Syllabus subtopic:

- Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary, Ministries and Departments of the Government.
- Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the findings of the report regarding death penalty and its significance; about Project 39A; about capital punishment and the case for its abolition

News: The number of death sentences awarded by trial courts in India saw a significant drop from 162 in 2018 to 102 in 2019, according to ‘Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics Report 2018’, prepared by Project 39A of the National Law University, Delhi. The report is expected to be released on Friday.

Key highlights of the report

- According to the report, 52.94 per cent of the 102 death penalties last year (54 death sentences) were given in cases involving sexual offences.

- No death sentence was awarded in 11 states — Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim — in 2019, while Rajasthan topped the list with 13 death sentences.

- Madhya Pradesh, which recorded the most death sentences (22) in 2018, halved its tally to 11 in 2019, the report said. Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim have not awarded any death sentences in the last four years.

- The death penalties awarded in 2018 were the highest in a calendar year since 2000, possibly as a result of amendments to the Prevention of Child Sexual Offences Act, extending the death sentence to non-homicidal crimes in cases of rape and gangrape of girls below the age of 12. Of the 54 death sentences involving sexual offences and murder, 70 per cent of the cases involved victims below the age of 12.
According to the report, High Courts in 2019 confirmed death sentence for 26 death row convicts — the highest in four years — and acquitted 32.

The Supreme Court, which decided the maximum death row cases (27) last year, confirmed death sentence for six persons and acquitted 10. The Supreme Court also directed a fresh trial in two cases after the High Courts confirmed death sentence, the report noted.

Death penalty cases were heard and decided in greater numbers in the Supreme Court last year due to changes in the listing procedure that former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi put in place.

With the 102 death sentences last year, there are a total of 378 prisoners on death row as of December 31, 2019.

About Project 39A by NLU Delhi

- Project 39A is a research and litigation initiative focusing on the criminal justice system.
- It works on issues around legal aid, torture, mental health in prisons and death penalty.