to more likely be corrupt and spend more money than those that are ideological because everyone has got a hand in the pot.
- ✓ **Support from outside** i.e. India has innovated a system of allowing a minority-party led government by receiving support in the legislature from groups without joining the government.

7. What is Pegasus and how does it work? Also throw light on the surveillance laws in India.

Answer

- Pegasus is a spyware that spies on people through their phones. It works by sending an exploit link, and if the target user clicks on the link, the code is installed on the user’s phone. Once Pegasus is installed, the attacker has complete access to the target user’s phone.
- The spyware leaves no trace on the device, consumes minimal battery, memory and data consumption and comes with a self-destruct option that can be used any time.
- It is capable of surveillance on three levels: initial data extraction, passive monitoring, and active collection. Once the phone is exploited and Pegasus installed, it begins contacting the operator’s command and control servers to receive and execute operator commands.
- It sends back the target’s private data, including passwords, contact lists, calendar events, text messages, and live voice calls from popular mobile messaging apps. The operator can even turn on the phone’s camera and microphone to capture activity in the phone’s vicinity.
- In the latest vulnerability, clicking the ‘exploit link’ may also not be required and a missed video call on WhatsApp will enable opening up the phone, without a response from the target at all.

Laws Governing Surveillance In India

- The laws governing surveillance in India are Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, which deals with interception of calls, and the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, which deals with interception of data.
- Under both laws, only the government, under certain circumstances, is permitted to conduct surveillance, and not private actors. Moreover, hacking is strictly prohibited under the IT Act.
- Section 43 and Section 66 of the IT Act cover the civil and criminal offences of data theft and hacking respectively. While, Section 66B covers punishment for dishonestly receiving stolen computer resource or communication. The punishment includes imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years.
- In 1996, the Supreme Court noted that there was a lack of procedural safeguards in the Indian Telegraph Act. It laid down some guidelines that were later codified into rules in 2007. This included a specific rule that orders that interceptions of communication should only be issued by **Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs.**

AT LEAST 17 INDIANS TARGETED

➤ Phones of 17 Indians so far known to have been infected with spyware via WhatsApp, **many more cases likely.** Total global count is around 1,400

➤ **Activists, journalists, lawyers and academics** among those targeted with the spyware called Pegasus

➤ Most victims were informed of the attack in the last few weeks by Toronto-based Citizen Lab which tracks ‘internet threats’; WhatsApp reached out to them later

➤ Spyware can enter phone through a video call (even if it’s not answered). **It can read all messages (not just WhatsApp), emails, contacts, calendar, call history and internet browsing history** on phones it infects



➤ **Malware attack first reported in May.** WhatsApp announced an immediate update on May 13 and had called it ‘a highly sophisticated attack’

➤ Congress says gov’t has been ‘caught snooping’, **demanding an SC-monitored probe** into the ‘illegal hacking’

➤ MHA calls reports of breach of privacy a **‘bid to malign India’.** Says gov’t committed to protecting citizens’ rights. IT minister Prasad says **WhatsApp asked to explain breach by Nov 4**

Privacy v/s Security

- The Supreme Court in a landmark decision in August, 2017 (**Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs Uol**) unanimously upheld right to privacy as a fundamental right under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution.
- It is a building block and an important component of the legal battles that are to come over the state's ability to conduct surveillance.
- But as yet a grey area remains between privacy and the state's requirements for security.

Way Ahead

- That 100 human rights activists, journalists and others were targeted should serve as a wake-up call for technology companies, governments and all Internet users. Tools that enable surveillance into private lives are being abused, and the proliferation of this technology into the hands of irresponsible companies and governments puts everyone at risk.
- Hence it is vital that as a democracy, India remains vigilant about the risk of the freedoms being eroded by technological means and plugs the loopholes to guard the privacy of every individual.

Extra Mile

- Facebook-owned platform WhatsApp has revealed that journalists and human rights activists in India have been targets of surveillance by operators using Israeli spyware Pegasus.
- The disclosure follows a lawsuit filed in a US federal court in San Francisco in which WhatsApp alleged that the Israeli NSO Group targeted some 1,400 WhatsApp users with Pegasus.
- The NSO claims that it only sells the software to governments but the Indian government has denied purchasing it and has asked WhatsApp to explain the security breach.
- The Indian government has also alleged that WhatsApp failed to disclose to Indian authorities the details of the spyware attack launched on Indian citizens. This was despite the fact that WhatsApp was legally bound under Section 70-B of the IT Act, 2000 to inform the government about the same.

Companies Involved

- WhatsApp, is the world's most popular messaging app, with more than 1.5 billion users worldwide. About a quarter of those users — more than 400 million, or 40 crore — are in India, which is WhatsApp's biggest market.
- The NSO Group is a Tel Aviv-based cyber-security company that specialises in surveillance technology. It claims to help governments and law enforcement agencies across the world fight crime and terrorism.

Surveillance Laws in US

- Electronic surveillance is considered a search under the Fourth Amendment, which protects individuals from unreasonable search and seizure. Thus, the government has to obtain a warrant from a court in each case and establish probable cause to believe a search is justified.
- It also has to provide a specific time period under which the surveillance is to be conducted and to describe in particular the conversation that is to be intercepted. There are very few exceptions, or exigent circumstances under which the government may proceed without a warrant.

Surveillance Laws In Other Countries

- In October 2019, the U.K.-based security firm Comparitech did a survey of 47 countries to see where governments are failing to protect privacy or are creating surveillance states.

- They found that only five countries had “adequate safeguards” and most are actively conducting surveillance on citizens and sharing information about them. China and Russia featured as the top two worst offenders on the list.
- Number three on the list was India, primarily because its data protection Bill is yet to take effect and there isn’t a data protection authority in place.

8. Explain the significance and concerns of Space based Internet, while highlighting the difference between the satellites in Low Earth Orbits and Geostationary Orbits.

Context

- SpaceX, the world’s leading private company in space technology, has fired the first operational batch of 60 satellites into orbit. It is eventually intended to evolve into a constellation of nearly 12,000 satellites (Starlink network) aimed at providing low-cost and reliable space-based Internet services to the world. The Starlink network will be deployed in the Low Earth Orbit, in the altitude band of 350 km to 1,200 km.
- In October, SpaceX informed the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in filings through the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that **it intends to deploy another 30,000 Starlink satellites** in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in coming years.
- The ITU is the **United Nations specialised agency for information and communication technologies**, with a membership of 193 member states, around 900 companies, universities, and international and regional organisations.

Answer

- Space-based internet is the ability to use satellites in orbit around Earth to send and receive data. Space-based Internet systems have been in use for several years now — but only for a small number of users. To make it work, thousands of low-cost satellites are deployed into orbit above the Earth.
- Internet services are now part of humanity’s basic infrastructure and an important means of delivering a wide variety of public services to the world. However, currently, about 4 billion people, more than half the world’s population, do not have access to reliable Internet networks.
- That is because the traditional ways to deliver the Internet — fibre-optic cables or wireless networks — cannot take it everywhere on Earth. In many remote areas, or places with difficult terrain, it is not feasible or viable to set up cables or mobile towers.
- Signals from satellites in space can overcome this obstacle easily and work towards ensuring that reliable and uninterrupted Internet services are universally available in every part of the globe.
- Once operational, space-based Internet networks are expected to change the face of the Internet. Services such as autonomous car driving are expected to be revolutionised. Further, the Internet of Things (IoT) can be integrated into virtually every household, whether urban or rural.

Satellites in Geo-stationary Orbit and Low Earth Orbit

- The Geo-stationary orbit is located at a height of 35,786 km over the Earth’s surface, directly above the Equator. Satellites in this orbit move at speeds of about 11,000 km per hour, and complete one revolution of the Earth in the same time that the earth rotates once on its axis. To the observer on the ground, therefore, a satellite in geostationary orbit appears stationary.

- One big advantage of beaming signals from geostationary orbit is that the satellite can cover a very large part of the Earth. Signals from one satellite can cover roughly a third of the planet — and three to four satellites would be enough to cover the entire Earth. Also, because they appear to be stationary, it is easier to link to them.
- However, owing to their lower height, signals from satellites in LEO cover a relatively small area. As a result, many more satellites are needed in order to reach signals to every part of the planet.
- Additionally, satellites in LEO travel at more than double the speed of satellites in geostationary orbit — about 27,000 km per hour — to balance the effects of gravity. Typically, they go around the Earth once every few hours.
- To compensate for the fact that they cannot be seen from a terrestrial location for more than a few minutes, many more satellites are needed in the networks, so that there are no breaks in the transmission of data.
- The Internet is all about transmission of data in (nearly) real time. However, there is a time lag — called **latency** — between a user seeking data, and the server sending that data.
- In space-based networks, data requests travel from the user to the satellite, and are then directed to data centres on the ground. The results then make the same journey in the reverse direction. A transmission like this from a satellite in geostationary orbit has a latency of about 600 milliseconds.
- Whereas a satellite in the lower orbit, 200-2,000 km from the Earth's surface, can bring the lag down to 20-30 milliseconds, roughly the time it takes for terrestrial systems to transfer data.

Concerns Around Space Based Internet Services

- Space based internet come with their attendant issues which include increased space debris and increased risk of collisions. Recently, the European Space Agency (ESA) had to perform, for the first time ever, a “collision avoidance manoeuvre” to protect one of its live satellites from colliding with a “mega constellation”.
- The constellations of space Internet satellites will also make it difficult to observe other space objects, and to detect their signals.
- Astronomers and scientists have also complained about increased “light-pollution”, a reference to light reflected from the man-made satellites that can interfere with — and be mistaken for — light coming from other heavenly bodies.

Conclusion

Given the immense potential of space based internet to democratize internet services by furthering the cause of extending its reach to every nook and corner of the world, the agencies involved should work on devising appropriate regulatory structures to mitigate the concerns of space based internet, so that the world at large can reap the benefits of this powerful technology.

- 9. The Supreme Court recently gave its verdict on the Sabarimala issue. Throw light on the judgement, while evaluating the doctrine of essential religious practices. How has the said doctrine squared up against religious freedom?**

Answer

The Supreme Court in a 3:2 verdict has referred the Sabarimala issue to a larger, seven-member bench after hearing pleas seeking a review of its decision to allow women of all ages into the temple. However, the earlier judgement has not been stayed by the Court.

September 2018 Decision

- In September 2018, the court had held that a centuries-old ban on women and girls aged 10 to 50 was illegal and constitutional. It held that the celibate nature of the deity Ayyappa and exclusion of women of menstruating age was **not an essential religious practice**.
- It also stated that the Board is considered state under Article 12 of the Constitution, and therefore the fundamental right to practice religion under Article 25(1) can be asserted against it.

Recent Judgement

- In referring the case to a higher bench, the Court has framed a series of questions for the seven-judge Bench to examine.
- These include whether a court can probe that a practice is essential to a religion or should the question be left to the respective religious head.
- Should “essential religious practices” be afforded constitutional protection under Article 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs); and
- What is the “permissible extent” of judicial recognition a court should give to PILs filed by people who do not belong to the religion of which practices are under the scanner.

Doctrine of Essentiality

- The doctrine of “essentiality” was invented by a seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in the **‘Shirur Mutt’ case in 1954** (*The Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras Vs. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar Of Sri Shirur Mutt*). The court held that the term “religion” will cover all rituals and practices “integral” to a religion, and took upon itself the responsibility of determining the essential and non-essential practices of a religion.
- Previous Supreme Court rulings have held that a practice that is “essentially religious” is protected under law.
- Scholars of constitutional law have argued that the essentiality doctrine has tended to lead the court into an area that is beyond its competence and given judges the power to decide purely religious questions.
- As a result, over the years, courts have been inconsistent on this question — in certain cases they have relied on religious texts to determine essentiality, in some on the empirical behaviour of followers, and in yet others, based on whether the practice existed at the time the religion originated.
- Experts also point out that the idea of providing constitutional protection only to those elements of religion which the court considers “essential” is problematic. As it assumes that one element or practice of religion is independent of other elements or practices.
- So, while the essentiality test privileges certain practices over others, it is, in fact, all practices taken together that constitute a religion.

Doctrine Of Essentiality vs Religious Freedom

- Freedom of religion was meant to guarantee freedom to practice one’s beliefs based on the concept of “inward association” of man with God.
- The apex court, in **‘Ratilal Panachand Gandhi vs The State of Bombay and Ors’ (1954)**, acknowledged that “every person has a fundamental right to entertain such religious beliefs as may be approved by his judgment or conscience”.
- Even, the framers of the Constitution wanted to give this autonomy to each individual. However, scholars argue that the essentiality test impinges on this autonomy and the essential practices test is antithetical to the individualistic conception of right.

Way Ahead

- The decision of a larger Bench would put at rest recurring issues touching upon the rights flowing from Articles 25 [freedom of religion] and 26 [right of administration of property of religious endowments] of the Constitution.
- Moreover, an authoritative pronouncement will also reflect the plurality of views of the judges converging into one opinion and may also ensure consistency in approach in the future along with instilling public confidence

Extra Mile**Grounds On Which The September 2018 Judgement Was Challenged In The Court**

- The petitioners argued that the court erroneously concluded that the ban is based on the age of women; in fact, it is based on the celibate nature of Ayyappa, which is distinct to Sabarimala.
- The petitioners also argued that the devotees of Ayyappa were not heard by the court; rather, the verdict was delivered in a plea filed by an NGO that has not “professed belief in the deity”.
- The court had held that the devotees of Ayyappa did not constitute a distinct religious denomination that is entitled to practise its unique customs. However, the petitioners argued that the uniqueness of the Sabarimala temple and its history is enough to grant denominational status to Ayyappa devotees.
- The petitioners claim that, Spiritual organisation, a common bond and the existence of unique practices which flow from its beliefs, are the three conditions to grant denominational status to a group and devotees of Ayyappa fulfil all three.

Dissenting Judgements

- Justices Rohinton F. Nariman and D.Y. Chandrachud have delivered a dissenting judgement. They were part of the Constitution Bench that delivered the original majority judgment in September 2018. Both dismissed the majority decision of a reference to a larger Bench.
- They held that the judgment of a five-judge Constitution Bench was the last word on the interpretation of the Constitution. Once a Constitution Bench has laid down the law, both legislature and the executive, were bound to comply and that is the rule of law.
- And that there is no occasion for the court to recalibrate judicial decisions on legal issues such as the essential religious practice test.
- Justice Nariman exclaimed that busybodies, religious fanatics, cranks and persons with vested interests will be turned down by the Court at the threshold itself and that for judges, the holy book is the Constitution.

About Review Petition

- A judgment of the SC becomes the law of the land as per the provisions of **Article 141**. It is final because it provides certainty for deciding future cases.
- However, **Article 137** gives SC the power to review any of its judgments or orders.
- The grounds available for review are as follows- the **discovery of new and important matter or evidence** which, after the exercise of due diligence, was not within the knowledge of the petitioner or could not be produced by him; **mistake or error apparent on the face of the record**; or **any other sufficient reason**. In subsequent rulings, the court specified that “any sufficient reason” means a reason that is analogous to the other two grounds.

- In **Union of India v. Sandur Manganese & Iron Ores Ltd. (2013)**, the court held that a review is by no means an appeal in disguise whereby an erroneous decision is reheard and corrected but lies only for patent error. It added that the mere possibility of two views on the subject cannot be a ground for review.
- Further, it is **not necessary that only parties to a case can seek a review** of the judgment on it. As per the Civil Procedure Code and the Supreme Court Rules, any person aggrieved by a ruling can seek a review.
- In case of failure of review petition, the petitioner can still file **curative petition** but only as a measure of last resort (**Roopa Hurra v. Ashok Hurra**).

10. The Supreme Court recently pronounced its judgement in the long festering Ayodhya land dispute case. Delineate the judgement of the court along with the rationale behind the verdict.

Answer

- In a 5-0 unanimous verdict, the Supreme Court recently ruled that the 2.77 acres of disputed land in Ayodhya will be handed over to a trust for the construction of a Ram Mandir. Furthermore, a 5-acre land will be allotted to the Sunni Waqf Board in an alternate site in Ayodhya.
- The court directed the central government to frame a scheme within three months to allocate land for the mosque and forming the temple trust. The temple which will be constructed will be managed by the trust.
- The court held that Nirmohi Akhara, which was granted one-third title by the Allahabad High Court in 2010, does not have a claim to title or even managerial rights.
- According to the SC, the three-way bifurcation by the Allahabad High Court was legally unsustainable and that dividing the land will not sub-serve the interest of either of the parties or secure a lasting sense of peace and tranquillity.

Recognition Of Claims By The Hindu Parties

- According to the Court, Hindus' worship at Ram chabutra, Sita (Kaushalya) Rasoi and at other religious places including the setting up of a Bhandar clearly indicated their open, exclusive and unimpeded possession of the outer courtyard.
- Further, according to the Hindu witnesses, the Hindus used to offer prayer even to the Kasauti stone pillars placed inside the mosque. Moreover, Muslim witnesses have acknowledged the presence of symbols of Hindu religious significance both inside and outside the mosque.
- The SC came to the conclusion that erection of iron railings to segregate the worship areas was not a sub-division of the disputed site and on balance of probabilities, there was "clear evidence to indicate" that the worship by the Hindus in the outer courtyard continued "unimpeded in spite of the setting up of a grill-brick wall in 1857.
- Hence, the Court acknowledged that Hindus have established "a clear case of a possessory title" to the outside courtyard.

Adverse Possession

- One of the questions before the Supreme Court was whether the Sunni Wakf Board had acquired the title of the disputed land by adverse possession. Adverse possession is hostile possession of a property – which has to be continuous, uninterrupted and peaceful.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

- The Sunni Waqf Board (SWB) had claimed that the mosque was built 400 years ago by Babar and, Muslims, by virtue of their long exclusive and continuous possession - from beginning to the desecration of the mosque – had perfected their title by adverse possession.
- The Court said that the Muslims have offered no evidence to indicate that they were in exclusive possession of the inner structure prior to 1857 since the date of the construction in the sixteenth century. Further, no evidence was offered by SWB to indicate that offering of namaz was exclusionary of the Hindus.
- Hence, the SWB had failed to establish right over the mosque either through ‘dedication by user’ or through adverse possession.

Given the long festering nature of the dispute which had been striking at the roots of the communal harmony in the country, it is hoped that judgement would put an end to the dispute and help the country to move ahead and focus on more important developmental issues while fostering communal harmony at the same time.

Extra Mile

Background and Chronology of Events

1528 - 1949

- The Hindu parties claim that the disputed site is the birthplace of Lord Ram which was demolished in 1528 by Mughal emperor Babur who constructed the Babri Masjid.
- In 1885, Mahant Raghubar Das had filed a suit seeking permission to build a temple in the Ram Chabutara area.
- The suit was dismissed and the court was of the opinion that granting permission to build a temple would amount to laying the foundation of a riot between the two communities.
- In 1949 idol of Lord Ram surfaced inside the mosque, which led to protests by Muslims. At this point, government proclaimed the premise as a disputed area and locked the gates.

IN THE COURTS, 1885 TO 2019

1885-86 The sub-judge and district judge of Faizabad dismiss a suit by Mahant Raghubar Das seeking to build a temple on the land in Ayodhya (on the courtyard where the Ram Chabutara stands) adjoining the Babri mosque.

1949 On December 22-23 that year, idols of Lord Ram and other objects of worship appear under the central dome of the Babri Masjid.

1950 Two suits are filed before the Faizabad district court by Gopal Visharad (Suit 1) seeking permanent mandatory injunction restraining Muslims from removing idols of Lord Ram.

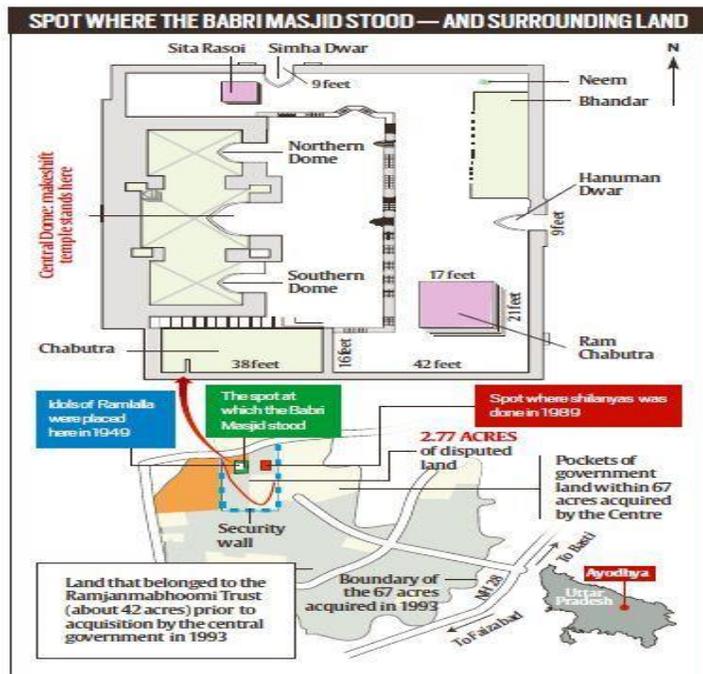
1959 Nirmohi Akhara files a suit (Suit 3) against Baboo Priya Ram Dutt for possession of the entire property (both inner and outer courtyards) arguing that they were dispossessed of the property in 1949 after the property was entrusted to Dutt, the receiver appointed by the government.

1961 The UP Sunni Central Waqf Board, and 9 Muslims of Ayodhya file a suit (Suit 4) against Gopal Visharad (plaintiff of the first suit), Mahant of Nirmohi Akhara, and 22 others seeking a declaration of the title.

1986 District Judge of Faizabad orders removal of barriers, locks and brick-grill wall for Hindus to worship the idols.

1989 Bhagwan Sri Ramlalla Virajman at Sri Ram Janam Bhoomi Ayodhya, Asthan Sri Ram Janam Bhoomi, Ayodhya file a title suit (Suit 5) represented by “next friend” Deoki Nandan Agarwala, a former judge of the Allahabad High Court.

2010 Allahabad High Court holds that the three parties— Bhagwan Ramlalla Virajman, Nirmohi Akhara and UP Sunni Central Waqf Board – are in joint possession of the disputed 2.77 acres of land in the absence of a better title, and direct a three-way partition.



1949 Onwards

- In 1950 two suits were filed in Faizabad civil court for rights to perform pooja of Ram Lalla and keep the idols in the structure, while Nirmohi Akhara filed a third suit in 1959.
- In 1961, UP Sunni Central Wakf Board filed a suit demanding possession of site and removal of idols.
- In 1986, District judge ordered for the locks to be removed and opened the site for Hindu worshippers.
- On December 6, 1992 the Babri Masjid was demolished which led to Hindu-Muslim violence leaving more than 2,000 people dead.

Use Of Article 142 In The Decision

- In granting five acres of land, to Muslim parties, the Supreme Court used extraordinary powers granted to it by Article 142 of the Constitution. It said that it was invoking Article 142 “to ensure that a wrong committed must be remedied”.
- It said that “justice would not prevail if the court were to overlook the entitlement of the Muslims who have been deprived of the structure of the mosque through means which should not have been employed in a secular nation committed to the rule of law”.
- The same article was invoked in the case of the Nirmohi Akhara, who were party to the case. The Akhara will now be part of the board, which will formulate the scheme for the construction of the temple.

Article 142

- The provision vests sweeping powers in the Supreme Court to ensure complete justice in cases that involve human rights and environmental protection.
- This was the first time that the court invoked this power in a case involving a civil dispute over an immovable property, involving private parties.

11. The Parliament recently passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019. Highlight the major provisions of the Bill. Also delineate the areas where the Bill has failed to satisfy the demands of the Transgender community.

Answer

- With the Parliament passing the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019, India got its first law protecting the rights of the transgender community.
- The Act’s long history traces back to the judgment in **NALSA vs Union of India in 2014**, which directed the Centre and State to grant legal recognition for the third gender, ensure there is no discrimination against them, and construct specific social welfare programmes.

Provisions Of The Bill

- **Definition:** The Bill defines a transgender person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. It includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons with socio-cultural identities, such as kinnar and hijra.
- **Certificate of identity:** A transgender person may make an application to the District Magistrate for a certificate of identity, indicating the gender as ‘transgender’. A revised certificate may be obtained only if the individual undergoes surgery to change their gender either as a male or a female.

- **Prohibition against discrimination:** The Bill prohibits the discrimination against a transgender person, including denial of service or unfair treatment in relation to education, employment, healthcare, right to movement, right to reside and opportunity to hold public or private office.
- **Health care:** As per the bill, the government must take steps to provide health facilities to transgender persons including separate HIV surveillance centres, and sex reassignment surgeries. Further, the government shall review medical curriculum to address health issues of transgender persons, and provide comprehensive medical insurance schemes for them.
- **Welfare measures:** The Bill states that the relevant government will take measures to ensure the full inclusion and participation of transgender persons in society. It must also take steps for their rescue and rehabilitation, vocational training and self-employment, create schemes that are transgender sensitive, and promote their participation in cultural activities.
- **NCT:** It provides for a National Council for Transgender persons (NCT), that will advise the central government as well as monitor the impact of policies, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons. It will also redress the grievances of transgender persons.

Shortcomings In The Bill

- The legislation is ambiguous in that it ostensibly gives every transgender person the right to self-perceived identity, yet it also stipulates that a transgender individual must apply to the district magistrate for a certificate of identity indicating transgender status. Moreover, there are no avenues open for appeal in the event a magistrate refuses to hand out such a certificate.
- This is in direct violation of NALSA judgement that had affirmed the right to self-determination of gender as male, female or transgender without the mandate of any medical certificate or sex-reassignment surgery (SRS).
- While the Bill seeks to prohibit discrimination, it does not explicitly define what constitutes as discrimination. The Bill makes “sexual abuse” punishable, but it does not define the acts that constitute sexual offences, making it complicated for transgender persons to report such crimes.
- Moreover, there is a genuine problem, with the bill prescribing mild fines and punishment such as imprisonment ranging from six months to two years for offences such as physical and sexual abuse. This is out of sync with existing penal provisions for rape and sexual violence.
- On the rights of transgender children, the Bill fails to include “gender non-conforming” children and “children with intersex variations”. It falls short of addressing and penalising surgeries on infants born with intersex variations with the intention of “correcting” their bodies to fit the binary gender.
- Another major flaw of the Bill is that it does not provide for reservation in education and employment for transgender persons, going against the mandate in NALSA, which had clearly stated that the state must take measures “to treat them as socially and educationally backward classes of citizens and extend all kinds of reservation in cases of admission in educational institutions and for public appointments”.
- The Bill does not tackle the question of realisation of civil rights — such as marriage, civil partnership, adoption and property rights, thereby continuing to deprive transgender persons of their fundamental rights and the constitutional guarantee provided by the Supreme Court in NALSA.

With the Bill becoming a law, unaltered in any significant form, in the face of strident opposition, it is hoped that the NCT, which is supposed to provide the institutional framework for implementing the Act, might allow more latitude for incorporating genuine demands, else this Act might well be a glove that ill fits the hand it was tailored for.

Extra Mile

- Intersex variations is defined to mean a person who at birth shows variation in his or her primary sexual characteristics, external genitalia, chromosomes, or hormones from the normative standard of male or female body.
- The NCT will consist of Union Minister for Social Justice (Chairperson), Minister of State for Social Justice (Vice- Chairperson), Secretary of the Ministry of Social Justice and one representative from ministries including Health, Home Affairs, and Human Resources Development.
- Other members include representatives of the NITI Aayog, and the National Human Rights Commission. State governments will also have representation. The Council will also consist of five members from the transgender community and five experts from non-governmental organisations.
- **Right of residence:** Every transgender person shall have a right to reside and be included in his household. If the immediate family is unable to care for the transgender person, the person may be placed in a rehabilitation centre, on the orders of a competent court.

12. The Union Cabinet has recently approved an alternate investment fund (AIF) to provide last mile funding to Housing projects. What is an AIF and what are the different types of AIF? Highlight the details of the fund along with its impact.

Answer

The Union Cabinet has approved setting up an alternate investment fund to provide last-mile funding to housing projects stuck across the country. The fund will seek to revive up to 4.6 lakh housing units in 1,600 projects with “positive net worth”.

Alternative Investment Funds

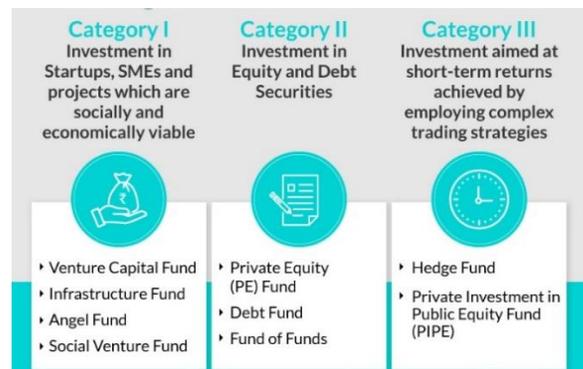
- Alternative Investment Fund is any fund established or incorporated in India which is a privately pooled investment vehicle. AIFs can be established in the form of a company or a corporate body or a trust or a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP).
- Generally, high net worth individuals and institutions invest in AIFs as it requires a high investment amount, unlike Mutual Funds.

Types of AIF

- As per existing SEBI classification, these private investment funds have been divided into 3 unique categories – Category I, Category II and Category III.
- The minimum qualifying corpus amount for these schemes is Rs. 20 Crores. The only exception to this rule is an ‘angel fund’, which is a subcategory of Category I AIFs, as they have lower qualifying criteria in terms of fund corpus at Rs. 10 crores.

I. Category I AIFs

- AIFs which invest in start-up or early stage ventures or social ventures or SMEs or infrastructure or other sectors or areas which the government or regulators consider as socially or economically desirable.
- It includes venture capital funds, SME Funds, social venture funds, infrastructure funds and such other Alternative Investment Funds as may be specified.



II. Category II AIFs

- AIFs which do not fall in Category I and III and which do not undertake leverage or borrowing other than to meet day-to-day operational requirements and as permitted in the SEBI (Alternative Investment Funds) Regulations, 2012.
- Various types of funds such as real estate funds, private equity funds (PE funds), funds for distressed assets, etc. are registered as Category II AIFs.

III. Category III AIFs

- AIFs which employ diverse or complex trading strategies and may employ leverage including through investment in listed or unlisted derivatives.
- Various types of funds such as hedge funds, PIPE Funds, etc. are registered as Category III AIFs.

Details Of The Housing Fund

- The total fund size is estimated at over Rs 25,000 crore with the Centre putting in Rs 10,000 crore, and State Bank of India and LIC injecting the balance amount into the fund in due course.
- The fund will be set up as Category-II Alternate Investment (AIFs) Fund registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), and managed by professional fund managers.
- It will provide loans on commercial terms after assessing the viability of each project but will ensure that the money flows into an escrow account so that it is used only for construction purposes.
- **Eligibility**
 - Funding will be provided only to those projects that are net worth positive and registered under RERA Act.
 - Stuck projects classified as Non-Performing Assets and those undergoing resolution under the National Company Law Tribunal will also be eligible for funding. This is a welcome change from an earlier proposal which barred such projects from support.
- A detailed investment policy will also be laid down for the selection of projects after a detailed due-diligence process. Due-diligence will include legal due-diligence, title due-diligence, micro-market analysis and financial analysis.

<p>WHO'S ELIGIBLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Projects that are financially viable – expected income higher than cost of completion ➤ Includes projects classified as non-performing assets by banks, or facing insolvency resolution in NCLT ➤ Ongoing projects registered with Rera ➤ Projects that have been referred by existing lender ➤ Projects facing liquidation will not be eligible for assistance 	<p>Housing units with following cost will be covered</p> <p>Mumbai: Up to ₹2cr</p> <p>Delhi NCR, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad:</p> <p>Up to ₹1.5cr</p> <p>Other cities:</p> <p>Up to ₹1cr</p>
--	---

Impact

- The fund will provide relief for those who have defaulted on repayment of their home loan EMIs in the stalled projects across the country.
- There are many genuine developers who are solvent, yet facing liquidity challenge due to various reasons such as poor sales and buyers preferring ready-to-move-in apartments. This funding will enable such developers to complete their projects through this last-mile funding.
- The fund is expected not only to support the sector but also generate commercial return for its investors.
- It will, in due course, help relieve the financial stress faced by a large number of middle-class home buyers who have invested their hard-earned money.
- It will also restore trust between buyers and developers and boost the sentiments of the housing sector as a whole and release large amount of funds stuck in these projects for productive use in the economy.
- It will have a multiplier effect as it will lead to increase in demand for steel and cement, which will provide impetus to generate more employment.

The fund will go a long way in not only reviving the real estate sector which has been facing trouble due to the overall credit freeze and the dwindling purchasing power but will also give a much needed push to the overall economy as the real estate sector plays a key role in the entire economy.

13. Global ratings agency Moody's has cut its outlook for India's credit ratings. How are credit ratings done? Also highlight the impact of credit ratings and their credibility.

Answer

- Global ratings agency Moody's has cut its outlook for India's credit ratings from '**stable**' to '**negative**'. Post this downgrade, India's rating is now Baa2, with a negative outlook.
- The ratings have been downgraded, citing the ongoing economic slowdown, financial stress among rural households, weak job creation, and the liquidity crunch in non-banking financial companies.
- According to Moody's, the probability of sustained real GDP growth at or above 8% has significantly diminished and there are increasing risks that growth will remain materially lower than in the past, leading to a gradual rise in the debt burden from already high levels. Thus, the lowering of the rating can signal that a change upwards could be a long way off.

Process Of Credit Ratings

- Credit rating agencies rate the financials and business models of companies, as well as economic management by sovereign governments. They analyze official and other data and interacts with government officials, business leaders, and economists, while doing so.
- The agencies then rate instruments such as bonds, debentures, commercial papers, deposits, and other debt offerings of companies or governments to help investors make informed decisions.
- They do this on a continuous basis, either upgrading or downgrading the instrument based on performance, prospects, or events likely to have an impact on the balance sheet or the fiscal position.

Impact Of The Ratings

- From a company's or a government's perspective, a better rating helps raise funds at a cheaper rate. It has an impact on companies planning to borrow overseas through bonds or foreign loans, as investors or banks abroad may well seek higher interest rates because of weak prospects. Hence, firms that borrow from the international markets are mindful of rating downgrades.
- In case of governments, whether the downgrade actually has an impact or not depends on how and where governments borrow. Many countries tap the global debt or credit markets to raise money, while some don't.
- India has been an outlier on this count as it has not issued a bond or raised money directly in the international market so far, which means that to a good extent, a downgrade has limited impact.
- In this year's Budget, the government announced its intention to go in for a sovereign bond, but is yet to go ahead with it, in the backdrop of criticism and caution by the RBI. In the past as well, Indian policymakers have hindered attempts to issue a sovereign bond or borrow from the international market directly.
- However, reduction in outlook is the first step towards an investment downgrade, as India is now just a notch above the investment grade country rating. An actual downgrade in country ratings can lead to massive foreign fund outflows.

Credibility Of The Agencies

- Credit ratings agencies have been criticised after the global financial crisis of 2008, when they were exposed after the collapse of highly rated banks and other institutions.

- Since then, they have come under attack in India too, and have also faced regulatory action. They also had to face a probe by central investigating agencies after they had assigned top ratings to borrowings by firms that were part of the IL&FS group last year.
- Often, the government has also complained that countries with higher levels of debt and a weak fiscal have managed better ratings.

The Indian government has responded to the change in outlook by saying that India's fundamentals are robust. Essentially, it has indicated that it does not agree with the assessment of the agency. However, given the large flows attracted by India into both government and corporate debt, along with FDIs, India needs to pay heed to the assessments and take corrective steps to bring the economy back on track.

14. The Union govt is pushing for Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to agree on Ken-Betwa river interlinking. In this light discuss the arguments for and against river interlinking projects.

Answer

The Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) is the River interlinking project that aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken river in MP to Betwa in UP to irrigate **3.64 lakh hectares** in the drought-prone **Bundelkhand region** spread across the districts of two states **mainly Jhansi, Banda, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts of UP and Tikamgarh, Panna and Chhatarpur districts of MP**. Central government has proposed **90:10 funding pattern** for Ken Betwa Interlinking Project where 90% of the total estimated cost is to be borne by the centre.

About Ken-Betwa River Interlinking Project

- The project involves building a **Dhaudhan dam** and a **230 km canal**. Besides, irrigation purpose, the project also aims to provide **49 million cubic metres** for drinking water supply in the region.
- The cost of the project is estimated to be around **₹18,000 crore project** but is mired in several controversies such as disagreement between the States on the sharing of water and environmental obstructions *etc.*

In this light, the arguments in favour of river interlinking project are as follows:

- Interlinking of rivers will help in **water availability throughout the year** considering that rainfall is concentrated in few months of the year.
- The river linking project on one hand will **reduce water shortages** in western and southern India, on other hand it will **mitigate the impacts of recurrent floods** in eastern India.
- This will also **reduce farmers dependence on monsoon rains** for purpose of irrigation.
- These projects can help India to meet its **clean energy production** (hydro project) as required under Paris climate agreement.
- Lastly, these projects also have potential to **promote inland water transportation** as well as **increasing income sources in rural areas** through fishing.

However, these projects are also present few challenges such as:

- The major issue relates to the **feasibility of the project** as the estimated cost of the All India river linking project is around **5,60,000 Crore** at 2002 price level.
- Further, the project may have **negative ecological effect** as may impact fisheries, flora/ fauna, wetlands and may lead to possible diversion of forest land.
- Similarly, building of dams and reservoirs under the project will lead to displacement of people. **For ex-** Tehri dam led to submersion of 72 villages.

- Interlinking of rivers will also likely to increase not only the interstate water disputes but also impact international relation. **For ex-** Teesta dispute with Bangladesh.
- Last but not the least, **MB Shah committee** pointed out that the linking of rivers will may **impact natural supply of nutrients for agricultural lands** by curtailing flooding of downstream areas.

The river linking project is a great **challenge as well as an opportunity** to address the water issues arising out of climate change. The long-term solution to water scarcity lies in investing in water conservation, efficient irrigation practices *etc.* Moreover, interlinking of river should take place **after a detailed study and feasibility.**

15. The Government has recently approved the enactment of Recycling of Ships Bill, 2019 after accession to ‘Hong Kong International Convention for Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009’. In this light discuss the key features of the Bill and the need for enacting such a law.

Answer

Recently, the Government has decided to enact of **Recycling of Ships Bill, 2019** after accession to the **Hong Kong International Convention for Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009**. The Bill restricts the use of hazardous material on ships and regulates the recycling of ships.

In this light, the key features of the Bill are as follows:

- The **Bill will apply to** any new or existing ship which is registered in India; ships entering a port or terminal in India, or the territorial waters of India; any warship, or other ship owned and operated by an administration and used on government non-commercial service and ship recycling facilities operating in India.
- Under the proposed Bill, **ships should not use prohibited hazardous materials** as notified by the government. However, the central government may exempt certain categories of ships from this requirement.
- Further, the **National Authority** will carry out periodic surveys to verify the prescribed requirements. Further, the Authority will be notified by the Central government to administer, supervise and monitor all activities related to ship recycling.
- As per the provisions of the Bill, **ships will be recycled only in authorised recycling facilities.** Moreover, a facility will be authorised when the Competent Authority is satisfied that it follows the specified standards.
- The Bill also mandates that **every ship recycler must ensure** safe and environmentally sound removal and management of hazardous materials from a ship, and comply with the specified environmental regulations.
- Contravention of the provisions of the Bill will make ship recycler liable to **pay environmental damages and clean-up operation compensation** as prescribed
- Lastly, ships to be recycled in India shall be required to obtain a **Ready for Recycling Certificate** in accordance with the Hong Kong Convention.

The legislation was enacted considering the following things:



- After accession to the Hongkong Convention India became **14th contracting state to ratify the Convention**. Hence, it became necessary to pass domestic legislation enacting the international convention.
- India is the leader in the global ship recycling industry, with a **30% market share** of the world. As per **UNCTAD report**, on Review of Maritime Transport, 2018, India had demolished 6323 tonnes in 2017 of known ship scrapping across the world. So, it became necessary to regulate these activities.
- The ship-recycling industry is a **labour-intensive sector** but it is susceptible to concerns on environmental safety.

Thus, the legislation will help regulating the ship recycling activities in the environmentally sustainable manner, while at same time will protect the interest of workers in the ship recycling sector.

About Hong Kong Convention

- The Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009 (the Hong Kong Convention), was adopted at a diplomatic conference held in **Hong Kong, China in 2009**.
- It was adopted by the **International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 2009**.
- The Convention aims at ensuring that ships, when being recycled after reaching the end of their operational lives, **do not pose any unnecessary risks to human health, safety and to the environment**.
- It also addresses concerns raised about the **working and environmental conditions** at many of the world's ship recycling locations.
- The Convention is **yet to come into force** because it has not been ratified by 15 nations, representing 40 per cent of the world merchant shipping by gross tonnage (capacity) and a maximum annual ship recycling volume of not less than 3 per cent of the combined tonnage of the countries.

16. Recently, the government has proposed to pass National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill, 2019. In this light, discuss the salient features of the proposed Bill and challenges in ensuring nirmal and aviral Ganga. Also suggest suitable measures to clean Ganga river.

Answer

The government is planning to introduce '**National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill, 2019** in the winter session of Parliament. The recent decision was taken in background of the rising cases of water pollution and as per the map of Ganga river water quality presented by the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** only **five out of 70-odd monitoring stations** had water that was fit for drinking and bathing.

In this light the salient features of the new draft bill are as follows:

- Bill propose to **ban the construction** of jetties, ports, permanent hydraulic structure, unless permitted by the **National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority**.
- It also proposes to create a **structure to supervise the health** of the Ganga River.
- Further, the Bill aims to ensure **atleast 23-30% of uninterrupted, ecological flow of the river**.
- The Act also specifies that unauthorized activities that cause obstruction or discontinuity of water in the River Ganga are liable for a term of **3 years** or fines **upto ₹ 50 crore**.

- Moreover, the **Armed Ganga Protection Corps (GPC) personnel** will be deployed and will have power to arrest those who pollute the river.

However, the proposed bill faces challenges on various counts such as:

- Recently, a **number of dams are being constructed** in the upper stretches of the river that may obstruct the natural flow of the river and its **self-purifying capacity**.
- Currently, **12,000 million litres per day (MLD) of sewage** is generated in the Ganga basin but there is a **treatment capacity of just 4,000 MLD**.
- The Act does not consider measures needed for controlling the **pollution in tributaries of Ganga River** like Kosi, Ramganga, Kali *etc.*
- The Act does not specifically mention of **participation of civil society or citizen** for monitoring and sustainability of the measures.
- The Act does not delve into issues such as delay in approval of projects, poor inter-agency cooperation, funding constraints *etc.*

In light of the above challenges/ issues following steps need to be taken:

- To clean Ganga River there is a need for **shared participation/ accountability** between the state and people.
- Further, there is also a need for **coordination between various pollution control agencies**.
- Further, **industries must be organized in clusters** to effectively handle the issue of industrial pollution.

17. The government has recently constituted a committee to frame a New National Water Policy. In this light discuss the reason for rising and perennial issue of water shortage in India. Also, suggest suitable measures to overcome the issue of water shortage.

Answer

The Union Water Resources Ministry has finalized a committee under **Mihir Shah** to draft a new National Water Policy (NWP). The committee will recommend measures to make key changes in **water governance structure and regulatory framework**. Water governance has been described as lack of fresh water resources to satisfy water demand.

According to UNICEF report, **54% of India's total area** faces high to extreme water stress and Water table in India declining **0.4 meter every year**. The reason for rising issue of water shortage are as follows:

- **Inefficient water use for agriculture** (agriculture amounts to **80 % of the water use**) along with high groundwater uses.
- Further, policies of several states giving **free electricity to farmers** promotes high groundwater usage.
- **Ignorance of traditional water bodies** impact ground water recharging mechanism.

Key Features Of National Water Policy, 2012

- It proposed setting up use of **National Bureau of Water Use Efficiency**.
- The concept of an **Integrated Water Resources Management approach** was advocated that took the river basin/ sub-basin as a unit for planning, development and management of water resources.
- It also proposed that a portion of river flows ought to be kept aside to **meet ecological needs (ecological flow)**.
- The policy also stressed for a **minimum quantity of potable water for essential health and hygiene** to all its citizens and to be made available within easy reach of households.

- **Lack of awareness** about importance of water conservation and usage leads to high water wastage and pollution. **For ex.-** Sewage and wastewater drainage into water bodies.
- **Lack of timely de-silting operations** reduces water storage capacity of traditional and man made water storage bodies.
- Other reason for water shortage are rainfall deficit, policy failures with respect to water resources prioritization, urbanisation, increasing per capita water demand *etc.*

To deal with the above issues following steps need to be taken:

- There is a need for **recycling sewage and household waste water** by setting up water-treatment plants. **For ex.-** Singapore, Israel *etc.* use waste water even for drinking.
- **Increasing awareness among the people** about scarcity of water and the need of conserving it.
- **Traditional water conservation/ harvesting** methods must be revived. **For ex.-** Tamaswada Pattern nallahs treatment in Maharashtra.
- Moreover, **drip irrigation and sprinklers** should be promoted for efficient water usage.
- There is also a need for **upgradation of water service infrastructure** and its proper maintenance.

Thus, there is a need for promoting a decentralised approach, with a key focus on water conservation, source sustainability, storage and reuse wherever possible.

18. RCEP offers the clearest path forward to establish a new network of trade arrangements to increase economic connections between member countries. India, by not joining this network, has missed the opportunity. Critically Examine.

Answer

- Commenced in 2013, the RCEP includes the ASEAN-member states and the six economies with which it has free trade agreements (FTAs) – Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea and New Zealand. Recently, India decided not to join the RCEP as it had reservations with various market access issues.
- Many analysts believe that India should have joined the deal while there are many which hailed the decision of not joining the grouping.

India Missed the Opportunity

- **Economic Powerhouse** - A concluded RCEP will constitute the world's largest trade bloc by both GDP and population, and be the second largest (behind the EU) in terms of share of world trade.
- **Economic Integration** - RCEP would have provided India with an eastern economic bridge and would have helped India's economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region. The momentum from a concluded RCEP could also support India's accession into APEC. **India is likely to face isolation.**
- **Bright Future** - The implications of RCEP's current and expected future size for the regional and global trading architectures are significant. At the regional level, its **developing country-focused model** will likely become the template for the next phase of trade and investment liberalisation.
- **Geopolitical implications** - A concluded RCEP would likely advance its adoption in Southeast Asia by **creating an Indo-Pacific institution in which ASEAN's central position is secured.** Giving up on the RCEP means considerable loss of geopolitical goodwill for India.
- **Strategic Implication** - It gives a message that, on trade, **India is a very difficult partner** and unwilling to go along with the rest of the region on a common agenda. Its trade policy is hardly

complementing of its foreign policy. Not only that, India's **celebrated outreaches like the 'Act East' policy** would take a hit.

- Disengaging from the RCEP would mean **ceding considerable strategic turf to China in the region.**

Not Joining RCEP: Need of the Hour

- **Flooding of Cheap Chinese Goods**- India's trade deficit with China accounts for about 50 percent of the country's total trade deficit. Joining RCEP would have flooded Indian Market with Cheap Chinese goods.
- **High Trade Deficit** - India has trade deficits with 11 of the 15 other RCEP members, many of them sizable. Joining RCEP would have made this deficit unsustainable.
- **Cost Benefit** - As a country with one of the highest average tariff rates on all imports among RCEP members, India would be among those making the largest cuts to get tariffs to zero. It also was not clear whether the benefits of the deal would make up for that cost.
- **Inherent Diversity** - Its members include some of the most advanced members of the OECD, alongside several lesser-developed economies, who naturally have major differences between their economic interests and capacity for trade reform. Members of RCEP would need to **strike a balance** between its **ASEAN-centred institutional form** and its **China/Japan -dominated economic geography.**

Conclusion:

- Joining RCEP would have helped India integrate into sophisticated "**regional production networks**" that make Asia the world's factory.
- However, India had strong reasons such as not getting a balanced and comprehensive deal, safeguarding interests of farmers, domestic industry and small businesses.
- In this context, it can be said that no pact is better than a "bad agreement as embracing the new dogma **of globalisation without a cost-benefit analysis is equally dangerous.**

Extra Mile

- India has decided **not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal** as India had significant issues of **core interest that remained unresolved.**
- The announcement, in this regard, was made at the **2019 RCEP Summit in Bangkok** on November 4, 2019.

Possible Impact:

- **On Indian Government** - The government no longer needs to make difficult concessions on agricultural trade.
- **On Other Members of RCEP** – They will not need to open their home markets to India's thriving, and low-cost, services sector. Other Members will be able to move forward faster with an agreement that was at risk of being jeopardized by India's foot-dragging.
- **On US** - The US, meanwhile, can take satisfaction from the fact that **its key regional ally in New Delhi is remaining outside of Beijing's orbit.** A stronger RCEP that included India would almost certainly have revived politically fraught question of whether Washington should rejoin the rival Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement or TPP.

- **ON RCEP** - As the second largest market in the group, and one of the largest global economies with a robust growth record, India would have been vital in the flourishing of the RCEP through new trade and investment creation.

What Next

- RCEP countries-in their **final declaration-left a window open for India to return**, believing they may be able to convince it on their demands.
- Meanwhile, according to the top Japanese negotiator, **Japan is also not considering signing a Chinese-backed regional trade pact without India**. Japan Seeks to keep India in China-Backed Regional Trade Pact.

RCEP talks: A timeline

Nov 2012
RCEP negotiations launched at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia

Sept 2015
India offers to eliminate tariffs on 42.5% of items from China, and more for ASEAN

2017-18
India improves its offer of eliminating tariffs for about 90% of the items from ASEAN, and over 74% of items from China

2018
Key Central ministries and departments, including Steel, Textiles and Heavy Industry, object to the deal

Nov 2019
India finally says no to RCEP deal to protect "vulnerable" sections

Impressive numbers

The 16 RCEP members together account for **39%** of global GDP, **30%** of global trade, **26%** of global foreign direct investment flows, and **45%** of the total population

19. Examine the role played by over ground workers (OGWs) in assisting terrorist organizations in insurgency affected areas. Discuss measures to neutralize influence of OGWs.

Answer

The police categorizes "**anybody who supports the militants**" as an OGW. Terrorist organisations like Hizbul and LeT have a well-established network of OGWs which is sustaining militancy in Kashmir. For every active militant, there are 10 OGWs lined up by their mentors. Militants act on the advice and orders of their mentors and OGWs.

Role Played By OGW

- **Provides Social base** - OGWs provides safe house, passage etc. for suspected militants. By doing so, it helps militants to establish a connection with locals there by generation sympathies for their activities. E.g. – **Role of Elgar Parishad** in supporting Maoism.
- **Makes militants inconspicuous** - OGW base is the main reason that militants move without getting noticed. Off late, OGWs have become **capable of carrying out small scale strikes** while retaining the capability to mix rapidly with the population.
- **Provides Logistic base** – Recently two OGWs were arrested by J&K police who were illegally transporting arms and ammunition from Punjab to Kashmir. They also carry information by acting as a messenger.
- **Financial Support** – They help militants in mobilizing funds for their activities. They collect funds from sympathizers, carry out disguised trade and indulge in money laundering activities so support terrorist organizations financially. This was one of the reason **India suspended cross border trade with PoK** in April 2019.
- **Helps in Recruitment** – They work towards the development of a negative sentiment in the minds of the so-called grey population or fence sitters in an insurgency affected region.

Measures To Neutralize Influence Of OGWs

- **Control of Foreign Funding** – The government should ensure strict compliance to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010, money-laundering act etc. so as to stop the financial support.
- **Breaking the OGW - Terrorist nexus** by identifying and apprehending the OGWs. Establishing checkpoints at strategic points, strengthening intelligence mechanism etc. can be very helpful in this.

- **Grievance Redressal & Development activities** - The grievances of the people should be addressed in order to halt radicalisation that creates militants and spawns the OGWs. Similarly, the ensuring an inclusive development of the region would generate trust on the government.
- **Categorisation of OGWs** - it is important to categorise the OGWs so that separate response strategies can be made for each one of the categories. For example OGWs for Logistic Support or OGWs managing Funding are easily identifiable and can be caught in the act. On the other hand, OGWs providing ideological support are hard to detect.

Conclusion

- OGWs have always been the mainstay for an insurgency movement and government must formulate **multi-pronged strategy** to neutralize their influence.
- There is definitely a need to **jointly map the OGWs, terrorists and anti-national elements** through a multi-agency effort.
- This will help in **generation of an intelligence picture** which is in sync with ground realities. Also due care must be taken so as to identify anti-national elements and as it has potential to alienate masses.

20. Without India, APEC would not only remain incomplete but also unable to reinvent itself. In this context, it can be said that APEC needs India as much as India needs APEC. Critically discuss.

Context

- The **Chile Government** had **cancelled the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit and the COP25 conference** (UN climate change conference) due to **anti-government protests** in the country.
- APEC Summit was planned for November and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25) was planned for December.

Answer

- APEC was established in 1989 as an intergovernmental platform for 21 Pacific Rim member economies to promote free-trade in the region.
- However, as APEC turns 30 this year, the grouping is facing the heat of unilateralism and protectionism. Competition and divergence in the form of **US-China tensions** was on full display at the 2018 APEC summit
- The current scenario presents the question of the forum's enlargement, with pointed reference to India.

APEC Needs India

- **Economic strength of India** – As the region's third largest and one of the fastest growing major economy, India presents the most promising market in the wider Asia-Pacific. India's burgeoning middle class is estimated to become 450 million in 2030. Also India aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy.
- **Boost to the economic activities** – APEC economies are experiencing sluggish growth. Hence, adding India to APEC would augment regional trade and investment.

- **Labour Supply** - India's labor force, which will be the largest in the world by 2030, will help offset the impact of aging populations and shrinking work forces in APEC economies.
- **Legitimate stakeholder in regional and global governance** – India is second largest democracy in the world and an important player in Indo-pacific arena.

India Needs APEC

- **Strength of the grouping** – The grouping represents more than a third of the world population, 47% of global trade and 60% of world GDP.
- **Aspiration of India** – India aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2024 and requires \$1 trillion for investment in infrastructure. Outside the west Europe, most of the **capital surplus nations** are in Asia Pacific which can quench India's thirst for investment.
- **Natural Corollary to “Act East” Policy** – Indian has already become a member of SCO. Joining APEC is a natural corollary to Act East Policy of India.

Conclusion

- The tangible benefits of Indian membership will materialize in the medium to long term. However, if APEC wants to **remain as relevant** as it was twenty-five years ago and look toward a **new phase of Asia-Pacific economic integration and growth**, including India is the single most consequential step it can take.
- India, on the other hand, will have to ensure economic reforms and openness to qualify for APEC membership.

Extra Mile

What is Chile Unrest

- Chile's protests began in mid-October as a student-led fight **against a 3.7% hike in metro fares**.
- But those demonstrations quickly swelled into a *much broader mutiny against inequality, the cost of living and police repression*.
- On 18 October, President of Chile declared a **state of emergency** after violence broke out on the streets of the capital, Santiago, later declaring the **country “at war” with “evil” delinquents**.

About APEC:

- APEC is an **inter-governmental platform** for **21 Pacific Rim member** economies to promote **free-trade in the Asia-Pacific region**.
- It was **established in 1989** to boost Asia-Pacific economies.
- **Goals** – Resist Protectionist Pressure, Counter Inward Looking Regionalism; Better Ways To Deal With Economic Conflicts

India is an observer of APEC since 2011 and has applied for its membership.

PRELIMS MCQS

1. ISRO has recently launched Cartosat-3. Consider the following about Cartosats -
 1. Cartosat-3 will have the highest ground resolution of all civil remote sensing satellites.
 2. Only government and government authorised agencies have access to Cartosat images.
 3. Cartosat-1 was the first Indian remote sensing satellite capable of taking three-dimensional images

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation:

- ISRO has recently launched Cartosat-3 onboard PSLV-C47. The main purpose of the mission is to place 1,625-kg Cartosat-3 satellite, the third generation of Earth-observation remote sensing satellites that ISRO has been launching and using since 1988.
- The Cartosat-3 was accompanied by thirteen commercial nano satellites of two U.S. customers that were the secondary payloads.

Cartosats

- The Cartosat satellites are used mainly for large-scale mapping of the Earth through high-resolution cameras. A key feature of the Cartosats is that they help to detect changes in natural geographical or man-made features. Their cameras can 'look back and forth' in an angle to generate continuous spot images.
- Cartosat satellites come back to the same place after every few months, so that they are able to capture the change that is happening on the ground.

Earth Observation Satellites

- The Earth-observation satellites also include the Resourcesat and RISAT series, the Oceansat series and many more. These satellites now focus on generating theme-based user-friendly data that are in great demand.
- The Resourcesat and RISAT series of satellites, provide imageries and data that are needed for land and water resources applications.
- The Oceansat series and the SARAL satellite, produce data on the oceans, while satellites like INSAT 3D, INSAT-VRR or Megha Tropiques study the atmosphere.
- Data from Earth-observation satellites are in great demand, both from government agencies.

Earlier Cartosats

So far, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has orbited eight Cartosats since May 2005.

Mapping the earth

Cartosat-3 is a third generation earth observation satellite with high resolution imaging capability. A look at some of its features



Uses: Large scale urban planning, rural resource and infrastructure development, coastal land use and land cover

Overall mass: 1,625 kg

Mission life: 5 years

Minute details: The satellite will be able to see objects that are just **25 cm** from its orbital perch around 500 km away

- The previous best view from a Cartosat was 65 cm
- Only government or government -authorised agencies can access images below a resolution of 1 m

A view of Cartosat-3 at the Assembly Complex at Sriharikota. • PTI

A. Cartosat-1

- Cartosat-1, launched in May 2005, was the first Indian remote sensing satellite capable of taking three-dimensional images.
- With a resolution of 2.5 metres, it could identify a car on the ground from space, Cartosat-1 helped in creating new digital maps of over 150 towns and cities in the country at a scale of 1:10,000. Earlier maps were of a scale of 1:50,000 or even lower.

B. Cartosat-2 series

- The first of the Cartosat-2 series was launched in 2007 and these have been substantially advanced versions of Cartosat-1. Seven of them are in orbit, each with the capability of taking images of resolution better than 1 metre.
- The previous best view from a Cartosat was 65 cm, as put in the last four satellites in the Cartosat-2 series - 2C, 2D, 2E and 2F. However, an existing policy allows only government and government authorised agencies to access ISRO's high-resolution imageries below a resolution of 1 metre.

C. Cartosat 3

- Many new technologies have been built in, such as a highly agile or flexible camera; high-speed data transmission, advanced computer system and new power electronics.
- It ushers in the third generation of high-resolution 'optical imaging' satellites that enable precise cartographic or mapping activities, apart from their unstated military use.
- It will have the 'sharpest eye' of civil remote sensing satellites in the world. One of Cartosat-3's cameras offers a ground resolution of 25 cm — this means it can pick up an object of a minimum of that size from a height of around 500 km. Currently, WorldView-3, a satellite owned by U.S. company Maxar, has the best ground resolution of 31 cm.

Application of Cartosats

- These satellites are used for applications like 3-D mapping, disaster management, agriculture management and recording of changes in land use.
- They are also used for urban and rural infrastructure planning, utility management such as monitoring road networks, water grids or distribution, creation of land use maps and even border surveillance.
- While the ISRO does not discuss outside its mandate, it is frequently heard that imageries from Cartosat-2 series were used to plan and execute military operations.
- For example, the trans-border 'surgical strikes' across the Line of Control with Pakistan in September 2016 and in Manipur at the border with Myanmar in June 2015.

2. Which of the following are forms of cyberattacks?

1. Phishing attack
2. Malware attack
3. Trojan Horse
4. SQL injection

Choose the correct option using the codes below:

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) recently confirmed that malware was detected at state-run NPCIL's Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) in September.
- Investigations were carried out by the Computer & Information Security Advisory Group (CISAG) – DAE along with the national agency, Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In).
- The investigation concluded that the malware infection was limited to the administrative network of KKNPP. The affected system contains data related to day to day administrative functions.
- The malware infection was not able to get access to the controls of the Nuclear Power Plant. As plant control and instrumentation systems are not connected to any external network such as Intranet, Internet and administrative system.

Significance Of The Attack

- The cyberattacks assume importance given the increased state of hostilities in the Indian subcontinent and India's ambitious nuclear plans that include constructing a dozen new nuclear power reactors across the country, with a total power-generation capacity of 9,000 MW.
- While nine reactors totalling 6,700 MW are under construction, the Indian govt has also given in-principle approval for setting up nuclear power capacities totalling 25,248 MW at Jaitapur (Maharashtra), Kowada (Andhra), Mithi Viridi (Gujarat), Haripur (West Bengal), & Bhimpur (MP).
- The detection of malware comes against the backdrop of India's power sector facing cyberattacks, with at least 30 events reported daily.
- There are growing concerns that the country's power infrastructure could be the next target of terrorists looking to cripple its economy.
- The issue has assumed greater importance as India now has an integrated national power grid, with south India joining the national electricity grid in January 2014.

Types of Cyberattacks

- **Phishing** is a type of social engineering usually employed to steal user data such as credit card numbers and login credentials. It happens when an attacker, posing as a trusted individual, tricks the victim to open a text message, email, or instant message. The victim is then deceived to open a malicious link that can cause the freezing of a system as part of a ransomware attack, revealing sensitive information, or installation of malware
- **Malware** is a code that is made to stealthily affect a compromised computer system without the consent of the user. This broad definition includes many particular types of malevolent software (malware) such as spyware, ransomware, command, and control.
- A **Trojan horse** is a malicious software program that misrepresents itself to appear useful. They spread by looking like routine software and persuading a victim to install. Trojans are considered among the most dangerous type of all malware, as they are often designed to steal financial information.
- **SQL injection**, is a kind of attack that employs malicious code to manipulate backend databases to access information that was not intended for display.

NPCIL

- NPCIL is an Indian public sector undertaking wholly owned by Union Govt and is responsible for generation of nuclear power for electricity. It is administered by Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).

- It was created in 1987 under the Companies Act 1956, with the objective of undertaking the design, construction, operation and maintenance of the atomic power stations for generation of electricity in pursuance of the schemes and programmes of the government under the provision of the Atomic Energy Act 1962.
 - NPCIL was the sole body responsible for constructing and operating India's commercial nuclear power plants till setting up of BHAVINI Vidyut Nigam in 2003.
 - It runs India's fleet of 22 commercial nuclear power reactors with an installed capacity of 6,780 megawatts (MW).
- 3. Consider the following statements regarding Arrokoth**
- 1. Ultima Thule has been renamed as Arrokoth**
 - 2. Arrokoth was discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope**
 - 3. Arrokoth is located in the Kuiper Belt**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The farthest cosmic body ever visited by a spacecraft, Ultima Thule has been renamed by NASA as Arrokoth. It was discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope in 2014 and NASA's New Horizon spacecraft sped past the object in January this year.
- The body is 6.6 billion km from Earth in the Kuiper Belt beyond the orbit of Neptune, and moves in a slow orbit around the Sun, once every 297 years.
- Arrokoth is an example of a "cold classical object" which has remained undisturbed since the solar system formed some 4.5 billion years ago.
- Provisionally named 2014 MU69 based on the year of its discovery, it was given the nickname 'Ultima Thule' last year following public suggestions made to NASA. Ultima Thule is a Latin expression that means "beyond Thule (borders of the known world)" and, as such, is used to denote a mythical, distant and unknown land.
- However, it is also associated with controversy, which is the reason the name has been changed. The name was adopted by Nazi Party forerunners and was being used by "modern so called alt-right groups".
- Arrokoth is the term for "sky" in the Native American languages Powhatan and Algonquian. NASA took consent from Powhatan representatives and proposed the name to the International Astronomical Union and Minor Planets Centre, the authority responsible for naming objects that lie in the Kuiper Belt. The Belt consists of a mass of icy objects that include Pluto, the dwarf planet.
- NASA's New Horizons spacecraft sped past the object in January this year. The New Horizons spacecraft is now at the outer edges of the Kuiper Belt that extends from the orbit of Neptune, and will join Voyager 1 and 2 beyond the Sun's sphere of influence and into interstellar space.

4. Consider the following statements regarding Bodos

1. Bodo language is included in the Eighth schedule of the Constitution.
2. Bodo language is the official language of the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts
3. Bodo Territorial Area District was created with the signing of Assam Accord

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: A

Explanation:

- The central government recently extended the ban on the Assam-based insurgent group National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) by five more years.
- The Home Ministry has also declared the NDFB along with all its groups, factions, and front organisations as an “unlawful association” under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- It did so for its involvement in a series of violent activities including killings and extortion, and for joining hands with anti-India forces.

Who Are Bodos

- The Bodos are an ethnolinguistic group in the state of Assam. They are a part of the greater Bodo-Kachari family of ethnolinguistic groups and are spread across north-eastern India and clustered strongly in Assam, along the eastern Duars.
- Bodos are the single largest tribal community in Assam, making up over 5-6 per cent of the state’s population. They have controlled large parts of Assam in the past.
- The Bodo people speak the Bodo language, a Tibeto-Burman language recognized as one of twenty-two scheduled languages in the Indian Constitution.
- The four districts in Assam — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang — that constitute the Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD), are home to several ethnic groups. The territory came into existence under the Bodoland Territorial Council Accord in February 2003.

**The Bodoland Dispute**

- The Bodos have had a long history of separatist demands, marked by armed struggle. In 1966-67, the demand for a separate state called Bodoland was raised under the banner of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), a political outfit.
- In 1987, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) renewed the demand. “Divide Assam fifty-fifty”, was a call given by the ABSU’s then leader, Upendra Nath Brahma. The unrest was a fallout of the Assam Movement (1979-85), which culminated into the Assam Accord.

- The Assam Accord addressed the demands of protection and safeguards for the “Assamese people”. This led the Bodos to launch a movement to protect their own identity.

NDFB

- Alongside political movements, armed groups have also sought to create a separate Bodo state. In 1986, the prominent group Bodo Security Force (BdSF) was formed by Ranjan Daimary.
- The BdSF subsequently renamed itself as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), an organisation that is known to be involved in attacks, killings, and extortions.
- In the 1990s, Indian security forces launched extensive operations against the group, causing the latter to flee to bordering Bhutan. In Bhutan, the group faced stiff counter-insurgency operations by the Indian Army and the Royal Bhutan Army in the early 2000s.

NDFB Factions

- In October 2008, bomb attacks in Assam carried out by the NDFB killed 90 people. After the blasts, the NDFB was divided into two factions — the NDFB (P), led by Gobinda Basumatary, and the NDFB (R), led by Ranjan Daimary. The NDFB (P) started talks with the central government in 2009.
- In 2010, Daimary was arrested and handed over to India by Bangladesh. Post which, this faction too began peace talks with the government.
- Later, in 2012 there was a split in NDFB (R), which led to the creation of NDFB (S), which has been against holding talks with the government.

5. Bureau of Indian Standards has released a report based on sample tests of water done in 21 big cities of the country. Consider the following statements regarding BIS and the study.

- 1. BIS is the National Standards Body of India**
- 2. BIS standard is not mandatory for public agencies which supply and distribute piped water.**
- 3. As per the study, tap water in Chennai is the safest for drinking water**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: A

Explanation:

- Bureau of Indian Standards has released a report based on sample tests of water done in 21 big cities of the country. BIS decided to undertake a study of the quality of piped drinking water being supplied in the country in view of the objectives of the Jal Jeevan Mission.
- Under its flagship **Jal Jeevan Mission**, the Centre aims to provide safe piped water to all households by 2024. However, the study showed that even in urban areas, which are connected to the piped water network, there is no guarantee that the water is safe for consumption.
- Samples have undergone physical and organoleptic tests (which identify odour, turbidity and pH levels), chemical tests (which identify toxic substances, pesticide residue and excess metals) and

- virological, bacteriological and biological tests (which identify harmful organisms and disease carriers).

Findings Of The Study

- Tap water in Mumbai is the safest for drinking while Delhi's water is the worst among 21 big cities. In fact, Mumbai is the only city where all samples of tap water met all the tested parameters under the Indian Standard 10500:2012 (specification for drinking water) so far.
- According to the test findings, only one of the samples in Hyderabad and Bhubaneswar failed and the two cities were ranked second in the list followed by Ranchi and Raipur.
- 15 out of 21 cities, (including Chandigarh, Gandhinagar, Patna, Bengaluru, Jammu, Lucknow, Chennai and Dehradun) failed to meet one or more safety parameters, which is of great concern.
- In most cases, samples across cities failed on parameters of total dissolved solids (TDS), turbidity, total hardness, total alkalinity, minerals and metals, and presence of coliform and E Coli, which can cause severe illness.
- The report has exposed the failure of water supplying agencies across cities to provide safe drinking water—a basic right for living.

Way Ahead

- While it is mandatory for bottled water manufacturers to meet quality standards, the BIS standard is voluntary for the public agencies which supply and distribute piped water.
- The Ministry will be writing to all State governments to develop a consensus on making the standard mandatory as stringent action cannot be taken unless the standard becomes mandatory.
- Further, BIS officials will soon hold meetings with public health departments, municipal corporations and see how test facilities can be strengthened there, which is key to ensure supply of safe drinking water.

Bureau of Indian Standards

- 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 which came into effect in December 1986.
- The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.

About The Mission

- The Mission was launched in **August 2019** with main objective of providing **piped water supply (Har Ghar Jal)** to all **rural and urban households by 2024**. About **14.60 crores** rural households of the country will be provided with providing Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs).
- Further, the mission also aims to **create local infrastructure** for rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household waste water for reuse in agriculture.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission also is set to be based on various **water conservation efforts** like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater for agriculture and source sustainability.
- The Mission also aim to converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of **sustainable water supply management** across the country.
- Thus, Jal Jeevan Mission focus on **integrated demand and supply management** of water at the local level.
- **Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation** is the implementing Department for the mission. Moreover, the provisional cost estimate for this mission is Rs. 3.60 lakh Crores.

- The organisation was formerly the Indian Standards Institution (ISI), which was registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.

6. Which of the following States in India follow have an Inner Line Permit System?

1. Arunachal Pradesh
2. Assam
3. Mizoram
4. Nagaland

Select the correct option?

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

- In a bid to protect the interest of tribal citizens, the Meghalaya cabinet has approved the amendment to Meghalaya Residents, Safety and Security Act, 2016, that seeks mandatory registration of outsiders for entering the State.
- As per the amendment, any person who is not a resident of Meghalaya and intends to stay more than 24 hours in the State will have to furnish a document to the government. However, Employees of the Centre, State and District Councils are exempted from the purview of the Act.

Background

- Following the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, there has been an increasing demand to enhance vigil against influx of non-indigenous people in the hill state.
- Furthermore, with the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in the offing there have been concerns that it might further lead an increase in the influx. The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill aims to make it easier for non-Muslim refugees from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to obtain Indian citizenship.
- To deal with such an influx three north eastern states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram already have a system of Inner Line Permit.

Inner Line Permit

- It is a document that allows an Indian citizen to visit or stay in a state that is protected under the ILP system. It states the dates of travel and also specifies the particular areas in the state which the ILP holder can travel to.
- No Indian citizen can visit any of these states unless he or she belongs to that state, nor can he or she overstay beyond the period specified in the ILP.
- The concept comes from the colonial era. Under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873, the British framed regulations restricting the entry and regulating the stay of outsiders in designated areas.
- This was to protect the Crown's own commercial interests by preventing "British subjects" (Indians) from trading within these regions.

- In 1950, the Indian government replaced “British subjects” with “Citizen of India”. This was to address local concerns about protecting the interests of the indigenous people from outsiders belonging to other Indian states.
- Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland are not among those drastically affected by migration from Bangladesh. The three states that have seen the highest migration, however, are Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, none of which has an ILP system.

Similar Provisions Evolving In Other North Eastern States

- Demands for an ILP system have been made in various Northeastern states. The North East Students’ Organisation, an umbrella body of all powerful students’ bodies of the regions, has been demanding for overall implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in all NE states.
- Last year, the Manipur People Bill, 2018 was passed unanimously by the state Assembly and now is said to be awaiting Presidential assent. The Bill puts several regulations on ‘outsiders’ or ‘non-Manipuri people’ in the state.
- The Bill had undergone series of negotiations regarding defining the “Manipuri” people, after which a consensus was reached regarding 1951 as cut-off year for the definition.
- In Assam too, there have been demands by certain sections for the introduction of ILP. Groups like the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad, a youth organisation, has been organising protest demonstrations seeking ILP throughout the state.

7. Consider the following about Pneumonia

- 1. Pneumonia is a form of respiratory infection that affects the lungs**
- 2. Pneumonia can be caused by Bacteria, Virus and Fungi.**
- 3. Pneumonia is a contagious disease**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

- Every year, November 12 is observed as World Pneumonia Day to raise awareness and to advocate for global action to protect against, help prevent, and effectively treat this deadly illness.
- Pneumonia is a form of respiratory infection that affects the lungs. A contagious disease, it is caused by bacteria, viruses or fungi, and leaves children fighting for breath as their lungs fill with pus and fluid.
- Globally, pneumonia claimed lives of more than 800,000 children under the age of five last year — or one child every 39 seconds. More children under the age of five died from the disease in 2018 than from any other. About 437,000 children under five died due to diarrhoea and 272,000 due to malaria.
- According to a report by UN, India had the second-highest number of deaths of children under the age of five in 2018 due to pneumonia. The report said just five countries were responsible for more

than half of child pneumonia deaths: Nigeria (162,000), India (127,000), Pakistan (58,000), the Democratic Republic of Congo (40,000) and Ethiopia (32,000).

- This “forgotten epidemic” is now responsible for 15% of deaths in children under the age of five, and yet, just 3% of global infectious disease research spending is allocated to the disease.
- While the disease can be prevented with vaccines, and easily treated with low-cost antibiotics if properly diagnosed, yet tens of millions of children are still going unvaccinated — and one in three with symptoms do not receive essential medical care.
- In addition, the strong link between child pneumonia deaths and poverty is undeniable. Lack of access to drinking water, inadequate health care, and the burden of undernutrition and indoor air pollution are major drivers of vulnerability to the disease. Around half of all pneumonia-related deaths are associated with air pollution.
- Strong global commitment and increased investments are critical to the fight against this disease. Only through cost-effective protective, preventative and treatment interventions delivered to where children are will we be able to truly save millions of lives.

8. Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has recently launched the Skills Build Platform with which Organization?

- a) IBM
- b) Infosys
- c) Google
- d) Wipro

Answer: A

Explanation:

- Directorate General of Training (DGT), under the aegis of Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), has announced the launch of **Skills Build Platform** in collaboration with IBM.
- This initiative is part of IBM’s global commitment to create a job-ready workforce and to build the next generation of skills needed for new collar careers.
- IBM had joined hands with Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in early 2018 to launch a first-of-its kind New Collar Curriculum.
- Post the successful completion of the course, in September 2019, 19 students were offered a five month paid internship at IBM.

Details Of The Platform

- As part of the programme, a two-year advanced diploma in IT, networking and cloud computing, co-created and designed by IBM, will be offered at the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) & National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs).
- The platform will be extended to train ITI & NSTI faculty on building skills in Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- Skills Build will offer digital learning content from IBM and partners such as CodeDoor, Coopacademy and Skillsoft.
- Students will also receive recommendations on role-based education for specific jobs that include technical and professional learning.

9. Consider the following statements regarding International Energy Agency (IEA)

1. It is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
2. IEA's mandate includes focus on Energy Security, Economic Development, and Environmental Protection
3. Only the OECD member states can become members of the IEA.
4. World Energy Outlook is released by IEA.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation:

- IEA has released World Energy Outlook 2019. It is the IEA's flagship publication, widely recognised as the most authoritative source for global energy projections & analysis.
- It represents the leading source for medium to long-term energy market projections, extensive statistics, analysis and advice for both governments and the energy business.

Highlights Related To India

- **Oil Outlook**
 - India's net oil import requirements will more than double between 2018 and 2040 and its level of import dependency will reach roughly 90 per cent making it one of the world's highest importer.
 - This means the Indian economy will continue to depend in the near term on oil or fossil fuels in spite of the government's stress on renewable energy and electric vehicles.
 - The report says a third of the growth in India's oil will come from trucks. Another quarter will come from passenger cars, with the Indian car fleet growing by a factor of seven between now and 2040.
- **Renewable Energy**
 - India's renewable power investment has doubled over the past five years, reaching nearly \$20 billion in 2018, and now exceeds that for coal power.
 - Ambitious targets, supportive policies with competitive bidding and falling costs have lowered risks for investors and led to reductions in power purchasing tariffs for utility-scale solar PV and wind.
- **Gas Outlook**
 - India will be one of the major drivers for the gas demand in next 20 years, which will put downward pressure on LNG prices.
 - However, in India, the prospects for natural gas are limited by supply constraints and affordability issues, as well as by the lack of infrastructure.

Global Findings

- The IEA outlook sees primary energy demand growing by a quarter by 2040, with renewable energy accounting for half of the rise and gas for 35%.
- On global stage, the Outlook sees the oil trade becoming increasingly centred on Asia, with China soon overtaking the European Union as world's largest oil importer and holding that position to 2040.
- The Outlook also sees the influence of traditional players on the oil market waning, with the US output pushing down the share of OPEC countries and Russia in total oil production.

- *This share drops to 47% in 2030, from 55% in the mid-2000s, implying that efforts to manage conditions in the oil market could face strong headwinds.*
- The demand for natural gas has been growing fast as a fuel for industry and (in China) for residential consumers. This has led to a worldwide wave of investment in new LNG supply and pipeline connections.

Heavy Reliability from Middle East

- The outlook states that whichever pathway the energy system follows, the world still relies heavily on oil supply from the Middle East. The region remains by far the largest net provider of oil to world markets, as well as an important exporter of LNG (liquefied natural gas).
- This means that one of the world's busiest trade routes, the Strait of Hormuz, retains its position as a crucial artery for global energy trade, especially for Asian countries such as China, India, Japan and Korea that rely heavily on imported fuel.

International Energy Agency

- The International Energy Agency is a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organization established in the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1974 in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
- The IEA was initially dedicated to responding to physical disruptions in supply of oil, as well as serving as an information source on statistics about the international oil market and other energy sectors.
- The Agency's mandate has broadened to focus on the "**3Es**" of effectual energy policy: *energy security, economic development, and environmental protection*.
- It has a broad role in promoting alternate energy sources (including renewable energy), rational energy policies, and multinational energy technology co-operation.
- Only the OECD member states can become members of the IEA. Except for Chile, Iceland, Israel, and Slovenia, all OECD member states are members of the IEA.

10. Consider the following statements regarding Harmonised System

- 1. It is a six-digit identification code developed by the World Customs Organization (WCO).**
- 2. It helps in harmonising customs and trade procedures**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Ministry of Commerce and Industry has allocated a separate Harmonised System (HS) code for Khadi.
- The Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System generally referred to as Harmonised System, or HS, is a six-digit identification code developed by World Customs Organization (WCO). Called the "universal economic language" for goods, it is a multipurpose international product nomenclature.
- The code follows from the **Kyoto Convention of 1974** and facilitates the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures.

- Over 200 countries use the system as a basis for their customs tariffs, gathering international trade statistics, making trade policies, and for monitoring goods. The system helps in harmonising of customs and trade procedures, thus reducing costs in international trade.
- According to the WCO website, the system currently comprises of around 5,000 commodity groups, each identified by a unique six-digit code that has numbers arranged in a legal and logical structure, with well-defined rules to achieve uniform classification.
- Of the six digits, the first two denote the HS Chapter, the next two give the HS heading, and the last two give the HS subheading.
- The HS code for pineapple, for example, is 0804.30, which means it belongs to Chapter 08 (Edible fruit & nuts, peel of citrus/melons), Heading 04 (Dates, figs, pineapples, avocados, etc. fresh or dried), and Subheading 30 (Pineapples).

Impact Of The Move

- In 2006, the government had given the MSME-controlled Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), the Export Promotion Council Status (EPCS). Yet, the absence of a separate HS code hindered Khadi from achieving its full potential, as its exports were difficult to categorise and calculate.
- As Khadi did not have its exclusive HS code all the data regarding export of this signature fabric used to come as a normal fabric under the textile head.
- The HS Code will help to keep a constant eye not only on the export figures, but it will also help in planning export strategies and give a boost to Khadi exports in coming years.

About WCO

- World Customs Organization (WCO), intergovernmental organization established as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) in 1952 to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of customs administrations worldwide. HQ – Brussels.
- It was renamed the World Customs Organization in 1994.
- The WCO maintains the **international Harmonized System** (HS) goods nomenclature, and administers the technical aspects of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreements on Customs Valuation and Rules of Origin.

11. Coalbed Methane can be used in which of the following?

1. **Cement production**
2. **Feedstock for fertilisers**
3. **Power generation**
4. **Fuel in Cars**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

The Ministry of Coal has asked the state-run coal miner Coal India Limited (CIL) to produce 2 MMSCB (million metric standard cubic metres) per day of coalbed methane (CBM) gas in the next 2 to 3 years. CIL accounts for over 80 per cent of India's domestic coal output.

Coalbed Methane

- CBM, like shale gas, is extracted from what are known as unconventional gas reservoirs — where gas is extracted directly from the rock that is the source of the gas (shale in case of shale gas and coal in case of CBM).
- The methane is held underground within the coal and is extracted by drilling into the coal seam and removing the groundwater. The resulting drop in pressure causes the methane to be released from the coal.

Distribution of CBM in India

- India has the fifth-largest coal reserves in the world. According to the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, India's CBM resources are estimated at around 92 trillion cubic feet (TCF), or 2,600 billion cubic metres (BCM).
- The country's coal and CBM reserves are found in 12 states of India, with the Gondwana sediments of eastern India holding the bulk. The Damodar Koel valley and Son valley are prospective areas for CBM development.
- CBM projects exist in the Raniganj coalfield, the Parbatpur block in Jharia coalfield and the East and West Bokaro coalfields.

Applications of CBM

- CBM has been looked at as a clean alternative fuel with significant prospects.
- According to the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute (CMPDI), CBM can be used for power generation, as compressed natural gas (CNG) auto fuel and as feedstock for fertilisers.
- It can also be used in industries in cement production, rolling mills, steel plant and for methanol production.

12. RBI has recently announced guidelines on compensation in Banks which would be applicable from April 2020. Consider the following regarding the guidelines

1. Banks can recover past bonuses if the executive's actions result in losses for the bank.
2. At least half the compensation of the CEO and whole-time directors would be variable pay.
3. The guidelines are applicable to small finance banks and payment banks.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has told private banks to raise the variable portion of remuneration to at least half of the total for their chief executives. This is being done so that the top management rewards reflect the '**pay for performance**' principles.
- The new guidelines announced by the central bank will be effective from April 1, 2020. These guidelines apply to private sector banks, local area banks, small finance banks and payment banks. They will also apply to multinational banks that have incorporated locally as wholly owned subsidiaries.

Background

- The compensation practices were one of the important factors which contributed to the global financial crisis in 2008. Employees were often rewarded for increasing short-term profit without adequate recognition of the risks and long-term consequences that their activities posed to the organisations.
- According to RBI, it was these perverse incentives that amplified excessive risk-taking that severely threatened the global financial system.
- The current revision takes place for the first time after 2012 when the central bank had capped variable pay at 70% of the fixed pay in a year.

New Rules**A. Variable pay**

- A substantial proportion of compensation i.e., at least 50%, should be variable and paid on the basis of individual, business-unit and firm-wide measures that adequately measure performance. At higher levels of responsibility, the proportion of variable pay will be higher, with a limit of 300% of the fixed pay.
- If the variable pay is up to 200% of the fixed pay, at least 50% of it must be non-cash, and if the variable pay is above 200%, 67% of it should be paid via non-cash instruments.
- In order for incentive-based remuneration to work, the variable part of remuneration should be truly and effectively variable, and can even be reduced to zero in line with the symmetry principle.

B. Bonus Rules

- The RBI said guaranteed bonus is not consistent with sound risk management or the 'pay for performance' principles and should not be part of the compensation plan. Therefore, guaranteed bonus should only occur in the context of hiring new staff as joining/sign-on bonus and be limited to the first year.
- If bonuses are paid in cash, at least half of the cash bonus should be deferred if the total amount is over Rs 25 lakh.
- In addition to deferring the bonuses, RBI has asked banks to have 'clawback' clauses which enable them to recover past bonuses if the executive's actions result in losses for the bank.

C. Whole Time Directors And Material Risk Takers

- Besides chief executives, the restriction on salaries will apply to senior executives, including whole-time directors, and other employees who are risk-takers such as bond traders.
- For whole-time directors and material risk takers, payment of at least 60% of the total variable pay must be deferred for a minimum of three years, subject to clawback arrangements.

D. Payment Modes

- According to the regulator, variable pay can be in the form of share-linked instruments, or a mix of cash and share-linked instruments.
- There should be a proper balance between the cash and share-linked components in the variable pay. Only in cases where the compensation by way of share-linked instruments is not permitted by law/regulations, the entire variable pay can be in cash.
- All the fixed items of compensation, including perquisites and perquisites that are reimbursable, will be treated as part of fixed pay.
- Further, contributions toward superannuation or retirement benefits will be treated as part of fixed pay.

13. Consider the following statements regarding Deposit Insurance

1. **The premium for deposit insurance is borne by the banks.**
2. **Deposit Insurance is provided only in public sector banks.**

3. Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is a fully owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation:

With the failure of the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank reigniting the debate on the low level of insurance for deposits held by customers in banks in India, the central government now plans to raise the cover. A legislation in this regard is likely to be introduced in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

Deposit Insurance

- Currently, in the unlikely event of a bank going bust in India, a depositor has **claim to a maximum of Rs 1 lakh per account** as insurance cover — even if the deposit in their account far exceeds Rs 1 lakh. This amount is termed ‘deposit insurance’. Depositors holding more than Rs 1 lakh in their account have no legal remedy in case of the collapse of the bank.
- The deposit insurance scheme **covers all banks** operating in India including private sector, co-operative, regional rural banks, local area banks and even branches of foreign banks in India. There are **some exemptions** like deposits of foreign governments, deposits of central/state governments and inter-bank deposits.
- This deposit guarantee can be released only if the bank gets closed. It cannot be released if the bank is a going concern.

Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC)

- The cover of Rs 1 lakh per depositor is provided by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), a fully owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India.
- DICGC last revised the deposit insurance cover to Rs 1 lakh in 1993 — raising it from Rs 30,000, which had been the cover from 1980 onward.
- DICGC charges 10 paise per Rs 100 of deposits held by a bank. The premium paid by the insured banks to the Corporation is required to be borne by the banks, and not be passed on to depositors.
- Over the years, the level of insured deposits as a percentage of assessable deposits has declined from a high of 60.5% in 2007-08 to 28.1% in 2018-19.

14. Which of the following is/are the discretionary powers of Governor?

1. Can appoint anybody as chief minister if there is no political party with a clear-cut majority in the assembly.
2. Can refuse to sign to an ordinary bill passed by the state legislature.
3. Can reserve a bill passed by the state legislature for president’s assent.
4. Can seek information from the chief minister with regard to the administrative and legislative matters of the state.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- a) 1, 3 and 4

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

The Governor enjoys two types of discretion one being **constitutional discretion and other being situational discretion**. The Governors of states can act at their constitutional discretion in the following instances such as: 1. When they have to reserve the bill for the consideration of the President of India, Governors can decide on their own without the advice of the Council of Ministers. 2. When he has to recommend for the President's rule in the state, he can act at his own discretion.

Further, the Governors of states can act at their **situational discretion** in the following instances: 1. When he has to appoint a Chief Minister after no party has a clear majority in the election or when the incumbent dies in the office. 2. When he dismisses the council of ministers on an inability to prove confidence in the state legislative assembly.

- 15. Nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile named Shaheen-I belongs to -----**
- a) Pakistan
 - b) Iran
 - c) Saudi Arabia
 - d) Oman

Answer: A

Explanation

- **Pakistan** has successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile.
- It is a land based **supersonic short-range ballistic missile**. It can strike targets up to 650 km, bringing many Indian cities under its range.
- This missile was first tested in April 1999.

- 16. Which of the following countries has become the first South Asian nation to criminalise several offences related to match-fixing?**
- 1. Bangladesh
 - 2. Pakistan
 - 3. India
 - 4. Sri Lanka

Answer: D

Explanation

- Sri Lankan Parliament has passed a bill labelled "**Prevention of Offences Related to Sports**".
- With this, **Sri Lanka** has become the **first South Asian nation** to criminalise several offences related to match-fixing.

Key Highlights:

- The legislation **covers all sports** and has stringent provisions for offenses related to corruption in sports.
- If a person is found guilty of committing an offence related to corruption in sports, then he may find himself jailed for a term up to 10 years and will be required to pay various fines.
- The bill also criminalises "**acts of omission**", which includes failure to report corrupt approaches.
- The legislation not only seeks to punish any person related to a sport who is directly involved in fixing, but also those who provide inside information.
- Curators who prepare surfaces to suit betting operators or the match officials who deliberately misapply the rules for money can also face a jail term if found guilty.

Note: Recently, Bangladesh's all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was handed a two-year ban, with one year being suspended for not reporting a suspected match-fixing offer to the ICC's Anti-Corruption Unit.

17. 'Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) – 2019' is a biggest naval exercise between

1. India & Bangladesh
2. USA & Bangladesh
3. India & Myanmar
4. USA & Japan

Answer: B

Explanation

- The second phase of the biggest **US- Bangladesh** Navy exercise named '**Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT)- 2019**' was conducted in Chattogram, Bangladesh.
- It is yearly exercise between the two countries in the Bay of Bengal. The **first edition** of exercise was held in **2011**.
- The exercise provides an opportunity to gain a better understanding of operational activities of the Navies of two countries and to get acquainted with advanced technology through various theoretical and practical training.

18. Consider the following statements regarding the New Colombo Plan Mobility Program:

1. It is a signature initiative of the Sri Lankan Government.
2. Under this programme, the government is trying to revamp the urban transportation system.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation

- As part of the **2020 New Colombo Plan Mobility Programme**, **Government of Australia** will support 11,196 students from 40 Australian universities to participate in projects in 36 locations across the Indo-Pacific.
- The New Colombo Plan Mobility Program **provides funding to Australian universities** and consortia to **support Australian undergraduate students** to participate in semester-based or short-term study, internships, mentorships, practicums and research in 40 host locations across the Indo-Pacific region.
- The Mobility Program is open to Australian university undergraduates aged 18 to 28, with capacity to include some students over 28.
- The programme provides Australian University students the opportunities to **gain cross-cultural awareness and experiences** that are vital to today's globally connected workforce.

19. Consider the following statements regarding Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO):

- 1. It is an agency that works directly under PMO.**
- 2. It is headquartered in Hyderabad.**

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- 1 Only**
- 2 Only**
- Both 1 and 2**
- Neither 1 nor 2**

Answer: D

Explanation

- The DRDO Chief (G Sateesh Reddy) has announced that the organization is planning to **increase the range** of ASTRA air-to-air missiles.
- DRDO is confident of extending the **range to nearly double of its existing range**, making it the most lethal BVR (Beyond Visual Range) missile.

About DRDO

- DRDO is an agency under the **Ministry of Defence**. It is headquartered in **New Delhi**.
- Its vision is to empower India with cutting-edge defence technologies.
- It was formed in 1958 from the amalgamation of the then already functioning **Technical Development Establishment (TDEs)** of the Indian Army and the **Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP)** with the **Defence Science Organisation (DSO)**.

About Astra

- Astra is an all weather beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile developed by DRDO. It is the **first air-to-air missile** developed by India.

- Currently, it can engage both **short-range targets** at a distance of 20 km and **long-range targets** up to a distance of 80–110 km.
- It has been integrated with **Indian Air Force's Sukhoi Su-30MKI**.

20. Consider the following pairs:

Name of Exercise	Participating Countries
1. Roar of the Sea	- India & Qatar
2. Tiger Triumph	- India & Bangladesh
3. Samudra Shakti	- India & Vietnam
4. Dustlik	- India & Kazakhstan

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

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

Answer: A

Explanation

Roar of the Sea:

- A bilateral maritime exercise called **Zair-al-Bahr or Roar of the Sea** was conducted between **India and Qatar**.
- This was the **first bilateral naval exercise** between **India and Gulf country Qatar**.
- Purpose - To promote interoperability between the navies of the two countries.

Tiger Triumph:

- Indian and US armed forces conducted the **inaugural tri-services exercise 'Tiger Triumph'** at **Visakhapatnam and Kakinada** in Andhra Pradesh.
- It was held along eastern coast in Bay of Bengal under the aegis of headquarters of Integrated Defence Staff.
- This was only the **second time that India** had conducted a tri-service exercise with a foreign country. Earlier, it had conducted similar **tri-service exercise 'Indra wargames'** with **Russia at Vladivostok** in 2017.

Samudra Shakti:

- **India and Indonesia** carried out the bilateral **maritime exercise "Samudra Shakti"** in the Bay of Bengal.
- This was the **second edition** of India - Indonesia Bilateral Naval Exercise.

Dustlik:

- The **first-ever India-Uzbekistan joint military exercise - Dustlik-2019** was conducted at Chirchiq Training Area near Tashkent.
- The exercise focused on **counter insurgency and counter terrorism** operations in urban scenario.

21. Consider the following statements regarding Indian Coast Guard (ICG):

1. ICG is a part of Indian Navy that protects India's maritime interests and enforces maritime law.
2. It operates under the Ministry of Defence.
3. It has jurisdiction over the territorial waters of India, including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: B

Explanation

ReSAREX-2019

- The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) conducted the '**Regional Level Search and Rescue Workshop and Exercise 2019**': **ReSAREX- 19** off Goa coast.
- Such exercise is very useful in a scenario where there has been increase in maritime and fishing activities. This gets complicated by occurrence of frequent cyclones.

About ICG:

- ICG is an armed force that protects India's maritime interests and enforces maritime law. It acts as a **second line of defence** after Indian Navy.
- It has jurisdiction over the territorial waters of India, including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.
- It was formally established in 1978 as an **independent Armed force** of India. It operates under the **Ministry of Defence**.
- Coast Guard Headquarters (CGHQ) is located at New Delhi.

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

1. The SCO has its headquarters in Beijing.
2. It holds summits of Heads of States as well as Heads of Government meetings annually in member countries.
3. Pakistan, for the first time, will host the 19th Council of Heads of Government of the SCO in 2020.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation

India To Host 19th SCO Heads Of Government Council

- **India** will host the **19th Council of Heads of Government** of the SCO next year.
- This will be the first such high level meeting of the SCO to be organised by New Delhi after its admission to the bloc in 2017.
- This was decided at this year's Council of Heads of Government of SCO held at Tashkent in Uzbekistan. The Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh represented as a Special Envoy of PM Modi at the conference.

About SCO:

- The SCO is a **China-led eight-member** economic and security bloc, in which India and Pakistan were admitted as **full members in 2017**.
- Its founding members included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- It has four observer States, namely Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia. It has six dialogue partners, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka
- The SCO, which **has its headquarters in Beijing**, holds summits of Heads of States as well as Heads of Government meetings annually in member countries.

23. Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) is related to

- a) World Trade Organization (WTO)**
- b) International Monetary Fund (IMF)**
- c) United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**
- d) Export Import (EXIM) Bank**

Answer: A

Explanation

The dispute settlement panel of WTO has ruled that **India's export subsidy schemes, including the provision for special economic zones, violated core provisions of global trade norms.**

Key Highlights

- It rejected India's claims that it was exempted from prohibition on export subsidies under the special and differential treatment provisions of WTO's Agreement on Subsidies & Countervailing Measures (SCM).
- The panel further ruled that **India is not entitled to provide subsidies depending on export performance** and said its per capita gross national product crossed \$1,000 per annum.
- It is worth noting that **under Article 3.1 of WTO's SCM agreement**, all *developing countries with gross per capita of \$1,000 per annum for 3 consecutive years are required to stop all export incentive.*

Schemes That Will Be Affected By This Ruling

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)
- Export Oriented Units (EOU) scheme
- Sector-specific schemes, including Electronics Hardware Technology Parks (EHTP) scheme and Bio-Technology Parks (BTP) scheme,

- Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme; and duty-free imports for Exporters Scheme.

What Next

- India has the **right to challenge the ruling** before the **appellate body** of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism with regards to export subsidy schemes. India has a month to do that.
- Alternately, India could **rework the export incentives** to comply with the WTO ruling.
- Under the various schemes, domestic companies are currently receiving billions in subsidies on an annual basis. Withdrawing the subsidies may have a significant effect on the performance of such companies.

Background

- In 2018, US had taken India to the WTO's over the issue of export subsidy schemes, claiming that they were hurting American companies.
- It had accused India of giving prohibited subsidies to Indian steel producers, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, information technology, textiles and apparel.

Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM)

- This agreement addresses two separate but closely related topics: **multilateral disciplines regulating the provision of subsidies**, and the **use of countervailing measures to offset injury caused by subsidized imports**.
- It contains set of rule rules regarding whether or not a subsidy may be provided by a Member. They are enforced through invocation of the **WTO dispute settlement mechanism**.

WTO Rejects Most Indian Claims Against US Steel Duties

- On November 15, 2019 WTO panel rejected most of India's claims that the United States was not respecting an earlier WTO ruling related to anti-subsidy duties on Indian steel.
- India's complaint alleging US non-compliance **listed 14 areas** where it said the United States was in breach of the international trade rules.
- Because of the duty imposed by the US, India's steel export to the US declined by 49% in 2018.

24. The following pairs highlight the name of exercise and the armed forces of India involved in that exercise. Which of the following pairs is/are correctly matched?

Name of Exercise	Armed Force Involved
1. Sindhu Sudarshan	- Indian Navy
2. Milan	- Indian Army

The correct code is:

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

Answer: D

Explanation**Sindhu Sudarshan**

- The Strike Corps (also known as **Sudarshan Chakra Corps**) of **Indian Army** has conducted the **annually held exercise, Sindu Sudarshan**, in Barmer, Rajasthan.
- This was the seventh edition of the exercise.
- The exercise was conducted to evaluate the capability of the defence services to strike deep into enemy territory in an integrated air-land battle.
- The Army carried out this exercise using its **integrated battle groups** which are the **new formations being raised by the force for warfighting in the future**.

Milan 2020

- **Indian Navy** will be hosting military drill called '**Milan 2020**' at **Visakhapatnam** in March 2020.
- **41 nations** from South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe that **share defence cooperation with India** have been invited for the drill.
- MILAN stands for - '**Multilateral Naval Exercise**'
- The MILAN series of **biennial exercises** commenced in 1995. **Untill last year**, it was **conducted at Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)**.
- Now it will be conducted for the **first time on mainland** at **Eastern Naval Command (ENC)** with increased scope and complexity of the Exercise.

25. Consider the following statements regarding Agni series of missiles:

1. **Agni missiles are nuclear weapons capable surface to surface ballistic missile.**
2. **These are being developed by DRDO.**
3. **It was after the success of Agni I that the government decided to launch Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.**

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: A

Explanation

- India has successfully conducted **the first night trial of nuclear-capable intermediate range ballistic missile Agni-II** from the Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast.
- The two-stage ballistic missile has a strike range of 2,000 km.

Agni Series of Missiles:

- The Agni series of ballistic missiles is being developed **under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme of the Defence Research and Development Organisation of India**.
- These missiles are **nuclear weapons capable surface to surface ballistic missile**.
- The range of Agni I is 700 km, Agni III is 3,000 km. The ranges of Agni IV and Agni V are longer.

26. Recently inaugurated Sisseri River Bridge is located in

- a) Meghalaya
- b) Jammu & Kashmir
- c) Arunachal Pradesh
- d) None of the above

Answer: C

Explanation

- Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has inaugurated the Sisseri River bridge at **Lower Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The 200-metre long bridge between *Jonai-Pasighat-Ranaghat-Roing road* will provide connectivity between **Dibang Valley and Siang**.
- It would **cut down the travel time from Pasighat to Roing by about five hours**.
- It was constructed by **Project Brahmanak of Border Roads Organisation (BRO)**. This bridge is also strategically important from military view point and will be a **part of Trans Arunachal Highway**.
- There are **four projects of BRO** in the state namely *Vartak, Arunank, Brahmanak and Udayak* working relentlessly to meet the strategic requirement of the nation and also immensely contributing in the socio-economic development of the region.

27. Consider the following statements regarding Nirbhaya Fund:

1. The Nirbhaya Fund Framework provides for a lapsable corpus fund for safety and security of women.
2. The fund is ministered by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: B

Explanation

Government is planning to set up **women help desks** in all police stations and **anti-human trafficking units in all districts** across India using the NIRBHAYA Fund. This was announced by Union Women and Child Development Minister.

Background

The Empowered Committee (EC) under Nirbhaya framework chaired by WCD Secretary Rabindra Panwar gave recommendation for these steps. It made the following suggestions:

- Set up anti-human trafficking units with a proper monitoring and reporting mechanism.

- Psychosocial and legal counselling and aid should be made available through these anti-human trafficking units to the beneficiaries.
- State-level nodal officers should be nominated to monitor the functioning of AHTUs and share their data with the EC and the WCD Ministry.
- The women help desks should be headed by women police officers not below head-constable rank and women officers not below assistant sub-inspector rank.

About Nirbhaya Fund

- The Nirbhaya Fund was set up by the Union Government in 2013 after the tragic Nirbhaya gang rape incident.
- The **1000 crore fund** was set up to support initiatives by the government and non-governmental organisations to protect the dignity and ensuring the safety of women and children in the country.
- The Nirbhaya Fund Framework provides for a **non-lapsable corpus** fund for safety and security of women.
- The fund is to be **administered by the Department of Economic Affairs** (DEA) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) of the Government of India.
- It provides for an **Empowered Committee of officers chaired by the Secretary**, Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD) to appraise and recommend proposals to be funded under this framework.

28. Consider the following statements regarding the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE):

- 1. It is the intergovernmental organisation responsible for improving animal health worldwide.**
- 2. It is recognised as a reference organisation by the World Trade Organization.**

Which of the above statements is/are Incorrect?

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

Answer: D

Explanation

- India submitted its notification about "**lumpy skin disease**" virus in cattle to the **World Organization of Animal Health (OIE)**.
- This has prompted China to issue a warning notification **against imports of cattle and cattle products from India**.
- Although **China does not officially import buffalo meat from India**, a large quantity gets smuggled in through ports and roads by various agencies.

Lumpy Skin Disease

- 'Lumpy skin' is an infectious disease in cattle which damages the hide and may result in chronic debility, reduced milk production, poor growth, infertility and sometimes death.

- The disease is caused by the **virus Poxviridae** also called the **Neethling virus**.

About World Organization of Animal Health (OIE)

- The OIE is the intergovernmental organisation responsible for improving animal health worldwide.
- **Created in 1924, Headquarter – Paris**
- It is recognised as a reference organisation by the WTO and in 2018 has a total of 182 Member Countries.
- It was created as the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) through the international Agreement signed on January 25th 1924.
- In May 2003 the Office became the **World Organisation for Animal Health** but kept its historical **acronym OIE**.

29. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), seen in news recently, is related to

- a) Prevent the flow of conflict diamonds.**
- b) Identifying original diamond in the market**
- c) Regulation of diamond mines in South Africa's Northern Cape Province**
- d) None of the Above**

Answer: A

Explanation

- The Plenary meeting of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) has been hosted by India in New Delhi.
- The event was hosted by Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It discussed developments in the implementation of the KPCS and wider diamond governance, as well as the ongoing reform agenda of the Kimberley Process.
- India is the **present Chairman of Kimberley Process (KP)**.

About KPCS:

- KPCS outlines the rules that govern the trade of diamonds.
- Its aim is to **reduce the flow of conflict diamonds** (rough diamonds used to finance wars against governments) around the world.
- For this purpose, it unites administrations, civil societies, and industries. **It is not an organization and does not have any offices or headquarter.**
- It is underpinned by the United Nations mandate and its observers include the **World Diamond Council** representing the diamond industry. It unites 82 countries worldwide.
- The KPCS came into effect from 1st January, 2003

India and the KPCS

- India is one of the founder members of KPCS and is the Chair of Kimberley Process for the year 2019 with Russian Federation as Vice Chair.
- India had earlier chaired KPCS in the year 2008.

Diamond Industry in India

- Currently India is exporting diamonds worth 24 billion USD. In the coming years, it is expected that the target will reach 1 trillion USD.
- There are more than 1 million people employed in diamond industry in India.

30. India International Cherry Blossom Festival 2019 was celebrated at

- a) Sikkim
- b) Meghalaya
- c) Manipur
- d) Arunachal Pradesh

Answer: B

Explanation

- The 4th India International Cherry Blossom Festival 2019 was celebrated in Shillong, Meghalaya from 13 to 16 November 2019.
- It was organized to celebrate the **mass flowering of autumn Himalayan Cherry Blossoms**.
- South Korea was the partner country in this year's Cherry Blossom Festival.

31. International Lavi Fair, seen in news recently, was organized in which of the following states?

- a) J&K
- b) Uttarakhand
- c) Himachal Pradesh
- d) Rajasthan

Answer: C

Explanation

- The four-day long **International Lavi fair** at **Rampur town, Himachal Pradesh**.
- Lavi fair has its own historical importance and is famous not only for trading activities but also for its age old long traditions.
- It is almost 400 years old and dates back to the time when **Raja Kehari Singh** of **Rampur Bushahr** state signed a treaty to **promote trade with Tibet**.
- Rampur, 120 km from Shimla, was once a major trade centre as it is located on the old silk route connecting Afghanistan, Tibet and Ladakh.
- The main attraction during the fair every year is the sale and purchase of **Chamurthi horses** — an **endangered species** known as the '**ship of the cold desert**'.

32. Consider the following statements regarding ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus):

1. ADMM-Plus is a platform for ten ASEAN member states and its ten Dialogue Partners.
2. India is not included in the ADMM – Plus.

3. The first ADMM-Plus was convened at Cambodia in 2010.

Which of the following Statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: A

Explanation

- Thailand hosted the **6th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus** (ADMM-Plus) meeting.
- India was represented by Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.
- As part of the agenda for ADMM-Plus meeting, Defence Minister of India released '**Handbook on Military Medicine for ASEAN**' along with Defence Minister of Myanmar Lieutenant General Sein Win.

About ADMM-Plus

- ADMM-Plus is the only official framework of **Defense Minister's meetings in the Asia-Pacific Region**.
- It provides platform for **10 member states of ASEAN and its eight dialogue partners** (*Australia, New Zealand, India, China, Russia, US, Japan and South Korea*) to strengthen security and defence co-operation.
- It has **five areas of cooperation** - *maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations and military medicine*.
- The **first ADMM-Plus** was convened at **Ha Noi, Vietnam in 2010**.

33. Consider the following statements regarding the European Investment Bank (EIB):

1. EIB is the lending arm of the European Union.
2. It is based in Luxembourg.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation

- The **European Investment Bank** has agreed to **phase out its financing for fossil fuels within the next two years** to become the world's first "**climate bank**".
- It will end its financing of oil, gas, and coal projects after 2021.

- Under the new policy, energy projects applying for EIB funding will need to show they can produce **one kilowatt hour of energy** while **emitting less than 250 grams of carbon dioxide**, a move which excludes traditional gas-burning power plants.
- Gas projects are still possible, but would have to be based on what the bank called "**new technologies**" such as *carbon capture and storage, combining heat and power generation, or mixing in renewable gases with the fossil natural gas.*

About EIB:

- The European Investment Bank is the **lending arm** of the European Union.
- **Based in Luxembourg**, it makes loans, guarantees, and provides technical assistance and venture capital for business projects that are expected to further EU policy objectives.
- The EIB Group has **two parts**: the **European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund**. The EIF specialises in finance for small businesses and mid-caps.

Gottiprolu

- Excavation by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in Gottiprolu, Andhra Pradesh has unearthed a trade centre of early historic period.
- The site of Gottiprolu lies on the right bank of a distributary of river Swarnamukhi, about 17 km east of Naidupet and 80 km from Tirupati and Nellore.
- The proximity of the site to the seacoast suggests that the site could have served as a strategic settlement involved in maritime trade.

Findings From The Excavation

- The excavation has discovered remains of a huge settlement surrounded by a massive brick enclosure. The available brick sizes (43 - 48 cms) are comparable with the Satavahana / Ikshvaku period structures in Krishna valley i.e. Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.
- On the basis of the brick size and associated findings, they can be placed anywhere between 2nd – 1st century BCE or little later (nearly 2000 years old).
- Among many other antiquities unearthed are a Vishnu sculpture of around 2 meters in height and a wide variety of pottery of the early centuries of current era.
- The site also had a series of broken terracotta pipes fitted into one another, revealing about the civic amenities maintained by the occupants.
- Other major retrieved antiquities unearthed are copper and lead coins, iron spear head, stone celts, terracotta beads, ear studs in semi precious stones and hopscotches.

Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019

- The Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was recently passed in the Parliament. It amends the Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Act, 1951.
- The Act provides for erection of a National Memorial in memory of those killed or wounded on April 13, 1919, in Jallianwala Bagh. In addition, it creates a Trust to manage the National Memorial.

Amendments

- Under the 1951 Act, the Trustees of the Memorial include, the Prime Minister as Chairperson, President of the Indian National Congress, Minister in-charge of Culture, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Governor of Punjab, Chief Minister of Punjab, and three eminent persons nominated by the central government.
- The Bill amends this provision to remove the President of the Indian National Congress as a Trustee. Further, it clarifies that when there is no Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, then the leader of the single largest opposition party will be the Trustee.
- The Act provides that the three trustees nominated by the central government will be trustees for a period of five years and will be eligible for renomination. The Bill allows the central government to terminate the term of a nominated trustee before the expiry of the period of his term without assigning any reason.

UNESCO World Heritage Week

- The World Heritage Week 2019 was recently celebrated from 19-25 November. The objective of the week, observed by UNESCO, is to make people aware of the rich heritage and also strive for its preservation.

- In India, various programs related to historical structures, tour places and cultural and traditional heritage of the country were initiated to celebrate the week.
- There are 38 World Heritage Sites located in India. These include 30 cultural sites, seven natural sites and one mixed-criteria site. India has the sixth largest number of sites in the world.

World Heritage Site

- A World Heritage Site is a landmark or area which is selected by UNESCO as having cultural, historical, scientific or other form of significance, and is legally protected by international treaties. The sites are judged important to the collective interests of humanity.
- To be selected, a World Heritage Site must be an already-classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area).
- It may signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of our intellectual history on the planet.
- The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Program administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 "states parties" that are elected by their General Assembly.

Centrally Protected Monuments

- According to a recent reply in the Parliament by the Minister of Culture, a total 651 Hindu temples in India are designated as Centrally Protected Monuments under the ASI.
- However, there is no record with the central government of the number of Hindu temples under the control of state governments.
- The largest number of Hindu temples under the ASI's protection is in Karnataka, followed by Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh.
- According to an earlier reply in March 2018, there are 3,686 centrally protected monuments/sites under the ASI. According to a state wise break-up provided by the government then, the largest number of these monuments/sites are in Uttar Pradesh (743).

India International Science Festival

- In a first, a class of 1,598 students attended a lecture on astrophysics in Kolkata to set a new record in the Guinness Book of World Records. The attempt, successfully completed at Science City, was part of the fifth edition of the India International Science Festival (IISF).
- India International Science Festival (IISF) launched in 2015 is a celebration to promote Science and Technology and demonstrate how science could lead India towards a developed nation within a short span of time.
- It is an annual event jointly organised by the Science and Technology-related ministries and departments and Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA).
- The goal of the Science festivity is to help youth, develop 21st century skills, with a focus on scientific knowledge, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. A long term objective is to encourage students to study and work in scientific fields.

Fifth Edition Of IISF

- The theme of this festival is 'RISEN', which stands for Research, Innovation, and Science Empowering the Nation.

- A students' science village has been planned at IISF-2019 where more than 2,500 school students from across the country have been invited.
- Young Scientists' Conference is another big event in terms of variety and number of participants.
- Around 1,500 young scientists and researchers got a chance to interact with experts of international repute and get a chance to present their posters and papers.
- Vignanika, a science literature festival, was another highlight along with Divyangjan, a new-age technology show.

NASA's all-electric Aircraft

- Recently NASA showcased an early version of its first all-electric experimental aircraft X-57 Maxwell at its aeronautics lab in the California desert.
- The Maxwell is the latest in a line of experimental aircraft NASA has developed over many decades for many purposes, including the bullet-shaped Bell X-1 that first broke the sound barrier and the X-15 rocket plane flown by Neil Armstrong before he joined the Apollo moon team.
- While private companies have been developing all-electric planes and hover-craft for years, NASA's X-57 venture is aimed at designing and proving technology according to standards that commercial manufacturers can adapt for government certification.
- Those will include standards for airworthiness and safety, as well as for energy efficiency and noise.
- Because electric motor systems are more compact with fewer moving parts than internal-combustion engines, they are simpler to maintain and weigh much less, requiring less energy to fly and are quieter than conventional engines.
- The challenge is improving battery technology to store more energy to extend the plane's range, with faster re-charging.
- Due to current battery limitations, the Maxwell's design is envisioned for use in short-haul flights as an air-taxi or commuter plane for a small number of passengers.

Patent Prosecution Highway Programme

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister has approved the proposal for adoption of Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) programme by the Indian Patent Office (IPO) under the Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks, India (CGPDTM) with patent offices of various other interest countries or regions.
- The Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) is a set of initiatives for providing accelerated patent prosecution procedures by sharing information between some patent offices.

Need For The Programme

- A significant growth has been witnessed in number of patent applications received by the Patent Offices across the world. One of the major catalyst in this growth is globalization in sectors like commerce, technology, education etc.
- Same patents being filed in multiple countries has forced patent offices to come together and work in cooperation with each other.
- The PPH also permits each participating patent office to benefit from the work previously done by the other patent office, with the goal of reducing examination workload and improving patent quality.

JPO and IPO

- The said programme will initially commence between Japan Patent Office (JPO) and Indian Patent Office on pilot basis for a period of three years only. The patent offices will frame their own guidelines for implementation of the programme
- Under this Pilot programme, Indian Patent Office may receive patent applications and certain specified technical fields only, namely, Electrical, Electronics, Computer Science, Information Technology, Physics, Civil, Mechanical, Textiles, Automobiles and Metallurgy while JPO may receive applications in all fields of technology.
- The ambit of the programme may be extended in future, as decided by the Commerce & Industry Minister.

Benefits of PPH Programme For Indian IP office

- Reduction in time to dispose patent applications.
- Reduction in pendency of patent applications.
- Improvement in quality of search and examination of patent applications.
- An opportunity for Indian inventors including MSMEs and Startups of India to get accelerated examination of their patent applications in Japan.

Indian Brain Atlas

- Researchers at the International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad (IIIT-H), have created the first-ever Indian Brain Atlas.
- The first attempt by the IIITH team at creating an Indian-specific brain atlas involved 50 subjects, evenly balanced out across genders. Emboldened by the results of the pilot study, the team went on to recruit 100 willing participants in the eventual construction of the Indian Brain Atlas, referred to as IBA 100.
- The study has revealed that the Indian brain, on an average, is smaller in height, width and volume when compared to Western and other Eastern populations.
- But overall, the Atlas is more comparable to the Chinese and Korean atlases than the distant Caucasian one.
- These differences are found even at the structure level like the volume of hippocampus.

Need For Creating The Indian Brain Atlas

- It was in 1993 that the Montreal Neurological Institute (MNI) and the International Consortium for Brain Mapping (ICBM) created the first digital human brain atlas. More recently, MNI and ICBM have released other brain atlases that are widely used as a standard in neuroscience studies.
- However, these 'standard' brain templates created using Caucasian brains are not ideal to analyze brain differences from other ethnicities, such as the Indian population.
- While even Chinese and Korean brain templates had been constructed, there was no corresponding template constructed for the Indian-specific population.
- MRI images taken are compared with the pre-loaded MNI template in MRI scanning machines to arrive at a diagnosis, and are likely to lead to a misdiagnosis.
- The study would also help in diagnosing dementia or Alzheimers as they are associated with atrophy of the hippocampus.

India Justice Report 2019

- The India Justice Report that ranks 18 large and 7 small states according to their capacity to deliver justice to all has been released. It is based on official data compiled by Tata Trusts and various NGOs.
- The report is a Tata Trusts initiative with Centre for Social Justice, Common Cause, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Daksh, Tiss-Prayas and Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.
- The ranking assesses the **four ‘pillars’ of the justice system — police, prisons, legal aid, and the judiciary** — in each state to deliver on their mandates. It uses government data to assess the budgets, infrastructure, human resources, workloads and diversity to do so.
- It also examines 5-year trends to demonstrate a state’s intention to improve access and delivery of justice by increasing resources, repairing shortfalls and clearing blockages.

Highlights Of The Report

- Maharashtra has emerged as the best state for justice delivery but could not score even 60% in performance on the four pillars of justice. Interestingly, Maharashtra didn’t lead in any category but emerged top in overall performance.
- The report placed Kerala and TN second and third, followed by Punjab and Haryana.
- The report revealed that UP and Bihar have the worst justice system in India. While UP ranked at the bottom of the list, Bihar stood at number 17.
- Following them from the bottom were Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.
- Goa topped among small states followed by Sikkim and Himachal.
- No State/ UT is able to meet all its diversity quotas (ST, SC and OBC); Karnataka comes closest -- having met its ST and OBC reservations, and missing its SC reservation target by four per cent
- Vacancy is an issue across the pillars of the Police, Prisons and the Judiciary, with only about half the States having made an effort to reduce these over a five-year period. For instance, the country has about 18,200 judges with about 23 per cent sanctioned posts vacant.
- Prisons are over-occupied at 114%, where 68% are under trials awaiting investigation, inquiry or trial.

Female Representation

- Women account for 26% of all judges in high courts and subordinate courts. They made up just 11% of HC judges and just 28% in subordinate courts. Till June 2018, seven states did not have a single woman judge in the HC.
- Further, women account for only 7% of the 2.4 million police personnel in the country. Despite the Centre targeting 33% of women in police forces, only four states and four UTs had over 10% women in police forces.
- However, over a five-year period (2012–2016), most states have tried to improve this. Bihar, in particular, had improved women’s representation from 2% to 9%.

Budgets

- Most states are not able to fully utilise the funds given to them by the Centre. The increase in spending on the police, prisons and judiciary does not keep pace with overall increase in state expenditure.
- Punjab was the only large state whose Police, Prison and Judiciary expenditures were able to increase at a pace higher than the increase in overall state expenditure
- The report revealed that India spends 0.08% of its GDP on the judiciary. On an average, except Delhi (1.9%), every other state and UT spends less than 1% on its judiciary.

- The Justice system is affected by low budget allocations, as per capita spend on free legal aid was just 75 paise per annum.
- The report highlighted that almost 80 per cent of India's 1.25-billion population is eligible for free legal aid, but only 15 million people have availed it since 1995.

Way Ahead

- The findings of the report establish beyond doubt very serious lacunae in the justice delivery system. The big gap between policy and practical realities should prompt a redoubling of efforts at closing the gender gap.
- It is also important that the judiciary and the government act urgently to plug the gaps in management of the police, prisons, forensics, justice delivery and legal aid in order to improve justice delivery in the country.

Alzheimer's Disease

- China recently announced that a new drug, meant to potentially treat Alzheimer's disease, will be available to Chinese patients by the end of this year.
- Called GV-971 or "Oligomannate", it is a seaweed-based drug, administered orally.
- The drug has received approval from China's National Medical Products Administration (NMPA), making it the new drug for the treatment of 'mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease (AD) and improving cognitive function'.

What is Alzheimer's

- Alzheimer's disease is a progressive brain disorder that typically affects people older than 65. When it affects younger individuals, it is considered early onset.
- The disease destroys brain cells and nerves, and disrupts the message-carrying neurotransmitters. Eventually, a person with Alzheimer's loses the ability to perform day-to-day activities.
- Alzheimer's disease is also the most common cause of dementia — which is a syndrome and not a disease in itself, and whose symptoms include loss of memory, thinking skills, problems with language, changes in mood and deterioration in behaviour.
- Scientists believe that for most people, Alzheimer's disease is caused by a combination of genetic, lifestyle and environmental factors that affect the brain over time.
- Less than 1 percent of the time, Alzheimer's is caused by specific genetic changes that virtually guarantee a person will develop the disease. These rare occurrences usually result in disease onset in middle age. However, the exact causes of Alzheimer's disease aren't fully understood

How Treatments Usually Work

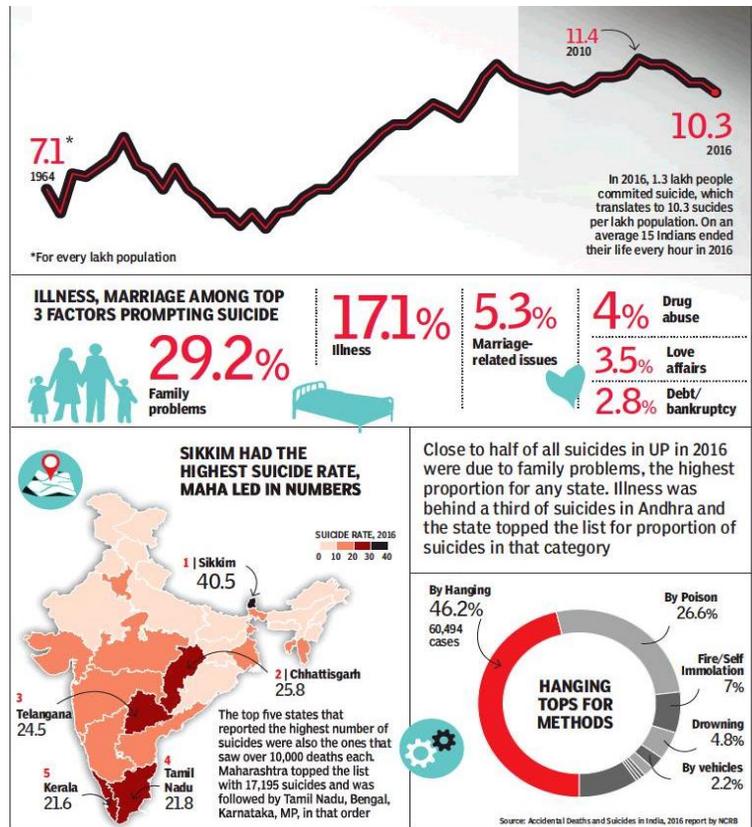
- There is no cure for Alzheimer's, because its exact causes are not known. Most drugs being developed try to slow down or stop the progression of the disease.
- There is a degree of consensus in the scientific community that Alzheimer's involves two proteins, called beta amyloids and tau.
- When levels of either protein reach abnormal levels in the brain, it leads to the formation of plaque, which gets deposited between neurons, damaging and disrupting nerve cells. But it is not known why the levels of these proteins reach abnormal levels in the first place.
- Most existing drugs for Alzheimer's try to target these proteins to manage some of the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

What Is Different In New Drug

- It has been claimed that oligomannate has a different mechanism of action from that of other drugs. It builds on the evidence that suggests an association between microbiomes in the gut and progression of Alzheimer’s.
- The study suggests that it is possible for a microbiome imbalance in an individual’s gut to influence the formation of plaque and inflammation of the nervous tissue.
- It suggests Alzheimer’s is not driven by proteins alone, but its development may require the interaction between the gut, brain and other inflammatory factors.
- Even so, the study did not establish if the link between gut bacteria and neuroinflammation in Alzheimer’s is direct or indirect. The lead inventor of the drug, has said that oligomannate works by reconditioning the imbalance of the microbiomes in the gut, thereby reducing the deposition of plaque and improving cognitive function.

Accidental Death and Suicide Report

- According to an Accidental Death and Suicide report for 2016 released by NCRB, fewer Indians committed suicide in 2016. The rate, which peaked in 2010, has been falling since then, with the only exception of 2015.
- At NCRB’s 2016 figure of 10.28 (WHO, however, puts the rate at 16.3), India’s suicide rate is lower than in Russia, Japan, France, US, Germany and South Africa. But it is higher than WHO estimates for China, UK, Spain, Italy and Brazil.



Reasons Behind Suicides

- Family problems and illness are the top two reasons for suicides by both male and female. Apart from these reasons, suicide triggers differ across genders.
- For women, marriage, love affairs and failure in exam are the next three biggest reasons; for men, they are drug and alcohol abuse, bankruptcy and marital trouble.
- In 2016, there was a jump in suicides because of marital trouble, illness, property dispute, family problems and love affairs. But there were fewer suicides because of failure in exams, bankruptcy, unemployment and poverty.
- Overall, men are more likely to commit suicide (68% of the suicides were male) than women.

Farmer Suicides

- Compared to overall figures of 6,270 in 2016, 8,007 farmers (including land-holders and cultivators) had committed suicide in 2015 across the country.

- The report shows that Maharashtra saw a 20 per cent dip from the previous year, in line with the national trend. However, the state continued to top the list with 2,550 farmers' suicides (40 % of all farmer suicides in the country) recorded nationwide. While Sikkim had the highest suicide rate.
- Karnataka (1,212) was second on the list but still recorded 50 per cent less farmers' suicides than Maharashtra.
- **Farm Labourer Suicides:** The data shows that 5,109 farm labourers committed suicide in 2016, compared to 4,595 in 2015. Even in this category, Maharashtra topped with 1,111, followed by Karnataka (867) and Madhya Pradesh (722).

2015 Data

- In 2015, the publication of diverse sets of data on farmers' suicides data showed that they were being exploited by micro-finance institutions.
- The data showed that 80 per cent of farmers who killed themselves because of bankruptcy or debts had taken loans from banks and registered microfinance institutions — not from money lenders.
- It was for the first time that the NCRB had categorised farmers' suicides due to debt or bankruptcy based on the source of loans.

Road Accident Report

The Union Transport Ministry has released its latest road accident report.

Findings Of The Report

- The report revealed an alarming rise in the number of all road fatalities in 2018, with 3,500 more people losing their lives on roads than in 2017, taking the total toll to over 1.5 lakh. Uttar Pradesh was at the top of the list with most road accident deaths – 22,256.
- Delhi recorded a death due to road accidents about every five hours in 2018. Out of every 10 accidents in Indian cities, one was reported in the national capital.
- Speeding was one of the primary reasons for fatalities in road accidents, with 64.4% of people being killed due to it.
- Walking, always an unsafe way to commute in Indian cities, has become more hazardous in recent years, with pedestrians accounting for 15% of all road deaths. The number of pedestrians killed on the roads rose by a steep 84% between 2014 and 2018, with average daily fatalities going up from 34 in 2014 to 62 last year. West Bengal topped the list of pedestrian fatalities followed by Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.
- While the number of people killed in accidents caused due to driving against the flow of traffic reduced by nearly 9% from 2017, fatalities due to accidents involving parked vehicles nearly doubled as compared to those in 2017.

Cause Of Accidents

- Globally, pedestrians are treated as the most vulnerable road users and their protection gets highest priority. However, in India rising fatalities show that the first right of pedestrians on the road has neither been understood nor given precedence while planning roads or while preparing traffic movement plans.
- Though the Motor Vehicle Driving Regulation gives the first right to pedestrians at uncontrolled pedestrian crossings, it's neither respected nor enforced. Further, there is hardly any training of drivers on how to respect the pedestrians' right of way.

- Moreover, almost all footpaths were encroached upon across cities and pedestrians were forced to walk on main roads. Municipal bodies and other road owning agencies usually take just cosmetic action on removing encroachments and clearing footpaths, mostly after court orders.
- There is hardly any highway policing system and patrolling is also insignificant on the roads. In majority cases, drivers simply leave the vehicles parked on the middle of the road without placing the warning signage for other vehicles.
- Every year the high number of fatal accidents are reported across the country during winter season and many of them are due to parked vehicles which have broken down on main carriageways.

Lancet Child and Adolescent Health Study

- The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health study was recently released. The data for the study was pooled from 146 countries including 1.6 million students aged 11–17 years.
- The study presents adolescent prevalence of insufficient physical activity and estimates for the first time – global, regional and national trends from 2001 to 2016.

Global Findings

- More than 80 per cent of school-going adolescents globally did not meet current recommendations of at least one hour of physical activity per day – including 85 per cent of girls and 78 per cent of boys.
- Between 2001 and 2016, prevalence decreased by 2.5 percentage points (significant change) for boys (from 80.1% to 77.6%), whereas there was no significant change for girls (from 85.1% to 84.7%).
- If these trends continue, the global target of a 15 per cent relative reduction in insufficient physical activity will not be met by 2030. The study proves that game time in playgrounds has been replaced by screen gaming for today's teenagers.
- The lowest levels of insufficient physical activity in boys were found in Bangladesh, India and USA.
- In 2016, Philippines was the country with the highest prevalence of insufficient activity among boys (93 per cent), whereas South Korea showed highest levels among girls (97 per cent) and both genders combined (94 per cent).

Girls Found To Be Less Active Than Boys

- The study also finds across all 146 countries studied between 2001-2016 girls were less active than boys in all but four countries (Tonga, Samoa, Afghanistan and Zambia).
- The difference in the proportion of boys and girls meeting the recommendations was greater than 10 percentage points in almost one in three countries in 2016 (43 of 146 countries).
- The biggest gaps were seen in the United States of America and Ireland (more than 15 percentage points). While, most countries in the study (107 of 146) saw this gender gap widen between 2001-2016.

Findings On India

- India is among the top ten ranking countries with the lowest level of insufficient physical activity among adolescents.
- In India, the overall prevalence of insufficient physical activity in adolescents in 2001 was 76.6 % which has now decreased to 73.9 per cent in 2016.
- Among boys the prevalence of physical activity in 2001 was 76.6 per cent which has climbed down to 71.8 per cent in 2016. While, among girls it was 76.6 per cent in 2001 which has decreased slightly to 76.3 per cent in 2016.

• Reasons For Lower Prevalence Of Insufficient Physical Activity

- The study cited that the potential explanation for this somewhat lower prevalence of insufficient physical activity in India as compared to other countries could be the importance of sports like cricket (particularly for boys).
- Further, adolescents are still active as they walk to and from school and girls are more actively involved in household chores.

• Skepticism Over Findings

- While India is below the global average, there are still 74% of Indian adolescents not getting enough physical activity.
- The country’s relatively better performance doesn’t take away the fact that India is largely an inactive nation.
- Experts were also skeptical about the India findings as it was too “generalised” and failed to address the huge rural-urban divide.

• Indian Efforts To Address Inactivity

- Director of the state task force on non-communicable diseases informed that they have embarked upon a campaign to fight obesity and step up awareness on physical inactivity.
- The campaign recommends compulsory physical activity for an hour at schools apart from creating enough playgrounds across towns and cities.
- It has also released a documentary ‘**The Zero Life**’ to draw attention of schools, families and society to the increasing menace of obesity.

Way Ahead

- The study stressed on urgent policy action to increase physical activity, particularly to promote and retain girls’ participation in physical activity.
- The authors have recommended urgent scaling up of known effective policies and programmes to increase physical activity in adolescents.

QS World University Rankings for Asia

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings for Asia has been released recently. The QS Rankings use a methodology based on 11 metrics.

Findings

- The **National University of Singapore** is ranked Asia’s best for the second consecutive year. It is followed by Nanyang Technological University, which has risen from 3rd to 2nd; and the University of Hong Kong.
- 96 Indian institutions rank among the top 550 institutions for the continent. Only Mainland China is represented more than India, with 118 featured universities.
- While Mainland China has four in the top 10 this year, India does not yet have a university among the top 30.

INDIA TOP 20 (ASIA RANKS)

	2020	2019	INSTITUTION/UNIVERSITY
▼	34	33	IIT Bombay
▼	43	40	IIT Delhi
▼	50	48	IIT Madras
▼	51	50	IISc Bengaluru
▼	56	53	IIT Kharagpur
▼	65	61	IIT Kanpur
▼	67	62	University Of Delhi
▼	90	86	IIT Roorkee
▼	112	107	IIT Guwahati
▼	114	106	University Of Hyderabad
▲	136	137	Jadavpur University
▼	139	134	University Of Calcutta
▲	152	167	Institute Of Chemical Technology, Mumbai
—	169	169	Anna University
▲	175	180	Birla Institute Of Technology And Science
▼	177	156	Banaras Hindu University
▲	177	187	University Of Mumbai
▲	188	241	IIT Indore
▲	191	237	Savitribai Phule Pune University
▼	192	177	Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

The best performing institution from India is IIT Bombay, which drops one place to 34th position. It is followed by IIT Delhi at 43rd place and IIT Madras at 50th.

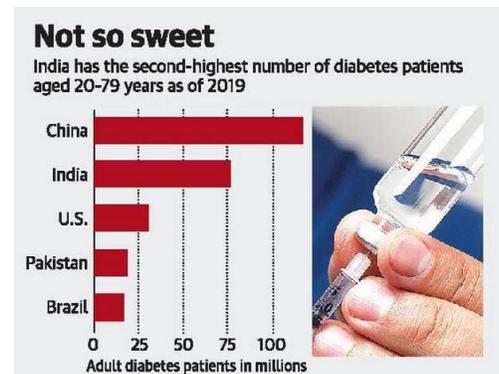
- IIT Bombay is the best Indian university in the 'Academic Reputation' indicator, which utilises the insights of over 94,000 academics regarding university quality. It ranks 32nd in Asia in this dimension. IIT Delhi (34th) and the University of Delhi (50th) are next.
- In the 'Employer Reputation' indicator, which utilises the insights of over 44,000 employers regarding the quality of a university's graduates, IIT Bombay ranks 21st in Asia. There are four other Indian universities among the top 50 (IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, University of Delhi and IIT Kharagpur).
- India dominates the 'Staff with PhD' indicator with seven institutions achieving the perfect 100.00 score and raking No. 1 tied in this metric. All seven are IITs — Madras, Kharagpur, Kanpur, Bhubaneswar, Indore, Patna, and Ropar.
- In the research indicators, India boasts five universities among the top 50 in the 'Citations per Paper' metric, and six among the top 50 in the 'Papers per Faculty' metric.

Diabetes Atlas

- On the occasion of World Diabetes Day on 14th November, the International Diabetes Foundation (IDF) has released the ninth edition of the Diabetes Atlas. The IDF is an umbrella organization of over 230 national diabetes associations in more than 160 countries and territories.
- World Diabetes Day was launched in 1991 by the IDF and the World Health Organization (WHO) in response to the rapid rise of diabetes around the world.
- The theme for diabetes awareness month and World Diabetes Day 2019 is "Family and Diabetes". Families are urged to learn more about the warning signs of diabetes and find out their risk of type 2 diabetes

Findings Of The Atlas

- India continues to be home to the second-largest number of adults with diabetes worldwide, with the latest data from the IDF putting the incidence at 77 million.
- The worldwide prevalence of diabetes has reached 9.3 percent with more than half (50.1 per cent) of adults undiagnosed. Type 2 diabetes accounts for around 90 percent of all people with diabetes. China is at the top of the list with over 116 million diabetics.
- India is on the top of the table of a clutch of countries from southeast Asia — Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Mauritius. Bangladesh, which is second on the list of top five countries with diabetes (20-79 years) in South East Asia, however, has only 8.4 million diabetics.
- The rise in the number of people with type 2 diabetes is driven by various factors, including urbanisation, an ageing population, decreasing levels of physical activity and increasing levels of overweight people and obesity.
- More than 1.1 million children and adolescents younger than 20 years are living with type 1 diabetes. For reasons which are unknown, type 1 diabetes is also on the rise.
- Diabetes was responsible for an estimated \$760 billion in health expenditure in 2019. The IDF estimates that 10% of global health expenditure is being spent on diabetes.



Way Ahead

- The Diabetes Atlas makes it clear that India needs to pause and re-evaluate its strategy to combat diabetes. It concurs that India needs a more effective national diabetes prevention programme which will require cooperation from several quarters, including medical education, health awareness in schools, and urban planning.
- It stresses on the urgency to develop and implement multi-sectoral strategies to combat the growing epidemic.
- It also underlined that prevention was key to the problem as in addition to people with diabetes, the country also has a huge burden of pre-diabetics.
- If they are targeted with information on the right lifestyle options to help keep blood sugar, lipids and blood pressure under control, at least a third of the people can be prevented from developing diabetes.

WHO To Approve Generic Insulin

- With insulin prices skyrocketing and substantial shortages developing in poorer countries, the WHO said that it would begin testing and approving generic versions of the drug to drive down insulin prices.
- Even though insulin has been on the WHO's essential medicines list for over 40 years, about half of those 80 million people cannot get the insulin they need, because they or their country's health systems cannot afford it.
- In US, where the price of a vial has risen to \$275 from \$35 over two decades, diabetics without good health insurance are forced to ration whatever they can afford or to buy insulin in black market

UNDP Accelerator Lab

- Seeking to address some of the most pressing issues facing India, including air pollution, through innovation, the United Nations Development Programme has launched the country chapter of its Accelerator Lab here.
- The laboratory that will be housed in the UNDP India office that has partnered with the Indian government's Atal Innovation Mission to achieve its objectives.
- The Accelerator Lab is an innovative new initiative by the UNDP, Germany and Qatar to find 21st century solutions to today's complex new challenges.
- The vision is to make faster progress in meeting the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the U.N. by 2030.
- Other issues that the laboratory will seek to address include sustainable water management and client-resilient livelihoods.
- The Indian lab will be among the 60 global ones that will find, test and try to scale up innovative solutions that can help combat both climate change and social inequity.
- These laboratories, housed within UNDP country offices across the world, bring together grassroots ideas with new sources of real-time data and experimentation to make faster progress in meeting the ambitious SDGs

Four key approaches sit at the core of the Labs' work:

- Building on locally-sourced solutions, finding things that work and expanding on them

- Rapid testing and iteration to implement what works and go beyond the obvious solutions
- Combining the best understanding, ideas and expertise to generate collective knowledge
- Accelerating progress by bringing expertise, creativity and collective intelligence to bear

National Registry of Voluntary Organ Donors

- Recently, the Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the Centre and the states of Punjab and Haryana, as well as the Union Territory of Chandigarh, to implement 'The Transplant of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994' in letter and spirit.
- It has also asked them to consider the recommendations of an Expert Committee set up to give suggestions for an effective implementation of the law.

Background

- The 1994 Act governs the transplantation of human organs and tissues in India, including the donation of organs after death. In 2016, two public interest petitions were filed in the High Court, seeking effective implementation of the law.
- In May 2019, the PGIMER was asked to constitute a committee of doctors for deliberations over the subject, and to submit a report containing measures to promote cadaver donations. The Committee submitted two reports to the court — one in May, and the last one on October 30.

Recommendations of the Committee

A. Digital Database And Biometric Verification

- The panel recommended the creation of a 'National Registry of Voluntary Organ Donors', and said that it may be based on a unique national ID number given by the National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO).
- A database of all surgeons and medical experts sanctioned for the transplantation should also be maintained.
- The identity of the donor and the recipient should be verified through a biometric system of authentication to prevent fabrication of identity or other fraud in the process.
- Further, all hospitals engaged in transplantation procedures must invest in a biometric system linked to the national database of Aadhaar and PAN numbers.

B. The Consent Process

- While the Committee has said that a donor card should be treated as a Living Directive for cadaver donations, it has also said that mandatory informed consent should be taken in case of live donors after explaining to them the risks involved in donation surgery.
- It suggested that a right be given to the donor to withdraw consent any time before the surgery and it prescribed a 'wait period' or cooling period to allow rethinking on the part of the live donor.
- The Committee has also sought a procedure for mandatory confidential psychological analysis of the donor in private before presenting them to the authorization committee.

C. Compensation For The Donor

- The Committee has recommended that a lumpsum monetary reimbursement be given to the donor towards expenses related to the transplantation, and suggested a payment of at least Rs 50,000 at the time of discharge.
- It has also called for a system to provide for medical insurance of the donor, and also for their post-surgical needs.

D. Awareness Generation

- Stating that the process of organ donation and consent involves religious beliefs, social taboos and certain apprehensions by the relatives, the Committee observed that there needs to be the involvement of certified NGOs and religious bodies to create positive awareness.
- It suggested that government hospitals and transplant centres should be given priority attention to improve the deceased organ donation, and measures should be taken to prevent the trend of employing visiting surgeons at private centres in violation of practice registration norms.

Maternal Mortality Ratio

- The Sample Registration System (SRS) 2015-2017 bulletin for Maternal Mortality Ratio was recently released. MMR is the ratio of the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births during the same time-period.
- As per the bulletin, India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has seen a decline of 8 points (6.2%) from 130 per 1 lakh live births in 2014-2016 to 122 per 1 lakh live births in 2015-2017, due to which India has averted nearly 2,000 maternal deaths per year.

Highlights Of The Report

- To understand the maternal mortality situation in the country better and to map the changes, especially at the regional level, the government has categorised states into three groups: empowered action group (EAG), southern States and other states.
- EAG states are the eight socio-economically backward states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in the southern States group. "Others" comprise the remaining States and Union Territories.
- The decline has been most significant in EAG States from 188 to 175. The ratio has reduced considerably from 77 to 72 per 1,00,000 live births among southern states and in the other states from 93 to 90.
- Retaining its first position, Kerala has reduced its MMR from 46 in 2014-2016 to 42 in 2015-2017. Likewise, Maharashtra retained its second position with 55 (down from 61) and Tamil Nadu its third position with 63 (down from 66).
- This decline has been possible due to gains made in institutional deliveries and focused approach towards aspirational districts and inter-sectoral action to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable mothers.

Significance

- The decline is important for India as 11 States have achieved the National Health Policy target of MMR 100 per lakh live births well ahead of 2020.
- The WHO has lauded India's progress and said that it puts the country on track towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of an MMR below 70 by 2030.

National Health Profile

- The National Health Profile (NHP), an annual stocktaking exercise on the health of the health sector was recently released by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI). The first release of the annual publication was in 2005.

- It covers all the major information on Demography, Socio-Economic Status, Disease Morbidity & Mortality, Healthcare Finance, Human Resources in Health and Healthcare Infrastructure.
- It is also an important source of information on various communicable and non-communicable diseases that are not covered under any other major programmes.

Public Health Spending

- Between 2009-10 and 2018-19, India's public health spend as a percentage of GDP went up by just 0.16 percentage points from 1.12% to 1.28% of GDP, and remains a far cry from the 2.5% GDP health spend that has been India's target for some years now.
- There are wide disparities in the health spend of states. The Northeastern states had the highest and the Empowered Action Group (EAG) states plus Assam had the lowest average per capita public expenditure on health in 2015-16.
- Among the big states, erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir leads with a 2.46% GSDP spend on healthcare – nearest to the ideal spend.
- Even states seen as better performers on health parameters, such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, fare poorly on the health finance index. Tamil Nadu spent 0.74% of its GSDP and Kerala 0.93% of its GSDP on healthcare.

Comparison With Other Countries

- In 2016, India's Domestic general government health expenditure stood at \$16 per capita. This is lower than Norway (\$6,366), Canada (\$3,274), Japan (\$3,538), Republic of Korea (\$1,209) and Brunei Darussalam (\$599).
- Among the 23 countries, including India that the CBHI chose for comparison, the highest per capita spender is the United States at \$8078.

Disease Profile Of The Country

- The NHP also notes the change in disease profile of the country with a shift towards the non-communicable disease from communicable ones. The country is witnessing accelerated rise in the prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like hypertension, diabetes and cancer.
- Out of 6.51 crore people diagnosed at state run NCD clinics during 2018, over 40 lakh were detected with hypertension, more than 31 lakh with diabetes, whereas over 11 lakh people were suffering from both hypertension and diabetes.
- Experts attribute the increasing incidence of these diseases to rapidly changing lifestyles, including stress, food habits and consumption of tobacco products and alcohol. Besides, a sedentary lifestyle and rising rate of obesity are causing a rapid increase in all kind of cancers.

Sex Ratio

- As per the NHP, sex ratio (number of females per 1,000 males) in the country has improved from 933 in 2001 to 943 in 2011.
- In rural areas, the sex ratio has increased from 946 to 949. The corresponding increase in urban areas has been of 29 points from 900 to 929.
- Kerala has recorded the highest sex ratio in respect of total population (1,084), rural population (1,078) and urban (1,091). While, the lowest sex ratio in rural areas has been recorded in Chandigarh (690).
- The estimated birth rate reduced from 25.8 in 2000 to 20.4 in 2016 and the death rate declined from 8.5 to 6.4 per 1,000 population over the same period.

- As per the report, the total fertility rate (average number of children that will be born to a woman during her lifetime) in 12 States has fallen below two children per woman and nine States have reached replacement levels of 2.1 and above.

Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI)

- Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI), established in 1961, is the health intelligence wing of the Directorate General of Health Services in the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- The Mission of CBHI is “To strengthen Health Information system in each of the district in the country up to facility level for evidence based decision making in the Health Sector”

Survey on Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition

- As part of the 76th round of National Sample Survey (NSS), the National Statistical Office (NSO), has conducted a survey on Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition.
- The main objective of the survey was to collect information on facilities of drinking water, sanitation along with housing facilities available to the households and the micro environment surrounding the houses, as these are the important determinants of overall quality of living condition of the people.

Drinking Water Facility

- Only about 48.6 per cent of the rural households and about 57.5 per cent urban households had exclusive access to principal source of drinking water. Further, only about 58.2 per cent of the rural households and about 80.7 per cent urban households having drinking water facilities within the household premises.
- About 87.6% of the households in the rural and about 90.9% in the urban areas had sufficient drinking water throughout the year from the principal source.
- The major source of drinking water was hand pump for the households in the rural areas (42.9%) and piped water into dwelling in the urban areas (40.9%).

Dwelling Units

- About 96.0 per cent of the rural households and about 63.8 per cent urban households had their own dwelling units. About 76.7 per cent of the households in the rural areas and about 96.0 per cent in the urban areas had house of pucca structure.
- Among families living in houses, about 93.9 per cent in villages and 99.1 per cent in cities had electricity for domestic use. About 48.3 per cent in villages and about 86.6 per cent in cities used LPG as fuel for cooking.

Sanitation Facilities

- About 56.6% of the households in rural and about 91.2% in urban areas had access to bathroom.
- The survey also showed that about 71.3 per cent families in villages and about 96.2 per cent cities had access to latrine.
- The major type of latrine used by the households was flush/pour-flush to septic tank in both rural and urban areas. About 50.9 per cent families in villages in rural and 48.9 per cent in urban areas used flush/pour-flush to septic tank type of latrine.
- Among the households which had access to latrine, about 94.7 per cent of the males and 95.7 per cent of the females in villages used latrine regularly.

Disabled Quota In Chattisgarh Panchayats

- The Chhattisgarh cabinet has approved an amendment to the state Panchayati Raj Act, 1993, which makes mandatory the presence of a person with disabilities in all panchayats across the state.
- Under the amendment, if there is no elected differently-abled person in the panchayat, the government will nominate one. As for janpads and zilla panchayats, the State government would nominate two such members, one male and one female, to them.
- After this move, the state will now have 11,000 persons with disabilities as representatives at the panchayat level.
- The cabinet also said that it would move to remove the educational stipulations of Class V and Class VII for members of the panch and those above panch, respectively. The only stipulation would be that the candidate be literate.

IMD Talent Ranking

- The 2019 IMD World Talent Rankings have been released. The rankings are released annually by Switzerland-based business school International Institute for Management Development's (IMD).
- The 2019 report takes into account three equally weighted talent factors to determine placement of these economies.
- The **“investment and development” factor** measures how much resources were invested to cultivate “home-grown” talent; the **“appeal” factor** evaluates the extent to which an economy “attracts and retains” foreign and local talent; while the **“readiness” factor** looks at the “availability of skills and competencies” in the labor force.

Global Findings

- Switzerland retained its title as the world's top talent hub, while Europe led the way in fostering the best conditions for competitiveness in a skills-scarce global economy. Denmark was placed second and Sweden was in the third place.
- The Top 10 was completed by Austria (4th), Luxembourg (5th), Norway (6th), Iceland (7th), Finland (8th), the Netherlands (9th) and Singapore (10th).
- Meanwhile, China (42nd) ranked in the lower half of the index. It fell 3 places due to low ranking on government expenditure per student, cost of living index and exposure to particle pollution.
- In Asia, Singapore, along with Hong Kong SAR (15th) and Taiwan (20th) lead in terms of talent competitiveness due to the readiness of talent pool.
- Most leading economies emphasize long-term talent development by focusing on investment and development.
- This emphasis, however, goes beyond purely academic aspects to encompass the effective implementation of apprenticeships and employee training. Such an approach ensures a consistent alignment between talent demand and supply.

Findings Related to India

- India has slipped 6 places to 59 rank on a global annual list of 63 countries. India is also lagging behind fellow BRICs countries - China ranked 42nd on the list, Russia (47th) and South Africa (50th).
- India also witnessed one of the sharpest declines among Asian economies owing to low quality of life, negative impact of brain drain, and the low priority of its economy on attracting and retaining talents.

- The drop is a combination of several factors including expenditure on education (per student) and the quality of education which may be linked to the GDP growth.
- There are other issues, such as the effectiveness of the health system and women's participation in the labour force.

Global Markets Dependency On The US Currency

- A Fed research paper released this year has said that **roughly half the 1.6 trillion of dollar banknotes in circulation were outside the United States.**
- Another Fed research paper estimated in 2017 that as much as **70% of all dollars were held outside the United States** and 60% of all \$100 bills circulated overseas.
- From the dominant reserve currency for central banks to the main channel for global trade and borrowing, U.S. dollars are **lifeblood for banks and markets around the world.**
- Markets got a reminder of dollar's hegemony in September when a squeeze in overnight dollar funding rates in New York sent shivers across the world.

Different Ways In Which Dollar Is Used Across The World

A. Central Bank Reserve Holdings

- Reserves of different currencies are held by central banks to **settle international claims, intervene in foreign exchange markets or as rainy-day funds.**
- IMF data shows that **total reserves** in the second quarter of 2019, in U.S. dollars were **\$6.79 trillion (more than 60% of the total).**
- The **euro is the second most popular reserve currency**, accounting for 20% of global holdings. Since 2010, the Japanese yen's role as a reserve currency has declined to 5.4% while the Chinese yuan has become more prominent, although represents just 2%.

B. International Payments

- The dollar is dominant for **transactions between non-U.S. exporters and importers.** Data from the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), an umbrella group of the world's central banks, shows that the **proportion of invoices denominated in dollars is nearly five times the dollar's share of world imports.**
- In 2018, more than half of all goods imported into the EU from non-members were invoiced in U.S. dollars, compared to just a third in euros.
- Furthermore, BIS found that **80% of financing of trade between banks is also in dollars.**

C. Commodity Pricing

- Commodities such as **oil and gold** are typically denominated in U.S. dollars, as are **benchmark futures such as Brent. Gulf oil producers peg their currencies to the dollar** to avoid risk from fluctuations when invoicing their sales.
- The dollar's supremacy was highlighted in 2018 when Washington decided to reimpose sanctions on Iran and all those doing business with it – any country breaking sanctions risked having access to dollars cut off.
- **China has launched yuan crude futures** which could eventually become a global price benchmark alongside Brent and WTI. But a pre-requisite would be liberalising China's capital account to allow free movement of money.

D. Investments and Borrowing

- **U.S. dollar lending to non-bank borrowers outside the U.S. stood at \$11.9 trillion** at the end of June 2019, which has more than doubled over the past decade.
- Foreign currency borrowing is **particularly common in emerging markets** which now have a record \$3.74 trillion in dollar debt.

Way Ahead

- Describing its role in the world economy as destabilising, governments and central banks have tried to reduce their dollar-dependency.
- But given the current dominance of dollar in the global markets, **de-dollarisation is likely to take many years.**

Strategic Sale In 5 PSUs

- In a bold privatisation move, the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs has approved strategic stake sale in five PSUs. These major divestment decisions were taken as the government targets to meet its highest ever divestment target of Rs 1.05 trillion for 2019-20.
- It also gave an in-principle approval for the government to reduce stake in certain state-owned companies to below 51 per cent in some while retaining majority stake management control.

Divestment Details

- As part of a consolidation of state-run hydropower companies, the government will sell its 74.23% and 100% stake in THDC and Neepco respectively to government-controlled NTPC Ltd, India's largest power producer.
- The government will sell its 63.75% and 30.8% stake share in Shipping Corporation of India and Container Corporation of India respectively along with management control to a strategic buyer.
- In the case of BPCL, the government will sell its 53.29% stake to a strategic buyer, ceding management control. Of the total 249.4 million tonne per annum (MTPA) refining capacity in India, BPCL has around 15 per cent or 38.3 MTPA. BPCL also has 15,177 retail outlets in India.

BPCL Divestment Excludes Numaligarh Refinery

- The proposed sale will, however, exclude the strategic Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) in Assam, given India's need to secure fuel supplies for security forces in the north-east.
- The major reason being its importance in being part of the Assam Accord of 1985 signed between All Assam Students' Union and the Centre following the anti-immigrant agitation.
- The cabinet approved strategic disinvestment of BPCL's shareholding of 61.65% in NRL along with transfer of management control to a state-run operating in the oil and gas sector.
- The remaining 38.35 per cent stake is held by the Assam government (12.35 %) and Oil India (26 %).

Impact of Divestment

- It is expected that the move will have a positive impact on Foreign Portfolio Investments in Indian capital markets
- It will lead to the creation of wider investment space for retail and institutional investors and may increase in the market premium of CPSEs due to likely positive investors perception.
- Further, the resources unlocked by the strategic disinvestment of these state run companies would be used to finance the social sector and developmental programmes of the Centre benefiting the public.

CMIE Report

- According to data released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India's unemployment rate in Oct' rose to 8.5%, the highest level since Aug' 2016. The urban unemployment rate for October 2019 stood at 8.9%, slightly higher than the rural unemployment rate of 8.3%.
- Among States, Tripura and Haryana saw unemployment levels of more than 20% (the highest), while the unemployment was the lowest in Tamil Nadu at 1.1%. Rajasthan saw its unemployment rate double between September and October 2019.
- The CMIE's figures are in line with the findings of the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey, which had estimated an unemployment rate of 6.1% between July 2017 and June 2018, the worst in 45 years.
- The data also comes on the back of other indicators showing a downturn in the economy, including the core sector output in September posting its worst contraction in at least 14 years. Earlier, August's industrial output shrank at its fastest rate in more than six years.
- Further, a working paper titled, 'India's Employment Crisis' by researchers at Centre for Sustainable Employment estimates that between 2011-12 and 2017-18, employment declined by an unprecedented nine million jobs (a 2% drop), with agricultural employment declining by 11.5%. In the same period, employment in service sector increased by 13.4%, while manufacturing employment dipped by 5.7%.
- The data in the paper also shows that while employment has been declining, those who are "Not in Labour Force, Education and Training" has continued to increase -- from about 84 million in 2011-12, it has now crossed 100 million.

Financial Firms Under IBC

- The government recently issued rules that provide a framework for bringing '**systemically important financial service providers**' under the purview of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).
- Accordingly, Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified the Insolvency and Bankruptcy (Insolvency and Liquidation Proceedings of Financial Service Providers and Application to Adjudicating Authority) Rules, 2019. The notification was necessitated because there was no system like the IBC that was designed exclusively for financial institutions.

New Rules

- As per the new rules, only a regulator will be allowed to refer a non-bank lender or housing financier to a bankruptcy tribunal, unlike in the case of companies that can approach a tribunal on their own, or can be dragged into one either by lenders or operational creditors such as material suppliers.
- The bankruptcy tribunal will appoint an administrator who will try to stitch together a turnaround plan. The administrator will be nominated by the regulator, such as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the case of non-bank lenders and housing financiers.
- The registration or the licence of the financial services provider will not be suspended or cancelled during the bankruptcy resolution process.
- In case a turnaround of the financial institution is not possible, before deciding to liquidate it, the tribunal will listen to the views of the regulator.

Significance

- The new rules address an important regulatory gap by bringing in certain classes of financial institutions under the scope of IBC.

- The introduction of the framework is a timely and important step for resolution of financial service providers permitting an interplay between regulators, creditors and the National Company Law Tribunal for appropriate actions.
- The rules are likely to help out distressed shadow banks and housing financiers, which have been battling a liquidity crunch for a year.

NBFC Liquidity Norms

- The Reserve Bank of India has recently revised the guidelines on liquidity risk management for non-banking finance companies in order to strengthen and raise the standard of asset liability management (ALM) framework applicable to them.
- The guidelines come in the backdrop of the IL&FS crisis and the subsequent Dewan Housing Finance Company (DHFL) debacle that have triggered wide concerns over the liquidity problem at NBFCs over the past year.
- The guidelines are applicable to all non-deposit taking NBFCs with asset size of Rs 100 crore and above, systemically important core investment companies and all deposit taking NBFCs irrespective of their asset size.

Norms

- The first key norm is on the maturity buckets for cash flows and tolerance limit. The RBI has broken up the up to one-month bucket into smaller buckets and set tolerance limits for mismatches. The first 30-day bucket has been divided into 1-7 days, 8-14 days, and 15-30 days
- The second aspect is the introduction of Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR). The main objective of the LCR is to ensure that NBFCs maintain sufficient liquid assets to meet obligations in a 30-day stress scenario.
- NBFCs will have to keep high quality liquid assets like cash, government securities and marketable securities issued or guaranteed by foreign sovereigns as a buffer to tackle any risk or shock.
- These assets can be readily sold or used as collateral to obtain funds in a range of stress scenarios and bring the situation in control in the future.
- The stock of HQLA to be maintained by the NBFCs should be a minimum of 100 per cent of total net cash outflows over the next 30 calendar days. This will be implemented in a phased manner.
- All non-deposit taking NBFCs with asset size of Rs 10,000 crore and above, and all deposit taking NBFCs irrespective of their asset size, have to maintain LCR starting from December 2020, at 50 per cent, increasing progressively by 10 per cent every year until December 2020 (70 per cent); 85 per cent by December 2023 and reaching 100 per cent by December 2024.
- For all non-deposit taking NBFCs with asset size between Rs 5000-10,000 crore, the LCR requirement will start at 30 per cent in December 2020 and reach 100 per cent by December 2024.

Impact

- LCR will promote resilience of NBFCs to potential liquidity disruptions by ensuring that they have sufficient high quality liquid asset (HQLA) to survive any acute liquidity stress scenario lasting for 30 days.
- In the near term, the impact could vary across players. For larger NBFCs that already have a good ALM profile, the impact of the new norms would not be significant. Many players also maintain an ample liquidity buffer and, hence, complying with the LCR requirement may not be difficult.
- But for NBFCs with wide asset-liability mismatches in the past, there could be some impact on their profitability. LCR will require NBFCs to maintain liquid investments and, hence, this will reduce the funds available for lending to some extent and add pressure on their net interest margins (NIMs), as investments in government bonds and other high quality bonds earn lesser interest.

- Also, a structural shift of moving away from short-term borrowing to longer term funds can increase the borrowing cost -- though the shift has already happened for most players over the past year.
- However, from a long-term perspective, the norms will restore confidence in the NBFC sector and will help bring in better discipline and structure in the management of liquidity among NBFCs.

Steel Scrap Recycling Policy

In a bid to ensure quality scrap for the steel industry, the government has come up with a Steel Scrap Recycling Policy that aims to reduce imports, conserve resources and save energy.

Need For The Policy

- National Steel Policy 2017 aims to develop a globally competitive steel industry by creating 300 MT per annum steel production capacity by 2030 by adopting state-of-the-art environment friendly technologies.
- There is a worldwide trend to increase steel production using scrap as the main raw material as recycling of scrap helps in conservation of vital natural resources besides other numerous benefits.
- However, the availability of scrap is a major issue in India and in 2017 the deficit was to the tune of 7 MT. This was imported at the cost of more than Rs 24,500 crore in 2017-18.
- It is believed that the scrapping policy will ensure that quality scrap is available for the steel industry.

Highlights Of The Policy

- The policy is based on 6Rs principles of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, Redesign and Remanufacture.
- It aims to promote a circular economy in the steel sector, besides promoting a formal and scientific collection, dismantling and processing activities for end of life products that are sources of recyclable (ferrous, non-ferrous and other non-metallic) scraps
- It will also aim to ensure processing and recycling of products in an organised, safe and environment friendly manner, besides evolving a responsive ecosystem and producing high quality ferrous scrap for quality steel production minimising the dependency on imports
- It intends to decongest the Indian cities from reuse of ferrous scrap, besides creating a mechanism for treating waste streams and residues produced from dismantling and shredding facilities in compliance to Hazardous & Other Wastes (Management & Trans boundary Movement) Rules, 2016.
- It will lead to resource conservation and energy savings and setting up of an environmentally sound management system for handling ferrous scrap.

Global Microscope On Financial Inclusion

- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has released the 2019 Global Microscope on Financial Inclusion report. The report, now in its 12th year, is a benchmarking index that assesses the enabling environment for financial access in 55 countries.
- The 2019 Microscope features 11 new indicators to better assess what governments are doing to address the gender gap in financial inclusion.

Findings Of The Report

- The overall environment for financial inclusion has improved globally with India, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay and Mexico having the most favourable conditions for inclusive finance.
- Within the overall framework for promoting digital financial inclusion, the report identified four basic enablers - allowing non-banks to issue e-money, presence of financial service agents, proportionate customer due diligence and effective financial consumer protection.

- Only four countries - Colombia, India, Jamaica and Uruguay - scored perfectly across all four parameters.
- In these countries, a range of providers are capable of providing digital financial services to people on the margins of formal financial system, regulations control for some of the risks inherent in these services, and clear rules mark out spaces appropriate for innovation to achieve greater financial inclusion.
- South Africa, India, Mexico, Tanzania and Uruguay were among the top countries that safeguard e-money via some sort of deposit insurance or protection.
- This type of protection provides security to users of these new technologies, avoids creating regulatory imbalances between different types of institution, and ensures that digital financial inclusion does not place new consumers in the financial system at a disadvantage compared to those transacting with more traditional institutions,
- Additionally, these countries require financial institutions to maintain liability for the actions of their agents, ensuring that customers whose nearest access point is an agent do not receive less protection than customers who can visit a bank branch

15-Point Reform Plan For Parliament

- The Vice President has expressed concern over the functioning of parliamentary institutions in the country and erosion of public trust in them.
- For the same, he has unveiled a 15-point reform charter for reforming the functioning of the Parliament.

Some of the important points in relation to charter are as follows:

- The Parties need to **ensure attendance of at least 50% of their legislators** all through the proceedings of the Houses by adopting a roster system.
- There is a need for review of **anti-defection law**.
- **Reviewing of the whip system**, which is stifling reasonable dissent even on non-consequential matters.
- Setting up of **special courts for time bound adjudication** of criminal complaints against legislators.
- The focus must be on **pre and post legislative impact assessment**.
- The **governments should be responsive to opposition** and opposition to be responsible and constructive while resorting to available parliamentary instruments.
- There is a need for **consensus on the proposal for simultaneous elections**.
- Steps should be taken for the **effective functioning of the Parliamentary Committees**.
- Moreover, the **representation of women in legislatures** needs to be raised.

Final Analysis

- Parliament is central to the very idea of democracy and was assigned a pivotal role in our Constitution.
- However, in recent years its stature and significance has diminished. Thus, there is a need for reforming the functioning of the Parliament as suggested by Vice President.

Kerala To Achieve 100% Internet Penetration

- The **Kerala Fibre Optic Network project** (Rs. 1,548 crore project) aim to provide Internet to every household in the State.

- The project is slated for completion by December 2020, under which **20 lakh BPL household** will get internet for free.
- As per the report titled '**India Internet 2019**', the State's Internet penetration rate is the **second highest in the country** i.e. 54%, next only to Delhi NCR with 69% penetration.
- The **Internet penetration rate is defined as** number of individuals aged above 12 per 100 population who accessed the Internet in the last month.
- However, the internet penetration rate is the lowest in Odisha (25%), Jharkhand (26%) and Bihar (28%).

FCRA

Recently, more than 1,800 NGOs and academic institutes have been found to be violating **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 (FCRA)** and they have been banned by the government from receiving overseas funds this year.

About FCRA

- The Act has a very wide scope and is applicable to a **natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities** (whether incorporated or not) as well as **NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India**. It is implemented by the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- The Act **prohibits acceptance and use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality** by a certain specified category of persons such as a candidate for election, judge, journalist, columnist, newspaper publication, cartoonist and others for any activity detrimental to the national interest.
- The Act also **regulates the inflow to and usage of foreign contribution** by NGOs by prescribing a mechanism to accept, use and report usage of the same.
- Further, the Act **permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme** to accept foreign contribution.

Preventing Misuse Of The Foreign Funding/ Suggestion

- There is a need for creating a **National Accreditation Council** consisting of academicians/ activist/ retired bureaucrats to ensure compliance of the law by NGOs.
- Effective compliance also requires a better coordination between **Ministries of Home Affairs and Finance** in terms of monitoring and regulating illicit and unaccounted funds.
- Further, the regulatory mechanism needs **to keep a watch on the financial activities** of NGOs and voluntary organizations.

India Corruption Survey, 2019

- As per the India Corruption Survey 2019, **Rajasthan and Bihar** fared the worst in country with 78% and 75% of respondents admitting to paying bribes, while Telangana topped the list in South India.
- The survey was carried out between October 2018 and November 2019 and was conducted by a social media firm and the **Transparency International India**.

Other specific points noted by the Survey:

- As compared to 2018, India's overall ranking in Corruption Perception Index has risen 3 places to **78 out of 180 countries**.

- The survey shows that the **top three corruption prone departments** are **property registration and land issues, police and municipal corporation**.
- While an average of 56% of respondents admitted to paying bribes in 2018, the number has come down to 51% in 2019.
- According to the survey, **Kerala is one of the least corrupt states**, where only 10% of people admitted to paying a bribe to get their work done. Besides **Kerala, Goa, Gujarat, Odisha, West Bengal, Haryana and Delhi** are least corrupt states.

Registration Of Political Parties U/nder Section 29A, RP Act, 1951

- **Jannayak Janta Party of Haryana** has been granted the status of a recognised **State party** by the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of **Section 29A** of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**.

Eligibility For The Designation As A State Party

- The party must have secured at least **6% of the valid vote & win at least 2 seats** in an Assembly General Election.
- Or, it must have secured at least **6% of the valid vote & win at least 1 seat in a Lok Sabha General Election**.
- The other criteria being that it has win **at least 3% of the seats or at least 3 seats**, whichever is more, in an Assembly General Election
- Or, it must have won at least **1 out of every 25 seats** from a state in a Lok Sabha General Election.
- Further, the party must have secured at least **8% of the total valid vote** in an Assembly or a Lok Sabha General Election.

Benefits Of Designation As A State Party:

- It is entitled for **exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol** for its candidates within that state.
- Further, recognised State and National parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and are also entitled for two sets of electoral rolls free of cost.
- They also get broadcast/ telecast facilities over Akashvani/ Doordarshan during general elections.
- A recognized National or State party can have a maximum of **40 Star campaigners** and a registered un-recognised party can nominate only **20 Star Campaigners**.

Daman And Diu, Dadra And Nagar Haveli To Be Merged

- *The government has tabled a Bill in the Parliament to **merge two Union Territories** viz. Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.*
- Though the territories are 35 km apart, they have had **separate budgets and different secretariats**.
- The merged territory will be named **Dadra Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu**. The headquarters of the territory is to be located in **Daman and Diu**.
- The Bill provides that the **jurisdiction of the High Court of Bombay** will continue to extend to the merged UT.

- At present, *the country currently has nine UTs* after the creation of the **UTs of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh**. However, with the merger of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the number of UTs will come **down to eight**.

Aim/ Purpose

- The merger of the two UTs, located along the western coast near Gujarat, will be done for **better administration, check duplications of various work and avoiding wasteful expenditure** that put unnecessary financial burden on the government.
- Further, in view of the policy of the government to have **Minimum Government, Maximum Governance** and considering **small population and limited geographical area** of both the Union Territories and to **use the services of officers efficiently**, government has decided to merge the two UTs.

Constitutional Provisions

- The bills on state formation can be introduced in **either of the houses**. However, **President's assent on the bill is required** before introduction.
- **Article 3** of Indian Constitution provides for formation of new states and Union Territories. It includes alteration in the **area, boundaries and name** of the state.

CIC Annual Report

The Central Information Commission (CIC) tabled its annual report for the year 2018-19 in the Parliament.

Important Facts In Relation To The Report

- The report said that in the year 2018-19, around **13.70 lakh applications** were received by the Central Public Authorities of the commission. This number is **11% more than the previous year 2017-18**.
- The highest number of applications were rejected by the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**. It has rejected 26.5%. It was followed by the **Ministry of Home Affairs** that rejected 16.41%.
- In the period 2018-19, the CIC **disposed around 17,188 second appeals and complaint cases**.

About CIC:

- The commission was set up under **Right to Information Act in 2005**.
- There are **10 Information Commissioners** and **one Chief Information Commissioner**.
- The commissioners are appointed by the **President of India** based on the recommendation of a **committee comprising of Prime Minister, the opposition leader and a cabinet minister nominated by the prime minister**.

Arunachal Pradesh Seeks Separate Bureaucrats' Cadre

- *Arunachal Pradesh* is planning for a **separate cadre of bureaucrats** because of its cultural and topographical diversity.
- Presently, Officials and police officers posted in the State belong to the **Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre** and are deputed for a minimum of two years and above.

Importance Of Having Separate Cadre

- The advantage of having a separate cadre is that **permanent bureaucrats are well aware of the local conditions**. This is important considering the fact that State **has 27 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes**.
- Further, there is **no institutional memory** as officers are transferred frequently. This not only **affects governance but benefits also do not reach people**.

- Moreover, political parties are not permanent so there is a need for a **dedicated bureaucracy for the State's welfare**.

Brown to Green Report, 2019

- The Brown to Green Report (2019) has been published by the **Climate Transparency partnership**.
- The report is the most comprehensive review of G-20 countries climate performance. It also aims at mapping achievements and drawbacks of individual countries to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impact.

Noteworthy Findings Of The Report

- It points out that the carbon emissions from **all 20 countries including India** is rising.
- The report also notes that **none of the G-20 countries have a plan** that will help them achieve the target under **Paris agreement**.
- Further, the report suggests that **renewable energy despite accounting for 25.5% of power generation** is not sufficient to outweigh the growth of emissions from fossil fuel sources.
- It also suggests that **low-carbon fuels** need to increase roughly **10 times by 2050** to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Report's India Specific Observation

- Among the G-20 countries, India has the **most ambitious nationally determined contribution (NDC)**. However, it still needs real action now to prepare the different sectors for stringent emission reductions.
- India and China are the only two G-20 countries that have most progressive energy efficiency policies.

Way forward

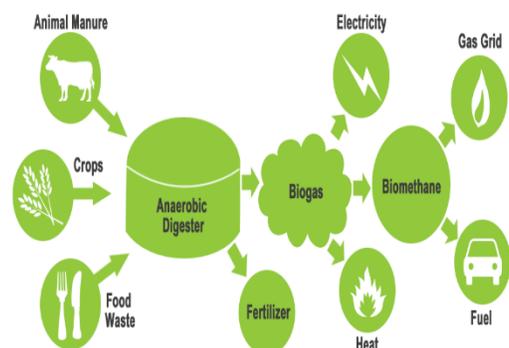
- The Report states that to keep the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degrees goal within reach, G-20 needs to **scale up mitigation, adaptation and finance** over the next decade.
- Further, there is a need for **cutting government subsidies to the aviation sector** by taxing jet fuel and using that revenues to invest massively in new carbon free fuels.

Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Initiative

- The government plans to use SATAT initiative to **address environmental problems** arising from **stubble burning**. It is a developmental effort that would benefit both vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs.
- Under the initiative the government aims to establish **Compressed Bio-Gas plants** mainly through independent entrepreneurs.

The Actual Working

- **Compressed Bio gas** produced at these plants will be transported through cascades of cylinders to the fuel station networks of Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) for marketing as a green transport fuel alternative.
- The entrepreneurs would be able to **separately market the other by-products** from the bio gas plants like bio-



- manure, carbon-dioxide *etc.* to enhance returns on investment.
- With this initiative the government aims to generate direct employment for **75,000 people** and produce **50 million tonnes of bio-manure for crops**.

Significance of SATAT Initiative

- The initiative has the potential to boost availability of **more affordable transport fuels** including **better use of agricultural residue, cattle dung** as well as to provide an **additional revenue source to farmers**.
- The initiative holds great promise for **efficient municipal solid waste management** and in **tackling the problem of polluted urban air** due to farm stubble-burning and carbon emissions.

Additional Information about Biogas and Compressed Bio gas (CBG):

- Bio-gas is produced naturally through a process of **anaerobic decomposition** of waste/ bio-mass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste *etc.*
- After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which **has pure methane content of over 95%** and with **calorific value of 52,000 KJ/kg** and other properties similar to CNG.

Plastic Parks

- India's domestic production meets **only 50% of its demand for plastic**, which is increasing with the growth of construction and infrastructure sector. To reduce imports, the **Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers (MoCF)** had formulated a scheme for setting Plastic Parks in different parts of the country.
- These parks will be located in **Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu**. Out of these, the plastic park at **Tamot in Madhya Pradesh** is functional.
- These parks will have an ecosystem with **infrastructure building and common facility** to consolidate and synergize the capacities of the domestic **downstream plastic processing industry**.
- The Union government aim to provides grant funding up to **50 per cent of the project cost**. The remaining project cost is to be funded by State Government, beneficiary industries and by a loan from financial institutions.

Sumatran Rhino

- Sumatran rhino is now **extinct in Malaysia** and now, *there are now just 80 Sumatran rhinos left in the world, all of them in Indonesia*.
- The Sumatran rhino is *the smallest of the five extant rhino species in the world*. The other species include the White Rhino, the Black Rhino, the Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros and the Javan Rhino.
- *In the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century*, the Sumatran rhinoceros used to be present in parts of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, northern Bengal, Bhutan, Comilla and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Government Junks Plan To Amend Forest Act, 1927

- The Union Environment Ministry has withdrawn a draft amendment that proposed updates to the **Indian Forest Act, 1927**.
- The reason was some of the contentious amendments relating to following:
 - ✓ The forest officers can **issue search warrants, enter and investigate land** within their jurisdiction.

- ✓ Further, the amendment proposed to give **forest officers indemnity** for using arms to prevent forest-related offences.
- ✓ Forest officials to get powers to **remove tribals from areas earmarked** for conservation.
- ✓ The amendment also proposed **to allow government to open any patch of forest** if it deems fit for commercial operations.
- ✓ It also advocated imposition of **forest development cess of up to 10%** of the assessed value of mining products removed from forests and water used for irrigation or in industries. This amount would be deposited in a special fund and used exclusively for reforestation and forest protection measures
- These proposed provisions drew flak from activists, tribal welfare organisations as well as from State governments which led Central government to drop the proposal.

EU Declares Climate Emergency

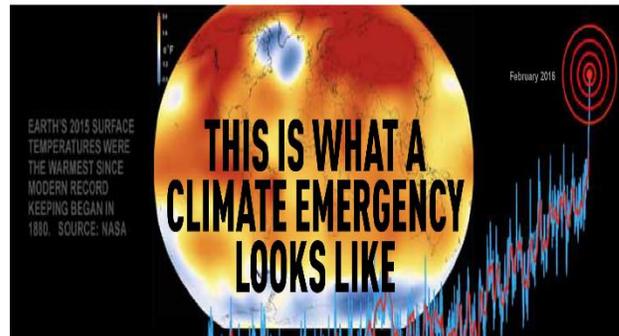
- European Union (EU) has passed a **resolution declaring climate emergency**, with this EU has become the first multilateral bloc to do the same.
- Outside Europe only **Canada, Argentina and Bangladesh** have declared a climate emergency.

About Climate Emergency

- There is lack of consensus as to what constitute climate emergency.
- However, many believe that it aims to achieve **carbon-neutral status by 2030-2050**. For ex- UK government aim to reduce carbon emissions by 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050. Moreover, it's also not just about reducing carbon emissions on a local scale, but also **raising awareness about climate change**.

Implication Of The Said Move By EU

- The move is expected to pressurise countries to act ahead of the United Nations summit on climate change that is starting on **Dec' 2, 2019 in Spain**.
- The resolution will have more **symbolic effect than practical impact** and is designed to pressure EU governments to adopt a commitment for all of the EU to reduce emissions to net zero.



If every promise made at the Paris climate summit is kept, the Earth's average temperature is estimated to rise by about 3° degrees Celsius. Mankind did not exist at the time when the Earth was 3° degrees warmer.

If we wish to keep temperature rise below 1.5° degrees we must declare a climate emergency and stop burning fossil fuels now. If we wish to keep temperature rise below 2° degrees we cannot burn all of the fossil fuels that are in existing mines and wells.

Malabar Tree Toad

A Bangalore based non-profit is working to train and equip residents of villages in the Western Ghats for mapping the range of an extremely rare species of toad *i.e.* Malabar Tree toad (MTT).

About MTT

- It is a very **rare species of amphibian** that is endemic to the Western Ghats. At the same time, it is an **endangered species** that spends most of its life on trees and comes to the ground only during the first monsoon showers to mate.
- The Western Ghats is a **biodiversity hotspot** and is home to **179 recorded amphibian species** and **80%** of them are endemic to it.

Zero Carbon Law

- Recently, New Zealand’s Parliament has passed the **Zero Carbon Act** that will commit New Zealand to be zero carbon emissions by 2050 or earlier
- The step has been taken as part of the country’s attempts to meet its **Paris climate accord** commitments.

Additional Facts

- New Zealand generates **80 %** of the electricity from renewable resources and is working towards phasing out the use of offshore oil and gas.
- Globally, there are over **1500 laws** on climate change and over 100 of which were introduced after the introduction of the Paris Agreement.

Specific Provisions of the Act

- To reduce **all greenhouse gases (except methane)** to net zero by 2050.
- It also aims to **reduce emissions of biogenic methane** (produced from biological sources) **up to 24-47 % below 2017** levels by 2050 and to **10 % below 2017** levels by 2030.
- The legislation also aims to establish an **independent Climate Change Commission**.
- The statute also proposes to establish a system of **emissions budget**.

About Biogenic Methane

- It is emitted by **livestock, waste treatment and wetlands**.
- Biogenic methane is a **short-lived gas** and degrades into the atmosphere over the decades.
- It is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

Significance

- This is the **first legislation in the world** to make a legally binding commitment to keep global warming within **1.5 degrees Celsius**.
- The move will also prod the other countries of the world to reach their emission reduction targets within specific timeline.

Climate Change And Its Impact On Health

As per the new report published in **Lancet (Countdown on Health and Climate Change Report)**, Climate change is damaging the health of the children and is also set to endanger the well-being of an entire generation, unless the world meets the target to limit warming to **well below 2°C**.

Findings Of The Report

- The report notes that as temperatures rise, infants will bear the greatest burden of malnutrition and rising food prices.
- For substantiating the above facts, the report points out that **average yield potential of maize and rice has declined almost 2%** in India since the 1960s, with **malnutrition already responsible for two-thirds of the deaths** of children under five years.
- Further, due to climate change children will suffer most with rise in infectious diseases. **For ex-** Vibrio bacteria that causes cholera is rising 3% a year in India since the early 1980s.
- Thus, the report concludes that the public health gains achieved over the past 50 years through various government initiatives, could soon be reversed by the changing climate.

Way forward

- To dramatically reduce emissions by 2050 and to meet multiple Sustainable Development Goals, India must **transition away from coal** and towards renewable energy.
- India will also need to enhance public transport, increase use of cleaner fuels, and improve waste management and agricultural production practice.

Swachh-Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan

The Environment Ministry is undertaking a mass cleanliness-cum-awareness drive in 50 identified beaches under Swachh-Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan.

About The New Programme/ Abhiyaan

- It has been launched by **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.
- The programme aims at making beaches clean and also aims to create awareness amongst citizens about the importance of coastal ecosystems (in Beaches across **10 states / UTs**).
- **Environment Education Division and Society of Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM)** under the Environment Ministry will be responsible for its implementation.
- Finally, the **best three beaches** will be awarded along with a certificate of appreciation.

Dal Lake Area To Be Eco-Sensitive Zone

- Recently, it has been decided by the UT of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) that it will set up a **10-member committee** to declare Dal Lake, an **Eco-sensitive Zone**.
- The decision has been taken considering the facts that the area of the Dal Lake has shrunk to **24 sq. km from 31 sq. km** and the lake has witnessed significant changes in land use, apart from increasing human population.

About Dal Lake

- Dal lake is the second largest in the state and is named as the **'Srinagar's Jewel'**.
- The lake is located in the **Zabarwan mountain valley** in the foothills of the **Shankracharya hills**.
- The lake has four main interconnected basins *i.e.* **Hazratbal, Bod dal, Gagribal and Nagin**.

About Eco-sensitive Zones

- As per **section 3(2)(v) Environment Protection Act, 1986**, the Central Government can restrict areas in which any industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out.
- Further, **Section 5(1)** of the act lays down that the central government can prohibit or restrict the location of industries while considering the biological diversity of an area, environmentally compatible land use, proximity to protected areas *etc.*
- Thus, under the above two clauses the government can declare **Eco-Sensitive Zones or Ecologically Fragile Areas (EFA) or No Development Zones (NDZ)** .
- Further, the Ministry of Environment & Forests has approved a comprehensive set of guidelines laying down parameters and criteria for declaring ESAs such as **Species endemism or rarity; Ecosystem Based criteria** such as sacred groves, frontier forests *etc.* and **Geomorphologic based criteria** such as uninhabited islands, origins of rivers *etc.*

Green Climate Fund

Recently, India has kicked-off a **\$ 43 million project** to boost climate resilience in three coastal states in partnership with the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**. The project is funded by the **Green Climate Fund (GCF)**.

About The Project

- The project will build climate-resilient livelihoods for **1.7 million people** in **Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha**.
- It also seeks to **offset 3.5 million tonnes of carbon**, protect vulnerable ecosystems, and benefit another **10 million people** with improved shoreline protection.

- The project will work with communities in restoring ecosystems and promoting climate-resilient livelihood options, such as the **sustainable farming of mud crabs**.

About GCF

- The **GCF was set up in 2010** under the **UNFCCC's financial mechanism** to channel funding from developed countries to developing countries to allow them to mitigate climate change and also adapt to disruptions arising from a changing climate.
- GCF will support projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing country Parties using **thematic funding windows**.
- It is aimed to raise **Climate Finance of \$100 billion** a year by 2020.
- The Fund is **governed and supervised by a Board** that has full responsibility for funding decisions and receives the guidance of the **Conference of Parties (COP)**.
- The Fund aim at promoting the paradigm shift towards low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways by providing support to developing countries.
- The Fund also strive to maximize the impact of its funding for adaptation and mitigation, while **promoting environmental, social, economic and development co-benefits** and taking a **gender-sensitive approach**.

Cooking Oil For Biodiesel Use

- Food distributor **Zomato** and biodiesel manufacturer **BioD Energy** have inked a partnership to collect used cooking oil from restaurants around the country. The purpose is to **converted it into biodiesel**, which would then be sold to oil marketing companies to be blended with regular diesel
- As per the **Food safety and standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** regulations, the maximum permissible limits for **Total Polar Compounds (TPC)** have been set at **25%**, beyond which the cooking oil is not fit for consumption.
- This will help in **reducing the re-use of cooking oil** and that will have positive public health outcomes and also **reduces import demand of crude oil**.
- The initiative is also significant considering the new government's initiative of **Repurpose Cooking Oil (RUCO)**.

The RUCO Initiative

- The initiative was **launched by the FSSAI** in February 2019 to collect and convert used cooking oil into bio-fuel.
- Currently, 64 companies have been identified for the purpose by FSSAI and **by 2020**, it will be possible to recover about **220 crore litres of used cooking oil** for its conversion into bio-fuel.

35th ASEAN Summit

- The **35th summit** of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the related summits were held in Bangkok, Thailand from 1-4 November 2019.
- **Thailand** holds the **rotating chair of the ASEAN for 2019**. The next ASEAN summit is to be conducted in **Vietnam in 2020**.

Key Highlights

- Themes like **multilateralism and connectivity** took the center stage of this summit.

- The summit emphasized on the need to **promote a seamless ASEAN** through the "**Connecting the Connectivities**" **approach**, both within the ASEAN region and beyond.
- The summit failed to bring the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to life as India opted out of it at the last minute.
- There were worrying signs about a **backsliding of US engagement with the region**. The relatively **lowly status of the delegation** sent to Bangkok in place of **US president Donald Trump** was conspicuous.
- Many analysts believe that this gesture will **widen the cracks in the relationship between the US and ASEAN**. It will push member states in ASEAN even closer to China.

India-ASEAN Summit 2019

The 16th India-ASEAN summit held on 3 November 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Key Highlights

- PM Modi, during inaugural address, expressed his commitment to further strengthen the partnership through stronger surface, maritime and air-connectivity and digital-link.
- To improve **physical and digital connectivity**, India has allocated **\$ 1 billion line of credit**.
- Indian PM welcomed the recent decision to **review the ASEAN-India FTA**.
- India expressed its desire to strengthen partnership in the areas of *maritime security, blue economy and humanitarian aid*.
- Both sides agreed to continuing the implementation of the **Delhi Declaration**, as the outcome of the **ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit** to mark the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations in January 2018, in order to further strengthen and deepen the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership in the coming years.

India – ASEAN Trade Relation: Recent Data

- Two-way merchandise trade between ASEAN and India grew by 9.8 per cent from **73.6 billion USD in 2017 to 80.8 billion USD in 2018**.
- There has been significant recovery of FDI inflows from India in 2018, amounting to 1.7 billion USD, which placed **India as ASEAN's sixth largest trading partner and sixth largest source of FDI among ASEAN Dialogue Partners**.
- ASEAN and India have set a **trade target of 200 billion USD by 2022**.

India-ASEAN Inno Tech Summit 2019

- The **second edition** of India ASEAN InnoTech Summit was held in **Davao, Philippines**. The previous summit was held in New Delhi.
- **Jointly Organised by** - Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- Aims - To explore new pathways for partnership between the countries and the Indian research based enterprises.

Bilateral Meet on the Margins of Summit

A. Meeting with the Prime Minister of Thailand

- PM Modi met Prime Minister of Thailand Prayut Chan-o-Cha on 3rd November 2019 on the sidelines of 35th ASEAN Summit, 14th East Asia Summit(EAS) and 16th India-ASEAN Summit.

- Welcoming **20% growth in bilateral trade** last year, leaders decided to task the trade officials to discuss ways and means to enhance trade and investment.
- Both sides decided to start a **direct flight between Bangkok and Guwahati**.
- They welcomed the finalisation of **agreements for cooperation between Ranong Port, Thailand and Indian ports in Kolkata, Chennai and Vishakapatnam**.

B. Meeting with President of Indonesia

- PM Modi met the President of Indonesia Joko Widodo in Bangkok on 3 November 2019.
- India attaches high priority to its bilateral relationship with Indonesia, with which it shares a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**.
- This year, India and Indonesia are also commemorating the **70th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations**.

14th East Asia Summit

- On 4 November 2019, PM of Thailand Prayut Chan-o-cha chaired the **14th East Asia Summit (EAS)** during the 35th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits.
- The **agenda** for this edition of the summit was to review the future direction of East Asia Summit co-operation and exchange views on regional and international issues.
- The East Asia Summit is the **premier forum in the Asia-Pacific region** to deal with issues relating **security and defence**.
- Since its **inception in 2005**, it has played a significant role in the strategic, geopolitical and economic evolution of East Asia.
- EAS comprises the **ten member states of the ASEAN** as well as **Australia, China, Japan, India, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States**.
- India was represented by PM Modi at the summit.

Key Highlights

- **Theme** of the 2019 East Asia summit - **“Advancing Partnerships for sustainability”**
- The Summit noted the progress according to the **Manila Plan of Action to Advance the Phnom Penh Declaration on EAS Development Initiative (2018 – 2022)**.
- The summit **adopted three documents** on *combating illicit drugs and transnational crimes, and forging partnerships for sustainability*.
- The participating leaders stressed that the **year 2020 marks the 15th Anniversary** of the establishment of the EAS and is an opportune time to explore further the future development of the EAS.
- The declaration called for effective measures to counter terrorism including by containing terror financing in the region.
- A draft EAS **Regional Plan of Action (RPoA) on Combating Marine Plastic Debris (CMPD)** is currently being developed as a follow-up to the EAS Leaders’ Statement on **Combating Marine Plastic Debris** adopted by the 13th EAS in November 2018 in Singapore.

India Proposes Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative

- While delivering a speech at EAS summit, the Indian PM proposed an “**Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**” for safe, secure and stable maritime domain.
- PM outlined global challenges facing the world today including **rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region** and highlighted the **need for working together to find out common solutions**.

Key Highlights

- **Aim of this initiative** - To conserve and sustainably use the maritime domain, and to make meaningful efforts to create a safe, secure and stable maritime domain.
- **Focus areas** - “**creating partnerships**” among interested countries in several pillars, ranging from “**enhancing maritime security** to preserving and sustainably using marine resources, **building capacity, disaster prevention and management**, as well as working together in **trade, and maritime transport**”
- India will organize an **Indo-Pacific Conclave in Chennai** early next year so as to take forward this initiative.
- So far, **Japan, Australia and Thailand have supported this initiative** and many more ASEAN member states are expected to do so in near future.

Sri Lanka Presidential Election 2019

Context:

- Sri Lanka’s former wartime defence minister **Gotabaya Rajapaksa** has been elected president.
- He defeated the candidate for the ruling UNP party, **Sajith Premadasa** by getting 52.25% of the vote.
- Later, the newly-elected Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has named his brother, **Mahinda Rajapaksa (a two-term president himself)**, as prime minister.

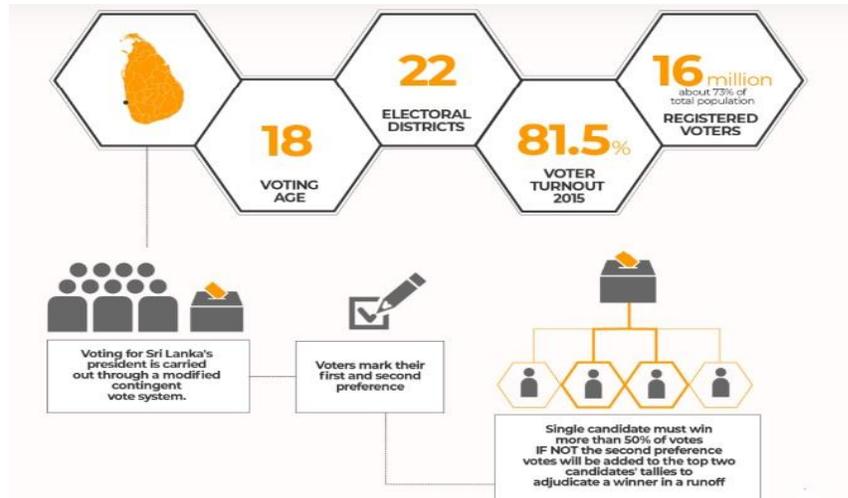
Analysis:

- The Rajapaksa brothers are credited with brutally destroying the Tamil Tigers to end Sri Lanka's 26-year-long civil war. They were accused of war crimes and multiple human rights abuses.
- As a result many analysts fear about the future of human rights and religious harmony in the region. It is also being feared that **democracy and freedom of speech** will be curtailed under Mr. Rajapaksa.
- Mahinda Rajapaksa’s decade as president was known for tightly centralized power and the spread of a **strident Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism** that has inspired attacks against the country’s large minority communities.
- Although the economy grew under Mahinda Rajapaksa, so did the country’s debt to China, whose influence in Sri Lankan affairs spiked during his regime. Sri Lanka was forced to give up a port complex to China.

Impact on India

- Gotabaya has had first-hand experience of the advantage of having good relations with India during the Eelam War. India also helped out by softening the UN Human Rights Council when Rajapaksa was hauled up on allegations of gross human rights violations.
- As a result, analysts in India believe that these factors will help India in dealing with Gotabaya government. Also, Gotabaya, in his manifesto, had said he wants closer ties with India on matters of security cooperation.

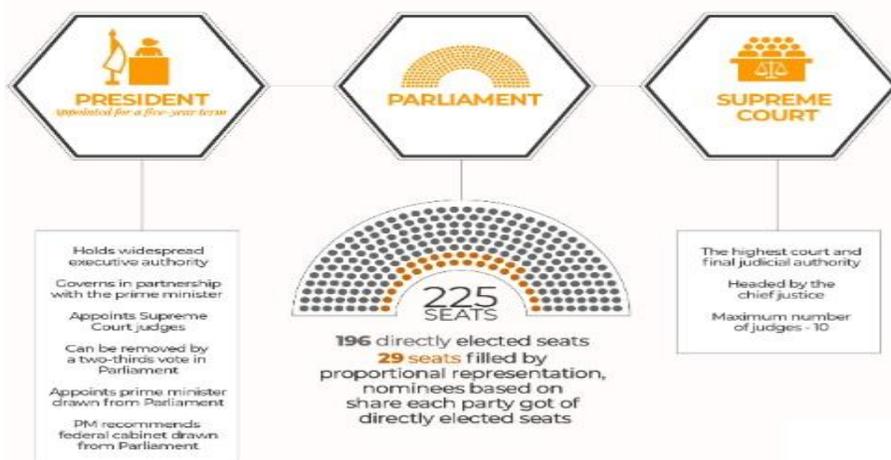
- India does have concerns of a Rajapaksa presidency pushing Sri Lanka closer to China. However, since 2014, China has tightened its stranglehold on Sri Lanka's economy and limited strategic autonomy.
- Hence, it is being expected that Sri Lanka will try to accommodate India's concern regarding Chinese presence.



Election System In Sri Lanka

Government Structure

- Sri Lanka's government operates under a semi-presidential system, where the president holds widespread executive authority but governs in partnership with a prime minister they appoint and a cabinet recommended by the prime minister.



State Visit Of President Of Sri Lanka To India

Context

Newly-elected Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa paid an official three day visit to India.

Key Highlights

- India announced a **line of credit of \$400 million for development projects** in Sri Lanka and a **\$50 million fund to fight terrorism**.
- Leaders of both the nations decided to utilise the **\$100 million credit line** earlier announced for setting up **solar projects in the country**.
- PM Modi stated that in line with India's '**neighbourhood first**' policy and **SAGAR doctrine**, Indian government gives primacy to its relationship with Sri Lanka.

- Indian government expressed confidence that the Government of Sri Lanka will carry forward the **process of reconciliation**, to fulfill the aspirations of the Tamils for equality, justice, peace and respect. It also includes the **implementation of the 13th amendment**.

Significance Of This Visit

- This was the **first overseas trip of Rajapaksa** since he took over as the island nation's President. It symbolizes the strength and dynamism of friendly relations between India & Sri Lanka.
- This visit is also significant owing to the **growing influence of China** in the island nation in last few years. It was Gotabaya's brother Mahinda Rajapaksa, now the PM of Sri Lanka, who had steered Sri Lanka in the direction of China during his Presidency.
- So far, Sri Lanka has positively reciprocated India's gesture of Partnership and stressed that India remains "**our relative**" even as China is its "**trade partner**".

Visit of Chancellor of Germany To India

Context

- Dr. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, visited India on 01 Nov' 2019 for the **Fifth Biennial Inter Governmental Consultations (IGC)**.
- Under the IGC format, the two sides discuss the **deepening of cooperation** in traditional sectors such as *transport, skill development and energy, and explore possibilities for cooperation in newer areas like green urban mobility, AI, etc.*

Key Highlights

- List of Agreements/ MoUs signed on the sidelines:
 1. Implementing Arrangement for Exchange of Personnel between ISRO and German Aerospace Centre
 2. Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI) on Cooperation within the International Smart Cities Network
 3. JDI between on Cooperation in the Field of Skills Development and Vocational Education and Training
 4. JDI on the Establishment of Bilateral Cooperation Project regarding Agricultural Market Development
 5. MoU For Cooperation in Inland, Coastal and Maritime Technology
 6. MoU on the Extension of Indo-German Partnership in Higher Education
 7. Statement of Intent on the key elements of the Indo-German Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement
- Ministry of External Affairs and its German counterpart signed a **Joint Declaration of Intent on Consultations for the period 2020-2024**.
- Ministry of Railways (MoR) and Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy signed Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI) of **Regarding Cooperation on Strategic Projects**.
- Both sides have also signed Joint Declaration of Intent on **Indo-German Partnership for Green Urban Mobility**.

[For detailed bilateral relation, aspirants are advised to refer India – Germany Relation from Yellow Book of IR]

Defence Minister Visit to Singapore

- Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh paid an official visit to Singapore from 18 to 20 November 2019.
- He attended the **India-Singapore Defence Ministers' dialogue** and also met Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Key Highlights:

- This was the fourth edition of their annual Defence Minister's Dialogue (DMD). The dialogue resulted in **three significant agreements** between the two sides.
1. Singapore may be **allowed to use India's Chandipore Integrated Test Range** for live-firing of its Spyder air-defense missiles. Singapore may well become the first foreign nation to be allowed access to this secretive military complex.
 2. The two countries have agreed to formalise the **Indian-Singapore-Thailand Trilateral Naval Exercises** in the Bay of Bengal into an annual affair. The three nations conducted their first-ever joint naval exercise in the Andaman Sea in October 2019.
 - Making it an **annual affair**, rather than a one-off event, signals the resolve that India and Singapore, along with Thailand, are keen on securing the Bay of Bengal from external disturbances.
 3. India has offered Singapore a **stake in its Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS)**.
 - Launched in **July 2019 under 'Make in India' initiative**, the DTIS aims to set up **six to eight "Greenfield Defence Infrastructure Facilities"** with the help of the private sector. The first of these facilities **would be dedicated to drone platforms**.

Singapore – India Defence Relation: In Brief

- Among all the Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries, Singapore was the first to begin naval exercises with India in 1993.
- In 1995, the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) was among the four foreign navies which participated in the **first MILAN series of naval exercises** among regional fleets of the Indian Ocean Region.
- If the 1998 memorandum of understanding on Defence Cooperation formalised this budding defence relationship, the **October 2003 Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA)** opened the flood gates for military cooperation.
- The institutionalisation of the **Defence Minister's Dialogue (DMD)** in 2015 heralded a new phase in India-Singapore Defence Cooperation.
- During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Singapore in **June 2018**, the two sides signed the **Mutual Coordination, Logistics, and Services Support Agreement**.

2+2 Dialogue Between India and Japan

- India and Japan held their **inaugural 2+2 defense and foreign minister** level dialogue on Nov' 30.
- This was held ahead of the annual summit meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in December.
- The **inaugural US-India 2+2 dialogue was held in September 2018**.

Key Highlights

- Peace, prosperity and stability in the Indo-Pacific was the key themes of this dialogue.

- India and Japan are also trying to finalize the military logistics agreement called the **Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)** at the 2+2 dialogue so that it can be signed during Abe's visit to India in December.
- Such an agreement could **expand the strategic reach and influence** of both the militaries: Japan could gain access to Indian facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and India could have access to Japan's naval facility in Djibouti.

Significance

- Japan is **only the second country** (after the US) with which India has such a dialogue format.
- The mechanism is an endorsement of the **special strategic partnership** between New Delhi and Tokyo, which is driven by a number of factors including the **desire to create an Asian strategic framework** that is **free, fair, and inclusive**.

Background

- The idea of such a 2+2 meeting was initiated during the summit meeting between Modi and Abe in Tokyo in October 2018.
- Most recently, the India-Japan defense ministerial level dialogue held in September 2019 also acknowledged the importance of a 2+2 ministerial level strategic dialogue.
- India and Japan have had a **2+2 foreign and defense dialogue led by secretary level** officers from 2010.

Visa-on-Arrival Facility for UAE Nationals

- Indian govt has issued a notification, granting visa-on-arrival facility to nations of UAE.
- This facility will be available **up to a period of 60 days** with double entry for business, tourism, conference, and medical purposes.
- The international airports where the facility will be available are in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.
- This move is aimed at enhancing "**people-to-people**" contacts and **trade relations with UAE**.

First BIMSTEC Conclave of Ports

- The **first ever BIMSTEC Conclave of Ports** was held at Vishakhapatnam on 7-8 Nov' 2019.
- It aims at providing a platform to strengthen *maritime interaction, port-led connectivity initiatives and sharing best practices* among Member Countries.
- Hosted by – Ministry of Shipping
- **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** which links five countries from **South Asia** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India & Sri Lanka) and **two from South-East Asia** (Myanmar & Thailand).

India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh co-chaired the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation in Moscow, Russia.
- It was the 19th edition of the event.

- During the meeting, Indian Defence Minister discussed **Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support** (ARLS) with his Russian counterpart.
- ARLS is an arrangement that will allow access to both India & Russia to each other's military facilities for expanding logistics support, supplies and fuel and operational turnaround of Indian military.

Other Highlights Of The Visit

- Indian Defence Minister along with Russian Minister of Industry and Trade, inaugurated '**India-Russia Defence Industry Cooperation Conference**'.
- The Conference discussed ways to promote defence industrial cooperation between India and Russia, technology transfer and investment in India in the defence industry under the 'Make in India' programme.
- Defence Minister visited St Petersburg where he placed a **wreath at the Piskarevsky Memorial Cemetery** honouring the soldiers and civilians who lost their lives during the Second World War.

8th Indo-German Energy Forum

- The eighth Indo-German Energy Forum (IGEF) 2019 took place in Delhi to enhance cooperation in the energy sector.
- The forum took note of the ongoing cooperation in the following sectors -- **flexibilisation in thermal power plants, renewable energies, demand-side energy efficiency and low carbon growth strategies and green energy corridors**.
- The Forum also finalized the roadmap for future collaboration between the two countries which include - promoting niche markets for Solar Energy, promotion of energy efficiency in buildings through ECBC, building materials and credit lines for financing corresponding measures and RE evacuation through state-of-the-art intra-state and inter-state transmission grid infrastructure.
- The **Forum was established in 2006** to enhance and deepen the strategic political dialogue on the ongoing energy transition in both the countries.

Pact Between India-Chile for Avoidance of Double Taxation

- The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of the **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) and protocol between India and Chile** for elimination of double taxation.
- The Agreement and Protocol implements minimum standards and other recommendations of G-20 OECD Base Erosion Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project.
- A DTAA applies in cases where a tax-payer resides in one country and earns income in another.

5th India – Europe 29 Business Forum

- The 5th edition of **India-Europe 29 Business Forum** was held at Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra in New Delhi.
- Organised by - Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Ministry of External Affairs
- Focus Sectors for this edition - Smart Cities, IT & ITES, Renewable Energy, Pharma and Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- **Europe 29 region** – The region stretches from **Switzerland in west to Turkey in the east and Norway in the north to Cyprus in the south**.

- This forum is India's largest European Platform and acts as a tool to counter **China's "16+1" mechanism**.
- In 2012, China launched "16+1" (i.e. China+16 European countries) mechanism to boost cooperation between the two. China has prioritized three areas of economic cooperation: high-technology, green technology and infrastructure development under this mechanism.

19th IORA Council of Ministers Meeting

Context:

- The 19th Indian Ocean Rim Association Council of Ministers (IORA- COM) meeting was held in Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- The meeting was attended by IORA's 22 Member States (including India) and nine Dialogue Partners.

Key Highlights:

- At the meeting, the UAE assumed the Chairmanship of the IORA for the period 2019-2021. **Bangladesh** assumed the **position of Vice Chair** of IORA (for 2019-2021).
- South Africa had been the Chair of IORA for the period 2017-2019.
- **Theme of the COM** - "Promoting a Shared Destiny and Path to Prosperity in the Indian Ocean"
- The meeting provided a platform to discuss ways in which member countries can move forward together in achieving their vision of a **peaceful, prosperous, and integrated Indian Ocean region**.

Other notable achievements during the meeting:

- Republic of Maldives became IORA's newest Member State
- Republic of Italy became IORA's 10th Dialogue Partner
- Agreement to include the **Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA)** as an **Observer**.

Suggestions put forward by India at the meeting:

- **Administration and Finance** – There is need to improve rules and procedures for the Secretariat, especially IORA's Special Fund. There is a mismatch between annual contributions, and the needs of the Secretariat and its Plan of Action. India proposed a **new, equitable payment plan that does not increase the burden** on States that cannot afford to pay more.
- **Focus on practicable work plans** – India proposed that IORA's calendar of activities must be well-balanced, and experts from line Ministries should be suitably involved.
- **Widening the circle of IORA** – India proposed to go beyond policy makers and academics to bring in business and other stakeholders so as to create a real-world impact.

IORA and India:

- India is a founder member of IORA and it hosted the first Indian Ocean Dialogue in 2015 at Kochi in which Kochi Consensus was released.
- **Kochi declaration** focused on maritime security challenges, information sharing, cooperation in disaster relief and economic cooperation.
- In October 2018 the **IORA adopted the Delhi Declaration on Renewable Energy in the Indian Ocean Region**.

- Delhi declaration called for *promotion of technology development and transfer, strengthening of public private partnerships in renewable energy and collaboration among IORA member states and the member nations of the International Solar Alliance (ISA)*.
- India is the **largest contributor to IORA Special Fund**. During the recent meeting, held at Abu Dhabi, India contributed USD1 million to the IORA Special Fund.
- For IORA-specific understanding of the Indo-Pacific, India is hosting the **6th Indian Ocean Dialogue, and the Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group meeting** in December this year.

[For detail on IORA, students are advised to refer Yellow Book on IR]

Paris Peace Forum

- The **second edition** of Paris Peace Forum took place on 11–13 November in **Paris, France**. **Pascal Lamy** was the president of this event.
- It was aimed at finding acceptable global solution for multilateral issues. India was represented by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.
- Paris Peace Forum is an international event on **global governance issues** and **multilateralism**, held annually in Paris, France.
- The first edition was held on 11–13 November 2018 in Paris in **commemoration of 100th anniversary of Armistice day, with Justin Vaïsse as president**.

Global Diplomacy Index 2019

- Released by - The **Sydney-based Lowy Institute**
- The index gives the latest statistics, marking how the world's diplomatic networks are expanding and, in certain cases, shrinking.
- This year's index covers the diplomatic networks of **61 G20, OECD and Asian countries and territories**.

Key Highlights:

- **China** now has **more diplomatic posts across the world** than the US, a marker of its growing international clout and ambition.
- China overtook the US in 2019 with 276 embassies and consulates worldwide, which is three more than the US.
- China's expansion in worldwide diplomatic presence has come **partly at the expense of Taiwan**, a self-governing democracy, which Beijing says is a breakaway province.
- After China and USA, next **three spots are occupied by France, Japan, and Russia**.
- US remains the most popular place for countries to maintain embassies and consulates. The **US is home to some 342 posts** belonging to the 61 countries included in the Index. **China**, with 256, is a **distant second**.

India's Rank:

- India is **12th among the 61 countries** ranked by the Lowy Institute. As of 2019, New Delhi has **123 embassies and high commissions and 54 consulates** globally.
- India too has expanded its diplomatic footprint: In 2017, it has 120 embassies and 52 consulates.

Freedom on Net 2019 Report**Context:**

- **Released by** - An international internet watchdog, the **Freedom House**
- **Title** of the report - '**The Crisis of Social Media**'
- Overall, **65 countries were assessed** to prepare this year's report.
- This year's edition is the **ninth report in the series**.
- It provides the overall scores to countries **using a 21-question in three categories**. These are:
 - **Obstacles to Access** - Details infrastructural and economic barriers to access, legal and ownership control over internet service providers, and independence of regulatory bodies;
 - **Limits on Content** - Analyzes legal regulations on content, technical filtering and blocking of websites, self-censorship, the vibrancy/diversity of online news media, and the use of digital tools for civic mobilization;
 - **Violations of User Rights** - Tackles surveillance, privacy, and repercussions for online speech and activities, such as imprisonment, extralegal harassment, or cyberattacks

Key Highlights:

- 33 out of 65 countries showed an **overall decline in internet freedom** since June 2018.
- Only **16 countries** showed **improvements** in their internet freedom status.
- **Pakistan** was given a **score of 26** and was declared '**not free**' in internet freedom status for the **9th consecutive year**.
- **China (overall score 10)** was ranked as the **world's worst abuser** of internet freedom for the fourth consecutive year.
- **India** was given an **overall score of 55** in the report and the **internet freedom status** in the country was reported to be '**partly free**'.
- **USA** had an overall score of 77. Although its online environment was reported to be **vibrant and free from state censorship**, the report **saw a decline in the overall internet freedom in the US** for the **third straight year**.
- **Ethiopia** recorded the **biggest improvement** in its internet freedom score in 2019.
- **Iceland tops the list with an overall score of 95**. It has been given a status of **world's best protector of internet freedom**. The country had no civil or criminal cases registered against the users for online expression.

Brainstorming

Aspirants are advised to write an essay on any of the following topics:

1. **The future of internet freedom rests on our ability to fix social media.**
2. **While social media have at times served as a level playing field for civil discussion, they are now tilting dangerously toward illiberalism.**
3. **What was once a liberating technology has become a conduit for surveillance and electoral manipulation.**

Hint – Refer the executive summary of Freedom on Net Report 2019 titled "The Crisis of Social Media"

Bribery Risk Matrix 2019

- Released by - **TRACE International**, the world’s leading anti-bribery standard setting organization. It measured business bribery risk in 200 jurisdictions to prepare the report.
- Evaluates all countries under **four different parameters** that include – **transparency, business interaction, civic society oversight and anti-bribery deterrence**.
- **Methodology** - Provides a score from 1 to 100 to each country for each domain and if a country gets a higher score it means it is in a higher risk of business bribery.

Key Highlights:

- **Top 5 most risky countries** – Somalia (200), South Sudan, North Korea, Yemen, Venezuela (196)
- **Top 5 least risky countries** - New Zealand (1), Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland (5)
- **India with a total risk score of 48 stands on 78th rank in the matrix.** It has been placed in a better position than neighbouring **China whose score is 59**.
- Among **BRICS nations**, South Africa is ahead of other countries with a score of 42 while the scores of Brazil and Russian Federation are 53 and 55 respectively.
- The report highlights **Bangladesh** (score – 72, Rank – 178) **as the highest risk country** in terms of bribery **in South Asia**.
- Afghanistan (168) and Pakistan (153) are other countries where bribery risk is high in South Asia.

6th World Congress on Rural and Agricultural Finance

- The 6th World Congress on Rural and Agricultural Finance was held in **New Delhi**.
- Jointly Hosted by - **Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA)**, **NABARD** and Ministry of Agriculture Farmers Welfare and Cooperation.
- **Theme** - “*Rural and Agricultural Finance: Critical Input to achieve Inclusive and Sustainable Development*”
- **Aim** – To help unleash the **potential role of rural and agricultural finance to achieve the sustainable development goal of the United Nations**.
- This congress is held at a regular intervals of three years. The **first edition** was held in **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2005**.
- The Congress provides platform to stakeholders of rural and agricultural finance all over the world with an **aim of achieving the SDG Goals 1 and 2**.

SDG 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere

SDG 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)

- The **eighth session** of the ITPGRFA was organized at **Rome, Italy**. India was represented by Union Agriculture Minister Shri Narendra Tomar.
- The ITPGRFA was **adopted** by the **Thirty-First Session** of the Conference of the **Food and Agriculture Organization** of the United Nations in 2001.
- This treaty is also known as the **Seed Treaty** and the Governing sessions of this treaty are **held biennially**.

- The Treaty aims to:
 - recognize the contribution of farmers to the diversity of crops that feed the world;
 - establish a global system to provide farmers, plant breeders and scientists with access to plant genetic materials;
 - and ensure that recipients share benefits they derive from the use of these genetic materials with the countries where they have been originated.
- Hence, it can be said that the Treaty is in **harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity**.

Kung Fu Nuns of the Drukpa Order

Context:

- The Kung Fu Nuns of the Drukpa Order received the **Asia Society's prestigious Game Changer Award** in New York.
- The award has been given for their **path-breaking work to empower women and dismantle gender stereotypes in the Himalayas**.

About The Kung-Fu Nuns

- The Kung Fu Nuns are the **fearless daughters of India** who represent a new generation of **Buddhists** using spirituality to inspire real-life action & impact. They are a strong community of 700 nuns and growing, with a **thousand year-old Drukpa legacy**.
- They belong to the **Drukpa Lineage**, a thousand-year-old Buddhist tradition that began in Himalayas.
- Tagline of these nuns - '**BE YOUR OWN HERO**'
- The **Gyalwang Drukpa**, the spiritual **leader and founder** of the Drukpa order, encouraged his nuns to train in Kung Fu to build confidence as leaders.
- In doing so, he flouted centuries of Buddhist tradition that barred nuns from physical exercise. **They are the only Buddhist nuns in the world to practice Kung Fu**.

About Asia Society Game Changer Awards

- Founded in 1956, the Asia Society is a nonpartisan, non-profit educational institution.
- The society is dedicated to promoting mutual understanding and strengthening partnerships among people, leaders and institutions of Asia and the United States in a global context.

Sanskrit Bharati Vishwa Sammelan

- The **first ever Sanskrit Bharati Vishwa Sammelan** or Sanskrit World Conference was organised in New Delhi.
- It was a three-day mega event for discussing ideas, theories and research findings in the ancient Sanskrit language.
- Organised by - **Sanskrita Bharati** [a non-profit organization]

Meghalaya-Based Insurgent Group Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council Banned

Context

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has banned Meghalaya-based militant group Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC).

- This step has been taken in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of **section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.**

Reasons For The Ban

- HNLC, along with its factions and frontal organisations, has been openly declaring as its objective the **secession of the state's areas**, which are **largely inhabited by Khasi and Jaintia tribals.**
- HNLC continues to intimidate and bully civilians to extort funds, maintain links with other insurgent groups of the Northeast to carry out acts of extortion.
- It maintains camps in Bangladesh to give sanctuary and training to its cadre.

Background

- In 1992, HNLC split from **Meghalaya's first militant group Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council.** Since then, the group has been wanting to "free" Meghalaya from "outsiders" (non-tribals).
- HNLC was first banned in 2000 but ban was later lifted.
- In 2007, HNLC chairman **Julius Dorphang** had surrendered before the state government.
- The post remained vacant until February 2019 when **Bobby Marwein took over as its new chairman.**

Ban On Assam-Based NDFB By Another 5 Years

- The Centre has extended the ban on Assam-based Bodo insurgent group **National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)** by another five years.
- According to MHA, NDFB has been indulging in illegal and violent activities, intending to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India in furtherance of its objective of achieving a separate Bodoland.
- The NDFB was **formed in 1986** to obtain a sovereign Bodoland for the Bodo people.
- It was **first declared an outlawed organisation in 1990s** and the ban has been extended every five years since then.

FACT Check Module To Curb Fake News

Context

- The government has decided to setup a **fact-checking module** under the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)** to combat the spread of fake news.
- This module will be called **FACT — Find, Assess, Create and Target.**

Working Of The Module:

- It will work on **four principles** — find, assess, create and target (FACT) — to combat fake news.
- The module will first be confirmed by Indian Information Service (IIS) officers.
- The officers are expected to **trace online news sources and publicly available social media posts** round the clock for any potential fake news. They will also monitor content posted by online influencers.
- It is also **expected to watch for themes or stories** promoting false and misleading information, especially related to the government or its supported agencies.
- Besides reviewing content and raising alarm over any false news or misinformation, the FACT team will **publish appropriate content to counter the narrative.**

- The FACT check module will focus on online and digital content, but will later **track news on electronic media also**.

Previous Attempt Against Fake News:

- In 2018, MIB had constituted a committee to **frame rules to regulate news portals and media websites**, and later disbanded it.
- During the Lok Sabha elections 2019, the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** had worked with social media platforms to **identify and remove problematic content**.
- In June 2019, **Press Information Bureau (PIB)** had also decided to **set up a fact-checking unit** to identify and counter any fake news about the government and its policies circulating on social media platforms, but **did not set a deadline for it**.

Background

- Government's decision to set up Fact module came after a **fake letter** in which PM Narendra Modi congratulates former Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi over the Ayodhya verdict circulated in Bangladesh.
- The letter had the appearance of being bonafide. It was a pale yellow colour with "Prime Minister" on the letter head, and was undersigned by PM Modi.

11th Maitree Diwas

- Union Defence Minister addressed 11th Maitree Diwas' in **Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh**.
- At the event, the minister announced that the government is planning to set up a **Northeast industrial corridor**.
- Maitree Diwas is a **2-day socio-military cultural** program that is jointly organized by **Tawang Civil Administration and Indian Army**. The program is organized to celebrate special relationship between the people of Tawang and the Indian army.
- **Theme** of 11th Maitree Diwas: **Know your army**.

Defence Innovations Conference

- The **Ministry of Defence (MoD)** had organised '**Def-Connect**' in New Delhi.
- It showcased the accomplishments of the **Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX)** initiative.
- It also acted as a strong outreach program towards the potential future entrepreneurs of defence sector.
- The aim of iDEX is to recognise talent and harness it amongst the youth, MSMEs, Startups and fast emerging private sector.
- During the conference, the **new iDEX logo**, its **portal** (www.idex.gov.in) and **dashboard for real-time monitoring of the programme** was launched.
- The **Defence India Startup Challenge (DISC) - III** was also launched under which three challenges from the Army, Navy and Air Force were thrown open to prospective startups.

Fast Patrol vessel to Coast Guard Delivered

- Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd (GRSE) has delivered Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) **ICGS Annie Besant** to the Indian Coast Guard.

- This is the **second in the series of five such ships**. It is a medium-range vessel capable of operations in maritime zones of country.
- It can perform multipurpose operations like patrolling, anti- smuggling, anti-poaching and rescue operations
- The entire design of these FPVs has been **developed in-house by GRSE** as per requirements specified by Indian Coast Guard.

SCOJtEx-2019

- The Union Minister for Home Affairs inaugurated the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Joint Exercise on Urban Earthquake Search & Rescue (SCOJtEx)-2019** in New Delhi.
- **Organized by** - National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)
- **Participants** – All 8 members of SCO including Pakistan
- **Aim** - To rehearse the disaster response mechanism, share knowledge, experience, technology etc.
- The exercise was the outcome of **9th Meeting** of the Heads of Government Departments of SCO countries dealing with the **prevention and elimination of emergency situations in Kyrgyzstan** during 2017.
- It was during this meeting that India offered to organize the next Annual Disaster Management Exercise for the region.

71st Raising Day of NCC

- The National Cadet Corps (NCC), the world's largest uniformed youth organization, has celebrated its 71st Raising Day on November 24.

About NCC:

- **University Corps** were created under Indian Defence Act, 1917 to make up shortage in army.
- **In 1948**, the **National Cadet Corps Act**, was enacted to replace the University Corps with the **National Cadet Corps**.
- The motto of NCC is: **"Unity and Discipline"**.

Mine Counter Measure Exercise

- A **first ever bilateral exercise** between the **Indian Navy and the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF)** on explosive ordnance disposal and mine counter measure was undertaken recently.
- Indian Navy has three categories of minesweepers: **Ham-class** minesweepers, **Pondicherry-class** minesweepers, **Mahe-class** minesweepers.
- Minesweepers are Naval ships that find and destroy Naval mines.

First Counter-terrorism Cooperation Exercise for 'Quad' Countries

- The National Investigation Agency hosted the **first counter-terrorism exercise** for the **"Quad" countries** -- India, the US, Japan and Australia -- at the NIA headquarters in Delhi.
- Name of Exercise - **'CT-TTX'** (counter-terrorism table-top exercise)

- **Purpose of the exercise** - To assess and validate CT response mechanisms in the light of emerging terrorist threats, to provide opportunities to share best practices, to explore areas for enhanced cooperation amongst participating countries.
- This is **first such engagement** among the Quad countries on regional and global issues of common interest.

Quad

- Quad is based on collective effort and *shared commitment on counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security cooperation, development finance, and cyber security* among the four democratic nations.
- The dialogue between the Quad countries was **initiated in 2007**. It got renewed focus from 2017 onwards.
- The **first ministerial-level dialogue** among the members was held in September 2019 on the sidelines of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Prithvi-II

- **Nuclear capable surface-to-surface Prithvi-2 missile** was successfully testfired at night.
- Prithvi-2 is capable of carrying 500-1,000 kg of warheads and is powered by liquid propulsion twin engines
- Already inducted into the armory of Indian defence forces in 2003, 'Prithvi' was the **first missile** to have been **developed by DRDO** under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).

Spike LR missile

- Indian Army successfully test-fired **two Spike LR (long-range) anti-tank missiles** from an **Infantry School at Mhow, in Madhya Pradesh**.
- Spike LR is a **fourth-generation missile** that has the capability of engaging with any target with precision up to a range of 4 km.
- It does not only have the capability to fire and forget but also the ability to fire, observe and update.
- It also has the ability to switch to a different target mid-flight, if the shooter decides to do so.
- Spike LR missiles is developed and designed by **Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems**.

First Country to Introduce New Vaccine to Combat Typhoid

- Pakistan became the **first country in the world** to introduce a new typhoid vaccine.
- This has been introduced in an effort to **combat a drug-resistant strain** of the potentially fatal disease in the Sindh province.
- Pakistan is suffering from drug-resistant typhoid fever since November 2016. The strain of **Salmonella Typhi bacteria**, which has become a so-called "superbug", has developed resistance towards old drugs.
- **Vaccine** - Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine (TCV), recommended by **WHO in 2018** for infants and children over 6 months of age in typhoid-endemic countries

- **India's role** – TCV is an India-made vaccine Tybbar, supplied by **Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech** (in February 2019, the Pakistan government approached the Indian vaccine manufacturer through the **GAVI Alliance** to supply TCV)

Miscellaneous Points

- **Sri Lanka** became the first South Asian nation to criminalise match-fixing related offences.
- **Lokpal Logo and Moto:** The Chairman of Lokpal, Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose has launched the logo of Lokpal. The motto of Lokpal i.e. “मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्” (Do not be greedy for anyone's wealth) was also adopted.
- **Broad band connectivity for villages:** Government of India has set a target of providing broad band connectivity to two lakh Gram Panchayats by March 2020.
- **Water 4 Change project:** It is a joint project that has been launched by India and Netherland for proper urban water management.
- **Guru Ghasidas National Park:** It will become Chhattisgarh's 4th tiger reserve.
- **Col. Chewang Rinchen Setu:** This was recently constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) at an altitude of 14,650 feet (bridge on the **Shyok River**) in the forward area of Ladakh region. With this the Siachen glacier is now open for tourists and tourism.
- **Important Days**
 - **November 11:** India celebrated National Education Day on November 11 to commemorate the birth anniversary of Maulana Abdul Azad.
 - **November 12:** Public Service Broadcasting Day.
 - **26 November:** National Milk Day.
- **Radha Krishna Mathur** has been sworn in as first Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh UT.
- **Polypedates bengalensis:** It is a new frog species that has been found in a residential area of West Bengal. It is also named as **Brown Blotched Bengal Tree Frog**.
- **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):** It has red-flagged the Madhya Pradesh government's initiative to increase tourism activities inside the **six tiger reserves** of the state i.e. **Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Panna, Satpura, Sanjay-Dubri and Pench**. Moreover, as per the Environment Ministry report, India has **2,967 tigers of which 526** are there in MP alone.
- **Mountain gorillas:** The efforts towards protection of Mountain gorillas have helped their population to bounce back from 680 a decade ago to over 1,000 in **Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda**. In view of the positive sign the IUCN has changed the status of mountain gorillas from **critically endangered to endangered**.
- **Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary:** It has the highest concentration of one-horned rhinos in the world.
- **Asiatic water buffalo:** It is the **state animal of Chhattisgarh**. It has been listed as **endangered** (IUCN Red List) as the remaining population totals **less than 4,000**.
- **DRDO chairman G Sathesh Reddy** was awarded the honorary fellowship by the Royal Aeronautical Society of United Kingdom. The aeronautical society recognised contributions of Reddy towards indigenous design, development and deployment of diversified missile systems, aerospace vehicles, guided weapons and avionics technologies in India. Dr. Reddy **spearheaded Mission Shakti**, the country's first Anti-Satellite Missile Test (ASAT) mission.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

- **Shivangi Swaroop** has become the **first woman pilot** to fly Indian Navy fixed-wing Dornier surveillance planes. She has joined the **Indian Navy as the first female pilot** on December 2, 2019. **Bhawna Kanth became the first woman pilot of the Indian Air Force** earlier this year.
- Renowned naturalist and broadcaster **Sir David Attenborough** has been awarded *Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2019*. The prize is conferred every year by *Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust since 1986* and consists of a citation and a monetary award of Rs.25 lakh.
- Indian boxer, **Laishram Sarita Devi** has been elected as a member of the AIBA Athletes Commission. She will be **representing the Asian bloc** in the AIBA's first-ever athletes commission. The **AIBA athletes' commission** was set up as a part of the reforms recommended by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for AIBA.
- India's **Ravi Prakash** was awarded the BRICS-Young Innovator Prize for inventing affordable and indigenously-designed milk chilling unit. This technology can be used for **chilling milk** from the point of production by bringing down the **temperature of raw milk from 37°C to 7°C within 30 minutes**. It uses **nano-fluid based** phase change materials.
- Acclaimed Indian sand artist **Sudarsan Pattnaik** has been conferred the Italian Golden Sand Art Award, 2019. He became the first Indian to win the prestigious award for his contribution to sand art. He was felicitated at the International Scorrna Sand Nativity Fete in Italy where he created a 10-foot-high sand sculpture of Mahatma Gandhi along with Russian artist Pavel Minilkov.